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‘From behind the curtain’ a study of a girls’ Madrasa in India

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‘FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN’

A STUDY OF A GIRLS’ MADRASA IN INDIA

Mareike Jule Winkelmann

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‘From Behind the Curtain’

A study of a girls’ madrasa in India

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I dedicate this project to my daughter, Tanika Marie,
the greatest muse in my life.

Note on transliterations

With a view to those readers who may be less familiar with Urdu, Arabic, and Persian, I restricted the use of words from the above languages in the text. Where desirable, the original word is added in brackets and can be found in the appended Glossary as well. Hoping to present a text that is easily accessible, I also omitted diacritics and chose the most simple spelling for Urdu, Arabic, and Persian words. Finally, the plural of words that have a 'broken' plural is formed by adding an 's' to the singular form, except in cases such as ulama and madrasas, in which cases the transliterated plural form has become common.

1 Introduction

In late 2000 I submitted a PhD research proposal titled *The Construction of Islamic Knowledge in a Women's Madrasa in Contemporary India*, intending to explore a 'traditional' institution of Islamic learning for young women in a society where Muslims form a minority. While in the initial setup of the study girls' madrasas were framed as 'traditional' institutions of Islamic learning, this turned out to be problematic. During a brief pilot study in late 2000, carried out in Delhi and Hyderabad, my observations suggested that there was no historical precedent for having public, large scale girls' madrasas. Even though girls' madrasas were said to be modeled after the boys' madrasas in terms of their curriculum, teaching methods, disciplining mechanisms, and the internal hierarchies reflected in the relations between the founders, teachers, and students, the emergence of public girls' madrasas represents a 'modern' phenomenon, since the oldest public girls' madrasas in post-Partition India were founded in the early 1950s.

The question I wanted to focus on was how girls' madrasas emerged in India, how they are different from madrasas for boys, what notions of Islam and of the self are generated, and in particular what is taught in girls' madrasas and if what is taught allows the young women to claim authority in Islamic matters in the public. With regard to academic literature about girls' madrasas, their existence is mentioned in passing under the heading 'Religious Education' in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (Barazangi 1995:409; Hoffman-Ladd 1995:328). But when I tried to find further information on the topic, it turned out that while there are substantial studies about boys' madrasas in India[1], there were hardly any comparable materials available regarding their female counterparts.[2]

In order to understand the background of the relatively recent establishment of girls' madrasas, I had to delve deeper into the educational past of the subcontinent. Academic sources on the colonial period suggested that late nineteenth century Muslim reformist ideas had influenced the establishment of the earliest public schools for Muslim girls (Minault 1998a). Islamic education for girls had mainly been a private matter prior to the late nineteenth century, but it then turned into a central issue of public interest. By the early twentieth century home education for girls that took place in the confinement of the women's quarters (*zenana*) existed side by side with the first public schools for Muslim girls.[3] Along with the first public schools for

Muslim girls, the overall increase in literacy, the emerging Urdu print culture, and the democratization of access to Islamic texts formed the background against which public madrasas for Muslim girls rooted in the standardized madrasa curriculum known as the *dars-e-nizami*[4] could come into being. Although at first glance home teaching and formalized education appeared to represent opposites, in terms of their curriculum girls' madrasas today still bear witness to earlier forms of home teaching. As will be shown in Chapter 4, subjects such as *adab* or value education[5], lessons in Muslim ritual (*ibadat*), and 'home science', which includes cooking, stitching, and embroidery, are still valorized in girls' madrasas today.

While certain ideas and their histories are introduced through textual sources, the practices discerned through participant observation in girls' madrasas are equally important for this study. Apart from collecting, translating, and analyzing written materials, I needed to give this project a firm ethnographic rooting through fieldwork carried out in one particular girls' madrasa in New Delhi.[6] Doing fieldwork in a girls' madrasa meant an opportunity to find out how young Muslim women relate to, generate, and transmit Islamic knowledge, what they define as Islam, and what perceptions of the self and the world shape their wishes for the future.

1.1 Introducing a first set of literature

What is taught in girls' madrasas needs to be located within the fields of Muslim girls' education and madrasa education for boys alike. As for the latter, writings such as Zaman's study on the 'modern' ulama's authority in India and Pakistan (Zaman 1999) and Malik's work regarding the social and institutional histories of a number of well known madrasas for young men in India and Pakistan (Malik 1997; 1996) are helpful for comparative purposes. With regard to the history of Muslim women's education in colonial India, Gail Minault's *Secluded Scholars* (Minault 1998a) sheds light on the early women's rights debates and the emergence of the first public schools for Muslim girls in the subcontinent. The late nineteenth century discourse on Muslim women's education emerged against the background of upcoming nationalist ideas of Hindu and Muslim groups. Making their case in favour of women's education, popular late nineteenth century Muslim reformers utilized arguments that reminded of nationalist discourses, wherein the role of women tended to be seen as crucial to social development.[7] More specifically, the reformist discourses depicted women as repositories of ethical and religious values, thought to be representative of the entire community's

moral standing. As the non-Muslim powers were on the rise, the reformers witnessed what they considered not just a political but a also moral decline. Since they saw a direct link between the preservation of what they perceived as un-Islamic customs and women, they argued that women needed adequate guidance to better their ways. As a result, the reforms aimed at transforming women into more competent wives and mothers, while at the same time Islam was to be cleansed of un-Islamic customs (Minault 1998a; Minault 1990; Metcalf 1990).[8]

Although the above developments in the field of women's education appear to be far from granting young Muslim women access to studying Islamic theology, my findings suggest that there is a link between the reformist discourse and the emergence of the first girls' madrasas. In fact, during fieldwork my interlocutors referred to the reformist ideas as the ideological background for the establishment of girls' madrasas. In addition, reformist writings like Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*) are still part of the curriculum in most (Deobandi) girls' madrasas today. In the girls' madrasa wherein I did fieldwork the *Heavenly Ornaments* is studied as part of Islamic law or *fiqh* (see Appendix II).

Moving away from the late nineteenth century Indian context, the following more theoretically informed studies have been a source of inspiration. In particular, Saba Mahmood's findings regarding the Egyptian mosque movement (Mahmood 2005; 2001) were crucial for putting the practices I observed in the girls' madrasa into perspective. Herein, Mahmood examines the concept of agency in a context wherein women appear to acquiesce in what non-participants may perceive as oppressive conditions. Urging to think in directions other than linking agency with progressive change and the normativity ascribed to freedom in feminist discourses, the cultivation of a pious self is acknowledged as a form of agency. Similarly, the concept of docility, re-read as the willingness to be taught, and Mahmood's critical approach to the notion of empowerment are pivotal for this study. In addition, the case studies in Lila Abu-Lughod's *Remaking Women* addressing the tension between the 'discourse of domesticity' (Abu-Lughod 1998:12) and the empowerment of women through the practice of participating in the public sphere were equally helpful. Although Abu-Lughod's discussions focus on more secular forms of education, in the case of the girls' madrasa similar tensions could be discerned. While the (informal) curriculum appeared to promote values associated with domesticity, in some sense the students were trained in participating in the public sphere by attending the madrasa at the same time, even if in seemingly limited ways. It is important to note that the

link between women's education and discourses of domesticity is not specific to Muslim communities in India. My findings indicated that non-Muslim communities in India and elsewhere raise similar questions with regard to women's education and access to public schools[9], concerning (separate) curricula, and with a view to preparing girls for marriage and motherhood.[10] This suggests that apart from Muslim identities, gender and community are factors that are equally important for understanding the above concerns. With the broader context and the ongoing discussions elsewhere in mind, this study nevertheless focuses on India and on madrasa education for girls in particular.

1.2 **Categorizing girls' madrasas**[11]

In order to get a first impression regarding how girls' madrasas function and what is taught, I initially visited a number of girls' madrasas in Hyderabad and Delhi. I wanted to focus on girls' madrasas at the secondary level for girls between roughly twelve and seventeen years of age, because puberty appeared to form a major divide between girls who stay at home to prepare for marriage and those who (are allowed to) continue their education. Even in relatively conservative Muslim communities, like the one wherein I did fieldwork, school attendance generally did not seem to be problematic for girls prior to puberty, but for the older girls the prospects of marriage and staying at home formed an alternative, especially when purdah or female seclusion[12] is practised.

During the early stage of fieldwork, my observations suggested that there are different types of girls' madrasas at the secondary level. Based on the main differences between the three categories, I developed the following distinction: To begin with, there are girls' madrasas that are referred to as madrasas although their curriculum is not based on the standardized madrasa curriculum known as the dars-e-nizami. In such cases the term madrasa mostly stands synonymous for an Urdu medium school with some Islamic content. Generally modest dress is compulsory, the basic tenets of Islam are taught along with some Arabic, and 'advice' literature for young women like the earlier mentioned late nineteenth century *Bihishti Zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*), or the *Ladkion ka Islami Course* (*The Girls' Islamic Course*) are prescribed for reading. Since these schools are not distinctly oriented toward studies in Islamic theology, the girls' madrasas of the first type remind of the first public schools for Muslim girls that emerged in the early twentieth century. Second, there are girls' madrasas that combine the respective state cur-

riculum for secondary education with Islamic teaching. In these madrasas of the second or 'dual type' the degree to which Islamic subjects are taught varies. The Islamic component may range from prescribing modest dress for girls and teaching religious knowledge (*dini talim*), to the integration of subjects like Arabic, history of Islam, and observing set prayer times. Finally, there are girls' madrasas that are rooted in the standardized madrasa curriculum known as dars-e-nizami and offer more or less exclusively religious education for girls at the secondary level. In practice, even these madrasas of the third type often incorporate a minimum of non-Islamic subjects in their curriculum, such as mathematics, English, Hindi, and computer skills. With a view to finding an answer to the question whether what is taught in girls' madrasas allows the young women to claim authority in the public, I did fieldwork in a girls' madrasa of the third type, because this seemed to be the place where such claims to religious authority were highlighted most.

1.3 Introducing the wider location

The girls' madrasa wherein I did most of my fieldwork was established in 1996 and hosted nearly two hundred students, who were roughly between twelve and seventeen years of age. Furthermore, the students were from a lower to lower middle-class background from all over India. The Madrasatul Niswan[13] is located in an area of New Delhi named after the famous Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya who died in 1325 AD. Nizamuddin is commonly referred to as one of the large 'Muslim pockets' outside the walled city of Old Delhi. In addition, Nizamuddin's shrine is known as the second largest place of pilgrimage after Chishti's shrine in Ajmer (Rajasthan).[14] The colony is divided by the wide Mathura Road with on one side Nizamuddin East, which is known for its railway station. On the other side there is the 'settlement' or *basti* Nizamuddin with its shrines, narrow alleys, and small bookshops.[15]

Any approaching car has to park by the side of the main road on the outskirts of the basti, as there are no paved roads leading further inside. Initially I was not too familiar with the layout of the area, and so for the first two years of fieldwork my daily walks led me along the people begging by the side of the road, followed by the flower sellers in front of the shrine or *dargah* of Nizamuddin Auliya, the small restaurants and hotels whose owners distribute free food to those in need at set times, and finally the butcher shops Nizamuddin is famous for. As the narrow alleys or *galis* are lined with small shops, perfume, books, leather socks, skull-caps or *topis*, clothes, cassette tapes, cigarettes, sweets, and bread are on display. A few steps ahead

the residential area begins, which is characterized by the narrow facades of the houses. Just a little further inside the basti lies the street where the weekly market is held, and then there is a garbage dump on the very back of the residential area, behind which there are a few more houses, one of them being the Madrasatul Niswan. As if to make the building even more inconspicuous, the garbage is less than inviting to anyone not intent on seeing the madrasa from close by. Directly in front of the building lies a patch of wasteland, marked by a car wreck, pieces of metal, and goats walking about among playing children. Adjacent, there are a number of grave markers, opposite which lies the second famous Sufi shrine together with the office of the Inayat Khan Foundation. Regarding the choice of locality, the Madrasatul Niswan's brochure states that 'In the beginning, the Jamia neither had its own building, land, or any financial assistance. A kind-hearted woman donated her own house for this noble cause.'

In late 2003 the madrasa's immediate surroundings underwent a makeover, owing to the New Delhi Municipal Cooperation's and the Delhi Development Authority's programmatic strive to fight encroachments. In addition, possibly the makeover also had to do with the presence of a large Hindu temple located right at the back of the madrasa and with the municipality's strive to render the 'forgotten' areas of New Delhi more attractive for commercial activities and tourism. The makeover resulted in the diversion of the path leading to the madrasa, as the garbage dump and the adjacent group of modest houses inhabited by Hindus were fenced off. In lieu of the earlier route, one could walk directly toward the madrasa via a new path leading from Inayat Khan's shrine and the slightly elevated grave markers toward the entrance of the building.

1.4 **Fieldwork methods**

Fieldwork began with a brief pilot study of three weeks in Hyderabad and Delhi in November 2000. During this first stay I visited some girls' madrasas in Hyderabad and began to collect written materials on madrasa education. I tried to find literature on madrasa education at academic publishing houses, at university libraries, in Islamic bookshops in Hyderabad and Delhi, and at the offices of Muslim organizations such as the Hyderabadi Urdu newspaper *Siasat*. In addition, I interviewed local people in both cities who were associated with madrasa education in various ways, thereby hoping to find out something or the other about girls' madrasas. The actual fieldwork began with my following stay in India from late September 2001 onwards,

when a first contact with the Madrasatul Niswan in Delhi was made. By February 2003 I returned to Leiden, and after visiting India again for three weeks in April 2003, I continued fieldwork from June 2003 until February 2004. Finally, the remaining gaps were filled in the course of writing up my dissertation in India from August 2004 until February 2005.

Doing fieldwork in the Madrasatul Niswan mainly meant participant observation. I followed classes as a student, observed interactions between teachers and students inside and outside the classroom, and occasionally taught English classes at the Principal's request. Apart from the above 'scheduled' activities, the informal conversations that took place in the staff room were an invaluable source of information. While initially I tried to give these conversations direction in line with the interview questions in Appendix IV, the discussions began to flow more freely as our rapport grew. In the order of my contacts in the madrasa, my main interlocutors were the Founder, Manager, Principal, teachers, students, graduates, and sometimes their friends. Our conversations mostly took place in the front room, the staff room, the many sections of the small building designated as classrooms, the Manager's home, and occasionally also in his friends' shops close by. Due to this particular community's outspoken aversion to (certain) things considered 'Western' and hence forbidden, using a taping device was not feasible. Instead, following each of my almost daily visits to the madrasa, I immediately took detailed notes to document what was said and also what the atmosphere was like. This strategy allowed me to trace in detail the often subtle shifts in openness and familiarity over time.

Most of our conversations took place in Urdu and Hindi, because I tried to take recourse to English only when something was too difficult for me to express in either language. Even though often all it took was a dictionary to clarify the issue in question, switching to English generally implied the sudden end of our conversations, because it instantly seemed to place me in the outsider's position again, which was disadvantageous for the flow of our conversations and for our developing rapport. For the same reason I chose not to make use of a translator either, as the confrontational aspect of our mutually perceived 'otherness' turned out to be valuable for the unfolding of the project.

My observations also allowed me to chart out networks between teachers, students, and their families, which allowed for relevant insights regarding the organizational structure and social hierarchies in the madrasa. Especially in the case of what I refer to as 'core families' (see Chapter 3), such network structures played an important role. The 'core families' came from the same

social background as the Founder and the Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan. In addition, their younger female family members were virtually all enrolled in the girls' madrasa as students, and some of the recent graduates had taken up teaching there. Their shared appreciation for and involvement in the work of the lay preachers' movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat[16] was another commonality. Apart from the young women belonging to the 'core families', for whom life inside and outside the madrasa mostly seemed to form a continuum, there were also students and teachers from rural backgrounds, who often were the only ones in their families to study or teach in a girls' madrasa (see Chapter 5).

In order to protect the privacy of my interlocutors, I left out the names of the people I met in the Madrasatul Niswan, even at the risk of yet again presenting women in seclusion as faceless and anonymous. By the same token the name of the madrasa is fictitious. However, the name of the fieldwork site remained unchanged, because otherwise the project would have lost some of its intriguing features associated with the surroundings of the madrasa.

1.5 Outline of the remaining chapters

Chapter 2 examines absences and appearances of girls' madrasas in contemporary debates. Although post 9/11 madrasa education became a much debated topic, mainly because of the alleged link between Islamic education and forms of violence, my initial findings indicated that not much is known about girls' madrasas. For that reason the main question in this chapter concerns the emergence of girls' madrasas as presented in Urdu literature and in English newspaper articles published post 9/11.

In keeping with the above concerns, Chapter 3 deals with the question of access to girls' madrasas post 9/11. My initial contact with the men in charge of running the girls' madrasa was crucial for being allowed to visit the madrasa regularly, owing to which questions dealing with the men's educational ideas and social background are addressed. As the Founder and Manager were actively involved in a transnational organization known as the Tablighi Jamaat, the final section of this chapter investigates the relation between the girls' madrasa and the lay preachers' movement. The main issue at stake is how the informal affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat may influence the curriculum of the madrasa and its underlying educational ideals.

Examining the curriculum and the educational ideals behind it, Chapter 4 situates the girls' madrasa in the broader context of Islamic education.

Questions raised include how the madrasa curriculum for girls is different from the standardized curriculum taught in madrasas for boys and how what is taught in practice in the girls' madrasa deviates from the official curriculum. As value education (adab) with its underlying ideals of Islamic womanhood appears to be central to the madrasa's educational mission, questions pertaining to teaching methods and discipline are discussed. In order to put my observations into perspective, a 'dual type' girls' madrasa is introduced in the final section of this chapter. Herein, the question is addressed how the curricular differences between the two madrasas may have an impact on the future of the students.

In Chapter 5 the students' future trajectories are linked with the question whether what is taught in the Madrasatul Niswan allows the young women to claim authority in the public. Regarding the latter, it is of concern how the public is defined, because Muslims constitute a minority in India. In addition, the context of the girls' madrasa again appears to form a specific category. With a view to what the students do after graduation, their stories indicate that there are tensions between education, agency, and discipline. Against the background of these tensions, the last question raised is what it would take for the young women to claim authority in the public.

Chapter 6 revisits some of my initial thoughts and concepts with regard to madrasa education for girls. In line with Mahmood's findings, the question is raised whether what is taught in the girls' madrasa is empowering and if the notion of empowerment is helpful in this particular context. After discerning the underlying educational ideals of the curriculum along with its associated ideals of Islamic womanhood in the previous chapters, another question deals with the historical precedents of learned women that may challenge these ideals. By the same token, in the madrasa the young women's stories may challenge or tally with the same ideals. Finally, even if female religious authority is not in the process of emerging as yet, an equally important question is what the young women gain out of their training.

1. See Metcalf 1982; Faruqi 1963; Ahmad 1996; Ansari 1980; regarding the modern South Asian madrasas see Zaman 1999.
2. See for example Qamaruddin 1997, which includes a survey-like section on girls' madrasas.
3. This overview is based on Minault 1998 and Metcalf 1990.
4. Regarding the history of the dars-e-nizami, see Malik 1997.
5. Even though the Arabic word 'adab' is more commonly translated as 'manners', my data suggest that with regard to the subject 'adab', as taught in the girls' madrasa, it implied more than etiquette or manners. Since what is taught is broader than social etiquette, I use adab in the sense of value education. Keeping in mind that my definition includes social etiquette, other aspects are related to gender roles and practices of everyday life, as we will see in Chapter 4.
6. Although I visited more girls' madrasas in the course of fieldwork, doing ethnographic fieldwork in one particular madrasa for girls allowed me to build long standing relations and to gain an in depth understanding of what is taught and how the five-year training in the madrasa affects the young women's lives.
7. On the relation between gender and nationalism in the Indian context, see for example Ali 2000; Amin and Chakrabarty 1996; Chatterjee 1989; Gupta 2001; Hasan 1994; Jeffery and Basu 1999.
8. See for example the Introduction to Thanawi 1998.
9. The question of 'safe access' to public institutions for girls in seclusion or purdah deserves mention here. In Hyderabad, for example, I visited a girls' madrasa that utilized a fleet of school buses the windows of which were entirely covered by black curtains. The buses picked up the girls from home and once they reached their destination, the entrance to the madrasa was covered too like a tunnel. At one end the bus stopped to allow for the girls to descend, and the madrasa building was at the other end.
10. Concerning the link between women's education and 'discourses of domesticity' in the 'Muslim World', see Abu Lughod 1998; Najmabadi 1993. Regarding Muslim women's education in India see Agrawal 1986; Ahmad 1982; Hasan 1998; Saiyid 1995; and Sharma 1995. For findings concerning education of Muslim girls in Europe, see Haw 1998.
11. For the purpose of this study I use the term madrasa whenever it was used by my interlocutors. With regard to the categorization of girls' madrasas the following should be noted: in the case of madrasas of the first type, the word madrasa could be substituted by 'school', while the second and third types represent madrasas in the proper sense. In India, it is quite common to prefix the word *dini* when making reference to madrasas of the third type, as these focus more or less exclusively on Islamic education. However, as the demarcation lines are often fluent between the second and third types, and because not everyone uses the term *dini madrasas* to refer to madrasas of the third type, I generally use madrasas in the sense of dini madrasas, unless indicated otherwise.

12. In this example purdah mainly stands for female segregation, while its other meanings, such as veiling and modest dress will be discussed at length in the following chapters.
13. Although the name is a pseudonym, my findings suggest that it is a common name for a girls' madrasa.
14. Nizamuddin's *khanqah* had a madrasa attached to it where scholars such as Shams al-Din Yahya, Fakhruddin Zarradi, Qadi Muhyuddin Kashani, and Fakhruddin Marwazi gave lectures (Momin 2001:63).
15. When approaching Nizamuddin by motorized rickshaw or 'three-wheeler', the drivers initially used to take me to Nizamuddin East, as there are not too many foreigners or *firangis* going to basti Nizamuddin. Some time later, when due to the heavy pollution and the cold I started using proper taxis regularly, the drivers thought that I wanted to go to the basti to pray for (male) offspring at the shrine.
16. Though post 9/11 the movement has come under closer scrutiny, the Tablighi Jamaat is generally referred to as an apolitical reformist movement. Founded in 1927 by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas in an area close to Delhi called Mewat, the movement emerged in reaction to Hindu missionary activities among Muslims. The movement assumed its present transnational character by the 1970s. For additional information regarding the history of the Tablighi Jamaat, see Sikand 2002. Concerning the life of its founder, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), his succession, and the spread of the Tablighi Jamaat, see Masud 2000, 6-7.

2 Discussing girls' madrasas: absences and appearances

As academic sources on girls' madrasas appeared to be scarce[1], I tried alternative ways of finding out how they emerged. Especially during the first months of fieldwork I spent time interviewing local people associated with various Muslim organizations and driving around Delhi searching for Islamic bookshops and publishers. The scarce Urdu materials available on girls' madrasas, like for example the section in Qamaruddin's *Hindustan Ki Deeni Darsgahen* (*The Madrasas of India*; 1997), seemed to consist mainly of survey like information. Such surveys generally include the founding date of the respective girls' madrasa, the number of students, affiliations with any particular Islamic school of thought, the subjects taught, and finally whether there are any 'special' subjects, such as 'home science', computer skills, and the like.[2] Although my interlocutors often showed great interest in madrasa education for girls, it was evident that among Muslims concerned with Islamic education information on this topic was generally scarce as well. In addition, those who were aware that girls' madrasas existed were generally men who had as little access to girls' madrasas as I did in those days.

2.1 Looking for girls' madrasas in the literature

Initially, my trips to the Old City of Delhi led me to the famous bookshops opposite Jama Masjid, but the bookshops of Nizamuddin were even more interesting. The basti Nizamuddin is lined with small bookshops, some of which are run by men associated with the lay preachers' movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat (see Chapter 3). The bookshops in front of the Tablighi Markaz or Centre sold the theological books studied in the nearby Madrasatul Niswan off the shelf. Besides, numerous treatises for women or addressing the issue of women in relation to various contemporary subjects were available as well (see Chapter 4). This literature did not, however, provide information on the development of girls' madrasas. While the content of these publications will be discussed in the following chapters, in this chapter I mainly deal with publications issued by Muslim

organizations on madrasa education. At the headquarters of the Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Hind, an organization of Islamic scholars mainly associated with Deoband[3], I obtained a number of issues of their publication *Al-Jamiyat* that included articles on madrasa education.[4] Other books on the topic of Islamic education and women were published by the Delhi based Institute of Objective Studies.[5]

The overall impression gained during my search for literature suggested once more that not much is known about girls' madrasas. Among the older generation, memories and images related to the pre-Partition custom of home teaching for girls in Delhi were well preserved.[6] In addition, during my initial visits to the Old City of Delhi I found that Urdu medium Islamic schools for girls were readily accessible too. Another point of entry into debates on madrasa education were articles published in the English medium Muslim newspapers post 9/11, often in response to the negative publicity on madrasas in the non-Muslim press. While most of the discussion did not deal with girls' madrasas in particular, it is worth noting that post 9/11 girls' madrasas were often mentioned as one of the positive developments in the field of madrasa education.

This chapter attempts to address the absences and presences of girls' madrasas in two main sets of writings by concerned Muslims. On the one hand there are Urdu writings that address the emergence and present state of madrasa education. On the other hand there are English articles published in Muslim newspapers post 9/11. In both cases, I point to the ways in which girls' madrasas are largely absent and occasionally present, sometimes as a topic in itself, but often as part of a wider argument on the achievements in the field of madrasa education. I use these sets of literature to give insight in the historical background of the emergence of girls' madrasas, to point to the contexts in which discussions on madrasa education for girls came to the fore, and to provide an insight into the wider debates on madrasa education. The latter include the specific context of the post 9/11 debates on madrasa education, which coincide with the period wherein I attempted to gain access to a girls' madrasa and did fieldwork there.

2.2 Discussing the early history of madrasa education

My interlocutors often suggested that madrasas for girls are modelled after madrasas for boys. Investigating how Urdu writers describe the history of madrasa education, I was struck by the extent to which these Muslim authors appear to identify with the Middle East. In other words, their

accounts tend to sketch the history of Islamic education in the Middle East and in India as a continuum, even though in India the 'Madrasa Movement' emerged in reaction to the colonial encounter and the decline of Muslim rule in the nineteenth century.

In a special issue of the earlier mentioned *Al-Jamiyat Weekly* on madrasa education, for example, the evolution of Islamic education is described from the times of the Prophet up to the 'age of technology'. The general argument is that Islamic education became institutionalized when in 1067 AD a minister of the Seljuk dynasty by the name of Nizamulmulk Tusi established the Nizamiya madrasa in Baghdad. The ruler had granted the property as an endowment (*waqf*) and left its management in the hands of the madrasa staff, thus ensuring limited state control over the madrasa. In keeping with the growing interest in Islamic knowledge, formalized education had to be provided in order to keep pace with the increasing diversity of Islamic thought at that time. As the number of students increased, the precincts of the mosques no longer sufficed to meet the spatial demands. Moreover, the ever-growing number of madrasa graduates needed funding to continue their studies, and the government administration in turn required able and efficient staff. Attempting to meet those needs, the mosques and madrasas offered training in non-Islamic subjects[7] along with the theological curriculum (Dehlavi 2002:21-22). The period of Imam Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) is seen as the golden period of Islamic education, because in his days education was 'so common that even the lowest professional was well educated'. Another Urdu publication elaborates on Ghazali's educational views, as in his opinion a human being should acquire the knowledge and skills helpful to understand the relationship between God and his servants and to live a moral life. (Farooqi 1992:45-59).

While in the above Urdu sources women are conspicuously absent, the few academic publications available mention fields of knowledge wherein women were trained from the early days of Islam onwards. According to one author, the disciplines in which women excelled include religious knowledge, cultural knowledge, poetic traditions, mystical education, vocational and professional education, music, and military training (Chaudhry 1953:77-101). In addition, Berkey's article on women's education in the Mamluk period points to women's contributions in the field of Islamic education. As Islamic legal and religious education were originally intended to be and continued to be mainly informal during the Middle Ages, the emergence of madrasas from the eleventh century onwards represents the formalization and institutionalization of the originally informal

and interpersonal methods of teaching (Berkey 1992:143). Apparently the madrasas did not monopolize the educational sector, because despite the growing institutionalization of Islamic education earlier forms of informal education continued to exist side by side with the madrasas. These informal forms of education are important for understanding how women were taught in the past. During the Mamluk period, women were active in the field of madrasa education as financial benefactors, founders, and supervisors (Berkey 1992:145). Since learned women are mentioned in historical sources, the question is how they were educated, because there seems to be no evidence that women taught or studied in the madrasas they were associated with as benefactors, founders, or supervisors. Instead, especially in learned families, the women's husbands and male relatives were generally seen as responsible for the education of women. Outside the home, women's participation in informal meetings held in mosques formed a point of contention, as on such occasions popular practice collided with the rules of gender segregation (Berkey 1992:151).

Still, it seems that even though women were mainly taught at home, it was possible for them to specialize in a particular subject under the guidance of a (male) teacher. Generally, such classes were held in the teacher's house and they were attended by men and women alike. Informal teaching at home and attending public classes are sketched as complementary activities in Chaudhry's (1953) account. Moreover, there are examples of women who even undertook 'grand tours during their educational career', and the same author points out that women enjoyed a 'rich and full-blooded' professional life as teachers, even if they were not officially affiliated with a madrasa. As the historical sources mention male savants who obtained diplomas (*ijazas*) from women, it is likely that women taught in private (Chaudhry 1953:72).[8] In that respect, a 'spotless character' or the 'integrity of their character' appears to form the necessary conditions for women's interactions with men. Similarly, there seems to be a strong emphasis on women's moral education and moral discipline, which is a point that will be examined in Chapter 4.[9]

Historical examples indicate that women could compete with men in the field of transmitting Prophetic traditions or *ahadith*, as many women in the early Islamic period were known as narrators of Prophetic traditions (*muhadditha*; Berkey 1992:151-153). Still, as Berkey points out, the education women received differed substantially from the education young men received in madrasas. As the main emphasis was on training the memory, such one-sided training ensured women's exclusion from formally acknowledged positions in the educational and legal sectors. With regard to the

above remark, my findings suggest that similar mechanisms underlying women's partial and selective inclusion in the public and restrictions in the educational domain are still at work in girls' madrasas today, as we will see in the following chapters.

2.3 Writings on madrasa education in India

Turning to the history of madrasa education in India as presented in Urdu sources, the president of the (revivalist) Islamic Centre[10] in New Delhi, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, points to the connection between the Muslim reaction to the introduction of Thomas Babington Macaulay's education policy in 1834 and the onset of the 'Madrasa Movement'. Under the colonial regime, Muslim power had visibly diminished by the early nineteenth century. Against this background, the author opines that the 'Madrasa Movement' is noteworthy for the leadership of Islamic scholars at a time when Muslims were in a vulnerable position. Underlying the movement were particular interpretations of Islam and Islamic knowledge. Assuming that Islam distinguishes between two types of knowledge, namely revealed knowledge and verified or scientific knowledge, the author concludes that the madrasa curriculum should be based on the same classification. The aim of madrasa education is to train students so that they may become competent in following the path laid out by Quran and shariah and to spread the knowledge and message of God to humankind for their physical, intellectual, and spiritual wellbeing (Khan 2002:84-137).

By the early twentieth century the most popular Islamic schools of thought and Muslim organizations were represented in the madrasa education system, such as the Deobandis, the Barelwis, the Ahl-e-hadith[11], the Jamaat-e-Islami[12], and the Nadwatul Ulama[13]. The efforts of the latter proved to be significant for the coming to be of girls' madrasas in India, and the girls' madrasa I did fieldwork in was, in fact, founded under the patronage of the Nadwatul Ulama. And there was another link, because the Nadwatul Ulama's former director of education, Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1914-2000), was influential in the Tablighi Jamaat (Malik 1997:471), the very same movement in which the 'men in charge' of running the Madrasatul Niswan were actively involved.

In Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's biography, the Muslim 'minority psychology' is mentioned as the main reason for the coming into being of *makatib* and madrasas in India. Regarding the minority rights of Muslims, the Indian constitution grants the 'right to freedom of religion', along with 'cultural and

educational rights for minorities', subsumed under the heading 'fundamental rights'. Nadwi claims that Muslims establish institutions of Islamic learning to ensure the preservation of Islam at a basic level in secular India and to counter their fear of cultural domination at the hand of the Hindu majority. Elaborating on his educational ideals, Nadwi argues in his *Madaris Arabia ke Talba ke Nam ek Paigham* (*A message to the students of Arabic madrasas*; Nazmi 2000:132-133) that a Muslim who studies Islam in order to communicate the message of God to man for his salvation is the vicegerent of the Prophet. By the same token, madrasas are founded to continue the mission of the Prophet, and for that reason a madrasa student should possess (some of) the Prophet's qualities. In the light of the above, Nadwi concludes that madrasas and makatib are not only necessary and beneficial for Muslims, but for everyone to learn morality and humanity. At the same time, Nadwi points out that the Hindu majority is unaware of the basic needs, identity, and psychology of the Muslim minority. As a result, government agencies may intentionally or unintentionally enact laws that form obstacles with a view to maintaining the communal identity of the Muslim minority. For example, Nadwi notes that the syllabi of state-run schools and colleges generally include Hindu mythology, belief, culture, and traditions (Hasan n.d.:134-137). The same point was frequently brought to my attention during fieldwork, when I asked the students why they attended a madrasa, as it seems to represent a widely held view.

Similarly, other authors such as Salamatullah (1990), the author of *Hindustan mein Musalmano ki Talim* (*Muslim Education in India*), note that following Partition Muslims feared the manipulation of secularism on the part of the non-Muslim majority. Claiming that following Partition Muslims became more conscious of their religion, such forms of cultural domination had the potential of causing damage to what he refers to as the 'cultural' Muslim identity. As a result, Muslims struggled to preserve their institutions of religious learning in an attempt to put a halt to the perceived decline of religious and moral values. The same author argues that morality cannot be confined to a textbook or to a set of principles, as society at large is responsible for moral education. In other words, value oriented education begins at home, extends to the neighbourhood, and should be continued in school, where ideally the environment is conducive to good actions. By the same token, teachers should function as role models, not through command and punishment, but through precautions and through creating a healthy atmosphere. Moral education is seen as a subject that cannot be limited to a fixed timetable, nor is it merely part of the curriculum, as it represents a process that permeates all academic activities, as we will see in Chapter 4.

As Islamic education developed in all its diversity, the gap between forms of non-Islamic education and madrasa education grew wider. The following examples may illustrate the extent to which both education systems co-exist today without allowing for many points of contact. In late 2002 a university lecturer asked me whether I wanted to give an informal talk about my fieldwork in a prestigious girls' college in New Delhi. I hoped that the views of the teachers-to-be would add to my understanding of the middle to upper middle-class non-Muslim opinions regarding madrasa education. Quite to the contrary, it turned out that the young women knew close to nothing about madrasas, although 'confessional schools' were included as a module in their teachers' training programme. Nevertheless, the students' textbooks did not appear to contain any substantial information about madrasas. Moreover, as far as the students' knowledge of Islam and Muslims was concerned, it was by and large informed by stereotypes.

In the Madrasatul Niswan in turn I was confronted with a host of stereotypes regarding non-Islamic education, because generally neither the teachers nor the students were familiar with alternative forms of education. Furthermore, since the teachers and students lived in purdah[14], they were hardly exposed to outside influences while teaching or studying in the madrasa. The worldview of this particular Muslim community also prevented the young women from getting too involved with their surroundings, as we will see in the following chapters. As a result, apprehensions concerning non-Islamic education were common. The young women's concerns centred on the 'free mingling of the sexes' and the disastrous consequences of 'immodest' behaviour, which according to them stood in a causal relation with teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.[15]

Very similar ideas were expressed by the earlier quoted president of the Islamic Centre about the flaws of non-Islamic education in comparison with madrasa education. In his opinion, Islam is entirely scientific and all encompassing, owing to which 'modern' knowledge does not add anything new to what is written in the Quran. By contrast, non-Islamic schools are presented in an unfavourable light, because 'secular schools' merely provide labour market oriented education, while madrasa education is oriented toward God. Similarly, the same author suggests that secular schools teach the possession of worldly things as the main aim in life. Islamic education, on the other hand, is meant to teach that material things are merely means needed to make life easier, rather than being ends in themselves. The main principle underlying the curriculum in Islamic schools is the command of God with its eternal ethics. As a result, although worldly development is

possible in non-Islamic societies, the evolution of proper humanity is impossible therein (Khan 2002:84-137).

