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Contemporary Muslim Girlhoods in Assam: Questions of Recognition and Redistribution in Education

By
Saba Monir Hussain

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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DECLARATION

This thesis constitutes my own original work and has been submitted to no other institute of higher education for the award of a degree other than the University of Warwick.

ABSTRACT

Based on empirical research in Nagaon, India, this study offers a post-colonial feminist analysis of subjectivities available to Muslim girls in contemporary Assam and the ways in which these girls inhabit and negotiate these subjectivities. To understand the subjectivities made available to Muslim girls, I first investigate how government policies for education authorize certain types of subjective possibilities for Muslim girls. I then analyze the narratives of teachers and parents to understand how gender, class, ethnicity and religion intersect in different ways to confer certain subjectivities as well as to challenge and reinforce the conferred subjectivities. Finally, I discuss Muslim girls' reconstructions of self through a combination of resistance and conformity to the conferred subjectivities.

The study begins by locating this research in the context of the wider sociological literature highlighting Muslim women's overall invisibility, key gaps in understandings of contemporary Muslim girlhoods and the limitation of the liberal feminist conception of agency as resistance. Methodologically, the study combines an analysis of educational equality policies, data from interviews with Muslim girls, their teachers, and parents, and focus group discussions across five different types of schools in Nagaon. The conceptual framework has been drawn from the scholarships of Nancy Fraser's perspectival dualism and Pierre Bourdieu's cultural authorization, as appropriated by feminist scholars. Fraser's perspectival dualism approach and the distinction between affirmative and transformative justice provide tools to understand various types of injustices at different levels (inter and intragroup) in the lives of school going Muslim girls. Feminist appropriations of Bourdieu help to think through discourses about class, gender, religion and ethnicity through which subjectivities are *conferred* upon Muslim girls. The Muslim girls' responses to these conferred subjectivities are understood using the concepts of reflexivity, and agency conceptualized as resilience.

The thesis concludes that the equal opportunity policy framework constitutes and normalizes the subjectivities of Muslim girls as economically subordinate and as culturally different. These abstract policy pronouncements are made real in the schools through teachers' perception of deficit in culture, morality, merit, and language. Muslim parents challenge the teachers' and policy perspectives through their investment in the idea of *good girlhood* that serves as a marker for 'good families', symbolically authorizing them as middle-class. Muslim girls resist and conform to the subjectivities conferred in the policies, by teachers and parents using their reflexive abilities. Mostly these negotiations are based on ad-hoc individual gains, rather than a transformative, collective feminist politics. They enable these girls to disrupt and negotiate the narratives 'about' them.

Overall this thesis offers an alternative to identitarian politics or cultural explanations of Muslim women's educational 'backwardness' in India, by applying insights from Fraser and Bourdieu to Muslim women's intersectional educational disadvantage. The thesis also directs focus upon Muslim girls' agency as encompassing their 'reflexive' articulation of suffering, conformity, and resistance to the subjectivities conferred upon them. This study offers an original contribution to the study of gendered minorities, institutions and relationships in the post-colonial contexts.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASU - All Assam Students Union

AGP - Assam Gana Parishad

BJP - Bharatiya Janta Party

CBSE - Central Bureau of Secondary Education

FGD - Focus Group Discussion

GoI - Government of India

GoA - Government of Assam

KV - Kendriya Vidyalaya

MHRD - Ministry of Human Resource Development

MoMA - Ministry of Minority Affairs

MDG - Millennium Development Goals

MoSJ - Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

NPE - National Policy on Education

OBC - Other Backward Classes

RSS - Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh

SC - Scheduled Castes

SIO - Students Islamic Organization

ST - Scheduled Tribes

VHP - Vishwa Hindu Parishad

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1. Introduction

This study offers a post-colonial feminist analysis of subjectivities available to Muslim girls in contemporary Assam and the ways in which these girls inhabit and negotiate these subjectivities in their everyday lives. The choice of Assam for my study is both personal and strategic. It was personal because of my identity as an Assamese speaking Muslim woman raised in Assam, which positioned me as an insider to my field in many ways. My gender, religious, ethnic (Assamese) and class identities position me in varied ways across the axes of disadvantage and advantage. The experience of schooling in Assam and having been the only Muslim girl and even the only Muslim throughout my educational life in India also shaped my interest in the issues of marginal identities in education. My career as a Social Development Specialist in the international development sector in India offered the opportunity to reflect upon my personal experience of growing up and being educated as a minority in a comparative perspective with Muslim communities living in myriad social-economic positions in India. The choice of Assam for my research was also strategic because Assam and the north-eastern states of India have not been the subject of many sociological studies. The lack of empirical and sociologically rich literature on Assam and the Assamese Muslims made my project a novel endeavor. Indian Muslim identity is largely conflated into an Urdu speaking North-Indian Muslim identity given their cultural proximity to the historic seat of power in Delhi. So, for a project invested in rethinking the taken-for-granted identity narratives about Muslims, the choice of a non-Urdu speaking peripheral Muslim community is significant. The overall contribution of this thesis is towards understanding subjective possibilities available to Muslims particularly Muslim women in contemporary India. This Chapter introduces the socio-economic and historical context of my research, it highlights the key empirical and theoretical contributions of my study, presents the research questions and a brief chapter outline of the thesis.

1.1. Muslim women and girls in India: A socio-economic and historical context

Muslim women's rights in India have long been the subject of an impasse between minority rights of the Muslim community and gender rights of Muslim women. These two rights are often conceptualized as being contrary to one another (Agnes, 2001; Solanki, 2013). The recent All India Pre-Medical Test (AIPMT) *hijab* controversy is a good case in point. Against the backdrop of large-scale irregularities in the Test, the

Supreme Court of India directed the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to conduct a second test, wherein it imposed a strict dress code, banning examinees from sporting jewellery, head scarves or veils, shoes, watches, cell phones, etc. (*Indian Express*, 25th July 2015). Subsequently, a petition filed in the Supreme Court by the Students' Islamic Association (SIO) and some of the headscarf wearing Muslim candidates appearing in the exam challenged the imposition of the dress code notified by the CBSE, on the grounds of disruption of religious practice (*Indian Express*, 28th July 2015). In its ruling rejecting the petition, the Court stated that the wearing of a headscarf was a 'small issue' and that a Muslim woman would not be 'committing a sin' if she were to remove it for three hours during the examination. Feminist legal scholar Ratna Kapur (2015) interprets the Court's pronouncement as being based on assumptions equating gender equality and women's freedom with the unveiled body, despite the veil's centrality to the identity of some women. Kapur (2015) also takes to task the SIO for its inability to challenge the underlying assumption pitting gender equality in opposition to the veil. Instead of the principle of gender equity, the SIO's petition took recourse to ideas of Muslim identity and group-differentiated rights. This creates an impasse between Muslim women's gender rights and their rights as members of a minority community. This impasse has shaped discourses on Muslim women in contemporary India, leading them to be constructed in particularly disempowering ways. Islamophobia in both the global and the national context, and the rising electoral fortunes of the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) in India, have further curtailed the possibility of discussing Muslim women's claim to gender justice without feeding into Islamophobic discourses.

Empirical studies find that Muslims and lower-caste Hindu groups are economically deprived as compared to the upper-caste Hindu groups (Borooah and Iyer, 2005; Sachar 2006). They are also more likely to be mistreated in schools and to experience discrimination in the classroom (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The Muslim Women's Survey done by Hasan and Menon (2005) reveals that 57.55% of Muslim women, compared to 36% among upper caste Hindu women, are illiterate.¹ The illiteracy levels among women of other socio-economically backward groups are comparable with Muslim women and in some cases worse. 68% of SC women and 71% of ST

¹ There does not seem to be any publicly available data comparing privileged sections among Muslims with upper caste Hindus

women were found to be illiterate. The Sachar Committee Reports further contextualizes this data saying:

“...disaggregative analysis of state data, by place of residence and by gender, presents a less flattering picture of the status of Muslims. When alternative indicators of educational achievement, more representative of the progress made in education, are considered, a significant disparity between the status of Muslims and that of other SRCs² (except SCs/STs) can be noted. For example, both the Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) and attendance levels of Muslims are low in absolute terms and in contrast to all SRCs except in some cases SCs/STs. In fact, in several contexts, SCs/STs are found to have overtaken Muslims” (Sachar 2006:84).

Muslim girls' school enrolment rates continue to be low: 40.6%, as compared to 63.2% in the case of upper caste Hindus. Less than 17% of Muslim girls complete eight years of schooling and less than 10% complete higher secondary education nationally. On an average, Muslim girls spend just 2.7 years in school, compared to 3.8 years in the case of Hindu girls. Simply put, Muslim girls in India show a low enrolment rate and very high drop-out rate from the formal schooling system. The gap is wider in higher education (graduates and above), with only 3.5% Muslim women, compared to 12% upper caste Hindu women, 5% Other Backward Classes (OBC) and 4% Scheduled Caste (SC) women, progressing to get an undergraduate degree (ibid.). The Sachar Committee Report also highlights that the educational attainment of Muslim girls is lower than that of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs). Only 68% of Muslim girls go to school, compared to 72% of Dalit girls and 80% of girls from other groups. It is worth noting that Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are considered to be historically deprived, and therefore receive constitutionally mandated affirmative action policies in areas such as employment and education. This is not the case with Muslims, with the exception of a few states where certain sections of the Muslim population are recognized as OBCs (Sachar, 2006).

The discussion above points us in the direction of two issues at the heart of Muslim women's marginal social status in India. Firstly, the empirical problem of Muslim girls' educational backwardness in India generally, and in Assam more specifically.

² Socio-religious communities that includes SCs, STs, OBCs

This can be viewed as a question of distribution of material resources that hinders Muslim children's, in particular girls', participation in education. The second issue is cultural recognition of Muslim women and girls in the socio-cultural discourse. This is connected with Muslim women's invisibility in colonial and nationalist discourses on women, as noted in Sarkar (2000). In post-colonial India, studies on Muslim women have traditionally discussed their disadvantaged social location. Though they are descriptively enriching, these studies have fed into the notion that 'Muslim women' represent a distinct category with a common identity and set of interests (Kirmani, 2008). Such an undifferentiated view of Muslim women has enabled their symbolic appropriation in the wider discourse of communalism³ in India, laying Muslim women open for appropriation by two distinct groups – Hindu Nationalists and Muslim Particularists. Paula Bachetta (1994) argues that *Hindutva*⁴ (Hindu-nationalist) discourse, like Orientalist discourse, suggests that the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men proves the inferiority of Muslims in general. This projection of Muslim women as 'backward' or 'victimized' is intimately related to the production of the category of the modern 'ideal Indian woman' as Hindu and upper-caste/middle-class (Sarkar, 2000). The particularist and conservative elements among Muslim communities such as the *Tablighi Jamaat* (TJ henceforth), deploy Muslim women as the bearers of Muslim corporate identity, and hence sanction measures of surveillance and disciplining them (Chacchi, 1999). These groups often adhere to and preach a militant Islam focused upon the practice of 'true' Islam which include practices exerting complete control over a woman's body and mind. These two types of symbolic appropriation of Muslim women in Hindu supremacist and Islamic particularist discourses have their roots in the Orientalist conception of binary oppositions between 'coloniser' and 'colonised', 'First' and 'Third' world, 'Modern' 'Traditional' and 'Black' and 'White' (Tikly & Bond 2013:425, emphasis in original). The post-colonial theorists therefore call for the development of more contingent and complex readings of postcolonial identities, focusing on their unstable, hybrid and fractured nature (Bhabha 1984) and the interplay of patriarchy and local social

³*Communalism* refers to the notion that Muslims and Hindus constitute separate and antagonistic groups. Within this discourse Muslim women stand as symbols of the Muslim community as a whole both for Muslim conservative groups as well as for members of the Hindu Right' (Kirmani 2009: 49).

⁴Hindu supremacy

hierarchies like caste and religion with colonialism in the formation of different subject positions amongst the colonized people (Spivak 1988).

1.2. Theoretical and empirical contributions of the current study

This study aims to unpack the processes through which certain types of subject positions are made available to Muslim girls in the schooling contexts in post-colonial India, through educational policies and the narrativization of these policies by key actors, namely teachers and parents. The processes through which particular subjectivities are conferred legitimacy in a given social field are viewed as a part of politics of authorization following Lawler (2004). This study offers a post-colonial feminist analysis of subjectivities available to Muslim girls in contemporary Assam and the ways in which these girls inhabit and negotiate these subjectivities in their everyday lives. It contributes towards post-colonial perspectives on contemporary institutions and relationships by drawing attention towards the discursive basis of education and identities in post-colonial contexts (Tickly and Bond 2014). Deploying a post-colonial perspective offers a ‘critical idiom’ for interrogating the discursive basis of Western rule, such that the cultural effects of a Western colonialism on non-Western cultures can be analysed in depth (Loomba 2005). Particularly, in understanding gender relations, a post-colonial lens attends to competing discourses of tradition and modernity as embodied by women, instrumental in idealizing and othering of certain types of subjectivities. Simultaneously this study also adopts a feminist analysis of Muslim women’s authorized position in the contemporary Indian society. As a feminist analysis this research is attentive to the hierarchal ordering of the world around gender. In research of this nature, the feminist researcher positions him/herself deliberately in a marginal standpoint to ‘see’ gender relations in ways that ensure homogenization of diverse experiences is avoided, and multiple possibilities of being and becoming are opened up. This study also cements its commitment to a feminist analysis by recognizing the multiple forms of inequalities that intersect with gender inequality in the current social order and offering a blueprint for transformative change (Menon 2012: vii). What is identified broadly as feminist post-colonial research here, therefore starts with questioning simplistic binaries such as “first”/“third World” or “we”/“they” or “modern/traditional” (Schurr and Segebart 2012: 148). It calls for a more differentiated analysis of power relations. Mohanty (2003) acknowledges the need for such a differentiated analysis of power relations in

(de)colonization processes when revisiting her iconic paper “Under Western Eyes” (1986). In her view, ongoing globalization processes make it necessary to move away from “geographical and ideological binarisms” (Mohanty, 2003:506).

It is notable that attention to education’s discursive role using a post-colonial perspective does not imply that the material dimensions of the post-colonial condition are insignificant. Rather, ‘education in the post-colonial world is shaped by a range of economic and political forces at a number of scales, including the local, national, regional and global’ (Tikly & Bond 2013: 423). Thus, in addition to paying attention to the cultural aspects of Muslim identity in India, my research remains attentive to economic factors linked to the politics of authorization of conferred subjectivities (Lawler 2004). I bring to bear a close reading of Muslim girls’ responses to the subjective possibilities made available to them by exploring the intersections of class, gender, religion and ethnicity in their accounts of self. I also draw attention to the various types of negotiations of Muslim girls with the subjectivities conferred upon them. By drawing attention to the multiplicity of experiences, aspirations and negotiations within the specific geo-political and historical context of Assam I challenge the existence of a singular category of the ‘Muslim girl’.

This study makes both original theoretical and empirical contributions to the understanding of gendered minority subjects in post-colonial contexts. The theoretical contribution of this study comes from an eclectic framework drawn from the scholarships of Nancy Fraser and Pierre Bourdieu. This allows the study to address three hitherto underdeveloped areas of research around Muslim girls. First, using Fraser’s perspectival dualism model and her ascription vs. affirmation and recognition vs redistribution distinction, this theoretical framework helps in articulating overlapping intersectional injustices experienced by Muslim girls. Second, incorporation of Bourdieu’s scholarship on cultural authorization to the theoretical framework further helps to understand how certain claims of identity and of injustice come to be legitimized over others. In particular, feminist appropriations of Bourdieu’s concept of cultural authorization provide a way to think of the everyday processes through which the politics of authorization confers pathological subjectivities to particular types of women. Following Bourdieu’s scholarship, my theoretical framework understands the politics of authorization in the field of

education using ‘rules of engagement’ around three axes, namely: middle-classness, respectable femininity or good girlhood, and Hindu normativity. Finally, this theoretical framework is attentive to Muslim girl’s agency in a way that agency is not necessarily pitted against victimhood as a binary opposite. Instead, following Harris and Dobson (2015), Muslim girls are recast as “suffering actors”, such that they are recognized as agents whilst claiming to be affected by patriarchal power structures at home, within the communities, and in their wider social context. To move away from notions of pure agency and pure victimhood, this theoretical framework focuses attention towards girls’ reflexive capacities, that involve reflection on the un-thought and unconscious categories of thought (Adkins (2004) and formation of new selfhoods i.e. ‘a sense of themselves with value’ (Skeggs 1997:167).

The overall theoretical contribution of this research thus lies in its ability to fruitfully account for myriad forms of disadvantage and the subject position they confer upon Muslim girls, as well as how Muslim girls inhabit, resist and negotiate these subject positions using their reflexive ability. In doing so this theoretical approach offers a way for us to understand Muslim women’s gender injustice claims within the family and community, whilst being sensitive to their claims of injustice as a member of a minority community in India. This new approach also warrants the conceptualization of Muslim girls’ agency as encompassing their ‘reflexive’ articulation of suffering, conformity, and resistance to the subjectivities conferred upon them, instead of conceptualizing them as passive subjects of dominant structuring forces.

The empirical contributions of this thesis are in un-packing the nature of educational disadvantage faced by Muslim girls in contemporary India, paying attention to the ways in which certain types of identities are conferred upon them through post-colonial education policies, educational policies at the school level and the narratives of teachers and parents. As discussed above, my analysis of Muslim girls’ contestations of those subjectivities from varied socio-economic locations, and of their narratives of ‘self’ that may or may not conform to the conferred subjectivity, contributes towards an enhanced sociological understanding of Muslim girls’ agency in contemporary India. The socio-economic, political and historical aspects of migration, post-colonial nation-building, ethno-nationalist identity formation, and the unmet developmental needs of Assam adds layers of complexity to the empirical

study. Of particular relevance to the discussions are the Assamese (Assamiya) vs. Bengali or *Khilonjia*⁵ vs. *Miyah*⁶ contestations of Assam, which continue to powerfully shape public discourses around identity.

Sociologically, this study offers new insights into the structuring forces operating within the field of school education for Muslim girls. As discussed above, I am interested in the socio-economic as well as the cultural/symbolic factors constituting the structure. My analysis is conducted both at the intergroup level, i.e. majority-minority or Hindu-Muslim relationships, and intra-group issues, i.e. relationships within the Muslim community that influence the nature of the structure. In this way, the analysis remains attentive to the forms of intersectional disadvantage experienced by Muslim women and girls due to the pull of poverty, majoritarian (Hindu) nationalism and minority (Muslim) patriarchy. I examine these multiple overlapping forces in the lives of school-going Muslim girls by paying attention to the politics of authorization which operate in the field of education. This study also focuses on Muslim girls' responses to these structuring forces and their implications for our conception of agency. I am particularly interested in how Muslim girls conceptualize the 'self' in response to the subjectivities conferred upon them.

To the best of my knowledge, this research is unique in its mapping of the entire field of school education by locating the various stakeholders – the state (as manifested in policies of education), the teachers, the parents, and the Muslim girls—on the basis of their positioning in the politics of authorization. In this way by combining the scholarly insights from Fraser and Bourdieu with the intersectionality approach and the theorizations of reflexivity and agency this study offers an original theoretical contribution to the study of gendered minorities by revealing how processes of domination and subordination are enacted, legitimized, normalized and contested by social actors in the field of education.

⁵ A term used for the indigenous Assamese speaking population. Also referred to as Tholua or Goriya.

⁶ A term used for Bengali speaking Muslims originating from Mymensingh district of colonial East Bengal (Bangladesh). Also referred to as Mymensingia.

1.3. Research questions and outline of the thesis

The overarching research question this study aims to answer is: What types of subjectivities or subjective possibilities are available to Muslim girls in contemporary Assam and in what ways do these girls inhabit and negotiate these subjectivities in their everyday lives? To answer this question, I ask four sub-questions, namely:

1. What types of subjectivities are conferred upon Muslim girls by governments' policies for education?
2. What subjectivities are conferred upon Muslim girls by teachers?
3. What subjectivities are conferred upon Muslim girls by their parents?
4. In what ways are the conferred subjective possibilities resisted and negotiated by Muslim girls in their everyday lives? And what are the implications of these types of negotiations for our understanding of agency?

Theoretically, I understand the issues of (socio-economic) distribution and (cultural/symbolic) recognition in Muslim women's social status in India as a 'bivalent collectivity,' following Nancy Frasers' (1997) two-dimensional model of social justice. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, this model outlines a conceptual spectrum which stretches primarily from economic forms of injustice (mal-distribution) at one end to primarily symbolic/cultural (misrecognition) forms at the other. My analysis at each stage of this study embeds issues of redistribution in recognition and *vice versa*. Fraser (1997) also makes a distinction between remedies of affirmation and transformation across the issues of recognition and redistribution, which helps to qualify what sorts of recognition and redistribution will create conditions of social justice for marginalized groups. To reveal how the various forces within the field of education create certain types of subjectivities, I deploy insights from Pierre Bourdieu's (1987) scholarship on cultural authorization, precisely as understood through the works of feminist scholars such as Bev Skeggs (2004, 1997), Steph Lawler (2004) and Smitha Radhakrishnan (2009). Significant portions of this thesis are devoted to making explicit the politics of authorization as discussed above. The thesis also includes the processes through which bids of authorization are made by various actors to position themselves in certain ways in a given field. To understand the different ways in which Muslim girls inhabit the conferred subjectivities that have been culturally authorized

and the costs of non-conformity to these subjectivities, I remain attentive to their reflexive capacity as conceptualized by Bev Skeggs (2004) and Lisa Adkins (2004).

To answer the research questions above, qualitative research methods are deployed. I explore the subjective possibilities available to a Muslim girl using a combination of policy analysis, and in-depth interviewing and focus group discussion with Muslim girls aged 13-18 across five different types of schools in the district of Nagaon. The teachers and parents of these girls were also interviewed. Chapter 4 provides a detailed reflective account of the methodological approach adopted in this study. The primary data was collected through fieldwork, conducted in Nagaon from Sept 2013- April 2014, in addition to a secondary analysis of policy texts. I supplement the interview and discussion data with detailed observations maintained in the form of field notes through the entire course of my fieldwork.

The subsequent chapters address the issue of authorization of certain types of subjective possibilities to Muslim girls and the nature of negotiations at the level of the state's education policy (Chapter 5), teachers in school (Chapter 6), family (Chapter 7) and the individual, Muslim girls (Chapter 8). This thesis begins by briefly outlining the geographical, historical, political and institutional context of the field-Nagaon in Chapter 2.

In chapter 3, I locate this study in the context of the wider sociological literature highlighting Muslim women's overall invisibility, key gaps in understandings of contemporary Muslim girlhoods and the limitation of the liberal feminist conception of agency as resistance in Chapter 3. This chapter reviews the key sociological literature dealing with Muslim women's historical marginalization in India. I examine a broad range of research that locates the ways in which religion, ethnicity, class, and gender have been understood. I also highlight a lack of intersectional understanding of Muslim women's marginalized status in India. This Chapter locates the analytical framework of my study within the existing literature, specifically pointing in the direction of the works of Nancy Fraser and Pierre Bourdieu. I highlight some of the ways in which the existing literature relates to my research while identifying critical analytical and contextual gaps in the literature. As noted earlier, my analytical framework has been deeply influenced by Fraser's (1997) concerns with redistribution and recognition, and with transformation and affirmation within them. I use Fraser's formulation in this thesis in three ways. Firstly, to develop a blueprint for

transformative change in the education of Muslim girls. Secondly, to avoid the economic vs. cultural dichotomy. And finally, to conceptualize injustices both at inter-group and intra-group level.

In addition to insights from Fraser's work, through Lawler's (2004) appropriation of Bourdieu, I bring to bear the politics of authorization or 'rules of engagement' through which particular types of subjectivity is 'conferred' upon school-going Muslim girls in the study. I draw attention to three kinds of rules of engagement, namely: middle-class-ness as understood through Bourdieu's (1987) theory of practice that connects class not only to income but distinctive practices; respectable femininity understood in Radhakrishnan's (2009) and Skeggs' (2004) appropriation of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, and Anustup Basu's (2008, 243) conception of Hindu-normativity wherein socio-political and economic processes are narrated and understood through what he calls the 'informatics of *Hindutva*' as discussed in Chapter 3.

This chapter also outlines the inadequacy of Bourdieu's formulation of habitus to account for the ways in which Muslim girls in my study bid cultural authorization. To do so I bring to bear the literature on reflexive abilities of subordinate groups as conceptualized by Skeggs (2004) and Adkins (2004). I also draw on Saba Mahmud's (2000) critique of liberal feminist conceptions of agency that view only women's active opposition to the various structuring forces as agential action ignoring the agency underpinning actions such as conformity, negotiation, and manipulation. To address Mahmud's concerns about the binary positioning of agency and victimhood, I adopt Harris & Dobson's (2015) conception of 'suffering actors' to capture a range of in-between subject positions inhabited by these girls.

In Chapter 4, I trace the methodological and ethical processes in this research leading to the production of this thesis. In doing so, the chapter details the debates on qualitative approaches, ethnography, and discourse analysis. This chapter also provides details of sampling, interviewing and ethical considerations, and an account of some dilemmas encountered during the research. It also provides a reflexive account of how my research is informed by the post-colonial, third world feminist politics. And finally this chapter also critically reflects upon my positionality in the field as a middle-class-diasporic- Assamese speaking- married woman, which produce

unusual insider-outsider configurations and dynamics around my status as a parent or a new mother.

The central research question I seek to address in Chapter 5 is ‘What kinds of subjectivities are conferred upon Muslim girls in contemporary educational policies?’ To address this question, this chapter provides an analysis of the key education policies governing the schooling of Muslim girls, using Fraser’s formulation of affirmation and transformation in recognition and redistribution. Following Lawler (2004), this chapter is mainly concerned ‘not with (felt) subjectivities but with the (conferred) subjectivity’ through which policies (of recognition and redistribution) constitute the subject of ‘Muslim girl’ (Lawler 2004, 114). In other words, the recognition vs. redistribution debate from Fraser’s theoretical framework is re-articulated here as a question of the ‘politics of authorization’ of subjectivities for school-going Muslim girls, operative within the field of education policy (ibid.). In particular, I consider the ways in which the equal-opportunity policy framework constitutes and normalizes the subjectivities of Muslim girls as economically subordinate and as culturally pathological. This process works in such a way that economically subordinate and culturally pathological subjectivities are conferred and normalized while all other ways of being and becoming are foreclosed for Muslim girls.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the research question ‘What kinds of subjectivities are conferred by teachers upon their female Muslim pupils?’ To address this question, I use Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which reveals the elements of the larger cultural configuration of class, ethnicity/religion and femininity in the field of education. Bourdieu (1984) uses habitus as a method for uncovering actors’ relationships to the dominant culture and the ways in which these relationships are expressed in a range of activities, including eating, speaking, and gesturing. Following Diane Reay (1995), I use “habitus as a method” to explore how the teachers in my study draw upon their habitus to conceptualize or judge the habits of their female Muslim pupils. My contention in this chapter is that teachers’ narratives constitute Muslim, Hindu, Bengali and Assamese identities in ways that normalize Hindu-Assamese identity as “appropriately Indian” and frames all other types of identifications as pathological (Radhakrishnan 2011: 5). In this chapter, I reveal four principal axes around which Muslim girls are conferred pathological subjectivities

through appearance (dressing and behavior); poverty; merit; and language, to ‘culturally de-authorize’ them in the field of education (Adkins 2004:12).

Chapter 7 hinges on the question: What kinds of subjectivities are conferred by parents upon Muslim girls? And what type of subjectivity is conferred upon Muslim girls in the process? To address these questions, I deploy Bourdieu’s theory of practice to view cultural and economic distinctions between classes not as *a priori* given but as being constructed through practices. His understanding of capitals further allows us to think of class distinction as a ‘set of actually usable resources and powers’ that are also inter-convertible, namely social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu 1984:114). In this chapter, I connect performances of certain gender practices with the symbolic capital that supports the pursuit of class interests. To do so, I adapt Radhakrishnan’s (2009) formulation of ‘respectable femininity’ to conceptualize three enactments of ‘good girlhood’ by parents: the ‘respectable’ negotiation of poverty, the prioritization of gendered discipline over academic achievements, and the merging of career aspirations with marital prospects.

In Chapter 8, I address the questions: ‘In what ways are the conferred subjective possibilities resisted and negotiated by Muslim girls in their everyday lives? And what are the implications of these types of negotiations for our understanding of agency?’ To understand the response of the dominated to their subordination, I tamper Bourdieu’s emphasis on the ‘generative effects’ of the habitus (Bourdieu 1984: 111; 1990: 116). To do so I focus on the reflexive capacities of the Muslim girls by paying attention to four reconstructed storylines about self that emerge from my data. The first one is the *Good (Indian) Muslim self* using Mehmood Mamdani’s conception of “Good Muslim” in the Western political discourse post 9/11. The second storyline is that of the *proud ‘Miyah’* self that seeks to invert pathological identifications. The third one is the *modern woman self* as enacted through dressing practices. And finally the *aspirational victim self*, enacting the merger of narratives of suffering from parental considerations of [gender] appropriate aspirations and religious discrimination in [future] career aspirations. Using insights from Skeggs (2004, 1997) and Adkins (2004), this chapter considers the ways in which Muslim girls negotiate the overlapping demands of good girlhood, Hindu normativity and middle-class bias in their lives by revaluating and consciously rethinking taken-for-granted social relations. Using the conception of ‘suffering actors’, from Harris and Dobson

(2015:147) I tease out the implications of a reflexive self upon our understanding of Muslim girls' agency.

Finally, Chapter 9 sums up the major findings of this study and briefly outlines issues for future research. The findings of the research are structured around the key theoretical and empirical findings of the research. The first section outlines the benefits of using an eclectic theoretical framework drawing upon Fraser's and Bourdieu's scholarship along with the insights of Skeggs and Adkins around reflexivity. The next section maps out the empirical issues around the process of authorization of a pathological subjectivity to Muslim girls with reference to policies and teachers' narratives. The next section highlights the processes through which parents and Muslim girls seek cultural authorization as legitimate actors in the field of education. And the final section discusses the reflexive capacity of the Muslim girls in the study by highlighting the interplay between the available subjective positions and the ways in which they are resisted and conformed. This Chapter winds up by discussing some of the limitations of the study and by outlining a possible future research agenda.

Following the organizational structure of the thesis discussed above, the next Chapter will contextualize the 'field' of Assam with specific reference to Nagaon where my data was collected, and its relevance to my study.

2. Contextualizing the 'Field.'

As I will discuss in depth in Chapter 4, Nagaon was chosen as my 'field' due to its literacy rate for women being in line with the national as well as the state average of approximately 67%. The presence of significant Muslim minority of 40% (Census, 2011) meant that sampling of Muslim girls in Nagaon was relatively easier than the rest of the state. Its easy accessibility by road and the presence of a wide mix Muslims-Assamese speaking (Khilonjiya), Bengali-speaking immigrants from East Bengal (Miyah/Mymensingia), immigrants from Sylhet (Sylheti) and North Indian Hindi/Urdu speakers also made Nagaon an attractive choice for my study. Nagaon is also a nerve center of Muslim identity politics in the state, with political agendas closely reflecting issues of Muslim or even specifically Bengali speaking Muslim identity. In this chapter, my aim is to map the 'field' of Nagaon geographically, historically and institutionally to provide the contextual details relevant to the study.

2.1. Geographic, spatial and administrative context

Figure (2.1) Map of India



Source: Maps of India

<http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/assam/assamlocation.htm>

The state of Assam occupies a peculiar position in the easternmost part of the Indian sub-continent, surrounded by Tibet and Bhutan to the North, China to the North-east, Burma to the South and Bengal (in India) and Nepal to the West. Hussain (1993) says Assam has all the features of a frontier region. Also because of its location, it has been a meeting point of two great civilizations- the Indian and the Chinese. Sharma (2011: 86) says that the ubiquitous monsoon and fevers plaguing the area came to the aid of the rulers of Assam in fighting the Indo-Turkish and Mughal Armies. Mughals are known to have conquered lower Assam for a short period in the 17th century, though the territory was wrested back by the *Ahoms* shortly afterward.

The Central Assam District of Nagaon (spelled by the British as Nowgong) is one of the largest districts of Assam. It sprawls across almost four thousand square kilometers

Figure (2.2): Districts of Assam



Source: Maps of India

of fertile alluvial plains and thickly forested hills. The district is bounded by the Sonitpur district and the river Brahmaputra in the north, West Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills in the South, and East Karbi Anglong and the Golaghat district in the east.

The mighty river Brahmaputra flows along the northern periphery of the district. Other major tributaries meandering through the district, such as the Kolong and the Kopili, drain into the Brahmaputra. Lying at a distance of 123 kilometers by road from Guwahati, which was my base during the fieldwork, the town of Nagaon constitutes a vital corridor linking the Upper Assam districts of Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia with the North Assam districts of Sonitpur and North Lakhimpur. Nagaon covers a total area of 3,831 sq. km. Nagaon was carved out as a separate administrative unit in 1832. Located in Central Assam, the eastern, western and southern segments of the newly organized district were once ruled by various petty feudal kings or their agents. The organization of village systems in the district lends it its name- ‘Na-gaon’ which means new (Na) and village (gaon) (Omeo Kumar Das Institute 2011: 11). The district headquarters is called Nagaon town. This is where my fieldwork was largely conducted, in that four out of the five schools are located in the main town. The district is also called Nagaon, but in this thesis, use the term Nagaon for the town unless otherwise specified. The *Madrassa* in my sample was located on the outskirts of the main town in Kodumoni block, which is roughly about 25 km away from Nagaon.

Nagaon district as a whole has a population consisting of about 40% Muslims though some blocks in the district are Muslim majority. In the context of research, it meant that sampling and access to Muslim communities was a lot easier than it would have

been in a town with a smaller Muslim population. In the district HQ of Nagaon Muslims are a sizable minority. Exact town-specific demographic information was unavailable, but informal sources say that about 30-35% of the town's population is Muslim. It is also one of the most linguistically diverse towns in the state, with Assamese, Bengali (various dialects) and Hindi (Marwari) being spoken widely. The various linguistic, ethnic and religious groups live in segregated localities, which are further divided along class lines. My ability to speak Assamese, Bengali and Hindi fluently fostered my superior ability to navigate the field on a day to day basis.

The names of the localities, such as Marwari Patty⁷, China Patty, Christian Patty, Decca (from Dhaka) Patty and so on reflect the historical origins of the main ethnic/religious group inhabiting that locality. Some of these, such as Marwari Patty and Decca Patty, continue to be inhabited by businesspeople from the Marwari trading community and by the Bengali-speaking Muslims originally from Dhaka, which is now the capital of Bangladesh. The main town comprises mostly Hindu-dominated areas such as Amla Patty, Panigaon and Haiborgaon, and Muslim-dominated areas such as China Patty, Decca Patty, and Fawzdari Patty. The inter-community relationships can be described as greatly fragmented. Muslim informants during the scoping stage of my research informed me of an unspoken agreement among the middle and upper middle class Muslim community in the town not to sell their existing properties to non-Muslims, even if better prices may be offered by non-Muslim buyers (Fieldnotes 2nd Oct 2013). According to these respondents, this strategy of self-segregation is in fact a response to the Hindu community's perceived unwillingness to rent and sell properties to Muslims. While the backlash against Muslims in real estate is not a new phenomenon (Jafferlot 2013, Sachar 2006), the Muslim community's reassertion in Nagaon is a new social phenomenon. Guyer (2013) finds similar articulations of self-segregation in Delhi's middle class Muslim dominated Abul Fazal Enclave. Within the areas dominated by the Muslim community again there is a distinct class segregation with respect to spatial allocations. Most often the poorest residents of the Muslim neighborhoods lived on the edges of the locality or the *patty*, relatively away from the main roads, and hence occupied properties on strips of lands with low real-estate value.

⁷Patty- A stretch of Road or a street

Religious places are integral to the community lives of Hindus and Muslim in the town with *Namghars* in the Hindu dominated areas and mosques in Muslim dominated ones. Just like the *Namghars* in the Hindu-dominated areas, the cultural life of the Muslim-dominated areas revolves around the mosques and the calls for prayers referred to as the *Azan*. Most localities I visited had more than one mosque in the vicinity and even in the economically backward areas the mosques appeared to be well maintained. The role of the mosque is not only religious: in many cases it doubles up as a community meeting point, a *Subahi Madrassa*⁸ and even as shelter during floods and storms. Many of respondents from the lower income groups attend these *Madrassas* and

Figure 2.3: Kaleidoscope Madrassa School



Source: Field notes 29th Jan 2014

participated in community activities in the mosque frequently. Even though women in Nagaon do not pray in the mosque the girls viewed it as significant to the cultural life in the community and their sense of identity

(Summarized from

Fieldnotes 12th Sept- 31st March). Similarly, religious educational spaces like Kaleidoscope Madrassa in my sample (pictured above) serve as sites of community activities- prayers during Eid⁹, *Ifaar*¹⁰ during Ramazan¹¹ and so on. The open space of the school was also used by community members to graze their cattle, maintaining a strong relationship between the community and the school. This was however, not true for the general or secular schools, which were enclosed from the community outside by walls and fences.

⁸ A makeshift early morning Madrassa for young children

⁹ Muslim Festivals of Eid-ul-Zoha or Eid-ul-Adha

¹⁰ The ritual breaking of fast during Ramazan/Ramadan

¹¹ Muslim holy month when people fast from sun-rise to sun set

Nagaon's spatial symbols give the sense of a highly contested political and social terrain, with different groups laying a claim to political and social space in the area. So, in addition to the imagery of Hindu religious symbols, Muslim religious symbols such as the green flag and the crescent moon make frequent appearances, especially in the shopping districts, which are populated both by Hindu and Muslim traders. In the main town there is a strong sense of political 'place-making' strategies such as putting up hoardings of individual local leaders with the pictures of national leaders on the background, and listing out these leaders' achievements. This indicates the presence of various competing political actors. These contestations were particularly strong between the right-of-center Congress party and the right-wing Bharatiya Janta Party. Both are national parties, but the latter is in an alliance with the regional party called Assam Gana Parishad (AGP). A new force is the All Indian United Democratic Front (AIUDF) which is a minority focused party becoming increasingly popular among certain sections of Muslims.

On the administrative front, the Nagaon district has three civil subdivisions: Nagaon, Kaliabor and Hojai, with ten revenue circles and eighteen development blocks. My fieldwork was conducted mainly in Nagaon, the district headquarters, located about 120 km away from Guwahati, the state's capital. It is a small town compared to the sprawling city of Guwahati. Being a district HQ the 'state' machinery is distinctly visible in the town: the district court, the district jail, the district magistrate office, the district hospital, the district education officer's office and the district school inspector's office are all located in the town. Nagaon has all the characteristics of an upcoming urban center. The town is lined with new construction and signs of an increasing spending power among the urban middle classes, with new shopping centers, hotels, cafes, and private hospitals coming up.

2.2. Socio-cultural and historical context

Pre-colonial Assam was a mostly self-sufficient, semi-tribal and semi-feudal society. It was largely disconnected from the rest of India due to its unique geographical location, which also helped the Ahom Kingdom to survive in the state from 1228-1826. The pre-colonial Ahom kingdom included what is today the districts of Lakhimpur, Darrang, Kamrup, Nawgong (or Nagaon), Sivasagar and parts of Karbi Anglong. Territorially, pre-colonial Assam was much smaller than colonial and post-colonial Assam. The state's location near a frontier made it a melting pot of languages,

races, cultures and religions. During this period, although there were Aryan groups composed of various castes and Muslims present in India, most of the population consisted of Mongoloid groups, who, through a gradual but incomplete process of *Sanskritization*, joined the Hindu fold, although they still retained many of the cultural practices of pre-Hindu times. Following the Pan-Indian Bhakti Movement, Saint Shankardev (1449-1568), made Vaishnavism popular in medieval Assam, making its *Satras*¹² powerful social institutions. Besides the two Hindu sects, pre-colonial Assam had a significant Muslim population. In 1841 a British administrator estimated about one sixth of Assam's population at that time to be Muslim (Robinson, 1841:252). Muslims had syncretized Islam in pre-colonial Assam, and participated actively in the military expeditions by the Ahom military against the Mughals in many battles, including the historical Saraighat Battle of 1671 (Hussain 1987, Barua 1986). The Ahom rulers were known to be the key patrons of Hindu and Muslim religious institutions, many of which also worked as educational institutions such as *Sanskrit Tols*¹³ and *Satras* for Hindus and *Madrassas* for Muslims.

The British first came to Assam in 1826 and added their newly annexed province to the existing Bengal Presidency. Only in 1874 was Assam made a new province of British India, by incorporating the Sylhet region of East Bengal (now in Bangladesh), the entire hill areas of the North East (states such as Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram) the Cachar District, in addition to the territories of pre-colonial Assam spread across the Brahmaputra Valley. It was designated as a Commissioner's Province. Although the new province was named Assam, it was in fact 'an amalgam of Assamiya speaking, Bengali-speaking and myriad tongued hills and tribal areas in which Assamiya was the claimed mother tongue of less than a quarter and Bengali the mother tongue of more than 40% of the population' (Guha, 1980:1701). Many observers see this as a colonial design to weaken the formation of a strong Bengali and Assamese national identity, instead paving the way for the reactionary politics of competition between the Assamese and the Bengali, which had a significant bearing on the nature of the polity and society in post-colonial Assam (Hussain 1993). The colonial economy in Assam relied on revenues from land and from tea plantations. Since Assam was a sparsely populated state, the land revenues coming from the state were limited, the

¹² Vaishnavite Hindu Monasteries

¹³ Vaishnavite Hindu Religious schools

colonial rulers directly or indirectly patronizing migration of peasants from thickly populated East Bengal to Assam's wastelands. Colonial records show that by 1911, the Nawgong district, which later hosted the largest concentration of Mymensinghia peasants in Assam, had a population density of 79 persons per sq. mile, compared to 724 persons per sq. mile in Mymensingh district of East Bengal from which most migration was encouraged (Census of India, 1911). This massive migration of Bengali speaking Muslims under the colonial rule, paved the way for Assam's contemporary identity politics and its 'micro'-nationalism, which is central to my analysis of the politics of authorization in subsequent chapters.

Independence and partition in 1947¹⁴ made the Assamese speakers numerically and politically dominant in post-colonial Assam. The Assamese middle classes, which consisted mainly of high caste Hindus, consolidated their social standing during this period. With the strengthening of the educated middle classes and the creation of a more stable and linguistically homogenous territorial unit through the separation of the hill states from Assam between the 1960s and 1970s, a strong Assamese nationalism emerged which later gave rise to the Assam Movement in the 1970s and 1980s. The presence of Muslim settlers from East Bengal provided a crucial force in the consolidation of the 'anti-immigrant' political stance of the Assam Movement. The movement demanded the deletion of Bengali Muslim names from electoral rolls and the expulsion of 'foreigners' from the state (Weiner, 2015; Guha, 1980; Sisson and Rose, 1990; Hussain, 1993). There was also a popular discontent with unequal regional development in post-colonial Assam which is often articulated in populist anti-immigrant public discourses. The Assam movement was also instrumental in creating conditions of Assamese linguistic hegemony over other languages in the state, as part of the discourse of indigenous Assamese identity. These issues of Assamese vs. Bengali, us vs. them, and the linguistic hegemony of Assamese, are important in understanding the micro-politics of identity in Assam that I explore through my study

¹⁴ This was Assam's second experience of Partition. The first partition of Bengal in 1905 under the leadership of Lord Curzon re-organized the Bengal province into several parts. The aim was to split the strong pan Bengali nationalist identity into smaller east and west Bengali identities fragmented on the lines of religion. As per Encyclopedia Britannica, "the line drawn by Lord Curzon's government, cut through the heart of the Bengali-speaking "nation," leaving western Bengal's *bhadralok* ("respectable people"), the intellectual Hindu leadership of Calcutta, tied to the much less politically active Bihari- and Oriya-speaking Hindus to their north and south". A new Muslim-majority province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was created with its capital at Dacca (now Dhaka). (Source Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/India/The-first-partition-of-Bengal#ref486335>).

in schools. This political movement organized by the All Assam Students Union (AASU), resulted in widespread violence, and provoked fear of exclusion amongst Bengali-speaking Muslim residents of Assam (Weiner, 2015; Hussain, 1993). The Assam Movement is believed to have come to a close in 1985 with the signing of the Assam Accord, which established those who had entered Assam after 25 March 1971 as illegal immigrants (Baruah, 1986). By this definition, any Bengali Muslims residing in India who could not prove that they had migrated before 1971 were infiltrators or foreigners, whom the Indian state could deport to Bangladesh. The collective traumatic memory of the Assam Movement is felt strongly by Muslims in Nagaon even today, often with reference to the Nelli Massacre (1983) which saw the killing of nearly 3000 people not far from Nagaon and has contributed to the “public discourse of doubt” (Ahmed 2014). He notes:

Doubt has become a permanent feature of Assam’s public discourse. Everything about Bengali-speaking Muslims has become a source of doubt – their mobility, land use, attire and, of course, their beards. Public discourse in Assam has produced them as a bearded, lungi¹⁵-clad, parasitic stranger (Ahmed 2014).

This persistent anxiety about their belonging in Assam perhaps drive most adult Muslims respondents to mark their space and location in Nagaon in the course of their interaction with me. Most commonly it was done by people showing the year of the construction of the house. Many of them also told me about their roots in Nagaon as far back as possible and indexed the family’s participation in the freedom movement and other such instances of public service (Summarized from field notes Nov 2013-April 2014).

In the 1990s the anti-immigrant rhetoric was again catapulted into the mainstream public narrative of India with the rise of the *Hindutva* politics, which spearheaded the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and its affiliates like the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (R.S.S.), the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (V.H.P), and others. Similar to the alarmist narrative of the Assam movement about threats to the indigenous Assamese, the *Hindutva* narrative was an imminent threat to the Hindu nation. Both narratives used striking claims often unsupported by credible evidence to make a case for the

¹⁵ A skirt like bottom worn by men.

demographic threat from illiterate, poor, fanatical and highly motivated Bangladeshis who would make India a Muslim-dominated nation or carve out a Muslim state from what is now Assam (Ramachandran, 1999). Notably, both these political forces de-historicized the movement of people across the South Asian region facilitated by colonial rulers as discussed above. The Assam movement's micro-nationalism and the Hindu nationalism of *Hindutva* political outfits are important to the context of my research specifically to understand the recurring themes of cultural difference, linguistic hegemony, and national identity.

While I was doing the research, the campaign for the 2014 General Elections for the lower house of the Indian Parliament was going on. In fact, the administrative offices such as the Office of the Inspector of Schools, the District Deputy Commission and so on were all on a 'high alert' mode because of the imminent elections. Given the electoral climate (and the eventual results) overwhelmingly in favor of the Bharatiya Janta Party in an unprecedented way, many of my respondents, especially Muslim teachers and parents, spoke openly about 'future uncertainties' and possibilities of 'communal tension' in a town that was already heavily segregated along class and religious lines, like most contemporary Indian towns and cities.

2.3. Educational context

Types of schools in Assam

The Department of Education of the Government of Assam is divided into the separate Directorates of Elementary, Secondary, and Higher Education, which are in-charge, respectively, of grades I-VII (age group 6-14), grades VIII-XII (age group 15-18) and undergraduate degrees and above (Table 2.1). The Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE) is responsible for administration control, development, and expansion, inspection, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of elementary education in Assam. The DEE is also entrusted with the operationalization of plan schemes such as Midday Meal, scholarships, and other incentives programs. It is interesting to observe that while the Directorate of Elementary Education is responsible for more administrative and managerial issues, the Directorate of Secondary Education (DSE) additionally concerns itself with equity, quality and institutional reforms (GoA). Furthermore, the Directorate of Secondary Education is

also responsible for Administration of Recognized Private Schools under the Assam Non-Government Educational Institutions (Regulation & Management) Act, 2016.

Table (2.1): Levels of Education Provision in Assam		
Level of education	Age group (in Years)	Governing body
Primary (Class I-V)	6-10	The Directorate of Elementary Education
Upper primary/ middle (class VI-VIII)	11-13	
Secondary (class IX-X)	14-15	Directorate of Elementary Education (until age 14) and partly Directorate of Secondary Education
Senior secondary (classes XI-XII) or pre-university/Junior colleges aged	16-17	Directorate of Secondary Education
Undergraduate degree	18 and above	Directorate of Higher Education
Source: Government of Assam, Department of Education Website http://assam.gov.in/web/education-department		

The schools in Assam are affiliated either to State Education Board, Assam (SEBA), or to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), or to the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE). The last of these has only a handful of schools in the state, so it will not be discussed further. The state-affiliated schools have a regional or sub-national focus in their curriculum, whereas the central government-affiliated schools (popularly called *Kendriya Vidyalaya* or KVs) are national in the content of their curriculum and the organization of the school around 'nationalist' symbols, such as the national anthem, the national language (Hindi) and so on. Central schools usually attract a wide diversity of students from a socio-cultural and economic standpoint, because they are designed to give uniform education to the children of all central government employees in transferable jobs.

Drawing the typologies from Mehrotra et al (2006) by the type of management, schools in Assam can be classified as follows. This classification will be integral in thinking about the differences in the five schools that were part of the study.

a) GOVERNMENT AIDED SCHOOLS:

- Assam State run Government Schools: These are funded and administered by the Directorate(s) of Education (DEE or DSE). The medium of instruction in these schools is typically Assamese. These include middle, secondary, and senior secondary schools affiliated with the Government of Assam through the various governing bodies as discussed in Table 2.1. Three of the five schools in my study namely Northern School, Meadow School and Sanctuary School fall under this category.
- Provincialized Schools: These are schools started by the community or by individuals in a community, but once they reach the norms of size, student enrolment, teacher recruitment, infrastructure and so on, they are adopted by the state government under the recent Assam Venture Educational Institutions (Provincialization of Services) Bill, 2011. Once provincialized, these schools then become eligible for grants, aids, and benefits under government-run schemes. Keleidoscope Madrassa School in my sample belongs to this category.