Others point to the tension between Islamic and 'secular' knowledge within the field of Islamic education itself. Addressing the tension between Islamic and non-Islamic education from a different angle, another source adds that the bifurcation between Islamic and 'secular' knowledge gradually crept into Islamic education as well. Owing to this bifurcation, some opine that secular knowledge should be banned from the madrasas altogether. Their main argument is that there appears to be a tendency to render education into yet another economic and commercial activity, or into a privatized sector with materialism as its primary aim and underlying guiding principle (Alam 2000:44-53). On the other hand, others express concern that the bifurcation of education and society results in the training of two separate worldviews, namely one that is traditional and one that is modern (Ajjola 1999:23). In the opinion of the latter, the aim of educational reform should be the integration of Islamic and secular knowledge. Such an integration could take the shape of allowing for a Western 'hardware', i.e. Muslims should appropriate the technology of the West, combined with an Islamic 'software' to preserve Islamic values. The latter justify their stance by claiming that there is no distinction between theology and science in Islam, as according to the Quran man's task is to observe nature. This Quranic injunction in turn is interpreted in such a way that the Islamic sciences originally combined theology and science. In the course of history this inclusive view of the Islamic sciences was reduced to theology, thereby marking the onset of what many perceive as the decline of Islamic education. In short, according to the adherents of the integrational model, modern interpretations of traditional concepts and institutions are needed in order to effect a positive change in the Islamic educational system (Ajjola 1999:27-4).

Similar tensions could also be discerned in the Madrasatul Niswan. While the young women's disregard for co-educational non-Islamic schools was obvious, their negative views were paired with the assessment that nowadays upward social mobility requires some degree of exposure to 'worldly education'. In line with this assumption, the Principal told me that their community deemed it desirable for girls below the age of purdah to study in non-Islamic schools. For that reason the daughters of the madrasa's 'core families' attended a prestigious public school in Delhi, as we will see in Chapter 4. The above section indicates the tensions in the field of Islamic education today. Although the Urdu materials surveyed tend to sketch the

rise of madrasa education in India as a continuum with the history of the Middle East, the 'Madrasa Movement', in fact, emerged against the particular background of declining Muslim power and the colonial encounter in the nineteenth century. In addition, post Partition in 1947 Muslims formed a minority in India, owing to which the gap between the non-Islamic education system and the madrasa education system widened. It is also worth noting that at present certain parallels with the situation under colonial rule and post Partition are highlighted, because many seem to perceive the Muslim minority today as being in a similarly vulnerable position as during those times of crises, especially post 9/11.

2.4 The post 9/11 media debate

Girls' madrasas also appeared in a very different set of writings that is in the English medium Muslim press. If some of the early Urdu medium writings were an attempt to rewrite history, these articles are part of debates that emerged post 9/11. While the non-Muslim media attempted to establish a link between madrasa education and forms of violence, the Muslim media utilized examples of 'modern' madrasas to show the new face of Islamic education. Among these 'modern' institutions of Islamic learning, girls' madrasas were mentioned as examples indicating how 'progressive' madrasa education can be. I would like to give an insight into these debates, as they also convey an impression of the post 9/11 Muslim concerns, the period in which I did my fieldwork.

The Muslim newspaper materials used below are representative of those who reacted to newspaper articles published in the English non-Muslim dailies from late 2001 onwards. The tone of the non-Muslim newspaper articles often bore resemblances with earlier colonial discourses that had utilized similar imageries of Muslims as naturally inclined toward violence.[16] The madrasas fitted into this imagery as the alleged 'breeding grounds' for the 'angry young man', thought to be readily available for initiating anti-national and terrorist activities. By contrast, concerned Muslim authors suggested that even if violence was consciously taught in some madrasas, we ought to take into account structural factors in such contexts. In their opinion, 'Islamic militancy […] has a strong element of class conflict […] as they [the students, M.W.] are also from poor backgrounds they express their sense of being cheated by society in the idiom of religion' (Rahman 2004:9). The responses can be categorized in three sets: those countering 'incorrect allegations' of non-Muslims, those arguing for reform of the madrasa system, and those providing positive examples of madrasa education.

Starting with those countering the 'incorrect allegations', historian Muzaffar Alam notes that 'the sad part of the present times is that the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party, M.W.] Government has been targeting these madrasas as breeding ground for conservatism and obscurantism' (Alam 2002). Another author states that post 9/11 the madrasas 'end up proving their secular credentials besides providing the authorities with certificates of loyalty' (Ahmed 2002). While the allegations attempted to project an image of the madrasas characterized by indoctrination, violence, and backwardness, historically speaking the madrasas were major centres of learning, scientific innovation, and high culture, as we saw in the previous sections. With a view to proving their point, my interlocutors often claimed that much of what had been published about the madrasas in the non-Muslim media lacked empirical validity. Especially the Delhi-based English medium Muslim newspaper *Milli Gazette* made great efforts to counter the allegations that were published in the non-Muslim media on an almost daily basis. According to the *Milli Gazette*'s chief editor Zafarul Islam Khan, today's negative images regarding the madrasas tend to be based on information about the neighbouring Pakistani situation or the border region madrasas. Owing to structural factors, such as the ongoing tensions over Kashmir and unceasing cross border violence, the environment is much more politicized in both settings. For that reason conclusions based on the two above-mentioned contexts is far from being representative of the overall situation regarding madrasa education in the rest of the country. Similarly, in reaction to a controversial report on madrasas issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Zafarul Islam Khan points out that 'Until now the authorities have not been able to identify a single madrasa in the country providing any sort of military training' (Sikand 2003). In order to fully appreciate Khan's statement, we ought to keep in mind that radical Hindu organizations are known to run schools that provide military training among other subjects. As opposed to the madrasas, even post 9/11 the curricula of schools with such agendas of violence remain by and large unquestioned.

The media discourse on madrasas also gave rise to other reactions, such as the repeated call for reform of the madrasa education system. Both Muslim and non-Muslim advocates opined that the establishment of a Central Madrasa Board would render the madrasa system more transparent.[17] For the Muslim advocates the need for funding and hopes for recognition of madrasa education as an alternative in its own right appeared to be the pivotal concerns. By contrast, the non-Muslim advocates seemed to hope for more transparency in order to check the madrasas' funding sources,

curb possible links with terrorist organizations in the border regions, promote assimilation to the non-Islamic education system, and to gain a say in the regulation of madrasa curricula with a view to exerting control. As a consequence, Muslim reactions to the proposed establishment of a Central Madrasa Board were ambivalent. While admitting that 'steps should be taken to encourage these institutions [i.e. madrasas, M.W.] to add inputs on modern education', concerned Muslims also expressed anxiety that the central monitoring of the madrasas could lead to interference on the part of the non-Muslim state. Despite such anxieties, it is a widely shared perception that reforms are necessary, as concerns centre mainly on the question of the future perspectives of madrasa graduates. One author mentions the example of a madrasa that recently increased the length of its course from fifteen to sixteen years, but 'even after completing such a lengthy and boring course, students fail to get anything'. For that reason 'there is a great need to streamline these madrasas and put them on a track', which could be among the tasks of a Central Madrasa Board (Rahman 2002).

By and large the suggested cooperation between the madrasas and the state was perceived as a 'welcome step'. The cooperation entailed the alleviation of fund raising for the madrasas, while in return the madrasas would give up their independent status and allow the state to monitor their activities. One newspaper article stated that 'amid growing allegations of misuse of madrasas by terrorists, Delhi government is working to register all such religious institutions in the capital and set up a board to run them to help remove the 'crisis of credibility'' (*Times of India*, 23 June 2002). Still, apprehensions continued to be expressed as well, as only a few weeks later another article titled 'Muslim Law Board opposes bill on madrasas' reported that 'terming the setting up of a Madrasa Board an infringement of the Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution and an interference in the rights of Muslims, […] participants said it was a deliberate ploy to defame these educational institutions […]' (*Times of India*, 23 September 2002). In reaction to the above article, a concerned Muslim reader opined on the internet that the setting up of a Central Madrasa Board was 'yet another government effort to harass poor Muslims […]. If the government is serious in combating extremism, then why just madrasas, why not temple trusts?[…]'. Apparently this was a feeling shared by many, as it seemed to be a common fear that instead of improving the situation for the madrasas, the state might strive to regulate and control them. In the words of the same reader, 'there is a fear that these monitoring bodies might be turned into regulatory bodies'. Moreover, so far the government-

run madrasas in other states have not proven to function well. Turning to government programmes launched in an attempt to promote the assimilation of madrasas to non-Islamic education, Zafarul Islam Khan of the *Milli Gazette* notes that 'in principle that [the government programmes, M.W.] sounds fine, but in practice it is very difficult to get funds from the state. Funds will only be given to a madrasa if it receives a prior security clearance […] even to get a simple birth certificate one has often to pay a bribe […] these hurdles make it impossible for many madrasas to access funds from the state' (Sikand 2003:3).

Finally, a range of positive newspaper articles familiarized the readers with madrasas of a different kind. I would like to take up the following examples to show what arguments were made with regard to the Jamiatul Hidaya in Jaipur, the Markazul Maarif in Mumbai, and finally the Jamiatus Salehat in Rampur. The 'hi-tech madrasa' Jamiatul Hidaya is mentioned, as it represents a 'completely new experiment with the traditional madrasa education system'. Apart from teaching theological subjects, based on a combination of the curricula of the Darul Ulum Deoband, the Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow, and the Mazahir Ulum in Saharanpur, this madrasa also provides training in *duniyavi* or non-Islamic subjects. Moreover, the Jamiatul Hidaya offers degree courses in computer applications, accounts and business management, and pharmacy. In the author's opinion, this 'institution is an apt example of how a madrasa must be in the age of science and technology'. By contrast, graduates from madrasas that are less well equipped face the dilemma that 'poor students who pass out from these madrasas quite unfortunately become misfits in the practical world since they can't decipher numbers on the buses or stations' names while travelling in a train.' Unlike these 'unfortunate ones', the graduates of this 'Oxford of the madrasa education in the country' are able to find 'prestigious jobs in places like Citibank, Kuwait Embassy, Luxor Pens, Escorts, Indian Railways, Rashtriya Sahara, etc.' (Ahmed 2002).

The above article suggests once more that future trajectories of madrasa graduates form an urgent concern (see Chapter 5). In that regard, the Mumbai based post-graduation education centre Markazul Maarif represents an innovative concept. The Markazul Maarif trains graduates from madrasas all over the country, including the Darul Ulum in Deoband, the Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow, and the Mazahir Ulum in Saharanpur. Every year an average of twenty graduates clears an entry test advertised in madrasas, thereby obtaining permission and funding to follow the two year training in the Markazul Maarif. During the post-graduate course, subjects such as English and computer skills

are taught. In addition, the Markazul Maarif is a registered Non Governmental Organization dedicated to social work in various Indian states, wherein the organization operates English medium schools, primary schools, orphanages, and healthcare centres. What sets the Markazul Maarif apart is that 'They [the students, M.W.] have everything to surprise anyone believing in the orthodoxy of madrasa graduates. Meet them and get the first hand experience of what a madrasa student could look like after being given some exposure to English and good teachers'. Apart from describing what the Markazul Maarif does for its students, at the same time the above statement counters a host of stereotypes regarding madrasa students. For example, it is a widely shared view that madrasa students are conservative, that they do not speak English, and that madrasa teachers lack proper training. Apparently, the Markazul Maarif managed to tackle all of the above issues successfully, as 'with flowing beards and traditional madrasa dress of *kurta* and *pajama* not lower than ankles, these young people flaunt fluent English and etiquette believed to be prerogative of only people with a Public School background'. The Markazul Maarif strives to fill a void in its aim to change 'the whole perspective of madrasas and their outlook', as 'in this competitive world […] it is just impossible to walk without arming with modern education'. (Rahman 2002a).

While the Jamiatul Hidaya and the Markazul Maarif offer education for boys, the Jamiatus Salehat in Rampur has offered secondary education for girls for more than three decades. Founded by the earlier mentioned Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind, the madrasa caters to more than one thousand students from all over India. Apparently the Jamiatus Salehat 'is not only changing the concept of women education in the country but also giving a facelift to madrasa concept'. What is innovative about this 'dual type' girls' madrasa is that up to the eighth standard it 'follows complete NCERT [National Council for Educational Research and Training, M.W.] syllabus and teaches every subject taught in a modern public school.' The 'dual' curriculum means that along with Islamic subjects, Urdu, and Arabic, the Jamiatus Salehat implements the state curriculum and teaches English and computer education from standard five onwards. In addition, the madrasa offers various facilities on its campus, such as 'a small hospital, a canteen, a general store and a bank'. As the Jamiatus Salehat belongs to the oldest and largest public 'dual type' girls' madrasas in India, it inspired others to set up similar institutions, as we will see in Chapter 4 (Rahman 2001). The above examples show that post 9/11 the already existing tensions within the madrasa education system led to an even sharper polarization. The situation necessitated a rethinking of madrasa education, and expressions thereof tended to be located between

being apologetic and confident. Among the latter girls' madrasas appeared again in the debate.

2.5 Returning to the emergence of girls' madrasas

During fieldwork, another Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon (Maharashtra) was commonly referred to as the oldest girls' madrasa in post-Partition India. This girls' madrasa was founded in the early 1950s, while the above-mentioned Jamiatus Salehat in Rampur came into being roughly twenty years later in the early 1970s. My interlocutors suggested on many occasions that the 1975 Islamization of Education conference held in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) was crucial for the post-Partition mushrooming of girls' madrasas in India. From India, Maulana Mukarram al-Nadwi attended the conference and subsequently founded the Muhammadiya Education Society in Mumbai. Similar to the earlier mentioned Islamization of Knowledge project, those associated with the Muhammadiya Education Society advocated the integration of Islamic and non-Islamic subjects in the madrasa curriculum. In addition to introducing 'dual' curricula in madrasas, a second idea that found enthusiastic following was promoting madrasa education for girls. This idea was well received in certain circles, as it was justified in historical terms. The history of women's education in Islam is briefly sketched in a recent issue of an Urdu magazine called *Hijab Monthly*. The main argument reminds of the late nineteenth century reformist ideas regarding women's education, which in turn are representative of explanations I heard during fieldwork:

> 'Once Islam was considered synonymous with education, because Islam didn't confine education to a particular caste or class. The Prophet made it compulsory for each and every Muslim to seek education. Imparting education to girls and women was a matter of great concern to the Prophet. He used to teach them and through them also their family members and close kin. However, following the 'golden age' Islamic scholars did not pay as much attention to the education of women and consequently it became a rare phenomenon. The need of the hour demands that society faces its negligence in order to stop this discrimination against women to the extent that every girl and woman should be educated, as the responsibility of educating and guiding future generations rests with her. Only this way the Muslim ummah may be able to regain its lost glory. The Prophet didn't confine his efforts to making women literate, as according to him it didn't suffice to acquaint women

> with one particular aspect of knowledge. The Prophet drew people's attention to teaching women even trifle things, though he was especially concerned with teaching them Islamic knowledge. To the Prophet it was clear that education represents the backbone of any society that generates intelligence, consciousness, and perception. Absence of these qualities may lead to its downfall, and hence the principal cause for the 'backwardness' of Muslim society is that it didn't pay much attention to women's education.' (Ibn-e-Fareed 2000:107-110)

Two points are emphasized in the above account, namely the precedent set by the Prophet with regard to educating women and that educating women is necessary today with a view to guiding the future generations and for the Muslim ummah to regain its lost glory. Taking such notions down to the family, as it were, the promotion of education for girls is also addressed in a poem found in the *Ladkion ka Islami Course*[18] (*The Girls' Islamic Course*), which is also used in the Madrasatul Niswan:

> *Ladki hai ek daulat* (A girl is wealth):
> 'Girl Child: A Gem of Society
> O successful man! O eloquent man
> You are anxious – Don't worry
> God gifted the girl to you
> She is like a beam of light in your life
> She is the gift of God
> She is the solace of your heart
> She has the key to prosperity
> She is laughing and reciting:
> I am the flower from paradise
> I am drenched in perfume
> I am coming from paradise
> I am she. Recognize me
> Whom the Prophet
> Used to love
> God gifted him, too
> First a girl-child like me
> She is a source of light
> For the whole human flight
> Praise thy God
> Prostrate before the Lord

As the girl is a blessing
As the girl is a gem
As the girl is wealth
God's gift, God's boon
She is light, she is solace
Welcome her unhesitatingly
Win her blessings
Either boy or girl
Both are a gift of God
Educate her
Discipline her
Teach her good conduct
The etiquette of life, too
She is the princess of your palace
She is a ray of hope for you
Don't get angry with her
Don't get angry with her' (Siwhari n.d.:3-4)

In order to fully appreciate the meaning of the above poem, we should keep in mind that many valorize having a male child more than having a girl in India. Giving birth to female offspring is often charged with negative emotions, as the mother may be ostracized by her family, owing to which her daughters in turn may end up being 'punished' for being girls. By contrast, the poem exhorts fathers that both boys and girls are gifts from God. For that reason it is the father's duty to educate his daughter, to teach her discipline and good conduct, which appear to form the cornerstones for the educational model laid out for Muslim girls, as we will see in Chapter 4.

To conclude, contemporary Urdu materials link the emergence of girls' madrasa with the educational model laid down in the times of the Prophet. While prior to Partition home teaching seemed to be the most common form of informal education for Muslim girls, the particular history of India with its colonial interim and the Muslim minority situation post Partition forms the background to the emergence of girls' madrasas. The latter were built on the ideological foundation established by the late nineteenth century Muslim reformers with their views regarding women's education, the role of women in society, and their ideals of Islamic womanhood. However, with regard to the curriculum of girls' madrasas today, the shift from informal education to institutionalized education called for innovations and modifications of the reformist ideas and the standardized madrasa curriculum, as we will see in the following chapters.

1. By contrast, regarding academic sources on the history of madrasa education for boys, see for example Alam 1999; Brandenburg 1978; Grandin 1997; Makdisi 1981.
2. Qamaruddin, who is affiliated with the Hamdard Education Society in Delhi, claims that there is a total of approximately 35,000 madrasas in India. Out of these, he suggests that roughly eight to ten percent are girls' madrasas, which amounts to a total of over three hundred. One of Qamaruddin's research assistants allowed me to make use of his survey like data on girls' madrasas across the country.
3. With a view to 'defining' the Muslim organizations mentioned in this section, I would like to note briefly that the Deobandis are known for their scripturalism in religious matters and apoliticism in worldly affairs. Their main opponents are the Barelwis who are known for their mystical inclinations and their less averse stance regarding things political. Finally, the lay preachers' movement known as Tablighi Jamaat believes in the necessary separation of politics and religion. For that reason it is an apolitical movement with a broad outreach, owing to its doctrinal simplicity and ideological transsectarianism. As a reform movement, it promotes the realization of a religious identity directed toward the universal Muslim community or ummah (see also Eickelman and Piscatori 1996:148-154)
4. In addition, I also used journals and periodicals found at the All India Milli Council (Taalim 1994) and at the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre (see Chapter 4).
5. The Institute of Objective Studies is associated with the Islamization of Knowledge project. In the educational sector, the project aims at the integration of Islamic and non-Islamic subjects. Those in favour of such integrative measures argue that Islamic education could benefit from state resources while remaining committed to its Islamic vision. The publications issued by the Institute of Objective Studies include a directory of Muslim organizations in Delhi, yet another survey-like book on dini madaris (Ansari 1997), and a study on Indian Muslim women since Independence (Hashia 1998).
6. For example, a retired lecturer of the Jamia Millia Islamia University still recalled the times of home teaching in the neighbourhood she lived in. Similarly, another retired teacher at the Anglo-Arabic College added to the collage of impressions with his memories of the Persian home teaching, which the female family members of his household had received.
7. Among the non-Islamic subjects taught were Arabic, Arabic literature, mathematics, history, astrophysical geography, chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacology, and medical sciences. Philosophy was not included in the madrasa curriculum, as the subject was restricted to classes held in mosques. Finally, while the primary language of instruction was Arabic, Syrian and Greek were compulsory for the students of medical sciences.
8. Apart from other examples, Chaudhry mentions that Ibn Batutta received such academic certificates or ijazas from two female scholars. One of them was Zaynab al-Miqdisi, who was also called *Rihlat al-Dunya* or 'Attraction of her Age' (Chaudhry 1953:73).

9. In addition, the author suggests that regional differences concerning the practice of gender segregation should be taken into account, as for example fifteenth century women in Spain had 'much more freedom of associating with men than women in the rest of the Islamic world'. Similarly, the learned Indian Mughal princesses enjoyed the company of 'literary persons', such as poets, writers, and religious scholars (Chaudhry 1953:81).
10. Like the girls' madrasa I did fieldwork in, the Islamic Centre is located in Nizamuddin. The Islamic Centre was founded by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan himself, who was born in 1925 in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh (Azamgarh). Disillusioned with his earlier associations with the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind and the Tablighi Jamaat, he founded the Islamic Centre with a view to bringing about an 'Islamic revival' (see Khan 1986; 2001).
11. The Ahl-e-hadith movement is known for the propagation of a 'pristine and pure' Islam, owing to which it is associated with the Wahhabis and the Salafis. Dating back to the post 1857 period, during the 1880s the movement became synonymous with socio-religious reform. Typically, followers of the Ahl-e-hadith deem Sufism and the veneration of saints at shrines un-Islamic and they do not practice adherence to any particular school of thought in matters of jurisprudence (i.e. they are *ghair taqlid*; see Khan 2001 regarding the question why the association with the Salafis is preferred over the term Wahhabi).
12. Following Partition in 1947 the Jamaat-e-Islami split up into a Pakistani and an Indian branch called the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind. According to Grare, the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind faced the challenge of preserving the cultural and ideological legacy of its founder Maududi, while remaining receptive toward contextual questions emerging in a Muslim minority context like India, wherein the organization could not monopolize the representation of all Muslims in the public sphere. Owing to this dilemma, the main activities of the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind are restricted to religious education and matters related to Muslim personal law (Grare 2001:98, 101).
13. Among the Indian Sunnis, the main allegiances are claimed to be either with the so-called Salafiyya movement, which is more commonly referred to as Wahhabi in the Saudi Arabian setting wherein the movement originates, or with the Nadwatul Ulama, known as liberalist. In India, the Salafis include the so-called Wahhabis and the followers of the Ahl-e-hadith movement. The Nadwatul Ulama in turn attempts to bring about reconciliation between the different Islamic schools of thought (*madhhaib*) in matters of jurisprudence. Moreover, the organization is known to be favourably inclined toward the independent application of reason in matters of jurisprudence called *ijtihad* and advocates an inclusive concept of Islam.
14. The concept of purdah denotes wearing 'modest dress', including a veil and burqa, as well as female segregation, which will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

15. Shedding light on how such stereotypes come into being, an essay on the Pakistani madrasas mentions the so-called radd texts (Rahman 2004:7). These texts serve to refute 'alien' philosophies and although they are not included in the official madrasa curriculum, such tracts are readily available and consumed. The treatises typically address a multitude of everyday topics, thus ensuring a broad outreach. In the radd texts, the 'West' is generally sketched as depraved, while Islam is presented as superior and under a constant threat of corruption by alien influences. In the bookshops of Nizamuddin such tracts were available in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, English, and French. Although the influence of the radd literature has not been discussed in depth so far, I share Rahman's opinion that its influence may be substantial on the minds of madrasa students from lower to lower middle-class backgrounds with little to no exposure to alternative forms of education.
16. See Gupta 2001 for an analysis of these colonial imageries of the Muslim man.
17. Till this date, in states such as Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh Madrasa Boards function as administrative organizations that check the incoming funds of their affiliated madrasas and serve as a link between the madrasas and the state.
18. *The Girls' Islamic Course* or *Ladkion Ka Islami Course* is also included in the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan (see Appendix II; see also Jeffery 2004).

3 The 'men behind the curtain' and the tablighi link

The following sections give a first insight into the setting wherein the actual fieldwork took place. As mentioned earlier, the onset of my fieldwork was influenced by the aftermath of 9/11. Madrasas increasingly drew public attention due to the alleged link between madrasa education and forms of violence. As a result, access to girls' madrasas was problematic. Once a first contact with the Madrasatul Niswan was made, I first got to know the men in charge of running the madrasa from 'behind the curtain'. It turned out that the men were affiliated with the lay preachers' movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat, which seemed to have an impact on the worldview and educational outlook of the men in charge.

3.1 'Doing research' post 9/11

During the planning phase of my fieldwork prior to 9/11 I intended to begin fieldwork by following up on my brief pilot study in Delhi and Hyderabad in late 2000. At that time, two staff members of the Henry Martyn Institute had introduced me to a girls' madrasa in Hyderabad.[1] However, in the aftermath of 9/11 the situation in Hyderabad and Delhi had changed significantly. When returning to the field in late September 2001, it became obvious that the new war on terrorism initiated by the United States also had an impact on the Indian setting and on the Muslim minority in particular. As a result, it was problematic to get access to girls' madrasas, because madrasas in general had come under close scrutiny due to their alleged links with violence and terrorism, as we saw in the previous chapter. Against the background of the mainly negative publicity spread by the non-Muslim dailies, the odds of starting a research project on girls' madrasas were anything but favourable. In addition, in Delhi I initially lacked the contacts I had in Hyderabad, owing to which I had to find a different point of entry.

To begin with, I called in the help of a colleague, who introduced me to local friends who accompanied me to a number of Islamic girls' schools in Old Delhi. Moreover, I consulted directories of Muslim organizations

in Delhi, through which I found addresses and phone numbers of girls' madrasas. On the one hand, it turned out to be relatively easy to interview representatives of various Muslim organizations, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind, the Jamaat-e-Ulama-e Hind, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, the editor of the *Milli Gazette*, as well as university lecturers at the Jamia Millia Islamia University, the Zakir Husain Centre for Islamic Studies, the Jamia Hamdard University, and finally the Hamdard Education Society, at the time.[2] Apparently a Muslim counter discourse was taking shape in reaction to the allegations voiced in the media and on the streets, owing to which many 'public figures' were eager to be heard. On the other hand, women working in girls' madrasas in Old Delhi seemed anything but eager to be heard, because all attempts at making contact over the phone or in person failed. Another practical problem was that whenever I tried to contact women by phone, I had to talk to the men, such as husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, or cousins, prior to being allowed to talk to the women I wished to speak to. Most of the time it did not even come to that, until a few weeks later I was finally allowed to meet two women working in a small girls' madrasa in Old Delhi. The entire family seemed almost apologetic about being so uncooperative at first, and they explained that recently they had heard about journalists, both Indian and foreign, who feigned interest in the madrasas only to write terrible things about them. In addition, these journalists had got their informants into trouble with the (non-Muslim) authorities.

After two or three visits to the family, during which I found out a little about the small neighbourhood girls' madrasa in question, I asked if I could accompany one of the women teaching there. The teacher replied that she would have to ask permission for such a visit first, as outsiders were generally not welcome in the madrasa and even more so foreign non-Muslims. After much haggling, ultimately the permission for me to visit the madrasa was not given. I even resorted to a different strategy by trying to get access to the girls' madrasa through the head of the council running it. Since nothing appeared to work, I decided to pay another brief visit to Hyderabad. There the scenario was similar and I was no longer allowed access to the girls' madrasa I had visited one year before. After I returned to Delhi, tensions seemed to ease slightly toward the end of 2001. With the help of a colleague, the initial contact with the Madrasatul Niswan in Nizamuddin turned out to be more fruitful, as I was allowed to visit regularly from late November 2001 onwards.

3.2 **A developing rapport**

One day, the *nazim* or Manager gave me permission to come to the madrasa regularly in the front office of the Madrasatul Niswan. This breakthrough was facilitated by his decision that I intended to do something useful with my research. While doing research was something familiar to him, it was something quite alien to the young women inside the madrasa, who continuously asked me which university in Delhi I was affiliated with, when I was going to attend classes, and why I spent my time with them when I had my own work to do. Similarly, during the first months of fieldwork my otherness was a central concern. As a result, the students and others I met in the madrasa deemed it important to achieve my conversion to Islam.

Among those who wished to see me convert was an elderly Maulana, who introduced himself as a friend of the Founder and in charge of the madrasa's front office on the day I met him. We exchanged phone numbers, as he pointed out that he had some interesting reading materials for me. During my Urdu class later on the same day my cell phone rang, and after a short while I figured out that it was the same Maulana. He called to convince me to repeat *subhan allah* (all glory be to God) after him a number of times over the phone, thereby embracing Islam under his guidance for my own good, as well as his own.[3]

A few days later, the Madrasatul Niswan's Manager let me know through one of the students that a befriended Maulana was waiting for me in his perfume shop in the nearby bazaar. Although I was aware that such contacts with men put me in an unfavourable light in the eyes of the young women in the madrasa, I nevertheless decided to meet the Maulana that day. In this case I hoped that my position as a researcher would grant me a small bonus regarding my respectability. When I arrived at the shop and the Maulana and I exchanged polite greetings, I noticed the presence of a young man, who looked at me a lot less favourably than his friend. Like the latter, he was a recent Deobandi graduate, and then the three of us sat down inside the small perfumer's shop, which was open toward the street, so that everything going on inside the shop was within sight for everyone passing by. The young graduate eyed me with an openly hostile look and kept his gaze lowered while the Maulana and I talked about everyday events in the girls' madrasa and his business. When the Maulana asked the young man what was wrong with him, he replied with a fiery glance that it was not right for his friend to talk to me, as I was not properly covered. Indeed, only my head was covered with a dupatta or scarf, and because I never wore a 'proper' burqa and hijab, the irritated young man expressed that I would go to Hell

for that and left. This was not the first encounter involving 'eschatological negotiations', as earlier on the same day another Maulana had condemned me for being a Christian in the front room of the Madrasatul Niswan, claiming that I would surely go to Hell for that on the Day of Judgment. However, it also deserves mention that in the morning the Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan and in the afternoon the Maulana stood up for me, as they explained that in their eyes I was doing good work and for that reason I would not go to Hell.

A third episode took place some time later, once I had started teaching 'spoken English' at the Principal's request. I was with the final year students that day and we had finished our lesson from the *English Reader* when one of the girls asked me whether I had read the Quran. When I said that I had, the same girl asked whether I had performed the ritual ablutions (*wudu*) prior to touching the Quran. I had to admit that I had not performed wudu, trying to explain that I had read the Quran in university and that, in fact, a non-Muslim had taught me Arabic. While some of the students indicated that they got my point, the girl who had triggered off the discussion insisted that it was very wrong to know the ritual obligations without abiding by them, irrespective of the circumstances. She and her friend then continued to give me a detailed 'lecture' about wudu and explained how I should have performed the ablutions correctly. Once they had finished their lecture, the girls asked if now I knew how to perform wudu. When I said yes, hoping that thereby I would be able to make my way out of the situation, the girls insisted that I should repeat exactly what they had told me about wudu and how to perform it the right way. I took a deep breath and started all over again, being reprimanded sharply as I got the requirements wrong a few times with regard to when to start from the left and when to start from the right side. Having stood the critical test of so many learned ears, once I finished the girls said that now it was time for me to come with them and perform wudu to wash off my sins and embrace Islam. This time, I was 'saved by the bell', as class was over and the Principal *badi appa* came in and told the girls to stop.

Following the above lecture, the Principal suggested that it might be better if I continued teaching the third year students. But it turned out that this group of students was even more activist in their attempts at converting me than the earlier group. This time, without much ado or rhetoric the girls literally cornered me after class. As the ceilings were too low for me to stand comfortably without banging my head, I sat on the floor when they asked me whether I knew the Islamic profession of faith (*kalimah*). When I

said that I did, they urged me to recite it, thereby becoming a Muslim, or else I would go to Hell on the Day of Judgment. As their strategy failed, following another teaching session the same students resorted to calling in the help of a first year student, who spoke English well. She asked me if I knew Arabic and when I replied that I did, she asked if I also knew the Islamic profession of faith (kalimah). When again I replied that I did, she said that if I knew the kalimah, she wanted to hear it from me, or else she would not believe that I knew Arabic. When I countered that I knew what the recitation of the kalimah implied and that hence I did not think it appropriate for me to recite it, she gave it one last try saying that I if I knew Arabic and had read the Quran, there was no reason why I should not embrace Islam and recite the kalimah right now. In the end, she smiled at my persistent refusal, which she seemed to accept as the outcome of her attempt at persuading me to convert.[4]

Having sketched the above incidents from my point of view, the students' perspective deserves mention as well. Keeping in mind that the madrasa with its underlying educational aim of bringing about personal reform trains the students in a particular style of call to faith (*dawah*), there I was as a perfect subject for trying out their different strategies. Still, when the Principal came to know about the above 'incident', she apologized on behalf of the students, saying that she had heard how they had 'bothered me'. She suggested that it might be better if one of the teachers accompanied me for my classes from now on to keep the students from bothering me more. As a consequence, I gradually became more familiar with the other teachers and began to spend more time in the staff room, where my pending marriage was of great common interest. It was also then that the idea took root that this was an even better time for me to convert, as I could then convert my entire family-in-law as well. Knowing that my husband-to-be was a Hindu, the teachers repeatedly asked me whether he and his family did not have a problem with my coming to the madrasa regularly. My in-law's 'mixed' (Sikh-Hindu) religious background and their lenience vis-à-vis my work became new topics for discussion. These conversations assumed a much more sympathetic tone than the situations sketched above, as the issue of my conversion seemed to gradually turn into a sort of 'running-joke' that provided an initial thread of continuity to our conversations in the staff room.

Following my wedding in November 2002 my position inside the madrasa changed once more. Despite my persistent refusal to convert, the teachers and students appeared to have come to terms with my otherness by assigning me the role of the new daughter-in-law or *bahu*, and soon that of an expectant mother. As most of them were familiar with both roles

in the Indian extended family system, my new standing within the family seemed to suffice for granting me a place among the teachers as well. At last I seemed to fit in, and following a period of struggle that had lasted for months, the situation began to change for the better. With our conversations moving away from the issue of conversion, there was more space for other topics. As we will see in the following chapters, common ground emerged in areas such as the female body, motherhood, child rearing, education, and values. In addition, because I was an outsider the young women considered me knowledgeable in duniyavi or worldly matters. As a consequence, the teachers and students often asked me questions regarding anything and everything about life in other countries, family structure, and religion. Sometimes, one or the other of the young women approached me with a written question, usually of a more intimate content, such as questions related to contraceptives, which seemed to be a topic of great concern, although never in public. Some of the married teachers seemed especially concerned about child spacing, as they told me that they did not want to become pregnant (again) too soon. Even though 'officially' practices related to contraception and 'family planning' were considered forbidden in this community, the complexity of the young women's lives often made them aware of the necessity to interfere with what was otherwise referred to as God's will. Practical as they were, the young women knew how difficult it would be to provide good education for many children these days and how frequent child bearing could wear out the mother. Moreover, as the young women were proud of and loved their work as teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan, they also showed concern for their professional status. Only the Principal appeared to form an exception, as she had already experienced numerous pregnancies. In general, questions related to contraceptives and child spacing pointed to an intriguing interweaving of principles dictated by belief and ideas introduced through the young women's access to information, which is a point that will return in Chapter 5.

Sharing time and space over a long period of time allowed for common ground to emerge, as a result of which both sides changed. While above I described some of the changes I observed in the young women I met in the madrasa, it deserves mention that I changed as well. During the early stages of my fieldwork I mostly felt inadequate. The young women seemed to derive self-esteem and peace of mind from their daily routine consisting of studies, set times for ablutions, prayers, and Quran recitations. By contrast, I was generally shaken by the time I arrived in the madrasa. The environment often made an overwhelming impression on my daily walks

to the madrasa, as there were always the ill, the beggars, the dirt, and the butcher shops. Generally I tended to cover my head when walking through the area, but once I had small stones thrown at me by young Hindu boys who thought I was a foreign convert to Islam. When I left my head uncovered the Muslim shopkeepers hissed at me or passed snide remarks, because I was not dressed 'properly'. After all, I walked the area almost every day for months at a stretch, and they knew I went to the madrasa. In their opinion I probably should have known how a decent woman ought to dress. Owing to the above impressions I tended to feel at a loss most of the time, not knowing what to do in order to feel more at ease.