- Union (Central Government)-run Schools or Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs): Kendriya Vidyalayas were established in the year 1963-64, on the recommendation of the Second Central Pay Commission, as a welfare measure for the employees who are transferable throughout the country. It marked the beginning of a new era for the education of the children of Union Government Employees who could not refuse to go on transfer, and at the same time could not allow the studies of their wards to be disrupted. They are managed by the *Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan* that comes under the Union Government. There are no schools in this category in my sample, but given my schooling was in a K.V, they have greatly shaped my understanding of the educational context.
- b) Private-Aided Schools: These are run by private organizations and affiliate to the state government either through SEBA or through CBSE. These government bodies are based in Guwahati and Delhi, and they are engaged in imparting education at all levels of schooling in Assam. These organizations receive aid in the form of maintenance grants from the Government of Assam, meant to help them meet their expenditure on education (approximately 95%). This aid is largely given for the payment of salaries, allowances, and the provident fund of the employees of the school. There is no private aided school in my sample.
- c) Private/ unaided Private Schools: Run by registered trusts and societies. These schools are affiliated with the state or central government either through SEBA or CBSE. But these organizations do not receive any financial support from the government. Also, the students from these schools are not eligible for any benefits, unlike the students from government-run schools. Missionaries run many private unaided schools in the state; one such example is City School in my sample. Though it is not a part of my sample, I also visited a new unaided English Medium school that has been founded in Nagaon, called Iqra Academy. It is recognized by CBSE and teaches forms I-VIII. It also features an additional religious module for the students, according to the Chairman heading the trust that runs the school (Fieldnotes, 11th Jan 2014).

A parallel educational system also operates in the state under the Board of Madrassa Education. During the colonial period, the Provincial Government of Assam established the Madrassa Education Board in 1934 in Sylhet. After the Independence, the institution was renamed as the State Madrassas Education Board, Assam. Some key distinctions need to be made about the contemporary organization of Madrassa education in the state. Madrassas in Assam can be divided broadly into two categories:

a) Govt. Affiliated Madrassas- Government-run madrassas are mainly of two types: first, there are the Middle English Madrassas, and then there are the High Madrassa. The former imparts education at a Middle School level, while the latter offers education at a High School level. These schools-cum-madrassas have been functioning since the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, and come under the umbrella of general education governed through the two Directorates of Education as appropriate. They mainly impart general education, while an additional religious subject is taught in these institutions (Khan 2010). Mostly Muslim students go to these schools, though this depends on the availability of schools locally; many non-Muslims also enroll in Middle and High Madrassas. The Madrassa Board does not govern these schools. Secondly, there are ex-venture schools, or community schools, which get affiliated to the government once they attain certain standards regarding some students, teachers, and infrastructure, etc. under the Assam Madrassa Education (Provincialization) Act, 1995. Many private or not-government-run Madrassas in Assam have been taken over by the State Government in recent times. Of the 707 Madrassas in Assam, 74 are provincialized, and 633 are recognized by the State Government.

b) Non-Government Or ‘Qaumi’ Or ‘Khariji’ Madrassas: The second type of madrassas have three-tier setups: Title Madrassas, Senior Madrassas, and Pre-Senior Madrassas. Many of the non-government Madrassas have been provincialized by the government of Assam as already mentioned; these institutions developed in the post-independence period. Religious education is the core of the curriculum in these madrassas, while general education is given only partial importance (Khan, 2010). These schools are governed by a Madrassa board. One of the schools in my sample is a Senior Madrassa which has recently been provincialized by the Government of Assam. While it gets to maintain the religiously-oriented curriculum sanctioned by the

Madrassa education board, it can claim government funded schemes such as the midday meal, free uniforms, and books.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter contextualized the ‘field’ geographically, historically and educationally. It signposted the reader to some of the key recurring contextual details that will inform my analysis and writing in the rest of the thesis- especially the political context of Assamese identity politics, language, the contestation of belonging and the organization of educational institutions. In the next section, I will locate my research in the context of the wider academic literature in the area focusing on scholarly contributions that have shaped the theoretical framework of this study.

3. Social Justice, Politics of Authorization and Agency in the Context of School-Going Muslim Girls: A Review of Literature

Having provided an overview of the research in the introduction and a geographical, historical socio-political and educational context of the field subsequently, I now map the theoretical foundations of this thesis. This chapter mainly concerns itself with putting forward a non-identitarian or status based approach of understanding Muslim women's educational 'backwardness' in India. It then seeks to reveal the processes through which they are conferred disempowering subjectivities in the field of education, by paying attention to the intersectional nature of disadvantages they face. The thesis also directs focus upon ways of conceptualizing Muslim girls' agency and reflexive capacity, disregarding either their suffering or their resistance.

There is a sizeable literature concentrating on Muslim womanhood in the legal system (Agnes, 2001, 2012; Narain, 2008; Kannibiran, 2013), in the socio-political system (Kirmani, 2008, 2009, 2011; Hasan and Menon, 2004; Hasan, 1994; Chacchi, 1994), in religion/Islam (Engineer, 1999), in films and media (Hussain and Hussein, 2015; Hirji, 2008; Fazila-Yacoobali, 2002). There remain glaring gaps in our understandings of Muslim girlhood in contemporary India, especially in the light of cultural and economic shifts induced by globalization. While Muslim women and girls come into the picture as victims of communal violence, everyday issues of identity, schooling, sexuality, dating, health, safety, mobility and so on remain under-researched and mostly invisible in the public domain. Muslim girls register in the national conscience only when they fit the stereotype of the other-as the victim of violence, physical or symbolic and through the socio-economic and cultural/symbolic identities associated with them. Some of the most enduring images of Muslim girls in the public domain includes images of child brides married off to Arab Sheikhs, and of victims of sexual violence at home or outside. They also enter the public consciousness in a limited way through adoption of attributes of upper caste Hindu women, by mastering religious texts such as the Gita and the Ramayana, as the stories of twelve-year-old Maryam Siddiqui from Mumbai (Express News Service, 2016) and thirteen-year-old Fathimath Rohila from Karnataka respectively reveal (Express Web Desk, 2016). Maryam won the Gita contest, and Fathimath won a Ramayana contest, and they were

both reported as the flag bearers of the Indian version of secularism and tolerance. However, beyond this sporadic visibility in popular media, the lives of Muslim girlhoods in India remain underrepresented and largely under-theorized in academic literature. In this Chapter, while mapping the theoretical terrain upon which this thesis is located, I frame the nature of the intellectual contribution of my thesis. I also draw out the wider literature from the sub-fields relevant to my study. In doing so, this chapter contextualizes the research questions by locating them in the relevant sociological literature. Throughout this chapter, I regularly signpost the reader as to how the theoretical approach adopted in this study has been influenced by the conceptual strengths (and weaknesses) of the wider sociological literature.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first part is devoted to introducing Nancy Fraser's work on social justice through remedies of recognition and redistribution, as possible responses to Muslim women's educational deprivation in India. Fraser's work is used to conceptualize a transformative social change in the education of Muslim girls. This provides the tools to think about the various types of (socio-economic and cultural/symbolic) injustices, the levels (inter- and intra-group) in which they happen in the lives of Muslim girls, and measures to redress these injustices. Fraser's formulation, in particular, informs my analysis of educational policies to understand the conception of educational justice and educational equity in the policies for Muslim girls' education, as discussed in Chapter 5. This analysis highlights the identitarian nature of the policies of education, leading to the construction of Muslim girls as pathological. Fraser's approach of perspectival dualism is a running thread throughout the thesis in understanding injustices in the lives of school-going Muslim girls as cultural without ceasing to be material. While Fraser's formulation helps us conceptualize distinct forms of injustices as socio-economic (mal-distribution) and symbolic/cultural (misrecognition), it does not offer many insights into the process of authorization of certain claims of justice or certain types of identities. In the second section of this chapter I concern myself with feminist appropriations of Pierre Bourdieu's scholarship on the politics of authorization, to map out the various intersecting forms of power that underpin the process of pathologization of particular groups of people. Following Steph Lawler's and Bev Skeggs's appropriation of Bourdieu, I use the concept of cultural authorization in the field of education to reveal the politics of authorization through which certain types

of femininity are ‘conferred’ upon school-going Muslim girls in my study. I call these the various axes through which the politics of authorization of subjectivities is operationalized in the field of education: the rules of engagement. Bourdieu conceptualizes habitus as the classed gendered and ethnicized motor of social difference/inequality. Viewed in this way habitus is the force authorizing dominant groups to confer certain types of pathologized identities to subordinate groups, based on the following rules of engagement, namely (a) Middle-classness (Chapter 5), (b) Respectable femininity or Good girlhood (Chapter 6), (c) Hindu normativity and Appropriate Indian/Assamese-ness (Chapters 4-5). The third section of this Chapter moves away from the terrain of conferred subjectivity to the terrain of experienced subjectivity. This section lays out the theoretical framework to capture how the school-going Muslim girls in my study bid for cultural authorizations in their lives by adhering to, resisting, negotiating with or challenging the rules of engagement, thereby demonstrating an agency beyond the liberal feminist conception of agency as resistance. I apply Harris and Dobson’s (2015) conception of ‘suffering actors’ to capture a range of subject positions between victimhood and resistance. In doing so, my analysis explores how Muslim girls talk back to the conferred subjectivities through their experienced subjectivities.

3.1. Muslim girls and social justice in Education: Through the lens of Nancy Fraser’s perspectival dualism

Much of the mainstream conceptualization of deprivation of Muslims in India generally and that of Muslim women in particular, is narrated in the language of social exclusion. Characterized as multi-dimensional, multi-level, relational, process-oriented and social actor focussed (de Haan 1999; Fraser 2010; Sen 2000; Silver 1998), social exclusion has offered a useful framework to conceptualize Muslim women’s educational exclusion in India. The weakness of the social exclusion framework lies in its inability to engage with the issue of social justice, and its consequent inadequacy in offering an agenda for transformative change for those deemed to be excluded (Sayed and Soudlin 2009). Another major weakness of the literature is the dichotomous understanding of inclusion and exclusion. In practice, formal inclusion of traditionally subordinate groups without transformation of institutions and attitudes of the dominant groups produces a hostile and culturally

disconnected environment leading to further exclusion. Similarly, Muslims and other subordinate groups in India have an equal right to education but experience myriad forms of institutionalized discrimination in educational contexts. In other words, certain types of inclusions can also produce exclusionary outcomes, as I show to be the case with the policies of inclusion of Muslim minorities in education in Chapter 5.

Nancy Fraser offers a formulation to leverage the practical utility of the concept of social exclusion as multidimensional, multi-level and relational, along with the emancipatory political project of 'justice.' The yardstick of social justice in Fraser's formulation is participatory parity, defined as 'social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to participate in social interactions with peers' (Fraser 2007: 27). Her framework of perspectival dualism allows us to understand how Muslim girls' educational deprivation is cultural and material at the same time. In the essay 'From Redistribution to Recognition?' (Fraser 1997a: 11-39), she lays out her framework for perspectival dualism. She starts with two analytically distinct types of injustice claims: socio-economic injustice, rooted in the political-economic structure of society; and cultural or symbolic injustice, rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication. In her words,

Examples [of socio-economic injustice] include exploitation (having the fruits of one's labor appropriated for the benefits of others); economic marginalization (being confined to undesirable or poorly paid work or being denied access to income-generating labor altogether), and deprivation (being denied an adequate material standard of living). Examples [of cultural or symbolic injustice] include cultural domination (being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and/or hostile to one's own); non-recognition (being rendered invisible by means of the authoritative representational communicative and interpretative practices of one's culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions) (Fraser 1997a:13-14).

This model also offers an alternative analysis of the issue of recognition by treating it as a question of social status of Muslim girls as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of

group identity alone, but means social subordination in being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. Viewed in this way, the politics of recognition is no longer limited to group based identity politics. Instead, it is politics aimed at overcoming subordination ‘by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on at par with other members’ (Fraser 2001:24). This model works by rejecting the view of recognition as valorization of group identity, and focusing on the effects of institutionalized norms on capacities for interaction instead of emphasizing on abstract ideas of re-engineering social consciousness. And, by enjoining status equality in the sense of parity of participation, it valorizes cross-group interaction, as opposed to separatism and group enclaving. Finally, the status model avoids reifying culture – without denying culture’s political importance (ibid., 25).

In the rest of this section, I show how Fraser’s (1997a) formulation is operationalized in my theoretical framework in three ways: firstly, to avoid the economic vs. cultural dichotomy; second to develop a blueprint for emancipatory change in the education of Muslim girls; and finally, to conceptualize injustices both at inter-group and intra-group levels. Then by drawing attention to some of the common criticisms of Fraser’s (1997) approach I lay the groundwork for thinking about a complementary approach that will help address some of those criticisms in my theorization.

Resolve economic vs. cultural dichotomy

The first way in which I deploy Fraser’s formulation is to analyze the economic and cultural injustices simultaneously, i.e. to resolve the recognition-redistribution dilemma. Fraser (1997:15) asserts that while these distinctions between injustices are analytical, in practice they are deeply intertwined, resulting in ‘a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination’. She characterizes the remedies for socio-economic injustice as ‘redistribution’ and those for cultural injustice as ‘recognition’. The school-going Muslim girls in my research face varying degrees of socio-economic injustice on account of their lack of access to quality education, financial constraints in the family, stigmatization of their Muslim identity and their Bengali identity, stereotypical representation, and lack of positive role models in the curriculum, as discussed in the subsequent chapter. They also suffer varying degrees of cultural injustice within their family when subject to control and discipline as a result of their

status as gendered bearers of Muslim communal identity and family honor, as described by Elizabeth Munn (1994) in her ethnographic study in Aligarh. Viewed in this way, neither redistribution nor recognition alone is enough to remedy the multidimensional injustices experienced by these girls. This ‘redistribution-recognition dilemma’ can be addressed by conceptualizing such injustices as described above as bivalent collectivities where injustices can be traced to co-primary harms and not just to standalone cultural or socioeconomic prejudices. This allows me to analyse both cultural/symbolic and socio-economic injustices experienced by school-going Muslim girls in a single integrated approach.

Blueprint for emancipatory change

Bivalent collectivities also contain a redistribution-recognition. Fraser (1997: 21-22) illustrates this by asking: ‘How can feminists fight simultaneously to abolish differentiation and to valorize gender specificity? [...] How can antiracists fight simultaneously to abolish ‘race’ and to valorize the cultural specificity of subordinated racialized groups? Though Fraser writes in the American context, the recognition-redistribution dilemma can be transposed easily in the context of Muslim women and girls in India by asking how Muslim women’s rights in India can be secured while securing the minority rights of the Muslim community. This dilemma between women’s rights (i.e. equality) and group rights of Muslims (i.e. difference) is at the heart of the policy analysis in Chapter 5. To resolve this dilemma, I find Fraser’s conceptual distinction between affirmative and transformative recognition and redistribution useful because it allows us to qualify what sorts of recognition and redistribution will create conditions of social justice for marginalized groups. This conceptual distinction between affirmation and transformation is the second way in which I draw on Fraser’s (1995; 1997) scholarship to inform my theorization. In her doctoral thesis, Shardha Chigateri finds this distinction between affirmation and transformation useful to ‘sift through differences between communities that are to be celebrated, rejected or taken on as an ethic for everyone.’ (Chigateri 2004: 325). To ‘sift through’ the type of difference that is to be celebrated or rejected, Fraser (1995;1997) evaluates the recognition and redistributive remedies through the lens of affirmation and transformation, thereby creating a framework of justice based on four political orientations: affirmative redistribution, affirmation recognition, transformative redistribution and transformative recognition, as outlined in Table 3.1

below. For Fraser (1997: 23), affirmative remedies are those ‘aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them’, and transformative remedies are those ‘aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework.’ Transformation redistribution is aimed at the deep restructuring of the relations of production associated with the political project of socialism; it tends to blur group differentiation; it can also help redress some forms of cultural misrecognition. Affirmation recognition is the cultural analog of the liberal welfare state, typically associated with mainstream multiculturalism. It follows a strategy of surface reallocations of respect among existing groups. And finally, transformation recognition, the cultural analog of transformation redistribution, is the project of deconstruction, focussed on the deep restructuring of the power relations of recognition.

The formulations of transformation and affirmation reported above not only resolve the recognition-redistribution and difference-equality dilemmas but also create a blueprint for emancipatory change by constructing two normative ideals of transformation-redistribution and transformation-recognition. In Chapter 5, I deploy Fraser’s formulation of affirmation and transformation by tracking a range of educational policies associated with the promotion of gender equality in India, with a focus on the schooling of ‘minority’ (Muslim) girls. Within the backdrop of formal policy discourse of equality, non-discrimination, and secularism, such an analysis reveals both the character of the post-colonial Indian state and the nature of authorized femininities for Muslims in the policies of education.

Analysis of Social Justice at Inter-group and Intra-group levels

Fraser’s (1997) formulations help resolve the inter-group vs. intra-group dilemma of social exclusion discussed above by applying the principle of *participatory parity* twice. As outlined earlier participatory parity is the yardstick for social justice for Fraser. Drawing on Fraser’s scholarship, Amanda Keddie’s (2012) proposal to apply the principle of participatory parity twice – once at inter-group level and once at intra-group level, relevant for my research. Following her suggestion, I apply the principle of participatory parity at the intergroup level to assess the effects of institutionalized processes of cultural domination of the Muslim community *vis-à-vis* the majority Hindu community through teacher’s narratives (Chapter 6). And then at the intra-

group level to assess the internal effects of the practices of the Muslim community on the participatory parity of the Muslim girls through parents' narratives (Chapter 7).

Table (3.1) Matrix of Justice		
	Affirmation	Transformation
Redistribution	<p><i>the liberal welfare state</i></p> <p>surface reallocations of existing goods to existing groups; supports group differentiation</p> <p>e.g. programmes for improving access to education among marginalized groups.</p>	<p><i>socialism</i></p> <p>deep restructuring of relations of production; blurs group differentiation; can help remedy some forms of misrecognition</p> <p>e.g. common school system for all children</p>
Recognition	<p><i>mainstream multiculturalism</i></p> <p>surface reallocations of respect to existing identities of existing groups; supports group differentiations</p> <p>e.g. reservation/quotas in education, right to establish minority educational institutions</p>	<p><i>deconstruction</i></p> <p>deep restructuring of relations of recognition; destabilizes group differentiation</p> <p>e.g. a schooling experience in which children from both minority and majority communities learn about a shared history, politics, culture, role models and so on</p>
<i>Source: Adapted from Fraser (1997)</i>		

Criticisms of Fraser

One of the key criticisms of Fraser's work has been in relation to her understanding of social actors and agency. Leon Tickly and Michell Barrett (2011) argue that Fraser's overtly institutional focus leads to an under-conceived notion of agency and the role of social actors in the process of exclusion and inclusion. In other words, while the working of socio-economic and cultural/symbolic structures are explicit in her work, the everyday processes through which these structures are experienced, negotiated and resisted are under-theorized in Fraser's formulation. Another enduring criticism of Fraser's scholarship is her dualist approach to justice, which leads to an artificial

separation between ‘the cultural’ and ‘the material’ (Young, 1997), or the realm of culture being seen as ‘merely cultural’ (Butler, 1998). In the book *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates her Critiques*, Fraser (2008) persuasively argues that the distinction between economic and cultural in her formulation is analytical and not substantive. According to Terry Lovell (2007: 68), whether injustices are principally generated in the economic system or in the cultural/status order or whether they are fully bivalent, the perspectival dualism approach carries the imperative that analysis must always examine all cases and all imperative remedies in terms of both, to avoid any category being seen as ‘merely cultural’ or exclusively ‘economic’. My theoretical framework also maintains this analytical distinction while undertaking a joined up analysis of cultural/symbolic and socio-economic structures in the education of Muslim girls. An area in which I have found Fraser’s perspectival dualism difficult to operationalize in the context of my research is in understanding local processes of domination and subordination across multiple axes of power – class, gender, ethnicity, and religion – in a post-colonial setting. In the context of Muslim girls’ education in Nagaon, for instance, what sorts of discourses about class, gender, religion, ethnicity, and nation mediate the processes of domination and subordination? An understanding of these key discourses and the practices they generate about Muslim girls’ education is critical to my project, to explain the naturalization and thereby legitimization of relations of power and gendered subordination of Muslim girls. In the next section, using elements from Pierre Bourdieu’s scholarship, I extend my theorization to incorporate an understanding of the politics of authorization of Muslim girls as legitimate (or not) actors in the field education.

3.2. Appropriating Bourdieu: Politics of authorization/ Rules of Engagement

Fraser (1995; 1997) offers tools to understand bivalent/intersecting forms of injustices and the types of redressal mechanisms. However, the usefulness of her scholarship is limited in analyzing how certain claims of justice or identity come to be legitimized over others. For that purpose I engage with Pierre Bourdieu’s scholarship. I am particularly interested in feminist ‘appropriations’ of his work. Following Moi (1991: 1017) by ‘appropriation’ I understand a ‘critical assessment of a given theory formation with a view to taking it over and using it for feminist purposes’. Feminist scholars working with Bourdieu’s conceptual apparatus have helped us understand

how middle-class femininities are normalized and working-class femininities are pathologized (Lawler, 2004: 114) and how working-class women seek symbolic authorizations through the practice of respectability- 'a respectability defined in opposition to the middle-class' (Skeggs, 2004:25). In post-colonial, non-Western settings such as India the pursuit of authorization through enactments of respectable femininity have been linked to the interplay of colonial/nationalist constructions of womanhood, and the solidification of (middle) class identities and nation-building (Radhakrishnan, 2009; 2011). In this thesis, I draw upon Bourdieu's (1986; 1992; 2001) theorization around cultural authorization in the field of education to bring to bear the politics of authorization through which certain types of femininity are 'conferred' upon school-going Muslim girls in the study (Lawler, 2004: 114).

Lawler (2004) extends Bourdieu's writings on cultural authorization using the examples of two contrasting case studies of media representations of political protests by women in Britain. She shows how one of these protests involving working class women was framed in disgusted and horrified tones in the process leading to its cultural de-authorization. The actions of these women protesters were framed as pathological using markers such as appearance, ignorance, and abusive motherhoods. In other words, these working class women were not seen to be legitimate actors in the field of political protest (Lawler 2004, 115-119). Understood in this way, social inequality is vested in differential abilities/powers of the authorization vested in actors within a field. Such an asymmetric power relation can be understood fruitfully regarding the operations of the classed and gendered habitus as discussed below.

Habitus constitutes a 'factor in social difference' (Fiske, 1992: 163), and a means through which 'large scale social inequalities such as class and gender are made real and are also made inhere within the person' (Lawler, 2004:113). In the context of my study, I understand habitus not only as classed and gendered but also as ethnicized, to grapple with localized questions of identity in Assam generally and in Nagaon particularly. Chapters 5-7 in this study, therefore, focus on the nature of conferred identity with a view to revealing the politics of authorization or 'Rules of Engagement' (ibid., 119) operational in the field of education. Throughout this thesis, attention is drawn towards three particular rules of engagement (rules henceforth), namely: middle-class-ness, respectable femininity, and Hindu normativity, where socio-

economic and cultural/symbolic considerations interact with each other. These are culturally authorized forms of being and becoming in relation to which subjectivities come to be conferred upon Muslim girls. Such a conception of ‘rules of engagement’ helps theorize politics of authorization in non-Western, post-colonial contexts of the global South where class is not the sole axis of social differentiation.

‘Rule’ Number 1: Middle-class-ness

The respondents in my study come from varied economic backgrounds – upper, middle and lower class, depending upon the types of classification deployed. The income-based classification by the National Council for Applied Economic Research divides the middle and upper classes into sub-categories (Shukla et al., 2004). Another classification by McKinsey (Ablett et al., 2007) subdivides the middle class into seekers, strivers, and aspirers to make further income based distinctions within the middle class as presented in Table 3.2. In her research on the New Middle Class, Leela Fernandez criticizes the studies of middle class which use income and occupational data for the purposes of classification, saying that ‘such measurements of the middle classes overlook the importance of converting between different forms of capital – social, cultural, symbolic and economic – in strategies to achieve, maintain or improve middle-class status’ (Fernandes 2006: 91). And indeed, Fernandes's critique is applicable not only to the middle class but class analysis generally.

Table 3.2 below introduces the income based classification of class based on Ablett et al (2007) and Shukla (2007) adopted in this study. This understanding of class will subsequently be expanded and strengthened using Bourdieu’s theorization of cultural production and reproduction as integral to the understanding of economic class.

Table (3.2): Classification of class used in the study					
Class	NACER Category Name	McKinsey Category Name	Income in Rs/annum	Income in £/annum	Income in Rs/Month
Lower class	Deprivers	Deprivers	<90,000	<1100	<7500
Middle class	Aspirers	Aspirers	90,000-200,000	1110-2450	7500-16,670
	Seekers	Seekers	200,000-500,000	2450-6140	16,670-41,670
	Strivers	Strivers	500,000-1,000,000	6140-12,270	41,670-83,330
Upper class	Near Rich	Globals	1-2 million	12,270-24,540	83,330-166,670
	Clear rich		2-5 million	24,540-61,350	166,670-416,650
	Sheer rich		5-10 million	61,350-122,700	416,650-833,300
	Super rich		>10 million	>122,700	>833,300
Based on Ablett et al. (2007) and Shukla (2010)					

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'capitals' and his theory of practice provide a way to address the critiques of income/occupation-based class analysis. Bourdieu's (1984:114) formulation classifies people by the set of actually usable resources and powers, namely social capital (connections to high-capital individuals and groups) and cultural capital (education and other forms of knowledge) as well as economic capitals. This framework shows that class is not only about income but also about social and cultural production and reproduction of privilege in different systems of

hierarchy: occupational, income and prestige and so on. Middle-class-ness as one of the rules of engagement in my thesis needs to be understood both as an economic and as a cultural construct. In post-colonial India, the middle class holds special ideological weight in imagining the Indian nation (Chatterjee, 1990; Deshpande, 2003; Fernandes, 2000). The post-independence middle-class were traditionally holders of stable government jobs being engaged 'in patriotic work for the betterment of the nation' (Radhakrishnan, 2009). Since the 1990s, processes of globalization have created a 'new' Indian middle class which includes IT professionals and employees in large Multi-National Corporations. Socially, these groups have been characterized by conservative cultural or nationalist values, along with a hunger for global consumer goods, and a conscientious integration into the global political economy (Deshpande, 2003; Fernandes, 2000). The New Middle-Classes engage in a global economy of work and consumption on behalf of the Indian nation (Deshpande, 1993) and are a central agent in reimagining the nation (Fernandes 2000). Thus, even when a majority of my respondents are not middle-class (in either the old or the new sense), economically, the 'hegemonic' authority vested on New Middle-Classes to speak on behalf of all Indians and to stand for all Indians makes them significant in understanding the normative 'rules of engagement' (Fernandes and Heller, 2006). Unsurprisingly, therefore, scholars of the middle class in India have long found that the Indian middle-class is an ideological construction, rather than the empirically 'middle' range of the population of India that the term implies (Deshpande, 2003; Fernandes, 2000; Fernandes and Heller, 2006). In Chapter 6 using teachers' conferment of a pathological subjectivity to Muslim girls, particularly on account of appearance and poverty or material deprivation, the normalization of the ideological middle-class identity is demonstrated.

Bourdieu's (1984) theory of practice views the distinction between classes not as *a priori* but as being constructed through practice. According to him, through socialization in a particular class position, external structures, particularly social power relations, are inscribed on the body in the form of the habitus, the 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1990b: 53). Understood in this way my interest in this thesis is in the class 'practices' in the field of education, for Muslim girls through which their class status is reproduced (and challenged). I draw attention specifically

towards the enactment of ideological middle ‘class’ practices by Muslim parents in Chapter 7. These include practices such as Negotiating poverty ‘respectably’, Prioritization of gendered discipline and Merger of career aspirations with marital prospects. Here, I contend that the concept of respectable femininity is integral to the reproduction and renegotiation of class identity.

‘Rule’ Number 2: Respectable femininity/ Good girlhood

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s (2013) account of the formation of the British middle -class in the nineteenth century shows how a culture of middle-classness, opposed to the lavish and unpredictable lifestyles of the aristocracy, idealized the position of women in the home. The strengthening of the economic status of the middle-classes leads to the normalization of gendered ideals of the middle-class. In India, middle-class women became the bearers of a modern nationalist culture, which was superior both to the cultures of the Western and of traditional or lower-class India (Chatterjee, 1989). Post-colonial constructions of Indian women hinge upon a notion of the family and idealized forms of domesticity (Mankekar 1999; Rao 1996). In the contemporary post globalization era the success of Indian women in international beauty pageants and their increasing participation in the IT workforce has signalled the arrival of the ‘global’ Indian woman: a virtuous woman who could be a global worker and consumer while remaining ‘essentially’ Indian (Parameswaran, 2004; Radhakrishnan, 2011, 2009; Thapan 2004, Ahmed-Ghosh 2003). This new formulation of femininity is referred to as respectable femininity. Radhakrishnan (2009) understands respectable femininity as a type of symbolic capital in Bourdieu’s formulation, such that it creates cultural authorization not only for individuals but groups as ‘respectable’. In other words, the conceptualization of respectable femininity as a constitutive element of ‘symbolically authorized middle-class-ness’ (ibid. 201). In this framework, it is not just education or tastes that constitute symbolic capital: respectable femininity and its association with the family and female domesticity also constitute forms of symbolic capital. Building on the conception of respectable femininity as symbolic capital by Radhakrishnan (2009), and Gilbertson (2011), Chapter 7 connects the performances of certain gender practices in Muslim families with the pursuit of class interests. In this way, it shows how class and gender interact in contemporary India to create the template of being feminine and being middle-class for school-going Muslim girls. This chapter draws attention to the

practices or enactment of respectable femininity in the field of education through which middle and upper-class status are reproduced, and lower-class status challenged.

Recent studies by Kabita Chakraborty (2009, 2010, 2015) focusing on Muslim girls in the *bustees* of Kolkata bring-out age and location specific nuances into the working of the idea of respectable femininity in the lives of young girls living in economic disadvantage, as was the case for the majority of girls in my study. She notes ‘... the pressures and expectations that young women should (and must) behave in particular ways, especially in public [...] a young woman is expected by her family and community to be a *good Muslim girl*’ (Chakraborty, 2015 19, emphasis in the original). The diversity of the local contexts, class and religious practices lead to multiple experiences and expectations of Muslim girlhoods across the country. However, Chakraborty identifies public perception, i.e. the image of being good, as central to the conception of good Muslim girls, as I discuss in Chapter 7 and 8. Private transgressive actions by Chakraborty’s Muslim girls of such as Bollywood dancing are not necessarily seen as detrimental to the idea of good girlhood. Another key theme around good Muslim girlhood is that of *Izzat* or honour, which is narrated in everyday discourses as ‘saving face’, ‘good reputation’, ‘good family’, ‘shaming the family’ and so on, ultimately connecting the idea of ‘good girls’ with that of sexuality, risk and patriarchal power (ibid., 20-21). Implicit in the notion of a ‘good girl’ is heterosexuality, which helps maintain the wider social heteronormativity (ibid. 35). Building upon Radhakrishnan (2009) and Chakarabarty (2016), I show in Chapter 7 that good girlhood works as a symbolic capital and helps Muslim parents to culturally authorize their daughters as legitimate actors in the field of education while legitimizing themselves as ‘middle-class’ in an ideological sense. In spite of her helpful theorization of the symbolic/cultural relations in Muslim girlhoods in the *bustee*, unlike Radhakrishnan(2009), Chakarabarty (2016) fails to address the socio-economic concerns in the lives of her respondents. In Chapter 7 I highlight ways in which girls’ education, academic performance and the subsequent possibility of doing ‘respectable’ or ‘appropriate’ jobs is an integral part of how Muslim families conceptualize respectable femininity and good girlhood in my study. In doing so, this thesis attempts to develop an understanding of the cultural/symbolic as well as the socio-economic aspects of contemporary ideas of good girlhood. My analysis in Chapter 7 draws attention to three enactments of ‘good girlhood’ by Muslim parents

in the field of education, namely, negotiating poverty 'respectably,' the prioritization of gendered discipline and the merging of career aspirations with marital prospects.

'Rule' number 3: Hindu Normativity

In the thesis, I deploy the idea of Hindu-normativity from Anustup Basu's work. He argues that the consolidation of a pan-Indian Hindu demographic and religious identity, cutting across myriad local devotional traditions, creates a monotheistic Hindu nation where the socio-political and economic processes are narrated and understood through what he calls the 'informatics of Hindutva' (Basu, 2012: 243). According to this view Hindu normativity leads Indian modernity to be determined less by secularization in a broad liberal sense, and more by the construction of a monotheistic form of Hindu religious experience (Basu, 2010:81). Elements of this argument can be seen in Chapter 5, where I discuss the Hindu-normative character of school settings. According to Basu, this 'single edifice of faith' is inherently connected to the 'discursive imagery of the nation,' embedding Hinduism deeply into Indian nationalism (ibid.). Furthermore, Basu (2012) argues that this 'aspired-for Hindu monotheism would then not just yield a Hindu nation in the world but would also be equipped to synchronize with other monothematic mantras of modernity like scientific progress, nation-state democracy, or techno-financial development' (Basu 2012: 111). Naturally, therefore, Hindu normativity in the empirical context of study finds a natural home in articulations of Hindu nationalism by many of respondents. Ann McClintock and other scholars of gender and nation have demonstrated that in most 'nationalist quests for airtight invariant identities' women are often assigned symbolically crucial roles as markers of the nation's moral values (McClintock, 1997:77). In other words, women (Hindu and otherwise) have a central role to play in the empirical articulation of Hindu-normativity and Hindu nationalism.

Veronique Benei (2008:2) calls the nature of nationalism articulated in government aided schools in India 'banal nationalism.' She understands banal nationalism as the 'the experience of nationalism being so integral to people's lives that it goes unnoticed most of the time.' Her detailed ethnographic work in schools draws attention to the production of Indian national identity through the motif of regional identity/belonging through which pupils connect to the nation emotionally. She focuses on the performance of everyday acts of patriotism and regional pride, which creates and

reinforces loyalty to this monotheistic Hindu nation. Benei's (2008:5) focus on everyday nationalism and its antagonism towards India's non-Hindu heritage helps to recover 'the emotional and embodied production of the political' in school settings. In Assam, the picture surrounding nationalism is complicated further by the focus upon Assamese (*Khilonjiya*) ethnonationalism, which stigmatizes Bengali-speaking Muslims (*Miyah* Muslims) as outsiders or as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. In Chapter 6, I also show how banal nationalism is expressed by teachers through the conception of the difference between Assamese- and Bengali-speaking girls, conferring upon them Indian-ness and lack thereof respectively. One of the areas in which this 'difference' is articulated (Chapter 6) and experienced (Chapter 8) is in the area of spoken and written (Assamese) language. In her fieldwork in the state of Maharashtra, Benei (2008) attempts to understand the relationship between language and national identity and finds the concept of mother tongue to be central in unifying the national-regional identities. The unifying role played by the Marathi language in her study, is played by Assamese (Asamiya) language in Assam, connecting the regional and national identity with a shared Hindu-normative cultural template between the two.

Hindu-normativity mediates the citizenship regime in India, Assam in particular, where Bengali speaking Hindus are seen as refugees (and subjects of compassion) whereas Bengali speaking Muslims come to be seen as parasitic economic migrants (and a subject of contempt). Chapter 6 reflects upon how Hindu-normativity drives the politics of authorization around 'difference' between legitimate and illegitimate citizens or between ways of being appropriately Indian or not. The analysis in Chapter 6 shows that in the localized context of my field in Nagaon, a normative Indian citizen is Assamese speaking (Asamiya), Hindu and middle-class. Throughout my fieldwork and indeed throughout this thesis, the terms *Miyah* and *Miyahni* for male and female Bengali-speaking Muslims respectively has been used by my respondents, particularly the teachers, to indicate the 'otherness' of a certain group about the normative citizen. While in other parts of India 'Miyah' might be a polite and respectable form of address to a Muslim man, 'in Assam it is a derogatory term used for a specific community- Assamese Muslims of Bengal origin' notes a young Bengali Muslim scholar from Assam, Shalim Hussain, in a recent article. He further notes:

Miyah is a matrix within which fall descendants of people who migrated from Tangail, Pabna, Mymensingh, Dhaka and other districts of present-day Bangladesh. However, there is a class angle to the equation too. An educated Bengal-origin Assamese Muslim who also speaks Assamese might be able to camouflage his Miyahness. (Hussain 2016)

Viewed in this way, the framing of someone as ‘Miyah’ in contemporary Assam is both a socio-economic and a cultural/symbolic judgment upon them and not merely a derogatory term. However, Hussain further complicates the picture by urging ‘If and only if it is impossible for us to be known simply as Indians or Assamese let us be called Miyah’ (ibid.). In doing so, he addresses an important conceptual difference between being labeled ‘Miyah’ and Bangladeshi, for these terms often come to be used interchangeably in Assam and by many of my non-Muslim respondents. He urges:

[L]et us not be called Bangladeshis or Bangladeshi immigrants or Immigrant Muslims. Using the ‘Bangladeshi’ appellation implies that our affinities and loyalties are divided and gives rise to ridiculous conspiracy theories. Similarly, the fancier hyphenated word ‘Bangladeshi-Indian’ is not feasible. Let ‘Miyah’ be a provisional term until we find some other to define ourselves better. (Hussain 2016)

Following Hussain (2016), throughout this thesis I refer to Bengali Muslim girls in my study as ‘Miyah’ girls to indicate the problematized socio-political connotation of the term in contemporary Assam. My respondents often used the word *Miyahni* to talk about Bengali speaking Muslim women. However, I found little academic research on the construction of the *Miyahni* in popular Assamese culture. Arupa Patangia Kalita’s novel titled *Felanee*, loosely translated as trash, documenting the life, experiences and personal losses of her central protagonist named Felanee, is an exception to the norm. Kalita’s work is path-breaking in its criticism of the general tendency to view identity as a single unit in Assam. She presents a multi-ethnic protagonist who is a Bodo, a Bengali as well as an Assamese, and the interlocking forms of oppression that her central character faces as a result of her gender, ethnicity, and class position in the Assamese society at the advent of the Assam Movement in the 1980s (Kalita, 2014).

In popular narratives, the *Miyahni* is frequently constructed as masculine or bereft of femininity due to the association with hard physical labour. This intersection of class (heavy labor-based occupation) and gender with the ethnic specificity of Bengali-

speaking Muslims in Assam is reminiscent of the ways in which Sojourner Truth expresses the perceived feminine defect experienced by Black women in America as compared to the White women ‘Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?’ (Sojourner Truth, 1851). The so-called *Miyahni* is also marked by appearance and language. The bodies of ‘other’-ed women come to be constructed as dangerous and disruptive of the idealized moral order and to the accepted notions of femininity and respectability (Gangoli, 2012; Skeggs, 1994). In addition to their othering through de-sexualization or masculinization discussed above, the ‘Miyahni’ get incorporated into what Jeffrey and Jeffrey (2005) call the Saffron Demography: a specific type of study of demography that rationalizes the Hindutva political project of Muslim othering by depicting Muslim women’s sexuality/fertility as uncontrolled. This leads to a contradictory process of hyper-sexualization, leading to the ‘sexual obsession’ around Muslim women based on the pre-existing notion of the demonized ‘other’ (the over-sexed Muslim man and his over-fertile Muslim wife/wives). To clarify the use of these problematic terms ‘Miyah’, ‘Miyahni’, Assamese (Assamiya) and Bengali, through the rest of this thesis, the term ‘Miyah’ girls will be used to indicate the Bengali speaking respondents in my study and the term Muslim girls will be used to refer to the entire sample of girls including Bengali and Assamese speaking girls.

The discussion so far maps out the three rules of engagement – middle-classness, respectable femininity, and Hindu-normativity to build the foundations for the analysis of the politics of authorization around class, gender, ethnicity and religion operational for Muslim girls in the field of education. Along with Fraser’s formulation of the macro-processes of recognition and redistribution, my theoretical framework based on the rules of engagement reveals how the processes of domination and subordination are enacted, legitimized, normalized and contested by social actors in the field of education. With this types of intertwined analysis of the macro-processes of recognition and redistribution along with the everyday politics of authorization this study offers an original contribution to the study of gendered minorities. The next section, outlines the ways in which Muslim girls’ responses to the politics of

authorization (and the conferred subjectivities) can be theorized using the concept of reflexivity.

3.3. Muslim girls talk back: Reflexivity and agency

Bourdieu's conception of habitus is an unconscious and embodied formation. The various characteristics of the 'habitus are enacted *unthinkingly*; partly defining them as habitual' according to Adams (2006: 515). The 'sens pratique' (the feel for the game) is an unconscious competence (Bourdieu, 1990: 52). And the habitus becomes 'a *modus operandi* of which [the subject] is not the producer and has no conscious mastery' (Bourdieu, 1977: 79). A reflexive awareness of identity is ruled out when it is placed beyond 'voluntary, deliberate transformation' (Bourdieu, 1977: 94). Bourdieu's habitus is also generative or self-reproducing through embodied practice. Lois McNay says that agency and autonomy are embodied in the concept of habitus, but they are qualified by the caveat that accumulated personal and collective history produce *pre-reflective* action-orientations. 'Thus, habitus gives the practice a relative autonomy on the external determinants of the immediate present but at the same time ensures that it is objectively adapted to its outcomes' (McNay, 1999: 100). In spite of McNay's reading of his work and Bourdieu's own attempts to find a place for the generative capacities of habitus in his writings, the approach is often criticized for its inability to theorize social change (Adams 2006). Thus, those subject to forces of domination come to be conceptualized as having little understanding or/agency over their subordination (Gilbertson, 2011).

Critics also highlight Bourdieu's over-emphasis upon the continuity of established social differences as the basis for identities. Groups such as Muslim girls in my study are conceptualized as incapable of finding ways to evade or resist the structures of power that culturally de-legitimize their claims upon education as an equal participant. Such a formulation does not account for the critical awareness with which girls in my study speak about their class, ethnicity/religion, and gender positions, the future aspirations and the tactics of evading, challenging or leveraging the multiple structures of surveillance to which they are subjected (See Chapter 8). In such a context 'it is difficult to know where to place conscious deliberation and awareness in Bourdieu's scheme of things' (Jenkins, 1992: 77). Bourdieu's formulation can show how the dominant perspective (Chapters 5, 6, 7) 'is put into effect, how interests are protected

and pursued and how authorization occurs... [It] cannot account for the nuanced practices of those who do not operate from a dominant position' (Skeggs, 2004: 30).

As a critique of Bourdieu's habitus, the idea of a reflexive self has been put forward most significantly in the scholarship of Anthony Giddens (1991) and Ulrich Beck (1992), who have suggested that the economic, cultural and technological changes of late modernity have led to the conception of a 'flexible, authored self, more open, transparent and above all, reflexive' (Adams, 2006: 512). The reflexive self in late modernity is also connected with de-traditionalization and increasing individualization, whereby external forms of authority are being replaced by the authority of the individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). This has led to identity 'being redefined as a pure reflexive capacity' (Melucci, 1996: 36). Critics have found this to be an excessively uniform analysis, which gives 'short shrift to the structural and cultural factors still at work in fashioning the self' (Tucker, 1998: 208). Others are skeptical of a situation 'where agency is set free from structure' (Lash, 1994: 119), and call for a more nuanced account of degrees of reflexivity, freedom, and constraint in relation to changing, but still powerful social structures (Adams, 2006). Skeggs's conception of identity helps me think through this habitus-reflexivity conundrum in the context of my research. Commenting on her research on working-class white women she says:

It is not an account of how individuals make themselves but how they cannot fail to make themselves in particular ways [...] the women are not the originators of their identities but are located in temporal processes of subjective construction [...] Within these constraints they deploy many constructive and creative strategies to generate a sense of themselves with value. (Skeggs, 1997: 162).

Elsewhere, describing the experiences of the same set of women discussed above in inhabiting certain types of class identity she says:

These women were aware of the perspective of the dominant which was always filtered through class judgments, constantly alert to the way they were judged as sexually excessive, pathologized as fecund and read as bad mothers; they were also critically reflexive about their practice. Their experience was not an unconscious pre-reflexive gendered experience based on misrecognition, but a

specifically classed-gendered experience, one of which they were highly critical and highly attuned; they strongly refused the perspectives of the powerful (Skeggs, 2004: 24-25).

Viewed in this way, the reflexive capacity of individuals is structured by their personal and collective past, their current circumstances and their future aspirations. At the same time, such a notion of reflexivity contains the possibility of change through the formation of new selfhoods i.e. 'a sense of themselves with value.' Chapter 8 of this thesis will discuss ways in which Muslim girls in my study attempt to reflexively forge together selfhoods that reconstruct the sense of self in their everyday lives using 'new' story lines.

Skeggs (2004) finds that women from subordinate groups whose femininity is not symbolically authorized produce authorizations at a local level by 'taking a different perspective and revaluing the positions they are expected to inhabit without value' (ibid.). Viewed through the lens of the politics of authorization, which is a recurrent theme in this research, reflexivity is the ability to re-value taken-for-granted, conferred subjectivities to forge new selfhoods. For instance, white working-class women in Skeggs (ibid.) authorized their existence as valuable people through the practice of respectability that ushers upon them a respectable womanhood, or in the context of my research a good girlhood. Similarly, feminist scholarship around the politics of authorization shows that working-class motherhood is a highly conscious class-based experience (Lawler, 2000; Reay, 1998). Despite being conferred a pathological or deviant identity, these women from subordinate groups are 'the authors of their experience of femininity, without being symbolically authorized' (Skeggs, 2004: 25). Such a view of reflexivity challenges Gidden's (1991) and Beck's (1993) assumptions about the transformative potential built into the ideas about de-traditionalization and individualization. Adkins (2004) calls for reflexivity to be, therefore, viewed as a situated process ambivalently related to norms; not necessarily transformative, de-traditionalizing or individualizing, nor simply incorporating the social order. She says

[R]eflexivity must therefore be understood to involve reflection on the unthought and unconscious categories of thought, that is, the uncovering of unthought categories of habit which are themselves corporealized preconditions of our more self-conscious practices (Adkins, 2004: 194).

The axes of dominant power to which Muslim girls in my study are subject are not only along the lines of class but also along those of religion, ethnicity, language and gender, as discussed in the section on rules of engagement. Thus, in the context of my study, there is a need to extend the theoretical framework of authorization to incorporate the multiple axes of dominance that school-going Muslim girls experience. Farzana Shain's (2000) call for the experiences of young Asian women to be understood in the context of the intersection of their everyday lives with the economic and political relations of subordination and domination resonates very strongly in the context of this research. Focussing upon intersectionality of identity. Kathy Davis (2014) says:

Intersectionality provided a more comprehensive and complex perspective on identity – one which would take into account the ways in which individuals are invariably multiply positioned through differences in gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national belonging and more.' (Davis, 2014: 21)

In my research I am concerned with the multiple positions occupied by Muslim girls in relation to gender, class (upper/middle/lower), ethnicity (as Bengali-speaking/Miyah Muslims or Assamese Muslims) and religion, and the ways in which these differences reinforce one another. In keeping with my interest in the politics of authorization, I use the intersectional approach to examine how individuals are 'recruited to' categories, i.e. how subjectivities are conferred and how those individuals make choices from 'subject positions' based on their intersectional locations (Adams and Padamsee, 2001). Connecting the Muslim girls' reflexivity with the strategies of seeking authorizations for new 'selfhoods' using the 'rules of engagement' in the field of education has implications for the conception of agency in this study, as I discuss below.

In the UK there has been a strong engagement with the educational, especially the schooling experiences of Muslim girls, covering issues such as aspiration (Ahmad, 2001; Archer et al. 2003; Basit, 1997), dressing (Dawyer, 1999), and experiences in multicultural educational contexts (Shain, 1999, 2000; Mirza, 2013; Mirza et. al 2011, Mirza and Matroo 2013). However, such an academic interest on contemporary Muslim women's issues is unusual in India. Flavia Agnes's (2012) scholarship has been an exception, in that it has consistently documented Muslim women's agency through their litigations aimed at securing better compensation on divorce, custody of

children, child support and so on. Another study on the reproductive behavior of Muslim women found that they are not passive followers of anti-contraception religious norms, but show a strong agency in taking an active role in planning their family, thereby transgressing and negotiating religious norms in reproductive matters (Hutter and Sahu, 2012). Agnes's and Hutter and Sahu's research highlights the under-explored issue of agency in academic research on Muslim women in India. Viewed in this way, Muslim women's agency is visible through litigations and active reproductive choices against the gendered reproductive norms of the community. In this conception agency comes to be viewed as the opposite of victimhood. According to this view, in only actively opposing the structuring forces in their lives can Muslim women be granted agency, just as they can be seen as reflexive only when they work towards de-traditionalization and individualization.