Finding an alternative route to reach the madrasa helped to some extent, as it allowed me to avoid some of the emotional turmoil caused by the surroundings. However, difficulties still seemed to continue inside the madrasa. At first the feeling of being inadequate made me try to go out of my way to adjust, at least in terms of outside markers such as dress. I avoided wearing jewellery, which the young women interpreted in a different manner, because they thought me extremely unfortunate for not possessing any gold. In addition, I consciously dressed 'down'. In other words, I chose inconspicuous colours for my plain cotton suits and made sure that my head and chest were covered at all times. Despite all efforts I continued to feel physically out of place, as I was too tall for the low ceilings and everyone else seemed to be much shorter than me. In addition, my dupatta or scarf that was supposed to cover my head, shoulders, and chest never seemed to be long enough either. Although later on I was relieved to see that the dupattas also slipped off the teachers' and students' heads at times, the situation really began to improve once I stopped trying so hard to adjust. The more I 'became' myself again in this setting, the more I eased into the situation, and the more perceptive I was with a view to what was going on around me. The above process also made me more reflective regarding the culturally determined aspects of my identity, what roles I assume, and what roles are assigned to me. I had to struggle to overcome my initial resistance when visiting girls' madrasas in the Old City of Delhi and in Nizamuddin, as it took time to appreciate the finer details of those places, such as the remainders of beautiful architecture, but above all it was the people who turned the initial challenge into an experience I could appreciate.

3.3 The 'men behind the curtain'

The Founder was among the first people I met in the madrasa. He was a Deobandi graduate from Ansari[5] background, who came from the Barabanki district close to Lucknow. He established the Madrasatul Niswan in 1996 to 'improve the personal life of the students', with the aim of increasing religious consciousness, and with a view to creating equality in terms of access to religious knowledge for young Muslim women. In terms of his professional background, the Maulana was a trained Arabic teacher who continued teaching Arabic at the Kashful Ulum Madrasa for boys in the Tablighi Markaz or Centre, and his profession, in fact, had brought him and his family to Delhi. In the girls' madrasa, setting the curriculum was one of his foremost tasks and responsibilities. He once told me that 'the mother's lap is the first madrasa', which was a common statement that reminds of similar arguments made by the late nineteenth century reformers, who also ascribed great importance to training young women in Islamic matters with a view to turning them into more competent wives and mothers. The Maulana's argument took on a different direction, however, as he claimed that in theory there was nothing objectionable about women taking up a profession, as long as their professional life did not conflict with the requirements of purdah. He explained that the shariah permits women to work as long as she wears a burqa and works in a gender segregated environment. But he also made clear that in his opinion employment opportunities were less important than the strive for personal reform.

The Maulana was also the father of the Principal, who in turn married the madrasa's Manager or nazim, whom I will introduce now. Like the Maulana, the *Nazim-e-Jamia* or Manager claimed Ansari background, and besides being the Founder's son-in-law and the Principal's husband, the younger Maulana was also distantly related with the founders of the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon.[6] However, neither he nor his wife were able to recall the exact line of relatedness between their families. Unlike his father-in-law who studied in Deoband, the Manager received his secondary education at the Kashful Ulum Madrasa, run by the Tablighi Jamaat in the Nizamuddin Markaz, where he graduated in 1988. Following his graduation he did tablighi work for one and a half years, and during the same period he co-authored a commentary on the *Hayat-us-Sahaba* (*History of the Companions of the Prophet*) with his father-in-law.[7] In keeping with the views of his father-in-law, the Manager stated that the madrasa's educational aim was the improvement of Muslim women's 'personal life'. Even though employment opportunities again ranked second in his argument, he nevertheless pointed out that according to the shariah there was nothing wrong with a woman working in

the public sector, as long as she observed purdah by covering her body and by ensuring that her workspace remained outside the scope of unrelated men.

The Manager explained that only ten percent out of the approximately one hundred and eighty young women were 'local' students, by which he referred to the girls living in the immediate surroundings of the madrasa, adding that all the students come from 'poor to lower middle-class families'. He emphasized that not all of them were Ansaris, as the students' social background appeared to cut across castes. Most girls were from lower castes, and many of them got married at a young age. In fact, many were already married prior to enrolment in the Madrasatul Niswan, but the Maulana said that he intended for such malpractices to stop in the near future, because these 'early marriages' led to many problems, such as students' prolonged stays at home. Strikingly enough, pregnancies were not mentioned in this respect and during my fieldwork I did not witness cases of pregnancies among the married students either. The Manager also pointed out that other students and teachers remained unmarried longer than their peers. This observation indicates that the level of education may represent a problem for some of the young women when trying to find a suitable spouse, while for others their studies formed an acceptable excuse to postpone marriage.

According to both Maulanas, the madrasa had turned out to be a success so far, because even though the Madrasatul Niswan is mainly promoted by word of mouth, parents come to the madrasa 'like customers come to a shop'. In their opinion, it is the quality of education that makes the madrasa so popular. The Manager explained that the curriculum is based on the dars-e-nizami, be it in an adjusted form to fit the shorter duration of the course. Due to the extensive language classes in Urdu and Arabic, the course was meant to take six years initially, but according to the Manager 'clever' girls should be able to complete the course in five-years. While in his words the average graduation age ranged between eighteen and twenty two, my findings indicate that the recent batches of graduates were considerably younger than that, namely between fifteen and sixteen years of age.

Regarding the extent to which the contentious duniyavi or non-Islamic subjects are implemented in the Madrasatul Niswan, the official curriculum includes maths, Hindi, science, and English. However, my observations did not confirm that apart from English any of the above subjects were actually taught. When I asked the teachers about this divergence, the Principal replied that as for now they lacked sufficiently trained staff to teach the above subjects. As often madrasa teachers have had little to no exposure to

non-Islamic forms of education and training, the above-mentioned problem is of common concern. In the Madrasatul Niswan, the students are expected to have attended government schools up to class VII, which also serves as a justification why there is no need to teach more non-Islamic subjects. After all, the students should have had some exposure to non-Islamic education prior to their studies in a madrasa. By the same token, they were encouraged to pursue their studies after graduation in government colleges and universities. However, again my data indicate that most of the students and teachers did not have much or even any exposure to non-Islamic forms of education prior to enrolment in the Madrasatul Niswan.

One possible explanation is that the madrasa has only been operating for a few years, owing to which they might have needed all the students they could get initially. By now, those in charge of running the madrasa may have become more selective regarding the students' educational and social background, as the teachers in particular often complained about the students' lack of adab or manners, which they blamed on their 'poor' background. A second explanation is that those in charge would like to make their own example the rule. As I will show in the following section, the Founder, the Manager, the Principal, and those belonging to the 'core families' adhered to the view that it was desirable for girls below the age of purdah to receive the best (non-Islamic) education possible.

3.4 **A relatively closed community?**

While most of the current teachers and students had little to no exposure to non-Islamic education prior to their studies in girls' madrasas, it turned out that badi appa's' young daughters attended the Delhi Public School, together with another girl from the 'core families'. The Delhi Public School represents one of the more prestigious schools in Delhi and hence I wondered how the Manager could afford the monthly school fees for his daughters. Moreover, the families would have needed certain 'contacts' in order to get their daughters admitted to such a middle- to upper middle-class public school. The above conditions did not seem to tally with the overall impression I got of the circumstances the families lived under, even more so as the Principal badi appa vented frequent complaints regarding the lack of adequate financial resources to meet various ends.

The riddle was solved when I found out that the school in question ran two daily shifts. The first was the English medium morning shift, for which high monthly fees had to be paid, while the second shift in Hindi started

past noon and was free of charge. Although the school uniform and the classrooms were the same, the teachers were different, and the classes were free of cost. Aware of the above divide, badi appa requested me on many occasions to speak to the Delhi Public School's Principal on her behalf and ask whether the high fees for the English morning classes could be waived in the case of 'poor people from the madrasa', as badi appa formulated it. She also urged me to make further enquiries in order to find out 'how the school system works in India', which was a statement that puzzled me on two accounts. To begin with, this learned young woman did not seem to be familiar at all with the non-Islamic school system of her own country. In addition, it struck me how much she and her husband would have liked for their daughters to continue their education in an English medium school prior to reaching the age of purdah.

When I asked badi appa and some of the other teachers why they wanted for their daughters to receive English medium education and why they preferred for them to attend the Delhi Public School, they unanimously said that these days 'we think that it is good for girls to get as much education as possible prior to reaching the age of purdah', which is to say prior to puberty. While girls below that age should have as much exposure to non-Islamic or duniyavi subjects as possible, from puberty onwards they 'have time enough' to dedicate themselves exclusively to religious studies. The suggested educational trajectory represents an alternative to the 'dual type' madrasa, wherein the state curriculum is taught alongside Islamic subjects. What the teachers suggested was a combination of education in duniyavi or non-Islamic subjects and din or faith in stages divided by the marker of puberty.

Despite the alternative educational model that makes it possible for the generation of badi appa's daughters to receive more non-Islamic education, I realized that neither the Founder, nor the 'core families', teaching staff, or students for that matter seemed to have much experience with the non-Islamic education system in India, as they had by and large received their education in makatib, madrasas, vocational training centres, and primary (Urdu medium) Islamic schools. As a result, badi appa was once again surprised to hear that there were also English medium (government) schools that were free of charge. The issue of non-Islamic forms of education indicated how relatively closed the Madrasatul Niswan's community is, how little the young women appeared to be aware of what was going on in their immediate (non-Muslim) surroundings, and how little orientation they possessed in navigating the non-Muslim administration of their own country.

By contrast, the young women were very much aware of what was going on in the rest of the 'Muslim World'. One day, two women from the neighbourhood, who were acquainted with one of the teachers belonging to the 'core families', came to the staff room just before the Thursday Programme was about to start. The elderly women, whose teeth and gums were reddened owing to their habit of chewing aracea nuts or pan[8], made themselves comfortable among the teachers and started to discuss politics with them. As the pending war on Iraq worried the women at the time, they asked badi appa to incorporate prayers for peace in the Thursday Programme. They added with agitated voices that war always hurts the *chhote log* or 'small people', adding that they were unable to do anything to stop this war, as Muslims were but a minority in India.

Similarly, once I asked the Manager's opinion regarding the ongoing anti-madrasa propaganda, and he replied in somewhat cryptic imagery that 'those people' (non-Muslims) were in power and that 'he who wields the stick can control the buffalo', adding that 'those who are not willing to listen to us know it is day, but they say it is night'. He explained that while their Hindu neighbours were on friendly terms with them, as they witnessed every day that they did not do anything wrong in the madrasa, the 'high class' that did not interact with Muslims was to blame for creating misconceptions. My observations confirmed that the Hindus living next to the madrasa were on friendly terms with their neighbours. One day, on my way to the madrasa, the women sitting outside the small house, which was a scene that stood in striking contrast with the strict purdah observed right next door, greeted me with a polite namaskar and invited me to join them for a while. The women, who were roughly between seven and seventy years of age, asked if I was a student 'there', and they nodded their heads in the direction of the madrasa. When I affirmed, explaining that I was doing research 'there', they smiled and said they were proud to have such a 'good school' right next door.

On another occasion the Manager and I talked about the Delhi government's effort to establish a Central Madrasa Board. His friend, a Deobandi graduate, explained that there was a Madrasa Board in his home state Bihar, where the government paid madrasa staff for teaching non-Islamic subjects in the affiliated local madrasas. Although the teaching of duniyavi or non-Islamic subjects did not have a negative impact on the quality of teaching in the madrasas per se, the practice of cooperating with the government resembled begging in his opinion, which represented a blameworthy act. The Manager disagreed with the idea of a Central Madrasa Board altogether.

He thought government help was no good, because the teachers' salaries would no longer be paid by the community, but by the non-Muslim government. In addition, in his opinion the interference on the part of the government would have a negative influence on the *dini talim* or religious education. He added that it was nevertheless in accordance with the shariah to accept money from a non-Muslim government. By way of conclusion he suggested that a madrasa did not have to teach duniyavi or non-Islamic subjects, since the students were expected to be familiar with non-Islamic subjects, and following their studies they could seek admission in universities.

The above indicates that the Madrasatul Niswan was founded within a milieu of lower caste Muslims from outside Delhi. Moreover, the Founder's and Manager's views indicate that although the Madrasatul Niswan represents an institution with relatively closed community structures and a certain disregard for worldly matters, what is going on in the political domain does not leave those inside untouched. Finally, the families of the Founder, Manager, and the 'core families' were linked through their association with the lay preachers' movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat.

3.5 The 'core families' and the Tablighi Jamaat

Conversations with the Founder, Manager, and the Principal, brought to the fore that they were part of a network that linked them with a number of other families in basti Nizamuddin through common areas of origin, caste, and their active involvement in the Tablighi Jamaat[9]. To begin with, it struck me that two of the fourteen teachers were maternal cousins and that their female siblings above the age of purdah studied in the Madrasatul Niswan. Moreover, the cousins' fathers came from the same Barabanki district close to Lucknow as the Founder. Finally, like the Manager, the two fathers had studied in the Kashful Ulum Madrasa for boys in Nizamuddin, a madrasa established by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat. In short, the three families appeared to form the backbone for a lot of activities in the girls' madrasa, such as taking turns looking after daily affairs and setting the curriculum. In addition, the men were all actively involved in doing tablighi work, and the cousins' fathers taught in the Kashful Ulum Madrasa for boys like the Founder. Apart from kinship, the shared worldview influenced by their affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat appeared to have brought together this group of men, and bonds between the families were maintained, reinforced, and extended through arranged marriages between children of the 'core families'.

The 'core families' also played a crucial role at a broader level, as it was through family ties that an active exchange of teachers and students was facilitated between the Madrasatul Niswan, the Jamia Noorul Islam in Lucknow, and the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon. Exchanges between the three girls' madrasas in turn ensured the reproduction of the above networks, as for example a young teacher who had graduated from the Jamia Noorul Islam prepared to marry the younger brother of a teacher who had studied in the Jamiatus Salehat.[10] In the Madrasatul Niswan, teachers and students were mainly recruited through family ties and tablighi work, and similarly international contacts too were maintained through the tablighi work of the Founder and Manager. Both used to travel all over the country and beyond on a regular basis, also to raise funds for the madrasa. Many students from places outside Delhi told me that they had come to know about the Madrasatul Niswan through the travelling men associated with it.

The above observations hint at how the Tablighi Jamaat appeared time again in the course of my fieldwork, both in conversations and physically. As for the latter, the organization's headquarters referred to as Centre or Markaz earlier were located in the direct vicinity of the Madrasatul Niswan. On my daily walks to and from the madrasa, I observed some of the activities going on in that part of basti Nizamuddin, such as the arrival of overseas delegations, the departure of local delegations of tablighi activists, preparations for major meetings, and the like. Moreover, the many cassette tape sellers and petty trade people affiliated with the Tablighi Jamaat often proved to be important sources of information, both with regard to the Tablighi Jamaat's activities and with regard to the background of the Madrasatul Niswan.

During my search for literature on madrasa education, I found the bookshops of Nizamuddin most helpful. The bookshops in front of the Tablighi Markaz sold the theological books studied in the nearby Madrasatul Niswan off the shelf. Besides, numerous treatises for women or addressing the issue of women in relation to various contemporary subjects were available as well (see Chapter 4). From late 2001 onwards, it seemed as if more of these small booklets were stocked, the print quality was better, and often English or French translations were available as well. Links between the Madrasatul Niswan and the Tablighi Jamaat involve a third party, namely the Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow. With regard to the latter it deserves mention once more that the Madrasatul Niswan was founded under the patronage of the Nadwatul Ulama, which intended to represent the middle path between the Deoband and Aligarh[11]. In addition, some of its graduates, such as the afore mentioned Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, joined the Tablighi Jamaat later on.

Conversations with students and teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan suggested that many of their male family members, such as husbands, fathers, brothers, cousins, or uncles were active in the Tablighi Jamaat or taught in the Kashful Ulum Madrasa for boys in the nearby Tablighi Markaz. Generally, whenever the students and teachers spoke about their male relatives' tablighi activities, such as the regular travelling 'in the path of God', they did so with admiration. At times their admiration was paired with a tinge of envy, as their male relatives' lives appeared to symbolize the mobility, freedom, and excitement some of them seemed to miss. The young women appreciated their relatives' tablighi activities, as on many occasions they expressed regret that owing to their observance of a very strict form of purdah activities such as 'travelling in the path of God' were beyond their possibilities.[12] Still, the madrasa's curriculum prescribed the Tablighi Jamaat's core piece of literature or 'manual', namely the *Fazail-e-Amal* (*Virtues of Everyday Actions*), for daily reading all throughout the five-year course. Apart from learning about virtues, the girls were also trained in the tablighi style of dawah, which the students practised on me frequently, as we saw before.

The Tablighi Jamaat and the Madrasatul Niswan represent social structures that set them apart from their immediate surroundings, for example due to their disregard for the lavishness associated with weddings and due to what Metcalf refers to as the (temporary) inversion of gender roles in the case of the Tablighi Jamaat activists (Metcalf 2000). Concerning the inversion of gender roles, it is noteworthy that men prepared the food for the students and teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan, while the women in turn were merely in charge of cleaning the school building and of washing their clothes, as men were not allowed to enter the madrasa. Keeping in mind the limitations of the concept, according to Metcalf such an inversion of gender roles can be observed in the case of the Tablighi Jamaat too, as the men who 'travel in the path of God' are left to their own devices in terms of looking after their daily needs for the duration of their journey.

With regard to weddings, the students and teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan voiced a distinct contempt for the lavishness associated with them. Although in India weddings are generally seen as opportunities for displaying wealth, in the case of the Tablighi Jamaat and the Madrasatul Niswan opulent wedding celebrations are condemned for representing unnecessary and even blameworthy luxury. The community's attitude regarding weddings has a bearing on the identity of the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan, as for example dowry[13] and the otherwise often feared role of the new *bahu* or daughter-in-law seemed to be lesser concerns within this com-

munity. After all, at least in theory marriage was perceived as yet another pious act to be carried out in all its simplicity. Still, many students and teachers loved to talk about the gifts they expected or had been given, while the Principal in turn tended to reprimand them for indulging in worldly desires, such as wishing to receive beautiful gold rings, as wearing jewellery and fancy dresses were supposed to be frowned upon.

In line with the community's worldview, it seemed as if nothing was supposed to create unnecessary divides among the students. Equality was emphasized with regard to the obligation to pursue knowledge for men and women, with regard to justifying the sameness of the curriculum in the girls' madrasa, and finally also with regard to observing purdah. The latter implies that unlike the more common interpretation that defines purdah exclusively as female segregation and modest dress, here the concept is interpreted to denote modesty in dress and behaviour for men and women alike.[14] Equality was also promoted among the students by ensuring that all of them wore the same plain white trousers, long blouses, and white headscarves inside the madrasa and refrained from donning any jewellery. However, despite the strong emphasis on equality there were exceptions, because the girls developed strategies that allowed them to show their individuality within the given constraints through very subtle means. For example, the young women adorned their hands and feet with floral mehendi or henna designs, or they decorated their simple white blouses and trousers with hand painted floral patterns, at times they chose finer materials for their dresses than plain cotton, or they wore jewellery after marriage and justified it as their husband's wish, which could not be denied.

In addition to the emphasis on equality, the Madrasatul Niswan and the Tablighi Jamaat seek to create a milieu characterized by deep piety. In the case of the Tablighi Jamaat this becomes evident in the *Fazail-e-Amal*, wherein the processes of sanctifying everyday life and its actions are laid out in minute detail. The manual's basic teaching is that certain virtues associated with daily behaviour are valuable for the accumulation of religious merit (*sawab*) for the Hereafter. One of the *Fazail's* main teachings, namely that one should abstain from futile things, also seemed to play an important role for the everyday life in the Madrasatul Niswan. The students and teachers were rarely ever found with idle hands, because everyone seemed to be occupied doing something or the other, such as studying, reading, handiwork, or chores, at all times.[15] Since the meaning of these observations will be discussed in the following chapter in relation to the concept of the 'total institution', suffice it to note here that without holding virtues such as abstaining from futile things in high regard, the Madrasatul

Niswan would not be able to operate under the present circumstances, considering that space is very limited.

While linkages between the Madrasatul Niswan and the Tablighi Jamaat were obvious at the informal level, at the formal level such a linkage remains questionable, because the Tablighi Jamaat is known to oppose any formal association with educational institutions, let alone with a girls' madrasa. Trying to gain a better understanding of the Tablighi Jamaat's position regarding women and education, I came across a publication titled *Women in the Field of Education* (Yunus 1994) in one of the tablighi bookshops opposite the Centre or Markaz. Herein, the author defines tabligh (preaching) as an action based on the Prophet's call to faith (dawah) and the efforts adopted by the Companions (*Sahaba*), carried out with the aim of reviving faith (din) and Prophet's practice (sunnah) among the believers, out of a perceived need for self reformation (Yunus 1994:3-5). Reminding of similar arguments made by the late nineteenth century reformers, especially women are thought to be in need of self reformation, as they are found guilty of perpetuating un-Islamic customs associated with household rituals, while representing the source of guidance for future generations at the same time. The following quote indicates how seriously the task of educating and reforming women is taken: 'Failing to do this the women and their innocent offspring will be washed away in a flood of irreligiousness, and ruin their worldly and next lives' (Yunus 1994:13). In other words, if a child turns toward 'evil', then evil will reign, because of the parents' failure to provide an Islamic upbringing for the child. Evils that harm children and thereby also society at large include novels and fictitious books, theatre, cinema, television, and fashion (Yunus 1994:19-20). Consequently, women are obliged to know questions pertaining to Islamic law (*masail*) and to seek knowledge about creation and law (Yunus 1994:23, 52).

Characteristic of the tablighi views regarding women's education is the idealization of past role models combined with anxieties regarding new methods of teaching and new areas of studies. Because women are seen as equal to man with regard to acquiring the rewards of matters pertaining to faith, if a woman 'wishes' to acquire knowledge, purdah should not be a hindrance. Furthermore, a select few should pursue higher education so as to guide others with a view to reviving the Prophet's practice (sunnah) of the first century of Islam. The suggested method of teaching entails that ulama teach women at home '*from behind a curtain*', and those women in turn should teach other women in their locality. The underlying motivation for acquiring knowledge is 'to perfect one's life internally and externally',

while knowledge should also enable a person to earn a halal livelihood. In the proposed educational model Islamic knowledge (*ilm-e-din*) represents a means of earning rewards (sawab) for the Hereafter. The author's concluding advice is to promote home teaching for women, for which he explicitly recommends Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's afore mentioned *Bihishti Zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*; Yunus 1994:53-55, 58). In addition, women's self reformation is to be effected through weekly religious (dini) programmes for women, for example, which should include the following elements:

- weekly educational meetings (*talim*)
- reminders to perform prayers (*salat*) regularly
- reminders regarding punctuality in counting rosaries (*tasbihat*)
- encouragement to study books on virtues (*fazail*)
- constructive approach toward raising children
- encouragement to make an effort to send men out in the path of God (Yunus 1994:3-6)

In line with the above suggestion regarding the organization of weekly religious programmes for women, every Thursday afternoon a lecture (*bayan*) is held at the Tablighi Markaz exclusively for women. Many of the teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan's attend the lectures regularly, which a learned man holds from behind a curtain. As the teachers pointed out on many occasions, for them the weekly meetings were a source of inspiration, because they learned something new. In addition, the short trips to the Tablighi Markaz also meant occasions for brief but regular outings, which all of the young women appreciated since such opportunities were rare otherwise.

In the Madrasatul Niswan, similar weekly meetings or *jamaats* were organized for the students, their female family members, and for women from the neighbourhood, on Thursdays around noon.[16] The Thursday Programme generally consisted of recitations from the Quran, traditions of the Prophet (ahadith), prayer (*namaz*), religious poetry in Urdu (*naat*), exegesis (*tafsir*), Islamic law (*fiqh*), value oriented literature (adab), and finally also the students' own poems (naat) and anthems (*taranas*) in praise of the madrasa. The poems and songs referred to as naat and taranas respectively appeared to constitute one of the few socially accepted means for emotional expression. Besides, the sung poems and anthems represented the only forms of music allowed in the Madrasatul Niswan.

When I asked the teachers how the students learned to sing the anthems, they replied that tapes were readily available in the nearby Tablighi Markaz.

On another occasion, the students showed me their notebooks, wherein they had written down the poems and anthems. I saw that sometimes the Urdu and Arabic words were written in beautiful calligraphy, while other poems appeared to be merely scribbled down. When I tried to find out more about the difference, the young women told me that apart from reproducing lyrics and tunes from tapes, they also liked to copy tunes for lyrics they had written in praise of Islam, the Prophet, and the madrasa.[17] The students either learned to sing the anthems from the tapes directly, or one of the teachers sat down with a student in the staff room adjusting the student's composition to fit the tune. The student in turn repeated each line while writing down the words, sometimes adding marks that indicated the correct intonation and the rhythmical rise and fall of the voice. Apart from the well known Urdu poems and the readily available anthems, some of the melodies I heard the students sing during the Thursday Programme reminded of popular Hindi *filmi* tunes. Although according to the worldview of this Muslim community watching movies was considered forbidden as well, not being exposed to the latest Bollywood songs at all seems almost impossible in any Indian setting. Although the madrasa appeared to be relatively secluded, the catchy tunes that cut across lines of religion, class, and caste tend to permeate every small market or bazaar.[18]

Every Thursday the Programme was held following the morning teaching session, roughly between 11:30am and 2pm. After a quick lunch, the students, teachers, and women from the neighbourhood including the teachers' and students' relatives gathered in the largest section of the building, which was the ground floor. Approximately two hundred attendants could be seated on the floor and on the open upstairs gallery in orderly rows supervised by senior students. Once everyone had taken place, first the teachers in charge of organizing the Programme that day used to enter the tiny hall and proceeded to the very front, where they sat down facing everyone else from a slightly elevated section of the hall. With the handwritten programme for the day in hand, they took turns announcing the students' contributions through the microphone. The technical equipment was located in the front room, where the Manager usually sat with his guests and listened to what was going on behind the door that separated them from the girls.

As the Thursday Programme was held in Urdu and Arabic, the latter was translated into Urdu for those not familiar with the language. While for the young women belonging to the 'core families', knowledge of 'true Islam' was associated with the mastery of Arabic, for the majority of lower-caste rural stu-

dents, Arabic merely represented another tough subject they had to master. While the Quran was recited in Arabic, the exegesis of a Quranic text (tafsir) took place in Urdu, in a contrastingly familiar tone and merged with numerous moral appeals to the audience fashioned in the style of the value oriented adab literature, which will be examined in the following chapter. At the teachers' request, students came to the fore and presented their contribution to the meeting. In the meantime, the teachers often called other students to the fore as well to reprimand them for performing poorly during the past week. To summarize the weekly event, for the students it meant an occasion to demonstrate their skills, while for the teachers it seemed to be a routine that entailed an occasion for public disciplining. For those who came to listen from outside, the Thursday Programme with its diverse contributions was an opportunity to learn something about Islam and to be reminded of one's moral obligations, which appeared to be the primary aim of the weekly meetings.

The above findings indicate that once the initial difficulties related to access were overcome, it turned out that the Madrasatul Niswan was established in a particular intellectual milieu of lower caste Muslims from outside Delhi. In addition, the informal association of the men in charge with the Tablighi Jamaat and its particular views regarding women and education appeared to have a significant bearing on the educational ideas underlying the madrasa's curriculum and on the worldview of the people involved. As we will see in the following chapter, the educational views of the men in charge of running the Madrasatul Niswan did not always coincide with what was actually taught inside the madrasa. Although they claimed that the standardized madrasa curriculum for boys (dars-e-nizami) had merely been adjusted to fit the shorter duration of the course for girls, my observations suggest that the 'adjustments' were made in line with a particular understanding of Islamic womanhood.

1. See also 'Visiting a Women's Madrasa in Southern India', *ISIM Newsletter* 7 (April 2001), 14; revised German version: 'Besuch einer Frauen-Madrasa in Südindien' at: http://www.meome.de/app/de/artcont_portal_news_article_jsp/70796.html.
2. To provide a brief background to the three organizations mentioned: The Jamaat-e-Islami-e-Hind is a political party founded prior to Partition in 1941 in Lahore (now Pakistan) and ideologically it draws on Maududi (see also Grare 2001). The Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Hind is an organization of Indian Muslim scholars mainly associated with Deoband, and among the organization's publications is Al-Jamiyat, quoted in Chapters 2 and 4. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board came to be in post-Partition India, wherein the constitutional 'minority rights' granted freedom of religion, based on which Muslims have since maintained their own 'personal law' in line with the shariah. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board in turn was established to protect the Indian 'Muslim personal law' from attempts at reform on the part of the (changing) non-Muslim governments. The *Milli Gazette* is a Delhi-based Muslim newspaper published in English.
3. The significance of the phrase *subhan allah* has been explained using the following hadith: Sad bin Abu Waqqas said: Once when we were with God's messenger he asked whether any of us was incapable of acquiring a thousand blessings daily, and when one of those sitting with him asked how any of them could acquire a thousand blessings he replied, 'If he says Glory be to God (Subhan Allah) a hundred times, a thousand blessings will be recorded for him or a thousand sins will be removed from him.' J. Robson, 'The reward for glorifying, praising, declaring God's unity and His greatness', in: *God's Names*, Book X, *Mishkat-al-Masabih*, vol. I, 486-487. Source: http://salmanspiritual.com/four_prayers.html.
4. Keeping in mind an earlier remark about the *radd* texts in the previous chapter (n. 12), it deserves mention that the students' attempts at converting me are understandable when taking into account what they thought to know about my cultural background. Apparently, they sincerely meant to save me from the depravity of the 'West'.
5. The claim to Ansari descent can mean two things: (a) the claim to descent from the *Ansars* or Helpers who welcomed the Prophet and his followers in Medina; and (b) reference to the convert (lower) caste of the weavers known as Ansaris in north India.
6. My findings suggest that the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon is the oldest and largest girls' in post-Partition India, as it was founded in the early 1950s.
7. The *Hayat-us-Sahaba*, which is included in the Madrasatul Niswan's curriculum, was compiled by Maulana Muhammad Yusuf, son of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas and the Tablighi Jamaat's second Amir. See Muhammad Khalid Masud 2000,12-13 on the question of Maulana Ilyas' succession by his son Maulana Yusuf.
8. *Pan* refers to a variety of betel nut preparations, known to have a mildly sedative effect. Although smoking tobacco and chewing *pan* are considered vices by many Muslims, apparently the two women indulged in chewing the dried betel nut variety quite frequently.

9. Masud mentions that the meaning of tabligh underwent changes, since the term assumed its present meaning of 'preaching' only against the background of Hindu and Christian missionary activities (Masud 2000:21). Although some of the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan expressed a certain resentment vis-à-vis Sufism and the popular practices associated with the shrines, the Tablighi Jamaat 's founder Ilyas fostered Sufi inclinations, although he was more of a reformer than a Sufi (Masud 2000:40). In line with the reformist ideal, the initial aim of the Tablighi Jamaat was the 'adoption of learning, teaching, serving and promoting religion as a way of life' (Masud 2000:11), thereby sanctifying everyday life and actions.
10. I am grateful to Khalid Masud for pointing out that the networks between the 'core families' resemble a modern version of an Islamic institution referred to as *wala*. The Arabic '*al-wala*' means 'support, love, help', and its legal meaning is to fully agree with the sayings, beliefs, and deeds that please God and the persons He likes. In other words, 'it is the foundation by which all relationships and dealings in a Muslim community are built […]', and 'it is the most powerful relationship that links between people' (http://islam.org.au/articles/20/tafseer1.htm). A point of contestation is whether this principle holds true exclusively for Muslims or may include non-Muslims as well.
11. The present Aligarh Muslim University was founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (b. 1817 in Delhi) in 1875 under the name of Aligarh Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College. The college was meant to represent a 'bridge between the old and the new, the East and the West'. For further information, see http://www.amu.ac.in.
12. Among this particular group of Muslim women, purdah includes wearing the ankle length manteau known as burqa, the face veil or *niqab*, thick socks up to their knees, and long black gloves reaching above the elbows, whenever they leave the madrasa and whenever they venture outside their homes, also in the scorching heat of summer in Delhi. Rather than complaining about it, the girls seemed to take pride in what they perceived as a particularly strict form of purdah.
13. Dowry, i.e. the gifts that come with the girl from her parental home, is used here as a term to be distinguished from the 'official' *mahr* and the customary exchange of gifts between the families.
14. This definition reminds of Maududi's elaborations on purdah in his *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam* (Maududi 1973). His approach to the question of gender meant that 'history [is] re-read through the glasses of moral depravity' with at the core of the problem being 'woman" (Maududi 1973:23, 13). In line with this diagnosis, Maududi argued in favour of two distinct and separate spheres for men and women: the male being the active working sphere and the female being fulfilled by motherhood and her ensuing 'passive role in life' (Maududi 1973:153-155).

15. See also the students' pledge in the Madrasatul Niswan's admission papers: 'I promise that I shall observe these rules and regulations and that I shall study with great dedication and that I shall stay away from those things that are a waste of time and that I shall never display any immoral behaviour. I promise that I shall dedicate 24 hours a day to studies in accordance with the timetable of the Jamia and that I shall obey the command of those in charge of the Jamia and accept any punishment if I break any of the rules and regulations.' (see Appendix I).
16. Prior to attending the weekly Thursday Programme in the Madrasatul Niswan for the first time, I heard of similar activities in smaller girls' madrasas in Shahjahanpur or Old Delhi and Okhla, where meetings for women were also organized on Thursdays and Fridays.
17. It deserves mention that there is a tradition of anthems (taranas) being composed in praise of Islamic institutions of learning, as for example Aligarh Muslim University and the Jamia Millia Islamia each have their own taranas or anthems (see e.g. http://www.amu.ac.in/tarana.htm and http://jmi.nic.in/jamiatarana.htm). I am grateful to Khalid Masud who suggested that it was probably the British who introduced the taranas in Islamic institutions of learning, thereby encouraging the development of loyalty to one particular school.
18. Besides the religious taranas and the influence of popular *filmi* songs, a third genre reminded of the old fashioned European 'kitchen songs' about 'fallen girls'. One day a teacher sang a song in which a married girl went to the cinema, worrying about what her husband and parents-in-law would say once she returned home. However, the temptation of seeing the film weighed stronger than her conscience. Once she entered the cinema hall, her glass bangles [the sign of a married woman, M.W.] broke, leaving her to wonder how to explain this to her husband in addition to her absence. Upon returning to her marital home late at night, her husband opened the door and immediately noticed the missing bangles, which she was unable to explain, and she felt ashamed vis-à-vis her suspicious husband and in-laws. According to the teachers, this song was common knowledge for girls and hence it was not considered forbidden, despite being non-religious, as it appeared to fall under a sort of 'advice song' genre for young women.

4 Curriculum and learning

'I promise that I shall observe the rules and regulations and that I shall study with great dedication and that I shall stay away from those things that are a waste of time and that I shall never display any immoral behaviour. I promise that I shall dedicate twenty four hours a day to studies in accordance with the timetable of the Jamia and that I shall obey the command of those in charge of the Jamia and accept any punishment if I break any of the rules and regulations.' (Students' pledge; see Appendix I)

The following sections examine the Madrasatul Niswan's curriculum with a view to finding out what ideas, other than the social background of the founders and their informal affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat, have left their mark on the educational model proposed by this institution. As a particular understanding of morality, along with a certain ideal of Islamic womanhood appear to be central for bringing about the madrasa's broader educational mission, the question is raised how disciplining mechanisms of various kinds ensure the reproduction of the above ideals. In order to put my findings into perspective, a 'dual type' madrasa for girls is introduced for comparative purposes.

4.1 Islamic education: the broader context

Regarding the history and background of the madrasa, the following is explained in the Arabic and Urdu 'advertising' brochure[1]:

> 'Delhi was a place of historical and academic importance before the advent of the British imperialists. There were many madrasas, which played an outstanding role in the field of education and dawah. Their alumni, who were great scholars, served the cause of Islam and made their efforts for the resurgence of Islam. But when the British subjugated India, they forced the madrasas to close down. They also hanged religious leaders and founders of madrasas. The whole city witnessed massacres of ulama. The number of madrasas was in thousands. However, following the tragedy, believers of Islam sacrificed whatever they possessed so that the word of Allah should prevail over other ideologies. They established Islamic madrasas apart from other endeavours. One

cannot imagine the intensity of pains taken by the Islamic reformers at that crucial point of time for the sake of God. The British also started to propagate Christianity through the channel of education. After India was enslaved, they opened colleges and universities for that purpose. They also prepared a curriculum based on falsehood. To achieve their aims, they did not only target boys but girls and women as well. They would think that the cradle is the child's first school. Muslims saw a threat in the expansion of these networks of schools and kindergartens at the hand of the British. So they in turn established a countrywide network of madrasas to combat the threat posed by missionary schools. But these madrasas were not able to counter these challenges. The urgent need for madrasas to educate girls was felt very desperately. So therefore, Muhammad Ilyas Barabankvi founded the first Islamic madrasa for girls, the Madrasatul Niswan, with the cooperation of his well wishers. Not a single madrasa of this kind was found in the vicinity of Delhi. In the beginning, the madrasa neither had its own building, land, or any financial assistance. A kind-hearted woman donated her own house for this noble cause. As a result, a madrasa came into being. From 1 June 1996 onwards admission started and from 6 June 1996 teaching began formally. Since its inception, the madrasa started gaining popularity. A large number of girls from Delhi and its vicinity flocked there. This forced the madrasa's authorities to think of how to fulfil this growing need. Thus, three more buildings were purchased, which helped to meet all needs. But these new buildings proved insufficient due to the ever-increasing number of students. Even the hostel and other facilities could no longer meet the needs. They were determined to purchase a large plot of land and to build multi-storied hostels so that the students, teachers, and employees may be accommodated. Muslims who want to guide their generation on an Islamic footing should sacrifice their lives and wealth for this cause. This will prove to be of eternal reward for them. In this regard, many ahadith are narrated, one of which is the following: 'Abdullah narrates the Holy Prophet (pbuh) saying: 'who among you considers the wealth of heirs dearer to him than his own wealth?' [...] God's Messenger said: 'So his wealth is whatever he spends (for God's cause) during his life (on good deeds) while the wealth of his heirs is whatever he leaves after his death.' (Bukhari) We pray to God to accept our deeds that way and to reward those who cooperate in this great cause and serve religion. We ought to help accomplish the aims and objectives of the madrasa.'

While in the above account the emergence of girls' madrasas is mainly presented as a move to counter British missionary activities directed at young Muslim women, the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan emphasized personal reform along with equality of access to the discipline of Islamic theology as the foremost reasons for establishing the madrasa. With a view to the institution's educational aims not much is said except that the institution stands for the guidance of the students on an 'Islamic footing'. In the Madrasatul Niswan's admission papers (see Appendix I) we find the additional information that 'the aim of the madrasa is the reform (*islah*) of morality (*ikhlaq*) and actions *(amal*)'. Apart from the Madrasatul Niswan's brochure and admission papers, I looked for materials that would allow for an understanding of the particular educational aims of this girls' madrasa from a broader perspective.

Starting with an Urdu source, the Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Hind's publication *Al-Jamiyat Weekly* summarizes the origin of Islamic education as follows: The first verse of the Quran called *Iqra* is considered the founding stone of the Islamic education system. Here it is written that God gives superiority to man above the angels, because of man's possession of knowledge. The Quran reads: 'Behold thy Lord said to the angels – I will create a vicegerent on earth!' They said: 'Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate thy praises and glorify thy holy name?' He said: 'I know what ye know not.' And he taught Adam the names of all things; then he placed them before the angels and said: 'Tell me the names of these if ye are right.' They said: 'Glory to thee, of knowledge we have none, save what thou hast taught us, in truth it is thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom.' (*Surah Al-Baqarah*, 31-32)

Other sections of the Quran mention those who are learned in a favourable manner too, as being knowledgeable is considered a means of accumulating merit for the Hereafter. 'Is one who worships devoutly during the hours of night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the *Miraj* of his Lord – (like one who does not)? Say: 'Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?' It is those who are imbued with understanding that receive admonition (*Surah Az-Zumar*, 9). As a second example, the following verse is cited: 'Allah will raise up to (suitable) ranks (and degrees) those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge.' (*Surah Al-Mujadala*, 11). My observations during fieldwork pointed in a similar direction as the above argument and quotations, because the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan seemed to hold the idea of accumulating merit for the Hereafter

through studying and teaching in the madrasa in great regard. Moreover, it appears to be a widely shared view that seeking knowledge represents a ritual obligation and that Islam encourages learning for men and women alike.

With regard to women and learning in particular we read elsewhere that 'she is under a moral and religious obligation to seek knowledge, develop her intellect, broaden her outlook, cultivate her talents and then utilize her potential to the benefit of her soul and of her society' (Jawad 1988:205). Similarly, the *Al-Jamiyat Weekly* states that God created man to worship Him and the purpose of knowledge and education is to obey Him and His will. Seeking knowledge (*ilm*) is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman, and according to the Prophet knowledge comprises Quran, hadith, and knowledge sanctioned under Quran and hadith. As a result, knowing and exploring nature as areas of science are not prohibited by Islam, because God is recognized and remembered as the Creator of nature through the above activities. In such an argument science cannot challenge the view that God is omnipotent and omnipresent, as a result of which the same article claims that God's commands are neither directed against human reason nor do they forbid experiments, as a learned person is thought to come closer to the Witnesses of God and his Followers directly or indirectly. In other words, science bears witness to God and His will (Bana 1988:17-20).

Those who advocate equal access to Islamic knowledge for women often cite the example of female teachers of ahadith among the women of the Prophet's time, as we saw in the previous chapters. The centrality of teaching hadith is justified as the collections of ahadith are considered repositories of Prophetic sunnah (Momin 2001:22). With regard to the most prominent methods of teaching ahadith, oral recitation, reading from the written text, and finally dictation are mentioned. Similarly, concerning the contents of teaching the Quran ranks first, followed by the ahadith, the biography of the Prophet (*sirah*[2]). The preferred methodology of instruction includes the following components: sitting quietly, listening with attention and understanding, memorization, acting according to what one has learnt, and finally dissemination. According to Al-Ghazali, the teacher should train students according to their ability, with affection, and understanding. Moreover, the use of illustrations and examples are recommended along with discussion, debate, and 'contemporary methods' (Momin 2001:42-43).

To acquire knowledge, the following four character traits are deemed necessary: determination, patience, humility, and broadmindedness. In addition, tireless efforts and bearing hardships to acquire knowledge rank

among the highest virtues that God encourages and appreciates. Finally, it is noted that no scholar is perfect in knowledge as scholars learn from each other; struggle and sacrifices are necessary to learn; and patience is necessary as the truth is hidden and knowledge is found in past, present, and future. The following hadith illustrates why knowledge should be transmitted: According to the Prophet, three things remain of a person after he passes away, namely eternal charity (*sadaqah-e-jariyah*); the knowledge another person learned from him; and a righteous son who begs forgiveness for his parents before God. Another hadith claims that one who desires leadership should acquire knowledge first and should continue to do so after becoming a leader, because knowledge is enhanced, strengthened, and secured through continuous study. Since God is considered to be full of knowledge and wisdom, he also represents the primary source of knowledge and transmitter of knowledge to man. However, while God is perfect in knowledge, human beings are not and thus learning is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman (Bana 2002:17-20). In the same issue of the *Al-Jamiyat*, the Prophet's migration to Medina is presented as the historical founding moment of women's education in Islam, because it was then that education became institutionalized. Once the quadrangular construction called *suffa* was built above the ground level in the Prophet's Mosque (*Masjid-e-Nabi*), the Prophet began teaching men and women there[3]. For the women a day of the week was fixed during which the Prophet used to teach them exclusively. Besides, the women's husbands, sons, and the 'Prophet's House' operated schools as well (Rizvi 2002:24-25).

Turning to the contemporary situation, the relation between Islamic education and the modern age is examined from an ethical perspective. Islamic education should aim at establishing a civic society based on a firm belief in God and His followers. Underlying Islamic education is the strive to bring about welfare, prosperity, and the salvation of the individual and of society, both in this world and in the Hereafter. In addition, the Islamic education system endeavours to establish justice, the recognition of human rights, and dignity of human life. With a view to the above aims, the Islamic system of education should emphasize the formation of ethical characters, as an exclusively materialistic life fails to provide peace of heart and mind. The primary objective of Islamic education should be to pave the way for righteous conduct in society, both with a view to pleasing God now, and with a view to the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter. In the above argument, education represents a social responsibility, the purpose of which is to nurture the hidden and natural qualities of a child through mechanisms that aid the upbringing and correc-

tion of the child. Islamic education is viewed as a purposeful act, endowed with the power to bring about the reformation of the individual and of society at large. Furthermore, education is seen as a process that can be adapted to meet new challenges and situations. As social development and prosperity depend on the definition of educational goals, one of the primary objects of Islamic education today is to prepare a child to be a responsible citizen, and therefore virtues are taught to bring about a spirit of cooperation and stability in society (Rizvi 2002:24-25). Even though the formulation was different, the educational ideals of the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan tallied with the above ideals to a great extent. As we saw in the previous chapter, both men stated that they wanted to bring about reform in women's actions with a view to improving society at large and with a view to accumulating merit for the Hereafter. In order to realize this aim, the Madrasatul Niswan prescribes a curriculum that is based on, though not identical with, the standardized madrasa curriculum for boys known as the dars-e-nizami[4].

4.2 The curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan

At first glance the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan seems ambitious for a five-year course (see Appendix II). To begin with, the 'Preparatory Year' offers a great variety of subjects. Herein, emphasis is laid on reading and memorizing sections from the Quran, learning the method of Quran recitation called *tajwid*, internalizing requirements related to ritual obligations such as the five daily prayers (namaz), along with mastering Arabic and Urdu[5]. Apart from continuing the memorization of the Quran and its recitation, the 'Pre-Senior Secondary Year' introduces a host of new subjects. Among the new subjects are the *Girls' Islamic Course* (see Jeffery 2004), Islamic law (fiqh), and history (*tarikh*). During the 'First Year' dogmatics (*aqidah*) is added, along with the biography of the Prophet (sirah), and Arabic literature. In the 'Second Year', the first collections of traditions of the Prophet (ahadith) are studied, together with exegesis (tafsir), and rhetoric. The 'Third Year' and 'Fourth Year' appear to form a phase of consolidation, as no major new subject areas are added, and the 'Fifth Year' focuses almost exclusively on the study of ten voluminous collections of ahadith. According to the official curriculum, a minimum of non-Islamic subjects is offered throughout the entire course, which includes English, mathematics, and according to the Founder and Manager also Hindi and computer skills. As a peculiarity of this madrasa, at the end of the list of subjects it is noted that daily readings from the *Fazail-e-Amal* (*The Virtues of Everyday Actions*) are mandatory for the entire

duration of the course. As we saw before, this tablighi book teaches how to accumulate merit (sawab) for the Hereafter through everyday actions.

A comparison with Malik's list of books and subjects constituting the contemporary dars-e-nizami (Malik 1997:536-541, see Appendix III) indicates that many books and even entire subjects were omitted in the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan. With regard to other subjects something has been added, and in addition my findings suggest that the practice in turn may deviate from the formal curriculum. With a view to the absences it easy to see that many books are missing in the field of Islamic law (fiqh), with a view to the basis of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), and concerning logic, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, and debate. Regarding other subjects a lot has been added, for example Quran recitation (tajwid) and memorization, history, Arabic essay, Urdu, and the cluster of subjects related to 'personal grooming' formed by 'Islamic Upbringing', Home Science, 'Daily Routine', and the weekly Thursday Programme. Besides, the entire body of value-oriented adab literature has been added as well, which includes Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar*, the *Qirat-ur-rashida*, the *Ladkion ka Islami Course*[6], as well as the tablighi oriented *Fazail-e-Amal*.

Malik notes that owing to its strong emphasis on linguistic subjects, the non-Quranic sciences are 'disproportionately represented' in the current dars-e-nizami (Malik 1997:536). While it seems as if the range of subjects is more diverse in the Madrasatul Niswan, there is a strong emphasis on teaching the traditions of the Prophet (ahadith) and on 'grooming' the girls in a particular Islamic way of life, in keeping with the community's ideals regarding Islamic womanhood. As I observed during fieldwork, the official curriculum does not indicate that in many cases the books mentioned are not studied completely. For example, in the case of the *Hidaya*, which is a bulky work on Islamic law, the chapters to be studied suggest that the selection was made with a particular aim in mind. The strategic reply I received when asking the teachers about the discrepancies between curriculum and practice was that the curriculum had been narrowed down 'to fit the constraints of a five-year course' (instead of the original sixteen and later eight years of studies for boys). However, we ought to keep in mind that the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan set the curriculum, as we noted in the previous chapter. Apart from struggling to fit all subjects into the shortened course, the two men have a particular ideological background that may influence their decision regarding what they deem important for the girls to know.

Even though the men in charge claimed that the curriculum was based on the dars-e-nizami, apparently the adjustments were made with

a particular agenda in mind. As a consequence, certain books, especially in the field of Islamic law, logic, and philosophy, were either left out entirely or they are only partially studied in practice. For example, with regard to Islamic law only those sections from the prescribed books are studied that are deemed important for girls, such as questions related to marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. As a result, the graduates only know Islamic law as far as questions pertaining to women are concerned by the end of their course. The Founder's and Manager's decision regarding the contents of what is taught appears to be informed by a particular understanding of what a (learned) Muslim woman ought to know.[7] Despite the Founder's wish to provide equal access to Islamic theology for women, the extent to which the young women have access to certain subjects is determined by the men in charge of running the madrasa. Although the men in charge claim that the curriculum is the same as the dars-e-nizami taught in madrasas for boys, we saw that the curriculum is substantially different, and moreover what is taught in practice often differs from the official curriculum.

4.3 Teaching methods and discipline

Contrary to what I heard many interlocutors outside the madrasa claim regarding the madrasas' teaching methods, namely that they would promote learning without understanding, the Madrasatul Niswan's teachers took great care to ensure that the students understood what they taught. After all, in the teachers' opinion their work did not merely represent a profession, because teaching was seen as a mission that ensured religious merit for the Hereafter. The spiritual side of their work seemed to equip the teachers with patience and tranquillity, and the students in turn generally displayed a great zeal for learning. For example, whenever an Arabic text was introduced, the teacher used to read it out loud first, following which she explained the vocabulary. In the meantime, the students who sat in a semi circle on the floor around her took notes. Following the morning classes the students had to learn the vocabulary of all the subjects taught that day by heart, because next day's class usually began with a round of repeating the vocabulary and contents of the previous lesson. During those repetitions the students took turns translating words from Urdu into Arabic and vice versa, and then they took turns reading the same text out loud, thereby demonstrating that they had understood the lesson.

In case someone's reading was not fluent, the student's turn ended and the teacher asked the next student to continue reading. As a disciplinary

measure, the student who failed to perform up to the mark had to stand up and remained in a standing position for the remainder of the class, or until the teacher told her to sit down again. Often more than one student ended up spending the remainder of the class standing up, as the students were under tremendous pressure to master the vocabulary of not just one but up to eight classes in a single afternoon. Continuous poor performance on the students' part tended to give rise to discussions in the staff room during recess, while correcting the students' homework, or while marking their written exam papers. In line with the community's view that learning represents a way of accumulating merit for the Hereafter as well, the teachers' tone was generally marked by worry about the student rather than criticism. Similarly, the students mostly seemed to form support networks rather than being competitive in situations wherein disciplining took place. Whenever students repeatedly failed to perform during the daily repetitions and tests, the Thursday Programme was the occasion when more severe reprimanding and mild scolding took place. Although I saw students break out in tears at such negative feedback, I also observed how warmly others comforted their fellow students by hugging them, holding their hands, or by wiping their tears away.

As an example taken from one of the classes in adab or 'value education', I would like to introduce the translation of an Arabic text from the *Qirat-ur-rashida* illustrating one of the many moral lessons taught with regard to everyday life. It deserves mention that the book was written by the earlier mentioned Maulana Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi of the Nadwatul Ulama. The *Qirat-ur-rashida* represents a 'key text' of the adab classes, as therein lessons in social etiquette are taught at the hand of the exemplary lives of the first Caliphs of Islam. The two volumes provide stories on everyday matters, such as eating and drinking the proper way, dressing properly, displaying appropriate behaviour when attending or organizing marriages, and running a household with a view to pleasing God. I chose the following text on the etiquette of eating and drinking, as it addresses an everyday matter, owing to which the students could relate to both the story and the lesson taught, as we shall see.

Etiquette of eating and drinking (Nadwi, Part II, n.d.:72-74)

> 'When Umar bin Abu Salma was a mere child, he would live with his mother Umm-e-Salma, who was married to the Holy Prophet after the demise of her husband Abdul Salma. Thus, Umar bin Abu Salma came under the upbringing of the Holy Prophet. Umar, the child, was an orphan slave. His father had died when he was a small child. But he

> ate with the Holy Prophet like a child eating with his father. The Holy Prophet loved him very much and taught him conduct and manners. Once, while eating with the Holy Prophet, he ate from the plate, but from different places, like most children do. The Holy Prophet taught him how to eat and instructed him to read the name of God before having a meal and to start eating from what was in front of him. The teachings of the Holy Prophet are meant for the entire Muslim ummah. Thus they should adopt the entire Islamic etiquette including the etiquette of eating and drinking.
>
> Here are citations of a few sayings and teachings of the Holy Prophet concerning the etiquette of eating and drinking. The Prophet said: I have been sent as a moral guide. Abu Hurairah says: The Prophet never complained about a meal. He ate if he liked the food and left it if he disliked it. The Prophet said: I do not take my meals while leaning. Anas says: The Prophet used to pause and breathed thrice while drinking water. Ibn Abbas narrates that the Prophet said: Neither breathe out into a vessel nor blow into it while drinking. Anas quotes the Prophet saying: Don't drink (water) while standing. Abu Hudaifa quotes the Prophet saying: Don't eat and drink from a silver or gold plate or vessel. For such things are for the disbelievers in this worldly life and for us in the Hereafter.'

During class, the teacher read out the entire Arabic text aloud first, following which she translated it word by word into the more familiar Urdu. Then she began to explain the text in Urdu with special regard to the moral lesson of that day. As a final step, the teacher encouraged the students to find examples from their own lives to illustrate and internalize the contents of their daily lesson in adab. With a view to accomplishing her didactic aim, the teacher asked the students whether they observed the requirements regarding eating and drinking at all times, as mentioned in the text. Hesitating to possibly appear in an unfavourable light, apart from muffled giggles the students remained silent. The teacher then asked whether the students had observed others eat their food. By way of responding to the question the students became more lively. One student pointed out that she had seen someone eat her food from all over her plate the other day, following which her observation was discussed in relation to the above text. Ultimately the teacher succeeded at contextualizing the text for the students and concluded that from now on they should be sure to act in line with the requirements of eating and drinking during every meal.

The English classes formed the exception with regard to the teaching methods, and the teachers were quick to admit that they simply lacked the

training to teach proper 'Spoken English'. Since the teachers generally did not understand the English texts, they mostly taught their classes with the help of Hindi translations of the English textbooks, which often resulted in odd readings and even odder pronunciations. Similar to lessons in other subjects, the students were asked to read the English texts out loud, but as they were unable to make sense of what they read, they did so without much intonation. Besides the teachers' insufficient training, a certain distrust vis-à-vis English and the culture associated with it accounted for the low level of interest the girls took in the contents of their *English Readers*, which they assumed to be manipulated by the 'government' anyway[8]. Nevertheless, especially the Principal badi appa admitted on many occasions that they were all in need of a decent English teacher, as she thought they should master the language in order to keep up with the world outside and its innovations, such as computers and the internet.

The daily afternoon classes on the hadith collections of Bukhari deserve special mention too, as this was the only subject taught by a male teacher. Consequently, the classes were not held in the main building of the Madrasatul Niswan, but in the house opposite the Principal's and Manager's residence. For this occasion, the final year students used to put on their burqas every afternoon and set out for the short walk to the other building. They always made sure that they arrived prior to the teacher, so that they could enter the building and walk upstairs without being seen. Usually they came in so early that they were able to spend some extra time in the single room on the first floor, where they sat and talked, read, or knitted until the teacher arrived. The teacher from the Tablighi Markaz remained on the ground floor for his class and communicated with the girls upstairs through a microphone. Apart from the above examples of 'special' classes, during which problems related to language and means of communication played a role, teaching was a well established routine. Despite the relative austerity of life in the Madrasatul Niswan, a certain courtesy marked the overall tone of interactions between teachers and students, which is subsumed by the earlier mentioned concept of adab.

4.4 **Adab or value education and the ideal Muslim woman**

'If superstitions, undue veneration of tombs, pagan customs, extravagance on the occasions of marriages and deaths and the like are still prevalent in our homes, it is largely due to the withering of the real spirit of Islam in the hearts of our women.' (Nadwi 2001:2)

The aim of bringing about a sense of adab in the students was not limited to the formally scheduled didactic activities that took place in the classroom. Even though lessons in adab or 'value education' only took up a relatively small portion of the timetable, my findings suggest that adab permeated the everyday actions and overall atmosphere of the Madrasatul Niswan to a great extent. Introducing the students to and grooming them in the rules laid out by the community's understanding of adab appeared to be pivotal for the madrasa's primary educational aim of bringing about the 'reform (islah) of the morality (ikhlaq) and actions (amal)', as stated in the admission papers (see Appendix I). The same admission papers demand that '[…] the students must fully respect the teachers, founders, and ulama behind the Jamia', and so a related question is how the above aims were achieved and put into practice. The very first lesson the students learned about adab was fourfold; namely that they had to show respect for their teachers, books, their authors, and finally the madrasa. With regard to showing respect for their teachers, we should keep in mind that most of the teachers were barely older than their students, as they were recent madrasa graduates themselves. Nevertheless, instead of using a less formal address like the first name or tum, the students addressed the teachers using the formal ap or appa. Considering that some of the teachers graduated from the Madrasatul Niswan just one year earlier and that the girls used to interact with them as fellow students, one could have imagined a less formal tone of address.

As far as the timetable was concerned, eight adab classes were scheduled per week for all students, without finding mention in the official curriculum. The books studied included the two volumes of the earlier mentioned *Qirat-ur-rashida*, and since the books are not directed at women in particular, the lessons left scope for the teachers' and students' creativity when searching for parallel situations and moral lessons in their own lives. While Nadwi's *Qirat-ur-rashida* is not mentioned in the curriculum at all, another book used for the adab classes, namely Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Bihishti Zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*; see Metcalf 1990), is listed under Islamic law or fiqh. The *Bihishti Zewar* belongs to the genre of late nineteenth century 'advice literature' for Muslim women, as it aims to instruct the young Muslim woman on how to be a good wife, mother, and family member. For example, the author explains how a young woman should write letters and to whom, how to dress properly, how to act during public functions and gatherings, what to read, how to speak, what to cook, what to spend money on, etc. In short, the book covers just about every aspect of everyday life. In the *Bihishti*

Zewar, as well as in a host of similar 'advice' books for women, and during the adab classes, the female Companions of the Prophet tended to be presented as role models for Muslim women today.

Parallel types of role models can be found in more contemporary literature as well. In *Islam and the Promotion of Knowledge*, for example, female teachers who issued *fatawa* 'with the same authority as men' during the time of the Prophet are mentioned (Momin 2001:18-19). By the same token, another author claims that 'it is difficult to come across a distinguished savant of this [i.e. early Islamic, M.W.] period who did not sit at the feet of a woman teacher' (Chaudhry 1953:72). More specifically, 'Ayesha [sic] represented the scholar and the savant who was a radiating centre of educative influence and at whose feet the savants and the slaves sat to acquire religious knowledge' (Chaudhry 1953:69). In addition, more recent publications on the female Companions include Nadwi's books on Aisha (Nadwi 2001; 2000), who appears to feature as the most prominent role model for women.[9]

With regard to activities Aisha engaged in that distinguished her as a scholar and as a role model for other women, it is noted that she used to organize weekly lectures for women, the Prophet's Companions used to consult her concerning theological matters, and she challenged the Companion's views on matters pertaining to women. In other words, 'in deciding juristic points concerning women, she used to keep their convenience in view and would cite the Qur'an [sic] and Hadith to support her opinion' (Nadwi 2001:54;94). Moreover, 'In the tafsir the excellence of Hazrat Aisha was un-paralleled among the male and female companions of the Holy Prophet. Her status as a scholar and commentator of the Holy Qur'an [sic] was at par with the elders among the companions like Hazrat Abdullah Bin Abbas' (Nadwi 2000:256). By the same token, 'among the companions whose rulings (fatawa), if collected, could develop into volumes of books, Hazrat Aisha has been included' (Nadwi 2000:279; see also Nadwi 2001:10; 89). Kandhelwi's *Shamail Tirmidhi*, which is part of the Madrasatul Niswan's curriculum (see Appendix II), includes Aisha's ahadith (Kandhelwi 2001), regarding which the earlier mentioned Chaudhry claims that there is a total of 2,210 (Chaudhry 1953:71).

Explaining why Aisha held such a high position and how the world has changed since, Nadwi continues: 'During the good days of the companions, the moral standard of the female companions was very high and they could, without let and hindrance, participate in the gatherings of prayers and discussions. But, towards the end of the age of companions, there was a set back in the moral standards and Hazrat Aisha pointed this out without

fear and favour. She said: *Had the Holy Prophet found in the women the (moral) degradation (now arrived at), he would have prevented them from attending (congregation in) the mosques as had the women of Bani Israel been prohibited.*' (Nadwi 2000:264). The same publication lists the actions, character traits, and elements constituting the social life of the female Companions. These markers deserve mention, since they set the female Companions apart from other women, by virtue of which they are considered worth emulating for women today. Among the praiseworthy actions are the acceptance of Islam, bearing of hardships, keeping ritual obligations, and abstention from music and musical instruments (Nadwi 2000:193-208). The female Companions' character traits include dignity and self respect, sacrifice of personal interests, avoidance of vengeance, endurance in the face of affliction, and honour and chastity (Nadwi 2000:219-226). Finally, among the elements that are thought to constitute a model social life are kindness to kin and relatives, protection and defence of the wealth and property of the husband, and love, service, and seeking pleasure of the husband (Nadwi 2000:228-235)[10]

Tackling the problem of the perceived 'backwardness' of Indian Muslim women, Nadwi concludes that 'the truth is that, if the women folk wish to guard their rights and privileges, they must pay special attention to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an [sic] and the Traditions concerning themselves' (Nadwi 2000:263), as it is only then that 'Muslim women even today can rise to high position of respect in society if they follow the great lives of the women companions' (Nadwi 2000:286). Although the author sets in with a praise of the great scholarly qualities of the female Companions, what he discusses at length are their moral qualities, their extraordinary character traits, and what made them good Muslim women. Ideas of what it means to be a good Muslim woman are (re)read through the lens of a preconceived ideal of womanhood, and the result is the taking shape of a role model based on examples borrowed from the past.

The above argument and examples from the literature reminded me of stories and moral appeals I had heard in the Madrasatul Niswan during the Thursday Programme and adab classes. On the above occasions, the young women were encouraged to bear hardships for the sake of Islam; they were reminded of an ideal past; and they were taught to behave in ways thought to be in accordance with past ideals. Apart from the informally scheduled classes, adab was maybe even more so transmitted, practised, and reproduced through the 'informal' curriculum, which is to say through rules regarding discipline, body control, and behavioural expectations. The subtle and yet all-pervading impact of adab becomes tangible in the fol-

lowing two examples of young girls who came to the Madrasatul Niswan as 'outsiders' who were nonetheless affected by the madrasa's 'civilizing mission'[11]. To begin with, there was a girl in her early teens who worked as a cleaner in the Madrasatul Niswan. She stood out in her appearance, as her *salwar kameez* tended to be very colourful, thereby contrasting the otherwise sober colours in the madrasa, and moreover her head was generally uncovered. After some months, a gradual change set in, as she began to linger around the staff room more and more. From that point of time onwards, in between her chores she was taught to read and write Urdu and Arabic properly. As a result, she was often found in a corner of the small staff room, her head covered with a clean white dupatta, reciting texts from her Urdu and Arabic primers. The young woman seemed quite new to the habit of covering her head properly, but she managed to keep it covered most of the time. The girl's new favourite pastime was to quietly observe and listen to the teachers' conversations in the staff room, while dedicating herself more or less fully to her self-studies. The former cleaner seemed to take pride in her newly acquired and visibly more demure appearance, as she spoke in a muted voice, tended to lower her eyes when addressing someone, and walked about in a much more feminine manner than before. Even though her age was roughly the same as the students', she did not socialize with them, nor did there seem to be a place for her among them. Nevertheless, the girl's status in the Madrasatul Niswan had changed, as she gained respectability through her interest in Islamic education, which suggests how upward social mobility can be achieved through the cultivation of a modest self. To the extent that she showed willingness to adjust to the codes of dressing and behaving, the teachers began to pay more attention to her, instead of just ordering for her to fetch them hot milk tea, clean up the floor, or put away dishes they had used for their breakfast.

As a second case, children below the age of enrolment used to come to the madrasa for tutorials in Arabic and/or reading, memorizing, and reciting the Quran on a daily basis. Apart from what they learned, I also observed visible changes in these children. For months at a stretch there were twin girls, around six years of age, who came to the Madrasatul Niswan daily for their first lessons in reading and memorizing the Quran. The girls stood out as they were dressed rather shabbily, with their make-do dupattas barely covering their heads. In addition, their complexion was greyish, as if they hardly got to go outside the house. Over the months their appearance changed, because due to their daily walks to the madrasa the children began to look much healthier. There was a blush on their other-

wise pale cheeks, their hair was neatly brushed and oiled, and the dupattas were carefully tied around their heads. As the twins were below the age of purdah, they were allowed to come to the madrasa by themselves, since they lived in the neighbourhood, just like most of the young children who came to the Madrasatul Niswan for tutorials. While initially the girls carried their Quran copies tied in plain pieces of cloth, after a while they proudly tied the Quran in beautiful green silk covers with matching buttons. Soon after the introduction of the silk Quran covers, the girls were no longer seen with the Quran lying on a cushion or a pile of books in front of them either, as both possessed ornamentally carved wooden Quran stands. Once the lesson was over, they folded up the wooden stands and carried them home together with the wrapped up Quran. Although when they first came to the madrasa the twin girls appeared anxious and scared, they gradually eased into the new environment. While they hardly spoke to anyone, they studied with great dedication and in a strikingly disciplined fashion for girls their age. Except for mastering their first lessons in reading and memorizing the Quran, apparently the girls had also learned something about adab, which came to the fore by means of the visible changes in dress and appearance, as well as in their ways of showing respect for the Quran. Within a short period of time the girls had picked up the moral undertone of conduct and dressing in their first encounter with the Madrasatul Niswan.

The above examples demonstrate how adab serves the madrasa's broader mission of bringing about reform in the morality and actions of Muslim girls through Islamic education. In addition, some of the young women belonging to the 'core families' got married to or hoped to get married to Indian boys studying in Medina and wished to settle there, as we will see in the following chapter. With regard to such future prospects, proper grooming was thought to be crucial for the young girls. The subtlety with which mechanisms of disciplining appear to function in the Madrasatul Niswan suggests that the influence of adab is indeed all-pervading.

4.5 The madrasa as a total institution

After demonstrating the impact of adab on the education provided by the Madrasatul Niswan, I would now like to examine the disciplining mechanisms by drawing upon Foucault's concept of the 'total institution'. To begin with, activity took place in accordance with a timetable in the madrasa, which was centrally positioned in the staff room. The students copied the timetable into their notebooks, as there was just a single copy of the official

timetable, which was hand written by the calligraphy teacher, whose task it was to make adjustments if necessary. As we saw earlier, there appeared to be tensions between normalizing measures, such as the timetable, means of surveillance, rules for punishment, and seating, and the ways in which individuality could be expressed in a context wherein there were few diversions.

According to Foucault, for the disciplinary society (Foucault 1995:216) to arise, initially the 'inversion of disciplines' was necessary. What was initially formulated in negative terms, such as the need to control those of unsound mind or as helping people out of their ignorance and poverty, was reformulated in positive terms, like increasing people's utility with a view to the labour market and developing a healthy mind and body. Similarly, originally education was meant to provide a sound upbringing to people who were poor and ignorant, while later on it was justified in utilitarian terms as a way to produce useful individuals and with a view to the labour market (Foucault 1995:210-211). The ensuing 'swarming' of disciplinary mechanisms implies that control over parents was hoped to be achieved through school children. In a parallel move, religious groups may aim at disciplining the population through a 'strive to eradicate places of ill repute' (Foucault 1995:211-212), which reminds of the reformist activism of both the Madrasatul Niswan and the Tablighi Jamaat.

Apart from such explicit ways of disciplining society, my observations in the madrasa indicated that disciplining did not primarily take place through the teaching methods employed, since more subtle forms of disciplining appeared to be at work, as we saw in the above examples of outsiders to the madrasa. In addition, the body comes to the fore as a central locus for disciplining. According to Foucault 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault 1995:136). By the same token, the main aim of the disciplining processes is to 'increase […] the mastery of each individual over his own body' (Foucault 1995:137). This statement hints at the ambivalence between subordination and agency, because the process of disciplining increases the potential for agency, while simultaneously training the body to be docile. In other words, certain forms of disciplining may increase the students' agency, because they learn about life and their bodies, while at the same time a particular ideal of Islamic womanhood is internalized.

One expression of the latter is modest dress. During teaching hours, the students used to wear the typical white uniform consisting of lose trousers (salwar), a loose cut blouse reaching below the knees (*kameez*), and a

broad scarf (dupatta) for covering the head, shoulders, and chest. Following classes, the girls were allowed to change into the more colourful suits they had brought from home. Each girl kept her belongings in a suitcase on the steel shelves that lined the classrooms, kept out of sight with the help of thick curtains. By contrast, the teachers wore whatever colours and materials they wished to don, at times accompanied by jewelleries or other small signs of extravagance in the otherwise sober environment. But when venturing outside the madrasa, all of them wore the same black manteaus (burqa) and veils (hijab) that rendered them unrecognizable to the outsider. As we saw in the previous chapter, the teachers and students were proud of the extra pieces of clothing they used for what they considered proper modest dress, namely knee-length socks and black gloves reaching over the elbow. The young women even used to wear the socks and gloves in the midst of summer, when in Delhi temperatures easily reach forty five degrees centigrade.

Foucault notes that rather than allowing for more freedom once a certain level of discipline has been accomplished, quite the opposite holds true, as increased aptitude goes hand in hand with increased self regulation. In other words, the better the mastery, the more the body is subjected to additional constraints (Foucault 1995:138). Similarly, I observed that while some students appeared to attend the madrasa to receive some form of formal education and not much else, others seemed to compete at the level of discipline and piety. The more they knew, the more eager they were to appear more dedicated than the others, for example by continuously swaying their upper bodies while studying, by keeping the daily prayers and supplications, by using Arabized Urdu with its formulaic expressions of faith, and by following their interpretation of the sunnah of the Prophet. For example, some of the young women claimed that the Prophet's favourite colours were green and white, which dictated the choice of colours for their suits. In addition, some of the teachers and students also seemed to be stricter about veiling than others, even inside the madrasa. Most teachers and students wore their long rectangular scarves (dupattas) wrapped rather loosely around their heads, and as long as they were surrounded by fellow teachers or students, they even allowed for their scarves to slip off their heads at times. By contrast, there were others who used a bigger type of veil, which they tied around the face closely, so as to cover the ears, along with every strain of hair, and the entire upper body. My findings did not suggest that the stricter style of veiling was necessarily associated with the girls from the 'core families', as sometimes students and teachers from

rural areas and from less 'pious' families adopted the stricter style of veiling as well. Owing to the randomness of the practice it is likely that other factors were at play, such as the hope for upward social mobility by cultivating a visibly pious self, which is a point that will be discussed in the following chapter.

The discipline required to observe the above-mentioned strictures was taught and practised during classes and outside the classroom, as both the formal and the informal curriculum appeared to be based on discipline of various kinds. First of all, the curriculum was so extensive that dedication was necessary on the part of the students. Such dedication was not merely hoped for, because it was explicitly formulated as a rule and pledge in the admission papers (see Appendix I). Second, the spatial constraints of the small building also called for discipline, because opportunities to enjoy privacy were limited. Although using the same space for studying, sleeping, and eating may not be that exceptional, under circumstances other than these such a limited space would hardly be shared by over one hundred and eighty people. As a result of the spatial limitations, every movement had to be well calculated when groups of students moved from one section of the building to another, as the ceilings were low, the staircases open and steep. Acts of discipline also define how 'one may have a hold over others' bodies', and it is herein that the political anatomy comes to bear. For example, the teachers' control over the students' bodies showed whenever they began to recite a text during class, as without any further ado the students ceased their activities, adjusted their posture, fidgeted with the scarves covering their heads, and started moving their upper bodies along with the rhythm of the teachers' voice.