Anthropologist Saba Mehmud (2000) is critical of such binary view of human agency. She views this as one particular form of agency among many, one which is rooted in the liberal feminist scholarship. When brought to bear on the study of women involved in patriarchal religious traditions within Islam or in non-Western contexts, Mehmud (2000) argues that this model of agency limits our ability to understand and interrogate the lives of women whose desire, affect, and will have been shaped by non-liberal traditions. Mehmud's (2000) criticism echoes Mohanty et al.'s (1991:333) critique of Western feminist writing that produces the 'third-world woman' as a singular monolithic subject. She is represented in Western feminist discourses as poor, tradition-bound, uneducated, ignorant, family-oriented, domestic, sexually constrained and victimized, in contrast to the representation of Western women as modern, educated, free and in control of their bodies and sexualities (ibid.: 334–337).

The consequences of a dichotomous understanding of victimhood and agency ingrained in liberal feminist thought are twofold. Firstly, the mis-description of Muslim women's/ girls' agency, ranging from an overemphasis on subordination and silencing of the agency to the overplaying of episodes of resistance and hence an overemphasis on autonomy (Madhok, 2013:104). The second consequence of the victimhood-agency dichotomy is that the vocabulary available to Muslim women/girls in talking about themselves is either the vocabulary of 'suffering without agency' (victimhood) or agency without suffering. This restricts their ability to express in-

between subject positions. Rosalind Gill refers to this dichotomous conception of agency and victimhood as the ‘agency pendulum’ (Gill, 2008: 38). In her view, the agency pendulum in liberal feminist thought makes it difficult for young women and girls to be recognized as agents whilst claiming to be affected by patriarchal power structures at home, within the communities, and in their wider social context. Harris and Dobson (2015) offer a corrective intervention through the formulation of ‘suffering actor’ that captures both injury and action in the lives of young women. In their words: ‘Recasting young women and girls as “suffering actors” may provide one conceptual tool to recognize and work with the impasse of ‘pure’ agent/victim dichotomies’ (Harris and Dobson 2015: 153, emphasis in original).

In a society such as India, which finds itself in a state of flux between a neo-liberal economic consensus and illiberal social practices such a conceptual apparatus is useful to capture the ‘multiple and hybrid forms of selfhoods’ in post-colonial, non-Western contexts (Hughes, 2013: xi). I find it particularly useful in my research to articulate agency as ‘resilience’ or a ‘set of capacities that enable people to survive, but which contribute little in the way of transforming the power structures that make their survival so difficult’ (Williams, 2011:267). In viewing Muslim girls as ‘suffering actors’ in Chapter 8, I open up the conceptual scope of the discussion on the agency of school-going Muslim girls within the rules of engagement, with a view to understanding agency under conditions of intersectional disadvantage.

3.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review has been to map the theoretical landscape upon which this thesis is grounded and to contextualize the research questions within the topical and theoretical literature. I argue that there is a lacuna in our understanding of the unique forms of intersectional disadvantages experienced by Muslim women due to the pulls of nationalism, patriarchy, religion and gender, and how they position themselves within these structures. Existing research also falls short of revealing moments of defiance and resistance in their lives. The review has shown that Fraser’s perspectival dualism model and her distinction between ascription, affirmation, recognition and redistribution can be a fruitful analytical path to understanding overlapping intersectional injustices for Muslim girls. The review reflects on some of

the key elements of Bourdieu's scholarship. I have found 'habitus' a helpful concept to understand the ways in which certain groups come to have the power to confer pathological subjectivities on other groups, on account of a hierarchical habitus that acts as the motor of social inequality. Feminist appropriations of Bourdieu's concept of cultural authorization provide a way to think of the everyday processes through which the politics of authorization confers pathological subjectivities to particular types of women. Based on a conception of the 'rules of engagement' around three axes, I demonstrated how the politics of authorization of subjectivities is operationalized in the field of education. The three rules of engagement discussed in this chapter are middle-classness, respectable femininity or good girlhood, and Hindu normativity. I also find that the agency of Muslim women and girls in India remains relatively undertheorized in contemporary academic literature, and understood still in binaries like victimhood and agency.

This review concludes that a non-identitarian politics of Muslim women's educational 'backwardness' that is attentive to the processes through which the politics of authorization work empirically, will be able to best explain Muslim women's intersectional disadvantage in education in India. Such an approach can fruitfully account for myriad forms of disadvantage and the subject position they confer upon Muslim girls while remaining focused on a normative emancipatory agenda. This approach can be further strengthened by incorporating Third-world feminist considerations to rethink the liberal feminist conception of agency. The new approach warrants the conceptualization of Muslim girls' agency as encompassing their 'reflexive' articulation of suffering, conformity, and resistance to the subjectivities conferred upon them.

In conclusion, I must also note that the theoretical approach refocused my research in many ways. I began my doctoral work with interest in the experiences of Muslim girls in multi-cultural schooling contexts and if they were qualitatively different from their Hindu peers. As my theoretical approach developed, I realized that a starting premise of 'experienced difference' did not necessarily provide the analytical tools to understand the cultural and economic aspects of injustice, especially in its religious-ethnic, linguistic and classed manifestations. Thus, I refocused my research from experienced identities to conferred identities. The refocused theoretical direction had

methodological and analytical implications for my research. Methodologically using such an eclectic approach influenced my choice of data collection techniques, sampling strategies and my positioning and reflexive awareness while conducting the research, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

4. Researching Muslim Girls: Methodological and Ethical Considerations

In the previous chapter, I have reviewed various sets of literature that locate the ways in which religion/ethnicity, class, and gender have been understood together generally, as well as the gaps in the literature on Muslim women's experiences in such intersections of disadvantage in India. In doing so, I have framed the analytical framework of my study and located it within the existing literature. In this chapter, I trace the methodological and ethical considerations in implementing the analytical framework discussed above by focusing on processes in this research that have led to the production of this thesis. The intellectual task accomplished by this chapter is that of 'recovering the research process and putting it up for scrutiny' (Harding, 1987: 9). This chapter also examines the methodological choices I made across various stages of the research and examines some of the key issues and dilemmas that emerged from the process. To do so, I discuss the relevance of my choice of qualitative research methods, namely interviewing, focus group discussion and ethnographic observations, underpinned by a commitment to intersectional feminism and feminist research methods. In particular I show how the interpretive nature of queries required methods that could reveal internalized processes through which identities are conferred, normalized, lived and negotiated with. I also discuss fieldwork dilemmas – such as the negotiation of access, ethical concerns, and my positionality – which highlight the centrality of recognizing intersectional identities and of emancipatory feminist politics in the everyday practice of research, data collection analysis and writing of the thesis.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first section provides a rationale for the use of feminist methodology in conjunction with an intersectional approach, and how that influenced my choice of research methods, namely, semi-structured interviewing, focus group discussion and ethnographic observations. The second section retrieves the actual fieldwork in Nagaon, highlighting issues of sampling, specifically, the ways in which I identified the schools and informants. I draw attention to the process of negotiation of access with 'gate-keepers' and ethical considerations. This section also outlines the process of working with the material collected from the field, making explicit the messiness of the process involved in what is now presented as a linear and systematized end product. The 'messiness' in arriving at a mode of analysis is crucially

linked to the ‘messiness’ of the field and the complexity of the lived realities of my respondents. Finally, as the researcher is ‘his (or her) own research tool’ (Smith, 2006: 351), the final section of this chapter acknowledges the impact of my subjectivity in the field. I provide a reflexive account of my subjectivities as an insider-outsider in my relationships with three sets of respondents: Muslim girls, predominantly Hindu teachers, and Muslim parents. Here, I also draw attention to how motherhood, shaped my interactions with the respondents and in turn shaped my research.

4.1. Feminist Methodology and intersectional identities

Discussions on feminist methodology often take place with ‘the ubiquitous gendered nature of social relationships and subjects of inquiry forming the background’ (Jamil 2016: 49). My research on a traditionally marginalized, group deployed feminist methodology as conceptualized by Sandra Harding (1987) offers a useful ‘alternative’ methodological and epistemological framework. The issue of what constitutes feminist research has been prominent in analyses of feminist methodology (Hussein 2015; Chigateri 1997; Maynard, 1994; Kelly et al., 1994; Mies, 1983; Harding, 1987). In general, feminist methodologies are reflective of the following characteristics:

Feminist methodologies include epistemological arguments on how to apprehend the social; the evaluation of specific research questions and designs that capture the historical, intersectional and transnational dimensions of women’s lives and gender relations; attention to ethical and policy implications; acknowledgement of the representational quality of research and scholarship; attention to the outcomes of the research including the development of multiple strategies of dissemination of research findings (Chakravarty, Cook and Fonow, 2011: 693).

The definition above implies that there is no particular feminist method of research but multiple approaches to doing research from a feminist perspective. Kelly et al. (1994) say ‘what makes research “feminist” is not the methods as such, but the framework within which they are located, and the particular ways in which they are deployed’ (Kelly et al., 1994: 46, emphasis in original). In the Introduction of her book *Seeing Like a Feminist*, Nivedita Menon writes

A feminist perspective recognizes that the hierarchal organizing of the world around gender is key to maintaining social order; that to live lives marked male

and female is to live different realities. But simultaneously, to be a feminist is to imagine occupying the marginal, relatively powerless position with reference to *every* dominant framework that swallows up the space at the center....When a feminist ‘sees’ from the position of marginality he or she has deliberately chosen to occupy, it is a gesture of subversion towards power; it disorganizes and disorders the settled field, resists homogenization, and opens up multiple possibilities rather than closes them off....To be a feminist is to recognize that apart from gender-based injustice, there are multiple structural inequalities that underlie the social order, and to believe that change is possible, and to work for it at whichever level possible (Menon, 2012: viii-ix).

For Harding (1987: vii), feminist research is characterized by the pursuit of ‘alternative origins of problematics, explanatory hypotheses and evidence, alternative purposes of inquiry, and a new prescription for the appropriate relationship between the inquirer and his/her subject of inquiry.’ Mies’s (1983:68) ‘Guidelines for Feminist Research’ delineate some shared attribute of feminist research. Firstly, it replaces the postulate of value-free research by ‘conscious partiality’ achieved through partial identification with the research subject. For Humphries (1999), partial identification is crucial because it takes into account differences and similarities between the researcher and the researched. Secondly, Mies’s (1983) guidelines ask for the ‘view from above’ or vertical relationship between the researcher and the researched, to be replaced by the ‘view from below’- a more reciprocal relationship between the two. From this perspective, research subjects are active, reflexive beings, not merely passive providers of information or victims of social forces around them. In a review of nine studies carried out by Western feminists about women from the global South, Mohanty (1991: 57) found that ‘third world women’ in the writings of Western feminists came to be defined as victims ‘of male violence’, ‘of colonial processes’, ‘of familial systems’, ‘of economic development processes’ and ‘of Islamic code’. Challenging such an understanding of women based on their object status is integral to the project of viewing social reality from below. Thirdly, the role of the researcher in Mies’s formulation has to evolve from uninvolved spectator to actions, movements, and political projects for emancipation (Mies, 1993: 68-69). Further, she suggests that feminist methodologies must locate the researchers within the process of production of knowledge instead of obscuring the relationship between the researcher and the researched (See also Stanley and Wise 1990: 39). Thus, all scholarly feminist practice

(whether reading, writing, critical or textual) can be understood as ‘inscribed in relations of power- relations which they counter, resist or implicitly support’ (Mohanty 1991: 53). In this study, therefore I foreground feminist considerations about marginal standpoints, overcoming inequality in research and knowledge production; valuing experience and emotions of respondents; and aiming for emancipatory political projects. Adopting such an approach has implications for my research methods as discussed below.

Focus Group Discussions

Much of the literature on the use of focus group discussions comes from the field of marketing research. According to Reinharz (1992:22-23) the difference between marketing researchers who use focus group discussions and feminist researchers is that the latter are more likely to grant the interviewees the status of ‘expert’ on the topic of discussion, in keeping with the feminist principle that women are experts on their experience. In the last two decades, feminists have increasingly moved towards using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a socially situated research method. Sue Wilkinson argues that focus groups are ‘a contextual method’. That is, they do not separate the social context and interactions of an individual from the individual herself. She calls it a relatively ‘non-hierarchical method’ that can shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the research participants (Wilkinson, 1999: 64-66). Ann Oakley’s criticisms of the researcher-driven one-on-one interviews may also be addressed through FGDs. According to Wilkinson (1999), however these ethical concerns remain in place even ‘when the one-on-one interview is replaced with the focus group, in particular because the researcher still retains a powerful role in analysis and writing-up of the data’ (Wilkinson, 1998:112). In the context of my research, the FGDs were aimed to create ‘closer to life’ interactional situations for the school-going Muslim girls, particularly when studying taboo or controversial subjects (Flick, 2002). They were found to be useful in discussing ‘shared experiences’ that are mainly debated across the society, such as dressing/modesty (veiling, etc.), marriage, education, love affairs and friendships. I also envisaged that FGDs would offer an excellent entry point to the lives of the girls I was studying and to the school in general. I felt that this would enable me to introduce myself and to build a rapport with the girls in a setting familiar to them. I was also confident that my loosely structured FGD tool (See Appendix 1) would enable me to identify the key themes around which the

instrument of the in-depth interview would be structured. Further details about the nature of data collection using FGDs are discussed in subsequent sections.

Interviewing

Feminists have critiqued traditional interviewing as a site for the exploitation and subordination of women, with the interviewers potentially creating outcomes against their interviewees' interests (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Ann Oakley's celebrated paper '*Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms?*' highlights the incompatibility of traditional interview techniques and feminist considerations around the asymmetry of power and knowledge production. She views this as a one-way process wherein interviewees give information whereas interviewers do not part with any, leading to the allocation of an objectified function as data to the respondents. Interviews are also not seen to have personal meanings regarding social interaction and appear to have to mean only insofar as they are statistically comparable with other interviews. Oakley (1981: 30) suggests that such a paradigm of interviewing creates problems for feminist researchers looking to validate women's subjective experiences. One way in which feminist researchers have addressed this problem is by treating the interview as co-constructive. Oakley (1981; 2015) and Reinharz (1983) have advocated a 'participatory model' that stresses the importance of the researcher sharing his or her biography with the researched, as I did by opening myself up to scrutiny by the interviewees. The idea of the sharing of identities and stories between interviewer and interviewee is thought to 'increase reciprocity and rapport in the interview process, thus breaking down the notions of power and authority invested in the role of the researcher' (Hesse-Biber, 2014). As a feminist researcher, I also had a stake in the issues of social change and social justice for Muslim girls. Thus, I did not inhabit my role as a researcher neutrally: I expressed solidarity with experiences of discrimination, alienation or oppression, instead of treating them as 'objective social realities' in the interviews with the girls. I also critically questioned teachers' and parents' 'taken-for-granted' assumptions around gendered surveillance, notions of merit, sexuality, and identity. At the same time, I remained attentive to my upper-middle-class Assamese-speaking Muslim background, which offered me privilege both within and outside of Assam, and which was not open to a majority of my respondents. In other words

As a feminist interviewer, I was aware of the nature of my relationship to those whom I interview, careful to understand my particular personal and research standpoints and what role I play in the interview process regarding my power and authority over the interview situation (Hesse-Biber, 2014: 184).

Policy Analysis

My research methods and tools to a large extent were geared towards capturing the ways subjectivities were being conferred upon Muslim girls. But the question of ‘conferred by whom’ and the questions around the legitimacy of these conferred subjectivities were more complicated. When I was interviewing people and understanding their interpretations, it was becoming increasingly clear that “*Sorkar*” (the government or the state) was a tacit third party in the discussion – some teachers and parents critiqued its policies and others appreciated the gestures or the message some of the policies around equality sent. However, people talked in the conceptual language inscribed in policies through ideas such as equal opportunity, secularism, and education as the motor of development and national pride. These frequent references to the government and its policies led me to connect policies of education to the politics of authorization of Muslim girls operational in the field of education. In her doctoral work on Educational Reforms under New Labour in the UK, Cath Lambert (2004) notes that state manouvres in the educational spheres significantly influences the structural and everyday practices in schools especially through the use of language. Making a case for paying attention to the use of language in governmental processes Norman Fairclough argues:

Given that political and governmental processes are substantively linguistic processes, there is a clear general rationale for using the resources of language and discourse analysis in researching politics and government (Fairclough, 2000:167).

Therefore, I turned to educational policies as a part of my methodological approach to examine the contemporary constructions of Muslim girls in education policy. The policies were chosen based on their focus on educational equality and minority rights. Given the scope of the study I also decided to focus on currently operational policies or to use the most recently amended version of the policy. My discussion in Chapter 3 therefore starts with the Constitution of India (1951), which situates education and equality in the post-colonial nation building project. The analysis that follows, pays

attention to the language in currently operational national policies whose directives influence the ways in which teachers confer certain types of identities upon their female Muslim pupils. The method of analysis of policy texts in Chapter 5 was based on critical discourse analysis approach. According to Bacchi (2000),

[T]he primary purpose of invoking discourse is to draw attention to the meaning making endeavors embedded in legal and policy debates. In such meaning-making endeavors often issues are represented in ways that hide power relations and often create individuals responsible for their own *failures*, drawing attention away from the structures that create unequal outcomes' (Bacchi, 2000: 46).

Using the discursive approach in conjunction with the theoretical framework of affirmation and transformation in recognition and redistribution as discussed in Chapter 3, I demonstrate how policies of education were deployed in ways that confer upon Muslim girls, subjectivities of cultural difference. The rationale behind using policy analysis is the premise, 'that discourses are socially embedded and function as regulative and constitutive of identities' (Lambert, 2004). And through the analysis of key policies I sought to identify the discursive subjectivities conferred, legitimized and circulated through education policies.

Feminist methodology: re-visiting research design

As my critical awareness of the asymmetrical power relations between myself and my respondents grew on account of our respective socio-economic locations, ethnic grouping (as Assamese or Bengali) and age, I was forced to pay more attention to my positionality in the field. I also had to rethink my research design with an aim to reconfigure the embedded asymmetrical power dynamics by incorporating the following elements into the research design:

- (a) *A structured opening presentation by the researcher:* I started by putting aside ten minutes at the outset of every FDG to introduce myself in a carefully worded statement in Assamese and to take questions from the groups that I talk about in Box 4.1. It added pressure to my time with the girls, and as a result, fifteen out of eighteen FDGs needed to be completed in two sittings. However, it also ensured that the discussions became more informal and free-flowing.

Box 4.1: Introductory monologue for FGDs

‘Hi, I am Saba. Please address me by my name, I am not your teacher so please do not call me ‘Madam’ or ‘Baidow’!! I am happy for you to address me with my first name. I am from Guwahati. I am 30 years old and I am a mother to a 1 year old boy. I have come home after several years, and it is taking me a while to get used to living with my parents and their ‘rules’ in Guwahati. At the moment I am studying in a University in England for a PhD. I am here to talk to you about myself and my research, and to learn from you about your lives. Let’s start with a short introduction with you all now. You can tell me your name and age, and one thing about yourself. It can be anything-what you like or do not like to, or anything else you think is interesting. Also please be aware anything that we talk here will be between me and you all. Do not give out any information that you do not want to and feel free to come talk to me in private after the discussion if you would like to.’

Source: Fieldwork 2013-14

- (b) *Opening the researchers for scrutiny:* To enable the respondents to scrutinize me before they opened up to me, I opened the floor up for a brief Question and Answer (Q/A) Session for 15-20 minutes before the FGDs and incorporated more time for the same in the interviews. In my past experiences of interviewing people, I had always factored time for questioning the researcher after an interview, but I found that doing so before, in fact, helped create moments of ‘shared knowledge’ by tapping into our shared cultural ‘reservoir’ (Skeggs, 1994: 161-162). By interrogating the researcher, the interviewees in the study were engaged in construing the researcher using their social realities as a reference. These similarities and differences between myself and the subjects of my research created what Mies (1983) describes as partial identification. Overall it helped ‘break ice’ and to build a rapport organically and enhanced the quality of interactions. (See Box 4.2 for a sample). Personally, this produced several moments of reflexivity to consider the impact of my identity upon the research and the interviewees, as I discuss in subsequent sections.
- (c) *Voluntary sampling-* A further strategy of redressing the asymmetry of power between the researcher and the researched was deployed by asking the girls to self-select themselves and their parents to be interviewed one-on-one, either at home or schools. Voluntary sampling was done with a view of putting the girls

in control of the next stages of data collection. At the end of the FGDs sessions, I made an announcement requesting the girls to tell me if they wanted me to come to their house to meet their parents and if they wanted to share their journey from home to school. I then left them with my contact details on the phone and in person giving them time to decide. I was aware of the risks of too few girls or too many girls taking up my offer, but I soon realized that over three-fourths of each of the FGD groups were contacting me again to be interviewed. On receiving verbal or telephone confirmation with the girls, I sought to speak with their parents to confirm the date, time and location and then proceeded to meet them according to our agreement. Soon I realized that most girls framed my visit to their parents as a social visit without talking about interviewing and the context of my research. In those cases, I used the first meeting to outline the context of my research and open myself up to scrutiny as I did with the girls. Additionally, the girls in the study choose pseudonyms for themselves to be used in this study. These were often pet names or names they liked, giving them some control over their portrayal.

Box 4.2 Sample Q/A preceding FGD

Rupa: Are you really that old? (Hysterical laughs in the room)

Saba: No no, not bluffing!!! I am that OLD.

Rupa: When did you get married?

Saba: Nearly 6 years back. That was after I studied for a Masters degree.

Lily: Then what are you studying now?

Saba: I am studying for a degree called PhD. You can do a PhD after doing an MA/MSc degree

Rupa: You were working at the time of your marriage? I would really like to work whether or not I get married.

Saba: Yes

Helen: That means you don't take money from your husband?

Saba: I do some times, I also give him money when he needs!!

Sana: Did your husband's family ask you to leave the job?

Saba: No they did not. I know some women come under pressure to quit their jobs when they get married. I was lucky it was not the case with me. Or maybe it was but I did not realise.

Sana: They must be really nice. Do they know you are wearing jeans today?

Saba: I don't think so. I don't know what he is wearing today either- so we are even I guess! (lots of laughs)

Sana: So nice, but my parents don't even let me wear jeans. I love it when girls wear jeans and kurta. It really looks nice. My little sister is allowed to wear jeans and skirts, but I am not. When I want to wear skirts they say 'your legs shouldn't be showing' and when I want to wear jeans, they say the top is too short'.

Helen: How is it to live in London? Are all the people in London white? Are there other Muslims in London?

Saba: It is nice but it is very cold and very rainy. There are lots of different kinds of people in London. It is a very big city. There are lots of Indians like me there who go there to study or work. Some of them are Muslims too.

Helen: When you live here with your parents in Guwahati who cooks for your husband?

Saba: He cooks for himself

Helen: Wow!! He knows how to cook. Even my dad cooks when we have a feast at home. He cooks very well.

(FGD Sanctuary School, 3rd Nov 2013)

Intersectionality

As discussed earlier, Muslim girls in my study faced and negotiated several overlapping forms of disadvantage based on their class, gender, religious and ethnic position. Capturing these intersecting disadvantages in Muslim girls' lives has

significant methodological implications. From a feminist perspective, Choo and Frerre (2010) point towards the enormous methodological demands of such a research project. It:

‘calls for data that are multilevel, capturing both the agency of individuals in making the world they inhabit and the enabling and constraining forces of the world as it has been produced’ (Choo and Ferree, 2010: 134).

In the context of my research, this meant two things. Firstly, having research instruments that captured the agency of individual Muslim girls while reflecting the nature of structuring forces in their lives (See the Appendices for the research instruments). This also implied that research instruments had to be general enough to accommodate a multiplicity of processes, positions, and subjectivities (conferred and experienced) emanating from them, yet precise enough for each unique individual. Thus, in-depth semi-structured interviews and semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) became my methods of choice. The implication of seeking intersectional data was to incorporate a diversity of intersectional positions among respondents. This required the sampling strategy to reflect the widest possible diversity of intersectional positions. While categories like gender, ethnicity, and religion were often self-reported by the respondents to a significant degree of accuracy, in India both the academic and the lay understanding of class are far less obvious. In the early days of the formulation of the research, I was informed strongly by income-related studies, particularly by McKensey Global Institute’s well-cited report, ‘India’s Consumer Market’ (Ablett et al., 2007) discussed earlier in Chapter 3. Its measures were later modified slightly by the National Council for Agriculture and Economic Research (Shukla, 2010). An income-based measure (see Table 3.1) is especially interesting to me as the relationship between religious and ethnic identities and class is undertheorized compared to the relatively well-developed theorizations of caste and class (Gilbertson 2011, Still 2011, Kapadia 1995, Chakravarty 1993). Thus, the design of my research instruments incorporated questions about income, occupation, and educational spending of the Muslim households to which my respondents belonged. However, once I started collecting the data, I supplemented the income-related measures with a more sociological view of class as the nature and composition of capitals (Fernandes 2000). This also helped me triangulate the class-related information revealed through income. However, instead of going into sub-

categories based on income, for the sake of simplicity I used the broad categories of upper, middle and lower class. I also make references broadly to lower, upper and middle-classes to denote the socio-economic location of my respondents more accurately from a comparative perspective.

4.2. Research Process: Fieldwork preparation, data collection, and analysis

I left the United Kingdom with a field diary I had already started writing in the run-up to my departure, a laptop, a recorder, and first drafts of my untested research tools: an FGD checklist (Appendix 1) and individual semi-structured interview tools for girls (Appendix 2), parents (Appendix 3) and teachers (Appendix 4). I also developed a separate instrument to collect information about the schools in my sample – types of governance, strength, academic performance and holidays (Appendix 5). Alongside my intellectual and emotional preparation was the logistic preparation of childcare once I arrived in India. This involved small issues such as checking for the brand of formula milk available locally, to the brand of disposable diaper available locally, to larger issues like getting all the vaccination and the right ‘travel system’. When I set out from the United Kingdom my intention was to hire childcare and rented accommodation in Nagaon. However, soon the lack of professional childcare services in Assam was evident, so I decided to base myself at my parents’ home in Guwahati located about 75 miles from Nagaon. This measure, I felt, would create a stable and safe atmosphere for my toddler, allowing me to concentrate on my research. In the absence of formal childcare facilities, I had to depend on family members for child care. This created several disruptions in my fieldwork schedule.

The data for this thesis came from focus group discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic observations, conducted over the course of nine months of fieldwork in Nagaon and from September 2013 to May 2014. I also used publicly available texts of government policies for the analysis of the language of the policies to understand the subjectivities conferred upon Muslim girls. Notably, given my interest in conferred subjectivities my project was never conceived as a school ethnography. The politics of authorization that I was interested in operated through multiple actors within and outside the school. I was also interested in Muslim girls’ responses to these conferred subjectivities through negotiations at school and outside. Much like Gilbertson’s (2011: 23) ethnographic work in Hyderabad, the school was a starting point for my research. As in her case the school gave me ‘access to people of

different ages – students, older siblings, teachers, parents, grandparents.' Even though much of my material is based on policy analysis, semi-structured interviews and group discussions, the school, the home and the in-between locations offered opportunities of undertaking ethnographic observations that helped position my respondents in their socio-cultural milieu and added texture to their narratives. The documentation of the fieldwork, especially my observations, were recorded in the form of reflective entries in my field diary typed at the end of every day of fieldwork, which I also draw on, in course of my analysis. Audios of interviews and FGDs were recorded and transcribed later. I kept note-taking to a minimum while in the field and only opened my diary to note information, such as a name or a contact detail. During the early days of fieldwork, I attempted to divide my notes into four sections to reflect on various aspects of doing research and on my role in the construction of research knowledge, following Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001): Observational Note (this is a descriptive note), Methodological Note (it reflects on the methodological aspects of research and researcher's actions), Theoretical Note (explanations for the data) and analytic Memo (brings several inferences together). This classification was useful to think about an organizational structure for my notes, but I realized that in the early days, without the space to transcribe the interviews and discussions, the theoretical and analytic notes would offer an incomplete picture. Thus, I focused upon the observational and methodological aspects of the fieldwork in my notes. In the rest of this section I will discuss the various stages in the research process including sampling and negotiation of access, data collection, transcription and data analysis, and ethics.

Sampling and negotiation of access

As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Nagaon was chosen as the 'field' for various strategic reasons, including its demographic composition, literacy levels, political significance in Assam and excellent connectivity. However, like any field, it offered challenges and opportunities in sampling and negotiation of access discussed here. According to Baxter, Hughes, and Tight (2006), gaining access to people, institutions or documents is not just a one-off exercise. I, too, found in the course of my research that it is a continuous and often dynamic process, which is not only conducted immediately before beginning one's data collection but happens continuously alongside the data collection. As the fieldwork progressed, I found that 'further dynamics of power emerged, particularly about the negotiation and renegotiation of

access' (Munro et al., 2004: 290). Respondents at various levels influenced whom I contacted and on what terms, influencing the overall reach of my research and the efficacy of the data collection. This was also driven by my identity and composition of social capital. As a daughter of an academic, my first point of call before beginning the data collection was the academic community in Nagaon, i.e. teachers in local colleges with whom I had come in contact over the years through my father, who is an academic from Gauhati University. Many of the college teachers in Nagaon have been his students at some point. This gave me the advantage of a warm reception and trust with the informal informants who helped me scope the field, in the sampling of schools and in locating contacts among the teaching staff in the schools. Thus, I must acknowledge here the role played by my social capital in providing access to schools.

Soon it became clear that the educational system in Nagaon, as in the rest of India, is deeply fragmented, with divisions around type of governance, public and private nature, co-ed and gender-segregated, religious and secular, regulated by Central Board of Secondary Education or Secondary Education Board of Assam, and so on. I also walked through the town center asking people about the schools in the area and the types of families that sent their children to those schools. Insights from various informants made it apparent that schools in Nagaon are class segregated, which means schools are likely to be relatively homogeneous in their class composition. Thus, there was little or no likelihood of finding girls from different academic backgrounds in a single school. Reflecting upon that, I note in my field diary:

The fact that schools are fragmented across many axes, means that I would have to select a larger sample of schools to meet the various criteria such as age, composition, class composition, gender composition, governance structure, and types in order to tap into the diversity of the Muslim community in Nagaon (Fieldnotes, 25th September 2013).

The schools to which the upper and upper-middle-classes sent their children became obvious very quickly as there were very few of them, but the task of revealing schools that attracted students from lower-middle and lower class backgrounds was comparatively more challenging. After the scoping study, I had an initial shortlist of eight schools in Nagaon that met my requirements of accessibility, a considerable presence of Muslim children, nature of the class composition of the school, type of

governance, and religious or secular orientation of the school. In addition to the criterion of class, the criterion of the type of governance of schools led me to shortlist five schools, as outlined in Table 4.1. The pseudonyms of the shortlisted schools in my sample are Meadow School, Northern School, Sanctuary School, Kaleidoscope Senior Madrassa and City School. The features of the school and the class and religious composition is also outlined in the Table 4.1. Given the rigidly class segregated nature of the demographics of the schools, a reasonably efficient class-based sampling was achieved through the selection of classes, which I later triangulated using income and occupation data from the interviews with girls and parents (see Interview instruments in the Appendix 1-4). Table 4.2 presents the class-wise distribution of the sample, and Table 4.3 presents the ethnicity-wise distribution. The other two axes of identity – gender and Muslim religion – remain constant throughout the sample.

Table (4.1) Nature of schools in the sample				
Pseudonyms	Type (Faith school vs. Secular School)	Type (Governance)	Class composition based on the typology in Table 3.2	% of Muslim children
City School	Faith school (Christian) with a secular curriculum	Government Unaided/Run by the Don Bosco Convent	Upper-class, upper-middle- class, middle-class	10%
Northern School	Secular	Government-aided	Middle-class and some lower-class	25%
Meadow School	Secular	Government-aided	Lower-class and lower middle-class	50%
Sanctuary School	Secular	Provincialized	Lower class	100%
Kaleidoscope Madrassa	Faith school (Muslim) with an Islamic curriculum	Provincialized	Lower class	100%
Source: Fieldwork data 2013-14				

Table (4.2) Class composition of sample		
Class		Sample (N)
Lower class		12
Middle class	Lower-middle class	9
	Middle-middle class	6
	Upper-middle class	9
Upper class		1
Totals		Total 37

Table (4.3) Ethnic composition of the sample	
Bengali-speaking (Miyah)	32
Assamese-speaking	4
Mixed	1
Total	37

In negotiating access to schools, my first lead came reasonably quickly in the form of Hiba, a female Muslim teacher in one of the first schools I had shortlisted. This was a significant development as she was a long-term resident and an experienced teacher with excellent contacts in her school (Meadow School), and the larger teaching community in Nagaon. She acted as a gatekeeper, defined in the online Social Research Glossary by Harvey (2004) as ‘persons who can arbitrate access to a social role, field setting or structure.’ She was instrumental in helping me make initial contacts with teachers in several other schools, while I was scoping for my sample. In this way, the key informants among the teachers in the other schools were recruited through snowball sampling. Once in the school, having a contact in the school turned out to be a double-edged sword. I also realized that the relationship between my key

informant among the teachers and the rest of the teachers had a bearing upon my interactions with the other teachers. For cultural reasons, during the fieldwork at Meadow School, Hiba took on a traditional hosting role in my presence, feeling the need to look after my needs such as lunch, and often inviting me to the staff room. This was an opportunity to build rapport with the teaching staff in the school, but also raised ethical questions around imposing myself upon her. I also anticipated that being seen as close to the teachers would negatively impact my ability to build trust with the girls. As I document in my field diary:

While I was in the staff room today discussing my research with teachers during recess, one of the girls from class IX came to the staff room to distribute sweets on her birthday. She addressed me as '*Baidow*' like she was addressing her teachers, instead of the usual informal address of 'ba.' She kept her head down and made little eye contact with me during the brief conversation. My presence in the staff room near the teachers may have led her to associate me with the teachers. (Fieldnotes, 21th October 2013)

I quickly moved away from my perch in the staff room to spend time around the school *verandah* (courtyard), where I would wait for my appointments with the head teacher and other teachers. Being seen as 'working hard' or being 'patient,' often for several hours and days, by the teachers got them to view me as non-intrusive. In addition to negotiating my relationship with the key informants, I drew valuable lessons from the first few days of field work in Meadow school for the rest of my fieldwork summarized as follows. First, I replaced the recorder with the much more innocuous-looking cell phone recorder, as teachers were often reluctant to speak on the recorder but most of them did not seem to mind the recording on the phone. Second, I avoided photographing the campus as teachers, were very suspicious of any photographing within the school premises. And finally, I decided not to ask for any student-related data that also rendered the teachers very suspicious of my intent. Another lesson learned during this period about interviewing teachers came in the form of my research assistant. Early on, I had also decided to hire a research assistant to help me with interviewing. Noor, a Bengali-speaking Muslim male and a doctoral student in Political Science at Gauhati University, came into the picture in the early days of my research, when I was anticipating the need for a Bengali speaker. However, his Bengali-speaking/*Miyah* Muslim subjectivity often came in conflict with the deep

rooted anti-immigrant sentiments harbored by some of the teachers, as illustrated in the exchange below. I realized that such exchanges could be traumatizing for him, while hindering the expression of many of the teachers' subjective views about their Muslim students (and the issue of immigration), which was vital for my research. Right after the exchange below the head-teacher in question excused herself from the interview, and refused to interact with me directly for several weeks henceforth. Following this interview, I decided to bring Noor along only for interviews with Bengali Muslim respondents, i.e. Muslim girls, and families.

Head teacher: The Muslim girls in our school are mostly Miyah Muslims. If you listen to them, speak you will know that Assamese is not their mother-tongue. Even their writing in Assamese is not up to the mark and often the use of words is inappropriate. No native Assamese speakers make mistakes like that. But if you ask them each one of them is going to say they are Assamese.

Noor (Visibly upset): Madam, you should give credit to the Miyah people for adopting the Assamese language as their own. Otherwise Assamese would have been a minority language in Assam. But the Hindu Bengalis have not accepted the Assamese language like that. Their children go to Bengali medium schools instead of Assamese medium schools. But nobody calls them a foreigner. Why? (Meena, Headteacher, Meadow School, Interview, 25th Oct 2013)

Once initial contact with schools was made and an amicable working relationship established with the teaching staff through formal and informal discussions, I sought some teachers' help to recruit participants (Muslim girls) for FGDs, reflecting the diversity of age groups, economic condition, and academic ability. I left a list of criteria for the selection of the respondents with the head teacher to give her time to identify the students based on the criteria laid out in Box 4.3. However, I realized that getting the teachers to shortlist individual

Box 4.3: Criteria for identifying sample for Muslim girls for FGDs
Gender: Female
Religion: Islam
Age: 13-15 (class VIII-X) or 16-18 (class XI-XII)
Academic ability: Mixed
Mix of veiled and unveiled girls where applicable
Numbers 4-8

students was a flawed strategy, as teachers typically identified ‘extrovert’ or ‘academically inclined’ students. My advance announcement also gave teachers the time to coach some of their students in presenting the school in a certain light, as the ‘rehearsed’ and ‘homogenized’ responses from the girls during the early stages of interviewing revealed. Thus, I changed my tactic very quickly by handing out a list of criteria to the teacher on the day of the discussion, in my presence. The new tactic and the girls’ growing familiarity with me ensured that I was getting much more reflective, personal and nuanced answers from them as the fieldwork progressed. In this way, the sampling of girls for focus group discussions was done through the purposive sampling technique. It is notable that while the sampling of respondents ensured that perspectives of girls in the age group of 13-18 year were included in the research, actual analysis was not conducted in an age disaggregated manner.

The criteria for identifying respondents for focus group discussion was useful in most of the schools. However, at the City School, the tactic was constrained by the fact that school authorities refused to grant me such unstructured access that I enjoyed in the other schools. At the request of the headteacher, I made a field work timetable and a list of criteria to shortlist Muslim girls. The head teacher then sent a list of probable dates with exact time slots when I could conduct my interviews with little or no time to spend in the school observing. However, I found that the notice given to the headteacher had minimal impact on her sampling, given that the proportion of Muslim girls in the school was minuscule. So, in essence, all the female Muslim pupils in the 13-18 age group at the City School were a part of the sample of girls that participated in the FGDs. From there, five girls self-selected themselves for the interviews, after the first round of FGDs with girls, spanning about a week’s time in the school.

All the criteria in Box 4.3 did not apply to all the schools. In the Kaleidoscope madrassa, populated only by Muslims, religion was not a criterion, nor was veiling status because all the students in the school are Muslim and all of them wear the *Burqua*. Similarly, in City school, the veiling/unveiling criterion were inapplicable because veiling was unacceptable as part of the school uniform. Once access was achieved came the question of consent, as discussed in a subsequent section on ethics.

Data collection: focus group discussions (FGD), interviewing, ethnographic observations

The groups selected for FGDs based on the criteria laid out in Box 4.3 were often larger than six, going up to ten in some cases, with several girls insisting upon coming to the discussion with their best friends. The FGDs often needed to be completed in two sittings, as the logistics of selecting the girls, getting them to a room and answering all their curious questions took more than an hour of uninterrupted time allocated in one sitting. In a few cases, FGDs could go on longer if the period right after the discussion according to the school timetable was lunch break or sports hour. The girls themselves often suggested alternative slots of free time and sports/recess break to for the FGD to be continued. The FGDs in schools helped me to build a rapport and a familiarity not only with the girls but within their peer groups more widely. Students in the school knew me, my name and would often informally talk to me and involve me in their conversations during recess and sports periods when I was not in an interview or a discussion.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-seven Muslim girls, twenty-six parents, and twenty-one teachers spread over five schools. I also conducted eighteen FGDs with the girls across the five schools as outlined in Table 4.4. Only eight of the thirty-seven interviews could be completed in one sitting. Of the remaining ones, twenty needed two sittings, and nine required three sittings, which meant that every time the girls had to be oriented about the study and the context of our discussion.

Table (4.4) Number of FGDs and Interview		
Focus group discussions		Numbers
Girls		18 (FGDs)
Interviews		
Teachers	Male (3)	21
	Female (18)	

Girls		37
Parents	Fathers (5)	26
	Mothers (21)	
Source: Fieldwork 2013-14		

In spite of the delays, I found that the spreading out of the interviews over a period meant that girls wanted to re-engage with some of the issues we had discussed earlier after having gathered their thought in the meantime. Many of them modified their responses. I was attentive to the reasons why the girls had changed their views about something and often found that the time elapsed allowed them to reflect on my questions from multiple vantage points. During the interviews, a few girls also amended or modified their earlier responses during FGDs, typically citing peer pressure as the reason for doing so. For example, in Kaleidoscope Madrassa, one of my respondents Bina said during the interview that:

In the group discussion, I said I want to be a teacher like everyone else, but I would like to be a doctor. But if I had said that in the group, they [her peers] would have made fun of me, and they would have known that I would like to move to general education after my FM exam' (Bina, 17, Kaleidoscope Madrassa, Interview, 30th Jan 2014).

Like the interviews with girls, my interviews with the families (typically mothers) of the girls from lower-class backgrounds were frequently interrupted by their commitments to work, caring responsibilities and other unpredictable disruptions. Avmajority of the respondents in the family interviews were mothers who were often available during the day, unlike the fathers. The fathers whom I could interview were primarily from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, as the fathers from the lower-class backgrounds had unpredictable work schedules. Many fathers were also reluctant to talk to an unknown woman about their daughters, whereas mothers appeared very comfortable and often keen to engage with me. There were several unplanned interruptions in the course of the interviews conducted at home on account of their everyday lives, e.g. one day during the interview it was raining heavily, and

the thatched roof of the house started leaking, diverting the family's attention. The everyday lives of the mothers I interviewed also offered interesting insights into the classed ideals of respectability narrated using motifs such as aspirations, family/marriage, motherhood, and dressing. The interviews with the teachers, eighteen out of twenty-one of whom were female, often remained uninterrupted, as they were in a work environment, without domestic disruption as in the case of mothers. They were also often in a position of power, where they had greater control over their pre-decided schedule. Often I found that the teachers in the government schools asked another teacher to cover for them or went to the classroom briefly to give the students a task, and then joined me for the interviews. Thus, unlike the other interviews, these interviews could be completed with little or no disruptions.

Ethical considerations

The interviews with the girls themselves revealed a great deal of optimism about the future even in the context of deep-rooted material poverty. This produced ethical dilemmas around the theoretical approach of researching Muslim girls' lives through their accounts of their lives – their situated knowledge. Following Harding (1991), I felt committed to deepening my understanding of these girls' lives through a feminist standpoint, focusing upon the perspectives of the oppressed in a patriarchal world. However, like Chagateri (2007), I did not want to create a fetish out of the 'abjectness' of the lives of many of my respondents and the nature of disempowerment it created. Neither did I want to replicate strategies of construction of the third world woman as objects – an approach against which Mohanty (1991) has famously cautioned researchers working in the global South.

Academia in the United Kingdom sets out very high ethical standards for researchers. Ethical and socio-cultural issues are of paramount importance to any research endeavor, particularly those involving vulnerable groups such as children. In this research, the British Sociological Association's (2002) code of practice was used as the basis of my ethical practice, to guide me towards a responsible relationship with the informants, practices of confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy. The BSA code was supplemented with Child Protection Policy by Save the Children, UK (2003) and Alderson & Morrow's (2004) 'Ten Practices of Ethical Research with Children' to weave together concerns around child-protection with those around participation and children's autonomy into the entire research process. In respecting children's

autonomy, the issue of ‘informed consent’ was pivotal for this research involving children aged 13-18¹⁶. As discussed in the sampling process, various layers of consent were taken on board before interviewing the girls, including that of teachers and parents. The first point of consent was the teachers, who gave permission to conduct focus group discussions on the school premises. The second point of consent was the girls themselves, who volunteered themselves and their parents to be interviewed. This was followed by consent from parents both to be interviewed themselves and for their daughters to be interviewed at home or in school. In this way, all the respondents in my study were given an opportunity to consent (or not) to being a part of the study. In particular, with respect to the most vulnerable group amongst my respondents - the girls - consent was taken from them individually and from their parents and teachers before interviews and focus group discussions respectively.

It is also notable that, following the BSA’s Guidelines on research ethics I had prepared a consent form to document the respondents consenting to being interviewed or giving consent for the minor girls in my sample. However, during the early days of my fieldwork I found that teachers were extremely reluctant to sign the document as it formalized my presence in the school ‘officially’. As one of my earliest interviewees Purna said:

If I sign this [consent form], it means that I am giving you permission to be in the school without asking for approvals from the Government. After all, we are government employees, we don’t have any authority to let anyone come to the school. It is out of goodwill we agreed to your request to do research. I hope you understand my position (Purna, Assamese Teacher, Meadow school, Interview 2nd November 2013).

Similarly, the head-teacher of Sanctuary School, Kaberi, felt that signing the consent form would lead her to be seen as a party to my research and vulnerable to be held responsible for any critical descriptions of the school coming from my research:

I know you have not ill-intention, but let’s say you write something about our school which is critical. I mean I have no problem if you write critically about us...we have lots of problems. If someone from the Education department reads

¹⁶ Official age of consent in India is 18 years.

something you have written, I will get blamed for allowing you to come into my school... You can do your research as long as I have deniability (Kaberi, Head teacher, Sanctuary school, Interview, 12th February 2014).

Similar explanations were given by teachers across the other schools which meant that the process of documenting consent was at odds with collecting the data. Parents showed similar reluctance to sign a piece of paper citing various reasons, including being illiterate, discomfort at putting their signature on a piece of paper not knowing what the paper will be used for, worried that their children will be treated unfairly in school if the teachers felt that the parents were critical of the school, and so on. In consequence of the above, I had to depend on the layers of verbal consent to participate, rather than written consent.

Transcription, data analysis, and writing

I started transcribing the interviews while still in India. However, a majority of the transcription was done once I came back to the United Kingdom. I transcribed all the audio files directly and started populating copies of the research instruments/guidelines as a way to document the interviews and the focus group discussions. One of the challenges of transcription was the fact that the interviews had to be simultaneously translated. As a feminist researcher based in the global North, the process of translation produced unique dilemmas around my position as a Western feminist 'knower' on gender and identity politics in Assam.

Writing in the context of Western and Eastern European feminists, Havelkova (1997: 57) notes that misunderstanding in the dialogue between Eastern and Western feminists arises from the assumption that 'a focus on women must necessarily mean the same thing in all contexts'. Havelkova further critiques the role of a translator adopted unilaterally by Western feminists doing research in non-Western contexts as follows:

Articulation in local terms is important, but I am afraid that women from the East will not articulate their experience in their own terms, because the Western feminist theoretical discourse has taken up the task of translation. For them, translation is a one-way project from West to East. This really means that those from the East speak two languages: their own and that of Western feminism. What is needed is awareness by Western feminists that they speak

in a contextually bound way, too. They must be willing to learn our language and to grant it validity (Havelkova 1997: 61).

Havelkova urges Western feminists to appreciate that their understandings and framings of the gendered world are not universal and are grounded in a Western local context that doesn't necessarily apply elsewhere. She urges Western feminists to learn the 'local' language rather than to force others to learn theirs. I remained attentive to these criticisms of Western feminists in my research, particularly in the process of translating my data from Assamese to English. While as a native Assamese speaker I did not require to learn the language, having lived and worked outside the state for all of my adult life I was conscious of meaning making processes in the translation and attempted to capture the essence of what was said by paying attention to local norms and the bodily gestures of my respondents in my transcription. For instance, often girls in my study addressed me as 'ba' - an informal address for elder sister. However, when some girls addressed me as 'baidow' - a more formal address for an elder sister or even a teacher, I could sense a difference in my positionality *vis-à-vis* the respondents in the interviews. Similarly, I captured angry gestures such as violent hand movements and nervous gestures such as giggles that added authenticity and richness to the translated and transcribed accounts. In hindsight, I feel that my Assamese identity and my academic training in 'Western' feminism enabled my project to engage in what Kramer (2003) calls a 'two-way translation' between two cultural contexts. I strongly identify with this position as discussed by Kramer in relation to her British-Polish identity and in the context of research on the abortion debate in Poland. She highlights her privileged access to research material and data in Polish due to her language and cultural skills, whilst maintaining her ability to critique both British and Polish culture.

Once the translation and transcription were completed, I moved on to the data analysis. I had planned to use NVivo for data analysis, but eventually decided against it due the following reasons: First, given that my sample was relatively small, mapping out the themes or searching items was not particularly challenging; second, I found its usefulness rather limited in interrogating text in more detail, because 'the existence of multiple synonyms would lead to partial retrieval of information' (Brown et al., 1990: 136). Therefore, the themes were mapped manually for analysis around the key issues that respondents talked about and the ways in which Muslim girls were framed (by themselves or by others). After several rounds of data analysis and mapping of the

themes emerging from each type of respondent a basic structure of analysis and writing began to emerge. The two questions around which I began to systematically map my data were a) What were the main issues being discussed? and b) How was the discussion framing Muslim girls/self? In chapters 5-8 the data analysis focused on these key issues and themes and the way the discussions framed Muslim girls. This mapping of themes formed the basis of data analysis, writing and division of the thesis into chapter. This type of mapping of themes enabled my analysis to reflect accurately the key discourses emerging in my research in a way that types of identities conferred to school going Muslim girls are revealed and un-packed through in-depth discussion. This process of mapping of themes also facilitated the process of writing

4.3. Positionality

The examination of the research process in the context of the researcher's positionality can be understood as an important part of reflexivity. Reflexivity here is understood to involve self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher, and a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity is also 'a continuing mode of self-analysis' (Callaway, 1992: 33) that influences every aspect of a research project. In a project inspired by feminist praxis, reflexivity is part of the theoretical, methodological, representational and ethical aspects of research. This section presents a reflexive account of the issues of positionality I encountered in the course of my research project.

The topic of my research required engagement with school-going Muslim girls of a particular age group, their parents, and teachers. During my preparations to conduct the research – formulation of the research questions, thinking about methods, drafting of instruments for semi-structured interviews and FGDs – my positionality as an Assamese-speaking Muslim woman studying issues of social justice and identity for Muslim girls in education remained central to my thought process. During the preparation for the fieldwork and the fieldwork itself, I began to reflect more deeply on the experience beyond the written page. Once I completed the fieldwork, I also reflected about how I deployed my positionality in different spaces. This section will draw briefly upon my reflections upon these two questions. When I began writing, I was particularly concerned with how my writings would represent Muslim girls in India – a group that has historically been invisible (Sarkar, 2001) and notoriously generalized (Hasan and Menon, 2004). My research project was aimed to offer a

critical alternative to the ‘marginalization/deviance paradigm apparent in academic research’ on Muslim women in India (Rashid, 2013: 39). Instead, it is ‘an expressly political project aimed at creating knowledge about the social relations and practices’ that allow Muslim girls to be construed in certain disempowering ways (Hughes, 2013: 205).

Just as the participants’ experiences are framed in social-cultural contexts, so too are those of the researcher (Bourke, 2014: 2). As a member of the dominant class and ethnic group (Assamese-speaking), it was imperative to establish trust with participants, particularly in the government-aided school, where the gap between us was the largest. As an Assamese-speaking Muslim upper-middle-class woman, I had to continually reflect upon what it meant to critically examine issues of economic and symbolic/cultural injustices. Drawing on Freire (2000), I had to remain alert not to speak for my participants, especially those from different class and ethnic backgrounds than my own, and not to try to work on their behalf to help them rise. According to Freire (2000), such efforts on a researcher’s part would, in fact, be counter-liberatory, as their position situates them as an oppressor. Bourke (2014:5) notes that ‘[i]n order to be an ally and advocate, my work has to reflect the voices of those who participate in research.’ Thus, to remain attentive to the voices of my respondents I translated their accounts verbatim and also recorded significant movements and gestures. In particular my transcriptions recorded strong hand-gesturing and bodily movements, indicative of anger and irritation, and giggles, indicative of nervousness, shyness or perhaps amusement at the topic of discussion.

Insider-outsider

As a feminist researcher, I was cognizant of my role as both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider.’ I was an insider in the sense that I speak a certain specific dialect of Assamese from upper Assam, one associated with economic and cultural elites. So, in economic and cultural terms, the teachers saw me as an insider, a sentiment echoed by one of the teachers in an interview as follows: ‘[...] when I hear you speak I can immediately tell you are from upper Assam and a good family background. Can anyone ever say to you that your forefathers were not from Assam?’ (Protima, Interview, Northern School 30th Jan 2014). Another teacher evoked a similar sentiment through what she saw as our shared Assamese-ness and shared a disdain for so-called Bangladeshi immigrants. In her words, ‘the Miyah people are the enemy for both of

us [pointing to the researcher and herself]' (Meena, Headteacher Meadow School, Interview, School 13th Nov 2013). In doing so, the teachers often made me a party to the discourse of Assamese vs. Bengali, or more specifically the native vs. immigrant discussion. This incorporation in the fold of Assamese identity instead of the more pathologized Muslim identity forced me to reflect critically upon the nature and the terms of my inclusion as well as the exclusion of many of my respondents from the conception of Assamese-ness. As an insider, I shared an understanding of the normative rules of the community. As per an Arab researcher working with Yemeni women in the UK, Khadeegha Al-Zouebi (2011:4), an 'ability to utilize insider-ness to create a rapport relatively free from tensions' is central to the legitimacy of the researcher in the eyes of the informants. Being an insider also helps to facilitate a shared knowledge of the normative rules, values, and belief systems. When discussing the 'beef incident' (Chapter 8), my insider knowledge of the food surveillance regime was critical for my legitimacy as a researcher in the eyes of the respondents.

At the same time, I have not lived in Assam for over thirteen years now, which made me a clear 'outsider.' This caused many respondents to feel the need to appraise me about the 'problem of illegal immigration' which affects them in their everyday lives. So, they saw my views on immigration and my conception of a broader and more fluid view of Assamese culture as naïve and as disconnected from the lived reality of Assamese people at large. The fact that I did not live in Nagaon, or for that matter in Assam or India, reduced my legitimacy as an insider significantly in the eyes of many of the teachers. The effects of this reduced legitimacy as an outsider were perhaps offset by the attributes of respectable femininity that I discuss in the next section.

Me and most of the girls in my sample come from different class positions, but in India, we are all homogenized under the gaze of a hegemonic cultural identity as 'the Muslim community' that mostly erases question of redistribution (class) while focussing mainly on recognition of (cultural) difference. Our Indian-ness is constructed largely through our shared other-ness to the normative Hindu femininity. While me and many of my respondents do not adopt visible markers of our religious identity, our names, and cultural practices, marked us as 'different' if not as other. I remained acutely aware of these commonalities cutting across class, ethnicity, language and geographical locations. So, despite being a non-practicing Muslim in my private life, my Muslim identity was central to my identity as a researcher working on

Muslim girls. However, despite being a researcher sharing elements of cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic identities with most of my informants, I still had to negotiate access to the field, as discussed earlier.

Notions of respectability and the mother-researcher

My identity as a married Muslim woman and as a mother opened me to a wide range of issues of scrutiny around religiosity, dressing, career, women's autonomy, motherhood, and childcare. One of the central themes of my initial conversation with all my respondents revolved around the narratives of 'striking a balance' – between motherhood and career, between Western and Indian and between Muslim and modern, producing symbolic capital of respectability for myself in the field, as conceptualized by Radhakrishnan (2009). She views this as a reshaped notion of respectability that includes home and a 'safe' job entrenched in global networks in contrast to the respectability centered on feminine domesticity. Radhakrishnan (ibid.) conceptualizes respectability using the idea of balance or 'feminine restraint' as discussed in Chapter 3. Viewed in this way, a respectable woman would be modern or Western in a restrained way: she would also be ambitious in her career, but not at the cost of family. This means that it is only in the contemporary historical context that my individual attempts to work as a researcher in a 'foreign' University while caring for a young child have come to be celebrated as respectable. My respondents saw many of the practices I deployed during the fieldwork as a marker of globally connected, yet traditional and family-oriented respectability. For instance, mostly during my fieldwork I wore fusion clothing – typically a combination of a traditional *Kurta* (a long top) with jeans, teamed with 'practical' walking shoes. Many of the respondents commented on the 'decency' and 'modernity' of the dressing practice, highlighting the idea of balance and feminine restraint. Similarly, most of the time I hired a car and a driver to get from my base in Guwahati to Nagaon where I was doing my fieldwork, a distance of roughly 75 miles –to tackle logistical difficulties, including safety and unreliable public transport. It also saved me valuable time, often allowing me to get home in time to put my son to bed. I was often forced to reschedule appointments, and on many occasions, turn down invites to dinners and other social events. The idea of being a woman concerned with personal safety, a woman chaperoned by a driver from one point to another, was aligned to the socially accepted

ideal of respectability shared by my adult respondents. The conversation below with one of the teachers demonstrates the value placed on safety, which will also be discussed in Chapter 7:

Ali: It must be very expensive to get the car from Guwahati every day.

Saba: Yes, it is. You can say that it is my biggest expenditure in doing the research.

Ali: You cannot place a value on a woman's honor. You travel alone every day – it is best to do it in your car with a driver you know. Even then you should be careful, these days. This driver is known to your family, right?

(Ali, Teacher, Kaleidoscope Madrassa, Interview, 4th Feb 2014)

Many respondents viewed the practices discussed above as a testimony of feminine restraint, producing symbolic capital in my field through welcoming and often empathetic responses towards my 'feminine' labor. Most parents in my sample, especially mothers, and female teachers, partially identified with me, and *vice versa*, on the basis our shared parenting experience. Even the few male teachers and fathers I interviewed talked very sympathetically about my situation as a researcher and a new mother. Respondents were often empathetic to my anxieties about being away from my child for extended periods of time and about taking occasional phone calls from home in the midst of an interview. In the course of time, the conversations became more personal and, most significantly, many of the mothers offered me advice on my concerns about developmental delays in my toddler. During the fieldwork, I canceled some of my appointments to take my son to a developmental paediatrician to assess the possible causes of his speech delay. It was a deeply distressing period for me personally, and many of my respondents with whom I rescheduled my appointments offered me advice based on their parenting experience. Some of the advice was highly gendered, such as recommendations about the 'mother spending more time with her children,' while another kind of counsel was insider information about trusted doctors, particularly from the middle- and upper-middle-class respondents. There were also several religious/spiritual recommendations, such as giving charity to shrines, visiting a holy shrine, etc. (Summarized from field notes dated 12th December – 9th March). In this way, my overlapping identities as mother and as a researcher fostered more equitable and humane interactions with the respondents. The interviews with parents

grappling with children's education in the context of material deprivation, seeking better lives and dignity, created some of the most troubling moments for me as an interviewer. These interviews more than all the others also re-focused my attention to questions of redistribution embedded in Muslim girls' education.

The symbolic capital of respectability facilitated my access to the field. It made inner family lives and living quarters accessible to me. At the same time, I was concerned that being seen by parents and teachers as a bearer of respectability might be detrimental to my positioning with the girls. However, I consciously maintained a critical distance from the perspectives of parents and teachers. This was particularly important in the context of the interviews with parents at home, in which the girls were often in the vicinity even if not directly participating in the interview. As a feminist researcher, I often critically scrutinized parents' (and teachers') perspectives during the interviews, by questioning notions of decency in dressing, good behavior, merit, and so on. Instead of accepting the identity conferred upon me I was conscious to demonstrate that the narrative of respectability did not sit on me seamlessly and that there were several and frequent moments of rupture, transgression, and resistance, much like in the case of the girls whom I was researching.

4.4. Conclusion

Overall this methodological approach was built on the theoretical framework and the nature of query discussed in Chapter 3, and influenced by feminist and intersectional approaches to research. Broadly the theoretical framework sought to address questions of recognition and redistribution (Fraser), reveal the politics of authorization (Bourdieu) and to understand the nature of Muslim girls' agency. The interpretative nature of my queries led me to adopt a qualitative research methodology. The features of the methodological approach discussed in this chapter are as follows. First, the feminist praxis defined every aspect of the methodological approach, particularly paying attention to researcher's positionality and the contexts of asymmetrical power between the researcher and the researched. I reconfigured the embedded power asymmetry by adapting my research design - adding extra time to introduce the research and the researcher including opportunities to scrutinize the researcher and voluntary sampling of key informants. Second, intersectionality was another key building block of this methodological approach. To capture the diversity and the

intersectionality of experiences of disadvantages of Muslim girls and their negotiations, the methodological approach had to adopt strategies like fragmentation of the sample based on class and ethnicity (gender and religion remaining constant). Third, the methodological approach pays attention to my parallel insider-outsider identity and my identity as a mother-researcher, by considering the impact of these identities upon the research. The impact of the positionality on my data analysis and writing was also discussed. In other words, in this chapter, the critical gaze is directed towards the researcher. And finally, ethical considerations around representation, anonymity, privacy and protection of vulnerable populations were discussed.

This chapter has recovered the research process from the researcher's point of view, laying open its methodological rigor for scrutiny. The next chapter marks the beginning of my analysis. It begins by addressing the role of state policies in the politics of authorization by highlighting the types of subjectivities the policies of education confer upon Muslim girls.

5. Framing ‘difference’: Muslim girls and the equal educational policy regime in India

State policies of education have an important role in legitimizing certain types of identities over others. This chapter is interested in understanding the nature of subjectivities the state policies of education conferred upon Muslim girls. The post-colonial Indian state is committed to providing equal educational opportunity to all children aged 6-14. It is also committed to the protection of minorities using various provisions, including the establishment of minority education institutions, support to *madrassas*, *maktabs* etc. The commitment to equal distribution of the government’s educational provision can be viewed as a measure of economic redistribution, whereas the provisions for setting up minority institutions can be viewed as recognition of a religious minority culture and their rights, as conceptualized in Fraser’s (1997) remedy of recognition. This tension between commitment to ‘equality’ (redistribution) and protection of ‘difference’ (recognition) in relation to minority education characterizes the equal opportunity framework that Muslims in India inhabit. In this chapter, I am specifically concerned with this policy regime, which is under-prepared to grant equal educational rights for Muslim girls but is geared towards the protection of cultural rights over economic rights. I am also interested in revealing the nature of subjectivities that such a policy regime authorizes for Muslim girls. The central research question I seek to address in this chapter is: What types of subjectivities are authorized to Muslim girls by government’s policies for education?

To address the research question above I use Fraser’s formulation of ‘affirmation and transformation in recognition and redistribution’. Following Lawler (2004:114), I am mainly concerned ‘not with (felt) subjectivities but with the (conferred) subjectivity’ through which the policies of recognition and redistribution are understood as constituting the subject of the ‘Muslim girl’. The recognition-redistribution distinction from Fraser’s (1997) theoretical framework is rearticulated in this chapter as a question of the ‘politics of authorization’ of subjectivities to school going Muslim girls operative in the field of education (ibid.). The politics of authorization in Lawler’s (2004) schema works through the perceived difference in the habitus of those seen as normative and those seen as non-normative. In Fraser’s (1997) formulation, affirmative policies operate through the normalization of normative socio-economic

and cultural/symbolic relations that authorize subjectivities premised upon difference. In contrast, transformative policies operate through the destabilization of inequalitarian socio-economic and cultural/symbolic relations and hence have the potential to authorize egalitarian subjectivities by changing everyone's sense of self. In this Chapter particularly, I consider ways in which the equal opportunity policy framework constitutes and normalizes the subjectivities of Muslim girls as economically subordinate and as culturally different. Building upon this in Chapter 6, I show how teachers' personal and institutional biases come together to confer these subjectivities - in particular using the idea of 'difference'.

This chapter begins by setting out the equal opportunity regime with an elaboration of the wider framework of equality in the Constitution of India (1950), and specifically around gender and minority education in the National Policy on Education (1986). The first section underlines the tensions between the ideas of equality and difference in the wider policy framework around the education of minorities. It shows that while equal educational opportunity regime is couched in the discourses of equality and secularism, it also demonstrates a parallel institutionalization of 'Hindu' bias (Singh, 2005) and an 'abandonment of the commitment to equal educational opportunity' (Velaskar, 2010). Both these features of the equal opportunity regime have a significant impact on the redistribution and recognition in educational provisioning conceived for Muslim girls and the nature of the subjectivities conferred upon them in the process. In the subsequent section, the two universal education programmes - *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* (2001), the Right to Education Act (2010) and the Pre-and Post-Matric Scholarships for the minorities are analyzed using theoretical insights from Fraser's model of justice and Lawler's concept of the politics of authorization. In each sub-section, I identify the asymmetric focus on the policies of recognition over redistribution and its impact on the nature of the subjectivities conferred upon Muslim girls in these policies.

In the next section I draw upon primary data: specifically, I draw upon interview data to illustrate the nature of the socio-economic and cultural/symbolic subjectivities conferred upon the Muslim girls by the scholarship programmes. Across the chapter, I draw on selective primary and secondary data to reveal the 'politics of authorization' operational in the field of education of Muslim girls. Overall, I argue that even though

the remedies of recognition and redistribution are both present in the state's education policies for Muslim girls, neither of them help subvert the relations of domination and subordination within the field of education. My intention throughout the analysis is to focus not only on what is *said* in the policy but what is left *unsaid*. I demonstrate in this chapter how this happens through processes of normalization associated with redistribution remedies and through a disproportionate focus on recognition. I return to these issues in the conclusion, where I bring together the discussion of the types of authorization of subjectivities made available to Muslim girls through policies of recognition and redistribution in education.

5.1. The Policy Framework: Constitution of India (1950) & National Policy on Education (1986)

Education has a very special place in the policy framework on equality in India. It is both a means of creating equality and an end in itself, to be distributed equally among all citizens. To this end, Article 21 of the Constitution of India, titled 'Protection of life and personal liberty,' was updated in 2010 with an addendum after the enactment of the Right to Education Act to guarantee free and compulsory education to all children aged 6-14, as outlined below. It is consistent with the state's larger equal opportunity framework for education rooted in its commitment to equality enshrined in the 'Right to equality' (Article 14), the 'Prohibition of discrimination' (Article 15), and the 'Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment' (Article 16).

The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine (Article 21(1), Constitution of India, 1950).

Furthermore, when Article 21 was updated, a sub-clause 'k' was added also to Article 51, which states that 'who is a parent or a guardian [is] to provide opportunities for education to his child or as the case may be ward between the ages of six to fourteen years' (Article 51A(k) Constitution of India 1950). It compels parents to provide education to children, shifting responsibilities from the state to the parents (Nigam, 2015). The National Policy on Education (NPE), drafted in 1968 and amended in 1986 and 1992, crystallizes the constitutionally accepted vision of education and equality. The NPE defines the role of education as that of 'acculturating', leading to the strengthening of values such as national cohesion, scientific temper and independence

of mind and spirit, furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our Constitution (MHRD 1992). In other words, education was seen as a key player in the nation building project. The NPE (1986) further specifies that the ‘national system of Education’ is to be operationalized through the Common School System for the provisioning of education to citizens irrespective of their ascribed identity. The NPE’s commitment to equality is supported further by its stated aim of initiating ‘appropriately funded programmes’, which is a particularly significant one in the context of a larger ecology of under-provisioning in educational policies by the post-colonial Government of India.

The concept of a National System of Education implies that, up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have access to education of comparable quality. To achieve this, the Government will initiate appropriately funded programmes. Effective measures will be taken in the direction of the Common School System recommended in the 1968 Policy (Section 3.2, NPE 1986).

The conception of a national system of education is consistent with the Nehruvian¹⁷ model of ‘growth with equity and social justice’ implemented through a ‘development model of capital accumulation, economic growth, modernization and a socialist transformation to fulfil economic, social and political aspirations of the new nation’ (Velaskar, 2010:63). The idea of a common/neighbourhood school system was the main vehicle for operationalizing equal educational opportunity for all citizens. However, in practice, allocations towards the common school system did not match the rhetoric, as the ruling political elites were covertly resisting such a drastic social transformation, one that was likely to dilute their class, caste, religious and other identitarian privileges. Primarily due to inadequate fund allocation, the government-aided school system was fragmented, while private schools for the urban elites and middle classes were encouraged (Tukdeo, 2015; Velaskar, 2010; Tilak, 2010). Unsurprisingly, the National Policy on Education (NPE) is seen by many as the beginning of the abandonment of the commitment to equal educational opportunity, concomitant to the processes of globalization and privatization (Velaskar, 2010: 72).

¹⁷ The secular modernist vision attributed to the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru.

The resulting system of unequal access to education has been a subject of many empirical studies and has been referred to as ‘hierarchies of access’ by Ramachandran (2004) and Bhatta (2014), and as ‘stratified access’ by Noronha and Srivastava (2013). In this study, I use the definition of the term ‘hierarchies of access’ taken from Ramachandran (2004) to refer to the process of fragmentation of the education system into public and private, and then the further fragmentation of both these systems in such a way that the poor get the poorest-quality education in both public and private-sector schools.

In addition to the question of the fragmentation of access, the concept of stratified access also alludes to the stratification of the quality of education, where the poor inevitably access lowest-quality education, whether in the government system or the private system. Empirically it means that quality education capable of delivering its equalizing function is not available to groups that need to be equalized. And studies conducted by Kingdon (2007), De et al. (2011), Annual State of Education Report(s) (Pratham 2012, 2014), have also highlighted this empirical context in which quality education in India remains limited to a minuscule section of the population. Hierarchies of access are an important factor in my study because Muslims are disproportionately represented in the poorest sections of Indian society, hence likely to be disproportionately represented in the schools with the poorest quality of education. Muslim women’s education, in turn, suffers disproportionately as a consequence of large-scale poverty and lower levels of men’s education in the community (Sachar, 2006; Hasan and Menon, 2006). Men’s low levels of educational attainment in the context of these communities is significant because the patriarchal social norms in south Asia dictate that men typically marry women less qualified than themselves. The framers of the Indian Constitution also recognized historical group-based inequalities and oppressions as the basis for state action. Article 16(4), in particular, states:

Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State (Government of India, 1950).

Groups such as women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Muslims in certain states such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, all benefit from affirmative action. According to Velasker (2010), both

Jawaharlal Nehru – the first Prime Minister of post-colonial India and Bhimrao Ambedkar – the framer of the Constitution – recognized the violation of the principle of equality in granting group-specific rights, but saw it as an essential temporary measure to overcome this impact of cumulative historical injustices and allow these groups to participate on equal terms with the rest of society. Reservations and affirmative action have been contentious political issues in India's post-colonial history. Many who support affirmative action are critical of the exclusion of Muslims and Christians from its ambit. In this study, since I focus on elementary education where reservations are not applied, I deliberately stay away from what is otherwise a key topic in the discussion of equal educational opportunity in India. Instead, I focus upon the particular 'Cultural and Education Rights' for the minorities, articulated in Articles 29-30 of the Constitution, covering the issues of protection of minorities' interests and their right to establish their educational institutions, as follows:

Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. (Article 29(1), Constitution of India).

All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. (Article 30(1), Constitution of India).

Articles 29 and 30 can be viewed, in Fraser's formulation, as remedies of recognition for minorities, aimed at protecting and affirming minority cultural identity using the conservation of cultural, religious and linguistic practices, as well as minority educational institutions. In her discussion on religious freedom in India, Neera Chandhoke (1999) notes that equality forms a conceptual family along with secularism. This means that issues of religious freedom, equality, and secularism in India go hand in hand.

The term 'secularism' is relatively new in the political lexicon and has been widely contested, most notably by Hindu supremacist groups, who view it as a ploy for minority appeasement. In fact, the 42nd Constitutional Amendment formally inserted the word 'secular' (along with 'socialist') as a characterization of the Indian Republic

in 1976. In the context of India, Chandhoke advocates an understanding of secularism as ‘equality of religion’ (ibid.). Unlike in the West, in India ‘secularism for the Constitution makers did not involve state antagonism towards religion, [but] it did imply some forms of separation between state and religion’ (Bajpai, 2002:181-182). Such a view of secularism supports the nation-building project that sought to create secular post-colonial citizenship identities as Indians ‘first and last’, irrespective of any competing allegiances of religion, caste, and language (ibid., 184). Seen in this way, secularism within the equal opportunity framework helps to arbitrate the contradictions between ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ about religion by adopting the stance that all religions are equal in the eyes of the state and its legal apparatus. At the same time, it permits religious minorities to establish and maintain their linguistic, religious and cultural practices and set up educational institutions.

While the Constitution of India guarantees equality and freedom from discrimination based on gender or religion, family matters in the major religious groups in India – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis – are governed by their respective personal laws (or the religious institutions referred to in Article 25), as detailed below:

Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion — (1) Subject to public order, morality, and health and the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion. (2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law— (a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice; (b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus (Article 25, Constitution of India).

The provisions of Article 25(2) (b) create a system of ‘differential citizenship’ and inequality for women from non-Hindu religious traditions (Narain, 2008). Pritam Singh’s (2005) insightful article ‘*Hindu Bias in India’s Secular Constitution*’ problematizes the provisions of Article 25 as follows:

The Article 25 (2) (b) fundamentally undermines the secular character of the state in favor of Hindus. If one adopts a strict definition of secularism, namely the separation of state and religion, this is an unambiguous violation of secularism. Even with a looser definition of secularism, the so-called Indian version of equal treatment of all religions, it violates secularism because of the clearly expressed special interest of the state in favor of ‘social welfare and reform’ of the Hindu religion. Why should a secular state be concerned about the social welfare and reform of only one religion? Why should a secular state be concerned with social welfare and reform of only Hindu temples religion? (Singh, 2005: 915)

Singh (2005) notes the discrepancy in the idea of secularism as deployed in the case of minorities and in that of the majority. These constitutional provisions can be seen as a case of active state intervention to consolidate Hindu identity. Mehta (2003:58) suggests that the ‘Indian state has used state power to consolidate Hindu identity in more ways than one can list’. Consequently, the Hindu citizen becomes the default citizen, with a more intimate relationship with the State. In contrast, the groups outside of the Hindu fold – mainly Christians and Muslims – are cast as non-normative citizens, whose family and cultural lives remain outside the purview of the state. This discrepancy in the idea of secularism, along with a host of other provisions that are beyond the scope of this thesis, leads Singh (2005) to refer to Indian secularism as ‘Hindu-tainted’ (ibid., 917).

With regard to women’s rights, this Constitutional provision allows the state to legislate the Hindu personal laws by the principle of gender justice, but not the Muslim personal laws. Thus, despite ‘formal constitutional guarantees of equality, Muslim women’s lives within the family are regulated and structured by explicitly discriminatory personal laws’ (Hasan, 1994: 59). While the post-colonial Indian state reformed the Hindu Code Bill, conferring despite its many anomalies, a semblance of equal citizenship to Hindu women in the eyes of the law, the same cannot be said for Muslim women (ibid.). These laws are mainly related to marriage, divorce settlements and custody of children, and thus do not have a direct bearing upon Muslim girls’ education. The policy of acceptance of Muslim personal law actively challenges Muslim women’s and girls’ equal citizenship rights, construing them as a subject of

cultural policy and not of economic policy. This gives credence to blanket claims about an essentialized ‘Muslim woman’ oppressed by ‘Islamic tradition’, victimized by Muslim men (caricatured as prone to violence, sexually voracious and polygamous), and in need of rescue by gallant and fair-minded Hindu men (Bacchetta, 1994; Kapur and Cossman, 1993; Jeffrey and Jeffrey, 2005).

In the context of education, the provisions of the NPE (1986) gives credence to the idea that Muslim women are a cultural subject by narrowly focusing on remedies of cultural difference (recognition). The remedies proposed in the NPE include the opening of separate educational institutions, ‘objective’ textbooks and the ‘integration’ of minorities as per Section 4.2 of the NPE (MHRD 1992):

Some minority groups are educationally deprived or backward. Greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interests of equality and social justice. This will naturally include the Constitutional guarantees given to them to establish and administer their educational institutions, and protection to their languages and culture. Simultaneously, objectivity will be reflected in the preparation of textbooks and all school activities, and all possible measures will be taken to promote an integration based on an appreciation of common national goals and ideals, in conformity with the core curriculum (Section 4.2, NPE, 1992).

The NPE’s pronouncements about minorities do not make any distinction between the educational disadvantage experienced by Muslim boys and girls, nor do they make any distinction between various types of Muslim women, constituting Muslims in general and women in particular as an undifferentiated group. What is most striking about the NPE’s provisions around minorities is its lack of attention towards the economic context inhabited by a large section of Muslims. Sachar (2006), Thorat (2012) and Shariff (2012), have also found ways in which Muslims across the country experience varying degree of mal-distribution, in the form of discrimination in bank credits, recruitment in public- and private-sector jobs, allocation of government funds under government schemes, and in housing and real estate. In other words, following Singh (2015), it can be said that Muslims in India experience institutionalized communalism in their everyday lives. Moreover, policy pronouncements such as the NPE examined above, are disconnected from their everyday material and

distributional concerns of Muslims and normalize their economic deprivation. Hence, they are unable to offer a pathway towards distributional justice in education.

Translating the Constitutional understanding of minority rights and the NPE's conception of minority education into educational terms shows that such an equal opportunity policy regime is geared towards protecting Muslim girls' cultural rights through remedies of recognition, and inadequately geared towards protecting their socio-economic rights through remedies of redistribution. According to Fraser and Honneth (2003:92) the 'problem of displacement' happens when consideration of Muslim girls' equal access to good quality government aided educational provisioning is displaced by concerns about identity-based educational provision such as *madrassas/maktabas*, gender-segregated schooling, and dressing. The outcome of such a policy regime is continued tensions of equality vs. difference and redistribution vs. recognition. According to Fraser, such an identitarian model of recognition tends to reify identity. She calls this the 'problem of reification' that places upon members of subordinate groups (Muslims in this case) who claim recognition, a requirement 'to elaborate and display an authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identity [...] it puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to a given group culture' (Fraser, 2000: 112). The overall effect, then, is the imposition of 'a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross pulls from their various affiliations' (ibid.). Translated in educational terms, then, learners are seen as members of pre-defined groups, exhibiting a set of pre-defined characteristics, as the education policy discussed below will demonstrate. Muslim girls in multi-cultural schooling contexts than are expected to be 'Muslim', with disregard to other axes of identification such as gender, language, ethnicity, and class.

This reification of identity, thus, obscures the politics of cultural identification and inter-group claims for justice. Struggles such as those of Muslim women for equal access to a place of worship (Niaz, 2015) and economic rights in marriage and divorce (Agnes 1994, 2001a, 2001b) remain shielded from the public discourse. This strengthens the Orientalist-inspired stereotype of the subservient Muslim women. I must emphasize here that in problematizing recognition in the context of my research I do not imply that Muslim girls' claims for cultural recognition are unwarranted;

instead, I attempt to shed light upon what sorts of recognition and what kinds of redistribution can secure Muslim girls' equal right to education while protecting their rights as members of a minority community. To address the twin concerns of displacement and reification, Fraser's distinctions between affirmative and transformative, recognition and redistribution, as discussed in Chapter 3, will be deployed in the next section. Using this model of justice, I will now analyze how contemporary educational policies address Muslim girls' claims of socio-economic redistribution and cultural/symbolic recognition. This analysis will then be connected to processes of conferring and legitimizing subjectivities upon Muslim girls in the subsequent Chapters.

5.2. Equal opportunity framework in practice

Sarva Siksha Abhiyan

Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), loosely translated as 'Education for all Mission' is the largest national programme on education in the world and it came into effect in 2001. It is the most prominent among all efforts initiated by the Government of India (GoI) before 2010 when the Right to Education came into effect. After 2010, the SSA and the RTE came to be synchronized in their initiatives, though remaining two separate entities. In addition to goals about enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes, SSA had a further goal to bridge social, regional and gender gaps, with the active participation of the community in the management of schools (MHRD 2001). In this section, I make two points. First, I show that the recognition measures within the SSA construe Muslim women as solely driven by religious/cultural motivations, and not by material motivations. Second, I demonstrate how SSA's minority education-related measures of redistribution are unable to bridge the class and ethnic/religious hierarchies of access to education for Muslim girls.

SSA directs its focus on the distributive elements of justice through the allocation of resources for teachers, infrastructure, food (midday meal), finances (scholarships) and clothing (free school uniforms) as per Section 1.5.1 of the Framework document, titled 'Girls' Education'. Section 1.5.1 indicates a focus on redistribution of material resources for girls' education, specifically towards girls from SC and ST backgrounds.

Education of girls, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, is the primary focus in *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. Efforts will

be made to mainstream gender concerns in all the activities under the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* programme. Mobilization at the habitation/village/urban slum level, recruitment of teachers, up gradation of primary into upper primary schools, incentives like midday meals, uniforms, scholarships, educational provisions like textbooks and stationery, will all take into account the gender focus. Every activity under the programme will be judged regarding its gender component (Section 1.5.1, SSA Framework, 2001).

The SSA is novel in its explicit choice of ‘gender component’ as the yardstick for measuring all its activities. In theory, this puts gender at the center of all educational programmes. The provisions above not only demand girls’ participation in education but also demand that the education system pursues girls’ education and that the social system actively generates demand for girls’ education. However, Muslim girls do not find a mention within the SSA’s gender equality-related pronouncements outlined in Section 1.5. This stands out as an anomaly because of the ample empirical evidence out there to suggest the grave nature of Muslim women’s educational deprivation nationally. A report on Minorities and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) written by Tanveer Fazal for Oxfam, India, highlighted how Muslim women’s educational status is comparable to that of women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and in some cases worse. The report says:

The Census 2001 figures returned Muslims as least literate among all religious communities. The recent NSSO 2007-08 education round further confirmed a high proportion of Muslims as illiterates [...] Muslim women (47.3%) count amongst the most illiterate segments of the society, their status comparable only with SC/ST (53.2%) women...Regarding levels of educational attainment, nearly one-fourth (23%) of all Muslim males and one-fifth (20.1%) of females were merely literate. A substantial proportion of Muslims—male (18%) and female (15.4%) had attained only primary education. Meanwhile at the higher levels of education, upper primary and above, Muslim proportion was significantly lower than that among all other Socio-Religious Category (SRC) including SCs STs and OBCs (Fazal, 2013:6).

The omission of Muslim girls from the gender-led agenda on education suggests that Muslim girls are culturally de-authorized as legitimate actors in the field of secular

education. In other words, while a majority of Muslim girls do attend secular schools (Sachar, 2006), the policy framework views this as an anomaly and construes them as a subject driven exclusively by cultural considerations such as gender segregation and religious/Islamic education. In other words, they come to be authorized as legitimate actors in the field of religious education, but not in the field of secular education. This point is further illustrated by the disproportionate focus on policies of affirmation recognition within the provisions of the SSA for the ‘Muslim minority children’:

To focus on education of Muslim children following interventions may be taken up

- a. To ensure availability of schools in all Muslim Minority concentration districts.
- b. Provision of only Girls Schools under the State Policy.
- c. Support to Madarsa (Madrassa) and Maktabas to provide regular curriculum to children who are not attending regular schools by providing EGS/AIE facility.
- d. Provision of Urdu text books for Urdu medium schools and also for those teaching Urdu as a subject as a part of free textbooks.
- e. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)¹⁸ also has the provision of 2 Urdu teachers in KGBV opened in blocks with Muslim population above 20% and select urban areas, if there is a demand for Urdu as a medium of instruction in those schools.
- f. Madarsas affiliated to State Madarsa Boards and satisfying certain conditions are eligible for such assistance as is available to other grant-in-aid schools e.g.
 - school grant @ 5000 per annum, per school for Primary Schools and Rs.7000/- per annum per school for Upper Primary Schools.
 - Teacher grant @ 500 per annum per teacher for low-cost teaching aids,

¹⁸ Residential schools for girls

- g. Free textbooks to all Muslim girls.
- h. Provision for Training of Urdu teachers.

(SSA Framework 2001, Section 1.8)

Drawing attention specifically to the provision of gender-segregated schooling for Muslim girls is among the remedies of recognition proposed in the SSA. The importance accorded to gender-segregated schooling for Muslim girls' hints at a continuation of the colonial/orientalist view of sexualized women-only spaces like the *Harams/Zenanas*. It is noteworthy that gender segregation, particularly in education, is not unique to the Muslim community in India or Assam. In fact, in late-colonial India and post-independence India, especially in Assam, most district headquarters were known to have one Government Girls High School and a Government Boys High School: for instance, Nagaon Girls High School and Nagaon Boys High School in my fieldwork location of Nagaon town. Colloquially they were referred to as 'government girls' and 'government boys'. By selectively emphasizing issues like gender segregation for Muslim girls, the SSA reaffirms Muslim girls' subjectivity as culturally different. They are perceived as driven solely by religious/cultural aspirations (as opposed to socio-economic ones), thus making them incompatible with modern education and idioms of progress and development. In doing so, Muslim girls' educational deprivation is explained as a function of their oppression under Islam.

A closer examination of the gender segregation provision and the remaining provisions under the SSA in Section 1.8 reveals a focus upon madrasa education, Urdu teachers, and Urdu as a medium of instruction in schools. This suggests that within the policy regime of recognition there is a juxtaposition of 'education for Muslims' and 'Muslim education'. Here Urdu is falsely universalized as a 'Muslim' language, in spite of the lived reality of a multiplicity of linguistic identities for a majority of Indian Muslims – Assamese, Bengali, Malayalam, and others. This type of affirmation recognition understands cultures 'based on the model of neatly wrapped packages, sealed off from each other, possessing sharply defined edges or contours, and having distinctive contents that differ from those of other *cultural packages*' (Narayan, 2000:1083, emphasis in original). Viewed in this way, the formulations of the SSA appear to construct a 'Muslim cultural package' in education that authorizes the claims of Urdu-speaking, gender segregation-practicing, madrasa-attending

Muslims, while claims for socio-economic redistribution or access to good quality education remain de-authorized. Following Lawler's (2004) formulation, such an authorization (or lack of it) operates by conferring upon Muslim girls a habitus inscribed by narrowly defined religious/cultural motivations in the field of education. In the process this helps to draw attention away from the post-colonial state's failure in educational provisioning for Muslim girls (Sachar, 2006).

I now focus on remedies of redistribution aimed at readdressing the socio-economic injustices experienced by Muslim children in the SSA Framework above. The commitment 'to ensure availability of schools in all Muslim minority concentration/concentrated districts' stated in Section 1.8 of the SSA framework can be seen as a remedy of affirmation redistribution, which provides for setting up of schools in minority concentration districts (MCD)¹⁹. The Nagaon district is one of the MCDs identified under the Prime Minister's Fifteen-Point Programme aimed at meeting infrastructural deficits in education, health, housing, sanitation, etc. in such areas. However, such an affirmation redistribution remedy does not disrupt the 'hierarchies of access' discussed above.

Gita Kingdon's (2002) research in India shows, enrolment of children from poorer backgrounds is adversely affected by the high opportunity cost of enrolling. She finds that this is because of their inability to afford non-fee schooling expenses, including travel, stationery, supplementary teaching or private tuitions. Calculations based on primary data collected in Nagaon are presented in Table 5.1 to support Kingdon's claims. I find that the girls from the lower-class and lower-middle-class group who attend government-aided Northern, Meadow and Sanctuary schools spend disproportionately more on transport and private coaching classes (henceforth 'tuitions') in relation to their income bracket as compared to those attending the government-unaided City School. In contrast, the upper-class and upper-middle-class girls attending City school spend most on inputs such as stationery, educational materials, school fees and tuitions. They spend comparatively less on public transport, given that they have access to private transportation. And they also spent considerably less on subject selective tuitions as they had help at home, in comparison to those

¹⁹MCDs or minority concentration districts are districts with a population of which a minority makes up at least 25%.

attending the government schools who often had outside help for most of the subjects. Notably, the City school was the only school in my sample that had an exhaustive network of buses ferrying students far and wide, because it was located on the outskirts of Nagaon town. I observed that

due to the good reputation of the City School and the provision of a good bus service, the Principal felt that parents were happy to let their children commute to the outskirts of the town, some even traveling for over an hour each way' (Field-notes, Dec 21st, 2014).

Notably, the girls attending Kaleidoscope School required significantly lesser material input for their rote-based education. These girls also spent the least on transport, as they all lived locally and walked or cycled to the school.

Overall, the annual expenditure per girl is higher in the upper and middle-class group than in the lower and middle class groups, but they appear to spend a much smaller proportion of their income on certain elements of their daughters' education notably in private coaching, than the lower class and middle class families in my study, as seen in the last row of Table 5.1. While the exact numerical analysis of this data is beyond the scope of the current study, it points to an interesting trend that most often lower and lower middle classes attending government schools are neither able to support school going children at home nor are they able to provide them with high quality schooling as many of my parents in Chapter 7 highlight. All parents in my sample appear critically aware of the gap between their aspirations and the quality of education being offered and hence attempt to bridge it. The lower and lower middle class parents depend on private coaching to potentially bridge this gap.

TABLE (5.1): AVERAGE EXPENDITURE PER GIRL BY SCHOOL TYPE			
	Expenditure per girl child per annum		
Item	Northern and Meadow and Sanctuary school(s)	City school	Kaleidoscope school
Class background of students	Lower class and middle class	Mix of upper and middle class	Lower class
Public Transport (Auto, Rickshaw, Bus) to school	£ 55-109	£ 35-86	0
Public transport to tuitions (pvt. coaching)	£ 16-32	0	0
Tuition (pvt. coaching) fees	£ 25-81	£ 51-202	£ 25-51
School fees	£ 3-8	£ 86-146	£ 2-3
Stationery and reference books	£ 20-30	£ 101-202	£ 5-10
Pocket money/Lunch	£ 5-10	£ 51-101	0
Extra-curricular activities (Music, art, etc.)	£ 5-10	£ 81-152	0
Total	£ 129-280	£ 404-889	£ 32-63
Annual income range	£900-£2450	£2450-£24500	£900
Source: Fieldwork 2013-14			

Clearly, the hierarchy of access in schools is a classed one, where class location dictates the nature of school accessed and the nature of investments in the education of girls. I find that the ‘hierarchy of access’ seen in Nagaon also has a religious and ethnic bias. The disproportionate presence of Bengali-speaking Muslims in the schools attended by girls from lower class backgrounds indicates that there is an intersection of an ethnic and religious disadvantage with a class disadvantage in the context of

Muslim girls' schooling in Nagaon (Table 5.2). The findings reported in this table also highlight that schools with a higher proportion of Muslim students are generally likely to perform worse academically than the schools with a lower proportion of Muslim children, in general. These findings around the religious character of the hierarchy of access to education are corroborated in trends reported in Sachar (2006), Fazal (2013) and Shariff (2012). Additionally, the commitment to provide schools in Muslim-dominated areas does not specify the types of school to be provided – a question which is increasingly important to ask amidst the fragmentation of the government provisioning of education following NPE (1986). The overall implication for such an affirmative redistribution provision under SSA is to encourage better enrolment and reduce the drop-out rate, but without the commitment to equality through universalization of quality education (Kumar et al. 2001).

Table (5.2) Proportion of Muslim students and educational outcome in the sample schools		
School	Proportion of Muslim students (2013-14)	Educational outcome as per class X pass percentage
City school	18%	100%
Northern school	52%	82%
Meadow school	50%	72%
Sanctuary school	88%	75%
Kaleidoscope madrassa	100%	NA
Source: NEUPA Report 2013-14, fieldwork data 2013-14 and Principal's reports (for City School)		

I find that the classed, religious and ethnic hierarchy of access to school prevalent in Nagaon remains unchallenged under the provisions of the SSA, as discussed above. In legitimizing the class, ethnic and religious bias, the affirmative redistribution policies of the SSA normalize the current economic and cultural relations of

subordination in which a large number of Muslims find themselves. In doing so, the gender-specific nature of socio-economic and cultural/symbolic injustices Muslim women experience within and outside the Muslim community are also normalized and made invisible. For instance, the provision of two model residential (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya) schools to Muslim girls under the SSA appears to be a novel idea in a context of high educational opportunity cost reported in Table 5.1 above. But empirical studies have documented issues such as inadequate budgetary allocations, inadequate curriculum content, questionable teaching pedagogy, and lack of training of teachers in these residential schools. Commentators have often critiqued these schools for state-supported gendered surveillance of girls from subordinate social groups (Kumar & Gupta 2008; Saxena 2012, Balagopalan 2010). In other words, instead of opening avenues for gender justice, these types of affirmative redistribution schemes normalize the relations of domination and subordination between dominant and subordinate groups and within the subordinate groups, thus fostering the multi-layered unequal education system where class, caste, religion, and ethnicity are the determinants of what types of education are accessible to children.

This type of normalization of inequality is in line with the increasing abandonment of concerns of equality under liberalization that began in India in the late 1980s, as documented by Velaskar (2010). Thus, Muslim girls' educational deprivation in India needs to be seen not only as a part of the conflicting policy commitment towards equality and difference but also as a part of the story of liberalization in education consolidating 'difference' through a differentiated schooling system and eroding the commitment to equality through universal educational access. From the perspective of the politics of authorization, the SSA confers an economically subordinate identity to Muslim girls in the field of education by maintaining the class and religious hierarchy of access to schooling. In other words, the state only authorizes their claims of justice towards physical access to education, with little regard to concerns about the quality of education or the constraints emanating from their minority status. In this way, their economically subordinate status is maintained and reinforced.

Right to free and compulsory Education Act (2009)

Over the years a steady stream of research, reportage and documentation has brought to public attention that poor infrastructure, blatant and covert discrimination, teacher

absenteeism, and concerns about quality support are contributing reasons for the persistence of inequality in education (ASER, 2014; De et al., 2001; Jha & Jhingran, 2005; PROBE, 1999). In this empirical context, the RTE was legislated with the ambitious mandate of universalizing education; to streamline various types of schooling; and a set of remedial procedures against iniquitous structures. The Act lays down the following broad provisions: (a) making schools accessible to all through provisions of no capitation fees and screening for admission for students in the 6-14 age group (Section 13.1); (b) ensuring that specific norms are observed by all schools (in student-teacher ratios, teacher recruitment, etc.); and (c) changing the exclusionary structure of private schools by reserving 25% of school places for ‘disadvantaged students’ (MHRD 2009: 9). While the provisions under the SSA were not part of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the RTE provisions form an integral component of the Constitution through the 86th constitution amendment, as discussed earlier.

The title of the RTE incorporates the words ‘free and compulsory’ to imply that every child has a right to full-time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards as per the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) of the Government of India. According to the MHRD ‘Free education’ means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate Government, shall be liable to pay any fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education. ‘Compulsory education’ casts an obligation on the appropriate Government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 age group. Thus, the RTE casts free and compulsory educational provision as an obligation of the state (MHRD, 2009). In the context of my research in this section, I discuss the implications of the provisions of the RTE on Muslim girls’ claims to socio-economic and cultural/symbolic justice, and the nature of subjectivity conferred upon them, by highlighting two main issues. First, the measures of affirmation-redistribution within the RTE focus solely on improving access, without disturbing the hierarchy of access. Second, the measures of affirmative recognition that seek to prevent discrimination are unable to disrupt either the banal Hinduism embedded in schools or the linguistic hegemony of Assamese.

With respect to socio-economic justice, the provisions in the RTE remain inadequate, largely as a result of being modelled as an affirmative redistribution remedy as conceptualized by Fraser, instead of a ‘right’ in the truest sense of the word. The Act not only co-exists with this unequal and multi-layered school system but also legitimizes it in three ways. Sadgopal (2011) explains that the RTE’s definition of ‘school’ under Section 2(n) comprises four categories of schools of varying quality and provisions: i) schools established, owned or controlled by ‘appropriate governments’; ii) schools under the regular grant-in-aid of government, either in part or full; iii) special-category schools such as Kendriya Vidyalaya, Navodaya or Sainik; and iv) private or unaided schools. Thus, it legitimizes a multi-layered, unequal school system where the family’s class status and religious and ethnic status, as I show above, determine the nature of access and the quality of education. In my study, as described earlier, Meadow and Northern schools come under the first category of schools, Sanctuary and Kaleidoscope Schools fall under the second, and City school falls under the fourth category. Such an educational system

[...] implies that almost 80% of the children in the 6-14 age group shall be denied education in schools which the state itself considers, rightly or wrongly, as providers of higher quality education. This deception destroys the very basis of education as a Fundamental Right read in conjunction with Article 14 (equality before law), Articles 15 (prohibiting the state from discriminating) and Article 16 (social justice)’ (Sadgopal, 2011: 2).

It is also seen that Section 5 of the RTE Act curbs children’s rights of mobility across the hierarchical school system by restricting the right of the child to seek transfer to schools of ‘specified category’ (that is, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and other similar elite schools) and private, unaided schools. Finally, in providing for the 25% of seats being reserved for schools of ‘specified category’ and private schools, aided or unaided (Section 12), for ‘children belonging to a weaker section and disadvantaged group in the neighbourhood’, the state again reinforces the idea that at present private schools are of higher quality than government schools. Notably, the Annual Status of Education Report 2014 for Assam finds that despite high enrolment in government schools, a large percentage of children studying in the fifth grade lack the reading skills expected of children in the second grade.

Within these contexts, Sadgopal (2011:23) poses three pertinent questions, keeping in view the Equal Opportunity framework of the Constitution: ‘Can there be a Fundamental Right to inferior quality education? Can there be a Fundamental Right to unequal education? Can there be a Fundamental Right to discrimination-based education?’. It is not my intent in this chapter to give a definitive answer to Sadagopal’s questions, but they set out for my research the critical, analytical and ethical issues in thinking about affirmation/redistribution policies in the education for Muslim girls. The Act has further been critiqued for leaving out children below the age of six and those over fourteen from its ambit, making it at best a partial ‘right’. Jayal (2012) points out that age-selective inclusion of children aged 6-14 impacts girls disproportionately. In a social context wherein mean age at marriage is between fifteen and sixteen (Nirantar, 2015), such a cap on the coverage of students means that Muslim girls become increasingly more vulnerable to early marriage if they are not retained in education. The lack of coverage of children under six from poorer families also means that older girls are drawn into childcare responsibilities once the opportunity cost of educating them after they turn fourteen increases, along with the cost of childcare for younger siblings (Kingdon, 2002). Notably, however, for the Muslim girls in my study, specifically those attending Northern, Meadow, Sanctuary and Kaleidoscope Schools who are mainly from lower- and lower-middle-class backgrounds, the RTE Act has indeed created better prospects of accessing the existing educational system. But because this education system remains deeply unequal, only a right to inferior education remains operational in the context of the Muslim girls attending the four government schools. Education is neither able to subvert nor to transform class, religious, ethnic or gender relations to create opportunities for social mobility, nor is it able to transform the system, which remains reliant on individual entrepreneurial students and parents. Thus, in spite of contributing to improved access and setting out measurable parameters in student-teacher ratio, teacher recruitment, etc., the RTE continues to confer an economically subordinate subjectivity to Muslim girls, taking cognizance only of the question of access and not the questions of quality of education. In the next section, I discuss the articulation of the remedies of cultural/symbolic injustices in the Act and discuss its implications for recognition of cultural/symbolic concerns in education.

The Assam RTE (2011) rules, in contrast to the provisions of the SSA discussed above, are novel in tackling everyday forms of discriminatory behaviour that children from the marginalized groups experience in schools. The provision of Section 5 of Assam RTE (2011) copied below extends the constitutional provisions in Article 15 and Article 16 about non-discrimination by their caste, class or gender.

The Government, Autonomous Council or the local authority, as the case may be, shall ensure that no child is subjected to caste, class, religious or gender abuse in the school (Assam RTE Rules, 2011, Section 5.3).