With beliefs and embodied discipline on the one hand, encounters with everyday life on the other hand may confront the believer with contrasting ideals. Although watching television, along with Bollywood and Hollywood movies, and listening to popular music were considered forbidden or haram by this community, there were occasions indicating that the young women could not avoid the influence of popular culture entirely. One day we sat in the staff room and badi appa's infant son displayed signs of discomfort, as he suffered from an itchy rash. The Hindi word for itch is *kujli* and the teachers present asked me for the English translation of the word. As soon as I said 'itch', the teacher who had asked me for the translation started to laugh and said: 'Oh, so *Itch Guard*[12] means *kujli* guard'. The other teachers also began to laugh, while the Principal badi appa and another teacher immediately quieted down and tried to assume a disapproving look in the

direction of the teacher who had passed the initial remark. They said: 'Oh, so you watched TV', but since they also knew the advertisement, they did not have a strong point reprimanding the other teacher, because they had obviously watched the same commercial. On another occasion I took my camera with me, as one of the students had asked me to take a photograph of her. When I mentioned my camera in the staff room, thinking that the teachers too might enjoy using it, my offer met with strong disapproval. The teachers were quick to say that the Prophet had 'stopped this custom' of producing images of human beings. Nevertheless, despite the strong opposition towards photographs, even badi appa admitted that she kept a number of passport size photographs of her children as infants. The above examples show strategies of negotiating 'outside' influences that are considered forbidden by this community's interpretation of Islam, so as to create small niches of defiance.

Besides reflections on the female body, dreams occurred in our conversations as a means for emotional expression. How the young women expressed themselves through dreams and what they expressed by bringing them out in the open can be discerned at the hand of the following examples. One day, badi appa approached me in the staff room showing me a small pile of hand-written notes. She explained that these were recent dreams of students, which she had written down and collected over the past weeks. Those dreams, she added, were either dreams the girls had at night or dreams induced by fever, as those were the two conditions under which dreams were thought to be of revelatory content. For her it was a regular activity to read the notes and then select those dreams she deemed important enough to show to her father and to her husband. Then she read out the dreams she had selected this time. It struck me that the Prophet was the central figure in all of them, and he invariably conveyed a message to the respective student. For example, in one dream the Prophet ordered the girl to criticize the Founder of the madrasa for not providing sufficient space and time to perform prayers (namaz) properly. Another girl had a dream during a bout of fever in which she saw the Prophet standing in the corner of the room 'with a serene face and a beard', owing to which 'her chest' got well immediately. The third dream conveyed the Prophet's praise for the good work of the madrasa, along with the promise that it would flourish. On another occasion badi appa told me that she had recently dreamed about me. When I asked her what her dream had been about, she said that she had seen me on the Hajj. She then asked the other teachers to confirm the veracity of that dream, as she had told everyone about it the next morning.

In his book on *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*, Moosa (2005) points out that dreams may be used to attest to one's piety and spiritual achievements, as they contain coded information and enforce the authority of the person portrayed (oneiric communication). According to early Muslim philosophy and mystics, there are ties between dreams, poetry, and revelation. In other words, dreams are thought to convey knowledge of a higher reality. Even though dreams are not per se authoritative, their meaning is often compelling to those sharing the same habitus, as in Moosa's words dreams are 'part of a continuum of prophetic inspiration' (Moosa 2005). For the same reason there appears to be a common acceptance of dreams as a means for emotional expression in the otherwise sober environment of the Madrasatul Niswan. On the one hand, badi appa's regular practice of writing down the students' dreams for her father and husband to read reminds of mechanisms of surveillance. On the other hand, it may be only through such 'dreams' that the girls were allowed to voice criticism vis-à-vis those in charge of running the madrasa. After all, it is striking that the students' dreams brought in the Prophet to make a certain point, as his authority cannot be denied.

Apart from the contents of our discussions held in the staff room, the staff room itself, along with similar 'enclosures', represents a site wherein disciplining took place. In Foucault's words for such a link between disciplining and space to emerge, it takes 'a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself', a 'protected place of disciplinary monotony' (Foucault 1995:141). In the case of the Madrasatul Niswan, the building was clearly demarcated from its immediate surroundings through a fence, thick curtains that were always drawn, and closed doors. Like many other girls' madrasas I visited, the Madrasatul Niswan was hard to find, because the building itself appeared to be in purdah or 'veiled', owing to which what went on inside remained protected from the outsiders' gaze. A closer look revealed that the building was also divided internally, whereby functional sites were set apart, such as the staff room and the main hall wherein the weekly Thursday Programme was held.

Still, except for the above sites the internal division of space was not clear in the Madrasatul Niswan, mainly because space was scarce to begin with. As a result, a constant hustle and bustle of movement and voices characterized everyday life in the madrasa. In addition, the lack of functional furniture allowed for flexible behavioural patterns, as the girls studied, ate, and slept on the floor wherever there was space available at any given moment. With the aid of 'props' such as mats, rugs, or cotton stuffed mattresses, the

same space was designated for a new purpose. Although space itself did not seem to be a decisive disciplining factor, circumstances allowed for disciplining techniques of a different kind. Rather than structural factors, it was the authority of the teachers and senior students that ensured the smooth running of everyday activities inside the crammed space of the Madrasatul Niswan.

Prior to the Thursday Programme, senior students were assigned the task of supervising the seating arrangements of those attending the weekly event. The other students used to sit down on the floor of the main hall and on the open gallery in rows according to the year they studied in. The senior students appeared to take their task seriously, as they tended to be very strict when it came to correcting rows of students that were not absolutely straight. Even at the risk of causing a major disturbance during the Thursday Programme, they seemed eager to ensure that the lines were sharply drawn, backs were straight, and dupattas adjusted so as to cover the smallest strain of hair. The women from the neighbourhood joined in the back of the hall, adjacent to the front room, where the Manager and his male guests were listening. The men also took care of the technical equipment, such as the amplifier and the microphone, which were handed to the girls from underneath the door that divided the front room and the main hall. Due to the proximity of the men in the front room and the girls assembled in the main hall, the men could hear every word of what went on inside during the Thursday Programme. This deserves mention, because those inclined toward a certain conservatism would see it as objectionable for the men to listen to the young women's voices. Nevertheless, in the Madrasatul Niswan the men listened with genuine interest, possibly also to convey the impression that they were able to survey what went on inside the space otherwise forbidden to them. Despite the awareness that they were under constant surveillance, the men's frequent inability to ensure the smooth working of the microphone also gave rise to jokes and muffled giggles on the part of the students. As the teachers and students were aware of being within earshot of the men in charge at all times, there was a flow of indirect communication through shouting between the front room and inside. At times, the communication was facilitated by messengers, such as the Principal's children who were free to commute between the two sections of the building.

Finally, another question related to exercising 'total' control was what made for permissible pastimes. We noted before that this community considered the depiction of people, photographs, movies, and non-religious music

haram or forbidden. Even though those in charge seemed to aim at creating a milieu that does not allow for many pastimes or 'things that are a waste' (see student's pledge, Appendix I), regular visits home and the two annual vacations were occasions when beliefs and embodied discipline could be put to the test. Once badi appa complained that the stay with her in-laws in Barabanki during the vacation following *Eid-ul-Fitr* had been extremely boring. As much as she dutifully emphasized liking her in-laws, she took up the occasion to relate in detail how boring village life was, adding that she could not wait for her husband (who was 'travelling in the path of God' at the time) to come and take her back to Delhi. When I asked a group of fourth year students what they had done during the same vacation, they answered in chorus that they had rested and read. When I continued to ask them what they had read, they mentioned the *Fazail-e-Amal* (*The Virtues of Everyday Actions*), the Quran, and collections of ahadith. The latter implied that the girls had access to copies of various books they studied in the madrasa at home. This in turn presupposes a certain intellectual milieu, along with a certain level of wealth, considered that some of the girls' parents could afford to buy such specialized theological books for them. Even if the presence of the Quran and the *Fazail-e-Amal* could be taken for granted in the case of this community, possessing collections of ahadith presupposes a deeper theological interest. Besides, the students' reply sounded too neat for adolescent girls who had expressed their eagerness to go home and enjoy their free time outside the crammed madrasa many a time. As there was no teacher around to check on the girls during recess, there was no immediate reason for them to come up with such a uniform answer. Hoping to find out more, I told them that my mother had come to visit and that we had spent the coldest evenings of the year watching films. A sharp sound of disapproval went through the small room, and the girls said that films and music – except for religious music such as naat and taranas – were completely haram. Now that I knew, I should stop watching them. The students' reaction indicated the extent to which they had internalized the worldview of the founder's community with regard to popular culture and activities associated with leisure. The discipline of the 'total institution' appeared to permeate the young women's free time, their time at home, which was often far away from Delhi, and their time with others who did not necessarily share their opinion regarding things forbidden.

My observations also included moments of disruption. For example, once another group of fourth year students browsed through my photographs, which included pictures taken on the Hindu festival of light or

Diwali[13]. As they immediately seemed to recognize the context of the photographs, I asked them whether they liked this festival. Interestingly enough, while some students immediately discarded the idea of *Diwali* altogether as a non-Islamic festival, others enthusiastically replied that they liked it very much. In fact, the girls who were favourably inclined toward the festival literally out-argued those who were not, in this group of students. In addition, one of the students who knew and liked *Diwali* added that she liked another festival called *Rakshabandhana*[14] even better.

To conclude, apart from the formally scheduled classes in adab that aimed at instilling a sense of moral duty in the girls, there was range of related practices, such as veiling, embodied ideals of Islamic womanhood, the use of a particular language code, and the mastery of rituals (ibadat) with their minutely prescribed postures and purification techniques, whereby the individual was thought to contribute to the greater good of the community. The extent to which this idea was valorized became evident when students and teachers told me that they considered the act of studying or teaching in a madrasa an act of merit for their families and for society at large, as we will see in the next chapter.

4.6 **Alternative views of self and 'Other'**

Whenever the young women put forward their views regarding what they considered markers of being a good Muslim woman, they engaged in a discourse with the absent or imaginary 'Other', such as their non-Muslim surroundings or influences associated with Westernization. The affirmation of their identities and the markers thereof implied the denunciation of the opposites and the absent 'Other', which remained unsaid at times, while on other occasions the judgment passed was made explicit. The 'Other' was generally identified as the non-Muslim majority in India and 'abroad' in the widest sense. Such perceptions of the 'Other' also appeared during teaching hours.

For example, the teachers in charge of the English classes made it a habit to ask me for vocabulary and Urdu translations of the English texts in the staff room. The teachers used a series of textbooks issued by the National Council for Educational Research and Training for the English classes, which meant that the same books were prescribed by the state curriculum for use in non-Islamic schools. For the teachers and students in the madrasa, these textbooks epitomized the 'saffron scare' in some sense, as in the young women's perception these textbooks were part of the ongoing 'Hinduiza-

tion' project of state curricula all over India. Their perception was rooted in the given that the overwhelming majority of names, historic figures, and cultural events such as family parties and outings in the *English Readers* were based on the non-Muslim majority culture. The occasional mention of a (Muslim) student called 'Ali', who was bound to make his appearance in any conversation in praise of Indian plurality, formed the exception. As the texts were rather meaningless for the girls in the madrasa, apart from trying to acquire a basic understanding of the vocabulary and grammar, the teachers and students did not engage in any further activities in relation to the texts. By contrast, as we saw in the above section, during classes in Islamic subjects, great care was usually taken to contextualize the lesson for the students. For example, during a lesson on prayer or namaz, the teacher reminded the students that social visits and functions, such as their last trip to the new madrasa in Okhla, or the attendance of weddings, should not interfere with one's ritual obligations, which made more sense to the students than a story about Mrs Verma's 'kitty party'[15]. While the texts in the above example were written from the perspective of the non-Muslim majority, some of the textbooks used for Islamic subjects tended to define the 'Other' as the non-Muslim in lieu. For example, during tafsir classes it struck me more than once that much of the Urdu commentaries on the Quran explained the text in relation to the unbelievers (*kafirun*) and the 'foreigner'. In other words, these texts were written with the absent non-believer in mind, who was typically used as the absolutely negative example of how society and morality decayed in a non-Islamic environment. The presence of one such foreign non-Muslim appeared to make the students more aware of the contents of such lessons, because whenever either the unbelievers or the 'foreigner' were mentioned, everyone tended to look at me. On such occasions the young women seemed partly apologetic, because in our discussions some of the teachers and students had begun to realize that 'Western culture' was not necessarily all that bad either, and partly curious as to how I would react.

Apart from textbook images of the 'Other', there were also actual encounters with young women whose views challenged the worldview of the teachers and students in the Madrasatul Niswan. Just like the Founder and the Manager, the teachers maintained occasional contacts with women outside the madrasa. One day a teacher's friend, who worked for a charitable foundation at the Inayat Khan Dargah, directly opposite the Madrasatul Niswan, came to visit. The young woman was responsible for organizing various 'empowering' women's projects, as she put it, such as machine knitting,

sewing, and other educational programmes. As far as her family history was concerned, she came from a Gujarati family, and the first person she talked about was her grandfather, who had been an actor as well as a Sufi dervish. Her father, who was a dervish too and a teacher (guru) of the lute (vina), in turn initiated the move from Gujarat to Delhi over forty years ago.[16] The young woman saw it as the result of the confluence of all the above factors that her childhood had been deeply influenced by the presence of dervishes and her father's students in their home. In addition to cultivating the family's spiritual heritage, she pursued her studies and obtained a degree in public administration. In the light of her current work, she found it surprising how she had eventually come to combine her father's spiritual outlook with her wish to work for worldly affairs.

When I asked her how she had come to know about the madrasa, she said that one of the teachers had come to attend one of the women's projects at the dargah, where she started to learn machine knitting. After some time, the teacher had invited her to come and visit the madrasa, and on that particular day she had decided to take her up on the invitation to come and see her friend in her workplace. The dervish's daughter confidently described herself as a deeply spiritual person and for that reason she was impressed with the interactions she observed in the madrasa. But with a glance at the long black manteaus hanging on the wardrobe, she commented in a carefree manner that she would never wear a burqa. Then, with a broad smile she took out a photograph from her bag that showed her in 'proper purdah', as she said, adding that this was a rare sight. For this young woman, being in 'proper purdah' simply meant that she wore a scarf (dupatta) loosely wrapped around her head, which she left uncovered otherwise.

Along with the views of the dervish's daughter, I also intended to find out about the Madrasatul Niswan's 'official' stance regarding Sufism. After all, basti Nizamuddin is strongly coloured by the Sufi shrines and their activities, such as the annual celebrations on the saints' birthdays (*urs*), the weekly spiritual vocal concerts (*Qawalis*), and the continuous flow of pilgrims, ill, and poor who come to seek relief. Moreover, links between madrasas and the Sufi orders (khanqahs) were a rule rather than the exception throughout history. Even the list of beliefs (aqidah) of Deoband recognizes Sufism as a valid form of seeking knowledge about God[17], and hence it was hard to imagine Sufism not figuring at all in the Madrasatul Niswan. When I asked badi appa what she thought of *tasawwuf* practices, which I did with the help of a book on Sufism, tariqah, and shariah, she said that Sufism did not play a role in this madrasa. She explained that according

to their community's beliefs Sufism was only for big people (*bade log*), because it was others who followed Sufi practices in their orders outside the madrasa, although personally she was not averse to the idea of Sufism altogether either. Another teacher added that even if they wanted to go to a dargah to pray, which would not be wrong per se, provided one had the right intentions for the prayer, it would still be impossible for the young women to go. In her words, they observed such a strict form of purdah that they would not be allowed to even walk with bare feet inside the shrine, where men would be able to see their ankles or hands exposed. Wondering what would be the use of wanting something that one could not have anyway, the young teacher concluded that she did not even want to go to a dargah anyway.

Keeping in mind that the madrasa represents a relatively closed community with a strong emphasis on orthodoxy and orthopraxy, I was surprised that badi appa's attitude toward Sufism was that favourable. Moreover, the vocational centre wherein many of the madrasa's teachers learned machine knitting, embroidery, and sewing, was directly affiliated with one of the two major shrines in the area, as we saw before. The above observations and examples indicate that the Madrasatul Niswan coexists comfortably with its Sufi neighbours, as there seems to be a 'division of labour'. It seems that while the Islamic learning imparted in the madrasa is meant for everyone willing to adjust to the requirements of discipline and ethical practice, Sufism is thought to be more complicated than that, probably because the practices are less accessible to the 'ordinary' believer.

4.7 A 'dual type' girls' madrasa

Following the above encounters with the 'Other' in the Madrasatul Niswan, I would now like to introduce a different type of girls' madrasa for comparative purposes. In this 'dual type' madrasa, Islamic subjects are taught alongside the state curriculum for secondary education. A comparison between the two madrasas allows for an understanding of what makes the Madrasatul Niswan different, while simultaneously identifying common issues, such as the strive for recogition by the state. The Jamiatul Zehra[18] public school/girls' madrasa[19] in Okhla was founded under the patronage of the Ahl-e-hadith movement (see Chapter 2, n. 11). In the brief history of the madrasa's inception we read that Maulana Abdul Hamid Rahmani established the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre in 1980. According to the Maulana the Salafi movement, which is equated with the Ahl-e-hadith,

used to thrive in Delhi prior to Partition. The reformist traditions of Shah Waliullah, Shah Ismail Shahid, and Shaikh Nazeer Husain Muhaddith were mainly kept alive through the Madrasa Rahimia[20], which represents one of the largest Ahl-al-hadith madrasas in Delhi. During the 1980s, the 'Salafi youth' revived the Ahl-al-hadith traditions and the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre in turn stood behind the foundation of the Jamiatul Zehra in 1985.[21]

Although initially the principal of the Jamiatul Zehra was reluctant to see me, I met her sister by chance. Following this introduction to the family, I also obtained permission to come and visit the school/madrasa. The principal's sister appeared to regret the fact that her sister worked in a madrasa and was quick to add that at least all the 'modern' subjects were taught as well in this madrasa. But she made it clear that she felt uneasy about the Islamic component of the curriculum and that she did not understand why her sister continued to work there. In order to show me why this was so, the principal's sister briefly sketched the educational history of the women in her family. To begin with, she proudly mentioned that her mother had been the first young woman to attend a public boarding school for girls in Lucknow. She and her sister in turn had both received 'modern' English medium education, and she seemed to take pride in her family's progressive attitude. In her opinion, the family's progressive views with regard to educating their girls made it even more embarrassing that her sister had decided to become the principal of a girls' madrasa.

The family's educational history also gave rise to the question why she thought parents chose to send their daughters to a madrasa. My host suggested that girls from rural areas and economically (relatively) deprived backgrounds who attend a madrasa are often the first women in their families to receive formal education. She explained that since in many cases the girls' parents are illiterate, they would not be able to distinguish between a school and a madrasa. In addition, she pointed out that in her opinion especially the 'dual type' madrasas that offer English medium education alongside Islamic subjects tended to lure parents into sending their children to a madrasa. Although I heard similar arguments on other occasions, one could counter that such an argument downplays the importance of the madrasas as institutions of Islamic learning and fails to do right to the parents' agency. Even though it may hold that the decision to send a daughter to a madrasa is made by mistake in some cases, this is likely to be the exception rather than the rule, because if such mistakes were the rule, the madrasas would be empty instead of mushrooming. What appears to be a more plausible expla-

nation is that many girls from rural and economically (relatively) deprived backgrounds come from large families with many children to feed. Since the madrasas provide education in return for nominal fees, offer boarding facilities, feed the students three meals a day, and often also ensure adequate medical care, sending one daughter or more to a madrasa may be a desirable option. In addition, the decision to send a daughter to a madrasa is often thought to be of religious merit for the entire family, as we will see in the following chapter.

Similar to the Madrasatul Niswan, the Jamiatul Zehra too offers education for those who are economically less well off. On the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre's list of priorities women's education ranks high. In the Introduction of the organization's brochure we read that 'Steps have been taken to get the school recognized by the CBSE [Central Board for Secondary Education, M.W.], so as to enable the students passing the 'secondary exams' to pursue their higher studies in a regular way. The school shall ultimately be elevated to a degree college for women, Insha Allah'. A few pages further, in the section titled 'Plans and Programmes for Future', number two on the list is the establishment of a Jamiatul Zehra Girls College. The 'school has been proposed to be developed into a girls college where the main emphasis would be on Islamic theology. The plan carries more value and weight because of the fact that our female community is a neglected lot particularly in the field of education. We intend to provide secular education as well as advanced theology courses so that our women could face the challenges of the modern age. We would like to give priority to this plan'.

The principal of the Jamiatul Zehra was aware of the above plans, as during my visits to the madrasa in late 2002 she was busy with the administrative side of her personal strive to seek recognition from the Central Board for Secondary Education. As the school was not recognized as yet, the principal was proud to relate that so far many of 'her' graduates had appeared as private candidates for the Secondary Board Exams at the Jamia Millia Islamia University. With regard to the school's curriculum that prepared the students for such exams, the Jamiatul Zehra's brochure states that the syllabus is based on the Central Board for Secondary Education subjects along with Urdu, classes on Islam (*Diniat*), Holy Quran (from the Nursery Class onwards), Arabic (from class VI), and computer education (from class III onwards). Although all subjects are taught in English, 'the subject is explained in Urdu as well. Hindi and Urdu are also taught along with English as compulsory subjects at all levels'.

The Jamiatul Zehra's 'Aims and Objectives' mention that the school also welcomes non-Muslim students, 'without discriminating them on the basis of religion, community, caste or creed so that they may also feel the cool breeze of Islamic culture and society'. Although I did not meet any non-Muslim students during my frequent visits, I found it typical of the madrasa's broader outlook that the role of Islam was downplayed in the above statement, because on the surface the impact of Islam appeared to be limited to the spheres of culture and society. As for the ensuing question how seriously the Islamic component was taken, the paragraph on passing 'Examinations and Promotions' mentions that the students have to ensure they pass with at least eighty out of hundred marks 'in each of the subjects of the Holy Qur'an [sic], Deeniat [sic], English, Maths, and Science'. The ranking of subjects too indicates that religious education is deemed important, because apart from failing to pass an exam, a student can even be expelled on account of failing one of the religious subjects twice.

As opposed to the Madrasatul Niswan, this 'dual type' madrasa made 'Games and Sports' compulsory for all students. Among the sports offered are volleyball, badminton, and indoor games. Apart from physical education, the teachers also organize regular 'Educational Tours and Picnics' 'whenever possible' to 'a historical place, a specialized institution, an unusual site, a museum or a zoo'. The ideology behind the educational model promoted by the Jamiatul Zehra could be summarized as nationalist with special regard for the Muslim community. The 'Aims and Objectives' section formulates the madrasa's educational aim in the following way: 'The institution aims at moulding the thoughts and beliefs, the hearts and minds and the bodies and souls of the students in the true Islamic frame work. To inculcate all these characteristics to the children which would make them a law-abiding, conscientious and sincere citizen. To imbue a sense of national and *(Milli)* concern so that they may become good citizens of our nation and Millat'.

Aiming to provide a structural framework that allows equal space for Indian cultural and Islamic elements, the celebrations of Independence Day, Gandhi Jayanti (Gandhi's birthday), along with *Eid-ul-Fitr*, Republic Day, *Eid-ul-Adha*, and Holi (Hindu spring festival) are included in the List of Holidays and Vacation. Such a combination or masala of shared festivities would have been unthinkable in the Madrasatul Niswan, as those in charge seemed eager to pay as little attention as possible to the wider non-Islamic social context. A similar masala can be found in the Jamiatul Zehra's 'List of Extra Curricular Activities', which includes Debates and Quiz competitions, On the spot essay competitions, Baitbazi competitions, On the spot paint-

ing competitions, Holy Quran Recitation competitions, Elocution (Hamd and Naat etc.), and Games and Sports competitions. In line with the above observations, the spirit of a 'local Islam' and the acceptance of its couleur locale pervaded the layout of the Jamiatul Zehra's school building too, as it was plastered with citations of Gandhi, the Quran, the ahadith, alongside drawings of pluralist India under its uniting flag.

A brief comparison of the two girls' madrasas points to important differences in the scope and definition of learning. To begin with, in the Jamiatul Zehra disciplining was mostly linked with classroom activities, owing to which everyday life resembled the routine observed in many other schools that start in the morning and end by noon. Such part-time school attendance is quite unlike the 'total institution' represented by the Madrasatul Niswan, where learning was not restricted to teaching hours and where for most of the students there was hardly any space for life outside the madrasa. In addition, the Jamiatul Zehra appeared to allot a different place to religion altogether, as Islam was explicitly limited to the ethical, 'cultural', and social spheres. As a result, the educational aims differed as well, because in the case of the Jamiatul Zehra those in charge argue that building the students' personality with a view to functioning within society is the primary educational aim. Such civic concern aims to ensure that the students of the Jamiatul Zehra may find it easier to embrace the plurality of the Indian environment than their peers in the Madrasatul Niswan. Finally, the students of the Jamiatul Zehra also have different future prospects in many ways, as their education prepares them to appear as private candidates for the 'secondary exams' that allow them to continue their studies in colleges.

1. As the madrasa's brochure is written in Arabic and Arabized Urdu, apart from those belonging to the 'core families' and those with a similar educational background, many parents may not be able to understand the text.
2. See for example Tirmidhi's (d.892) *Kitab ul-Shamail*, which is included in the Madrasatul Niswan's curriculum (see Appendix II).
3. Here, the author mentions the Prophet's wife Aisha in particular as a learned scholar of hadith, jurisprudence, poetry, and literature, as we will see later on in this chapter.
4. For the history of the dars-e-nizami, see Malik 1997, 522-541. During fieldwork I observed that it was common for even the smallest neighbourhood Islamic school to claim that they taught the dars-e-nizami, because such claims provided even modest institutions with authoritative credentials, which in turn ensured a steady flow of new students and incoming funds.
5. It deserves mention that mastery of Urdu is not to be taken for granted among Muslim youths in India today. For example, in girls' madrasas in Hyderabad the first year is often dedicated entirely to teaching the girls 'proper' Urdu. Principals and teachers often complained that the girls did not know Urdu anymore, as their primary education takes place in Hindi. Furthermore, it seems that many parents no longer cultivate Urdu in a predominantly Hindi and English speaking environment. Similarly, even though in the case of the Madrasatul Niswan the girls are expected to know Urdu prior to starting the course, my observations indicate that especially girls who come from rural areas are often in need of basic language training in Urdu.
6. For a discussion of the *Bihishti Zewar* see Metcalf 1990. The *Lives of the First Four Caliphs*, i.e. the *Qirat-ur-rashida*, will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter, and finally Patricia Jeffery notes the influence of the *Ladkion ka Islami Course*, a popular Islamic primer for girls in five parts, on rural (Islamic) education in Bijnor in Jeffery 2004.
7. Similarly, although Maududi was in favour of education for men and women alike, he qualified the latter noting that for women the curriculum should be restricted to what she needs to learn in order to become a good mother and housewife (Maududi 1973:199).
8. With regard to this assumption we should keep in mind that so-called 'textbook conflicts' have led to riots in the past and to an increased sensitivity regarding the contents of non-Islamic textbooks on the part of the Muslim communities. In the opinion of many the contents of such textbooks have been manipulated with a view to minimizing or even eradicating the influence of Muslim culture on the subcontinent.
9. For the publication of this book, the author received the help of the Begum of Bhopal, whom he met in 1914 and whose decisive role for the struggle for Muslim women's education in India has been described in Gail Minault 1998.

10. Regarding the last point, the author goes to great lengths stating that: 'Even an obedient and loving wife will not care for her husband if he breaks his conjugal relations with her even temporarily. A male companion did this but his wife continued to serve him assiduously.' (Nadwi 2000:237).
11. Patricia Jeffery talked about the madrasa's 'civilizing mission' in Bijnor during a conference on values of education (Neemrana, April 2003).
12. Itch Guard is an ointment advertised for in a rather comic and hence catchy fashion on national television.
13. *Diwali*, the festival of light, is celebrated annually to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The festival also marks the beginning of the auspicious wedding season, and moreover it is widely held that new ventures are best started after the *Diwali* celebrations to ensure good fortune.
14. *Rakshabandhana* is a Hindu festival on the occasion of which sisters tie colourful threads or bracelets around their brothers' wrists after praying on their behalf and in 'exchange' for gifts, thus ensuring the sister's good will for the next year.
15. A 'kitty party' is a gathering of married and typically middle aged women, either organized at home or at a restaurant during day-time, when their husbands are at work. Such parties are notorious for being great occasions for gossip, display of wealth, and extravagant tastes.
16. The *vina* (lute) is a classical instrument exclusively played by men. The young woman mentioned the belief that those who play the vina cannot have children, adding with a smile that her father had proven this to be wrong, as she has four sisters and four brothers.
17. I am indebted to Dietrich Reetz for pointing out this link.
18. As in the case of the Madrasatul Niswan the name of this 'dual type' madrasa has been changed too, though it is a real name.
19. Interestingly enough, while the Jamiatul Zehra's advertising brochure labels the school as 'Public School', i.e. a private school, the Principal, as well as the teachers and students refer to it as a madrasa. Hence the double labelling, which might be the result of the ongoing strive for recognition by the state.
20. In 2002, the Madrasa Rahimia was the only madrasa in Delhi registered with the Waqf Board.
21. The overview is based on the brochure of the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre New Delhi. Apart from the Jamiatul Zehra, the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre also runs The Institute of Islamic Education, the Shariah College Sanabil, and a Vocational Centre. Interestingly enough, the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre not only has its branches within India, as the Shariah College also maintains ties with the Islamic University of Madinah, the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University of Riyadh, and with the Ummul Qura University Makkah. Apart from ensuring funding through these channels, students who qualify at the Shariah College are 'eligible to get admission' in the aforesaid institutions abroad.

5 Female authority and the public

'Many women acquired Deeni knowledge [i.e. knowledge pertaining to faith, M.W.] from great Muhadditheen [narrators of Prophetic traditions, M.W.] from behind the curtain, and they in turn taught these sciences to other men from behind the curtain.' (Yunus 1994:58)

After examining the educational programme of the Madrasatul Niswan, this chapter addresses the question whether female authority in Islamic matters is emerging in girls' madrasas. My findings suggest that the students' identity as Muslim women, along with the demands laid out by the concept of purdah or gender segregation, are factors that influence their professional choices as well as their ability to participate in the public. With a view to finding answers to the above question the following sections examine the linkages between gender, the nexus between agency and discipline, and forms of public presence.

5.1 Life after graduation

When I began fieldwork in the Madrasatul Niswan in late 2001, rumour had it that a vast plot of land had been acquired in another predominantly Muslim locality called Okhla, where also the Jamiatul Zehra introduced in the previous chapter and the Jamia Millia Islamia University are located. Another rumour had it that the entire Madrasatul Niswan was to shift by mid 2002, but once the moment had arrived, it turned out that construction work had progressed to such a limited extent that only the nursery section was to commence its teaching activities for the youngest in Okhla. Two senior teachers in their mid twenties were delegated from the Madrasatul Niswan in Nizamuddin to set up the nursery unit in Okhla, which prior to the teachers' departure I had not been aware of. Apart from occasional tutorials for young children and despite the curriculum's claim that the madrasa provides education for various age groups (see Appendix II), what is taught in practice is the five-year secondary course for girls from roughly twelve years onwards. Nevertheless, the plans for expansion also seemed to include an extended outreach through the introduction of formalized primary education.

As only two of the teachers had taken up teaching the youngest in Okhla and not everyone had seen the new site to begin with, for those who stayed behind in Nizamuddin the Okhla madrasa almost acquired the status of an ideal myth. Adding to this impression were circumstances ensuring that whenever I wanted to go to Okhla to see the new compound, the route description and address were too vague to be of practical use. Later on it occurred to me that the girls were probably used to relying on their guardians or on those in charge of organizing the transport facilities provided by the madrasa. Owing to their restricted mobility, the young women may not have been as concerned about the details of how to get to the new madrasa.

The prospect of the Madrasatul Niswan's expansion also gave rise to the question what the students intended to do after graduation. The Manager told me that they hoped to host up to one thousand students eventually, which implied that the madrasa would soon need more teachers. Against the background of these developments, I took up the occasion to ask students of different age groups what they wanted to do after graduation. While doing so, I paid attention to the students' background, since I had become increasingly aware that many of the students and teachers had moved to Delhi from far-away places. For them the move itself was a big step that may well have a major impact on their future life. When I asked fourteen second year students what they wanted to do after they graduate, they answered in chorus that they wanted to teach in the Madrasatul Niswan or start new girls' madrasas elsewhere. Similarly, a group of sixteen girls in the third year replied that they wanted to teach either in the Madrasatul Niswan or in a similar girls' madrasa elsewhere. By contrast, for sixteen girls studying in the final year in 2002 marriage ranked above anything else. When I asked them what they wanted to do after graduation, they answered in the following order: (1) get married; (2) teach in the Madrasatul Niswan if they need more teachers, teach elsewhere in similar girls' madrasas, or start similar girls' madrasas; (3) do tabligh (*tabligh karenge*)[1]; and (4) organize jamaat, which they defined as preaching and leading women's meetings on Islamic topics in their respective communities. The order of the above replies indicates that while for the twelve to fourteen year old students the question of marriage did not seem to be important as yet, the graduates, who were roughly between sixteen and seventeen years of age at the time, appeared to be more aware that the prospect of marriage was of prime importance for their future.

With regard to the students' preference for the teaching profession, the following explanations may help to shed light on the question why the students were so unanimously inclined toward taking up teaching and

nothing else. To begin with, the madrasa was in the process of expanding and those in charge hoped to find recognition with the Central Board for Secondary Education, owing to which they would need more teachers in the near future. In addition, as the madrasa was not recognized by the Central Board for Secondary Education as yet, most of the students may not have been aware of any other career choice, nor would most of them have been in a position to pursue further studies due to the relative lack of financial resources. Second, the curriculum and its underlying educational aims seem to prepare the students well for the teaching profession, as we saw in the previous chapter. Third, considering that the teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan were barely older and in some cases even younger than their students, it was easy for the latter to identify with the teachers. While on the one hand the non-existent age difference may have come at the cost of difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom from time to time, on the other hand the peer effect strengthened the teachers' function as role models for their students. Keeping in mind the limited space in the Nizamuddin madrasa, the teachers, whom the students saw more than their families in most cases, enjoyed respect and a relative freedom of movement, which the students admired. A fourth possible explanation is the high status enjoyed by the teaching profession, as it is generally seen as respectable career choice for women. By the same token, in an environment wherein female seclusion is practised to such an extent, it may be also perceived as an advantage that teaching in a girls' madrasa does not interfere too much with the obligations associated with married life. In short, the students' replies indicate that most of them were content with the prospects of marriage and teaching, as they primarily seemed to study for personal merit.

5.2 Remaking women: education, agency, and discipline

While studying in a madrasa and working as a teacher are seen as respectable for Muslim women living in seclusion, there may well be tensions between purdah and participating in the public sphere. To gain insight in these tensions, first the relations between education and feminism will be addressed. In *Remaking Women*, Abu-Lughod defines feminism in broad terms, namely as 'the wide range of projects that have or had as an explicit goal or necessary foundation the remaking of women' (Abu-Lughod 1998:23). In addition, examining the relationship between feminisms and Islam, Kandiyoti argues that 'in an increasingly 'globalized' world […] the area of gender relations and women's conduct marks itself out as a zone of

struggle for conflicting bids of power and control' (Haw 1998:93). As a result, 'issues of women's rights are invariably […] "part of an ideological terrain where broader notions of cultural authenticity and integrity are debated and where women's appropriate place and conduct may be made to serve as boundary markers"' (Abu-Lughod 1998:3). Although the case studies in *Remaking Women* discuss more secular forms of education, Abu-Lughod addresses concerns that bear strong resemblance with my observations in the Madrasatul Niswan.

In India the project of remaking women and the vision of the 'new woman' are rooted in late nineteenth century reformist ideas, as we saw in Chapter 1.[2] Thanawi's afore mentioned *Bihishti Zewar* (*Heavenly Ornaments*) is noted as an example of the literature published in Muslim reformist circles that was shaped by the colonial encounter (Abu-Lughod 1998:19). The ensuing definitions of the 'new woman' gave rise to tensions between 'women's greater participation in the public world […] and women's enormous responsibility for the domestic sphere' (Abu-Lughod 1998:8). Typically, questions regarding the images of the 'new woman' emerged in relation to postcoloniality and modernity (Abu-Lughod 1998:5). In defining what is 'modern', Abu-Lughod takes recourse to Rabinow's argument that 'it is impossible to define modernity; rather what one must do is to track the diverse ways the insistent claims to being modern are made' (Abu-Lughod 1998:7). In the Madrasatul Niswan, claims to modernity were made at different levels: the emergence of girls' madrasas is in itself a modern phenomenon (in the sense of a new development), the teaching methods are modern (in terms of teaching according to a fixed timetable and having exams and degrees), and modern subjects such as English and computer skills are taught. Although the context of the Madrasatul Niswan differs significantly from the more secular style of education discussed in *Remaking Women*, Abu-Lughod's claim that the modernization projects examined are both emancipating and regulatory is to some extent helpful for understanding the case of the girls' madrasa as well.

As we saw in the previous chapter, attending modern educational institutions simultaneously entails being exposed to and being socialized into new discourses about training the mind and building one's character, along with new practices of disciplining the body. With regard to such disciplining practices, Saba Mahmood's study of the Egyptian women's mosque movement (Mahmood 2005; 2001) sheds light on the question of agency in a context wherein women appear to acquiesce in what non-participants may perceive as oppressive conditions. In brief, in the women's mosque movement in Cairo, women from various socioeconomic backgrounds provide lessons for each other on

'Islamic scriptures, social practices, and forms of bodily comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self' (Mahmood 2001:202). In an attempt to redefine agency cut loose from its associate concept of resistance to domination, Mahmood argues that agency can also mean the 'capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create' (Mahmood 2001:203). In other words, agency thus defined is the 'capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will […]', even if unintentional (Mahmood 2001:206). While liberalism linked the concept of self-realization with individual autonomy, the idea of self-realization per se precedes Western liberalism in its expression through religious and mystical traditions (Mahmood 2001:208). Urging to think in directions other than linking agency with progressive change and the prevalent normativity ascribed to freedom in feminist discourses, docility should be reread as the willingness to be taught, or as 'ways in which individuals work on themselves to become the willing subjects of a particular discourse' (Mahmood 2001:210). The conscious effort at reorienting emotions, which Mahmood encountered among women in the mosque movement, is acknowledged as the highest degree in the practice of faith. This assessment is based on the Aristotelian view that the acquisition of moral values presupposes a relation between outward behaviour and inner dispositions, paired with the concept of *habitus* coined by Bourdieu, which denotes the relationship between learning, memory, experience, and the self/body. In Mahmood's words, 'piety also entailed the inculcation of entire dispositions through a simultaneous training of the body, emotions, and reason as sites of discipline until the religious virtues acquired the status of embodied habits' (Mahmood 2001:212). By contrast, 'to analyze people's actions in terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is to necessarily reduce the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of domination' (Mahmood 2001:222). Instead, agency can mean developing a modest self, perfecting the ideal of embodied piety, and thus also the continuity of a 'discursive tradition that holds subordination to a transcendent will (and thus, in many instances, to male authority) as its coveted goal' (Mahmood 2001:204).

5.3 Purdah: being physically present but socially absent?

In the Madrasatul Niswan, one marker of 'embodied piety' is purdah, which denotes female segregation, modest dress, and veiling[3]. In Frogs in a Well, Patricia Jeffery discusses purdah among women associated with one of the two Nizamuddin shrines. Rather than presenting them as victims of a

rigid Islamic tradition or as oppressed, Jeffery's observations highlight the complexity and ambivalence in the women's lives. For the women associated with the Nizamuddin shrine purdah, female seclusion, and refraining from working outside the home equal luxury (Jeffery 2000:24). In this case study, purdah is defined in the following way: (1) as an ideology based on Islam; (2) as an expression of social stratification; and (3) as related to the concepts of honour and shame. Jeffery's notion of purdah may be summarized as 'physical presence while being socially absent' (Jeffery 2000:104).

However, for the women in the Madrasatul Niswan, such a description would be problematic. To begin with, the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan are present in the public, even if in a specific way. In order to understand their presence, a brief digression on the concept of the modern public sphere is needed. Central to the conventional Habermasian notion of the modern public sphere is that participants are considered as equals, not hindered by attachment to particular interests or identities. Communication is based on the rational exchange of ideas and opinions about issues of the common good. Rather than particular identities, only the power of rational argumentation is acknowledged (Habermas 1974). Yet, the assumption that participants would be able to bracket inequalities of status and that the outcome of debates would not be influenced by the identities and social positions of the participants, has been convincingly criticized (see Calhoun 1992).

Pointing out that the public sphere is, in fact, an arena for the formation and enactment of social identities, some have argued that rather than employing the concept of a unified public sphere, it is more productive to start from a proliferation of publics. Fraser (1992), for instance, proposes to employ the term 'subaltern counterpublics', that is 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (Fraser 1992:123).[4] Although the Madrasatul Niswan is not so much an arena for debate than a space for the enactment of particular identities, it can be seen as a counterpublic. Such counterpublics are particularly likely to emerge in stratified societies, which are defined as 'societies whose basic institutional framework generates unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination' (Fraser 1992:122). Warner defines a counterpublic as a public that maintains awareness of its subordinate status and sets itself off against a dominant public (Warner 2002:86). In addition, Fraser points out that 'however limited a public may be in its empirical manifestation at any given time, its members understand themselves as part of a potentially wider public' (Fra-

ser 1992:124); she also suggests that subaltern publics carry 'emancipatory potential' (Fraser 1992:124).

We saw that post 9/11 the Indian madrasas drew much public attention in the media. As a result, stereotypes regarding madrasa education were made explicit and had to be argued out, because the former subaltern reacted and challenged many of the stereotypes, as we saw in Chapter 2. While the Hindu majority presents itself as the unmarked category in the public sphere, within the counter public sphere too the question emerges who represents the Madrasatul Niswan, because also within a counter public sphere inequalities continue to exist. In the Madrasatul Niswan I observed inequalities based on caste, class, and the difference between rural and urban backgrounds. Language, for example, represents a divider that cut across all of the above factors. While the Principal badi appa and the young women belonging to the 'core families' were apt speakers of Arabic and used 'elaborate' Urdu with confidence, others needed Hindi translations in order to understand the Urdu textbooks. Many girls came from non-Urdu speaking families, or their spoken Urdu did not contain the same Persian and Arabic influences as in the case of the young women belonging to the 'core families', because their primary education had been in Hindi, or they were the first (female) family members to receive any kind of formal education. Despite claims to equality, the existing inequalities within the counter public sphere suggest that the 'core families', and in particular their male members, appear as the unmarked category. Moreover, my findings suggest that merely having access to or participating in some sort of public sphere does not necessarily imply equal voice, as differences along the lines of gender, class, and caste were at stake.

There is another line of criticism of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere that is relevant to the discussion on the Madrasatul Niswan. As Moors (2005 forthcoming) has pointed out, this notion is also limiting in its exclusive focus on rational debate as the only legitimate form of participating in the modern public sphere, for this means that other forms and styles of communication are a-priori seen as ineffective and undesirable. If, however, the public sphere is recognized as an arena wherein group identities and interests are always at stake, then there is a need for a more all-encompassing 'politics of presence' that allows for the inclusion of other forms of critical expression and non-verbal modes of communication. Such a 'politics of presence' becomes especially relevant when discussing contributions of subaltern groups that may be less well versed in effectively presenting their points of view in normalized and hence acceptable formats of 'rational argu-

mentation'. Forms and styles of presentation may include, for instance, bodily comportment, appearance, and dressing styles. Wearing modest dress can be an act of participation in the public sphere, because it may be perceived as a statement by the public, even though making a statement may not be the (primary) intention of the wearer. Similarly, (girls') madrasas like the Madrasatul Niswan are a form of 'presence' in the Indian public sphere, as by virtue of its physical presence the Madrasatul Niswan interacts with and participates in the wider public sphere. Although the graduates' position as learned women may not be acknowledged by the public owing to a host of factors, the young women in purdah still appear to participate in the public through their presence. Granting that participation through presence and through making a statement by wearing modest dress may be unintentional and difficult to control, such forms of presence nevertheless have an effect on the public, which is contrary to being 'socially absent'.

In keeping with Mahmood's findings regarding women's agency and modesty, the extent to which the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan appeared to be aware of and took pride in living in purdah sheds light on how the cultivation of a modest and pious self can mean agency. The young women in the Madrasatul Niswan were gradually socialized into the community's habitus through the subtle yet all-pervading lessons in adab, which centre on the topic of female modesty as expressed through wearing modest dress. Outside the madrasa, the teachers and students wearing modest dress may be perceived as reminders of a moral superiority vis-à-vis any non-purdah observing woman and vis-à-vis any man whose gaze the women in purdah attempt to escape. In that respect a woman in purdah can be a powerful symbol to others, as to the Muslim woman who does not observe purdah she may be a moral reminder of a normative value and to the bypasser she may seem anything ranging from oppressed to praiseworthy.

While Jeffery's case study suggests that the extent to which women can afford to live in purdah may set them apart from women of a lower social standing[5], the relation between purdah and 'living in luxury' needs to be briefly revisited. In keeping with Fahmy's argument regarding the *School for Midwives* in Egypt (Abu-Lughod 1998), the status of the graduates of the Madrasatul Niswan may well be compromised by their low social standing. The majority of the Madrasatul Niswan's graduates is from a lower to lower middle-class background, and in addition the Founder, Manager, 'core families', and most of the students also have a low-caste background. Such a combination of factors may easily undermine the graduates' standing vis-à-vis high-caste Muslim communities, or vis-à-vis those 'in authority' who

claim high descent. Simultaneously, however, purdah provides lower castes with a strategy facilitating upward social mobility, as a sense of modesty, patience, and obedience – all virtues that are considered 'civilized' (Minault 1998:45) – is instilled in the young women through socialization.

5.4 The 'women behind the curtain'

The following examples highlight the meanings of purdah, the nexus between agency and discipline, and public presence for differently positioned women in the Madrasatul Niswan, namely for the women of the 'core families', for those outside the 'core families', and for the 'less disciplined' cases.[6]

Women of the 'core families'

The most 'public' woman inside the Madrasatul Niswan was, without doubt, the Principal badi appa. Being in her late twenties, the madrasa's Founder's daughter was married with three children and a fourth on the way at the time of my fieldwork. Among the teachers, she formed the exception with regard to her age. As a result, owing equally to her age and her weight, the other teachers and students used to address her as badi appa[7] or 'big elder sister'. Badi appa was born in the Barabanki district close to Lucknow, as the third of nine siblings. As opposed to her daughters, who attended the prestigious Delhi Public School during the free afternoon classes held in Hindi, badi appa had received her primary education in the Yaseen Education Centre for Muslim girls in Nizamuddin. Because other teachers from the 'core families' made similar references to the Yaseen Education Centre when I asked them about their primary education, I wanted to find out what this institution was all about.

Badi appa told me that the Yaseen Education Centre used to be a small (*chhota-mota*) building in the vicinity of the so-called *Kali Masijd*[8] or mosque, both located at walking distance from the Madrasatul Niswan. When she attended the Centre, it was a privately run Urdu medium school for Muslim girls from the neighbourhood. As far as badi appa could recall, an engineer had set up the small school over thirty years ago, delegated the task of running the school to a female manager, and saw to it that a recognized curriculum for primary education was taught. One day, badi appa sent for one of the third year students to accompany me to the house Yaseen Education Centre's founder, or at least to the place where the Centre used to be, as badi appa was not sure whether the school was still in use.

Although being a student she was obliged to observe purdah at all times, the girl left the madrasa without the company of a 'guardian'. She did not even wear a burqa when we ventured into the neighbourhood bazaars, which the madrasa's Manager did not seem to mind either when we passed him on our way out. Later on I thought that the only explanation for the scenario was that the student in question was below the official age of enrolment to the madrasa and hence also below the age of purdah. As she was one of the younger girls belonging to the 'core families', I could only assume that she was still below the official age of admission to the Madrasatul Niswan. Despite her young age, she probably obtained permission to study in the madrasa precisely because of her family ties with the 'core families'.

We first walked through narrow alleys lined with small shops and then took a turn that led us along the withered walls of Kali Masjid. A little further we entered a narrow wooden door, which lead through an equally narrow passage that opened into the spatious courtyard of a haveli or mansion. It took only a second for the young man who spotted us to call the daughter of the Yaseen Education Centre's founder, who then welcomed and accompanied us into one of the many open rooms looking out on the courtyard. As we had come unannounced, the bedding was still lying on the ground, but with a distinct disregard for this given, our host gestured for us to sit down. The young woman had been the last teacher of the Yaseen Education Centre, which ultimately closed its doors in 2002. Explaining why the Centre had closed down, she said that since she and her sister were married with children, they did not have time anymore for running the school. After a short pause she added that her father had started the school over thirty years ago, at a time when there were no other schools for Muslim girls in this neighbourhood. As this had changed over time, she concluded with a smile that the school had lost its function of providing both primary as well as adult education to an average of roughly fifty students at a time.

Suddenly the founder entered the room and asked in impeccable English what had brought me to his house. As soon as I had told him the purpose of my visit, he joined us with a broad smile on his face and started what resembled a lecture. I had told him about my research in the nearby Madrasatul Niswan and that I wanted to know more about the Yaseen Education Centre. In line with this brief background information, he said that in the term *dini madaris* (Islamic seminaries), the word din or faith stands for character, owing to which the function of the dini madaris should be to mould the students' character, whether they are Muslims or not. Expound-

ing further on his views regarding Islam and being a Muslim, he added that in his opinion everyone who is obedient to God is a Muslim, as this is the original meaning of Islam. Because he considered any claims to exclusivity or absolute truth as sins, he suggested that to exclude others or to condemn their faith invariably made a person fall outside the fold of the Muslim community. Continuing his train of thought, he voiced his conviction that everyone should go for the Hajj, as the Kaaba belonged to all Abrahamic faiths and should not exclude followers of other beliefs. In his words, education was to teach that there is no exclusive truth in any religion. As a concluding remark in passing, he told me that he was a descendant of the saint Nizamuddin Auliya, who gave the area its name. The contrast could not have been sharper than between the claims to exclusivity I had heard in the Madrasatul Niswan and the broadmindedness of the Yaseen Education Centre's founder. It struck me that his married daughters continued to live in his house, but I had encountered similar practices in the family of the Sufi's daughter mentioned in the previous chapter.

Returning to one of the Yaseen Education Centre's former students, namely badi appa: her family had shifted from the Barabanki district to Delhi when her father took up a teaching assignment in the Kashful Ulum Madrasa for boys in the Tablighi Markaz in Nizamuddin. It was then that she began to attend classes at the Yaseen Education Centre, following which badi appa received her secondary education in the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon[9]. At the time of my fieldwork she taught Islamic law (fiqh) to the final year's students, along with exegesis (tafsir), Arabic, English, and also Farsi was planned as a new subject. Badi appa, her husband, their children, and a changing number of teachers lived in a narrow three-storied building in a gali or alley just around the corner from the Madrasatul Niswan. As the main building of the Madrasatul Niswan was already too small at the time, some of the unmarried teachers from Lucknow, Bahraich, and Malegaon stayed either with badi appa and her family, or in the building opposite their small house. Similarly, the main building too served as a multifunctional space, wherein the students studied, slept, ate, spent their free time, and often also the holidays for the entire duration of their studies. Despite the immense budget mentioned in the Madrasatul Niswan's brochure, there did not seem to be any leads suggesting that the money raised was used to meet the private needs of those in charge.[10]

Badi appa appeared to be the most visible, the most heard of, the most referred to, and the most respected teacher in the Madrasatul Niswan. As the Founder's daughter and the Manager's wife she enjoyed a certain

status to begin with, and she was also considered a role model for her piety and excellence in knowledge. With regard to their status, the same held for the daughters of the 'core families' to some extent. Badi appa and the girls from the 'core families' shared a similar family background, as the 'core families' came from the same Barabanki district. However, as the girls from the 'core families' were much younger than badi appa, they were generally seen as aspiring to the elder's degree of accomplishment.

Like the Manager, the father of one of the teachers from the 'core families' had also studied in the Kashful Ulum Madrasa for boys and continued to teach there, just like the Founder. Two of the teacher's younger sisters and a number of cousins were also enrolled in the Madrasatul Niswan as students or taught there at the time of my fieldwork. While she had also studied in the Yaseen Education Centre, as opposed to badi appa she referred to it as a 'school' instead of a madrasa. With a view to her family background she highlighted that the men in her family dedicated every Thursday and Friday to carrying out tablighi work. She also expressed regret that there were no similar requirements for girls, although in her words the practices of the tablighi activists functioned as a role model for women. As her mother had not studied in a madrasa, she and her two sisters were the first girls in her family to do so. Another younger sister of hers below the age of purdah attended the Delhi Public School together with badi appa's daughters. In addition to the community's belief that girls should acquire as much secular knowledge as possible prior to the age of purdah, the strive for upward social mobility appeared to be another significant factor at play. Upward social mobility also seemed to be possible through better marriage prospects due to Islamic education and the internalization of adab. In that respect, one of my interlocutors in the Old City suggested that I should keep my eyes open with regard to issues related to female labour migration to the Gulf States. He pointed out that some of teachers may not teach primarily out of religious motivation, but with a view to 'qualifying' for a husband working or studying in the Gulf States, and one such case was, in fact, brought to my attention in the Madrasatul Niswan.

Roughly one year after she graduated from the Madrasatul Niswan, the above-mentioned teacher from the 'core families' got married in August 2002. As she was only fifteen years old, she was considered too young to live with her husband, who was an Indian student in a madrasa for boys in Medina. Once her in-laws had left for Riyadh and her husband for Medina, the new bride temporarily returned to her parents' house. She also took up teaching again for the time being. In our conversations, she highlighted the

value of the gold jewellery that her husband and in-laws had given her, as she proudly displayed her ornamental gold rings. Initially, the young woman continued to live with her parents in Nizamuddin for a few months, and this arrangement was supposed to last for about a year. During that year she intended to carry on teaching the *Mansurat* and the *Qirat-ur-rashida* to the second and third year students in the Madrasatul Niswan. Following this interim period, she was supposed to join her husband in Medina. When I asked her what she was planning to do there, she said that she would not teach in Medina, because she wanted to continue her studies. She also told me that there was a well-known girls' madrasa in Medina, for which her in-laws had already sought enrolment on her behalf.

However, instead of staying with her family for another year, it was soon decided that the bride would join her husband in Medina after *Bakr-e-Eid* in early February 2003, because the family deemed it better for her to be reunited with her husband as soon as possible. The young woman was visibly delighted at the prospect of seeing her husband again that soon. Prior to her relatively sudden departure, she took a leave from her teaching activities to bid her grandparents farewell in their village. Upon her return from her grandparents' place, the bride told me that as her in-laws lived in Riyadh, she and her husband, who by then had come to India to 'fetch her' (*us ko lene ke liye*), would live by themselves. She was also happy to recount that her husband had already found an apartment for them, and that he had bought furniture especially for her, because as a student he used to live in a single room. The above story suggests that for the young bride, who came from the same lower caste Ansari background as the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan, her education and accomplishment in leading a pious life facilitated what most would consider a good marriage, as she was to settle abroad with the son of a relatively well-to-do family.

While the above teacher got married and settled in Saudi Arabia, her sixteen year old cousin was still unmarried. She taught English, exegesis (tafsir), and Islamic law (fiqh) to the first to third year's students, and she opined that she was not at all eager to get married either, as she gave priority to continuing her studies and to teaching in the Madrasatul Niswan. She appeared to follow the example of her father, who according to her saw teaching as more than a profession. As a result, he deemed it important for her, along with her sisters, cousins, and for his daughters-in-law to study or teach in the Madrasatul Niswan. In her words, he 'got upset' whenever one of them missed out on one day of studying or teaching. While the other teachers often referred to her as lazy, sleepy, and notoriously late for her teaching

duties, this hardly appeared to coincide with the very active and assertive impression she made. With regard to her 'laziness', she admitted that even though she was used to waking up early in the morning for her first prayer, she usually went back to sleep afterwards. As a result, she faced great difficulties waking up again to begin her daily teaching duties on time.

Like her married cousin, she was born and raised in Delhi and graduated from the Madrasatul Niswan in 2001 at fifteen years of age. The cousins' graduation age suggests that the girls from the 'core families' were up to two years younger than the other graduates when they received their fazilat degrees. A third teacher, whom I will introduce in the following section, got married to one of the cousin's elder brothers, and they all lived together as a 'joint family' in the basti Nizamuddin. Unlike many other teachers who did not live in the vicinity of the Madrasatul Niswan, this teacher was in a position to go home every day, and hence she also had to share in the household chores. The teacher's privileges included the permission to occasionally go to the nearby bazaar alone in order to buy fabrics and suit pieces[11] for herself. She also enjoyed a certain freedom at home, as apart from having access to books she knew from the Madrasatul Niswan, she was also allowed to read books on 'general knowledge'. The teacher qualified the latter as politics, geography, and medicine, along with Urdu magazines provided by one of her older brothers. When I asked how her self-studies combined with the household chores that were expected of her, she plainly said that 'whoever has time helps in the house'. This also included the male family members, because whenever they received male guests from the Tablighi Markaz, her brothers were expected to tend to the men. Besides her self-studies, other pastimes included sports, such as playing badminton. With regard to physical exercise she immediately pointed out that the requirements laid out by purdah formed a major practical problem. She seemed all the more delighted to relate that unlike now, the new madrasa in Okhla with its lawn and rooftop terrace would be protected from outsiders' gazes in such a way that the students would be able to play and exercise there. For the time being, on many occasions the teachers and students voiced regrets that there was no space for physical exercise or for outdoor activities in the tiny Nizamuddin madrasa, which they unanimously considered healthy. The above story of the married teacher's cousin indicates that even within the same family degrees of freedom, privileges, and duties vary from case to case. Within the same household social roles may differ to a great extent among peers, as we will see in the following example of the sister-in-law[12], who lived with the same family.

At age twenty-two, the cousin's sister-in-law did not have children yet, although her marriage had taken place more than four years ago. On many occasions she expressed distress about her childlessness and asked me to pray for her, so she would conceive soon. Strikingly enough she appeared to valorize the *dua* of a non-Muslim for this purpose. Her stories made clear that she carried much more responsibility for various household chores than for example the two teachers mentioned above, although the three young women equally taught full-time in the Madrasatul Niswan. Apart from the 'daily nuisances', of which the sister-in-law gave the example of having to prepare different dishes for breakfast early in the morning while everyone else was still asleep, a more urgent problem was that all the family members of the in-laws' household were much slimmer than she was. Because her husband in particular preferred slender women, her curves made her feel even more miserable.

When I asked whether the pressure exerted on her to lose weight had anything to do with particular beliefs regarding what a woman should look like, she said that the matter of dieting and trimming down had nothing to do with Islam. It was rather her husband's preference that made her wish to look more like her sisters-in-law, who in turn said that they considered themselves ugly and wished they had more curves. Still, the daughter-in-law continuously asked me for advice regarding dieting and exercising regimes. Ultimately she succeeded in losing some weight, although her continuing chores and teaching duties left her tired and much more quiet than before. Some time later she told me that the situation had become even worse, as her husband now openly threatened to leave her if she were to gain any more weight. She emphasized that it was her duty to please him, which in her words had everything to do with Islam. As a consequence, the sister-in-law went to great lengths in order to give her body the shape he desired, out of fear of losing him. Her earlier good humoured, self-confident, and outspoken nature faded with her weight melting away, giving way to a much more serious and fashion-conscious young woman, who no longer chattered about picnics at India Gate and egg *paranthe*[13] from her favourite food stall in South Delhi. Instead, she began to wear high heels and fashionable black mini *kurtis*[14].

In 'Femininity and its Discontents', Meenakshi Thapan analyzes urban Indian women's experiences with regard to their bodies and sexuality. Even though Thapan's sample of women surveyed did not include Muslim women, some of her observations sounded strikingly familiar, for example when talking about how women internalize the idea of being a 'body-for-

others' (Thapan 1997:173). In the sister-in-law's story, being a 'body-for-others' meant that she saw it as an obligation dictated by Islam to lose weight in order to please her husband. Furthermore, Thapan notes the influence of the media in shaping perceptions of the female body. Borrowing a phrase of Bordo, she claims that 'the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through standardized visual images' (Thapan 1997:174). As a consequence, she suggests that the 'concern with what is considered excessive weight and with the shapely female body which emerges in the women's narratives is to a large extent a reflection of what Kim Chernin (1981) refers to as the 'tyranny of slenderness' in the west' (Thapan 1997:173).

Similarly, the sister-in-law's 'domestic trials' hint at a clash between the community's beliefs and alternative ideals. Contrary to what we saw in the previous chapter regarding beliefs about the body, namely that it was thought to be 'good' the way God created it, the above example indicates how beliefs may be overruled by competing ideas. The sister-in-law's case indicates that some of the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan did not only adjust to a particular ideal of Islamic womanhood, as the sister-in-law also seemed to subject to certain Western and Indian middle-class notions of womanhood. After all, the sister-in-law's husband threatened to leave her if she were to gain more weight. Due to the sister-in-law's story I also became increasingly aware of how the men in this Muslim community seemed to be more exposed to media and 'Western' influences than the women living in purdah. Interviews and informal conversations with men from the same community suggested that, under the motto 'know thy enemy'[15], the men were generally well informed regarding things more or less forbidden, such as the latest Hollywood and Bollywood films, popular television serials, cell phones, and the internet. As a result, the men often seemed to be torn between their beliefs and images representing entirely different norms and values. Their wives in turn[16], like the sister-in-law introduced in the above story, tend to find themselves caught between a conservative particular trend of Islamic beliefs and practices on the one hand, and Western and Indian middle-class ideals that permeate urban India on the other hand. In that sense, the above story suggests that alternative forms of disciplining of the body may be equally important, as it is not only the madrasa that disciplines.

Those outside the 'core families'

Besides the 'core families' of the Nizamuddin madrasa there were also a number of teachers and students who came to the madrasa from outside the capital. Their family backgrounds differed from that of the 'core families', as they often came from rural areas, and because they were often the only women in their families to receive formal (madrasa) education or to pursue a professional career as teachers.[17] Apart from the above-mentioned differences, some of these teachers and students were particularly important for the madrasa, since they reinforced links between the Madrasatul Niswan and its two affiliated girls' madrasas in Lucknow and Malegaon. In addition, their stories indicate how, in line with Mahmood's argument, agency can mean acquiring religious merit for oneself, one's family, and for the community at large through studying or teaching in a girls' madrasa.

As opposed to the teachers introduced so far, at age twenty-four one of the 'older' unmarried teachers was born in Bahraich as the daughter of a local school Headmaster. She had six brothers and sisters and received her secondary education at the Jamia Noorul Islam in Lucknow. She was the first and only girl in the family to initially study and then teach in a girls' madrasa. Furthermore, the young woman conveyed the impression of being a committed and strikingly serious teacher, who was also comparatively strict in her interactions with the students. She taught exegesis (tafsir) and the earlier mentioned *Qirat-ur-rashida* to the second to fourth year's students. In the afternoons she was part of the small group of teachers who regularly visited the Inayat Khan Foundation, where courses in machine knitting and cloth painting were offered. Apart from her regular shifts as a warden in the Madrasatul Niswan, during which she remained inside the madrasa to watch over the students beyond teaching hours, she otherwise lived with badi appa's family nearby. When I asked her why she had chosen to study in a madrasa, keeping in mind that none of her family members had set a precedent for it, she said that it had been a question of merit for the entire family for her to do so, which was the formulaic reply I received on most occasions when asking the above question.

The teacher's friend was twenty-one and came from a small place close to Mumbai. Similar to her friend's family constellation she had four siblings, none of whom had studied in a madrasa. By contrast, she received her secondary education in the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon with the permission of her parents.[18] After graduation, the Principal of the Jamiatus Salehat 'sent' her to the Madrasatul Niswan to teach the Mansurat. The teacher's two elder sisters were already married, and her two brothers ran small businesses simi-

lar to that of their father, who was a textile trader. As the train journey home took almost two days, she told me that during vacations usually one of her brothers came to pick her up and accompany her on the long journey south. Her family's expectations appeared to stand in sharp contrast with her full-time teaching assignment in the madrasa. She said that whenever she went home, her family expected her to dedicate herself fully to household chores, as if to make up for the time she spent studying and teaching otherwise. As an exception to the above pattern, after the vacation following *Eid-ul-Fitr* in 2002, she was proud to relate that this time her parents had taken her for a one-day trip to see a waterfall in the vicinity of her native small town, which had meant an exceptional break from the otherwise sober housework routine. Around the same time, the other teachers started to mention jokingly that she appeared to 'like' her friend's younger brother very much. According to the other teachers the families were already in the process of negotiating the prospect of marriage between the two.

The stories of the two befriended teachers from Bahraich and Mumbai convey a different sense of self than in the cases of the teachers and students introduced so far. Both came from very different family backgrounds than the girls belonging to the 'core families', as they were the only ones in their respective families to study and then teach in a madrasa. As a result, while the students and teachers from the 'core families' appeared to view themselves as part of a wider network of equal-minded people, these two young women stood quite alone in their respective families. Above anything else their studies and work represented an act of religious merit for their families, as they formulated it.

Besides these two befriended teachers who had received their degrees from the affiliated Malegaon and Lucknow madrasas, there was yet another teacher from Lucknow. The young woman was in her mid-twenties and although she had been born in Lucknow, she spent her youth in Jeddah, where her father used to work as an engineer. When reaching the 'age of purdah', she returned to India to stay with her family in Lucknow and received her secondary education in the Jamia Noorul Islam[19]. She moved from Lucknow to Delhi once she got married to an engineer who lived in the capital, and like the sister-in-law mentioned above she did not yet have children. Maybe that was also one of the reasons why her husband readily arranged for her weekly trips from South Delhi to Nizamuddin, where she usually stayed for three to four nights a week, in order to make the long journey worthwhile. Apart from teaching English in the Madrasatul Niswan, she also continued her own studies. From August 2002 onwards she was

among the first teachers to start the nursery section of the new madrasa in Okhla. When I asked her why she had studied in the Jamia Noorul Islam, she patiently explained that 'everyone' knew that it was one of the best girls' madrasas in India. In an equally patient manner she added that the Jamia Noorul Islam followed the same curriculum as the Madrasatul Niswan and the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon. However, she did not mention the distant family ties between the founders of these three girls' madrasas, which ensure the frequent exchange of students and teachers between the three institutions. As we saw before, such exchanges primarily depend on the permission or ijaza of the parents, guardians, or husbands, along with that of the respective Principal.

The above cases indicate that the young women from outside the 'core families' played an important role for maintaining relations within the network formed by the three girls' madrasas mentioned above. In addition, their cases demonstrate how for these young women studying in a madrasa or teaching in a girls' madrasa later on may represent acts of religious merit for them, their families, and for the community at large.

The 'less disciplined' cases

Not all the young women were equally taken with the disciplining processes of the Madrasatul Niswan. In order to highlight how agency can be discerned in the disruption of set patterns, role models, and customs, two students and a befriended young woman who came to visit the madrasa are presented here as contrasting cases. At age sixteen and born in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh, a new student arrived at the Madrasatul Niswan some weeks after the start of the academic year in August 2002. Although she was much older than any of the other first year students, this was the place she had been assigned. She made it clear from the very beginning that her enrolment was only temporary, as she only intended to stay for the total duration of one year. She said that spending a year in a girls' madrasa was her own choice, because she wanted to understand 'Islamic culture' better prior to seeking admission to Aligarh Muslim University, where she hoped to fulfil her dream of studying Unani medicine. So far, she had attended a Public School, but with a view to the future it was 'Aligarh or nothing', as she said time and again. Owing to her earlier exposure to non-Islamic education, she was among the few young women in the Madrasatul Niswan who spoke English fluently. It took her some time to get used to the austere way of life in the madrasa, because her sudden life as a boarder

appeared to offer close to no diversions, but over time she became increasingly appreciated for her patience and skilfulness in decorating suit pieces with hand painted floral designs. At the same time she seemed to enjoy her position as an outsider in many respects. What set her apart was that she enjoyed speaking English, she was older than her fellow students, her stay in the madrasa was only temporary, and finally she had an attitude that was not at all demure like that of the majority of young women studying or teaching in the Madrasatul Niswan.

Similarly, there was a fourth year student from a remote area in Delhi, whose father had decided that she should continue her studies in a madrasa, although in her family she was again the only young woman to do so. While her father had justified this decision as an act of religious merit for the entire family, the student emphasized that above anything else she felt that his decision was more of a burden on her. Quite like the student introduced above, this young woman was comfortable speaking English. She emphasized that out of all the books studied in the Madrasatul Niswan, she especially liked the *English Reader*, because it contained 'foreign things'. What also set her apart was that she had a driver's license, as her father was a car salesman. She told me that she loved driving around, as it gave her a feeling of independence and freedom. Apart from driving, she loved listening to 'Western' music and to Madonna[20] in particular, as she told me on many occasions. In the face of her classmates' visible disapproval regarding both activities, she simply discarded their principles as 'stupid'.

When I asked the same student what she wanted to do following her expected graduation in 2004, she told me that she hoped to pass her '10+2' Secondary Board Exams at the Jamia Millia Islamia University, where madrasa students were allowed to appear as private candidates, as we saw in the previous chapter with regard to the Jamiatul Zehra. She added with determination in her voice that she wished to pursue her studies, although she did not know yet in which subject. With regard to the student's demeanour, it is worth noting that even this 'rebel' changed over time. When I first met her, the young woman's views stood in sharp contrast with the worldview and beliefs of most of the other women in the Madrasatul Niswan. Moreover, she voiced them publicly, irrespective of the sensibilities of her fellow students and teachers. As her outspoken opinions and defiant behaviour did not go unnoticed, by the time she reached her final year she had become visibly more demure. Apart from losing weight, which added to her more mature appearance, apparently she had shed some 'wild hairs' too. As a result, she seemed reluctant to communicate with me on later occasions,

perhaps because she felt uncomfortable about her earlier straightforward attitude. Although the two students introduced above initially displayed signs of direct resistance to the madrasa's 'civilizing mission', in both cases their attitudes changed and their resistance weakened over time. While in the case of the first student the change began to set in after a few months already, in the second case it took years for the madrasa's subtle disciplining measures to show results.

As a final example, I would like to mention a young woman who neither studied nor taught in the Madrasatul Niswan. She was a friend of the above-mentioned teacher from Bahraich, who merely came to visit Delhi for two days. Like her friend, the young woman had been born in a 'far-off place in a village' close to Bahraich. She travelled together with her husband and her infant son, as the latter required medical attention. After consulting a popular Muslim doctor in Nizamuddin, she came to spend the afternoon with her friend in the staff room of the Madrasatul Niswan. As her friend was still teaching a class, the young woman engaged me in an insightful conversation about her life, the female body, disease, and the dilemmas of rural women.

Similar to her friend, the young woman was in her early twenties, but unlike her friend she got married at a young age. Initially she pointed out that having two sons meant a blessing, because having male offspring secured her standing within her in-law's household. But it also meant a challenge, since giving birth to and raising the boys in the village had left her emaciated and weak. While her older son attended a boarding school, the younger one lived with her and the joint family in the village. The infant boy suffered from a 'skin condition' that worried her a lot. Apart from seeking medical attention for him, she pointed out that she had wanted to see the doctor as well with a view to her continuous weight loss, which had gradually led to chronic fatigue and a condition she described as 'general weakness'. While the young woman lived under similar conditions as the sister-in-law we met earlier in this chapter, by contrast this young woman's presence seemed to fill the staff room with an air of accusation directed against the unfair conditions she had to endure as the daughter-in-law to a rural joint family. Although she may not have been in a position to change much about her condition, she appeared less constrained in voicing her concerns, because as opposed to the other young women in the madrasa, she was much less preoccupied with her demeanour.

While the education provided by the madrasa with its requirements regarding the girls' demeanour hardly seems to allow for the students and teachers to speak about potentially objectionable issues, their visit-

ing friends were more vocal in voicing critique regarding their position as women in society, about their husbands, or concerning the joint family system. These brief observations suggest that the education imparted in the madrasa appears to influence the young women's worldview, way of life, dress, demeanour, and language substantially. The impact of the often subtle disciplining could be discerned in the brief examples of the madrasa's 'civilizing mission', especially in the cases of the non-madrasa attending girls who nevertheless adjusted to the subtle requirements they were confronted with. Their adjustment became discernible at the hand of visible markers such as dress, body care, and donning hijab, as we saw in the examples of the former cleaner and the twins in the previous chapter. The above cases above indicate how for all women developing a pious self and internalizing 'civilized' manners affected their standing positively. In the Madrasatul Niswan hierarchies also depended on the levels of Islamic knowledge acquired, a form of cultural capital easier available to the women from the 'core families'. Still, women from outside the capital had clearly gained religious merit for their families as well as cultural capital in their communities of origin. Simultaneously, with a view to upward social mobility also other forms of knowledge were helpful, and acquiring non-Islamic knowledge (prior to puberty) was deemed desirable especially within the 'core families'. Finally, upward social mobility also seemed to be possible through better marriage prospects facilitated by Islamic education and the internalization of adab.

5.5 **A question of authority**

Apart from the issues of merit and upward social mobility, I would now like to discuss the question whether what is taught in the Madrasatul Niswan allows the young women to claim authority in Islamic matters, that is to claim authority in the public. Let me begin with a brief comment on the question of authority made by the above-mentioned teacher who graduated from the Jamia Noorul Islam in Lucknow years ago and followed a number of additional courses in the Nizamuddin madrasa. She pointed to the fact that while for boys there is a mufti course, no such course exists for women. Hereby she indicated that, apart from teaching in a girls' madrasa, other career options in line with the five-year course in Islamic theology do not yet exist for young women. She added that in her opinion a mufti course for women would not come into being in the future either, because according to her the role of female madrasa graduates is limited to giving

informal advice and to making *personal* use of their knowledge. In her opinion the hierarchy of academic degrees in Islamic theology implied the following: the *alim* degree means that one is learned but without authority to use the knowledge, studying for the *fazila* degree deepens one's knowledge, and the *mufti* course, which authorizes the issuing of fatawa and the transmission of religious knowledge, does not exist for women. Although accepting the latter means to continue denying women access to professional trajectories in the Islamic legal sector, she concluded that ultimately nothing would stand in the way of post-graduate studies for women per se, as it all depends on the girls' *wishes*. However optimistic the teacher's views regarding the graduates' wishes being decisive, my findings suggest that the guardians' wishes and expectations were equally crucial for shaping the young women's future.

Turning to the academic literature, Abou El Fadl's study on Islamic law, authority, and women titled *Speaking in God's Name* is helpful for its definitions of the notion of authority. While it is assumed that there are no elites in Islam, that truth is seen as accessible to all, and that the individual is held accountable for his/her deeds, Abou El Fadl points out that the egalitarian outlook of Islam tends to become corrupted by anxieties vis-à-vis ideas that threaten to deconstruct what is viewed as authoritative (Abou El Fadl 2001:11), which is a point that I will return to. With regard to accountability, in the Madrasatul Niswan the idea of individual accountability can be detected in the everyday discourse. Owing to its spiritual proximity with the Tablighi Jamaat, which represents a milieu wherein accountability is expressed in clearcut sums through which one can calculate the merits of everyday actions for the Hereafter, most of the students and teachers appeared to be driven by the strive to internalize correct practice.

Introducing the distinction between coercive and persuasive authority, the author elaborates that while on the basis of coercion a surrender of judgment takes place, on the basis of persuasion this process is more reflective. With a view to madrasa education, the definition of coercive authority reminds of the common stereotype that learning takes place without understanding. As a counter argument to the above stereotypical image, it is worth noting once more that in the case of the Madrasatul Niswan my observations did not provide evidence indicating that a surrender of judgment tends to take place under coercion. Instead, I would like to suggest that in a context wherein the cultivation of a pious and docile self represents the ideal, the above distinction between coercive and persuasive authority is not very helpful. While a total 'surrender of judgment' may not be the rule,

there are circumstances under which principles associated with beliefs may overrule reflective judgment, even without coercion.

Even though there may be no elites in Islam, there appear to be 'special groups'. Regarding one such 'special group', namely the jurists, the author suggests that they 'are authoritative not because they are in authority […] but because of the perception of being authorities on the set of instructions […] that point to God's Way.' (Abou El Fadl 2001:53). According to such a definition rooted in perceived authoritativeness, some of the teachers and senior students in the Madrasatul Niswan would qualify as authorities, because they view themselves in such a way when reflecting on their social roles. In addition, some of the older students told me that they were ascribed authority in Islamic matters by their respective surroundings. Their stories suggested that especially students and teachers from rural backgrounds are often seen as authorities in Islamic matters, owing to which other women seemed to approach them regularly for advice. To borrow from Abou El Fadl's cluster of definitions, the young women's authority is persuasive rather than coercive, since the students and teachers operate within the realm of belief rather than in the realm of real existing power relations.

Abou El Fadl mentions that an authority should possess five characteristics, but in line with my earlier point of criticism I would like to point out that when beliefs and principles are absolute, such conditions attached to the notion of authority are rendered meaningless. In other words, if there is no choice but to believe and to abide, it is irrelevant whether the person who tells me to do so is honest, diligent, comprehensive, reasonable, and self-restrained. At best, I may hope he or she would be any of the above. Even though the author attempts to defend the above five contingencies as 'rational necessities' (Abou El Fadl 2001:57), a possible counter argument is that power can corrupt and overrule such necessities dictated by reason, especially when being in power represents a desirable end in itself. Regarding the above concern, even Abou El Fadl has to admit that 'paternalism' does emerge, since in the case of specialists such as the jurists the economy of knowledge tends to be tilted in their favour. After all, it is those who have versus those who have not (Abou El Fadl 2001:62). Because authority is presented as plural and as ascribed in a dialectic process with both text and laity/audience involved, the study introduces the reader to a plurality of opinions and authorities, even with regard to the question who is an authority. Returning to the example of the Madrasatul Niswan once again, in the case of badi appa she is both an authority and in authority. As the Principal of the madrasa, the Manager's wife, and the Founder's daughter she can

enforce certain things by virtue of her position, or in other words since she is *in* authority. In addition, she is considered *an* authority, as she is perceived to be the most learned among the young women.

Apart from relying on self-definitions and perceptions, other sources suggest that bodily practice represents another angle from which the concept of authority can be examined. In *Formations of the Secular*, Asad's discussion of the sacred draws upon Bourdieu's earlier mentioned habitus, which is defined as bodily and sensory experiences of the divine and as faith lived through bodily practice. Linking habitus with the notion of authority gives rise to questions such as how attitudes of personal responsibility are formed by associating bodily experience with authority, or how notions of authority are shaped by the ways in which people explain their bodily experiences and practices, and finally how authority is reproduced socially and contested through discourse. In keeping with the above approach to the concept of authority, the stories of the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan point out certain 'economies of pain' expressed through bodily practice, which appear to play a central role for the habitus in the madrasa. The pain and the degree to which the young women identify with it resound in the earlier mentioned taranas and naat, which mourn the passing of the Prophet's times and express an almost painful longing to emulate both the Prophet and his times. Such repeated experiences of relived pain, paired with the discipline of learning how to sing the tunes and how to move the body along with them, have a physical aspect to them that adds depth and value to the practice. While the pain is relived and reproduced exclusively by women, owing to which it is gender specific, the pain's cultural meanings are highly specific too, because they are rooted in the beliefs and principles of this particular Muslim community. These underlying beliefs and principles marking the habitus in turn are instilled in the young women through their studies and their way of life in the madrasa. Habitus, defined as faith lived through bodily practice, is a valuable concept with a view to trying to discern how authority is reproduced in the madrasa. In everyday discourse, bodily experience tends to be explained with reference to hadith and sunnah, as we saw in the example of the role of dreams in the previous chapter. The same holds for the overall tone in the Madrasatul Niswan, since great emphasis is laid on references to hadith and sunnah, as we saw in the examples of the lessons in adab in the previous chapter.[21] While Asad's discussion of habitus in relation to the notion of the sacred helps to shed light on certain aspects of authority encountered in the shape of bodily practice in the Madrasatul Niswan, the question how authority is reproduced socially and

contested through discourse is less meaningful for this study, as authority appears to be mainly reproduced rather than contested. Borrowing from Mahmood's definition of docility once again, the young women's 'willingness to be taught' seems to be more important than debate.

Reminding of the spiritual outlook of the Tablighi Jamaat with its strong emphasis on virtues (fazail) rather than on legal questions (masail), for the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan the emulation of the Prophet's time seemed to rank higher than trying to find ways to become a mufti. In addition, my observations indicate that (for the time being) the students and teachers appear to view themselves outside the scope of such discussions. Still, claims to authority were made in different respects in the Madrasatul Niswan. As we saw earlier, the Founder and Manager claimed to follow the standardized madrasa curriculum known as the dars-e-nizami, because the implementation thereof gives the institution authority. Furthermore, the *alimat* and *fazilat* degrees associated with the students' graduation are derived from the authoritative madrasa degrees issued for young men.

To conclude, even though initially I was looking for an emancipatory reinterpretation of Islamic law as the most visible marker for an emerging female authority in Islamic matters, according to Mahmood this represents a typical 'pitfall', and moreover such a reinterpretation does not seem to take place in the Madrasatul Niswan as yet. One possible explanation is that such a reinterpretation is not what the young women want to achieve, because in line with the above reflections they may not perceive the legal domain as problematic or oppressive. Moreover, we should keep in mind that the young women only learn about Islamic law to the extent that the curriculum permits it. In other words, they study only those sections of books on Islamic law that are deemed important for them to know according to those in charge of setting the curriculum. Taking into account relations between power and gender in the Madrasatul Niswan, the power to define and regulate correct practice mainly rests with the men in authority – in other words with the Founder, Manager, and, to a lesser extent, with the women close to them. Apart from the question whether an emancipatory reinterpretation of Islamic law can be discerned, we heard the views of one teacher who suggested that the madrasa graduates were only supposed to make use of their knowledge at the informal level and strictly for personal use. Finally, with regard to the question of female religious authority, Muslim intellectuals interested in madrasa education frequently voiced the suggestion that for such authority to emerge, exposure to alternative forms of education and learning methods may be necessary. Such an exposure could take the

shape of alternative forms of education grounded in a broader knowledge base prior to enrolment in a madrasa, post-graduation programmes similar to the work of the Markazul Maarif described in Chapter 2, or one could imagine the emergence of more 'dual type' girls' madrasas like the Jamiatul Zehra introduced in the previous chapter.

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1. As a reply to my following question how and among whom they intended to do tabligh or missionary work, the students said that they wanted to do tabligh among the women of their respective communities.
2. See Chatterjee 1989 for a discussion of the 'new woman' in the Hindu setting.
3. In *The Veil Unveiled*, Faegheh Shirazi analyzes and deconstructs multiple layers of meaning of the veil or hijab. She notes that 'To delimit the meanings of the veil is indeed a challenging if not impossible task. […] while the veil in the Hindi movie serves to draw the male gaze, the veil in the Iranian movie serves to deny the male gaze. […] Whereas Muslims use the veil to safeguard women from men outside the family, Hindus use the same devices to enforce women's subordination to their in-laws.' (Shirazi 2001:175). Apart from emphasizing different uses of the veil, she points out that 'On the one hand, the veil is a simple garment that millions of women deal with in their daily lives as a matter of habit, without a second thought. […] On the other hand, the veil is an enormously important symbol, as it carries thousands of years of religious, sexual, social, and political significance within its folds.' (Shirazi 2001:180).
4. Compare this also to how Talal Asad in his *Formations of the Secular* refers to the modern Western public sphere as a space of social exclusions. For effective representation of the excluded minorities to take place, a decentred pluralism would be necessary (Asad 2003:177), which however is contrary to the elites' interest.
5. Jeffery mentions similar observations with regard to the madrasas' 'civilizing mission' in rural settings, as her interlocutors tended to draw a sharp line between those who were educated in a madrasa and those you were not. Typically, the latter were frowned upon for their improper use of language and immodest dress. In other words, through education people tried to imitate a life style associated with higher class and caste culture (conference paper; Neemrana 2003).
6. Although I spoke with more women than those represented in the following sections, I selected their cases as each of them illustrates one or more of the above-mentioned linkages between purdah, the nexus between agency and discipline, and public presence.

7. Barbara Metcalf points out that the use of appa or sister indicates a certain simplicity of discourse, while at the same time emotional warmth is expressed through this fictive relationship (Metcalf 2000:51). Moreover, the address 'badi appa' suggests that the authority of this young woman seemed to depend as much on her status as it did on her knowledge and personal efforts.
8. I am grateful to Patricia Jeffery for pointing out that according to an *Archaeological Survey of India* report on Nizamuddin, the name of the mosque in question should be *Kalan*, i.e. 'great', mosque instead of the commonly used *Kali* or 'black' mosque.
9. As mentioned before, the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon appears to be the oldest and largest public girls' madrasa in post-Partition India.
10. Memories of such malpractices are preserved in books like Nazeer Ahmad's *The Bride's Mirror*, wherein a teacher uses her students' tuition fees for her own good. Instead of teaching the girls who come to her house in pursuit of knowledge, she makes them clear all kinds of household chores. See Ahmad 1903.
11. As the young teachers in the madrasa all wore *salwar kameez*, i.e. the typical 'Punjabi style' lose fitting trousers (salwar) with a matching long or short blouse (*kurta* or *kameez*) and scarf (dupatta), most of the girls used to buy the matching fabrics for their outfits as a so-called 'suit piece' on the weekly market in Nizamuddin. They stitched the fabrics by hand and often adorned them later on, for example with hand painted floral designs. Mastering the skill of producing these multi shaded floral designs in turn was part of the 'home science' classes in the Madrasatul Niswan, along with stitching suits by hand, and embroidery.
12. Generally speaking, in India the relationship between the new bride or bahu and her mother-in-law is charged with anxiety. Girls tend to be socialized into anticipating the hardships of being the new bride in the extended household after marriage. Typically, the new bride is expected to be demure and shy, enduring the plotting of the other sister-in-laws and meeting demands to work harder than everyone else, while constantly being criticized on the part of the mother-in-law. The bahu's role in the extended family is the topic of much popular culture in India, such as daily soap operas about the conflicts between bahu and mother-in-law or *saas*.
13. *Paranthe* are stuffed and fried breads that are often served for breakfast and considered to be quite heavy. When my mother-in-law suffered a stroke and was hospitalized, upon hearing which hospital she was in the same teacher immediately pointed out that her favourite egg *paranthe* stalls were right in front of the hospital, recalling the many occasions when she had gone there.
14. While the traditional blouse-like garment referred to as kurta extends down to the knees or even further and is loosely cut, it is considered fashionable to wear fitted kurtas and/or a much shorter version of the kurta called kurti, which barely covers the thighs.

15. It deserves mention that the motto 'know thy enemy' also represents an important strategy in the work of the Tablighi Jamaat, where it is justified as a means to increase the efficiency of their dawah or call to faith.
16. Although this may hold equally for other female family members, in my opinion the wives probably suffer most from the men's struggle, as the relationship with their partner has such a deep bearing on them in terms of their self-esteem, their status within the family, and their position in the wider social context.
17. For example, out of fourteen girls studying in the second year, one girl came from Bijnor, one from Saharanpur, one from Lucknow, one from Barabanki, another one from as far south as Mumbai, and the remaining nine girls were from Delhi. Similarly, in a third year section, out of sixteen students two girls were from Bijnor and one girl was from Lucknow. For those who had come to the madrasa from far away places, the only time they got to see their families was during the main vacations in May/ June and following the month of ramzan. Although monthly visits home were allowed, for those whose families lived far away an extended weekend was generally too short to visit them. Keeping in mind that Delhi is a vast city, even most students 'from Delhi' were boarders. Apart from the girls belonging to the 'core families' in Nizamuddin, most of the students from other areas in Delhi were not in a position to commute daily, because of the costs associated with travelling and because of safety reasons. As stated in the Admission Papers (see Appendix I), the boarders were allowed regular contact with their parents over the phone 'during set timings' and for no longer than three minutes at a stretch. As a result, it was a frequent sight to find girls crying because they were homesick, although public displays of emotions tended to be frowned upon.
18. It deserves mention that with regard to such 'permissions', the word ijaza was often used. While ijaza is generally used for a particular certificate issued by a teacher for a student, who is then allowed to teach the same book to others, in Urdu ijaza is also used as a formula for taking leave, or denoting the permission to do something, issued by a person considered authoritative, such as parents, teachers, the Principal, etc.
19. The same teacher pointed out that Aligarh Muslim University and the Qaramat College in Lucknow recognize the degree issued by the Jamia Noorul Islam as equal to the '10+2' secondary graduation. By contrast, the Jamiatus Salehat in Malegaon is recognized as equal to a BA, due to the different standards of the Maharashtrian Board for Secondary Education. According to her, most graduates of the Jamia Noorul Islam continue to study Arabic or Islamic Studies, or they seek admission for the so-called Bachelor of Unani Medicines.
20. In order to appreciate how much this statement set her apart from the other students, we should keep in mind that in this community all non-religious and especially all Western music is forbidden, along with films, novels, and things such as photographs or other modes of depicting human beings, as we saw before.

21. With regard to the above observation, Brown suggests that 'raising sunnah to a place of virtual equality with the Qur'an [sic] was one means of protecting the organic link between the two sources' (Brown 1996:17). Furthermore, the rank of prophecy in Islamic thought makes people turn to sunnah for guidance in times of challenges and changes, thus rendering it a 'symbol of authority' (Brown 1996:138). Weighing the textual sources against each other is also the premise for the questions 'How does God speak?' and 'Who speaks for God', which are claimed to be central to contemporary struggles for the right to represent Prophetic authority (Brown 1996:133). According to the same author, herein also lies the strength of revivalist movements, as they 'promise to bring Islam back to life' (Brown 1996:141).

6 Girls' madrasas revisited

Following the discussion of the emergence of girls' madrasas in India, the specific social and ideological background to the madrasa I did fieldwork in, its curriculum in comparison with the curriculum taught in madrasas for boys, and the future trajectories of the female graduates, I would now like to highlight and summarize my main findings. While initially I was looking for markers of emancipation, it turned out that in order to appreciate the education provided by the Madrasatul Niswan, the notion of empowerment did not prove to be helpful. The centrality of discipline adab or value education reminded of late nineteenth century reformist ideas and influenced by the informal linkages with the Tablighi Jamaat, the men in charge saw the reform (islah) of personal life as the primary educational aim. As a result, even though the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan were knowledgeable with regard to Islamic theology, the internalization of a certain discipline and values associated with adab seemed to prevent them from developing the confidence to apply the acquired knowledge outside the teaching profession. Instead, the Madrasatul Niswan appeared to aim primarily at the reproduction of a relatively closed community with its particular worldview. Moreover, the informal affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat also ensured the reproduction of tablighi ideas, because the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan, and the weekly Thursday Programme in particular, emphasized the importance of cultivating certain virtues (fazail) with a view to the Hereafter over questions related to Islamic law (masail).

As the informal linkages with the Tablighi Jamaat were examined at length in the previous chapters, I would now like to briefly discuss the Tablighi Jamaat's role in relation to gender. The Tablighi Jamaat 's founder is remembered to encourage women to work, and from the time of its inception the organization advocated the sameness of the sexes (Metcalf 2000:54-55). By contrast, my findings indicate that in the Madrasatul Niswan men were by and large in charge of women's lives by virtue of their roles as guardians and decision makers regarding most aspects of the young women's lives, while the teachers and students lived in seclusion, as they observed a particularly strict form of purdah. With regard to gender, Metcalf's argument concerning the inversion of gender roles in the Tablighi Jamaat deserves qualification. Although the male staff cooked food for the young women in the madrasa and looked after everyday affairs, the inversion of gender roles

appears to be of a temporary and rather limited nature. Similarly, in the case of the Tablighi Jamaat the inversion of roles mainly seems to play a role when men are travelling 'in the path of God', or whenever women organize meetings for other women. Rather than representing an inversion of gender roles, the above examples seem to be the result of a range of disciplinary mechanisms. By the same token, the tablighi ideology, as found in tablighi literature available on the topic of women in the broadest sense, does not appear to promote an egalitarian outlook. In the words of Sikand, 'Through the lectures of the *muballighin* [tablighi volunteers, M.W.] and tablighi elders and through numerous tablighi-type texts an attempt is made constantly to communicate and reinforce the image of what is regarded as model Islamic womanhood' (Sikand n.d.:10). This ideal is by and large informed by Deobandi ideas regarding women's social roles and the concept of modesty, as we saw with regard to Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar and in examples taken from the genre of value-oriented (adab) literature in Chapter 4. Elaborating on the point of gender roles, a tablighi activist states that 'Domestic work alone is the proper sphere for women. […] Her spare time she should spend in zikr and namaz and in counting her rosary (tasbih). […]' (Sikand n.d.:14). The above description reminds of my observations among the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan, who seemed to have internalized the above ideal of Islamic womanhood to varying extents.

Apart from the cluster of adab literature, the Tablighi Jamaat's *Fazail-e-Amal* (*Virtues of Everyday Actions*) is prescribed for daily reading in the Madrasatul Niswan. Masud points out that the *Fazail-e-Amal* represents a piece of 'ethnic literature' (Masud 2000:83). After all the *Virtues of Everyday Actions* were written in a particular setting, which was distinctly Indian, town-based, and using the madrasa idiom (Masud 2000:83). Another observation indicates that while in the early twentieth century many believed that the West had achieved perfection and that progress meant to follow the ways of the West, the Tablighi Jamaat established the emulation of the life of the Prophet as the ideal (Masud 2000:86).[1] As we saw in Chapter 4, a set of literature emerged in the intellectual milieu of the Tablighi Jamaat that highlights women's moral qualities at the hand of examples taken from the history of Islam. Although especially in the case of Aisha women's intellectual accomplishments tend to be mentioned as markers of progress, they are mainly noted in the margins signifying the ideal conditions during the time of the Prophet.[2] As being knowledgeable seems to be mainly viewed from a moral angle, knowledge does not appear to represent a value in itself in the Madrasatul Niswan, nor does being knowledgeable seem to be acknowledged as a

pivotal aspect of the young women's identities. Within such an interpretive framework, being an accomplished savant is reduced to possessing a praiseworthy character trait. The young women in turn are socialized into thinking that they can only emulate but not achieve the social standing associated with the female Companions. The formulaic answer to the question why this is so was that times had changed and hence emulation of the ideal was all women could hope to accomplish today.

What is known about the historical examples of learned Muslim women may challenge the above interpretation, as we saw in Chapter 4. One source explicitly mentions that women who narrated ahadith form the earliest historical example of women's careers in Islamic theology, which began at the time of the Prophet and his wives. In addition, it is noted that 'the teachers wielded considerable social influence in those days and the women teachers shared the prestige and authority enjoyed by the profession' (Chaudhry 1953:75). In line with the earliest precedents in the history of Islam, the teaching profession still appears to be the most acceptable career choice among women today. Women's skills as jurists, on the other hand, tend to be mentioned in the margins. Still, the notion of 'joint authority' sheds light on the conditions under which women associated with families of religious scholars participated in writing fatawa, or countersigned them along with the more authoritative male family members. Apparently, 'Some women savants exercised the authority of countersigning legal decrees on points referred to their relations, a father or a husband who functioned as the Mufti of the town' (Chaudhry 1953:76). As a consequence, 'The houses of the woman savants transformed themselves into institutions of higher learning for women' (Chaudhry 1953:84).

Moving on from the early history of Islam, Berkey highlights the same question regarding the learned women of the past from a different angle and within a different time frame, as his findings concern the Mamluk period (twelfth century AD). From the Middle Ages onwards, there are examples of female savants who travelled in pursuit of knowledge, which remind of the examples of teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan, as described in the previous chapters. Since the question under which conditions such travelling in pursuit of knowledge was possible for female savants remains open, the only indicator is once again the emphasis on women's flawless moral standing, which appears to be prerequisite for women's participation in the heterosocial public sphere. In other words, apparently the permission to study goes in tandem with the moral qualities a woman should possess (Jawad 1988:207). In the case of the teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan, we noted

that migration in pursuit of knowledge or with a view to taking up a teaching assignment mainly depended on the permission (ijaza) of their guardians. Moreover, being part of the network constituted by the 'core families' appeared to play a significant role as well.

In keeping with Berkey's observations, it is deserves mention that even today many books intended for women are actually addressed at men, as the latter still appear to be widely perceived as responsible for women's education. In addition, due to an 'agenda of submission' informed by certain ideals of Islamic womanhood, women continue to be excluded from certain degrees of learnedness and public function, as we saw in the preceding chapter. The emphasis on studying ahadith in curricula for women, which could also be discerned in the Madrasatul Niswan, is rooted in the early history of Islamic education, as there is a 'history of un-official learnedness' of female teachers who taught the traditions of the Prophet (ahadith) to their male students. Even though the education of these learned women generally took place within an informal setting, historically their informal authority was recognized through the authorizing diplomas they issued (ijazas) and through the chain of authority (isnad) associated with the traditions of the Prophet (ahadith), wherein they were mentioned. Notwithstanding the above, the curriculum for women has been and continues to be different from the curriculum for men in content and in emphasis.

With regard to the madrasa curriculum for girls and its underlying educational aims, the teachers' and students' stories indicate that the ideal of bringing about personal reform, as formulated in the Madrasatul Niswan's admission papers, may or may not tally with life outside the madrasa. Furthermore, it remains to be seen whether more comprehensive ideals such as those mentioned in Chapter 4 are realized in the Madrasatul Niswan. Just to briefly recall, one author argued that 'she [the woman, M.W.] is under a moral and religious obligation to seek knowledge, develop her intellect, broaden her outlook, cultivate her talents and then utilize her potential to the benefit of her soul and of her society' (Jawad 1988:205). While the basic obligation to seek knowledge is met by enrolling in the Madrasatul Niswan, the broadening of the students' outlook, the cultivation of the young women's talents, and above all the utilization of their potential to whatever aim, represent aspects of education that do not seem to be valorized that much as yet. A point of criticism directed at the curricula of boys' madrasas in Pakistan is that 'they [the commentaries, M.W.] have to be learned by heart which makes students use only their memory not their analytical powers […] the assumption on which the *Dars* [i.e. the dars-e-nizami, M.W.] functions is that

the past was a golden age in which all that was best has already been written. What remains to the modern age is merely to preserve it' (Rahman 2004:5). Taylor views the phenomenon of 'looking back' as something practised at a broader scale when noting that 'generally, we still draw on the old images of higher times in our political life. We think of our founders as giants, living in a heroic age' (Taylor 1992:225). The above reflections also help to shed light on Nadwi's selective (re)reading of female role models such as Aisha, as we saw in Chapter 4, and the ensuing heavy emphasis on moral rather than scholarly achievement, on piety rather than competitiveness, and on reproduction over innovation or critical reading

Regarding the question why pedagogical innovation may sit uncomfortable with those in charge of setting the curriculum in the Madrasatul Niswan, one possible explanation is the lurking fear that the only alternative to the known vistas would be to adopt a Western model with all its perceived negative consequences. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that for the founders, teachers, and students their identity as Muslims in a minority situation appeared to be central to their self-definitions. As Patricia Jeffery points out with regard to the people associated with the Nizamuddin shrine, comparatively speaking their Muslim identity was much more important than it may have been for other Muslim artisans of a similar class/caste background in the same area, because being a Muslim represented the pivotal facet of their existence. Similarly, for the teachers in the Madrasatul Niswan being a good Muslim stood synonymous for social capital, because their daily income depended on their piety.

Besides assuming that an emancipatory reinterpretation of the texts studied may not have been perceived as necessary on the part of the teachers and students, another possible explanation is that there might be conscious efforts not to let this happen on the part of those in authority. Within the power structure of the Madrasatul Niswan we saw that the restricted curriculum set by the Founder served a particular purpose, namely the reproduction of the community's worldview with its ideals of what it means to be a good Muslim woman. With a view to accomplishing the above, we noted the curriculum's focus on the traditions of the Prophet, through which role models for women are discerned, along with literature from the value oriented genre referred to as adab. As a result, where the past is seen as perfect, reinterpretation or seeking out new vistas may be perceived as futile activities. Similarly, because authority is primarily thought to be outside the self, exteriorized to the extent of being exclusively found in the precedents of the Prophet and his Companions, there did not seem to be a self-

reflective discourse on authority. Nevertheless, the young women seemed to be content believing that their studies, teaching, and finally also their way of life represented complete dedication to Islam. Moreover, we cannot afford to lose sight of the difference between rural and urban environments, which also account for divergent views concerning the question of female authority in Islamic matters. In rural areas, where women have less access to authority regarding Islamic matters, the madrasa students were often readily accepted as authorities on Islam, as we saw in the previous chapters. In addition, Muslim intellectuals, along with others who considered themselves concerned with the project of madrasa education for girls, provided yet another perspective on the question of authority. Those not directly involved in madrasa education appeared to be convinced that within a generation or so learned young women from the girls' madrasas would challenge the established authority of the ulama.

Although the founders, the members of the 'core families', and most of the students in the madrasa came from a lower caste background, the tone set by the all-pervading presence of adab was adopted from the high caste and court culture. In other words, for the students from lower to lower-middle class backgrounds, rural areas, and/or lower castes, the madrasa's educational outlook and moral ideals provided an opportunity to re-orient themselves with the aim of becoming upwardly mobile. For example, we learned about cases where upward social mobility was achieved through taking up teaching as a profession after graduation, while for others receiving education as such meant upward social mobility. Other stories hinted at the parents' hopes that by grooming their daughters into the ways of the higher castes, they would eventually have better marriage prospects. Under the influence of the late nineteenth century reformist ideas and similar to what happened in the aftermath of Partition in 1947, many lower caste Muslims then and now may see a chance to become upwardly mobile by imitating the higher castes, by inventing high caste ancestry, by denying convert backgrounds, and finally by claiming ancestry from outside India. Possibly with a view to accumulating social and cultural capital, adab set the tone for interaction in the Madrasatul Niswan, which the students internalized through the cultivation of the community's adopted high caste habitus.

The cases briefly introduced in the previous chapters suggest that the girls' social standing as learned women is at times acknowledged and sometimes negated by the students' and teachers' surroundings. While the young women are generally well informed with regard to rights and obligations pertaining to women, the fine balance between Islamic beliefs and

influences perceived as 'Western' also gives rise to tensions in the domestic field. Similarly, even though the official curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan does not appear embracing when it comes to the non-Islamic component of Indian culture, what the students do outside the madrasa may be a different story altogether, as we saw in the examples of students participating in Hindu festivals in Chapter 4. The above tensions indicate that despite the conservative worldview, which the Madrasatul Niswan seeks to promote there is space for deviation from the seemingly all-pervading discipline.

Viewing the madrasa in its wider social context, the discussion of the public sphere in Chapter 5 suggests that the Madrasatul Niswan constitutes a counterpublic in its own right. Calhoun alerts us that 'we must ask not just on what thematic content it [the public sphere, M.W.] focuses but also how it is internally organized, how it maintains its boundaries and relatively greater internal cohesion in relation to the larger public, and whether its separate existence reflects merely sectional interests, some functional division of labour, or a felt need for bulwarks against the hegemony of a dominant ideology' (Calhoun 1992:58). Taking up some of the above points, the Madrasatul Niswan represents a relatively closed, self-sufficient community structure that appears to reproduce itself through the formal and informal curricula. Contrary to processes involving the bracketing of differences, markers of identity, and inequalities, the Madrasatul Niswan promotes a habitus that is based on a particular social identity. This identity, in turn, is rooted in the community's interpretation of what it means to be a good Muslim woman, which is a total concept that includes practices of female seclusion, codes of dress and language, along with the internalization of the community's definition of what it means to lead a correct inner life marked by the constant strive for perfection. In addition, the Madrasatul Niswan represents a particular sort of community, as it resembles a 'closet' community (Taylor 1992:225). While using the social imagery of the ummah, the call for reform is strictly personal, and so are the (personal) rewards for the Hereafter. While the social component serves as a reminder at the moral level, reform is aimed at in the personal realm. In Taylor's words: 'improving devotional books were meant to be read and their contents internalized by each person […] the utility of printing was that it could make possible the wide diffusion of these practices of interiorization […] but the "Religion of the Closet" didn't depend for its practice in each individual case on the fact that it was probably being followed in hundreds, even thousands of other homes' (Taylor 1992:225).

With regard to the reproduction of a closed community like the Madrasatul Niswan, the question why parents send their children to a madrasa is often raised. With a view to countering the many stereotypical ideas related

to madrasa education and violence, it is important to acknowledge that parents are generally driven by the wish to give their children a good education. Rather than suspecting forms of violence, aggression, and force to be the order of the day, we ought to consider that parents who send their children to a madrasa generally do not seek admission to see their children turn into terrorists or jihadis, but to give them what they think is the best education possible for them (Philip n.d.:1). In the Madrasatul Niswan, most students in turn appeared to be content with their parents' decision. When I asked a student from Bijnor why she had come to Delhi instead of attending a girls' madrasa closer to home[3], she said that she knew the Madrasatul Niswan was the 'best' madrasa. Asking the same question in a group of third year students, they answered that they studied in a madrasa to please Allah, to work for their faith, and to save the world from going to Hell by doing tabligh. Although the scope of education may be limited and one-sided in some respects, my findings suggest that in the case of the Madrasatul Niswan the frequently noted stereotype that students learn without understanding is not the rule either. Still, as the teachers are often insufficiently trained to provide a broader outlook, not much didactic innovation can be expected with regard to encouraging more critical thinking, which however may hold for any other type of school as well. In that regard, Barbara Metcalf points out that organizations such as the Tablighi Jamaat are not alone in India to promote 'cultural encapsulation' (Sikand 2002:1).

Viewed from a different perspective, 'running such a large number of madrasas is perhaps the largest community effort by any single community in any part of the world in the field of education […]' (Philip n.d.:4). In other words, even if despite its strive for recognition the Madrasatul Niswan is not successful at becoming a vocal member of the 'official' public sphere, being part of the larger project of providing Islamic education for those who would otherwise not receive education at all makes it an important effort in the realm of civil society. In Barbara Metcalf's words: 'literacy is good, schooling is good – even if this is not modernity' (Sikand 2002:1).

To conclude, girls' madrasas like the Madrasatul Niswan seek to teach young women Islamic knowledge, manners, and ethics, which the participants in the discourse generally perceive to be unavailable or neglected otherwise. However, the notion of empowerment is problematic, as Mahmood points out, because it is often dictated by an agenda written by those who subscribe to the linkage between feminism, agency, and power (Mahmood 2001:203). Searching for a such a political agenda represents a pitfall, because in the course of looking for 'revolutionary' indicators, such as signs of change and progress, one tends

to lose sight of other forms of agency found in the continuation of a discourse of piety, modesty, and submission – be it in new ways. In a context wherein docility, redefined in Mahmood's argument as the 'willingness to be taught' (Mahmood 2001:209), and the cultivation of a pious self in continuity with an Islamic discourse that valorizes subordination to a transcendent will and by consequence often also to male authority are seen as ideals, agency defined as resistance to such relations of domination is not a helpful concept. In keeping with Mahmood's findings concerning the Egyptian mosque movement, in the Madrasatul Niswan the cultivation of a modest and pious self seems to represent the ideal. Those who participate in the discourse perceive Islam as an individual and collective practice of embodied pious living, and the young women indicated in many ways that they do get something valuable out of their education, namely the prospect of upward social mobility through education, better marriage prospects, the option of taking up the teaching profession, and finally the accumulation of religious merit for themselves and for their families.

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1. Note that Masud's criticism of the Tablighi Jamaat is threefold: (1) the Tablighi Jamaat 's agenda reduces Islam to an aversion toward modernity; (2) Islam is reduced to the personal and ritualistic level (Masud 2000:31), and (3) the distinction between virtues (fazail) and questions pertaining to Islamic law (masail), along with the strong emphasis on the former served to circum-navigate problems of sectarianism (Masud 2000:103).
2. With regard to the admiration for the time of the Prophet I observed that the majority of the Madrasatul Niswan's students and teachers, and especially those belonging to the 'core families', were named after the Prophet's wives and female Companions.
3. Owing to conversations with Patricia Jeffery I was aware that in rural Bijnor some madrasas hosted separate sections for girls and that some maulvis intended to open similar girls' madrasas.

Appendices

I Translated admission papers of the Madrasatul Niswan (2001)

Family data

- Educational standard (*talimi liaqat*)
- Character certificate
- Caste (*qaumiat*)
- School of thought, sect (*madhab*)
- Nationality
- Parents — orphans
- Age — birth certificate
- Father's name and educational background
- Father's occupation and annual income
- Fax, cell phone numbers, and email
- Signature of the guardian (*sarparast*)

Rules and regulations

- The student must attend all classes (at least 75% attendance to pass unless she has been ill)
- If the student has to go out, permission of the head teacher and the hostel warden has to be asked
- Students must always wear the school uniform during class hours
- The students must remember that the Jamia is a centre of motality (*ikhlaq*)
- The aim of the Jamia is the reform (*islah*) of the morality (*ikhlaq*) and actions (*amal*)
- The students' behaviour should be in accordance with the shariah
- The students' clothes should be in accordance with Islam
- Purdah is to be observed at all times

Holidays

- Besides the regular holidays, fifteen days of extra holidays can be granted with permission of the Manager
- Students who go to fairs (*melas*), cinemas, or other places of entertainment will be expelled from the Jamia

- The students are strictly prohibited to wear jewellery (*zewar*)
- The students must observe the obligatory rituals (*ibadat*)
- The students have to attend the daily gathering (majlis) on the *Virtues of Everyday Actions* (*Fazail-e-Amal*)
- The students must fully respect the teachers, founders, and ulama behind the Jamia
- The students must stay away from trial (*fitna*) at all times
- Three rounds of exams are held per year, plus one annual exam

Student's pledge

I promise that I shall observe the rules and regulations and that I shall study with great dedication and that I shall stay away from those things that are a waste of time and that I shall never display any immoral behaviour. I promise that I shall dedicate twenty four hours a day to studies in accordance with the timetable of the Jamia and that I shall obey the command of those in charge of the Jamia and accept any punishment if I break any of the rules and regulations.

Scholarships

For poor students, the Jamia offers scholarships for those who have 80% attendance or more and reach at least 60% of the full marks during exams.

Contact with parents

During set timings, parents are allowed and encouraged to call the Jamia to inquire about the student's progress. The student is allowed to speak on the phone for three minutes. On the first Thursday of every month, the students can go home to visit their parents. When they are picked up from the Jamia, the students must be accompanied by a *mahrem* man whose photo is with the Jamia. A woman cannot fulfil that function. A student cannot meet a *ghair mahrem* man, even if he is a close relative of hers. One can come and meet the students on Thursdays after 12pm and on Fridays from 9-12am. Parents are expected to check with the Jamia regularly about the student's advancement and regarding possible problems. After every round of exams, there is a meeting for the parents/guardians, during which the students display their aptitude.

The father also has to promise to abide by the rules and regulations as laid out above. Finally, there is a recommendation of the Jamia committee, deciding which class to send the girl to.'

II Translated curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan

'Under the Supervision of Mohammad Rabey Hasani Nadwi (Secretary General of the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow)

Preparatory, Primary, and Senior Secondary Education

The curriculum for primary, secondary, and higher learning is in accordance with the Kulliat Usul ul-Din (Faculty of Theology), Kulliat ul-Adab (Faculty of Arts), and the Mahad ud-Dawah (Institution of Dawah).

Establishment of institutions and faculties:

1. Nursery School
2. Primary School
3. Secondary School
4. Faculty of Teacher's Training

Besides Islamic studies with emphasis on tafsir and ahadith, modern sciences are also taught in the Madrasatul Niswan.

Al-Sanat-ul-Idadia

Preparatory Year (Arabic class)

Quran recitation and memorizaton	1. Memorization of *Surah Al-Qaria* to *Al-Nas* *Al-Tajwid and Al-Qirat* 2. The entire *Holy Quran* 3. *Rehmani Arabic Qaida*
Daily Routine:	Memorization of *Dua e-Mathura*; supplications are recited in daily prayers and at different times during day and night.
Islamic Upbringing:	1. Memorization of the fundamentals of prayer (namaz); its conditions, bathing, ablution, and other Islamic fundamentals 2. Training in stitching and cooking, etc.
Arabic:	*Miftahul-Quran* (Part I-II)
Urdu:	1. *Rehmani Urdu Qaida*

	2. *Urdu Zuban* (Part I-II) by Muhammad Ismail Merthi 3. Reading, writing, dictation and letter writing are taught
English:	*Al-Qalam Islamic Primer*
Mathematics:	1. Memorization of Urdu tables 2. Multiplication
Home Science:	Respect for teachers and author, regard for books, classroom, and discipline are taught
Remark:	Weekly Urdu *Al-Nadi* is held on Thursday under the supervision of female teachers

Al-Sanat-ul-Ibtidaiah

Primary Class (Pre-Senior Secondary School)

Al-Tajwid and *Al-Qirat*:	1. Memorization of tajwid from *Moin-ut-Tajwid* along with its basic grammar 2. Memorization of *Surah Al-Fil* to *Al-Nas*
Daily Routine:	Memorization of *Dua e-Mathura*, narrated by Prophet Muhammad for different times of day and night from *Masnun Duain* by Muhammad Ashique Ilahi Buland Shahri. Besides, the students also learn about Islamic etiquette.
Islamic Upbringing:	1. *Ladkion ka Islami Course* (Part I-V) by Sheikh Maqbul-ur-Rehman Bijnori 2. *Dini Talim ka Risala* 3. Students are trained in stitching, cooking, etc.
Islamic law (*Al-Fiqh*)	1. *Bahashti Samar* (Part I-II) 2. *Talimul Islam* by Mufti Muhammad Kifayatullah Dehlavi
History (*Al-Tarikh*):	*Tarikh ul-Islam* (Part III) by Mufti Muhammad Miyan Dehlavi
Arabic:	1. *Rehmani Qaida Arabic* 2. *Miftahul Quran* (Part I-III) 3. *Arabic Sifwatul Masadir*. Memorization of names of days, months, and years in Arabic.

	4. *Minhaj ul-Arabia* (Part I)
Urdu:	1. *Rehmani Qaida Urdu*
	2. *Urdu Zuban* (Part III-V)
	3. Writing
	4. Dictation
English:	The teacher selects a book as per ability of the students
Mathematics:	The teacher selects a book as per ability of the students
Home Science:	Respect of teachers and author, regard for books, classroom, and discipline are taught.
Remark:	Weekly Urdu *Al-Nadi* is held on Thursday under the supervision of female teachers

Al-Sanat-ul-Ula al-Alia

1st Year of Senior Secondary

Al-Tajwid and *Al-Qirat*:	1. The Holy Quran is taught with tajwid and basic grammar. The teacher recommends the grammar book.
	2. Memorization of *Surah Al-Zoha* to *Al-Adiyat*
Dogmatics (*Al-Aqidah*):	*Taqwiat ul-Iman*
Daily Routine:	Memorization of *Dua e-Mathura* – narrated by Prophet Muhammad for different times of day and night from *Masnun Duain* by Muhammad Aashique Ilahi Buland Shahri.
Islamic Upbringing:	1. *Khawatein aur din ki khidmat* by Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (for study)
	2. Training in stitching, cooking, etc.
Al-Fiqh:	*Bihishti Zewar* (selected lessons)
Usul al-fiqh:	*Mabad-e-usul-al-fiqh* by Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi
Al-Tarikh:	*Tarikh ul-Islam*
Biography of the Prophet (*Al-Sirah*):	*Tarikh Habib Illah*
Arabic Literature:	1. *Mufid ut-Talebin*
	2. *Minhaj ul-Arabia* (Part II-III)
	3. *Qisasun Nabiyin* (Part II-III)
	4. *Al-Tamrin Al-Takallum bil-Lughatil Arabia*

	5. Memorization of *Sifwatul Masadir*
	6. *Qismul Masadir*
	7. *Miftah ul-Quran* (Part III-IV)
Arabic Essay:	1. Translation and essay writing
	2. *Arbi Ka Muallim* (Part I-II)
	3. *Muallim ul-Insha* (Part I)
Grammar (*Al-Sarf*):	*Ilm ul-Sarf al-Awwal* by Mushtaque Ahmad Jarthawli (*Tamrin ul-Sarf* for study and exercise)
Syntax (*Al-Nahw*):	*Ilm un-Nahw* by Mushtaque Ahmad Jarthawli (*Tamrin un-Nauh* for study and exercise)
Urdu:	*Dini Talim Ka Risala* (Parts I-XI) by Muhammad Miyan Dehlavi
English:	The teacher selects a book as per ability of the students
Mathematics:	The teacher selects a book as per ability of the students
Remark:	Weekly Arabic and Urdu *Al-Nadi* is held on Thursday under the supervision of female teachers

Al-Sanat-al-Sania al-Alia

2nd Year of Senior Secondary

Al-Tajwid and *Al-Qirat*:	1. *Tashil ut-Tajwid* by Qari Muhammad Siddique Bandwi
	2. *Al-Tamrin bit-Tajwid wal Hadar*
Exegesis (*Al-Tafsir*):	*Tarjamatul Quran* and its commentary (Part I-XV) along with exercises in grammar and syntax
Al-Aqidah:	*Taqwiat ul-Iman*
Prophetic traditions (*Al-Hadith*):	*Tahzib ul-Akhlaque*
Al-Fiqh:	1. *Nur ul-Izah*
	2. *Quduri* (*Kitab ul-Boyu)*
Usul al-Fiqh:	1. *Tashil ul-Usul*
	2. *Usul al-Shashi*
Rhetoric (*Al-Balaghat*):	*Tashil al-Balaghah*

Arabic Literature:	1. *Lisan ul-Quran*; *Juzan Mukhtar ul-Mohalemin wal Moallimat* 2. *Miftahul Quran* (Part V) 3. *Qisassun-Nabiyin* (Part III)
Al-Insha:	1. *Arbi ka muallim* (Part III) 2. *Al-Tamrin alat Takallum bil-Lughatil Arabia* 3. *Muallim ul-Insha* (Part II)
Islamic Upbringing:	1. Training in stitching, cooking, etc. 2. Students are also trained in Islamic etiquette
Daily Routine:	Drill of daily routine on Islamic foundations
Al-Tarikh:	*Tarikh ul-Islam wa-Sirat un-Nabawiah* (for study)
Al-Sirah:	*Sirat un-Nabi* by Allama Shibli Nomani (Part I-II for study)
Al-Sarf:	*Kitab us-Sarf* by Abdur Rehman Amritsari (for study)
Al-Nahw:	*Tashil Hidayat un-Nauh*
English:	The teacher selects the chapters from the books
Remark:	Urdu and Arabic *Al-Nadi* is held on Thursday under the supervision of teachers

Al-Sanah al-Salisa al-Alia

3rd Year of Senior Secondary

Al-Tafsir:	*Tarjamatul Quran* (Para 16-30) and its commentary with exercise of *Al-Sarf* and *Al-Nahw*
Al-Aqidah:	*Al-Aqidat-ul-Hasanah*
Al-Hadith:	1. Selected chapters from *Mishkat ul-Masabih* 2. *Hayat us-Sahaba* (Part I)
Usul al-Fiqh:	*Nur ul-Anwar*
Arabic Literature:	1. *Qisas un-Nabeyin* (Part IV) 2. Mansurat
Al-Insha:	1. *Arbi ka Moallim* (Part IV) 2. *Al-Tamrin alat-Takallum bil-Lughatil Arabia*
Upbringing:	Stitching, embroidery, and cooking are taught

Al-Tajwid and *Al-Qirat*:	Revision of *Tashil ut-Tajwid* along with *Tajwid* and *Hadar*
Daily Routine:	Teacher selects matter
Al-Tarikh:	Teacher selects chapters
Al-Sirah:	*Sirat un-Nabi* by Allama Shibli Nomani (Part III-IV for study)
Al-Sarf:	*Ilm us-Sigha* by Sheikh Muhammad Rafi Usmani
Al-Nahw:	*Al Nahw ul-Wazeha* (Part I-III)
Rhetoric (*Al-Balaghat*):	1. *Dorus ul-Balaghah* 2. *Al-Balaghat ul-Wazeha*
English:	The teacher selects chapters from the book
Remark:	Urdu and Arabic *Al-Nadi* on Thursday is organized under the supervision of teachers

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Al-Sanah al-Rabia al-Alia

4th Year of Senior Secondary

Al-Tajwid and *Al-Qirat*:	The teacher chooses chapters from selected *Surahs*
Al-Tafsir:	*Al-Jalalain* (Part I-II)
Usul ut-Tafsir:	*Al-Fauz ul-Kabir fi Usul ut-Tafsir*
Al-Aqidah:	*Risalatu Tawhid* and *Al-Aqidat ut-Tahawia* or summary of *Al-Aqidat ut-Tahawia*
Al-Hadith:	Selected chapters from *Mishkat ul-Masabih*
Usul ul-Hadith:	*Moqaddama Tanqih ul-Lamat* by Abdul Haque Mohaddis Dehlavi
Al-Fiqh:	*Hidaya Awwalain*
Al-Mirath:	1. *Tashil ul-Faraedh fil-Mirath* 2. *Seraji*
Arabic Literature:	*Mukhtarat* (Part I)
Upbringing:	Students are trained in stitching, embroidery, and cooking
Daily Routine:	The teacher selects a chapter from a recommended book
Al-Tarikh:	The teacher chooses a chapter from a book
Al-Sirah:	1. *Sirat un-Nabi* by Allama Shibli Nomani 2. The teacher selects chapter for study

Al-Nahw:	*Al-Nahw ul-Wazeha al-Thaniwia* (Part I-II-III for study)
English:	The teacher selects a chapter from a prescribed book
Remark:	1. Children are taught astronomy, so that they may find out namaz timings and the qibla (direction of prayer) 2. Urdu and Arabic *Al-Nadi* is held on Thursday under the supervision of teachers

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Al-Sanah al-Khamisah al-Alia

5th Year of Senior Secondary

Al-Tafsir:	*Maarif ul-Quran*
Al-Hadith:	1. *Sahih ul-Bukhari* 2. *Sahih ul-Muslim* 3. *Sunan al-Nasai* 4. *Sunan Abi Daud* 5. *Al-Jame ut-Tirmidhi* 6. *Sunan Ibn Majah* 7. *Sharh Mani al-Asar lit-Tahawi* 8. *Al-Moatta lil-Imam Malik* 9. *Al-Moatta lil-Imam Mohammad* 10. *Al-Shamail lit-Tirmidhi*
Al-Tarikh:	*Tarikh Dawat o-Azimat* (for study)
Remark:	Weekly Urdu and Arabic *Al-Nadi* on Thursday is held under the supervision of teachers

Further, daily reading of the *Fazail-e-Amal* is prescribed for the entire duration of the course.'

III The current dars-e-nizami [1]

Exegesis *(tafsir)*	*Tafsir al-Jalalain*
	Anwar al-tanzil
	Al-Kashshaf an Haqaiq al-Tanzil
Methods of exegesis (*usul al-tafsir*)	*Fauz al-kabir fi usul al-tafsir*
Methods of Prophetic traditions	*Sharh Nukhbat al-Fikr*
Hadith	*Al-Bukhari*
	Muslim
	Al-Muwatta
	Al-Tirmidhi
	Abu Daud
	Al-Nasai
	Ibn Majah
	Masabih al-sunnah
Islamic law (fiqh)	*Sharh Wiqaya*
	Al-Hidaya
	Khulasa Kaidani
	Kitab Muniyat al-Musalli wa Ghuniyat al-Mubtadi
	Nur al-idah ilkh
	Mukhtasar al-Quduri
	Kanz al-Daqaiq
	Al-Faraid al-sirajiya
Basis of Islamic law (*usul al-fiqh*)	*Nur al-anwar*
	Al-Tawdih fi hall jawamid al-Tanqih
	Al-Talwih ila kashf haqaiq al Tanqih
	Musallam al-Thubut
	Husami al-Muntakhab fi Usul al-Madhahib
	Usul al-shashi
Grammar (*sarf*)	*Mizan al-sarf*
	Munshaib
	Sarf-e Mir

	Panj Ganj
	Dastur al-mubtadi
	Ilm al-Sigha
	Fusul-e Akbari
	Zarawi or Uthmaniya
	Al-Tasrif al-Zanjani or al-Tasrif al-Izzi
	Sarf Bahai
	Marah al-Arwah
Syntax (*nahw*)	*Nahw-e Mir*
	Kitab al-Awamil al-Miat or Miat amil
	Sharh Miat amil
	Hidayat al-nahw
	Al-Kafiya fil nahw
	Al-Fawaid al-diyaiya or Sharh Jami
	Tashil al-Kafiya
	Hashiya Sharh Jami
Literature	*Nafahat al-yaman*
	Sab muallaqat
	Diwan al-Mutanabbi
	Maqamat al-Hariri
	Al-Hamasa
	Mufid al-talibin
	Nafahat al-Arab
Logic	*Al-Risala al Sughra fil mantiq*
	Al-Risala al Kubra fil mantiq
	Kitab al-Isaghuji
	Mirqat
	Mizan al-Mantiq
	Tahdhib fi ilm al-mantiq
	Sharh al-Risala al-Shamsiya or Qutbi
	Mir Qutbi
	Sharh Sullam al-Ulum or Mulla Hasan
	Sharh Sullam Hamd Ullah
	Sharh Sullam Qadi Mubarak or al-Munhiya
	Al-Hashiya al-Zahidiya al-Qutbiya called Risala Mir Zahid

Philosophy	*Sharh Hidayat al-Hikmat or Maybudhi* *Sadra* *Shams Bazigha* *Al-Hidaya al-saidiya*
Theology	*Sharh Aqaid al-Nasafi* *Al-Hashiya ala Sharh al-Aqaid or Khayali* *Hashiya ala l-Umur al-amma min Sharh al-Mawaqif called Mir Zahid* *Sharh Mawaqif or Sharh al-Izzi*
Mathematical sciences and Astronomy	*Tahrir usul al-handasa li Uqlidis* *Khulasat al-Hisab* *Tasrih fi Tashrih al-Aflak* *Sharh Chaghmini*
Metrics	*Arud al-miftah*
Rhetoric	*Mukhtasar al-Maani* *Talkhis al-Miftah* *Mutawwal*
Debate	*Al-Adab al-Rashidiya fi ilm al-munazara*

1. Based on Malik 1997:536-541.

IV Interview Questions

The following questions were used as guidelines for the interviews and informal conversations that took place during fieldwork. The respondent groups to the questions were:

- Students in girls' madrasas
- Teachers in girls' madrasas
- Students' and teachers' families
- Founders of girls' madrasas
- People otherwise involved in madrasa education for girls
- People referred to as 'marginal cases', such as visiting friends of teachers and students

Students/Teachers

- Did a female relative of yours studied in a madrasa?
- Did a male relative of yours studied in a madrasa?
- Where were you born?
- What kind of work does your father do?
- How did you find out about this particular madrasa?
- Did you go to school before you began to study in this madrasa?
- Was it your wish to study/teach in this madrasa?
- When you visit your family's home, do people treat you differently because you study/teach in a madrasa?
- Has anyone outside the madrasa ever asked your opinion on an Islamic matter?
- Do you travel to do dawah/tabligh? If not, would you like to do so? If so, how do you travel?
- How do you pass time during vacations at home?
- What do you think about cinema, movies, and popular music?
- Which festivals does your family celebrate?
- Do you attend prayers or meetings in a mosque?
- What would you like to do after you graduate?
- Are you married? Would you like to get married?
- What constitutes a good husband or a good wife?
- Did you observe purdah prior to enrolment in this madrasa?
- Will you continue to do so after you graduate?

– Would you like for your daughter to observe purdah in the same way?

In addition to the above, the teachers were asked the following questions:

– Did you work prior to taking up teaching in this madrasa?
– Did you ever think of pursuing any other profession?
– What is your qualification?
– What would you like your students to do after they graduate?

Families

– How did you find out about this madrasa?
– Has any male or female relative of yours studied in a madrasa?
– Do you recall any of your female relatives being taught about Islam at home?
– Were any of your relatives involved in the establishment of this madrasa?
– Has your relative's studying/teaching in this madrasa affected your family life?
– What would you like your relative to do after she graduates?
– Do you think your relative would in turn encourage her daughter to study in a madrasa?
– How do you feel about women doing dawah/tabligh? What precautions would you like your relative to take if she went travelling?

Founders

– Did you graduate from a madrasa? If so, which madrasa did you graduate from?
– What made you think of establishing a girls' madrasa?
– Did this idea find support from the outset?
– How did you try to convince people in your surroundings that a girls' madrasa was needed?
– How is the madrasa funded?
– Who determines the curriculum taught in this madrasa?
– What would you like your students to do after they graduate?

V List of girls' Madrasas in Delhi

Secondary level girls' madrasas

- Madrasatul Niswan, Nizamuddin
- Jamiatul Banaath, Okhla
- Jamiatus Salehat, Old City
- Madrasa Aminiya Islamia, Old City
- Madrasatul Banaath, Old City
- Qaumi Madrasa Niswan, Old City
- Madrasa Rahimia, Old City (has a girls' section)

Madrasas with a 'dual curriculum'

- Khadijatul Kubra, Okhla
- Aminia School, Old City (established in the early 1920s by Maulana Mohammad Amin, now run by the great-granddaughter of Urdu writer Nazeer Ahmad)
- Zohra Girls' School, Old City (established in 1983 by the Qaum-e-Punjabian, around 200 students from I-X Standard, not recognized because of dual curriculum, building given as donation by the lady who lived in that house after she died, as she used to teach the Quran to girls in her neighbourhood)
- Madrasatul Iqrah, Old City (recently established, was said to teach a maulvi course for girls)

VI Overview map of India

VII Glossary

Amal	action
Adab	synonymous with etiquette, manners, or value education in the case of lessons in adab as held in the madrasa
Ahl-e-kitab	lit. transl. people of the book; denoting the followers of the Abrahamic faiths, viz. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
Alim/alima; pl. *ulama/alimat*	m./f. scholar of Islam
Amir (Tablighi Jamaat)	highest position in the hierarchy of the Tablighi Jamaat
Anjuman	voluntary association
Ansari	(1) 'Helpers'; i.e. those who welcomed the Prophet and his followers in Medina; (2) low-caste converts to Islam from the north Indian caste of weavers
Aqidah	dogmatics; list of beliefs
Badi appa	lit. transl. 'big elder sister'; respectful address used for the Principal of the Jamiatul Banaath
Bahu	daughter-in-law
Balaghat	rhetoric
Basti	settlement
Bayan	lecture
Bazaar	market
Burqa	ankle length manteau worn by women living in → purdah when venturing outside the home
Chhote log/ham log/voh log	lit. transl. small people/we/they
Dargah	Sufi shrine erected around the grave of a holy man, where people of different faiths worship; also associated with miracles such as healings of barren women and mentally challenged people
Dars-e-nizami	standardized eighteenth century → madrasa curriculum of Mulla Nizamuddin Sahalvi
Dawah	call to faith; i.e. missionary work
Dervish	lit. meaning 'one who sits in a doorway'; term used for the dedicated Sufi 'monk'
Dhimmi	non-Muslim living in an Islamic environment for whom special laws are applicable
Din/dini/diniat	faith/matters pertaining to faith

Dini talim	religious education
Diwali	annual Hindu festival of lights, celebrated to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity
Diya	traditionally small earthen oil lamp lit on the occasion of → *diwali*
Duniyavi	transl. as matters pertaining to the world or worldly, secular
Dupatta	long scarf completing the → *salwar kameez*; used for various purposes, such as covering the bosom, the head, carrying a baby in a sling, or used as a baby hammock
Eid-ul-Adha; *Eid-ul-Fitr*	Islamic festicals marking the end of the month of → *ramzan* and the commemoration of the Abrahamic sacrifice respectively
Farz aliyan	positive obligation
Farz kifayah	sufficiency obligation
Fatwa/fatawa	sg./pl. legal decree
Fazail	virtues
Filmi	matters pertaining to Bollywood films, such as music and gossip about actors
Fiqh	jurisprudence; Islamic Science of law and its commentaries
Firangi	foreigner
Fitnah	trial
Gali	alley
Ghair mahrem	denotes a man whom a girl could marry in theory, in whose company the girl should veil or whose company is even forbidden for her
Guru	teacher
Hadith/ahadith/muhadditha	sg./pl. traditions of the Prophet of Islam; a woman recounting such collections of traditions
Hajj	pilgrimage to Mecca; one of the five Pillars of Islam
Halal	something permitted by Islamic law
Haram	something forbidden by Islamic law
Haveli	mansion, the rooms of which characteristically open toward a spacious courtyard
Hijab	veil
Hindutva	fundamentalist Hindu politics

Ijaza	lit. permission; also the diploma obtained by a teacher with whom one has studied a particular book or subject to the teacher's satisfaction, who in turn gives his or her ijaza to the student to teach this book or subject
Ijtihad	contested concept implying that after acquring the required knowledge, one is authorized to deduce rules of Islamic law through juristic reasoning
Ikhlaq	morality
Ilm	knowledge
Ilm mahmood	praiseworthy knowledge
Ilm mazmoom	blameworthy knowledge
Islah	reform
Isnad	authoritative chain of narrators of → *ahadith* or Prophetic traditions
Jamaat	lit. transl. gathering
Jamia	university
Jihad	concept denoting the 'Holy War', interpreted as both the external war against non-Muslim unbelievers waged if and when circumstances so require, as well as the inner war to overcome one's shortcomings
Kaaba	holiest place of worship in Islam situated in Mecca; lit. 'cube', due to its cubical structure
Kafir/kafirun	sg./pl. unbeliever
Kalimah	Islamic profession of faith; one of the five Pillars of Islam
Kebab	meat dish, the most popular form of which is seasoned minced meat grilled on a skewer
Khanqah	Persian for house or abode of Sufis and → *dervishes*; Sufi order
Kujli	itch (Hindi)
Kurta pajama	male dress consisting of long trousers (*pajama*) and a straight knee length shirt (*kurta*)
Madhab/madhaib	sg./pl. system of → *fiqh*; also rendered as sect, school of thought
Madrasa	Islamic seminary; derived from the Arabic root *'dars'*, which means lesson, and hence the madrasa is the place where the lesson is held, thus denoting the school in general

Mahr	dowry
Mahrem	A man forbidden for a woman in marriage, who then is assigned the role of guardian over her, prior to her marriage
Maktab/makatib	sg./pl. Islamic primary school wherein mainly reading Arabic and reciting the Quran are taught
Markaz	centre
Masail	questions pertaining to Islamic law
Masjid	mosque
Mehendi	henna; used as a paste to decorate women's hands and feet on festive occasions, especially weddings, and for dying one's hair or beard
Millat/milli	community/matters pertaining to the community
Mufti	scholar of Islamic law authorized to issue → *fatawa*
Naat	Islamic Urdu poetry
Nahw	syntax
Namaskar	formula of polite greeting among Hindus
Namaz	prayer
Nazim	Manager
Niqab	face veil
Pan	mixture of aracea nut, chutney, and condiments wrapped in a betel leaf
Parantha	fried bread, either with filling or plain, eaten as a side dish
Purdah	concept denoting both female segregation and donning 'modest dress', i.e. the → *burqa* or manteau and veil
Qaum	caste
Qawali	devotional music of the Sufis and → *dervishes*
Radd	Islamic texts in which 'alien' philosophies are refuted
Rakshabandhana	annual Hindu festival on the occasion of which sisters are supposed to give gifts and tie strings or bracelets around their brothers' wrists and bless them, for which they in turn receive gifts, thus ensuring their good-will for the next year
Ramzan	month of fast; one of the five Pillars of Islam
Saas	mother-in-law
Sahaba	Companions of the Prophet

Salwar kameez	female dress consisting of loose trousers (*salwar*) and a long blouse (*kameez* or *kurta*)
Sarf	grammar
Shariah	Islamic law
Sirah	biography
Subhan allah	transl. all glory be to God
Sufi/tasawwuf	mystical tradition and practice
Sunnah	traditions on the practice of the Prophet
Tabligh/tablighi	preaching or propagation of Islam/matters pertaining to such activities of preaching
Tafsir	Quranic exegesis
Taqlid	adherence to one of the schools of Islamic law or → *madhaib*
Tarana	anthem
Tarikh	history
Tawhid	concept denoting the unity of God
Ummah	universal Muslim community
Vina	lute
Wahy	revelation
Wala	transl. as support, love, help
Waqf/awqaf	sg./pl. endowment
Wudu	ritual ablutions
Zakat	alms; one of the five Pillars of Islam
Zenana	women's quarters of the house

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Nederlandse samenvatting van het proefschrift

'From Behind the Curtain'. A study of a girls' madrasa in India

'Van achter het gordijn'. Een studie over een madrasa voor vrouwen in India

Madrasas voor vrouwen, bestaan die dan? – was de voornaamste reactie die ik kreeg wanneer ik mijn onderzoeksproject presenteerde. Terwijl ruimschoots informatie beschikbaar is over *madrasas* voor jonge mannen, lijkt er nog maar betrekkelijk weinig bekend te zijn over soortgelijke instellingen voor vrouwen. Met dit proefschrift wil ik daarom ingaan op de vragen hoe de *madrasas* voor vrouwen in India zijn ontstaan, in hoeverre zij verschillen van *madrasas* voor jongens, en hoe islam in een *madrasa* voor vrouwen geïnterpreteerd wordt. In het bijzonder wil ik nagaan wat de jonge vrouwen bijgebracht wordt en of wat ze leren hen toestaat gezag op te eisen in de publieke sfeer. Het onderzoek is gebaseerd op ethnografisch materiaal dat in een *madrasa* in New Delhi voor jonge vrouwen tussen twaalf en zeventien jaar werd vergaard. De beginfase van het veldwerk stond in het teken van de nasleep van 11 September 2001, en mede om die reden leek het alsof niet alleen de vrouwen waarmee ik in contact probeerde te komen achter een sluier leefden, ook de *madrasas* die ik wilde bezoeken leken letterlijk onzichtbaar te zijn.

In hoofdstuk 1 wordt de opzet van het onderzoeksproject uiteengezet en introduceer ik tevens de omgeving van de *madrasa* waarin het veldwerk grotendeels heeft plaats gehad. Hoofdstuk 2 onderzoekt waar *madrasas* voor vrouwen in de literatuur verschijnen en waar ze afwezig zijn. In dit deel wordt vooral gebruik gemaakt van Urdu bronnen en Engelse krantenartikelen die in de moslem pers na 11 september 2001 zijn gepubliceerd. In India werd in het kader van de nasleep van de aanslagen in de Verenigde Staten *madrasa* onderwijs tot een publiek onderwerp dat veel aandacht trok, voornamelijk vanwege de vermeende schakel tussen *madrasa* onderwijs en geweld. Ten gevolge van dergelijke beschuldigingen leken de anders vaak moeizaam te localiseren *madrasas* voor vrouwen publieker te worden dankzij de moslim media, waarin ze als voorbeeld aangehaald werden om

aan te tonen hoe progressief bepaalde moslim gemeenschappen in India zijn en hoe *madrasa* onderwijs ook 'anders' kan. Ook kon hieruit belangrijke informatie over *madrasas* voor vrouwen worden afgeleid, waarbij naar voren kwam dat terwijl *madrasas* voor vrouwen opgericht zijn volgens het model van 'traditionele' *madrasas* voor jongens, zij desondanks 'modern' zijn qua opzet.

Hoofdstuk 3 begint met een blik 'achter het gordijn' van de *Madrasatul Niswan*, waarin wij om te beginnen kennis maken met een aantal 'publieke' mannen. Uit hun verhalen komt naar voren dat de ideeën van de mannen achter de schermen vaak niet overeenkomen met wat er daadwerkelijk op onderwijsgebied in the *madrasa* gebeurt. Terwijl mannen het feit dat het curriculum afwijkt van hetgeen wordt onderwezen in *madrasas* voor jongens rechtvaardigen met het argument dat de studieduur voor vrouwen korter is, geven mijn data aanleiding tot de conclusie dat de 'afwijkingen' voortkomen uit hun visie op de positie van vrouwen in de samenleving. De aan hun visie ten grondslag liggende ideeën zijn gekleurd door de contacten van de mannen 'achter de schermen' met een organisatie van leken predikers, de *Tablighi Jamaat,* en het werk dat zij daarvoor verrichten.

Hoofdstuk 4 belicht aan de hand van voorbeelden en verhalen hoe het onderwijs en het alledaagse leven er uitzien in de *Madrasatul Niswan*. Er blijken niet alleen verschillen met het *madrasa* curriculum voor jongens te bestaan, maar er zijn ook aanzienlijke verschillen tussen het officiële curriculum en hetgeen in de praktijk aan de orde wordt gesteld. Terwijl aan *fiqh* oftewel de islamitische wet weinig aandacht wordt besteed, met uitzondering van vragen die belangrijk geacht worden voor de jonge vrouwen, krijgt *adab* oftewel onderwijs in waarden en normen veel meer aandacht dan vastgelegd in het lesrooster. Eveneens belangrijk zijn processen van (zelf)disciplinering. De nadruk die zowel in de literatuur, in de media, alsmede in de publieke opinie wordt gelegd op uit het hoofd leren als kenmerk van *madrasa* onderwijs strookt niet met mijn data. Wel waren andere vormen van disciplinering duidelijk aanwezig, met name wat betreft de vorming van het zelf- en het wereldbeeld van de jonge vrouwen. Hen wordt ook bijgebracht hoe zij zich dienen te kleden, hoe zij moeten praten en wat voor gedrag van hen verwacht wordt in het leven van alledag.

Met het oog op de toekomst van de afgestudeerde jonge vrouwen wordt in hoofdstuk 5 de vraag naar de betekenis van *madrasa* onderwijs voor de positie van moslim vrouwen in de publieke sfeer aan de orde gesteld. In dit hoofdstuk wordt nagegaan wat de jonge vrouwen na het voltooien van de vijfjarige opleiding met hun kennis doen en of zij ondanks

hun strenge vorm van sluieren een publieke rol kunnen en willen spelen. Ter ondersteuning van het theoretische gedeelte worden verhalen en voorbeelden uit het alledaagse leven in de vrouwen *madrasa* aangehaald, waarbij de relaties en spanningen tussen gender, het 'achter een sluier leven' van vrouwen (*purdah*) en hun aanwezigheid in de publieke sfeer nader worden belicht. Uit de verhalen blijkt dat terwijl het lijkt alsof de jonge vrouwen leren berusten in hun eigen onderdrukking, zij dit zelf vaak anders ervaren, namelijk als het cultiveren van een godvruchtig zelf. Bovendien onderscheiden de jonge vrouwen zich van hun leeftijdsgenoten die niet in een *madrasa* gestudeerd hebben, doordat zij zich bepaalde vaardigheden eigen hebben gemaakt die deelname aan de publieke sfeer vergemakkelijken. Bij wijze van conclusie worden in hoofdstuk 6 een aantal ideeën aangaande *madrasa* onderwijs voor vrouwen herzien. Terwijl vanuit *tablighi* kringen geleerde vrouwen vooral af worden geschilderd als vrouwen met een buitengewoon moreel karakter, zijn er historische voorbeelden van geleerde vrouwen die zelfs mannen onderwezen. Publieke *madrasas* voor vrouwen kwamen tot stand onder de invloed van hervormingsbewegingen uit de late negentiende eeuw, en de *Madrasatul Niswan* blijkt tevens beïnvloed te zijn door informele banden met de *Tablighi Jamaat*. Deze factoren hebben een weerslag op het ideaalbeeld van de moslim vrouw dat de *madrasa* poogt te propageren. Ten gevolge daarvan verschilt het *madrasa* curriculum voor vrouwen dan ook aanzienlijk van het curriculum dat in *madrasas* voor jongens wordt onderwezen. Hoewel de vrouwen op grond van hun opleiding aan de *madrasas* nog geen religieus gezag claimen in de publieke sfeer, vormen de *madrasas* voor vrouwen wel een belangrijke bron van sociaal en religieus kapitaal. Het volgen van een dergelijke opleiding kan leiden tot sociale mobiliteit en verbeterde huwelijksvooruitzichten, en heeft bovenal een spirituele meerwaarde voor henzelf, hun families, en voor de gemeenschap als geheel.