The Act itself, however, does not attach mechanisms of retribution when these provisions are not met. Despite its recognition of cultural and symbolic devaluation that certain groups experience in school settings, it does not challenge the ‘banal Hinduism’ embedded in the school settings (Benei, 2008: 209). Radhika Govinda’s (2013:622) work on the use of overt Hindu symbols in ‘secular’ women’s organizations in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh similarly suggests that normalized use of Hindu symbols or ‘banal communalism’ leads to the equation of ‘Hindu’ with ‘secular’. Translating this formulation to the government-funded schools, especially the Northern and Meadow schools, where Muslims girls constituted about 50% of the total student population, the deeply entrenched ‘banal communalism’ made the overtly Hindu character of the schools invisible to both Hindu and non-Hindu students and teachers alike. I view this phenomenon as the ‘Hindu-normative’ nature of school settings, drawing upon Basu (2012), as I note in Chapter 3. He characterizes Hindu normativity as the merger of myriad devotional traditions, eclectic beliefs, practices, and customs into a single edifice of Hinduness (Basu, 2008: 240). The Hindu-normative social conditioning of a significant number of teachers in my sample is discussed in Chapter 6, and Muslim girls’ experiences of inhabiting and negotiating Hindu-normative school settings in their everyday lives are discussed in Chapter 8.

In my view, Hindu normativity leads to the acceptance of banal Hindu nationalism within the educational setting that marks out Hindus and Muslims, in particular through the bodies of Hindu women and Hindu girls that embody the nation and the national culture (McClintock, 1993; Yuval Davis, 1997). This normative ‘good’ feminine subject is defined with respect to the non-normative ‘bad’ feminine subjects

of the nation, often minority women and sex workers (Gangoli, 2012). This demarcation of subjectivities can be understood as the demarcation between the normative and non-normative habitus. Habitus consists of a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992: 16). Viewed in this way, the bodies of Muslim women and embodied practices like dressing, language and other expressions come to be seen as different. In leaving the Hindu-normativity of state-funded school settings unchallenged, the commitment to protecting children from subjugation to caste, class, religious or gender-bases abuse remains superficial. Such affirmative redistribution measures help to maintain the structures of (de)valuation that confer subjectivity of difference to Muslim girls. From the perspective of the politics of authorization, even though the RTE itself does not directly construe Muslim girls as culturally different or deviant, it is complicit in the maintenance of the generative structure that devalues their identity.

In the discussion around symbolic/cultural justice, another important provision of the RTE concerns children’s right to learn in their mother tongue: ‘The medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in child’s mother tongue’ (Section 29(1) RTE, 2009). Given the background of India’s language policies, specifically with the state’s reluctance to promote mother tongue education for minority languages, the caveat of ‘as far as practicable’ suggests a lack of serious engagement with the language issues of children speaking minority languages, which are crucial to making education a fundamental right. This also dilutes the version of Article 350A of the Constitution, which makes it obligatory for the State to ‘provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.’ (Sadgopal, 2010). This provision of RTE (2009) appears to be disconnected from the larger history of denial of the mother tongue as a medium of education in India’s school system since the 1970s, with the increasing demand for ‘English Medium²⁰’ schools, according to Sadgopal (2011). Today there is a broad consensus that all children must have equal opportunities to acquire a reasonable proficiency in English, as part of their broader right to learn other subjects as well. Historically this has come about partly due to the hegemonic practice

²⁰ Schools where the medium of instruction is English

of imposing the Three-Language Formula (NPE-1986, Section 8.7). As per this formula the three languages to be learned in state-funded education in Assam are Hindi, English, and Assamese, with Bodo, Bengali given recognition in geographically restricted regions (Baruah, 1986). In Assam, issues of language have been at the heart of colonial and post-colonial Assamese identity politics (Bhattacharjee, 2012). While a detailed exploration of the issue is outside the purview of this research, I would like to emphasize that the Assamese Official Language Act (1960) promises to '[s]afeguard of the use of Bengali language in the district of Cachar', which is predominantly populated by Bengali speakers (Government of Assam 1960). The framers of the Official Language Act ignored the ground reality that only 55% of the population of the state at that time was Assamese speaking – they were spread across just six districts of the Brahmaputra Valley. The remaining population consists of Bengalis migrated from West Bengal in India, the Sylhet and Mymensingh provinces of erstwhile East Bengal, various tribes like the Boros, Karbis, and so on (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Within the ambit of affirmative recognition remedies, this may be seen as a fragmented affirmative recognition remedy that creates further differentiation between the affirmed identities. The cultural (language) rights conferred upon Bengalis of Cachar in response to the 'language riots' in 1960, delegitimized the linguistic rights of Bengali speakers in other parts of Assam, especially in such districts as Nagaon, where they have a substantial presence in the government aided school system. This geographically selective protection of language rights creates ambiguity in the equal opportunity regime in education and supports the normalization of the Assamese linguistic identity in the schools in Assam outside of Cachar. Consequently, non-Assamese speaking groups, come to be marked as 'different' or as 'deficient', as I will discuss in Chapter 6. These constructions of difference work in peculiarly gendered ways as Anne McClintock describes in the context of African identity formation, using the 'family trope' that depicts social hierarchies as natural and familial allocating specific functions to the dominant and subordinate members of a society (McClintock, 1993). Bengali Muslim girls, then, become incorporated into such a social hierarchy through the cultural functions of mothering, including the inculcation of Assamese language to the next generation of children, as discussed through teachers' narratives in Chapter 6.

Pre and post-matric scholarships for students from Minority Communities

Several schemes were operational in the government aided schools, including scholarships, free books, free uniforms and bicycles. In this chapter, I only consider the scholarship scheme because these scholarships are directed solely towards students of the minority community, which includes Muslims. I draw attention specifically to the pre-matric scholarships, as the post-matric programme had only been rolled out by the Government in 2013 and at the time of my fieldwork, none of my respondents had benefited from it. The Scholarships are awarded on a 75:25 proportion between the Central Government Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Government of Assam. On the ground, the scheme was colloquially referred to as the 'minority scholarship.' Interestingly, unlike the scholarship schemes administered for SC/ST/OBCs housed in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ), the minority-related scholarship schemes are administered by the Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA).

The scholarship at the pre-matric level will encourage parents from minority communities to send their school going children to school, lighten their financial burden on school education and sustain their efforts to support their children to complete school education. The scheme will form the foundation for their educational attainment and provide a level playing field in the competitive employment arena. Empowerment through education, which is one of the objectives of this scheme, has the potential to lead to upliftment of the socio-economic conditions of the minority communities (Pre Matric Scholarship, MoMA).

Both schemes can be understood as affirmative redistribution measures aimed at reducing the financial burden for low-income Muslim parents with school going children. As seen through the lens of Fraser's (1995; 1997) formulations, these schemes attempt to provide financial assistance to Muslim families to support schooling of their children without attending to questions of hierarchies of access, poor quality of education and adverse experiences of Muslim children in multi-cultural schooling contexts. There is a further affirmative remedy built into this scheme through reservation of 30% of the scholarships for women.

The criticism of the programmes' inability to subvert structures of domination applies here too as I discuss next. I make two points here. The first pertains to the nature of

the redistribution engrained in the scholarship programme. A closer look at the language of the scheme sheds light upon some of the less obviously stated aims of the scheme, namely to ‘provide a level playing field in the competitive employment arena’ and to ‘uplift the socio-economic condition of the minority community’. From an educational perspective, noted scholar of education Krishna Kumar critiques such policies of affirmative redistribution because they ‘[locate] the argument for equality in outcomes that are extrinsic to educational experience’ (Kumar, 2005:108). For instance, the outcomes of a level playing field in employment and the upliftment of the socio-economic condition of the minority community tell us nothing about what these scholarships will achieve regarding improving Muslim children’s educational experience and education outcome. Are they able to come to school more often, perform better in literacy and numeracy, experience improved self-esteem? These issues remain marginal in the agenda of equal opportunity for Muslim girls and other subordinate groups. Kumar (2005) therefore proposes the deployment of the criterion ‘intrinsic to the education’ system in order to assess the success (or lack thereof) of these policies. His criteria includes parameters such as the treatment of children at the hands of teachers in actual pedagogical settings, the share of symbols representing the so-called beneficiaries of compensatory measures in the curriculum of schools and colleges. In addition to obliterating Muslim children’s experience of schooling, such an affirmative redistribution measure frames all types of prejudice and discrimination faced in the employment as a function of their current socio-economic condition; hence, to be solved through the remedy of redistribution in the form of the scholarship programme. In doing so, widely documented experiences of discrimination faced by Muslims in employment are normalized and invisibilized (Sachar, 2006; Jafrellot, 2006; Thorat, 2012; Sheriff, 2012).

The second issue is the extent of redistribution achieved through the scholarship programmes in the lives of the girls in my study. Respondents receiving the scholarship, highlight the gross inadequacy of scheme in the context of the high opportunity cost of schooling. The implications are particularly grave for the girls from lower-class backgrounds. The following excerpt from a conversation with fifteen-year-old Rejia, who received the Minority Scholarship last year, suggests that one of the positives of the scholarship is that it can spill over distributive effects on other family members. At the same time, it shows that the delays in receiving the

scholarships mean that the intended purpose of easing out the burden of education is not met directly, and families cannot plan in advance how the money will be used. So its use is often ad hoc, which means there is also the potential for the scholarship to be diverted towards non-educational household purposes. She illustrates the inadequacy of the benefit received under the pre-matric scholarship using a comparison with the cost of buying a reference book. She says that under the scholarship scheme, an annual lump sum of Rs 1850 is paid per annum, whereas the cost of a must-have reference book for Maths is Rs 1000, i.e. more than half of the scholarship money.

Rejia: I only got it once at the end of class IX last year. I had applied in class VIII . Also, they said the amount I received is for my application the year before. Maybe I will get something later this year for my application last year. I don't know!

Saba: What did you do with the money you got last year?

Rejia: We saved 500 Rupees to buy the R.D. Sharma reference book for class X. Then my mother got my sister and me some woollen clothes for the winter because our old clothes were tattered. And we bought a second-hand bicycle for my sister for 200 Rupees to go to school.

Saba: Did you buy the book you wanted?

Rejia: No, actually the book costs nearly Rs 1000 (£10). I didn't know that earlier. I think I will get someone's book from school and photocopy it. I have already photocopied sections I want, but it is a big book, so I photocopy it bit by bit.

(Rejia, 15, Northern School, Interview, 13th Feb 2014)

The interview above, like many others, shows that scholarships give the lower-class families a much needed financial freedom to buy things that they are otherwise unable to afford in their day-to-day lives, such as an important reference book, woollen cloths, and so on. However, in the context of such high opportunity cost of schooling the financial inadequacy of the scholarships limits the extent of the financial freedoms. From Fraser's (1997) perspective affirmation redistribution measures by design are not meant to alter the playing field, so it is to be expected that the benefits from the

measures such as pre- and post-matric scholarship are unlikely to achieve much materially. In that sense, inadequate benefits help continue the authorization of an economically subordinate subjectivity conferred upon Muslim girls. In contrast, if equal access to quality education had been made available by the State through a common school system, then the system of hierarchy of access would have been transformed, creating a more equitable field of education. At the same time, it would have obliterated the need to dispense affirmation/redistribution remedies, such as the pre- and post-matric scholarships, as a way to equalization. This is specifically true in the context of the disproportionately high opportunity cost of sending girls to school borne by lower-class parents, as shown earlier in Table 5.1.

Finally, these types of affirmative redistribution, instead of abolishing class differentiation and the ensuing hierarchies of access to education, support and shape them. Their general effect is to shift attention from the class division between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ to the divisions within the ‘have nots’. In Fraser’s (2008) words, the result is to

mark the most disadvantaged class as inherently deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more. In time, such a class can even come to appear privileged, the recipient of special treatment and undeserved largesse. An approach aimed at redressing injustices of distribution can thus end up creating injustices of recognition (Fraser, 2008:85).

Reshma, a fifteen-year-old who receives the pre-Matric scholarship, identifies below the nature of misrecognition she experiences in her everyday life as a beneficiary of the programme. In her view, merit-based scholarships would lead to a more positive sense of self for her than identity-based ones. The latter, in Reshma’s view, stigmatize minority students like her as lacking in merit, hence as being undeserving beneficiaries.

I would rather have a scholarship meant for everyone, instead of a minority scholarship. Otherwise, people tend to think just because you are Muslim you get the scholarship even if you don’t work hard. In spite of getting 80%, I get the same scholarship as those who get 50%. I would like to get a scholarship that recognizes me as a good student (Reshma, 15, Meadow School, Interview 30th Nov 2013).

For Muslim girls in the study, then, their economic subordination/poverty comes to be legitimized and normalized and attributed to their deficit in merit or culture as discussed further in Chapter 6. Reshma's focus on merit as a determinant of social benefit may be questionable, but her proposed alternative, in a way, articulates Fraser's conception of transformative remedy, which transforms everyone's sense of self by destabilizing or deconstructing rigidly formed identities. In Reshma's context, then, not only will such a remedy enable her to value her academic pursuits; it will also allow others to value her without being held accountable to a lower standard of what she construes as merit. While I am not supporting the merit-based argument for the benefit, Reshma's idea does point me in the direction of thinking about the intertwined nature of the justice claims of Muslim girls. On the one hand, there are real material (redistribution) needs to access education and then to remain in education; on the other hand, there are questions of recognition, and as Reshma points out claims for recognition are not solely about narrowly defined cultural norms (difference), but also about a sense of oneness with the rest of the society (equality), an ability to participate in the field of education/school as 'peers' without being marked with labels like deficient, beneficiary and different.

5.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made the case that even when the remedies of recognition and redistribution are both present in the state's education policies for Muslim girls, neither of them help subvert the relations of domination and subordination within the field of education. I have shown that the wider equal opportunity regime (e.g. the Constitution and the NPE) turns a blind eye towards existing hierarchies of access in education, and in fact, historically it has played a key role in creating this highly stratified, unequal education system where good-quality education is reserved for a few. Regarding Muslim women's rights, a 'differential citizenship' regime enables the Muslim Personal Law Board to continue to govern Muslim women's lives in matters of consent, marriage, divorce, child custody and so on. The policy regime actively establishes Hindu identity as the default identity, i.e. it suffers from a Hindu bias where the Hindu citizen becomes the default citizen, with a more intimate relationship with the State. In the school setting, I have argued that the Hindu bias of the policies operates as a cultural Hindu-normativity, where all other cultural practices come to be seen as either within the ambit of Hindu-ness (hence normative) or outside of it (hence

non-normative or deviant). Using Fraser's distinction between transformation and affirmation in policies of recognition and redistribution, I find that measures of affirmation/redistribution in SSA, RTE and Pre-and Post-Matric scholarship schemes authorize an economically subordinate subjectivity to Muslim girls, one that subsumes their gender identity. Their religious and ethnic identities are conflated with their class identity, much like the conflation of low-caste status with low-class status in Hyderabad, India (Gilbertson, 2011) and that of race/ethnicity with class in the case of African Americans in the United States (Ortner, 2006). I also find that measures of affirmation/recognition in SSA, RTE and Pre- and Post-Matric scholarship schemes confer a subjectivity of difference or deficit to Muslim girls, whether as being overtly religious, oppressed, or as lacking in merit. This is done through a disproportionate focus on a narrowly conceived minority identity in policies and programmes. Such a focus on identity allows distributional issues such as unequal access to educational opportunity and need for good quality education for Muslim girls to remain unaddressed. At the same time, this allows the subjectivity of difference conferred upon Muslim girls to be entrenched in the field of education, as the subsequent chapters will also demonstrate.

To come back to the research question that this chapter set out to address: my findings suggest that Muslim girls' claims of justice in education are authorized in post-colonial India only as long as they are premised upon the idea of 'cultural difference'. This includes the authorization of practices such as gender segregation, teaching and learning in Urdu. Their claims are premised on similarities with other Indians, and equality remains un-authorized. For example, discrimination and differential treatment in schools, and good quality education remain de-authorized. In selectively authorizing claims for the 'recognition' of difference at the expense of the 'redistribution' of educational goods, these policies authorize and reproduce a culturally different and economically subordinate subjectivity for Muslim girls.

In the next Chapter, I will discuss the nature of subjectivity conferred by teachers upon their female Muslim pupils. In doing so, the chapter also reflects upon how teachers interpret abstract and ambiguous policies of equality in articulating differences between pupils based on discourses of class, gender, ethnicity and religion underlying their habitus.

6. Teachers' Narratives: Framing 'Difference' as Pathological

The policy analysis in Chapter 5 has shown that the formal discourse of equality in educational policies in India is largely translated into affirmative recognition with some affirmative redistribution to support Muslim girls' educational equality in India. As discussed earlier, strategies of affirmative recognition and redistribution work by leaving intact the underlying generative structures that facilitate further group differentiation and solidification of essentialized identities. Chapter 5 also showed that the disproportionate focus on recognition remedies over redistribution remedies confers upon Muslim girls a singular subjectivity of 'difference'- socio-economic and cultural/symbolic. This Chapter carries forward the overall interest of this thesis in the subjectivities conferred upon Muslim girls. It connects teachers' particular interpretations of the 'difference' in relation to Muslim girls with the tensions between equality and difference emerging from the policies discussed above. In particular, in this chapter I discuss how teachers make abstract notions of 'difference' in policies real in their everyday lives, through the lens of their classed, ethnicized and religious habitus. The specific question this chapter addresses is: What subjectivities are conferred upon Muslim girls by teachers?

To address this research question, I use Pierre Bourdieu's conception of habitus in a way that reveals elements of the larger cultural configuration of class, ethnicity/religion and femininity in the field of education (Bourdieu, 1984). My contention in this chapter is that teachers constitute Muslim, Hindu, Bengali and Assamese identities in ways that normalize middle-class Hindu-Assamese identity and pathologies 'difference' from these norms. In the process they lay out a blueprint for Muslim girls (and Muslims generally) to become full members of the society. Through implicit references to the Bengali Muslim femininity the idea of difference was operationalized in the teachers' narratives about Muslim girls. Radhakrishnan's (2011) formulation of appropriate Indian-ness is useful here to think about difference in relation to a normative ideal that includes elements of class, religion, caste and ethnicity. I focus on four axes of difference drawn from my interview data from Hindu and Muslim teachers that are deployed to confer a pathological subjectivity to Muslim girls: appearance (dressing, behaviour), poverty, merit, and language. Their

articulation of difference is done in ways that Muslim girls are ‘culturally de-authorized’ (Adkins, 2004: 12) from the field of (secular) education. The distinction between appropriate and inappropriate ways of being is understood here as being embodied in the relational and hierarchical habitus making habitus, the motor of social inequality as discussed in Chapter 3 (Lawler 2004).

I start by demonstrating how the appearance of so-called Miyah or Muslim girls came to be pathologized by teachers through an ethnicized, classed and gendered aesthetic inscribed in teachers’ habitus. Drawing upon the wider literature on the over-determined nature of Muslim women’s dressing (Dwyer, 1999), this section attempts to understand how the global discourse of Muslim women permeates local contexts and interacts with the teachers’ classed, ethnicized/religious notions of difference embodied by Muslim girls. The second section goes on to show how teachers’ narratives construe not ‘poverty’ *per se* but the realm of culture in poor Muslim families as the sources of educational backwardness due to the nature of habitus it produces, leading Muslim girls to have unfavourable attitudes and dispositions towards education. This has implications for how teachers conceive Muslim girls from lower-class backgrounds, as undeserving beneficiaries of the state’s educational provisions and for the wider equal education opportunity framework. This section draws attention not only to individual teachers’ habitus but towards an institutional habitus that enables teachers and educational institutions to distance themselves from the educational outcomes of certain types of students. The next section highlights how the classed and ethnicized ideology of merit is used as a marker of difference between the normal Hindu habitus and the pathological Muslim habitus. Finally, I focus on the hierarchy of linguistic habitus of the teachers’ Assamese identity and that of the pupils’ Bengali identity. Drawing attention to the historical hegemony of Assamese over Bengali (and other languages), this chapter demonstrates how teachers as authorized speakers (both in the field of education and in the subfield of language within it) normalize the Assamese language, and the particular dispositions attached to it. In doing so, they culturally de-authorize Muslim girls, Bengali Muslims girls in particular, in the field of education. This section also draws attention to the gendered role of Muslim girls in maintaining the historical linguistic hegemony.

6.1. Appearance as ‘pathological.’

In this section, I examine some specific aspects of Muslim girls’ appearance marked as having a ‘deeper’ pathological meaning in teachers’ narratives, such as dressing and bodily disposition. The actual practices of dressing and veiling among the Muslim women and girls in Assam/Nagaon are diverse and highly context-specific, as in other communities, as documented in Box 6.1. Post-colonial researchers have also shown that there are multiple practices of veiling and multiple meanings attached by Muslim societies to veiling, such as piety, ethnic identity (Lewis, 2007), gender seclusion (Mernessi, 1991), patriarchal control (Abu-Odeh, 1993), nationalism and ‘authentic’ national identity in contrast to a Westernized identity (Ahmed, 1992). Yet, there is a universal discursive construction of ‘Muslim women’ through the practices of veiling, much like the references to veiling in colonial and ‘Oriental’ discourses on Muslim societies (Kandiyoti, 1991; Dwyer’s 1999). As seen in the Orientalist constructions of Muslim women, teachers’ narratives in my study, construe veiling as an ahistoric and static practice symbolizing archaic, gender- oppressive practices within Muslim societies (Wagner et al. 2002).

Meena, cited below, is a newly appointed head-teacher of Meadow School. She is a middle-class Hindu woman in her forties. In the quote below she responds to my query: ‘In your experience have you see any difference in the behaviour of Hindu and Muslim girls in school?’. In response she says:

I have found Miyah girls to be somewhat different from the rest of the girls, I mean from ‘our’ Assamese girls. The most visible difference is that they cover their head. This can be seen as a kind of difference. It appears as if they have to show their religious identity publicly also. Hindu girls too are religious, but they do not publicly demonstrate their virtues so much. Covering the head also violates our School Uniform. Attire like that is not a part of ‘our’ culture. Personally, I don't have a problem with what the girls wear or not, but other students, parents, and teachers may take offense to that (Meena, Head teacher, Meadow School, Interview 9th November 2013).

Meena points to Muslim girls’ veiling as the most striking difference that sets them apart from Hindu girls in schools. She also maintains that her personal values are not anti-veiling *per se*, and she views it as her duty to ensure that the students follow a

uniform dress code in line with Assamese culture. The quote above is striking in the deployment of an ‘us’ and ‘our’ (Assamese) ‘vs. ‘them’ (Bengali) classification in pointing out that the so-called Miyah girls’ dressing sets them apart from other girls in the classroom.

The narrative above displaces the lived reality of multiple types of dressing and veiling practices across Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Nagaon (Box 6.1) with a constructed image of ‘Muslim women’ drawn from references to globally- and nationally-generated Orientalist images of Muslim women. Such depictions of Muslim women constitute cultural misrecognition in Fraser’s (1997, 2003) sense through subjection to alien standards of judgment about dressing. Box 6.1 summarizes the various dressing practices, based on my field notes from 2013-14, which I encountered among Nagaon’s Muslim women and girls, rather than one crystallized form of ‘Muslim dressing.’ What I call ‘contextual veiling’ is the most common form of veiling I observed during my fieldwork, wherein women and girls adopted a veil in accordance to the contexts of meeting elders, social/ritual gathering, praying and so on. Many girls from lower- and lower-middle-class families who regularly walked to school over considerable distance also reported veiling on the way from home to school, as a way to avoid the discomfort of the ‘male gaze’ enacted upon them through what is commonly referred to as eve-teasing. This is in contrast to Meena’s perception of a homogeneous ‘Muslim dressing’ practice of veiling. In fact, empirically, among the respondents across the four secular schools, I found just one respondent who regularly used a headscarf as part of her religious beliefs, while other followed contextual veiling practices shared by Hindus and Muslims alike. In their study of school-going British Muslim girls, Mirza & Mitreoo (2013: 213) found that whether out of choice or not, those girls were expected to perform “the fixed utopian Muslim femininity that the teacher knew and came to expect” from their exposure to the powerful orientalist discourse around Muslim women. Similarly Meena and other teachers in my study came to pre-empt a certain type of Muslim femininity, thereby seeing ‘difference’ where it did not exist.

BOX 6.1: COMMON DRESSING & VEILING PRACTICES IN ASSAM

No or contextual veiling: Most Muslim women in Assam are traditionally known to not adopt any kind of veiling outside ceremonial occasions such as weddings, births and deaths. 24 out of my 37 respondents, and 68 out of 80 girls with whom I came in touch indirectly through the FGDs did not normally observe any form of veiling in school or at home. About ten of the twenty-five respondents, and several respondents in the FGDs, suggested that they did cover their head on their way to and from school to appear 'respectable' to bystanders, so that the latter may refrain from passing lewd comments.

Uroni (headscarf): It is the most common and most flexible of all veiling practices. Most school girls, as suggested above, reported using their Dupatta (or a scarf) as a headscarf when needed. For instance, in one of the schools, which has a Mosque in the vicinity, some of the girls reported that when they hear the Aazan (call for prayer from the Mosque) they typically cover their head for a few minutes as a mark of respect. Covering one's head transiently during prayer times is a common cultural practice both among Assamese- and Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. I also found frequently during my visits to the girls' families to interview parents that many of their mothers often covered their head either with a duppatta or with the loose end of the saree as they came out to the living room or the common area to meet me. It was interesting to see that a majority of the women I interviewed in the course of the fieldwork were fairly lenient about letting the Uroni slip by, unless in the presence of an older family members. At the same time, at home none of the girls from Madrassa school used an Uroni.

Burqua: This includes a long black overcoat or robe worn on top of the usual clothes, with a matching black headscarf. Some women also used an additional face veil called Naquab. The burqua is not as common as the Uroni discussed above, and the Naquab is also very rare except in the outskirts of town, in areas such as Kodomoni, where the madrassa I visited was also located. Here wearing the burqua with the Naquab was a common practice for young women and girls. The five girls I interviewed at the Madrassa school and all the twenty girls who participated in the FGDs all wore the burqua as a part of the stipulated school uniform. At home many of them either didn't practice any form of veiling or practiced wearing an Uroni. Even for social occasions they frequently shuttled between the Uroni and the burqua depending on the nature of the occasion, the mode of travel, the weather, and so on.

(Source: Field notes from September 2013 - March 2014)

The positioning of many of the teacher's critical gaze towards the embodied practices of Muslim girls can be understood through Bourdieu's work on the reproduction of social inequalities through the authorizations of certain dispositions or habitus as normal while marking out certain others as abnormal (McNay, 2004; Skeggs, 1994). Here Dwyer's (1999) findings on the over determined nature of Muslim women's dressing as a marker of their identity are notable. Writing in the context of British Muslim women, she says:

[D]ressing comes to be used as a signifier for essentialized and oppositional identities in dominant paradigms that explain the lives of young South Asian

Muslim women through a binary opposition between ‘traditional’ and ‘Western’, which is often straightforwardly read from appearance’ (ibid., 6).

Furthermore, she says that these ‘discourses are also reinforced through a focus upon the veil as the dominant signifier for Islam’ (ibid. 8). Adapting Dwyer’s (1999) formulation into my research, I find that, by negating the great diversity and contextual details of Muslim girls’ dressing, many of the teachers create a Hindu vs. Muslim dichotomy in the society. They also create a secular vs. religious dichotomy that associates certain types of dressing with an intrinsic religiosity (or lack thereof). In such a scheme of things the categories ‘Muslim’ and ‘religious’ are juxtaposed, as are the categories ‘Hindu’ and ‘secular’. Secularism, enshrined as a constitutional value integral to the vision of a post-colonial nation, comes to be understood as a Hindu-normative value ; it can only be embodied and protected by the Hindu citizens of India. This type of over-simplification of identity and the attributes attached to it is referred to as ‘cultural streamlining’ in Radhakrishnan’s (2011) work. In her view, cultural streamlining goes hand in hand with the production of ‘appropriate difference’ in order to manufacture distinct identity categories, viz. Indian, Western, Muslim, Hindu (Radhakrishnan, 2011: 5).

A similar process of cultural streamlining can be found in teachers’ narratives attempting to construct Bengali-Muslim identity in opposition to the normative Assamese identity. This normalizes the Hindu-Assamese identity as ‘appropriately Assamese’ and by extension ‘appropriately Indian’, whereas the Muslim identity, specifically the Miyah identity, is pathologized for its perceived incompatibility with the very same values. By attributing a fixed form of dressing to the Muslim girls, the latter were construed as pathologically religious and governed solely by Islam and not by the constitutional script of secularism. The normative Hindu-Assamese citizens such as Meena the head-teacher I quote above, become protectors of this type of secularism. These processes of cultural streamlining, leading to the conferment of a pathological subjectivity by the teachers can be connected with how policies of education also embed cultural difference.

The next quote, cited below, comes from an upper-caste Hindu woman, a middle-class teacher of mathematics named Protima. As a teacher of what is considered a prestigious subject, and as a young staff member and an alumna of the same school,

Protima was well regarded by teachers and students alike as a ‘model’ feminine subject. Now married with two children, Protima spoke with the authority provided by her current role, but also the authority of her normative habitus or ‘embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history’ (Bourdieu, 1990:56). Her experience of being a teacher in the same school gave her a unique inter-generational perspective. In the quote below, Protima sees the adolescent Miyah girls’ ‘big’ ear-rings, ‘heavy’ eye make-up, ‘long’ nails and ‘tight’ *kurta* as being at odds with their academic commitment. It is also notable that only recently have schools such as the Northern school opened up to children from a lower-class background, as a result of the right to education legislation, providing admission on a first-come, first-serve basis. Thus, Protima not only gives us an inter-generational perspective, but also an inter-class perspective.

Come fourteen, fifteen years of age these [Miyah] girls transform into women. You can see it in their body language. Look at those big ear rings, the long nails coated in red nail paint, heavy eye make-up, and the tight *kurtas*. Who are they trying to impress? Obviously, they are not thinking about their studies or their future. They are looking to find a man to get married to. We were pretty dumb at that age, but these Miyah girls are over-smart [...] They think of school as a place to mingle with boys. Some of them are good in studies initially but once they become adolescent they are distracted. It is very sad, how they throw their life away (Protima, Maths teacher, Northern school, Interview, 25th January 2014).

According to Skeggs (1997) to work on the body is usually coded as ‘feminine’, but this work should be invisible for it to be respectable. But the work done by the so-called Miyah girls on their bodies – the big ear-rings, long painted nails, makeup and styles of dressing are rendered selectively visible, by marking them not only as ‘different’ but also as morally devious from the work done by the normative Hindu middle-class girls on their bodies. They are seen not just as ‘smart’ for their embodied expressions but as ‘over’ smart or smarter than normatively acceptable. In the quote above, Protima also sexualizes these embodied practices by connecting them with the interactions of these girls with the opposite sex. Such a sexualized view of Miyah girls was common among the teachers in my sample. While the sexualized representation

of adolescent girls is nothing new or uniquely attributed to Miyah girls, the attribution of preparing to get married is perhaps unique about them.

Some of the teacher's concerns about Miyah girl's marriage can be understood in the light of the issue of the relatively early age of marriage of Muslim girls, something that teacher and girls in my sample pointed me towards. However, national-level data collected by Nirantar (2014) shows that on average both Hindu and Muslim girls are likely to marry around the age of sixteen. State or district level data on this subject was unavailable but one can safely assume that teacher's concerns about early marriage may potentially have a basis in the specific local reality of Nagaon. Yet it does not explain the attribution of a sexualized pathological subjectivity to Muslim girls, used to ultimately de-authorize them as legitimate actors in the field of education. Lawler's (2004: 114) focus upon a 'classed' aesthetic can be deployed to understand Protima's 'classed' habitus as the basis on which the appearance of the Miyah girls is being evaluated. As discussed in Chapter 3, the habitus and the aesthetic inscribed on it aren't just classed but also ethnicized and religious. Moreover, some people, such as Protima quoted above, 'by the virtue of their habitus, are able to pass judgment, implicitly or explicitly, on others, and to make that judgment count' (Lawler, 2004: 112). In this way, the differences between the Hindu teachers' habitus and the Miyah girls' habitus become operational because of the unequal power of authorization in the field of education.

Comparing Meena and Protima's quotes suggests a contradiction in how Muslim girls' appearances are evaluated by teachers, based on their habitus inscribed by class, ethnic and religious biases. On the one hand, being veiled was seen as pathologically religious; on the other, being unveiled and invested in fashion was seen as a mark of sexualization. Within this schema of simultaneous sexualization and de-sexualization, big ear-rings, long painted nails, heavy make-up and tight fitting *kurtas* come to signify a pathological subjectivity, as does the perceived practice of veiling, foreclosing in-between subject positions for these girls. Such a pathological subjectivity is viewed as incompatible with academic pursuits. Miyah girls (or any such bearers of such pathological subjectivities) are then, not authorized as legitimate actors in the field of education. In this section, I have shown that a deeply classed and ethnicized aesthetic is made invisible when deployed as the neutral yardstick through

which the appearance of Miyah girls is evaluated and framed as pathological by teachers. The next section will focus upon the framing of poverty of many of the Miyah girls in this study as cultural deficit and another marker of a pathological subjectivity.

6.2. Material deficit as ‘cultural’ deficit

Data from the SCR reveal that 38% of India’s Muslims live below the poverty line. Local-level poverty estimates disaggregated by religion were collected under the 2011 Census, but the data have not been made public. National-level empirical data (SCR, 2006), region-level data from the Muslim Women’s Survey (Hasan and Menon, 2005) and district-level data from Reddy (2010) point towards the disproportionate representation of Muslim among the poorest sections of the society. My own field observations reveal that most of the lower-class families in my sample lived under conditions of great infrastructural and financial deprivation an issue that teachers in Meadow, Sanctuary and Kaleidoscope schools consistently highlighted. However, there was a general tendency among the teachers to make simplistic assumptions about poverty, cultural deficit and education when Muslim girls were concerned.

In Purna’s narrative below, the poor educational outcome of Muslim girls is seen as function of the cultural deficit at home. Purna is herself a middle class and upper caste married Hindu woman, with teenaged children. In the quote below, by paying attention to an assumed cultural deficit in Muslim homes, Purna forecloses alternative explanations of educational backwardness, whether the lack of material inputs for education or inadequacy in teaching and pedagogy. Parents of the Muslim girls are framed as incapable of doing the necessary disciplinary/surveillance work on their daughters, and the girls’ intention of learning is viewed with suspicion. To further her argument about the ‘uneducable’ nature of her students, Purna marks out the lack of toilet facilities in the homes of many lower-class families as a sign of their uncivilized and barbaric nature, inscribed in their inferior habitus.

Their [Miyah girls] parents are illiterate, so how can they monitor what their daughters are doing? They cannot tell whether these girls are really studying or using the opportunity to get out of home to have fun. They do not understand the value of education themselves, so naturally the children do not take education very seriously like you and I do. We can only teach the lessons in the school, but we can’t inculcate ‘culture’ in the six-seven hours they are at

school [...] You will not believe that we have so many girls in the school who do not even have a toilet in their house. So they just misuse the toilet in school, and it becomes a nuisance for all the others. In fact, many of the girls just come to school for the toilets, and not for learning. What can we expect from such pupils (Purna, Assamese Teacher, Meadow school, Interview 8th, November 2013).

Diamond et al. (2004) have studied the unequal habitus of teachers from privileged groups teaching in schools populated by students from racially and economically subordinate groups in the USA. They expanded Bourdieu's conception of habitus to explain teachers' organizationally embedded expectations regarding what is possible for students from particular backgrounds, using the idea of an 'organizational habitus' (Diamond et al., 2004: 76). I find such a broader organizational focus useful to illustrate how student composition (school context) conditions teachers' evaluations of and behaviour towards students from certain marginalized backgrounds. In predominantly low-income and African-American schools, Diamond et al. find that teachers emphasize students' deficits and have a reduced sense of responsibility for student learning. In contrast, when a larger proportion of students are middle-income, white, or Asian, the students' intellectual assets are emphasized and teachers feel more accountable for what students learn. These overlapping class, ethnic and religious bias are explicit in Purna's narrative discussed above, too. By citing the cultural deficit of so-called Miyah families, she normalizes teachers' reduced sense of responsibility towards students.

The sense of reduced responsibility, and in some cases a selective responsibility towards a handful of so called good students was exhibited by teachers across the three government-aided multi-cultural school settings in the study – Northern, Meadow, and Sanctuary school(s). In contrast, the teachers at the Kaleidoscope madrassa were at the other end of the spectrum: they viewed themselves as being responsible for the provisioning of education and related government-funded facilities as Ali's narrative below will illustrate. Ali, a mild mannered man in his sixties, drove an SUV to meet me for the interview at the Kaleidoscope Madrassa. He is the founding headteacher of the Madrassa, has been at the helm of the school's affairs for the last three decades and was retiring within days of our conversation. Ali has two sons engaged in a

construction business and both daughters-in-laws were teachers, including one in Kaleidoscope school. He noted that his family has lived in poverty before the Madrassa was Provincialized or taken over by the government, but now retiring from “Sorkari” sakori and with several members of the family productively employed in the government or elsewhere, they can conveniently be described as middle or upper middle class. In discussing the Mid-day meal scheme being implemented in the Madrassa he said that, he found it inappropriate for a school like his in a predominantly poor area to differentiate between the children who are covered under the mid-day meal (hot lunch) scheme provided by the government and those who are not. This scheme provides lunches for students up to the age of fourteen years. However, Ali viewed it as his and the school’s responsibility to provide food to all the children in the school knowing the deprived economic backgrounds they came from.

It would be odd to have one group of students (up to fourteen years) eat, and the other group (over fourteen years) not eat. They all come from poor families, if we can provide them one meal at least, we feel satisfied. So we provide meals to all students in the school. Occasionally, the food is less, but the students know they are all treated equally. The older kids often come forward to forego a meal. Sometimes community members donate rice, oil, and some provisions. We also use the supply from the mid-day meal schemes carefully. During Ramzan, we get donations that we use to buy supplies. Some days we run out of food, but mostly, by Allah’s grace, we have been able to feed all the children (Ali, Head-teacher, Kaleidoscope Madrassa, Interview, 5th Feb 2014).

In the Kaleidoscope madrassa, which houses 100% Muslim students and nearly 100% Muslim teaching staff, the sense of responsibility is very strong, unlike in the other government-aided schools. This can partly be attributed to its ‘provincialized’ character. In other words, the school was set by the community to begin with, but once it followed the norms of size, student enrolment, teacher recruitment and infrastructure set out in the Government of Assam’s regulations in those matters, it was adopted by the state government under the recent Assam Venture Educational Institutions (Provincialization of Services) Bill, 2011. Thus, in this case the school’s organizational habitus is influenced strongly by its connection with the community to which it caters, and from which it draws its teaching staff.

In addition to being deeply influenced by the school's micro-political character, the teachers' organizational habitus is also influenced by the equal opportunity policy framework embedded in the constitution, and the national policy on education discussed in Chapter 5. This framework accords legal equality to all citizens guaranteeing equal opportunity, by legislating non-discrimination and equal treatment irrespective of their ascriptive statuses such as sex, caste, and religion, as enshrined in the Articles 15-16 of the Indian Constitution. This policy commitment to equality and non-discrimination was also narrated widely by the teachers in my study as a part of their pedagogical practice. The following quote by Pritom a male Social Studies teacher in his mid 40s suggests that teachers in the government aided education system subscribed to a commitment to equality of opportunity, to be achieved largely through affirmative redistribution. In fact, Pritom is one of the most popular teachers in Meadow School, and many of the students talked about his ability to empathize with his students and to connect with their struggles. Personally, as the only earning member of a family of four including two school going children, Pritom classified himself as lower-middle class in economic standing. His quote below, suggest that Pritom shares the pronouncements of Article 51 of the Constitution mandating parents and guardians to 'provide opportunities for education to [their] child' when the latter is aged between six and fourteen.

The main problem the Miyah people here face is poverty. That is why they prefer to get their girls married at a young age. If they send these girls to school and support them in completing their education, then only this problem will be solved in the future. These days government is giving so many facilities, especially for girls – scholarships, free books, uniforms, bicycle, and even mid-day meal – they should make the most of it (Pritom, History teacher, Meadow School, 7th October 2014).

In this quote Pritom acknowledges the problem of poverty as many other teachers in the study do, and highlights the problem of girls' early marriage in many lower-class families as a coping strategy. He also acknowledges the links between educational equality and larger socio-economic equality that the policies discussed in Chapter 5 do. Yet, Pritom does not make the connections between the problem of hierarchies of access in education and the wider socio-economic context of discrimination in jobs and in schools. By disconnecting these issues from the analysis of Miyah girls'

educational deprivation, such narratives situate Miyah girls or their families as disinterested in education, and hence de-authorize these girls' claim to legitimacy as actors in the field of education.

The teachers' individual and organizational habitus discussed above need to be viewed not only from an institutional perspective, but also from a class perspective. The examples above suggest that the institutional perspective must consider the ways in which the school's micro-political context influences the teachers' conception of responsibility towards students. The narratives mark a reversal of the language of universal educational provisioning by the state in favour of what Foucauldians (Burchell 1996, Rose 1997, Abel and Ghatak 2013) have called the 'responsibilization' of individuals and households in line with normative socio-economic and cultural ideals. According to Rassool (2004), the moral thread that runs through such a discourse is the need to imbue those at the margins of society with the mainstream and core values of society, i.e. the middle-class values of hard work and responsibility. At the same time, these narratives are also consistent with the policy practice of directing a disproportionate amount of attention towards the recognition of difference through affirmative recognition policies, to be seen in the National Policy on Education (1988) and in the *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* Framework (2001). As argued in Chapter 5, these policies construe cultural deficit in Muslim families as the source of the girls' educational deficit, and hence most of their proposed solutions to the problem of Muslim girls' education revolve around interventions with Muslim parents and family. Such narratives of difference mark Muslim girls' families (not the state, the school or the teachers) as solely responsible for the girls' poor educational outcomes. The teachers carry forward these notions of difference and imbue them with further pathological meanings (or not) depending upon their class, ethnic and religious biases in personal and institutional habitus. In the next Section, again following the concept of habitus, I will discuss teacher's understandings of merit or lack of it in the context of Muslim girls.

6.3. Lacking in Merit

A majority of the teachers who participated in my study were unsupportive of affirmative redistribution state policies, deeming such policies incompatible with the idea of merit. In the quote below, Bijoya, an English teacher at Northern school,

constructs Muslim girls as undeserving beneficiaries of the state-sponsored scholarship programmes for minorities, whose provisions were discussed in Chapter 5. A backdrop for this is the larger context of the cultural deficit view of the so-called Miyah girls that has been discussed in the preceding sections. In the quote below, Bijoya, like many other teachers in my study, highlights that policies based on affirmation/recognition do not necessarily foster motivation for education, as they are largely de-linked from academic performance. Students scoring just over 50% are eligible for the scholarship, and hence there are no incentives for improving academic performance among scholarship recipients. She further extends her perspective on meritocracy by blaming the perceived lack of merit for the dilution of the quality of education in general.

What should we tell the Hindu girls who work hard to get good marks and still don't get a scholarship? How do we motivate them? I am not saying Muslims should not get the scholarship but it should be merit based, students should not come to school just to get the scholarship or to get the other freebies, there has to be an interest in education. Why fill up the classroom with *jabor*²¹ ? Poor quality students affect the quality of teaching so when the government tells us about improving quality of teaching, it should also improve the quality of the students it gives us [...] With the exception of a few good girls, the other girls know that even if they don't study well, they can't fail. And on top of that, the government will give them a scholarship and spend taxpayers' money to give them facilities they don't know how to use. This is just so frustrating, you know [...] as a teacher and as a taxpayer (Bijoya, English Teacher, Northern School, Interview 31st January 2014).

In the quote above Bijoya's casual use of a disrespectful term 'jabor' or trash for her current and prospective students indicates the normalization of the cultural devaluation of certain sections of society. This can be understood as mis-recognition in Fraser's formulation. Bijoya's views above are also similar to Clarinda Still's and Amanda Gilbertson's studies in southern India in the context of caste, class and education. Still (2007) suggests that the concept of caste has been 'de-legitimized' by upper castes by articulating a powerful discourse about the detrimental effects of caste-

²¹ 'Jabor' is the Assamese word for trash

based affirmative action on merit-based upward mobility. Similarly, in my study I find that although the material benefits of the minority scholarships are very limited and even inadequate as discussed in Chapter 5, they have high symbolic meaning ‘as a sign of government support’ for the minorities. However affirmative benefits to minorities and subordinate groups are seen as a sign of the state’s ‘unfair preferential treatment’ by upper castes who traditionally populate the middle and upper classes (Gilbertson, 2011:38). Like Still’s and Gilbertson’s upper-caste middle-class informants, teachers like Bijoya view the Pre and Post Matric scholarships for the minorities as causing the dilution of ‘merit’. In their view, equality achieved through merit is seen as the desirable form of equality, in contrast to equality through states policies of affirmation. Additionally, Bijoya also takes recourse to her social location as a tax-paying responsible citizen to make her disgust towards the state’s affirmative action explicit. This is notable because in many teachers’ narratives their professional role overlapped with their class location to create a habitus that is institutional (collective) and personal (individual) at the same time.

The narrow focus on this transcendental attribute of merit (or its lack) in Bijoya’s narratives was often repeated across the schools. It became most blatant in Sanctuary school, which is populated solely by lower-class students, and amongst them the most disadvantaged ones, making the transition between school and between rural and urban locations

Every girl in the school [Sanctuary school] interviewed had a story about why she was there. Given its unflattering reputation, my respondents felt compelled to explain their circumstances perhaps. One of my respondents has moved to an aunt’s place in the town when her father untimely passed away, another one had to leave her old school due to disciplinary action taken against her and many others have moved to the town recently with their families from nearby rural areas in search of economic opportunities... (Fieldnotes, 28 January 2014).

In the quote below, an upper-middle-class Muslim Maths teacher from Sanctuary school, Sara, cited below, labels her students as ‘C Grade’. Sara is a Bengali speaking Muslim woman married to an Assamese Muslim man and has children in their 20s and 30s.

If I am honest, I would just say the students we get are just hopeless...no future. Not B Grade, but C Grade. We are happy as long as they pass... [we] don't have big expectations from these students (Sara, Mathematics teacher, Sanctuary School, Interview 15 January 2014).

As per the Class X²² pass percentages reported in the NEUPA Report (2014) cited in Chapter 5, the Sanctuary school, which houses nearly 100% Muslim students, underperforms when compared with the Government-unaided City school, but also compared to the two other schools in the Government system (Northern and Meadow schools). Thus, Sara's concern about the underperformance of the students cited below is not misplaced. The students in the school predominantly came from lower class backgrounds, and as the field notes cited below suggest, many of the children in Sanctuary school, were coping with difficult personal circumstances and transitions of one kind or another. However, Sara's and other teacher's narratives in these context simplify the personal circumstances of students to a great extent. What is also striking is Sara's dissociation of the school from the process of determining a child's future. Her view of the students as bearers of a predetermined future depending upon their socio-economic locations is extremely deterministic. Additionally, Sara's quote above is one of many I encountered in my fieldwork that casually use derogatory labels such as 'C-Grade' to describe students. On the surface the label itself indicates lack of academic merit but the larger message is that of the unworthiness of certain children as learners.

In the previous section, teachers mis-recognized poverty as a cultural problem for the so-called Miyah girls. In this section, too, the teacher's labeling of all these diverse lived experiences in one stroke as 'C-Grade' conceals the various factors that impede educational outcomes for children. The problem of poor academic performance gets framed as a problem of lack of merit instead of a problem of hierarchies of access that relegates children from economically and culturally subordinate groups to poor-quality education. Not only do the circumstances under which these students seek education go un-noticed: the girls at Sanctuary School and their families frequently came to be framed as pathological in the day-to-day interactions between the teachers

²² The exam that students in India give aged 15-16, to select their stream of study from science, humanities and commerce.

and the girls. In Chapter 8, also I will discuss how these types of labeling of communities and families as pathological is normalized in schools.

In the field-note dated 9th February 2014 below, I suggest that in comparison to other schools in my sample, the students at Sanctuary School were the most likely to be subjected to many types of humiliation by the teachers. The teachers routinely de-humanize them as a group by deploying references to what they viewed as their collective lack of merit. This message of deficit is further amplified by connecting the perceived lack of merit with the class, ethnic and religious locations of the family (or the family background), and the lack of prospects of social mobility from those locations.

Today again I heard one of the teachers shouting at a classroom full of students. It feels as if the students here are being shouted at a lot more than in the other schools. Today the teacher in question was making references to the students' inherent inability to complete their project work on time. In the process she also insinuated that given their lack of merit (as evidenced by incomplete project works), the students were destined to remain in un-respectable occupations like their parents- most of whom were daily wage workers and sellers in the market (Fieldnotes, 9 February 2014).

According to Bidwai (2006), the obsession with 'merit' in India is unique. It has taken on a mystical significance as a quality inherent in some people and not acquired through training and effort. Radhakrishnan (2011) says that the notion of merit as inherent personal worth and talent contains within it the historic complaints of India's middle classes about the government's affirmative policies. The merit-based ideology of class mobility that I captured widely in the teachers' narratives discussed in this section presents itself as an alternative to identity politics. In a society historically rooted in the divisions of caste, class, religion and ethnicity, the ideology of merit provides a coherent idea of 'how India ought to be run' (Radhakrishnan, 2011: 90). The ideology of merit is 'established middle-class common sense' according to Gilbertson (2011: 56), so that it renders invisible the role of caste, class and religious subordination(s). From the perspective of the largely middle-class teachers, the middle-class ideology of merit legitimizes their discriminatory behaviour towards students from disadvantaged groups (castes, religious communities, and classes) on

the basis of their ‘failure to meet middle-class standards of merit’ (Gilbertson, 2011:56). In doing so, they culturally de-authorize Muslim girls’ claims as legitimate actors/learners in the field of education. As discussed above, this perceived failure of many so-called Miyah girls to meet the middle-class standards of merit is an integral part of many Hindu and Muslim middle-class teachers’ institutional habitus. It then comes to be deployed by many teachers to dilute their responsibilities around the academic outcome for the students from subordinate backgrounds, as found in Diamond et al. (2004).

Teachers’ habitus manifest in different ways in government-unaided schools with a significant presence of middle- and upper-class Muslims, such as City school. Here I find that the language of meritocracy widely prevalent in the vocabulary of teachers in government-aided schools is being replaced by a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate sorts of merit. While derogatory terms like ‘Miyah girls’ were not used by the teachers in City school, they still made a conceptual distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim pupils. Smita, who is a social studies teacher in the City school, makes such a conceptual distinction between the effortless and more holistic merit of Hindu and Christian girls and the inappropriate and laboured merit of Muslim girls.

I think the Muslim girls are more disciplined at home than the other girls, so they just study all the time. Most of them are reluctant to participate in extra-curricular activities. Whereas, Hindu girls and some Christian girls are all-rounders who do well academically and in extra-curricular activities. After all grades are not everything, participating in other activities help students to acquire social skill which is equally important to be successful in their future lives (Smita, Social Studies teacher, City school, 20 December 2013).

In this quote, Smita frames Muslim femininity as docile and submissive, following the orientalist stereotypes. Muslim girls’ academic focus in City school is assessed negatively because such behaviour is viewed as resulting from oppressive disciplinary regimes in Muslim families, and not because of the effortless, transcendental attribute of merit. Taking the case of high-achieving British/Chinese girls in the UK, Lousie Archer and Becky Francis argue that their success and seeming good behaviour tend to be problematized by the teachers due to their association with the ‘wrong’ sort of

subjectivity and the ‘wrong’ sort of pupil identity produced via passivity and repression (Archer & Francis, 2005). On similar lines, Smita’s narrative discussed above suggests that somehow the academic focus seen among middle-class Muslim girls is the wrong sort of merit, produced through the imposition of disciplinary measures at home. This type of re-signification of merit in the context Muslim girls appears to be in line with Orientalist explanations of Muslim women’s subservience and reinforces the cultural de-authorization of Muslim girls as legitimate actors or legitimate claimants of the attribute of merit in the field of education.

In this section, comparing the narratives of the government- aided schools with the unaided ones, one can say that the notion of merit as used by teachers is quite fluid. In the context where the teachers are positioned in a higher class location than the students, their conception of merit suffers from an overlapping of class and ethnic/religious bias whereby Muslim girls are de-authorized for not having merit *per se*. Whereas in the contexts where teachers are in class positions equal to or lower than the students, the de-authorization happens on account of the wrong kind of merit. The next section will demonstrate how the framing of cultural difference to confer pathological subjectivity to Muslim girls is carried forward using the linguistic hegemony of Assamese over Bengali.

6.4. Linguistic hegemony

It is notable that all the four government-aided schools in my sample – Northern, Meadow, Sanctuary and Kaleidoscope, are Assamese-medium schools, where English is taught as an additional language. The government-unaided City school is an English-medium school, where there is the option of learning Assamese and/or Hindi. In the government-aided schools, the question of languages is at the heart of the politics of student and teacher identity, and plays a significant role in the nature of their everyday interactions. For the teachers in my study the Assamese language is an important marker of ‘appropriate difference’ between the native Assamese, or *Khilonjiya*, and the immigrants, or so-called Bangladeshis. In this section I draw attention to the production relations of the Assamese language and the nature of the power relations between speakers that it entails. Following Bourdieu (1977b, 648) I treat language not only as an instrument of communication or of knowledge but also an instrument of power. For Bourdieu, ‘[t]he structure of the linguistic production relation depends on the symbolic power relation between the two speakers, i.e. on the

size of their respective capitals of authority'(ibid.). In this context, cultural competence can be seen as 'the capacity to command a listener', which means that 'a person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, and distinguished' (ibid.). Understood in this way, then, symbolic power is not vested in the language itself (i.e. how it is spoken, diction, etc.), but in the speaker (i.e. who is speaking it). In this context, the following excerpt from my interview with a Maths teacher, Rupali, from Northern school, highlights the 'appropriate difference' in spoken and written Assamese between native speakers and immigrants, or so-called Bangladeshis. Using an inherently biological, pre-reflexive notion of 'mother tongue', Rupali views the 'Miyah Muslim girls' as incapable of acquiring the same cultural competence in Assamese as the so-called *Khilojiya* or native Assamese speakers:

Rupali: The Muslim girls in our school are mostly Miyah Muslims. If you listen to them, speak you will know that Assamese is not their mother-tongue. Even their writing in Assamese is not up to the mark and often the use of words is inappropriate. No native Assamese speaker makes mistakes like that. But if you ask them, each one of them is going to say they are Assamese, but they don't speak like you and me. They speak with a thick Miyah-accent. No matter how much we correct it, it doesn't change. That is the influence of their mother tongue (Bengali)

Saba: But across Assam, lots of people speak Assamese in a different way. In Guwahati and lower Assam they speak a very different dialect than in upper Assam.

Rupali: Yes, yes! That is also true. For example, when I hear you speak I can immediately tell you are from upper Assam and a good family background. Can anyone ever tell you your forefathers were not from Assam? Even if you have grown up in Guwahati and now you live abroad, I can still tell from your style of speaking where you come from. That is what I mean, if their mother tongue is Bengali, then that influence cannot be erased even if they say Assamese is their mother tongue. What they speak is not a different version of Assamese like you are saying, it is a different language altogether

(Rupali, Northern school, Maths teacher Interview, 15th Oct 2013)

According to Rupali's narrative, then, the 'Miyah-accent' ingrained in the Assamese spoken by the girls in my study is construed by the teachers as a lack of cultural competence of language i.e. 'legitimate language, the authorized language which is also the language of authority' (Bourdieu, 1977:648). Talking about habitus, Bourdieu (1986) notes that one's aesthetic disposition (e.g. ways of dressing, talking, etc.) is inseparable from a specific cultural competence. Cultural competence is measured by tastes held by people, especially their relationship to, and knowledge of, objects and practices associated with 'high' culture (Skeggs 2004:28). In the narrative above, Rupali views a certain form of spoken Assamese as being a marker of high culture or of cultural authenticity. By drawing attention towards the researcher's linguistic and class affiliations, Rupali demonstrates that linguistic 'difference' is not only about 'Assamese' and 'non-Assamese' but about the 'family background' of the speaker. The idea of 'family background' is unique to India's middle class vocabulary as per Radhakrishnan (2011). It helps distinguish between families that are considered 'good' or not based on their competency in high culture and lack of it in a Bourdieusian sense. In a deeply perceptive analysis, she notes:

'Background' refers not only to overt class markers but also to the gendered character of the domestic sphere which is implicitly linked to class standing. Good family backgrounds are composed of heterosexual families in which middle-class women make appropriate decisions for their husbands and children (Radhakrishnan, 2011: 11).

Background understood in this way appears in Rupali's narrative earlier pitting the researcher's perceived Assamese-speaking femininity against the Bengali-speaking Muslim femininity of the schoolgirls. By background she is not only referring to cultural competency of the language, but also to the class location of the people claiming this competency. The embeddedness of the question of class is further demonstrated by teachers in informal conversations, wherein take pride in sending their children to English-medium private schools, and adopting a much more lenient stance to the cultural competency of their own children in Assamese, and towards people like myself, who were seen as having a shared 'background'. Protima, whom I quoted earlier in an informal conversation about family, says:

By god's grace both my children are very studious. They both study in the City school. Relatives said it is so competitive to get into that school. But not once, but twice my children cleared the entrance. They are learning everything in English – that is the language they need for their future careers [...] They both know how to read and write Assamese at a basic level but struggle to read anything advanced. They are even reluctant to read story books in Assamese. They now want everything in English, because of the English-medium schooling. As long as they become 'good people' I do not think we should worry so much about language. (Protima, Maths teacher, Northern school, informal conversation, 25th Jan 2014)

Contrasting Rupali's and Protima's comments about the two sets of children shows that children from middle-class Assamese-speaking Hindu families, or even Assamese-speaking Muslims like myself, remain under-scrutinized through this yardstick of cultural competence in Assamese. Their socio-economic and cultural 'background' shields them from these evaluations. A recent article notes that 'there is a class angle to the equation [of Assamese vs. Bengali]. An educated Bengal-origin Assamese Muslim who also speaks Assamese might be able to camouflage his 'Miyahness' (Hussain, 2016, emphasis in original). In contrast, Bengali-speaking students who also come from lower-class economic backgrounds are saddled with an additional responsibility of proving their cultural authenticity imposed on them in the government-aided vernacular schools.

In addition to class, gender relations also come to play an important role in the maintenance of the linguistic hegemony of Assamese. Kaberi's narrative below is interesting in its explicit marking out of gender and the role played by women's bodies in the transmission of Assamese identity culture (through the Assamese language) to the future generations. She notes that Bengali-speaking Muslim girls have a special gendered role in continuing the hegemony of the Assamese language in their future role as mothers.

I think learning the language (Assamese) is very important, even if it is not necessary for a career in the future. It is our identity... it keeps us rooted. And even if these girls do not have a career or wealth in the future, at least as mothers they will be able to pass on the language to their kids. Children learn from

mothers...there is a reason why it is called mother tongue. (Kaberi, Head teacher, Sanctuary school, Interview, 23 February 2014).

Kaberi's narrative is compatible with one of the ways in which women have been implicated in nationalism: as active transmitters and producers of the national culture and as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989: 7). The significance of the gendered family trope in Kaberi's narrative can be understood by deploying Ann McClintock's (1993) two-fold understanding of the role of 'family' in the colonial/imperial projects. In her view the symbolic trope of family naturalizes the subordination of woman to man, and child to adult. In the process, then, the family is offered as an indispensable trope for presenting what was often violent historical change as natural progression. In this context, then, Muslim girls come to be naturalized as the future mothers entrusted with the nationalist responsibility of passing on the Assamese language. Transposing McClintock's formulation to Kaberi's narrative highlights that deploying the metaphor of Bengali-speaking Muslim girls as the future Assamese mothers not only reinforces the gender hierarchy by placing them solely in the domestic sphere, but also acts as a way of making linguistic (and cultural) hegemony natural or organic by masquerading it as benign maternal knowledge. It also appears to offer Miyah women a way out of their pathological subjectivity, by investing themselves in raising Assamese families that are stripped off their Bengali/Miyah heritage.

6.5. Conclusion

The discussions in this Chapter carry forward the argument I made in Chapter 5 about the disproportionate focus on measures of recognition in the policies of education leading to the framing of Muslim girls' subjectivities as culturally different. The teachers' narratives discussed in this Chapter carry forward the idea of difference and based on class, ethnic and religious bias underlining the habitus construe the difference as pathological. The processes of conferring pathological subjectivity to Miyah girls goes hand in hand with the normalization of middle-class, Assamese speaking feminine subjectivities. Muslim girls in general and Miyah girls in particular are largely de-authorized as legitimate actors in the field of education using unfavourable evaluations of their appearance, poverty, merit and language.

Their appearance, especially their dressing, is culturally streamlined to conceal internal diversity and focus attention towards practices of 'Islamic' or 'religious' dressing such as *burqua* or *hijab*. In contrast, expressions of adolescent Muslim girls' evolving sexuality through makeup and accessories are also hyper sexualized in teachers' narratives. Pathological subjectivities are conferred upon them whether as overtly disciplined subordinate femininities or as out of control hypersexual femininities. Teachers in my study also showed a strong awareness of the material context of the lives of many of their students. Large-scale poverty was accepted as detrimental to the educational outcomes of many of the Muslim girls in my study. However, instead of connecting the material context of their lives with their educational contexts, teachers showed a propensity to make simplistic assumptions about poverty, cultural deficit and education of Muslim girls. Thus, the poor educational outcome of Muslim girls comes to be correlated with cultural deficit at home as opposed to deficiencies in the school or its teaching. Being viewed as uneducable, their claims to be legitimate actors in the field of education are culturally de-authorized. In this way while teachers accept the constitutional premise of equal opportunity discussed in Chapter 5 and conceal the problem of hierarchies in access in education, which operate through class, religion and ethnic biases.

Merit is another marker through which Muslim girls are pathologized. The girls from a lower class background are often marked as lacking in this pre-reflexive quality of merit. Such an ideology of merit is biased in favour of middle- and upper-class students and it culturally de-authorizes Muslim girls' claim to being legitimate actors/learners in the field of education and legitimizes teachers' discriminatory behaviour and diluted sense of responsibility towards students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such attitudes, I found, were shown both by Hindu and Muslim teachers from middle-class backgrounds. In the school populated by middle and upper-class students, however, Assamese and Bengali speaking Muslim girls were not directly conferred a pathological subjectivity for their lack of merit. They were being conferred a pathological subjectivity because of holding the 'wrong kind of merit' produced by disciplinary regimes at home. In other words, only two pre-determined types of subjectivities could be inhabited by Muslim girls: either as simply lacking in merit (if they are lower-class) or as lacking in the right kind of merit (if they are middle or upper-class). Finally, the politics of language has long been an integral part of Assam's

cultural and political landscape. It is therefore unsurprising that teachers' narratives in the study view the Bengali language, which is the mother tongue of many of my respondents, as a marker of appropriate difference between the Assamese and the non-Assamese identity. I find that Bengali-speaking Muslim girls from lower-class backgrounds remain over-scrutinized by the yardstick of language compared to both their middle- and their upper-class Assamese-speaking Muslim counterparts.

Overall, teachers' narratives discussed in this chapter shows that deeply gendered, classed, religious and ethnic biases construe Muslim girls, especially Bengali-speaking girls from lower-class backgrounds, as pathological with reference to the normative middle-class, Assamese-speaking Hindu identity. I have shown in this chapter that the teachers in my study, 'by virtue of their habitus, are able to pass judgment, implicitly or explicitly, on others, and to make that judgment count' (Lawler 2004, 112). In this way, the differences between the middle-class, predominantly Hindu teachers' habitus and the so-called Miyah girls' habitus become operational as the unequal power of authorization in the field of education. However, subjectivities conferred upon Muslim girls are not absolute, they are actively contested by parents and girls themselves as subsequent chapters will show. In the next chapter in particular, while remaining interested in conferred subjectivities, I focus upon alternative conferment of subjectivities by parents. These subjectivities challenge the pathological subjectivities conferred upon Muslim girls in relation to the middle-class Assamese speaking normative through bids for cultural authorization around those parameters. On the other hand such alternative conferment also produces its own normative standards of enactment, and a regime of surveillance to enforce it.

7. *Bhal Suwali*²³ and Good Families: Symbolic Capital and Cultural Authorization

The previous Chapter highlighted ways in which teachers in my study confer Muslim girls a pathological subjectivity, de-authorizing them from education on account of appearance, poverty, (lack of) merit and linguistic difference. In this Chapter, I am interested in understanding the subjectivities conferred upon Muslim girls by their parents. The specific research question, this chapter sets out to answer is: What subjectivities are conferred upon Muslim girls by their parents?

To address the research question, I deploy Bourdieu's theory of practice to view cultural and economic distinctions between classes not as *a priori* givens but as being constructed through practices. His understanding of capitals, furthermore, allows us to think of class distinction in terms of the 'set of actually usable resources and powers' that are also inter-convertible, namely social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984: 114). Viewing these theoretical formulations side by side suggests a nexus between class practices and the nature and composition of capitals. Following the lead of Bourdieusian researchers working in South Asia, such as Radhakrishnan (2009) and Gilbertson (2011), in this chapter I connect the performances of certain gender practices with the symbolic capital that supports the pursuit of class interests. By class interest I mean the maintenance of class status for the middle and upper classes and the pursuit of class mobility for the lower classes. Understood in this way, my interest in this thesis is in the 'practices' of enactment of respectable femininity in the field of education, which are expected of Muslim girls, and through which their class status is reproduced and challenged. Here, I understand the notion of a '*Bhal suwali*' or 'good girl' by using Smitha Radhakrishnan's (2009) conception of 'respectable femininity'. Her formulation of respectable femininity is characterized by several attributes of 'gendered restraint', articulated in the areas of sexual norms, consumer values and career aspirations, and by practices such as the prioritization of family over career, material gains being directed towards the family and normative sexual behavior.

²³ Literally translated as good girl

The concept of '*bhal suwali*' or 'good girlhood' articulated by parents in my study encapsulates this gendered restraint through three enactments in the field of education, namely negotiating poverty 'respectably', prioritizing gendered discipline over academic pursuits, and merging career aspirations with marital prospects. I argue that the parents' conception of 'good girlhood' serves as a marker for 'good families', symbolically authorizing them as middle class (ibid., 212). The school-going Muslim girls in my study serve as symbols through which Muslim, Indian, Assamese and Bengali identities are imagined afresh by Muslim. Such a formulation enables us to 'examine the interplay between gender, class, and religion in everyday practice' (ibid., 211). In other words, the analytic of 'good girlhoods' that I deploy in this chapter knits together economic (redistribution) and cultural (recognition) concerns into a single approach, thus providing a way to understand processes of cultural authorization as they persist over time.

The three enactments of gendered restraint discussed above are used to structure this chapter as follows. In the first section, titled 'Negotiating poverty the materiality of poverty respectably', I underline how people on the economic margins find themselves straddling considerations of respectability while attempting to manage the disproportionately high costs of schooling. Yet, they also remain attentive to the status production work or symbolic capital accruing work to be placed on girls, as bids for cultural authorization for the girls and for the families. In the next section, titled 'Prioritization of gendered discipline', I highlight the gendered nature of good Muslim girlhoods enacted by parents through disproportionate focus upon non-educational themes, such as moral character building and physical safety. The final section discusses the practice of 'Merging career aspirations with marital prospects'. Here I show how parents from various class backgrounds in my study merge ideals of empowerment and financial independence with the ideals of good families and marriage, in order to construe a good Muslim girlhood.

7.1. Negotiating the materiality of poverty 'respectably'

In this section I highlight the nature of educational mal-distribution experienced by the lower-class families in my study and the nature of their navigations to access education for their children. I start this section with a short description of the context of material deprivation and lived experience of affirmative distribution policies for the

Muslim girls in my study, intending to connect the narratives from parents with those of the policy (Chapter 5) and the teachers (Chapter 6). The empirical context of material poverty or deprivation is at the heart of a majority of parental navigations of educational choices for their daughters. I argue that in spite of grave material considerations in decision-making around the education of Muslim girls, cultural/symbolic factors, especially those that concern gender, are also an important part of these negotiations. Unlike the research on respectability in South Asia, which has focussed largely on the gender-related practices of middle-class families, my research shows that considerations of respectability and the symbolic capital of good girlhood are critical also to the processes through which lower-class families negotiate the materiality of poverty.

The following is an excerpt from my field notes describing the living conditions of Rejia's family when I visited their family home to interview her mother Rohima. It sets out the context of material deprivation under which many of the respondents in my study live. In addition to the discussion on the dehumanising nature of material deprivation, the observations below note that in spite of conditions of material deprivations, Rohima is concerned about the 'inadequate femininity' embodied by her daughters as a result of the family's inability to afford 'feminine' winter clothing. Unsurprisingly, therefore, certain types of dressing practices are an integral part of Rohima's conception of the symbolic capital of good girlhood in the field of education. These practices include wearing clean, ironed school uniforms and having neatly tied hair.

Rohima showed me the toilet which she and her daughters use. It is a simple structure made of bamboo sticks, and all around the structure, they have attached sheets of newspaper for a sense of privacy. The rooves of the house are leaking in many places, with buckets and pots placed at the bottom to catch any water seepage after yesterday's rain. The family does not have electricity. Her prized possession is a big chargeable lamp/torch placed on her daughter Rejia's table, which lights the house in the evening and allows the two girls to study. Rohima lamented that she couldn't provide even 'feminine' clothing to the daughters. As a result the eldest daughter [Rejia] cycles to her tuition in the winter mornings wearing one of her father's old tattered jackets. She also notes that they never ask her daughter's friends to come home for fear of being

ridiculed about the dilapidated condition of their home. She put a lot of emphasis on dressing her daughters in clean school uniforms (provided by the school) – washed in starch and ironed every day and hair tied neatly [...] There is also just one pair of ‘good clothes’ between the sisters, so they never attend a social function together, instead taking turns. She was obviously distraught by the situation and referred to it as ‘living like animals’ (Field notes, 9 Feb 2014).

The context of material deprivation discussed above is typical of nearly all the lower-class respondents in my study. Unsurprisingly then, all the lower class respondents in my study emphasize how insecure livelihoods and poverty shaped the educational choices they made for their children. Gita Kingdon’s research in India shows that the enrolment of children from poorer backgrounds is adversely affected by the high opportunity cost of enrolling. She finds that this is because of their inability to afford non-fee schooling expenses, including travel, stationery and supplementary teaching/private tuitions. (Kingdon 2002). My calculations based on primary data collected in Nagaon were presented in Table 5.1 earlier to support Kingdon’s claims. I find that the girls from the lower-class (deprivers) and the middle-class (aspirers) group that attend government-aided Northern, Meadow and Sanctuary school spend disproportionately more on transport and private coaching classes (henceforth ‘tuitions’) than those attending the government-unaided City school and the government-aided Kaleidoscope school. That table also showed that the upper-class and middle class-girls attending City school are able to spend most on inputs such as stationery, educational materials, school fees and tuitions. They spend comparatively less on public transport since they have access to private cars or to school buses. On the other hand, I also showed that girls attending Kaleidoscope school required very few material inputs for their rote-based education. These girls also spent the least on transport as they all lived locally and walked or cycled to the school. These patterns of expenditure, wherein the poor are asked to spend significant proportion of their income filling quality gaps in educational as well as access gaps, are integral to the understanding of parents’ narratives in this section.

In the quote below, Amina, a mother of four girls in the 7-14 age group, shows how both parents being in good health and getting regular paid work are variables that would determine their daughters’ schooling outcomes. She also highlights the

dilemmas around equitable distribution of the family's meagre resources to the four daughters who are in various stages of schooling. The economic uncertainties in Amina's family's life prevail in spite of the provisions such as free and compulsory education for children up to the age of fourteen under the RTE Act discussed in Chapter 5. Amina's quote below also needs to be viewed within this empirical context of the disproportionately high cost of education for lower and lower-middle class girls attending government aided secular schools as discussed above in Table 5.1 earlier.

As long as we are both in good health, and he [her husband] keeps getting regular work we can afford to at least have her finish school. It is not just school you know. There are expenses on tuition, commute, uniforms, books and notebooks. With four daughters, giving them all the facilities equally is always difficult for us. We try [...]. The girls also have to work hard and focus on studies and make their future lives worthwhile (Amina, mother of Asma, Interview 2nd -3rd Dec 2013).

This suggests that in the context of lower-class parents, the policy commitments towards affirmative redistribution through the universalization of education (in the SSA, 2001) and right to education (RTE Act, 2010) do not translate into a substantive redistribution of educational resources for them. In spite of the State's commitment to providing free and compulsory education, in practice, as noted in Chapter 5, the affirmative redistribution policies of the government do not disrupt the existing hierarchies of access ingrained in the multi-layered educational system. This means that lower-class parents like Amina are saddled with additional costs, such as private coaching to compensate for what they view as inferior learning in the government-funded Assamese-medium schools such as Meadow school. In the course of the interview, Amina further notes her aspirations for her youngest daughter:

She is very bright [...] if I can afford then I would send her to a private English school, where she can learn well. The LP²⁴ school she goes to is very bad. Even as an illiterate woman, I can tell that, so you can imagine how bad it must be (Amina, mother of Asma, Interview 2nd -3rd Dec 2013).

²⁴ Lower Primary School attended between ages 6-10

Amina's concerns about the quality of education her children receive have been substantiated by empirical studies. Recently, the Annual Status of Education Report, for Assam finds that despite high enrolment in government schools, a large percentage of children studying in the fifth grade lack the reading skills expected of children in the second grade (Pratham 2013). The question for the rest of this section, then, becomes how this empirical context of deep-rooted material deprivation and educational inequality is negotiated by parents in my study.

I find that in a context of widespread poverty and lack of economic capital and a deeply hierarchical or unequal education system discussed above, Muslim parents in my study use the symbolic capital of 'good girlhood' to negotiate their way through poverty in the field of education. Using the example of dressing, and choice of schools, I show that parents in this study attempt to forge a 'good girlhood' that can be an authorization in the field of education for their daughters to be considered as legitimate actors. The first practice I discuss here is that of dressing. Rohima's narrative below places a certain type of dressing at the center of the process of acquiring the symbolically authorized middle-class-ness. Skeggs (2004) has shown that once legitimated, middle-class femininity becomes, in itself, a kind of capital that women seek to embody in order to gain symbolic profit. This strategy is well documented in the academic literature of masculinity and femininity in Britain and India among non-dominant groups (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Ray, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). In the quote below, Rohima emphasizes the nature of dressing that can convey the idea of 'good families' as an important middle-class practice. Such dressing in the context of schooling in her view includes wearing a clean, ironed school uniform with neatly tied hair.

How you dress tells people what kind of a person you are. I make sure they [daughters] look like girls from 'good families' interested in studies, not just those girls who go to schools to have fun. If a girl goes to school with untied hair and crumpled clothes, the teacher will automatically assume she is disinterested in studies and does not pay attention to them. How will they learn anything if the teachers do not pay attention to them? (Rohima, mother of Rejia, Interview, 9-11th Feb 2014, emphasis added)

The girls from ‘good families’ are construed as ‘good girls’ in schools: academically inclined and sexually restrained. The gender practices of showing academic engagement (Archer et al., 2007) and sexual restraint (Radhakrishnan, 2009) help lower-class parents such as Rohima to claim cultural authorization for their daughters as legitimate actors in the field of education. Radhakrishnan’s (2009) middle-class IT workers use the trope of ‘good families’ and ‘good background’ to convey normative ideals about themselves, which translate into symbolic and material capital and symbolic gain from IT employment that in turn helps them pursue and maintain their own ‘good families’. In other words, ‘good girlhoods’ and ‘good families’ reinforce each other. Rohima’s focus upon dressing her daughters in a certain way demonstrates that, for lower-class parents in the study, enacting the classed aesthetic of appearance discussed by teachers in Chapter 6 is integral to seeking cultural authorizations. In doing so the parents show a critical awareness of how pathological subjectivities are conferred on their daughters on account of their appearance and attempt to distance their daughters from such conferred subjectivities. Skeggs’s (1997) longitudinal ethnography of young working-class women in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s shows that class was central to the process of dis-identification. She understands (dis)identifications from/with as ‘(dis)simulation of these social and subject positions’ by which alternative identities come to appear coherent (ibid., 13). Similarly, lower class parents in my study used the practice of (dis)identification to avoid their daughters from ‘being fixed into one-dimensional subject positions, which label and judge them’ as pathological (ibid. 13). Thus, lower class parents in my study pursued respectable and feminine identities for their daughters through certain enactments of dressing which were seen to be more legitimate and socially acceptable in the school settings. Another way in which lower class parents in my study acquire symbolic capital is by choosing low-cost but culturally valued educational options for their daughters, such as Madrassa education, as I will discuss next.

Begum, cited below, says that the poor economic condition of the family has driven them to choose Madrassa education for their daughter. At the same time, the madrassa’s religious education and the possibility of future employment as an Arabic teacher in a government school is viewed as a win-win situation. On the one hand, she feels that her daughter can accrue material gains through her job as an Arabic teacher

for her family; on the other, she can accrue symbolic gains from being well versed in religion and from being in a profession (teaching) that enables her to prioritize the future family.

My daughter is going to the senior Madrassa, as you know. It is a big relief that we do not have to spend much on her education... If she becomes a teacher like Ruma baidow²⁵ she can also show the path of God to the students and she can financially contribute to her future family. What is better than a teaching job for a woman? [...] It will really help our family, especially to educate the younger children in good schools. Even to have a family, the teacher's job is the best (Begum, mother of Bina, Interview 8-9th March 2014).

The harsh material reality and the economic precariousness discussed at the beginning of this section underlie the quote above. However, despite living in conditions of abject poverty, the lower-class parents in my sample often viewed the career choices made for their children positively and sought to optimize their outcomes. Parents attached positive aspirations to educational choices, such as a madrassa education, which in most cases is unlikely to bear many economic fruits through employment as discussed in Chapter 5. However, viewing these education choices through the lens of respectable femininity suggests that the positive aspirations that the parents attach to these choices are not purely economic. As the quote from Begum suggests, the choice of education for the daughter is expected to accrue symbolic capital and not economic capital alone to the family. Following Radhakrishnan's (2009) formulation, such a conception of respectability allows the family to be at the center of women's lives whether through income or the delivery of gender roles or both. Referred to colloquially as '*Sarkari Sakori*', government jobs, including the job of an Arabic teacher in a government-aided school, are greatly prized because of regular income, benefits such as pension, maternity leave, regular working hours and desk or office-based roles (Khan, 2009). In other words, government jobs are seen as compatible with the ideal of the family which was the central symbolic force behind respectable femininity. Thus, a part of the socialization of good girlhoods is a preparation for these respectable government jobs.

²⁵ Literally translated to big sister, often teachers are also referred to as Baidow in Assamese medium schools.

7.2. Prioritization of gendered discipline

Disciplinary measures specifically tailored to adolescent girls were integral in the educational field across the home-to-school continuum. Across the various class backgrounds, the parents in my study emphasized the need for gendered disciplining, and to achieve that various practices of surveillance were put in place in school as well as at home. Such surveillance was tied to the regulation of the girls' sexuality and can be partially understood through the notions of honour (*honman*) and shame (*bodnam*), which feature notably in public discourses about women of South Asian and Muslim background (Mirza and Mitroo, 2012; Werbner, 2007; Haw, 2009). As arbitrators of Muslim girls' cultural authorization in the field of education, honour and shame are to be deployed as units through which the respectability of a 'good girl' is measured and expressed. Unlike in the studies of south Asian women in the diaspora, where honour and shame are expressed as binaries, in the context of the Muslim parents in my study these are contextual and deeply malleable concepts tied to their class identity, as I discuss below.

In this section I draw attention to the practices of surveillance of embodied behaviors of girls, including dressing, walking and talking, in order to understand the workings of the disciplinary regime based on ideas of honor and shame in the field of education further. I also highlight how the discourse of safety (or lack of it) in public spaces helps rationalize this regime of surveillance. The following excerpts from my field notes based on ethnographic observations from two of the co-educational schools in my sample – Sanctuary school and City school, outline the ways in which schools reflect the gendered disciplinary regime. In the Sanctuary school, populated by students from a lower-class background, there is a strong emphasis on exclusively policing the mobility of girls outside the school premises during school hours, whereas those restrictions do not apply to the boys. Similarly, in City school, which has an affluent middle-class and upper-class demographic composition, girls had disproportionately strict sartorial guidelines, which were actively enforced by the teaching staff in the school.

The girls are not allowed to go out at lunch hour to buy lunch, but boys are. So the girls often find themselves dependent on boys if they choose to buy lunch. Many girls said that the boys in the class charged them extra money for delivery (field notes, 12 January 2014).

The girls often complain about headaches induced by wearing the hairbands issued by the school as a part of the uniform. Often during lunch hour and when they use the toilets, the girls joked about taking a break from the hair bands. Not wearing the said hair-band could lead to disciplinary measures including the levying of a fine. In addition to the prescriptions around the hairband there were several other gendered prescriptions around ‘how to tie your hair’ and ‘how to wear the dupatta’ and ‘what sorts of eye-wear’ were acceptable to wear for girls (field notes, 21 December 2013).

Parents in my study were very supportive of the school’s disciplinary regime in spite of its blatantly sexist nature. In the quote below Iqbal, lecturer in a local college, says that even though the City school’s educational provisioning is below his expectation, the school’s strongly enforced disciplinary regime is the main reason for its attractiveness to him. The ‘strict’ disciplinary regime is viewed as supportive of building a specifically classed morality in line with the ideal of good girlhood. Similar positive views about the disciplinary regime were expressed by all middle-class and upper-class parents of girls attending the City school.

Frankly speaking, I am not very pleased with the [City] school’s academic quality. They have high teacher attrition due to low pay and even many of the existing teachers are not very qualified especially for subjects like Maths and Science. We, therefore, pay a lot of attention to class work and home work. We have got her private coaching for Maths and Science, and her mother helps with Social Studies. But I am very pleased with the ‘strict’ culture of the school. This is especially important for girls this age (adolescence) to be disciplined and to be guided properly. Some of their disciplinary measures are absurd, but I appreciate the efforts they make to instil the discipline of walking, talking and dressing. These are important in building one’s moral character. That is the reason why I have always wanted my daughter to go to a convent (Iqbal, father of Shabnam, interview 25th Dec 2013).

In other words, he suggests that his upper-class background and access to economic capital enables him to meet the material gaps in the school’s educational provisioning, such as extra tuitions, study materials, and other forms of support. However, the symbolic capital of ‘moral character’ or the culturally authorized symbolic capital of

good Muslim girlhood can only be accessed through disciplinary measures at the convent school geared towards producing an idealized feminine subject. Such a feminine subject is culturally and morally authorized through the symbolic capital of respectability. For Skeggs, 'Respectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who do not are not' (Skeggs, 1997: 3).

The discipline of 'walking, talking and dressing' envisaged by Iqbal above is integral in maintaining a culturally authorized respectability embedded in the personhood of the 'good girl'. A notable feature of good girlhood is that it needs to be authorized and acknowledged publicly, as noted in Karim's quote below. He is a low-level officer in a government department who can be classified as middle-class in an economic sense. His daughter Amy attends the Northern school. In the context of her schooling, Karim echoes Iqbal's concerns earlier about the need to be a 'good girl' in an all-encompassing way as opposed to being a 'good student'. He recognizes the increasingly important role played by women's education in fostering a sense of financial autonomy and voice within the family. In the quote below, Karim views the feminine subjectivity of a 'good student' as being respectable in a limited way, whereas the subjectivity of a 'good girl' is seen to be more universally respectable.

Education is very important, especially for girls these days. If they have their job and own money, they have a say in the husband's family. But the most important thing is to become a person worthy of respect both through academic achievements and through good behavior [...] I would prefer if people called her a 'good girl' rather than just a 'good student'. Then the whole family will be proud of her (Karim, father of Amy, Interview 12th March 2014).

As discussed above, the gains from being a 'good student' are accrued as limited economic capital through future career and earning prospects. A 'good student' is desirable, but the culturally authorized symbolic capital of 'good girlhood' is a far more malleable asset in that it is convertible into cultural and economic capitals.

The concerns about gendered discipline are magnified further in parents' concerns about safety, which was one of the most widely reported anxieties of parents across class backgrounds. However, the parental conception of women's and girls' safety in my study is narrated through the discourses of honor and shame, centering on gendered discipline. In the context of safety in public spaces, these discourses are enacted

through practices such as restrictions on mobility. Mehmuda's quote below makes explicit a widely accepted distinction between an adolescent boy and an adolescent girl in their vulnerability to violence in public spaces. She highlights the anxiety parents face when daughters are in public spaces and the asymmetrically gendered nature of this anxiety about girls' safety. In her view, in contrast to adolescent boys, adolescent girls are uniquely unsafe in public spaces in Nagaon, and hence they need to be under parental surveillance. That means restricted and largely dependent mobility outside the home. What is interesting about the narratives is the characterization of gendered vulnerabilities in public spaces as 'mistakes'. In other words, their vulnerability is perceived to stem from inappropriate actions on the part of the girls, such as interactions with the opposite sex, love affairs and so on. Here, fear is not only about safety of girls, but also about the cultural and symbolic consequences of being unsafe.

If she were a boy of sixteen, I wouldn't worry so much. But because she is a girl I never let her off my eyes. Either her father or I drop her to wherever she has to go. If both of us are busy, I send her younger brother to escort her to her tuition. You never know, these are bad times. Boys can make mistakes and learn from them. But a girl's mistakes are life-long, so we have to look after our daughters well. There are so many crimes against women and girls these days; I am anxious about Moni when she is not at home. I am even afraid to listen to the news on TV or to read the newspaper, everyday something or other happens! (Mehmuda, mother of Moni, Interview 14th Nov 2013).

As insinuated by Mehmuda above, the journeys from home to school and back made by school girls through public spaces are seen as dangerous, both due to the possibility of physical corruption (sexual and other forms of physical violence) or through moral corruption (through interactions with members of the opposite sex). Thus, concerns around the sexual control of women on the part of the community contribute significantly to the modes of articulation of safety, security, and risk, embedded in identity politics and morality concerns about the public visibility of girls (Phadke, 2005). Viewed in this way, the discourse of gendered safety is inextricably linked to questions of good girlhood and good families. Threat to good girls and good families comes from hetero-sexual relationships 'chosen' by girls. These threat is obviously magnified further if the girls' 'choice' involved a non-Muslim man and/or someone

from a family with lower socio-economic standing than the girl's family. Thus, the discourse of girls' safety is central to the schemes of gendered surveillance to protect family and community 'honor'. Though different communities and castes would define honor in different ways, the common themes include cultural and customary practice, and moral and sexual codes (Chowdhary, 1997). From the analytic perspective of respectable femininity where the woman 'embodies the family', both sexual violence against her and sexual (and romantic) choices made by her are seen as acts of transgression of the honor of the entire family. And the greatest danger to the ideology of honor is that of *bodnam* (shame), attached to female bodies. Notably, this discourse on *bodnam* does not make a conceptual distinction between violence inflicted on female bodies and the exercise of sexual (and emotional) choices on the part of women: both are unequivocally construed as acts of *bodnam*. This nuance must be added to our understanding of safety within the framework of gendered discipline. Viewed in this way, not only do the parents attempt to discipline girls to secure them from violence (sexual and otherwise) in public places; they also do so to protect the girls from their own choices, which can potentially be a source of *bodnam* or shame leading to the loss of symbolic capital.

The issue of girls' physical mobility is scrutinized deeply by the families to avert the loss of symbolic capital or *bodnam*. Conversely, symbolic capital is accumulated through gendered surveillance practices such as vetting the girls' movements by asking questions such as 'why?', 'with whom?', and 'when will you be back?', by escorting them in public places, ensuring 'appropriate dressing' and 'appropriate behavior' in public spaces and so on (field notes, 13 November 2013, 6 January 2014, 5 March 2014). Shahnaz Khan's (2009:1529) research in Mumbai reveals that restrictions imposed on Muslim women's mobility and access to public space were quite similar to the curbs exerted on women from other communities. These included controls on timings, purpose, place, dress, and companions, with similar concerns voiced regarding their sexual safety and respectability. Research on Muslim women in India has also shown that their minority status and the history of gender-specific violence on Muslim women in the Hindu-Muslim communal riots accentuates the Muslim community's anxieties around girls' safety (Hasan & Menon, 2004; Sachar, 2006). However, regarding safety in public spaces, there is little acknowledgment of

how Muslim girls' class and ethnic location qualitatively transforms the enactments of their gendered disciplining by their parents in Nagaon, as discussed below.

Bela is a mother of three from a lower-class background. Her daughter thirteen-year-old Alia attends the Meadow school, and normally either walks to school with her younger sister or takes a shared rickshaw²⁶. In the quote below she highlights that the interaction between ethnic and class disadvantage produces additional vulnerability for Miyah girls in their everyday interactions in public spaces. Bela negotiates this situation by advising her daughter to enact culturally authorized forms of gendered restraint by staying out of trouble. It was understood that by keeping her gaze lower and refusing to acknowledge the verbal (and sexual) attacks, girls were able to voluntarily draw attention away from them and stay away from trouble.

Miyah girls are always more prone to being teased by people [...] and no one will come and help because they think she must have done something to attract the attention. It is true! Because we are poor, people think we have no self-respect or honor. I just tell her "look down and head home straight from school," even if someone makes a lewd comment she should never look back or answer. People are always looking for a chance to 'talk.' That is why the girls have to be very careful not to engage with such people [...] One such incident is bad enough to ruin a girl's reputation for life. I will always trust my daughter, but why give other people a chance to 'talk'? It is better to walk away with your respect intact (Bela, mother of Alia, Interview 6th Dec 2013).

Bela's response can be located within a larger ideological structure that dictates that 'good women do not take notice of unknown men's comments, and if they do, then by definition they are asking to be harassed further or indicating that they like it' (Phadke, 2007: 46). Her response also needs to be seen in response to the sexualization of the Miyah Muslim girls, as noted in the teacher's narratives in Chapter 6. The teachers' narratives, also indicated a juxtaposition of the class and ethnic/religious identity to confer upon Bengali speaking Muslim girls a pathological subjectivity. This pathologized subjectivity is further strengthened sexualization of the Miyah girls, as noted in Chapter 6. Such an interpretation of the sexual behavior of the Muslim girls from lower-class backgrounds is central to the (re)production of the middle-class

²⁶ A three-wheeled bicycle for public hire, with a covered seat for passengers behind the driver (Source: Wikipedia)

Assamese and Hindu conceptualizations of respectable femininity. To counter these views, the lower-class Muslim families in my research often lay out a behavioral blueprint for the young girls going in and out of public spaces. A similar adoption of the gendered disciplining was reported by Still (2010) among the upwardly mobile/aspirational Dalit groups in Tamil Nadu. Like Phadke (2007), I find that concerns over honour and fear of *bodnam* are much more pressing among the relatively lower-class families, especially those who live in localities where their arrivals and departures, and their behavior and dressing, in the public spaces, are easily visible to neighbors. As part of forging the subjectivity of good girlhood, so-called Miyah girls from lower-class backgrounds are socialized into a fear not only of external violence but also of community censure that will have a direct impact on their future marital prospects.

Bela's narrative above can be contrasted with Shahida's narrative below, in which she highlights the need for her daughter to make a claim on the seemingly unsafe public space. Shahida, quoted below, is an educated middle-class woman, whose daughter attends City school. Similar narratives were common among middle-class and upper-class parents. Shahida outlines in the quote below that her responses to the perceived insecurity of women in public spaces are to maintain a loose regime of surveillance around her daughter's movements, specifically when she has to be in public spaces, such as waiting for the school bus:

I just go to the bus stop every afternoon to pick her up, and we walk back together. Her father drops her in the morning. Even if one of us can't make it for some reason, people in the locality know us, and if anyone has any bad intentions, they know that her family is close by and she lives in the locality. I trust Shabnam in these matters; she tells us everything... We have also given her a cell phone last year so that she can immediately call for help if there is a problem when she is alone [...] I have made sure it is not a smartphone otherwise we will have other problems at hand [giggles] (Shahida, mother of Shabnam, Interview 24th Dec 2013).

Comparing Shahida's and Bela's narratives indicates that public spaces and ensuing anxieties around safety are experienced differently by Muslim girls depending upon their class position. Not only does Shahida's access to economic capital enable her to

‘secure’ door-to-door transportation for her fifteen-year-old daughter, her social capital allows her to safeguard her daughter’s ‘good girlhood’ in the event of any unsavory encounters. However, a lack of the very same capitals, in contrast, makes Bela conscious about her daughter’s vulnerability towards being construed as non-respectable. Upper-class and upper-middle-class women in my study are less likely to be impeded by concerns about safety in education and employment, and are also able partly to disregard some of the rules of respectable femininity due to the legitimacy provided by their economic and social capital, along with other forms of cultural capital (Gilbertson, 2011; Moi, 1991). In other words, while all the parents in this study experienced anxieties about the safety of their daughters in public spaces, the extent of anxiety about safety and the nature of their enactments of gendered surveillance varied according to parents’ class background. The middle and upper-class parents were able to maintain certain forms of surveillance such as pick-ups and drops, access to cell phones enabling them to maintain gendered discipline through surveillance and policing of their daughters, in ways that lower class parents were unable to. In doing so, although they create an impression of relaxed and more open parenting while maintaining the focus on gendered discipline. In the next section I discuss how parents expected Muslim girls to enact good girlhoods by merging together future career aspirations of girls with marital prospects.

7.3. Appropriate Aspiration: Merger of career aspirations with marital prospects

Contemporary literature on respectability in South Asia views it as an interplay between gender, class and nation which allows new women to engage in the global economy as workers and consumers, but only guarantees their high status as cultural and nationalist icons if they ultimately prioritize their family over their careers (Thapan, 2004; Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Fernando & Cohen, 2013; Hewamanne, 2012). This merger of economic ideologies that push women into the labor market and cultural ideologies that firmly locate them in the domestic sphere characterizes the discussions around ‘new womanhood’ in post-globalization South Asia. In my study, the Muslim parents enact this merger of economic and cultural ideologies in the field of education by fusing together career aspirations and marital prospects into a single concept of ‘appropriate aspirations’. I conceptualize it as family approved personal aspirations which support women’s consumption, career and education related ambitions while maintaining the marital family-centered ideals of respectable femininity and good girlhoods. In the quotes below Mehmuda, from a middle-class

background, connects her daughters' career aspiration of becoming a doctor with the possibility of marrying a 'guy from a good family'. Begum, from a lower-class background, connects her choice of madrasa education and planned career as Arabic teacher for her daughter with the possibility of finding a suitable matrimonial match: 'doctor-engineer'. The term 'doctor-engineer' is used colloquially in Assam to convey the idea of someone, in what are seen as stable professions including doctors, engineers, and bureaucrats.

Her father has very high hopes for her. So he has even told all relatives that she will only marry a suitable guy after she becomes a doctor. That way we can choose a well-settled guy from a good family, instead of just marrying her off early to just any guy. If she is a doctor, obviously, people will queue up on our door with proposals. If a woman is financially independent than she has more say in the in-laws' family also. It is very important (Mehmuda, mother of Moni, Interview 14th Nov 2013).

She is a very good girl. It will be really good if she can get a job as an Arabic teacher after her FM exam. Maybe then we can find a 'doctor-engineer' son-in-law (giggles) if Allah is willing!! Nobody likes an illiterate wife nowadays; they want the wife to be educated and sensible, so that she can look after the kids and the family in a better way than an uneducated woman (Begum, mother of Bina, Interview 8-9th March 2014).

Mehmuda's and Begum's quotes show that the choice of education and employment over marriage and family in contemporary India has been socially validated. However, this validation still happens within the confines of considerations around future marital prospects of girls. Example from my fieldwork suggest that for young women becoming a doctor or having a career has in many ways come to be set as the benchmark of respectability. This is further solidified by the idea that educated women with careers are 'better' able to discharge their gender roles at home as wives and mothers. Viewed through this line of reasoning, then, educated women with careers are seen to compensate for delayed marriage by becoming better in delivering their gender roles, as Begum suggests. Mehmuda, similarly, views the possibility of delay in the marriage of her daughter and extended time spent on her medical career as a 'symbolic' investment in respectable femininity, one that will allow her a greater

choice of middle- and upper-class partners in the future. In this sense, having an education and a career helps to bring together various constitutive elements of what is considered as good girlhood in contemporary Nagaon. The contemporary notion of respectable femininity ingrained in the conception of good girlhood continues to value domesticity and the centrality of the institution of the heterosexual family; yet, it has also come to include issues such as choice of partners and a stronger voice for women in the marital relationships. Viewed in this way, Muslim parents seek cultural authorization for their daughters as legitimate actors in the field of education, and hence re-imagine themselves as 'good families.' They are also actively using education to rearticulate the conception of respectable femininity for Muslim girls. This merger of career aspiration with marriage has spurred parental focus upon girls' education, and a great deal of attention towards future aspirations as I discuss further in Chapter 8. All the parents in my study were therefore deeply invested in girls' education and their career aspirations, often pressuring them overtly and covertly to aspire for careers with high 'symbolic capital', such as doctor and teacher. Yet, given the merger of marital and career aspirations, such focus upon female achievement cannot be seen as subverting the gender order. Based on her study of Muslim communities in Mumbai, Khan (2007) suggests that jobs perceived to be 'appropriate' for girls are typically jobs that do not demand long hours out of the home and neighborhood, or prolonged contact with men outside the community. This description is also applicable to the respondents in my study. However, the job of a doctor is seen as the only exception to many of these rules about timings and interactions with the opposite sex. Such rules are relaxed, perhaps because of the gendered conception of the care ethic, which becomes a symbolic capital in itself. At the same time, the extremely high symbolic status accorded to doctors in the local cultural landscape would also ensure that female doctors are highly valued in the marriage market.

The model of respectability that Mehmuda and Begum conceive for their daughters through the merger of educational and marital goals is new in many ways. The fact that a majority of parents in my sample connected education with marital prospects indicates the entrance of new discourses and practices of femininity, respectability and girlhood in their local context, and perhaps more widely. These discourses are new in that they focus on a 'new' liberal Muslim girl who embraces education, pursues a career, exercises choice of partners and delays marriage. These enactments of

respectability are also new in the sense that they are not limited to the middle classes, but much more widely articulated by parents from various backgrounds. In another sense, however, the model of respectability that Mehmuda and Begum conceptualize for their daughters is a continuation of the colonial and nationalist models of respectable femininity from the 19th and 20th century. Radhakrishnan (2009) reminds us that a conception of the larger progress of communities and nations is at the heart of the discourses of respectable femininity, and of the enactment of these femininities by individual women and girls. Such a discourse of respectable femininity helps reimagine certain nations (e.g. India) as developed, communities (e.g. Hindus and Muslims) as modern or progressive and families (e.g. Muslim families in my study) as 'good families.'

7.4. Conclusion

Parents of Muslim girls often came into focus in policy pronouncements and teachers' narratives as being unsupportive of girls' education. Thus, irrespective of their orientation towards the education of girls, Muslim parents are often demonized in the discourse on Muslim girls' education. I find that Muslim parents from varied class backgrounds in my study walk a tight-rope between their class aspirations, their religious identity and their ethnic identity in their negotiations with the field of education for their daughters. In fact, parents in my study rejected these demonizations and instead highlighted their commitment to the education of girls, while staying committed to certain forms of femininity that accorded them symbolic capital. In the parents' narratives throughout my study, this type of femininity was articulated as '*Bhal Suwali*,' or the 'good girl.' In this Chapter, I have argued that the discourse of good girlhood lays out some of the rules of the game for the Muslim girls and the regime of gendered surveillance that its enforcement needs. I have also discussed how through three enactments of good girlhood Muslim parents in my study bid for cultural authorizations for their daughters in the process seeking authorizations for themselves as middle-class or as 'good families'. However, depending upon their class location the nature of these enactments are different.

In the first enactment of good girlhood, they negotiate the materiality of poverty 'respectably'. This means that lower class parents adopt a classed aesthetic of dressing for their daughters to bid for authorization as 'good girls' and for the families to be

authorized as ‘good families’. Similarly, parents try to leverage the economically affordable and culturally valued Madrassa education of their daughters to accrue symbolic capital, even when the possibility of accumulating economic capital through such education remains limited. The second enactment of good girlhood is through the prioritization of gendered discipline. Parents in my study show a disproportionate focus upon issues of honor and shame, producing a regime of surveillance around the girls’ embodied practices such as dressing, talking, walking, mobility and visibility in public spaces. This led to the prioritization of gendered disciplinary concerns of parents over academic or educational ones. I showed that these enactments of gendered discipline in particular around surveillance of girls’ and parents anxiety around issues of safety in public spaces vary as per the class and ethnic location of parents in my study. I demonstrated how middle and upper middle-class parents, are empirically able to exercise surveillance in much deeper ways than the lower and lower middle-class parents due to better access to resources. The last enactment happens through the merger of career and marital aspirations into a single concept of appropriate aspirations, as a marker of good girlhood. Such an articulation of good girlhood is connected with the re-imagination of the Muslim community and the Muslim family which has often remained demonized in the discourses around girls’ education. At the same time, by enacting good girlhoods through appropriate aspirations they are also able to bid for authorization as good families. The language in which the Muslim family’s re-imagination is articulated is that of women’s and girls’ choice in various aspects of life. As discussed in the section on gendered discipline and in the section of appropriate aspirations earlier, it is not a choice made available to girls in my study as active participants. Instead, the girls come to be seen as malleable objects to be deployed in certain gendered ways in the transaction of both economic and symbolic capitals. I therefore conclude that school-going Muslim girls in my study serve as symbols through which Muslim, Indian, Assamese and Bengali identities are imagined afresh. This formulation allows us to ‘examine the interplay between gender, class, and religion in everyday practice’ (Radhakrishnan, 2011: 211).

From the discussion above, Muslim parents in my study are incorporated within the politics of authorization as the arbitrators of cultural authorization for Muslim girls as legitimate subjects in the field of education. The degree and nature of parental arbitration vary according to the parents’ class position, as this chapter has shown.

Nonetheless, this cultural authorization is sought through the enactment of ‘respectable femininities’ or, in this case, ‘good girlhoods’. In the next Chapter, I will discuss the ways in which girls challenge and accept the subjectivities conferred upon them by teachers and parents through their reconstructions of self.

8. Reflexive Selves: Muslim Girls' constructions of 'Self.'

This chapter builds on the previous three chapters to explore how school-going Muslim girls in my study 'deconstruct and reconstruct' (Kirmani 2009) the conferred subjectivities in their personal narratives. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how the equal opportunity policy framework of post-colonial India constitutes and normalizes the subjectivities of Muslim girls as economically subordinate and as culturally different, deficient or pathological. I have also shown how teachers' judgements around Muslim girls' appearance, poverty, merit, and language create the conditions for a pathological subjectivity to be 'conferred' upon school-going Muslim girls. Being framed in these ways de-authorizes their claims as legitimate actors in the field of education and society more widely (Chapter 6). In Chapter 7, I have shown that Muslim parents bid for cultural authorization of their daughters using a disciplinary regime inspired by discourses of 'respectable femininity', translated into notions of 'good girlhood' as a constitutive element of symbolically authorized middle-classness. At the same time, like Farzana Shain's (2000) study on British Asian girls, my research reveals that Muslim girls are not passive recipients of oppressive cultural practices at inter- and intra-group levels. Instead, they are involved in devising a host of conscious strategies to navigate these conferred subjectivities in their everyday lives, within schools and beyond.

By looking at the ways Muslim girls themselves construct 'self' in their personal narratives, this chapter challenges the idea of a fixed category of 'Muslim girl'. Instead I highlight how Muslim girls 'carry with them multiple intertwined identities' based on their personal and collective experiences (Kirmani, 2009: 49). Carrying forward my interest in conferred subjectivities, this chapter focuses on showing the diversity of the ways in which school-going Muslim girls talk about their own subjectivity. In particular, it focuses on Muslim girls' reflexive understandings of the self. I contend that their reflexivity is demonstrated in how they resist, conform and negotiate the subjectivities conferred upon them through the 'rules of engagement' – middle-class bias, Hindu normativity and respectable femininity/good girlhood – and reconstruct their subjectivities using storylines concerning their 'self'. This chapter draws attention to alternative subjective possibilities that Muslim girls in my study seek to

inhabit through their construction of 'self'. Within the framework of politics of authorization, these alternative constructions can be viewed as attempts to wrest control over the external narratives of identity that are about them, through narratives of 'self'. The specific research question this chapter attends to are: In what ways are the conferred subjective possibilities resisted and negotiated by Muslim girls in their everyday lives, and what are the implications of these types of negotiations for our understanding of agency?

To address the research questions above, I adapt Bourdieu's formulation of 'embodied and unconscious habitus' wherein the dominated are seen as having little understanding or/agency over their subordination (Adams, 2006; Gilbertson, 2011). To adapt this theorization for my research, I focus my attention on Muslim girls' reflexive capacities. Their reflexive capacities are understood as 'taking a different perspective and revaluing the positions they are expected to inhabit without value' (Skeggs 2004:25) and as their ability to reflect on the 'unthought and unconscious categories of habit that themselves *corporalized* preconditions of more self-conscious practices' (Adkins, 2004: 194, emphasis in original). Such a view of reflexivity helps to account for the diverse ways in which Muslim girls in my study negotiate the structural forces in their lives. They frequently reflected on the identities conferred upon them on account of their class, ethnicity, religion, and gender positions. They frequently drew references from their personal and collective past, their current circumstances and their future aspirations to revalue their social location as gendered, classed, religious or ethnic minority subjects, and to consciously rethink taken-for-granted practices and values.

My main argument in this chapter is that Muslim girls both resist and conform to the subjectivities conferred on them, using their reflexive abilities to reconstruct their 'self'. Connecting it with my wider theorization on the politics of authorization suggests that these reconstructions of the 'self' are bids of authorization in order to become legitimate actors in the field of education and the wider society. In relation to the narratives that we speak about ourselves, Kathy Davis argues that, from a feminist post-structuralist perspective,

[w]ho we take ourselves to be at any one point in time depends on the available storylines we have to make sense out of [...] being-in-the-world, along with the legitimacy and status accorded to those storylines by the others (Davis, 1993: 4).

In this chapter, I view storylines as the discourses Muslim girls have access to, in order to frame narratives through which their selfhoods are realized. These storylines deployed by the girls are in relation to the ‘rules of engagement’ discussed throughout this thesis using policy analysis and teachers’ and parents’ narratives. In other words, storylines about the ‘self’ respond to discourses about the middle class, respectable femininity/good girlhood and Hindu normativity. Davis views the process of reconstructing the self as a double action: of taking subject positions in discourses as one’s own, and of being placed in subject positions by powerful discourses (ibid.). There are tensions between ‘what positions are made available to subjects and what they accept/ resist/ modify as they construct storylines about who they are, and who they are becoming’ (Koehne, 2005: 106). Using examples from food habits, dressing, aspirations, and language, this chapter identifies four such types of reconstructed storylines about the ‘self’ conveyed by the Muslim girls in my study, namely: good ‘Indian’ Muslim, the proud ‘Miyah’, the ‘modern’ woman, and the ‘aspirational victim’. I remain open to the possibility of these storylines and narratives being contradictory because discourses provide subjects ‘with multiple layers of contradictory meanings that are inscribed in their bodies and their conscious and unconscious minds’ (Davis 1993: 13).

The four storylines about the ‘self’ emerging from my data will be used to organize the rest of this Chapter. The first section highlights a storyline of the ‘Good (Indian) Muslim self’. Using Mehmood Mamdani’s conception of the ‘Good Muslim’ in Western political discourse, I highlight how Muslim girls in my study interpret and inhabit the category of ‘Good’ (Indian) Muslim through their negotiations of Hindu normativity, with specific reference to food practices and association with role models. The second section discusses the storyline of proud ‘Miyah’ self, that attempts to turn the pathological ‘Miyah’ identity upside down by investing it with positive value. The next section focuses on the preoccupation of Muslim girls with the ideal of the ‘Modern Woman self’ that is enacted through different types of dressing practices and

aspirations. The final section discusses the subjectivity of the ‘aspirational victim self’. This section connects personal aspirations of Muslim girls with two types of regulatory forces that come into play from the family (i.e. at intra-group level) – ‘appropriate aspirations’ – and from their society (i.e. at inter-group level) – ‘discrimination’. The aspirational victim selfhood is also enacted through the ideal of the ‘meritorious self’, which follows the script of transcendental merit to fulfil aspirations, and the ‘pragmatic self’, which is invested in ad-hoc fulfilment of short-term aspirations.

8.1. The ‘Good (Indian) Muslim’

In this section, I highlight how the Muslim girls interpret and inhabit the category of ‘Good (Indian) Muslim’ using their acceptance of Hindu normativity in dietary norms and role models in their school curriculum. Mamdani’s (2005) definition of the ‘good Muslim’ offers a powerful analytical tool through which to understand the politics of authorization of certain types of Muslim subjectivities in Western public discourses. According to him, the Western political discourse has come to distinguish between ‘good’ (secular, westernized) and ‘bad’ (premodern, fanatical) Muslims (Mamdani, 2005). Applying this model to the gender and religious landscape in India, I have argued elsewhere in a co-authored paper that

‘good Muslim’ women do not challenge the status quo of hierarchies between the communities, and through the acceptance of the benevolence of Hindu men align themselves with the Indian nation (Hussain and Hussein, 2015: 300, emphasis in the original).

The bad Muslim challenges the Indian nation, while the good one defends it through the acceptance of and association with the Hindutva project (Srivastava, 2006). During a focus group discussion at City school, in the context of a discussion on discriminatory attitudes of non-Muslim peers in the school, several girls referred me to an incident they all called the ‘Amira’s tiffin²⁷ incident’ or the ‘beef incident’. Amira, aged thirteen, is a quiet girl and speaks only when asked, unlike her peers who often responded spontaneously in discussions. She comes from an upper-middle-class background, and the family is of Bengali-speaking heritage. Like many other middle and upper middle-class families in my study, they have adopted Assamese as their

²⁷ Lunchbox

mother tongue perhaps a generation ago. The story of 'Amira's tiffin incident' goes like this:

The then eleven-year-old Amira found herself ostracized from her predominantly Hindu peer group as they suspected her of bringing beef for lunch. This rumour quickly circulated throughout class V and other classes, making Amira the subject of stigma and ridicule (field notes, 12 December 2013).

It is well known that Hindus view the cow as a sacred animal, so eating beef is not a religiously sanctioned activity for Hindus. However, it is a major part of the dietary practices of many lower-caste Hindus, Muslims and Christians in Assam, and in India more generally. Amira's informal ostracization went on for a full academic year, in which her peers refused to share a seat, share food or play with her, as reported by her below. She also notes that her ostracization was so severe because of her status as the only Muslim student in her cohort.

Amira: A couple of years back, it was the day after Eid. So I bought chicken Pulow²⁸ in my tiffin [...] Some girls in my class just spread a rumour that I was carrying beef in my tiffin. I told them, that's not true, but they won't listen. Everyone just stopped talking to me; no one wanted to sit with me, or play with me, even share a book with me. They told me I that I smelled bad, and that I was dirty.

Saba: That sounds like a bad situation. What did you do?

Amira: It was the worst time. I did not feel like coming to school at all. I started making excuses to my parents for not coming to school. I asked my parents to change school so that I could start afresh. But they did not think this was a big issue.

Saba: How did you survive that period? Did you tell your teachers, your parents? Did you ask anyone for help?

Amira: I used to be absent from school a lot. And then I just waited for the year to be over. Once we moved to class VI, there were lots of new students in

²⁸ A rice and chicken dish.

my class. And after the vacation, when we came back, the class teacher made an arbitrary sitting arrangement so that the students get to know one another. That way I became friends with Nisha. She does not know about that incident. I have since then never brought any meat to school. I even feel scared to bring any home cooked food that would smell. Now I just get pocket money and buy food in the canteen. I did not bring the teachers into this. I did not want to make an 'issue' out of it. They would have thought I was complaining and not being a good sport.

Saba: But it was an 'issue', wasn't it? From what you are saying you seem to have suffered. Then, why were you so reluctant to get help?

Amira: If I made it into a big issue, they would find another issue to bother me. They are in a group; I am by myself [...] I just wanted the whole thing to end. The teacher might scold them all one day. But in a group even getting scolded is fun. But I will still have to come to the class and be with these people.

Saba: How did your parents react to the episode?

Amira: They said such things are common. It happens to everyone [all Muslims] they said. They say I need to be emotionally strong and concentrate on my studies. If I were a good student, my mum says the kids in my class would not have behaved like that. They felt that the problem was my inability to ignore the other people's comments [sobbing]. They just did not understand how difficult it was for me. They did not even want to come and talk to the teacher. I agree with them that if I were the best student in the class that would not happen to me, so I now focus on studies more than anything.

Saba: Are you worried that a similar incident could happen again?

Amira: It may happen again. Now there is one more Muslim girl and two Muslim boys in my class, so hopefully if such a thing happens, there will be some people who will talk to me. Frankly speaking, I do not want to do anything else to be seen as 'different.' I just want to be like everyone else [...] I want to hide until school gets over. Then I can be myself

(Amira, 13, City school, interview, 21 December 2013, emphasis added).

The discussion with Amira demonstrates the Hindu-normative nature of the cultural common sense among school-going young people. It also sheds light upon the micro-political impacts of the majority-minority relationships in the classroom. Research on schools in India confirms that Hindu normativity is embedded in the lives of young people in India through the curriculum (Bhog et al., 2011), the ‘labour’ of patriotism enacted through various activities in school, such as singing, drawing and physical training (Benei, 2008) and their socialization at home (Gupta, 2008). Latika Gupta’s comparative study of Delhi’s mixed neighbourhood of Dariyaganj, aptly titled ‘Growing up Hindu & Muslim’, finds that Hindu children disproportionately ‘conveyed the images of a Muslim crowd which stinks and is unhygienic’ (Gupta, 2008: 38). Experiences of dietary surveillance such as Amira’s were reported across all the schools in my sample where Muslims were a minority. In such contexts, Muslim girls were often asked about the contents of their lunch box, and derogatory comments were made in reference to eating beef. Most girls also experienced misrecognition when their Hindu friends visiting their homes often overtly and covertly refused to eat. Moni says:

She [her best friend] always brings her own water bottle and drinks out of it when she is in my house. She does not touch any food my mother offers her. She said that she is forbidden from eating in my house. She even told me later that if I go to her house and sit on the bed they will wash the sheets and if I drink out of a cup they will throw it away (Moni, 16, interview, Meadow school, 12 November 2013).

While Moni and Amira’s class backgrounds are divergent, they share the experience of misrecognition through surveillance of their food habits by peers in school. Similar stories have been documented in other parts of the country. The Dalit Student’s Union at Hyderabad Central University was told that a beef stall would cause offense to those who view eating meat (and particularly beef) as unnecessary and immoral (Gundimeda, 2009). In the infamous ‘Dadri incident’ of 2015, in the North-Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, a man was lynched to death by neighbours on the suspicion that the family was cooking and eating beef (Indian Express, 25 December 2015). Notably, Hindu normativity is also widely internalized in the socialization of Muslim children in India, Assam in particular, as evidenced by Amira’s parents’ normalization of the dietary surveillance regime in the schools. By treating Amira’s experience of mis-

recognition as an individualized hurt, as opposed to a pattern of dominance spread across generations, her parents deny legitimacy to her experience of victimhood. Instead of articulating personal and collective injustices they focus on the middle class common sense of merit and academic excellence propelling communities towards participatory parity. Thus normalizing the experiences of pain and psychologized/individualized suffering (McRobbie, 2009), and perhaps rendering any conception of collective or organized resistance in response to a shared suffering improbable.

Amira came to be ostracized in the school for a perceived failure to perform the good Indian Muslim-ness. Yet through her acceptance of Hindu normativity she attempts to reclaim a 'Good (Indian) Muslim' subjectivity, in the process un-marking herself as someone with 'different' food habits. To enact this subjectivity, she now eats the standardized food in the canteen instead of bringing her lunch. She also has a new set of friends who are disconnected from the time she was 'marked' in pathological ways by her peers. Her negotiations are located inside the structure of Hindu normativity, and she seeks to be authorized as the same – 'like everyone else' – instead of being marked with her identity by means of the pathologization of her food habits. She does not distance herself from her Muslim identity, but forges a 'Good (Indian) Muslim' identity by depoliticizing the 'beef incident'. In other words, instead of viewing it as part of a larger story of misrecognition and seeking cultural justice through the intervention of teachers, Amira seeks to view it as an aberration in her school journey that she is keen to move past. In doing so, she avoids being drawn into the Hindu vs. Muslim identity tussle, where she will invariably be forced to occupy the (bad) Muslim 'identity package' through her association with the 'beef incident'. In emphasizing 'I want to hide, until school is over. Then I can be myself', she illustrates the performative nature of the 'Good (Indian) Muslim' subjectivity in Muslim-minority schooling contexts. In the next section I extend the discussion by drawing attention to the ways in which Muslim girls in my study enact Good (Indian) Muslimness through their choice of 'Good' (Indian) Muslim role models.

In the four state government-run schools in my sample, Assamese was the language of instruction, and it was taught as a separate subject. References to Azan Fakir²⁹ and

²⁹ A Sufi saint from the region.

the Muslim festivals of *Eid*, *Fatheha*, and *Muharram* were made in the curriculum, and marked in the school's holiday and extra-curricular calendar. In the national curriculum taught in City school, there were selective references to Muslims, largely in history textbooks, and particularly in the context of the historical invasions of India. Respondents across the national and the regional curriculum often expressed exasperation about the lack of Muslim role models in the curriculum. While studying this lack of Muslim role models in the curriculum would itself be an interesting area for inquiry, in this section, I concern myself specifically with Muslim girls' preoccupation with 'Good (Indian) Muslim' role models. This demonstrates the ways in which the Hindu normative structure is embedded in the minds of my Muslim respondents. The following is an excerpt from a discussion among four girls – Shabnam, Toffy, Jenny and Ruhina – as part of a larger focus group discussion at City school. It outlines both the vacuum of role models and the reflexivity exercised in naming 'good Muslim' role models whom they know will become acceptable in the Hindu-normative settings.

Shabnam: The only Muslim people I have read about in my history books [are] Changiz Khan, Mehmud of Ghor or Ghazni, Akbar and Aurangzeb. I haven't read of any great people.

Toffy: What about Shahjahan? He built Taj Mahal.

Shabnam: Yeah, but Mughals were invaders, they cannot be called role models. There are other great Muslims in the freedom struggle, but we do not read about them in our books.

Toffy: I like Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam: he is a real hero for everyone, Muslim or not.

Jenny: He is a great man. And I like the fact that in spite of being a Muslim, he is considered a role model by everyone. He shows us that if you work hard, no matter what, you will succeed. We have read about him in the English book. Is that right?

Saba: So A.P.J. is a Muslim role model that everyone knows, who else?

Shabnam: Some freedom fighters: Maulana Azad maybe. I have not read anything about him.

Saba: Anyone else?

Toffy: No.

Jenny: What about S.R.K.³⁰?

Shabnam & Toffy: Oh yeah!!

Toffy: And all the other Khans in Bollywood. But they are not like other Muslim people. They are very rich. Regular Muslim people are not like that. But anyhow, they give Muslims a good name. Otherwise, it feels like Muslims are no good.

Shabnam: S.R.K. is my favourite. I also like how he is married to a Hindu woman, and he always talks about being Indian first and having a mixed religion family.

Saba: What about someone like Sania Mirza?

Shabnam: I love her! She is an inspiration. And so smart in how she talks and dresses. It is so good to see a Muslim girl achieve so much.

Toffy: But she married a Pakistani. She could have married anyone in India. Why did she have to marry in Pakistan? I do not understand.

Saba: Maybe she thought of the person she is marrying and not the country.

Jenny: That is true [...] I can say that I like her, in front of you. But if I say that to my friends, they will say she is not even Indian; she married the enemy. It will somehow become about all Muslims supporting Pakistan.

Shabnam: That is true, ba³¹!

(City School, Focus Group Discussion, 20th December 2013)

³⁰ One of India's most popular movie stars, Shah Rukh Khan

³¹ An informal address for an elder sister

This discussion shows us that the Muslim history of India comes to be popularly associated with military invasions by Changiz Khan, Mehmud of Ghazni, and Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India. Through their understanding of Indian history from textbooks, my respondents have no hesitation in marking these people as ‘bad Muslims’. The selective historical narratives about Muslims discount their contributions in areas such as architecture, art, literature and medicine. Through this selective historical lens, Mughal Emperor Shahjahan, who built the Taj Mahal, is also viewed as a ‘bad Muslim’.

In contrast, the persona of the former President, the late Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, is widely viewed as a ‘good Muslim’ role model by these girls and many others I interviewed in the course of my fieldwork. Dr Kalam, who passed away in 2015 is often credited for being an eloquent motivational speaker and revered as India’s ‘missile man’ for his central role in India’s Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO). His Presidency, however, has been critiqued extensively for his apolitical positions, especially during the Gujarat Riots of 2002. This was widely seen as an outcome of his affinity with the ruling Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janta Party, which supported his candidature for Presidency. Writing in a leading national daily in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots, Rafique Zakariya, a noted Islamic scholar and politician, says: ‘Dr Kalam’s personal life shows his distance from Islam and his affinity towards Hinduism: he is a Brahmachari known to be highly proficient in the Hindu religious text’ (Zakariya, 2002). While it is beyond the scope of this research to deconstruct Dr Kalam’s political position, it is evident that he can be viewed as the embodiment of the Hindu-normative, ‘good (Indian) Muslim’ ideal.

The girls’ choice of role model can also be seen as a bid for authorization as a ‘good (Indian) Muslim’. Similarly, the ‘Khans’³² of Bollywood come to be framed as ‘Good (Indian) Muslims’ like Dr Kalam, because of their association with Hinduism (e.g. through marriage and observance of rituals) and their embodiment of nationalism in a cosmopolitan and globalized world (Pugsley and Khorana, 2011). The Khans of Bollywood also break the monotonous association between Muslims and poverty. The shared underlying thread in the acceptance of Dr Kalam and the Khans of Bollywood as role models is their appeal to India’s Hindu majority and their compatibility with

³² A top male Muslim film stars including Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Aamir Khan.

the narrative of India's neo-liberal development. However, the girls do not show similar appreciation for the Muslim sportswoman Sania Mirza, the country's highest ranked female tennis player. Mirza suffers from a deficit of 'Good (Indian) Muslimness' in the terms set up by the discussion above, because of her marriage to a Pakistani athlete. This demonstrates the gendered and nationalistic criteria for good Muslim-ness in India.

From the perspective of the politics of authorization, the discussion above suggests that Muslim girls in my study attempt to bid for cultural authorization as Good (Indian) Muslims: educated, professional, patriotic and apolitical. In doing so, they seek a reflexive re-evaluation of their Muslimness and the stereotypes attached to it. Interestingly, while Amira, Shabnam, Toffy and Jenny accept the Hindu-normative order, they do not do so passively. They remain aware of the alternative positions that they may inhabit in their personal lives, but they consciously choose a certain normative position to be able to survive their Hindu-normative cultural milieu. In the focus group discussions, the girls were happy to acknowledge Sania Mirza as a very positive role model in conversations with a Muslim interviewer and their Muslim peers, but publicly, i.e. in mixed groups, these girls are likely to choose a 'Good (Indian) Muslim' role model such as Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. This is similar to Amira's distinction between 'being myself' and 'being at school' earlier, highlighting the public character of the enactment of good (Indian) Muslim-ness. The reconstruction of self as the 'Good (Indian) Muslim' enables these girls to privately reject Hindu normativity, while publicly conforming to it. Such a reflexive awareness of their socio-cultural milieu cannot be understood without conceptualizing these girls as agential actors who articulate both suffering and ameliorative action.

8.2. Proud 'Miyah'

Before delving into the proud 'Miyah' subjectivity in this section, it is worth remembering the unequal nature of citizenship accorded to Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. It is also pertinent to remember that the de-authorization as legitimate actors in the field of education is experienced by many of the respondents through pathologized appearance, perceived lack of merit, and the linguistic hegemony of Assamese language discussed in Chapter 6. I understand a proud 'Miyah' subjectivity as the investment of pride and its public articulation by some of my respondents. It is worth noting that there has also been a

recent wave of ‘Miyah’ poetry asserting the ‘proud ‘Miyah’ subjectivity I discuss in this section. Commenting on this literary phenomenon, Nabina Das writes:

What was once considered hate speech is now a proud badge a literary practitioner can wear, ‘Miyah’ (or, ‘Miya’) poetry and performance is the new trail being blazed by a group of young scholars, teachers and professionals. The common force between them is that they are poets and writers, and very angry’ (Das, 2016).

In this section, I highlight how some Muslim girls in my study seek to revalue their identity by investing it with positive values, while identifying structures of power that confer pathological subjectivities upon them. Huma is a sixteen-year-old girl from Northern School. She was one of the most vocal respondents in the focus group in which she participated. She has a knack for doing impressions and is popular in her peer group for her sense of humour. Huma is a Bengali-speaking Muslim and comes from a female-headed household of lower-class socio-economic background. Her father left the family when she was eight years old, she recalls. On many occasions during formal and informal interactions with her, she has indicated the family’s difficulty in meeting some of the additional expenditures associated with schooling. Huma’s narrative, reported below, renders visible the pathologization of difference through visible markers on the bodies of Miyah girls from lower-class backgrounds. She notes that when she started wearing a nose-pin, an item which is associated largely with the appearance of Bengali Muslim women, her peers at Northern school viewed it as violation of normative dressing embodied practices. They responded to the violation of the normative dressing code by connecting it with the family’s class location, in particular her mother’s occupation as a domestic help.

Last year when I started wearing my nose pin, everyone started saying: ‘Oh! You look like a Miyahni’ [...] It was really hurtful. Someone even said: ‘Now you can just wear a knee-length saree and sweep people’s houses like your mother (Huma, 16, National School, Interview, 27th January 2014).

In the next quote, Huma summarizes her response to this pathologization by focusing on her family and cultural pride in her heritage. She mentions her mother’s economic and emotional resilience as the force that enables her to think of a future outside of poverty. She also affirms her pride in her ‘Miyah’ identity by adopting visible markers

of identity: embodied practices like wearing a nose-pin, and speaking a particular dialect of Bengali that respondents often referred to as ‘Miyah bhakha’ (‘Miyah language’). While Huma’s quote above articulates the suffering or ‘hurt’ caused by middle-class and ethnic biases, the quote below expresses her rejection of gendered stereotypes to reconstruct a proud ‘Miyah’ subjectivity:

I don’t care what they [peers] say [...] I am very proud of my mother. It is because of her hard work that I am even able to come to school and imagine a future that may be better. I am also proud to be Muslim; why would I want to hide it? I want to wear a nose-pin, my saree, and speak my ‘Miyah’ language. They [her Assamese peers] want us ‘Miyah’ girls to be ashamed of our identity so that we think less of ourselves. That is why you will find ‘Miyah’ girls are shy [...] I am not like them. I always talk back, even if it is not about me (Huma, 16, Northern School, Interview 27th January 2014).

Huma shows that visible markers on the body of a Bengali-speaking female Muslim, such as the nose pin or a certain style of wearing the saree, come to be negatively stereotyped to construct the image of a *Miyahni*. Skeggs (2004:169) suggests that ‘certain bodies are read through their appearance (and disposition) as having value/no value’. She also notes that while others in her position often adopt a shy demeanor to survive the institutionalized misrecognition, she consciously adopts a more active resistance by ‘talking back’ as a way of articulating claims for equal stakes in society. Viewed in this way, the proud ‘Miyah’ self is not only invested in the act of revaluing personal identity, but they are also engaged in reflexively identifying the patterns of collective misrecognition and maldistribution, and identifying strategies for talking back. Interestingly, unlike most reconstructed storylines of the self-discussed in this chapter, Huma connects her personal experience of misrecognition with the experiences of others like herself. This type of reflexivity has the potential to develop into wider ‘Miyah’ feminist politics through the mobilization of these women on the basis of their collective gendered, ethnicized and classed subordination in Assam.

I also find that such a devalued ‘Miyah’ femininity is not always defined as the inferior other to the normative idealized upper-caste/ upper-class Hindu femininity: it is also framed as an inferior type of femininity amongst the Muslim femininities in Assam. To make explicit the invisible hierarchy among Muslims themselves I draw upon the

following excerpt from a focus group discussion at Northern school, where Huma is engaged in conversation by Neha. The latter is among a handful of middle-class children in her school, which is largely populated by children from lower-middle- and lower-class backgrounds. In the excerpt below, she is critical of the ‘Miyah’ girls for their perceived un-smartness, as reflected in attributes such as their lack of participation in extra-curricular activities and academic engagement. Huma, on the other hand, criticizes Neha’s middle-class bias and her inability to recognize the class difference between them, which leads them both to experience schooling in different ways from each other. In the course of the discussion, Huma’s assertive stance made Neha very uncomfortable, by making the latter’s class privilege visible. In doing so she deconstructs ‘smart-ness’ as a function of social and economic capital, as Bourdieu (1986) has shown in his work in *Distinction*.

Neha: The ‘Miyah’ girls are very unsmart. They are just not interested in anything.

Saba: What do you mean by unsmart?

Neha: [Silence]. I mean most ‘Miyah’ girls in our class are not good in studies. They do not get good grades. They do not participate in anything else in the school. Their dressing is so shabby [...] As if they do not care!

Huma: I know what she means. I do not get good grades. But unlike you I can’t afford five subject tuitions. I cannot afford to take music lessons, nor can I afford ‘stylish’ clothes. So when you are poor, you can’t be smart.

Neha: I wasn’t talking about you Huma. I was just giving that as an example. If I perform in a function or get any appreciation for some reason, then many Hindu girls find it surprising. They say ‘in spite of being Muslim you are so smart’ or they say ‘you are not like other Muslims’. I am a Muslim myself; I want to feel proud of other Muslims.

Huma: You and I are different?[...] Muslim but different. I do not mean just you and just me. I mean your friends and my friends. In the last ten years, this is the most we have talked. Isn’t it? Today is the first time you are even talking to me properly because of this sister [referring to the researcher]. You always look down upon us, and now you are saying you want to be proud of us.

Neha: (In tears) It is not like that [...] I stop the discussion shortly afterwards.
(Northern School, Focus Group Discussion, 12th Feb 2014)

In suggesting that they are ‘different’ in spite of a shared Muslim identity Huma makes explicit the workings of class within the Muslim community itself and its effect on schooling experiences. This attribution of value (or lack thereof) within the classed, Assamese and Hindu, normative rules of engagement is negotiated by Huma by actively producing a ‘Miyah’ counter culture. This can be viewed as similar to the strategy of ‘resistance through culture’ that ‘provided a vehicle for the expression of their identities in the school context, of which dress and language were important visible markers’ (Shain, 2000: 163). Unlike most of the girls’ narratives in my study, Huma’s account attempts to work outside the rules of engagement. Consistent with Shain’s research on Muslim girls’ survival strategies, Huma and other such girls in my study were perceived as ‘difficult’, ‘aggressive’, or ‘militant’ in their approach, and were considered to be academically disengaged. Also, Neha’s perspective above appears to be in line with Fernandez and Heller’s (2006) findings of the ‘hegemonic aspirations’ of the new middle-class in India. According to them, the middle-class in India is hegemonic in its ability to ‘accumulate privileges and replicate distinction’ (ibid. 499). The small Bengali Muslim middle-class is also incorporated into these hegemonic aspirations through their ‘distancing from lower class identity’ (ibid. 496) and their ability to position themselves as standing in for or representing concerns of all Muslims.

Other than the strategy of talking back, the proud ‘Miyah’ selves also emphasize the need for a distinctive ‘Miyah’ identity and solidarity. For instance, Kulsum is critical of her ‘Miyah’ peers who are seen to be diluting their ‘Miyah’-ness because of their greater proximity to Assamese speakers. She is particularly distraught by the lack of solidarity of some of her ‘Miyah’ peers towards their shared experiences of cultural misrecognition in school settings.

[...] that girl you spoke to yesterday [name], she just acts like she doesn’t know Bengali. She just hangs around the Assamese girls, and never mixes with any of us. She even joins in when her friends make fun of the Miyah accent. That

is so disgusting. All of us dislike her (Kulsum, 15, Meadow School, Focus Group Discussion, 9th Nov 2013).

Such a view encourages a so-called consolidation of 'Miyah' identity as a counter-culture to the hegemonic Assamese identity, but replaces one set of exclusionary rules of engagement with another. In the 'new' rules of engagement, the 'Miyah' girls' who do befriend Assamese girls and the fluidity of their identities also come to be viewed negatively. Such an articulation of the 'proud Miyah' self can foster the notion of self-segregation of Miyah girls and lead to perceptions of unwillingness to forge friendships outside the 'in' group. In this way, the structures of domination are reproduced and participatory parity remains a distant dream. Overall, in reconstructing the proud 'Miyah' self, the girls in my study reflect upon 'un-thought and unconscious categories habit' (Adkins, 2004) about their class and ethnic locations. They also re-evaluate and re-signify the subordinate position that they are expected to inhabit (Skeggs, 2004). This reconstructed self enables the girls in my study to articulate emotions of anger and hurt, while also articulating agency, thus breaking the binary conception of victimhood and agency (Harris and Dobson, 2015) - a theme that will be discussed further in the next sections.

8.3. 'Modern' women: Decently Western

This section seeks to understand aspects of Muslim girls' navigation of the discourse of modernity and tradition through the enactment of a 'modern self' in post-colonial contexts. In her ethnographic study among middle-classes in Hyderabad, Gilbertson (2011) finds a preoccupation with binary discourses of tradition and modernity which she deems integral to the localized status games, legitimizing the domination of the elite over the poor and of men over women. In these ways the idea of modernity comes to play a crucial part in the politics of authorization, especially in post-colonial contexts through allocation of people on the class/status axes. For Appadurai and Breckenridge (1995:16) 'appropriation of the means of modernity and the cultural sociology (principally of class and state)' determines 'who gets to play with modernity and what defines the rules of the game'. Thus, in post-colonial contexts, appropriations of modernity are important for people to successfully bid for cultural authorizations. Gender is a key site of competing discourse of tradition and modernity, in particular with reference to women's way of dressing. Sunder Rajan and Park (2000: 61) view this as the 'entrapment' of women in the conflict between 'tradition' and 'modernity'

in post-colonial contexts. Third world feminists have been critical of the various modernization theories that understand women's social positions in relation to binaries such as modern versus traditional, empowered versus disempowered (Mohanty, 1989; Sangari and Vaid, 1990, 2009; Rao, 1999; Appadurai, 1996; Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1995). Following Maitrayee Chaudhuri (2012: 278), I use the term 'modernity' in quotes to indicate the contestation between widespread everyday discourses of modernization as westernization (and vice versa), and the problematization of these discourses in Indian sociological literature. In Muslim women's lives, particularly around dressing or veiling, these discourses produce pathological connotations of difference as seen in the teacher's narratives of 'appearance as pathological' in Chapter 6. These binary formulations view a modern/Westernized subjectivity and a Muslim subjectivity as mutually exclusive. In other words, Muslim women cannot be authorized as Muslim and modern at the same time. This enforces additional criteria upon Muslim women to demonstrate their modern subjectivity in their everyday lives. In this section, I map the ways in which Muslim girls attempt to rearticulate a post-colonial modernity to produce a story line of the 'modern self' through enactment of 'decently western' dressing. In doing so they resolve the 'modernity' versus 'traditional' conundrum in their immediate present.

Tina is a fourteen year-old from City School. She comes from an upper middle-class background, and lived in the school hostel at the time of the interview. She is very active in extra-curricular activities and hopes to pursue a career in fashion design in future. Her interest in clothing and accessories made her popular in her peer group as the 'fashion-guru' (Field notes 23rd Dec 2013). In the quote below Tina is critical of the ways in which her clothing choices assume a meaning beyond her intent or control. She says that whenever she opts to wear Indian clothing, such as *Salwar Kameez/ Kurta Pyjama*, she comes to be labelled as a *Miyahni*. As discussed earlier, such a label often indicates an unfavourable socio-economic and cultural/symbolic judgement about the bearer of the label. However, the same standard is not applied to Hindu girls if they choose to dress in traditional ways. In spite of the discomfort with the double standard she describes below, Tina appears to tacitly accept the Hindu normativity of the standards of dressing and by association an exclusivist conception of modernity itself.

My family does not care so much so I can dress any way I like. And I do not live with them, so it does not matter. But my friends are very judgmental. If I am wearing a long kurta, or traditional clothes, they start telling me I look like a 'typical Muslim'. By 'typical Muslim' they mean very traditional and shy. They think typical Muslim girls listen to everything their parents say and do not have the courage to challenge anything. I am not like that. That is why it is very annoying, when they say such things. I just wear jeans and a top all the time to escape that. They never say anything to the Marwari (Hindu) girls if they are dressed in traditional clothes, but because I am Muslim I have to keep proving how modern I am, so that they do not compare me with the uneducated people... This is unfair. I do not like Indian clothes much, so this is not a big deal. What if I feel like dressing up in traditional clothes one day?... I feel angry, but then I tell myself these friends have been with me since primary school, is it worth losing friends over these little things (Tina, 14, City School, Focus Group Discussion, 4th Jan 2014).

Tina points towards the burden of constantly proving their modern subjectivity placed upon Muslim girls, while the same is not the case for Hindu girls who can be Hindu and modern at the same time. In the context of Muslim girls in Britain, similarly Dwyer (1999: 7) observes that racialized and gendered discourses about South Asian Muslim women are 'produced through the use of dress as an overdetermined signifier of identity' drawing upon a series of binaries such as 'traditional' versus 'Western'/'modern', 'religious' versus 'secular', 'parents' versus 'peers'. Basu's (2012: 81) conception of Hindu normativity also leads Indian modernity to be determined less by secularization in a broad liberal sense, and more by the construction of a monotheistic form of Hindu religious experience. Muslim girls therefore carry the burden of proving their modern subjecthood through an enactment of disassociation 'traditional' dressing.

At the same time, most girls in my study reminded me that in fact unbridled westernization was often both undesirable and impossible to achieve, with considerations of decency in mind. The idea of 'decent' Westernization allowed for the contextualization of dressing in class-specific ways. For instance, among the upper- and middle-class families girls had the privilege of being picked up and dropped from point to point, leading to the loosening of the parameters of decency, as

the girl is not constantly in the public eye, as Ruhina notes below. Sixteen-year-old Ruhina, who attends City School, is from an upper-middle-class Assamese speaking background. She is considered by her peers and teachers as a gifted student. In informal discussions, she spoke widely about her passion for classic works of fiction such as *Pride and Prejudice*, her love for the *Harry Potter* series and poetry. She is well versed in authors like Jane Austen, Agatha Christie, and mostly spoke in fluent English throughout the discussion whereas the other girls in the school chose a mix of English and Assamese (Field notes, 21st Dec 2013). She notes that even though wearing shorts on the streets of Nagaon will not be an acceptable form of dress for her parents, she is able to dress in shorts for her tennis sessions in the sports club, or when going to a friend's place when travelling from point to point in a car. Decency of dress in these cases gets construed as context-specific dressing and not necessarily a rigid idea.

I love wearing shorts. They are comfortable. But I cannot imagine walking around Nagaon in shorts. My parents will be petrified. I do not think they are conservative for thinking like that. I myself will not be comfortable in being stared at. But when I go to play tennis or visit a friend, I can wear shorts as my father is dropping me there. I am not 'out there' dressed like that (Ruhina, 16, City School, Focus Group Discussion, 14th Jan 2014).

Ruhina's interview, like those of other girls from similar class backgrounds, suggests that upper-middle-class women are able partially to disregard the rules of respectable femininity in dressing due to the legitimacy provided by their economic and social capital along with other forms of cultural capital (Gilbertson, 2011: 17). In contrast, among girls from lower- and lower-middle-class families, the notion of decency is more rigid as the girls find themselves in the public eye frequently: whether it is while going to school, or going for coaching or socializing with friends (Phadke, 2007). Sana describes how a public enactment of a Westernized modernity by her is likely to be seen as disruptive of the dominant moral order through labels like 'loose character' and 'sexy'. This disciplinary regime often comes into force post-puberty.

I can wear anything I want at home: short, long, sleeveless. But when I go outside, my parents insist on dressing decently. After I got my period two years back my mother started telling me not to wear tight fitting or short clothes. I

understand why they say that... if I wear 'sexy' clothing on the street people will make comments and they may think I am a 'loose' character. Even if I do not think like that, my parents also do not think like that, but we cannot control people's minds (Sana, 14, Sanctuary School, Focus Group Discussion, 9th Dec 2013, emphasis added).

In Sana's case 'decent modern' dressing is defined as loosely as fitted clothing of a certain length. In other words, Western dressing meeting the local criteria of decency. Following these criteria, many young women paired denims with loosely-fitting long tunics called *Kurta*, or they would often cover their upper body with a *dupatta* or a long scarf with Western wear. Such a notion of decency was widely reported by girls, parents and teachers in my study. Unlike Tina and Ruhina from middle-/upper-middle-class backgrounds, Sana is more aware of how her dressing will be seen as a marker of morality (or lack of it) through the 'classed' aesthetic revealed in teachers' narratives in Chapter 6. The decently Western dressing practices also show conformity to the discourse of gendered restraint discussed in previous sections around parental ideals of gendered discipline, wherein young women are expected to show gendered restraint as conceptualized by Radhakrishnan (2009). Another important hallmark of decent modernity that Sana shows above is its public enactment, much like that of 'good (Indian) Muslim' discussed earlier. While many of these choices of dressing are made under influences of structuring forces in their lives, the girls in my sample showed a strong reflexive awareness of the need to be 'modern' in certain ways, in order to be able to bid for cultural authorization in a post-colonial context. Their enactments of decent modernization also suggest that they are acutely aware of their own socio-cultural milieu and their own social location. Thus, I find it is useful to think of these girls as actors actively seeking cultural authorization through their navigation of the post-colonial discourse of modernity, along with that of 'respectability' by enacting a decent Western mode of dressing. In the next section I will analyse the enactment of the subjectivity of the 'aspirational victim' through which the girls in my study voice their strong personal and career aspirations while articulating restrictions imposed by gendered regimes of 'appropriate aspirations' and the structures of religious discrimination in future employment.

8.4. The aspirational victim self

The working woman juggling her domestic duties, and following the dictates of feminine restraint in consumption and in sexual behavior, stands out as the symbol of India's post-colonial developmental and nationalist trajectories. Increasingly, women with aspirations of public visibility, career and consumption are normalized to a great extent in the popular discourse, as evidenced in the narrative of the Muslim girls, parents, and teachers in my study. In these narratives academic achievements and career aspiration were viewed as central to articulating ambitions of consumption, class mobility and autonomy, which in turn were key elements of their reconstructed storylines. At the same time, the discussions around merging career and marital aspirations, and negotiating poverty respectably in Chapter 7, show that aspirations cannot merely be understood as individual career or material ambitions. They also involve the idea of new personhood with greater 'voice' and 'choice'. Thus, aspirations in these contexts combine considerations of both recognition and redistribution. In an upcoming paper, Gilbertson (2017) views aspiration among India's youth both as a capacity and as a compulsion, showing the interplay between accessible and inaccessible forms of capitals. Based on my data, this section draws attention to two types of regulatory forces that mediate the narratives of aspiration: 'appropriate aspirations' (at intra-group level from the family) and 'discrimination' (at intergroup level from the society). The dual nature of aspiration produces a dual and contradicting storyline of the 'aspirational victim' self. By 'aspirational victimhood' I refer to subjectivities that are deeply ambitious about accessing new patterns of consumption and autonomous lifestyle while being deeply entrenched in gendered and ethnicized discriminatory regimes, conceptualized more generally as suffering actors by Harris and Dobson (2015). In this section, I show that, in fact, by articulating 'aspirations' and 'victimhood' from inter- and intra-group forces, Muslim girls in my study manifest the types of reflexivity as conceptualized by Adkins (2004).

Appropriate Aspirations

In this section, I elaborate the gendered over-emphasis upon the academic achievements of girls leading to the conception of 'appropriate aspirations', including both career and marital aspirations, as echoed in the discussion of the merging of career and marital aspirations in Chapter 7. In other words, appropriate aspirations are career or personal aspirations supporting the growing consumption aspirations, class

practices of respectability and gender roles within families. In negotiating ‘appropriate aspiration’, girls in my study exhibit a range of attitudes: conformity to the parental model of respectability, using the parental model of respectability to expand the boundaries of respectable/appropriate jobs, and challenging the model of respectability using Koranic knowledge, as I discuss below.

Naina is a fourteen-year-old eldest child from a lower-middle-class background. In the quote below, she highlights gender difference in parental expectation of aspirations. As for most of the girls in my study, education is one of the top priorities in the household due to its perceived relevance to class mobility. Naina experiences parental gendered expectations both through her incorporation into the caregiving roles at home in contrast to her brothers, and through a disproportionately higher expectation of academic achievement. This regime of surveillance is part of the parents’ strategy of compliance with, the economic and cultural ideals of respectable femininity. Her experience of gendered aspirations mirrors Radhakrishanan’s (2009) formulation of respectable femininity underpinning the balance between education/career roles and domestic/caring/reproductive roles.

I think parents expect too much from daughters. Like me, I have to help out at home, be nice to guests, help younger siblings and also do well in my exams. Someday if I get bad marks they ask me ‘why did you perform so badly’ but if my brother does that they say ‘you should try harder’. They behave as if I should be good at everything. They just wouldn’t accept me getting mediocre or bad marks (Naina, age 14, Meadow School, Interview 20th Oct 2013).

Offering critical insights into parental aspirations, Moni shows how the educational choices of Muslim girls are dictated by parental aspirations of appropriate jobs in the future. Certain occupations, such as medicine and teaching, are implicitly encouraged as ‘appropriate jobs’, whereas physical, labour-intensive, entrepreneurial and technological careers are seen as inappropriate. In the lived experiences of the girls then, these gendered parental aspirations turn into an asymmetrical emphasis upon academic performance for girls compared to boys. And not only is their academic performance important, their subservient behaviour while pursuing these academic ideals is equally important to the performance of respectable femininity, as it has been shown throughout the parents’ narratives in Chapter 7.

My parents say that it is ok if the boys don't study but the girls should study properly so that you can get a 'decent' job. All jobs are not for girls, you know! (Moni, 16, Interview, Meadow School, 12th Nov 2013)

Khushi's narrative below also highlights the gendered nature of aspirations of many Muslim girls following parental aspirations for symbolic capital through the behaviour of women/girls. Khushi is a seventeen year-old attending the Northern School, who comes from a lower-middle-class family of traders. In the quote below, she acknowledges that parental or family approval takes precedence over personal aspirations, or else the two often get morphed into one. Khushi agrees to follow the terms of appropriate aspirations laid out by her parents. In doing so, she helps to access the symbolically authorized middle-class-ness for the entire family.

After school, I hope to complete my degree and get a good job. I do not want to get married soon. After the degree, teaching or office-based work will suit me most as parents will not be worried about the work atmosphere. Then maybe I can get married. I will only marry a guy that allows me to work [...] It is really important that I get a say in the choice of partner, after all I have to live with him for a big part of my life. I have told my parents that I will do as they say but they must listen to me when it comes to marriage... I will tell them about my boyfriend if they bring up marriage. He is a really nice guy, very supportive of me studying or doing a job after marriage (Khushi, 17, Interview, Northern School, 14th March 2014).

In Khushi's socio-cultural milieu she expects questions about marriage to arise after she turns eighteen, so she pragmatically invests in her future aspirations by seeking greater control in the choice of a marital partner who she perceives to be supportive of her career goals. Following Radhakrishnan's formulation, she enacts respectability by choosing respectable, gender-appropriate jobs, and by putting the family at the centre of all decision-making around careers. She is also deeply conscious of the bargaining power that compliance to 'appropriate aspirations' gives her in negotiating her choice of partner. In doing so, Khushi is forging what Kandiyoti (1991:24) has called a 'patriarchal bargain' with her family, where she exchanges personal career aspirations for a choice in her marital partner. The latter she believes will play a significant part in materializing her future personal and career aspirations, in line with

the widely reported assertion of Facebook's chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, that 'the most important career choice you'll make is who you marry' (Groth, 2011).

Similarly, Tina, from an upper-middle-class background, negotiates her aspirations within the larger narrative of respectability. Her aspiration of a career in fashion is not seen as appropriate for a 'good girl' or for a 'respectable' family, but she achieves temporary approval of her aspirations from her parents by pitting one type of transgression of respectability against another. As a result, she is bargaining the acceptance of what may be seen as the *lesser* of the two transgressions. In doing so, she realigns the boundaries of respectability within the family, without necessarily transcending them. At the same time, she compromises one kind of right in order to access another kind of right.

My family makes fun of me when I say want to be a fashion designer. They think it is the same thing as being a tailor [Giggles!]. It is better to get married, my father says, than to be a tailor. Because I am not so good in studies, they think I can't aim to be successful on my own. But I am quite stubborn with what I want. Just jokingly I told my father the other day that if they don't let me study for a degree in design in Delhi or Bombay, I will run away and get married to a Hindu guy he won't approve of. My ex-boyfriend was Hindu, so I have no problem with that. But I know that will piss off my father, so I said so to scare him a bit. He then said it is better to be a tailor than to bring disrepute to the family [Giggles] (Tina, 14, City School, Interview, 19th Jan 2014)

In the above quotes from Khushi and Tina, the 'suffering marked by structures' is downplayed in narrating the bargain between career choice and marital choice. Such strategies of negotiation can be understood as a type of non-transformational agency that enables people to survive, but without disturbing the power structures that make their survival so difficult in the first place, as described by Phillipa Williams (2012) in her study of Muslim weavers in Banaras. The narratives discussed above show that girls in my study inhabit the aspirational victim subjectivity in response to parental aspirations that disregard their personal aspirations.

Girls attending the Kaleidoscope Madrassa were often in the unique position of challenging parental aspirations around marriage by using their greater Koranic knowledge to make a case for further education. They were consciously aware that any case against marriage must be framed in religious terms, as Bina does below. She uses a specific verses from the Koran to make a case for parental support of her aspiration for University education. Her parents are both illiterate and, as the most educated person in the family, she attempts to channel her parents' notions of 'appropriate aspirations' towards achieving her own educational and career aspirations.

I really want to study in the University like Rumana baidow [a teacher]. First I have to go to college in Nagaon, then I can go to Guwahati, if Allah wishes [...]. My father says that he wants me to stay at home and study as much as I want. Here there is no University, so after Madrassa I have to go to Nagaon, maybe I can commute. But to go to University in Guwahati or Dibrugarh I have to live outside. So I told my father that the Koran says that you should pursue knowledge even if you have to go to distant lands. By studying further I will be doing Allah's work, and as a teacher I will be spreading his word to younger people. He agreed with me! But by the time I have to go away, he may forget [giggles] (Bina, 17, Kaleidoscope Madrassa, Interview, 17th March 2014).

Bina challenges her parents' idea of appropriate aspirations by both stretching its definition to include higher education, and presumably delaying marriage. At the same time, in her desire to be a teacher her goals conform to the specifications of appropriate aspirations for women. Another way in which some other girls inhabit this subjectivity is through an uncritical conformation to parental aspirations. Rejia expresses disdain for all things outside those that are normatively considered acceptable. She has secured her mother's trust and support for her education and future aspirations, in spite of the family's precarious economic condition. An involvement in a heterosexual relationship is viewed to be detrimental to that relationship (with her mother), posing a threat to her educational aspirations.

I don't like the girls who waste time by having boyfriends. My mother works really hard to put me through school and trusts that when in school I will only be studying. I don't know about other girls, I just mind my own business, and

think about my future plans. There will be lot of time in the future to enjoy after I have a good job (Rejia, 15, Northern School, Interview 12th March 2014).

Like Rejia's acceptance of the regime of 'appropriate aspirations', in her research on British Muslim girls' 'survival strategies', Shain's (2000: 164) respondents often showed conformity to the stereotypes of quiet and shy Asian/Muslim women. However, she argues that 'this apparent conformity was part of a conscious strategy of survival' (ibid., 165). Concurrent with Shain's (2000) findings, I find that future career aspirations were central to the survival strategies of most of my lower-class respondents, often leading to deferred gratification. The imagined deferral, as Rejia suggests, is until they have achieved their economic and consumption aspirations. These girls 'did not involve themselves in rule-breaking activities, nor did they confess to engaging in relationships that might threaten their existing positive relations with parents (or teachers)' (ibid., 164).

Discrimination

Discrimination against Muslims in employment has been established as an empirical fact by studies providing evidence of discrimination in private sector recruitment (Thorat, 2007) and in public sector recruitments (Sachar, 2006). There is further evidence to suggest that an overwhelming number of Muslims in the labour market are actually self-employed in informal sector jobs as a result of their inability to get public or private sector employment (Sachar, 2006; Sheth and Haeems, 2006; Sanghi and Srija, 2014). This type of mal-distribution hinders participatory parity between the Muslim (minority) and Hindu (majority) communities by systematically capping the numbers of Muslims in public sector employment. Shami impassionately narrates this fact, during the focus group discussion at the Kaleidoscope Madrassa. In this section I show that the 'aspirational victimhood' in the context of perceived discrimination in employment is enacted in two ways by my respondents. First, through the enactment of a *meritorious self* whose merit (or skills) in a competitive neo-liberal labour market will overturn discriminatory societal biases against them. Secondly, through the enactment of a *pragmatic self*, wherein they keep pursuing aspirations of socio-economic mobility (accrual of economic and symbolic capitals) while articulating experiences of institutionalized discrimination within public sector employment, which drives their educational choices.

Coming from a large family of lower-middle-class background, at eleven, Shami was transferred from a secular government school to a Madrassa school because of her perceived lack of academic merit as compared to her siblings. As discussed in Chapter 7, in resource-scarce situations parents often invested in the child that was perceived to be the most meritorious, and hence most likely to be able to secure a job in the future and contribute to the family income. The Madrassa offered them a low-cost educational option for Shami, who was not seen as a good educational investment by the family considering the high costs involved in sending children to government schools. Shami resents her parents decision and is deeply critical of the discriminatory regime of employment that has motivated her parents to seek Madrassa education for her. Verifying her claims about the specific instances of discrimination was beyond the scope of my work, but the quote below highlights the internalized nature of institutionalized discrimination.

Even if Muslim girls get educated, they don't get jobs. Why is that? Then what is the point of getting an education? When Muslims give the TET³³ exam their names do not come out on the list. That is because when they see the name they know our religion. So they either give them very low marks or just throw away the answer scripts. It happened to many people I know! Why does this happen? Why? Why? Why? [Agitated, hitting her hands on the desk] (Shami, 15, Kaleidoscope Madrassa, Interview 29th Jan 2014).

Shami was, in fact, so visibly shaken during the discussion around the discrimination in employment, that I stopped the discussion for fifteen minutes to allow her time to regain her composure. During the break from the discussion, when I took Shami away to inquire about her well-being, she explained that this is an emotive issue for her because unlike Hindu girls she felt trapped in Madrassas which offered little possibility of socio-economic mobility. This type of injustice experienced by Shami can be conceptualized as mal-distribution at intergroup level, i.e. experienced by Muslims in relation to Hindus in this case (Keddie, 2012). Shami also experiences intra-group mal-distribution due to gendered parental expectations of the academic performance.

³³ Normally, the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) in Assam was anonymized, with candidates writing their roll numbers, and not their names on the answer scripts.

The nature of negotiations of institutionalized discrimination varies across class backgrounds. Ruhina responds to the questions around discrimination by inhabiting the subjectivity of a 'meritorious self'. Ruhina self-identifies as a meritorious student, and feels that in the school she has never been discriminated against on the grounds of religion. The City school's Catholic/Christian ethos required all the students to participate in religiously informed activities, like the recital of verses from the Bible every day, prayers and singing of Christmas Carols. This was seen by Ruhina as a mark of equal treatment of Hindu and Muslim students in the school, i.e. equal distance from Hindu and Muslim religious traditions in contrast to the informal Hindu-normative character of the three government aided schools in my sample that other respondents have discussed. However, she does not appear to express the same confidence on the non-discriminatory regime in the context of future employment. Notably, she views 'merit' as the silver bullet against existing social biases against Muslims. In doing so, she individualizes her own success using the ideology of merit, rendering invisible the collective mal-distribution that Shami's narrative alluded to earlier.

In school, I have never felt discriminated against. This is a Missionary school, whether Hindus or Muslims everyone has to participate in the Bible recitation and prayers. Everyone has to follow the same rules of discipline and dressing [...] I don't see any discrimination of any kind. I don't know if I will feel the same way when I apply for jobs. I read things in the paper and hear others talk about it. But I guess even if there are some biases, people can't just drop you if you are very good at what you do. So, I hope I can overcome negative biases about Muslims through my academic performance (Ruhina, 16, City School, Focus Group Discussion, 14th Jan 2014).

Ruhina distances herself from the narrative of Muslim discrimination further by suggesting that such things are 'read about' and 'talked about', but somehow not real in her lived context. By highlighting the importance of 'being good at what you do' or being meritorious in order to avoid discrimination, she implicitly then accepts the ideology of merit discussed by teachers and parents in Chapter 5 and 6, respectively. Interestingly, like other upper-middle- and upper-class respondents, Ruhina also feels the need to represent the Muslim community and overcome 'negative biases' through her actions (as a meritorious student). She not only seeks to authorize herself as a

meritorious student, but also as a ‘model’ Muslim who by the virtue of merit can subvert discriminatory social attitudes. This attitude reflects a tension between seeking authorization as an individual meritorious student disengaged from the realities of discrimination, and negative stereotyping of ‘others’ and being a Muslim girl with ‘merit’ changing the way in which the society views Muslim girls. For instance, self-identified meritorious student Rejia, from a lower-class economic background, prefers to receive a merit-based scholarship instead of affirmative (and inadequate) benefits under the current Minority scholarships that undermine her academic achievements (Chapter 5).

Munni, who attends the Kaleidoscope Madrassa, comes from a lower-class family background. She shows a remarkable commitment towards her education by travelling over two hours every day to reach school, which is uncommon in her schooling context. In her case, the perception of discrimination felt by her family drives the choice of Madrassa education, as other more secular career avenues are considered wrought with religious discrimination. This can be understood as a strategy of ‘discrimination-proofing’ her career. A career path as an Arabic teacher in a government-aided school is viewed by girls from lower-class families as a way of accumulating both economic and cultural capital in their social setting.

They [Hindus] can’t compete with us in this [Arabic/Islamic education] [...] I want to complete my education to FM³⁴ level so that I can work as an Arabic teacher. That is why I will not move to general education, it has no job prospects for people like me (Munni, 14, Kaleidoscope Madrassa, Interview 19th Feb 2014).

Munni’s narrative challenges the commonly understood association of Muslims with the preference for a Madrassa education because of its Islamic content. Instead it views by views Madrassa education as a widely accepted tactic for many Muslim children and families to navigate institutionalized economic mal-distribution. Such engagements with state-aided educational institutions do not necessarily work in the favour of marginalized actors, as Williams (2012) reminds us, based on her study on Muslim weavers in Varanasi. Her study reveals the complex and contradictory ways

³⁴ Faizul Maarif or F.M. is the final examination of the senior Madrassas. F.M. is usually compared with the graduation level exam of general education (Khan, 2012; Field notes, Jan-Feb 2014).

in which the marginalized groups relate to the state's architectures of governance, in the context of a liberalizing economy. Like Williams' Muslim weavers, Munni and many other girls in my research continue to engage with the state (in the field of education) seeking authorization as legitimate actors through the pursuit of education, public sector jobs, such as that of Arabic teacher in government schools.

Like Munni, Moni's quote below also points towards a 'pragmatic self' positioning in relation to aspirations, through a strategy of discrimination-proofing by choosing a 'safe profession': a profession seen as high-demand and low-supply, and hence likely to be less discriminatory in recruitment. She says her father has motivated her to pursue a degree in medicine as it is viewed as a 'safe profession'. According to the quote below, her father's economic pragmatism about 'safe professions' overlaps with his rigid views about appropriate aspirations for girls. In the quote below she says that her aspiration to 'be a doctor' is not only a way to negotiate discrimination in employment by making a 'safe choice', but also a way to negotiate the gendered surveillance placed upon her by her family.

I want to be a doctor. My father says it is a safe profession. There is always a shortage of doctors, and people always fall sick [giggles]. I would prefer to study normal³⁵ medicine, but if for some reason I can't get into Guwahati or Dibrugarh³⁶ medical, then I can also study for a degree in Ayurvedic or Unani³⁷ medicine [...]. He is very conservative in his views and thinks that girls shouldn't get out of the house much. But he holds doctors in great esteem, and will make exceptions for me to study, and to be independent if I study medicine. I have known that for as long as I can remember. I don't know what will happen if I can't get into medical school (Moni, 16, Meadow School, Interview 30th Nov 2013).

Moni's account above illustrates the tension between economic ideology, which pushes women into the workplace and pushes girls to aspire to work, and the gender

³⁵ Conventional Western Medicine

³⁶ Guwahati Medical College (GMC) Assam Medical College (AMC) referred to colloquially as Dibrugarh Medical College because of its location in the town of Dibrugarh in upper Assam. They are both government of Assam funded medical colleges, with subsidised fees.

³⁷ Ayurvedic is the traditional Indian medicine with deep cultural and philosophical connection with the Vedas. Unani is the Persian tradition of medicine, practiced in some parts of India. There are selected government institutions that teach courses in these types of alternative medicines.

ideology, which frames women's place at home or within traditionally caring roles in the workplace (Macleod, 1992). In this case, Moni inhabits the subjectivity of a 'pragmatic self' that enables her to enact a conformity to both these ideologies at the same time, while being allowed to pursue certain freedoms in return, for the sort of bargains struck by many of my respondents.

8.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed four reconstructions of identity enacted by school-going Muslim girls in my study. The reconstruction of proud 'Miyah' subjectivity enables them to invest their ethnic identity with positive meanings. This, in many ways, also offers a blueprint for a political project based on their 'Miyah' identity that connects their individual experiences of misrecognition and mal-distribution with the larger alignment of power operational in the society. Of all the storylines of selves discussed in this Chapter, the reflexive reconstruction of the 'proud Miya' self is most intimately linked with a possible emancipatory political project. As discussed above, like all successful emancipatory projects this project articulates a position of historic subordination.

The 'Good (Indian) Muslim' self, on the other hand, is a depoliticizing project enacted by many Muslims in India in response to the Hindu normativity of their socio-cultural milieu. In this chapter I showed, using the example of the food surveillance and the choice of role models, how school-going Muslim girls in my study sought to be authorized as 'good Muslims' through conformity to Hindu normativity. However, as discussed above, this cannot be viewed as an uncritical acceptance of dominant power. As Skeggs (1997:162) poignantly says, 'It is not an account of how individuals make themselves but how they cannot fail to make themselves in particular ways...'. Thus, the reconstruction of a 'good Muslim self' can be seen as part of 'constructive and creative strategies to generate a sense of themselves with value' (ibid.).

I also discussed the pursuit to be authorized as a 'modern women.' Modernity or 'being modern' was an important preoccupation in the lives of my respondents, enacted through practices of dressing. In reconstructing themselves as Western through dressing, many of the respondents claimed authorization as 'modern women.' This claim also needs to be seen against the backdrop of the pressures they experience from

their peers and in the wider culture to choose between a modern/Westernized subjectivity, and a traditional/Muslim subjectivity, as though they were mutually exclusive. The realms of meaning available in this regard are very limited to binaries of traditional versus modern, Muslim versus secular, and so on, that foreclose other ways of being and becoming. The girls challenge these binaries and position themselves as decently modern selves.

In the last section, I connected their explicitly expressed aspirations with their articulation of acceptance and rejection of obstructions from the family and the wider society in achieving what they deem to be a good life. In articulating an aspirational victimhood they demonstrate the reconstructed storylines of self as ‘meritorious’ and as ‘pragmatic’ that enable them to generate a positive sense of self to negotiate with the regulatory forces of gender and class in ‘appropriate aspirations’, and of class, gender, religion and ethnicity in ‘discrimination’. Across these various enactments of self, Muslim girls resist and conform to the conferred subjectivities using their reflexive abilities.

I find that their resistance and conformity can be seen through the lens of reflexivity, and can also have implications for our understanding of the agency of Muslim girls. The girls in my study, through the story-lines of reconstructed selves, demonstrate that they continuously revalue the positions they are expected to inhabit as being without value, thereby showing a self-conscious practice. In doing so, they show an agency that may or may not be transformative, but which is, in any case, able to simultaneously articulate the suffering caused by the rules of the game, as well as the ameliorative actions that help them negotiate these rules. They also constantly bid for cultural authorization as legitimate actors, demonstrating an acute awareness of the politics of authorization that has been discussed throughout this thesis. Whether these bids are successful or not depends on their individual location, but that they are constantly bidding for authorization is a marker of their personal agency.

9. Conclusion: From Narratives ‘About’ Muslim Girls to Muslim Girls’ Narratives of ‘Self.’

Based on empirical research, this study offered a post-colonial feminist analysis of subjectivities available to Muslim girls in contemporary Assam and the ways in which these girls inhabit and negotiate those subjectivities. Through this research, I have been interested in breaking the conceptual impasse between minority rights of the Muslim community and the gender rights of Muslim women, by attending to the experiences of injustice both at inter-group and intra-group levels. To do so, I direct the critical gaze towards various actors (State, Teachers, and Parents) who play a part in conferring subjectivities to Muslim girls in contemporary India. I was motivated in part by my personal interest in redirecting the focus of sociological research on Muslim women and girls from an identity or culture-based perspective to a ‘perspectival dualism’ that attends to cultural and economic issues. As a feminist researcher, it was imperative to be interested in exploring the nature of Muslim girls’ agency in negotiating the limited and pre-determined subjective positions available to them. Here my interest has been both empirical and theoretical.

Overall this research challenges the conceptual impasse in conceptualizing Muslim women’s rights by developing a theoretical and analytical approach that takes into consideration their multiple locations and intersectional disadvantages. My research firmly locates a possible ‘Muslim’ feminist position in India both within the politics of recognition (or identity politics) and the politics of redistribution (or resource allocation). Such a position has implications not only for Muslim feminist movements but also for other emergent minority feminist movements in India and for the larger women’s movement, to attend to the distinct socio-economic and cultural/symbolic injustices experienced by women from minority groups. This research also brings out the nuances of contemporary Muslim girlhoods in India, Assam in particular, by paying attention to the interplay of forces of globalization, patriarchy, Hindu nationalism and Assamese sub-nationalism in the lives of these girls. Specifically, discussions around the merger of marital and career aspirations, gendered disciplining and considerations of respectability on the parts of the parents, challenge some of the long held stereotypical views around Muslim women, girls and Muslim communities. These discussions position them along with communities across the post-colonial global south context which are facing rapid changes in gender relations with exposure

to forces of economic and cultural globalization and political populism. These insights add to the evolving field of girlhood studies in the context of the global south and in the context of Muslim girls in particular, who have traditionally been subsumed under the category of ‘third world women’. By engaging with Muslim girls ‘narratives of self’ this research begins to re-direct focus towards their reflexive understandings of the self. This helps us to move away from unhelpful binary descriptions of agency and victimhood that fail to acknowledge the experiences of victimhood in agency or the agential acts subsumed within victimhood. This gives my research the vocabulary to describe the in-between and multiple subject positions that Muslim girls in my study inhabit and articulate. Finally, the narratives of some girls in my study allowed me to begin to scratch the surface of what may in future be articulated as a Miyah feminist position. This position, much like the Black feminist position, can re-signify the historically subordinate Miyah-feminine identity with positive value.

Using empirical data, I have made a case that Muslim girls are conferred cultural subjectivity in the abstract state policies of education that in turn are made real by teachers’, parents’ and girls’ interpretations, through the discourse of class, gender, religion, and ethnicity. In Sections 9.2- 9.4 of this chapter I discuss the empirical insights from my research and the contribution these insights make to the knowledge around contemporary Muslim girlhoods in Assam with particular reference to issues of recognition and redistribution underlying the politics of authorization of subjectivities. The theoretical contribution of this research comes from offering an alternative to identitarian politics or cultural explanations of Muslim women’s educational backwardness in India. My proposed alternative combines Fraser’s formulations of redistribution, transformative and affirmative claims of injustice with Bourdieu’s insights on cultural authorization, to reveal the nature of subjective possibilities open to Muslim women. This alternative approach also pays attention to Muslim women’s social location in India based on class, ethnicity, and religion. And lastly, the thesis directs a focus upon Muslim girls’ agency as encompassing their ‘reflexive’ articulation of suffering, conformity, and resistance to the subjectivities conferred upon them. In the subsequent sections of this Chapter, I draw out the key themes of my study, highlighting the main theoretical and empirical contributions of this study. In the discussion around the key empirical findings below, I also address the four research questions.

9.1. A new theoretical framework

One of the main contributions of my study is in developing a new eclectic theoretical framework that attempts to address questions of recognition and redistribution underlying the politics of authorization operational in a said field. My conceptual framework is drawn from the scholarships of Nancy Fraser and Pierre Bourdieu. This research uses Fraser's (1995; 1997) formulation in three ways. First, to develop a blueprint of what transformative change in the education of Muslim girls in India will look like. Second to avoid the economic vs. cultural dichotomy and third to conceptualize injustices both at an inter-group and intra-group level as discussed in Chapter 3. Such an approach enabled me to address Sayed and Soudlin's (2009) criticisms of using a social exclusion framework to explain the status of Muslim women in India. Fraser's (1995; 1997) conceptual distinction between affirmative and transformative, recognition and redistribution also enabled my theoretical framework to evaluate what sorts of recognition and redistribution will create conditions of social justice for Muslim women. This resolved the persistent dilemma between women's rights (i.e. equality) and group rights of Muslims (i.e. difference) by sifting through 'differences between communities that are to be celebrated, rejected or taken on as an ethic for everyone' (Chigateri 2004: 325). Using Fraser's formulations also enabled the resolution of inter-group vs. intra-group dilemma of social exclusion by applying the principle of participatory parity twice - once on injustices at inter group level (e.g. religious discrimination in employment) and then at intra-group levels (e.g. gendered stipulation of appropriate aspirations) as discussed in Chapter 8 (Keddie 2012).

Feminist appropriations of Bourdieu's scholarship are central to this project. The biggest contribution of his scholarship to my conceptual framework is to think about the politics of authorization or the processes through which subjectivities are conferred and legitimized in given fields. Following Lawler (2004), my theoretical framework uses the concept of cultural authorization in the field of education to bring out the politics of authorization through which certain types of femininities are 'conferred' upon school going Muslim girls in this study. Lawler (2004) views social inequality as differential powers of the authorization, made real through the operation of the classed, gendered and ethnicized habitus, as discussed in Chapter 3. Chapters 5-7 of this thesis focussed upon the nature of identity conferred upon Muslim girls with a view of revealing the politics of authorization through 'Rules of Engagement' (ibid.,

119). I direct my attention specifically to three types of rules of engagement or culturally authorized forms of being and becoming. The three rules around which this thesis is structured are middle-class-ness, respectable femininity, and Hindu normativity. Conceptualized in this way a theoretical framework focused on the ‘rules of engagement’ helps reveal the politics of authorization in non-Western, post-colonial contexts. Such an approach pays attention both to intersectional disadvantage and to processes of legitimization and normalization of relations of domination and subordination. My approach, however, does not view processes of domination as absolute. Instead, they are seen as highly contested processes. Hence my theorization focuses attention towards the contestations by the dominated by using insights on reflexivity from Skeggs (2004), Adkins (2004) and on the agency from Mehmood (2000), Katz (2004), Williams (2012). Thus, a combination of insights from Fraser, Bourdieu, and intersectionality approach, along with theorizations of reflexivity and agency, produces an original theoretical contribution in sociology. This contribution reveals how processes of domination are enacted, legitimized, normalized and contested by social actors in the field of education. The subsequent sections of this chapter will summarize the key empirical findings from my data, working thematically.

9.2. Authorization of Pathological subjectivity

Broadly speaking this thesis has demonstrated that the equal education policy regime in contemporary India disproportionately values the protection of cultural rights of Muslim girls over economic rights (Chapter 5). I also find that measures of affirmation recognition and redistribution like the SSA, RTE and Pre and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes confer a pathologized subjectivity upon Muslim girls characterized by overt religiosity, oppression and a lack of merit. This is achieved through a disproportionate focus on a narrowly conceived minority identity in policies and programs. Such a cultural pathologization does the work of hiding distributional concerns in education, including access to educational opportunity, and quality while entrenching the said politics of authorization.

Coming back to the first research question I posed about the role of educational equality policies in producing subjective possibilities for Muslim girls, my findings suggest that Muslim girls’ claims for justice in education are authorized in post-colonial India as long as they are premised on the idea of ‘cultural difference’. This

means practices like gender segregation and teaching, and learning in Urdu are authorized. On the other hand, Muslim girls' claims premised on similarities with other Indians and equality remain de-authorized. For example, discrimination and differential treatment in schools abounds and good quality education remains de-authorized. In selectively authorizing claims for recognition of difference at the expense of redistribution of educational goods, policies authorize and reproduce a culturally pathological subjectivity for Muslim girls (Chapter 5). This regime of disproportionate focus upon recognition exists side by side with the regime of equal opportunity enshrined in the Constitution and carried forward in principal by the universalizing policies such as the SSA and the RTE Act. Such a parallel regime of governance embeds the tensions between ambitions of equality and difference in post-colonial education policies with regards to minorities.

In the policies of education for Muslim girls 'difference' is authorized. However, abstract policy pronouncements and orientations are often re-articulated by people in their everyday lives. Teachers in my study made elements of the educational policies real by carrying forward the idea of 'difference'. My analysis in Chapter 6 reveals that teachers normalize middle-class Hindu-Assamese identity as 'appropriately Indian' or 'appropriately Assamese' and mark other types of subjectivities as 'appropriately different', through a process of 'cultural streamlining' (Radhakrishnan 2011). For middle class Assamese speaking Indians, these strategies do the work of establishing themselves as the normative citizen representing India in the global arena as the emerging superpower (Fernandes 2006, Radhakrishnan 2009). Further, the processes of cultural streamlining enable the teachers in my study to confer pathological 'difference' to Muslim girls through references to their appearance (dressing and behaviour), poverty, merit and language. This reinforces the policy authorization of Muslim girls as pathologically different.

Coming specifically to the second research question related to teachers' role in conferring subjectivities upon Muslim girls, I find that teachers carry forward the disproportionate focus upon recognition from the policy while also taking forward the narrative of equality of opportunity emerging from the policies. Overall, teachers' narratives discussed in this chapter show deeply gendered, classed, religious and ethnic biases to construe Muslim girls, especially Bengali speaking girls from lower class backgrounds, as pathological with reference to normative middle class,

Assamese speaking Hindu identity. I have argued in chapter 6 that the teachers in my study ‘by virtue of their habitus, are able to pass judgment, implicitly or explicitly, on others, and to make that judgement count’ (Lawler 2004, 112). In this way, the differences between the middle class predominantly Hindu teachers’ habitus and the so-called Miyah girls’ habitus, becomes operational as the unequal power of authorization in the field of education. While recent empirical data from Human Rights Watch (2014) and Sachar (2006) have revealed that teachers’ implicit biases towards minorities qualitatively transforms Muslim children’s experiences of schooling in India’s government aided school system, my analysis offers new insights into the gendered processes through which the ambiguities of equality and difference in the policy are reproduced by teachers. This analysis also draws attention in particular ways to the under-researched areas of class and ethnicity that facilitate the processes through which teachers confer subjectivities upon their female Muslim pupils.

9.3. Bids for Cultural authorization: About ‘good families’ and ‘good girlhoods’

Following the well-established policy concerns around equality discussed in Chapter 5, parents across class backgrounds in my study accorded a great deal of importance to education of children, both as a way to reproduce and to challenge class status. Class as economic status and as practice has also been a running theme throughout this study. In post-colonial India, the middle class holds special ideological weight in imagining the Indian nation (Chatterjee 1990; Deshpande 2003; Fernandes 2000; Varma 1998) and the hegemonic nature of India’s middle class is well researched (Fernandes & Heller 2006, Deshpande 2003). Scholars have also revealed the role of gender practices in the enactment of middle-class-ness in contemporary India (Thapan 2009, Radharishnan 2009, Ahmed Ghosh 2004). However, my research also finds the articulation of middle class aspirations by lower class respondents (middle and upper class respondents) through enactments of ‘good girlhood’. My analysis in chapter 7 connects performances of certain gender practices with symbolic capital that supports the pursuit of class aspirations or class mobility for individuals from a lower class background. The specific types of gendered enactments my data reveal are understood through the catch-all phrase of ‘Bhal Suwali’ or ‘good girl’ analogous to Radhakrishnan’s (2009) formulation of respectable femininity characterized by several attributes of gendered restraint in sexual norms, consumer values and career

aspirations. Practices such as prioritization of family over career, material gains directed towards the family and normative sexual behavior constitute 'Good girlhoods' which serve as a marker for 'good families', symbolically authorizing them as middle class (Radhakrishnan 2009: 212). To be culturally authorized as 'good families', the Muslim parents in my study expect gendered restraint from daughters through three enactments in the field of education namely: negotiating poverty 'respectably,' prioritization of gendered discipline over academics and merger of career aspirations with marital prospects as discussed in Chapter 7. These enactments by Muslim girls do the work of imagining Indian Assamese/Bengali identities afresh for Muslim parents in my study, in ways that they may be symbolically authorized as middle class and as a 'good family'.

Here my contribution to knowledge is to offer a new model of respectability deployed by Muslim parents in my study to bid for the twin-authorizations as 'good girl' and symbolically authorized middle class 'good family.' Using the example of appropriate aspirations produced by the merger of career and marital prospects in the narratives of Muslim parents, I found the articulation of a new type of respectable femininity and good girlhood cutting across classes. This 'new' conception good girlhood emphasizes on ideals of choices available to Muslim girls - in education, careers, selection of partners and timing of marriage. However, the empirical evidence presented in my research suggests that it is the idea of choice and choice making subjects that sets apart the new articulation of good girlhood, and not the actual availability of choices. My findings suggest that the choices available to Muslim girls continue to be circumscribed. This conception of good girlhood is also new in the way that it is shared across classes and not limited to the middle classes as research on this topic generally indicates. I have argued, following Radhakrishnan (2009), that this model opens up the possibility for Muslim parents in my study to re-imagine their place as a community in the post-colonial developing nation and as a 'good family'.

Coming to the third research question around parents' role in producing subjective possibilities for Muslim girls, my findings suggest that they get incorporated within the politics of authorization as the arbitrators of cultural authorization for their daughters as legitimate subjects in the field of education. They view the enactments of 'good girlhood' as key to the production of cultural authorizations for Muslim girls in education and their families in the wider society. However, instead of opening up

the gamut of subjective possibilities for Muslim girls, parental preoccupation with the discourse of ‘good girlhood’ produce additional regimes of surveillance. These regimes of surveillance create conditions that push Muslim girls towards education, academic achievement and the workplace while maintaining their place at home as well as within gender-appropriate jobs (Macleod 1992).

9.4. Reflexive selfhoods

As Chapter 8 indicates Muslim girls in my study were critically aware of their own socio-economic position the limitations that imposed upon them in claiming certain subjective possibilities, and the predisposition for certain other subjective possibilities to be conferred upon them readily. However, ‘rather than being passive recipients’ of conferred identities these girls were involved in ‘making choices’ that were influenced by their gender, class, ethnicity (Assamese or Bengali) and religion (Shain 2000: 162). My research revealed a host of conscious strategies they adopted to navigate these conferred subjectivities in their everyday lives within schools and beyond. In particular, my analysis reveals that their navigation of conferred subjectivities involves various types of negotiations with the ‘rules of engagement’ that chapters 5-7 discuss namely: middle class bias, Hindu normativity and respectable femininity or good girlhood.

The specific strategy of negotiation that I consider for my analysis in Chapter 8 is Muslim girls reconstruct a new ‘self’ using different types of storylines. Davis (1993: 4) has said that self-identity at any one point in time depends upon ‘the available storylines we have to make sense out of’ and ‘the legitimacy and status accorded to those storylines by the others’. Thus, I find that the storylines that my respondents used to make sense of their self-identity were generated through the merger of the elements of conferred subjectivities with those of lived or desired subjectivities to reconstruct their self-identity. Their storylines show tensions between ‘what positions are made available’ to them and ‘what they accept/ resist/ modify as they construct storylines about who they are, and who they are becoming’ (Koehne 2005, p. 106). This interplay between the available subjective positions and the ways in which they are resisted and conformed to is the main contribution of this Chapter, in understanding the ways in which conferred identities are inhabited by subordinate groups. In the process the Chapter sheds light on four new types of storylines of self-articulated by Muslim girls in my study, namely: ‘Good (Indian) Muslim self’ using

Mehmood Mamdani's (2004) conception of 'Good Muslim' in the Western political discourse and highlighting negotiations of Hindu-normativity in school; the proud 'Miyah' self which turns the pathologized 'Miyah' identity upside down by investing it with positive value, the 'Modern woman self' enacted through specific practices of dressing and the 'aspirational victim self' which voices diverse future aspiration of a good life and the negotiations of intragroup and intergroup obstructions to achieving these aspirations. The other key empirical insight that this chapter contributes to sociological knowledge is that the reconstructed selves are not new selves, rather they accept and discard elements of conferred subjectivities or the available storylines using discourses about middle class, good girlhood and Hindu-normativity that were revealed in Chapter 5-7. Practices of conformity and resistance therefore exist side by side in their reconstructed selves. This ability to merge, revalue, re-signify discourses and the conferred subjectivities demonstrates Muslim girls' 'self-conscious practices' (Adkins 2004: 194) and reflexive capacity.

Coming back to the research question, Muslim girls' negotiations of conferred subjectivities and its implications for agency, I find they don't passively receive conferred subjectivities that de-authorize them in the field of education. Through various types of negotiations these girls reconstruct their self-identity in ways that seek to reclaim their authorization as legitimate actors in the field of education. They largely conform to the parental pursuits of cultural authorization, however they again accept, discard, expand and rework the discourse of respectability. As discussed above, the re-articulated self continues to include elements of the conferred subjectivity, while showing glimpses of change through an articulation and politicization of collective experiences of subordination. Thus, I acknowledge the agency of these girls and their reflexive capacity. However, building upon the ideas of agency beyond resistance following the works of Katz (2004) and Williams (2011), I view Muslim girls' agency in my study as 'resilience'. It enables them to survive, but contributes little in the way of transforming the power structures that make their survival so difficult. Future research in this direction can offer further empirical and theoretical insights into agency in the context of Muslim marginality in India as I discuss below. I conclude this Chapter with a reflection on the limitations of my study and the potential for further research in the next Section.

9.5. Concluding comments: Limitations and future research outlook

One of the major limitations in understanding Muslim women's marginality in contemporary Assam is lack of quantitative data. The most definitive data sets on Muslims- The Sachar Committee Report (Sachar, 2006) and Muslim Women's Survey (Hasan and Menon 2005) are easily a decade old now. There is also room to incorporate regional variations among Muslim communities across India and in studying gender issues the need to incorporate age specific nuances. The Census (2011) data on Assam disaggregated by religious groups has not been made publicly available due to the raging insider vs. outsider political debates in the state. Muslim femininities have been a marker of difference as this research suggests, but Muslim marginality in contemporary India needs to be understood both in relation to conferred femininities and masculinities.

In relation to research on Muslim women in India I identify the following possible areas of research that I will look to explore in the future. First is historical Sociology, connecting issues of identity and gender in colonial Assam with the contemporary identity politics. As a researcher, I found a striking lack of historical material connecting events of colonial-history with contemporary politics that produced these seemingly distinct and irreconcilable identities in contemporary Assam: Bengali and Assamese. Historical sociological accounts such as Guha (1980) and Hussain (1993), which offer insights into the processes of pre-colonial and colonial identity formations in Assam in the run up to the Assam Movement in the 1980s are exceptions to the rule. In contemporary Assam there have been few scholarly endeavours to explain events such as the rise of Hindutwa politics in Assam in the historical context of identity politics of the state. Such studies will enable future researchers to think more closely and critically about processes of identity formation in Assam. In Indian historiographic practice documentation of the experience(s) of women largely focuses on elite Hindu women (Sarkar 2001; 2008, Thapar-Björkert 2006). This needs to be challenged with accounts of the histories of the oppressed but also of resistance, solidarity and of co-existence using recent innovations in areas like memory research and oral history research.

Second possible area of future research can be that of (re) inserting 'class' as a unit of analysis in understanding Muslim women's marginality in education. This is vital to the agenda of a non-identitarian politics discussed in this thesis. The third area of

future research I identify is closely connected to the second one: understand the Muslim middle class in India as a distinct group with its own hegemonic aspirations. In this study I found distinct patterns in the narratives based on the class and ethnic position of the respondents. Muslim middle class however small in number identifies much more strongly with the 'new' hegemonic middle class identified by Fernandes & Heller (2006) and Deshpande (2003) than with the lower class Muslims. In the context of Assam this could be conceptualized as a study of Assamese speaking Muslims who are often economically better off than the Bengali ones and seek to continuously re-affirm a distinct Khilonjia identity. Such research has the potential to offer interesting insights into class mobility, identity and political ideologies. Fourthly, empirical research on various facets of Muslim girl's and women's lives will remain central to my future research agendas. Everyday issues, such as interactions with media, political activism, work, sexuality, reproductive health and mobility and so on remain under researched and mostly invisible in the public domain. These can offer fruitful avenues for expanding the understanding of contemporary Muslim girlhoods in Assam and in India. Finally, there is scope for further advance in theoretical work on the links between recognition, redistribution and the politics of authorization in empirical contexts. My research offers an analytical approach to understand the subjective possibilities open to groups experiencing intersectional disadvantage and the ways these possibilities are negotiated. This can in fact inform future analytical and theoretical templates for studying the politics of authorization operational in other fields, empirical contexts and groups.

In summary, the field of research on Muslim women, girls in particular, is seeing the emergence of new empirical research within the West and outside. I am confident that my research will spark interest both in the under-researched geographical location of Assam and in the field of contemporary Muslim girlhoods in South Asia, by deploying non-identitarian models of understanding marginality. I also hope my research will offer researchers in post-colonial contexts, methodological insights into productively engaging with their feminist standpoints in order to engage with organic research in the socio-cultural milieu.

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10. APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CHECKLIST

1.	Details of respondents: Name and age
Prompts for discussion	
2.	Discussion on Muslim role models and aspirations
3.	‘Muslim women are educationally backward’
4.	‘Parents don’t support Muslim girls’ education’
5.	Muslim girls and early marriage
6.	Experienced difference at school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim girls and other girls- differences and similarities at home and in schools <input type="checkbox"/> discrimination at school <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing
7.	Parental expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Educational/career <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing

11.APPENDIX 2: SEMI- STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CHECKLIST (GIRLS)

SECTION 1: BASIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION
Name Pseudonym & age:
Schooling Name of the school _____ Class/Grade of the respondent IX Type of School& distance from home _____ Fees & other expenses on education (PCM) R
Interview location
Family socio-economic details Family members No. of Siblings and their educational status Approximate family income (per annum): Occupation of the working members of the family Level of education of both parents
Details of the neighbourhood they live in Name _____ Type : Types of residents (occupation/religion/caste/ethnicity) Mixed- Muslim majority _____ Educational status of other children in the area (in school, dropped out, working)
SECTION 2: EVERYDAY LIVES (HOME)
<i>Issues for observation at school:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing pattern <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting/living arrangements <input type="checkbox"/> Location of religious/National symbols. <input type="checkbox"/> Gendered spatial practices <input type="checkbox"/> Home-school –home journey
Home to school commute

<p>Nature of activities at home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Chores <input type="checkbox"/> Games and hobbies <input type="checkbox"/> Learning <input type="checkbox"/> Religious and cultural activities
<p>Nature of disagreements with parents. And how they are resolved.</p>
<p>Perceived difference between their life and that of their</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Brothers/male relatives of same age group <input type="checkbox"/> Peers in school <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Muslim girls in school
<p>SECTION 3: EVERYDAY LIVES (SCHOOL)</p>
<p><i>Issues for observation at school:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Dressing pattern/uniform</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sitting arrangements</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Recess and sports activities</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Location of religious/National symbols in the school.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Prayers and other rituals</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Location and imagery around the common areas, corridors, water tap, girl's toilet, etc.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Nature of extra-curricular activities.</i>
<p>Likes and dislikes in school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Peer interactions <input type="checkbox"/> Participation
<p>When it is said 'a student is doing well'-what does it mean?</p>
<p>Who are your friends at school? Why did you become friends?</p>
<p>Do boys and girls your age become friends? If yes, how is this different from friendships between girls? If no, why?</p>

Comparing with the culture at home (say the spoken language, dressing, etc.) how do you find the school different or similar?

Do you take an interest in the non-Muslim culture say Hindu/Christian festivals? Do your non-Muslim friends take interest in your culture? Do your non-Muslim friends ask you questions about your religion/culture? If yes, give a few examples.

SECTION 4: LOOKING FORWARD: ASPIRATIONS

After you complete schooling (12th Standard), what do you hope to be able to do?

And what might be the possible obstacles in your plan?

SECTION 5: VIEWS & OPINIONS (SAME AS FDGs)

What do you say to the view that ‘Muslim women are educationally backward’? Give reference to the fact that Muslim girls enrolment (wrt Muslim boys) reduces at VI standard (Age 11), what happens at that age?

What do you say to the view that ‘Parents don’t support Muslim girls’ education’?

What would you say to the view that ‘Muslim students experience discrimination at school’? Have you ever felt discriminated against? If so in what ways?

12.APPENDIX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CHECKLIST (PARENTS)

BASIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION
Name (s)
Educational attainment of respondent:
Occupation & family income
Interview location
Family details
Details of the neighbourhood they live in Name _____ Types of residents (occupation/religion/caste/ethnicity) _____ Educational status of other children in the area (in school, dropped out, working) _____
Observations at home Material conditions Gendered living arrangements Roles and responsibilities Dressing Display of national religious symbols
Discussion points

- ☐ General history of women's education in the family-mother, grandmother etc.
- ☐ Current status of education of girls aged 13-18 in the family. Articulations of choice of school.
- ☐ Merits and de-merits of girls education
- ☐ Obstacles/difficulties in girls education
- ☐ Comments on the existing nature/quality of school
 - ☐ Physical access
 - ☐ Curriculum
 - ☐ Quality of teaching
 - ☐ Cultural practices in the school
 - ☐ Other issues
- ☐ Ability to address current concerns with schooling.
- ☐ Does education serve different purposes for the girls and the boys? If yes in what ways
- ☐ Post-education aspirations for daughters
- ☐ Female role models for daughters
- ☐ Reflection on the cultural practices at home (e.g. language, dressing, etc.) *visa vis* School

SPECIFIC VIEWS & OPINIONS

- ☐ What do you say to the view that 'Muslim women are educationally backward'?
- ☐ What do you say to the view that 'Parents don't support Muslim girls' education and want to marry them off early'?
- ☐ What do you say to the view that 'Muslim students experience discrimination at school'?

13. APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CHECKLIST (TEACHERS)

BASIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION
Name
Educational attainment
Years in teaching
Name & Type of School
Designation (Subject taught)
Interview location
Details of the nature of socio-economic background of the students in the school
Ballpark figures on the number of Muslim girls in the school
PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FEMALE MUSLIM STUDENTS
<p>Key policies influencing their everyday working in the school. What are the specific policies for girls and for minorities? Did these policies have the intended outcome?</p> <p>Are there any differences between Muslim and non-Muslim students in the school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural <input type="checkbox"/> Economic <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural, etc. <p>What are the reasons for the perceived differences? Have these factors changed over the years? If yes, how?</p> <p>How do these differences effect their academic performance in school?</p> <p>What does the school do to mitigate any detrimental effects on the academic performance of Muslim girls?</p>

14. APPENDIX 5: SCHOOL INFORMATION SHEET

Key information about schools	
Name of the School	
Type of school	
Grades taught	
School timing	
Lunch break	
Main Holidays	
Total no. teaching staff	
Ethnic/religious composition of teaching staff	
Total No. of students	
No. of Muslim students	
Matriculation result 2012-13	
HS result 2012-13	
Key government schemes (general)	
Key government schemes (minority)	

Extra-curricular activities	
Other information	

15. APPENDIX 6: LIST OF RESPONDENTS

i) List of Focus Group Discussion Respondents

School	FGD	Name	Age
Meadow School	1	Moni	15
		Mehjabin	15
		Payal	16
		Reshma	15
	2	Asma	13
		Alia	13
		Sultana	14
		Haseena	13
		Majoni	14
		Shahin	14
	3	Naina	14
		Kiran	15
		Farhin	15
		Deepika	15
	4	Sona	15
		Joya	15
		Moina	16
		Riba	16
		Hima	16
City School	5	Parul	14
		Jasmine	13
		Azmin	13

		Nilu	13
		Sharmin	13
		Amira	13
	6	Nourin	14
		Shahnaz	14
		Anjum	14
		Nomi	15
		Nafisa	13
		Tina	13
	7	Shabnam	14
		Toffy	14
		Sonu	14
		Jenny	14
		Parvin	14
	8	Nishad	15
		Tanni	15
		Ruhina	16
		Farhana	16
		Simi	16
		Tahsin	15
		Sayedda	16
Kaleidoscope Madrassa	9	Saira	15
		Fahmida	15
		Munni	14
		Shami	13

		Laila	14
	10	Rokia	15
		Bina	17
		Mina	16
		Abida	16
		Parbi	17
	11	Taslim	18
		Sadia	18
		Jusna	18
		Manju	17
	12	Rabia	13
		Runa	14
		Anwara	13
		Hanifa	15
Northern School	13	Huma	16
		Samia	14
		Fahmi	15
		Pinky	14
		Neha	15
	14	Urvashi	15
		Shila	15
		Alisha	15
		Amy	16
		Rejia	15

		Jebin	16
	15	Khushi	17
		Momi	17
		Nazia	18
		Rosy	17
	16	Minu	15
		Zubi	15
		Momi	13
		Tuli	14
		Poppy	14
Sanctuary	17	Rupa	14
		Sana	14
		Lily	15
		Juri	15
		Mini	14
		Helen	15
	18	Uzma	15
		Bobby	14
		Ria	15
		Rani	15

ii)

ii) **List of parents and girls interviewed**

	Interviewees	
School Name	Girl	Parents
City School	Shabnam	Iqbal (father), Shahida (mother)
	Ruhina	Hameed (father), Sajida (mother)
	Amira	
	Tina	Abdul (father)
	Nomi	Rashida (mother)
	Toffy	Mohamed (Father)
	Nilu	
Northern School	Rejia	Rohima (mother)
	Amy	Karim (father), Rabia (mother)
	Huma	
	Neha	Hasna (mother)
	Khushi	Zainab (mother)
	Momi	
	Pinky	Razina (mother)
	Minu	Nazmina (mother)
Meadow School	Moni	Mehmuda (mother)
	Asma	Amina (mother)
	Kulsum	
	Reshma	Helima (Mother)
	Alia	Bela (mother)
	Naina	

	Hasina	Mehrun-nisa
	Sona	
Kaleidoscope Madrassa	Bina	Begum (mother)
	Shami	
	Hanifa	Asia (mother)
	Munni	
	Fahmida	Ruzema (mother)
	Manju	
	Anwara	
Sanctuary School	Ria	Madina (mother)
	Sana	Asfia (mother)
	Bobby	
	Rani	Rokiya (mother)
	Juri	Moti (mother)
	Uzma	
	Rupa	

iii) List of teachers interviewed

1. Meena Borpujari, Headteacher, Meadow School
2. Hiba Begum, Social Studies teacher, Meadow School
3. Purna Saikia, Assamese teacher, Meadow School
4. Pritom Sarma, History teacher, Meadow School (M)
5. Sister Betty, Headteacher, City School
6. Smita Roy, Social Studies teacher, City School
7. Chandan Das, Maths teacher, City school (M)
8. Ali Jafar, Head teacher, Kaleidoscope Madrassa (M)
9. Rumi Begum, teacher, Kaleidoscope Madrassa
10. Rahila Banu, teacher, Kaleidoscope Madrassa

11. Sara Ahmed, Maths Teacher, Sanctuary School
12. Kaberi Deka, Headteacher, Sanctuary School
13. Mitali Baruah, Science teacher, Sanctuary School
14. Monidipa Bharali, English teacher, Sanctuary School,
15. Rupali Bora, Maths teacher, Northern School
16. Protima Choudhury, Maths teacher, Northern school
17. Anamika Bora, English teacher, Northern School
18. Jaya Phukan, Science teacher, Northern School
19. Sajida Banu, Social Studies teacher, Northern School
20. Rofida Begum, Hindi teacher, Northern School

21. Bijoya, Kalita, English teacher, Northern School

16.APPENDIX 7: CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Contemporary Muslim girlhoods in Assam: Questions of Recognition and Redistribution in Education

A summary of the research: This research focuses of school going Muslim girls experiences to education with the aim to identify factors leading to their general overall educational backwardness in Assam, and more widely in India.

Name, position and contact address of Researcher: Saba Hussain, Doctoral Student, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, UK

I confirm that I have understand the information about the project provided by the researcher and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.

☐

I agree to / for my daughter to/ my students to take part in the above study.

☐

Note for researchers:

Include the following statements if appropriate, or delete from your consent form:

☐

4. I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded

I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation being video recorded

☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

☐

Name of Participant/Parent
Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature