

**The Making of “New” Muslim Women: A Critical Study of Select Malayalam
Magazines for Muslim Women**

A thesis submitted during 2023 to the University of Hyderabad in
partial fulfillment of the award of a Ph.D. degree

in

Gender Studies

by

Muhammadali Koran Kulangara

11CWPG07



Centre for Women's Studies

School of Social Science

University of Hyderabad

Central University (P.O.), Gachibowli,

Hyderabad – 500 046

Telangana

India



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“The Making of “New” Muslim Women: A Critical Study of Select Malayalam Magazines for Muslim Women”** submitted by **Muhammadali Koran Kulangara** bearing registration number **11CWPG07** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for award of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social Science is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

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2. Presented a paper at National Conference on “Language, Culture and Minorities: Issues and Challenges” organised by Department of Sociology, Maulana Azad

National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad, on 22nd and 23rd March 2018.

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of coursework requirement:

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1. GS801	Feminist Theories and Research Methodologies	4	Pass
2. GS802	Pedagogy of Gender Studies	4	Pass
3. GS832	Muslim Women's Magazines in Kerala	4	Pass

Deepa Sreenivas

Supervisor

Supervisor
Centre for Women's Studies
University of Hyderabad

K. Suresh Ravi

Head of the Department

HEA
महिला अध्ययन केन्द्र
Centre for Women's Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
हैदराबाद / Hyderabad-500 046

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Dean of School

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समाज विज्ञान संकाय
School of Social Sciences
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद-500 046, भारत
Hyderabad-500 046. INDIA.



DECLARATION

I, **Muhammadali Koran Kulangara**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled "**The Making of "New" Muslim Women: A Critical Study of Select Malayalam Magazines for Muslim Women**" submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Deepa Sreenivas** is bonafide research work. I also declare that it has been not submitted previously in part or in full to this University or other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Chapter One

MAGAZINES FOR MUSLIM WOMEN: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

AN INTRODUCTION

This study explores the moment when the Muslim community in Kerala actively engaged in remaking women in relation to the massive social and economic transformation of the community. This process of transformation is informed by the social economic development of the community as a result of Gulf migration and the pressure of secular (state and non-state) actors to modernize the principles and practices of Islam. The socio-political environment of the Shah Bano affair and the subsequent campaign for a Uniform Civil Code was one of the critical factors that influenced community's efforts to remake the gender regime within the community. The central focus of this thesis is how the question of gender emerges in contemporary Malayalam magazines for Muslim women while engaging with the present context.

Women's magazines are a significant part of Kerala's Muslim magazine culture. They play a vital role in the socialization process and are one of the critical sources contributing to shaping women's view of the world. Women's magazines also help shape contemporary societal values; they set fashion trends, influence how a woman should behave and look, and create ideological messages. These magazines' moderate monthly circulation rates suggest they fulfill at least some of their readers' needs and expectations. They are a prominent source of information about fashion, dressing style, relationships, sexual health, and sexuality. For

this study, I use two prominent Muslim women's magazines in Kerala, *Poomkavanam*, and *Aramam*.¹

Magazines for Muslim Women

Aramam is the first women's magazine for Muslim women in Malayalam after independence. It started in response to existing popular magazines. *Manorama* and *Mangalam* were prominent among popular magazines. These magazines have a large readership among the Muslim community. *Jamaat-e-Islami* leaders saw the increasing popularity of these magazines in society as a cultural threat. The 50th-anniversary souvenir of the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kerala Chapter mentions the occasion of *Aramam*'s birth:

This soap opera magazine pollutes the reading culture of ordinary people, especially women. They caused unhealthy trends to rise in society. They consistently portray suicide as an easy solution to problems in their personal life. Therefore, to combat such cultural pollution, the Girls Islamic Organization (GIO) decided to publish a women's magazine.²

The souvenir further states its mission: "*Aramam*'s priority is to liberate at least the women of the Muslim community from the powerful influence of this toxic literature and develop a creative and enlightened reading culture among women." Since GIO is part of *Jamaat e Islami*, we can safely assume that the intended 'enlightened' reading is Islamic. The editorial in the inaugural issue of *Aramam* spells out its mission:

Nowadays, many Muslim women are interested in reading and other scholarly activities. It is the responsibility of community leaders to provide good books and

¹ The meaning of the Malayalam words *Poomkavanam* and *Aramam* is "garden." Metaphorically it connotes the idea of paradise. In Malayalam Muslim literature, both words are used to refer to family and heaven.

² "Prasidheekaranagal [Publications]," in *Jamaat-e-Islami Anpatham Varshikapathippu [Jamaat-e-Islami Fiftieth Anniversary Edition]* (Kozikode: Prabhodhanam, 1992), 189.

publications to women. This need not be emphasized as the Muslim community has assumed this responsibility to some extent. Unfortunately, there has not yet been a women's magazine with an Islamic perspective. *Aramam* aims to fill this gap.³



Figure 1 *Aramam* cover page September, 2012

Being the only magazine of its kind, *Aramam* gained wide circulation in the Muslim community in its early days. It attempts to educate Muslim women about the problems of the liberal secular agenda of feminist movements and other modernizing elements. It also proposes its form of modernity based on Islamic ideas. *Aramam* aims to create new

³ "Editorial," *Aramam*, May 1985, 2.

conceptions of Muslim womanhood that differ significantly from both traditional *Sunni*⁴ and secular feminist notions of womanhood. However, *Aramam*'s version of Muslim womanhood was contested by conventional Sunni Muslims. The broad reach of *Aramam* prompted the traditionalists to start their magazine to reinforce traditional notions of femininity and check influence of *Aramam*. So they began *Poomkavanam* in 1988. It is imperative for them to defend new conceptions of Muslim femininity as such conceptions critically engage with traditional notions of femininity and gender.

Dr. Hussain Randathani, the honorary editor of the magazine, explains how the idea for a magazine specifically for Muslim women came about and how he and his team implemented the project: "The seeds for *Poomkavanam* were sown in the office of *Al Irfaad* magazine in Arafa Building, Kallai Road, Kozhikode. I, TP Abubakar, PMK Faizi, Umar Kallur, PK Palathole, KA Kadangode, and O. M Taruvana were all involved in the initial discussions."⁵ Dr. Hussain and the figures he mentioned are major intellectual figures and ideologue within the traditional *Sunni* sect in Kerala, led by AP Aboobakkar Musaliyar. "We were a group of young individuals interested in contributing to Muslim literature. We were inspired by the success of *Al Irfad* magazine to think of a family-oriented magazine. I personally nurtured the idea for a family magazine in my mind."⁶ The next step towards starting women's magazines from *Sunni* background was to get the approval and support from leading religious leaders of the traditional *Sunnies*. The team contacted prominent *Sunni*

⁴ In Kerala, the term "Sunni" does not refer to the division between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as all Muslims in the state follow the *Shafi* School of Jurisprudence of Sunni Islam. Instead, "Sunni" is used to refer to those who support traditional Islam, while those who support reform are called *Mujahids* or *Jamaaths*. The categories of traditionalism and reformism emerged in Kerala in the 1920s, when Islamic reform movements arose and gradually developed into distinct theological positions and organized movements representing the Sunnis and the reformists.

⁵ Hussain Randathani, "Uyaechayude Padavukalil [On the steps of progress]," *Poomkavanam*, September 2013, 54.

⁶ Randathani, 54.

leaders such as OK Usthad and K V Muhammad Musaliyar to seek consent for starting an exclusive magazine for *Sunni* women.

Many scholars at that time believed that a magazine exclusively for women was unnecessary. It was then that the *Jamaat* members started a women's magazine. Many *Sunni* Muslims accused it of mocking the *Sunni* sect. With that, a favorable attitude towards a women's magazine came from the *Sunni* community.⁷

Aramam and its influence among Muslim women created a conducive environment for traditional *Sunni* intellectuals to act urgently on creating an exclusive magazine for Muslim women. The first issue of *Poomkavanam* was released in March 1988. In its silver jubilee special issue, Dr. Hussain describes the editorial of the first issue of the magazine as the editorial policy that defined the nature of the magazine. “What was the policy of the magazine? It was well communicated to the people in the very first editorial itself.”⁸ The editorial of the first issue announces the magazine's nature, “A family magazine that excels as a best family guide; that is *Poomkavanam*.”⁹ It also clarifies the magazine's view on women and the status of women in contemporary society:

Women are mothers, daughters, and wives. There are no religions or philosophies that do not glorify women. However, despite this, women are still in tears and families are in conflict. It is the duty of men to protect women, but in this case, the protector becomes the destroyer. The savior becomes the exploiter.¹⁰

For *Poomkavanam*, women's ideal roles are seen as being a mother, daughter, and wife. Any other role that takes a woman outside of these ideals is generally viewed as the denigration womanhood. *Poomkavanam* recognizes women's vulnerable position in society.

⁷ Randathani, 54.

⁸ Randathani, 56.

⁹ “Editorial,” *Poomkavanam*, March 1988, 5.

¹⁰ “Editorial,” 5.

“The woman is exploited everywhere—on the streets, in the shacks, and in the palaces. There are many posing as liberators, shedding tears for her; in fact they are the guardians of the red light areas.”¹¹ Although the magazine acknowledges that women are often disadvantaged in the society, it holds that egalitarian philosophies, including feminism, contribute to the exploitation of women in society. “Women are the backbone of the family. Those who put them on the streets are enemies of society. Is it not a matter of concern that both men and women are on the streets? If so, the family is in danger. We must identify the enemy.”¹² Those who advocate for women's unregulated access to the public spaces and challenge the enforcement of traditional gendered boundaries in the division of private and public spheres are considered the enemy.

The same editorial declares the proposed aim of the magazine: “Our goal is a good family, with a good family woman. The *Poomkavanam* magazine will guide them. It will protect the honor of society. We want a happy family with a happy woman.”¹³ The magazine’s aim is to have a happy family, with a woman well-equipped to fulfill the roles and responsibilities expected of her within the family. The *Poomkavanam* magazine will provide guidance through its contents to help women achieve this notion of womanhood. This aim is conceived as something that protects the honor of the society. The content of the magazine is designed to promote this notion of family and gender roles.

¹¹ “Editorial,” 5.

¹² “Editorial,” 5.

¹³ “Editorial,” 5.

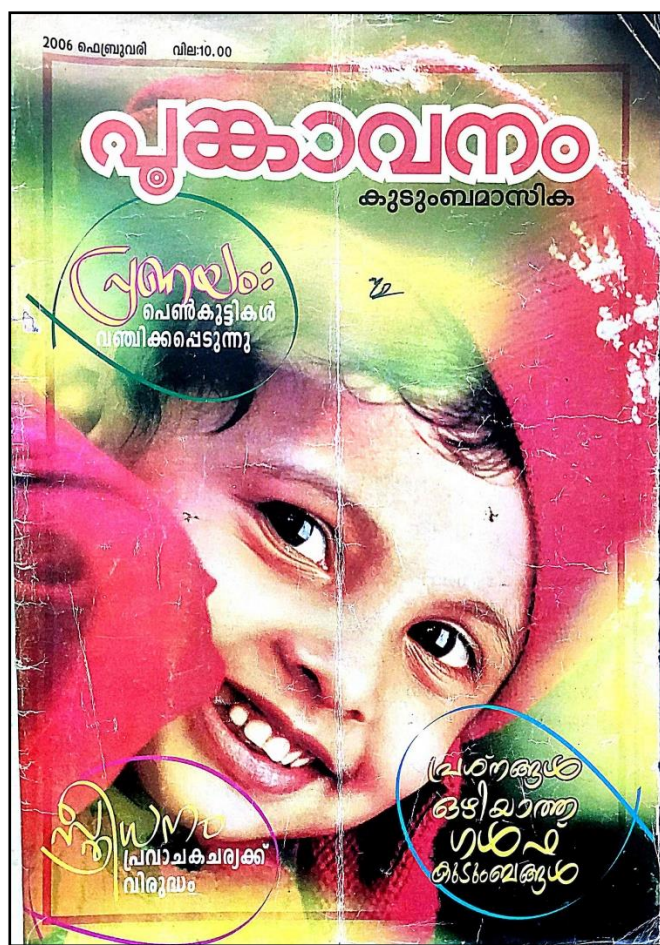


Figure 2 *Poomkavanam* cover page February, 2006

In addition to promoting traditional gender roles and upholding strict gender norms, the magazine aims to provide its female readers with the necessary skills and information to effectively fulfill their gender roles in a changing society. *Poomkavanam* aims to create the model of a happy family with a woman at its heart who is able to effectively handle the challenges of being a housewife in rapidly changing world, and who does not transgress the established institution of family. In the eighties, this dissemination of information and guidance became increasingly important within the Muslim community in the context of socio-economic changes due to mass migration to Gulf countries. The migration of working men to the Gulf region left many families without male heads of households and with women

as the primary managers the household.¹⁴ This transformation brought about new challenges and opportunities, and having access to accurate information and skills became crucial for the community to navigate these changes effectively. As such, efforts to disseminate new skills to cope with changing contexts within the Muslim community became a priority. In this context, both magazines *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam* devoted a significant amount of space to educating their women readers on how to manage a household in the new environment.

It is intriguing to observe how those who create and work for *Poomkavanam* view its historical significance and impact. Ibrahim T N Puram, the editor in charge of the magazine, writes about the historical contributions of the magazine in its silver jubilee issue, September 2013:

Poomkavanam was born during a time when popular publications and religious reform magazines were spreading filthy ideas among Muslim families. *Poomkavanam* worked to purify and cleanse these families. This collective effort, made by a group of pure-minded individuals who were not motivated by business interests, has paid off. *Poomkavanam* is able to fairly displace the influence of these popular publications and religious reform magazines on Muslim families.¹⁵

For him, the biggest achievement of the magazine is its effort in countering the influence of popular literature and Muslim reformism. The magazine promotes traditional *Sunni* ideas and opposes the ideas of reformist Muslim organizations and magazines, but it also proposes and articulates its own version of reform for the community. Ibrahim is enthusiastic about highlighting the magazine's reformist posturing. He writes:

¹⁴ J. Devika, "Women's Labour, Patriarchy and Feminism in Twenty-First Century Kerala: Reflections on the Glocal Present," *Review of Development and Change* 24, no. 1 (June 1, 2019): 79–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972266119845940>.

¹⁵ T N Puram, "Manassil Padarnna Poomkavanam [The flower that spread in the mind]," *Poomkavanam*, September 2013, 135.

Poomkavanam vehemently opposed dowry practices and fought against the cancer it has caused in our society. We were not just talking about this issue for namesake; we made strong interventions to address it. We continuously raised awareness about the issue and involved religious leaders such as *Qazis*, *Syeds*, and *Ulamas* in these efforts. Any impartial reader will say that there has been no magazine in the history of Kerala that has provoked such an outcry against dowry as *Poomkavanam*. It is a great accomplishment to be able to make a positive impact, *Alhamdulillah!*¹⁶

Historical Background of Magazines for Muslim Women

The Coast of Kerala was the first host of Islam in India.¹⁷ Its trade relations with the Arab world, which began long before the birth of Islam, opened an easy way to spread Islam along the Malabar Coast.¹⁸ The theological authority of the early Muslim community was the Islamic missionaries who migrated from Arabia.¹⁹ Western colonialism ended Arabian trade dominance on the Malabar coast, which eventually affected direct missionary interventions of Arab Muslims in Kerala.²⁰ By the middle of the 19th century, as European powers began to tighten their grip on the entire Islamic world, almost all Muslim countries eventually came under Western hegemony. With the advent of colonial modernity, the whole system of Muslim states underwent significant changes. Western colonial modernity created a new set of intellectuals and social reformers in the Muslim world. Jamaluddin al-Afghani (AD 1836-1897), Muhammad Abdu (AD 1849-1905), and Rashid Riza (AD 1856-1935) are among the most influential figures to have evolved from Islam's encounter with colonial modernity.²¹

¹⁶ T N Puram, 135.

¹⁷ Michael Wood, *The Story of India* (Random House, 2015).

¹⁸ Vinod K. Jairath, *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim Communities in India* (Routledge, 2013).

¹⁹ Richard Maxwell Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India," in *Religious Movements in South Asia, 600 - 1800*, ed. David N. Lorenzen, 2004, 105.

²⁰ Jose Abraham, *Islamic Reform and Colonial Discourse on Modernity in India: Socio-Political and Religious Thought of Vakkom Moulavi* (Springer, 2014).

²¹ Clinton Bennett, *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

Although the colonial influence prevented the physical presence of Arab religious figures in Kerala, the colonial invention and the spread of print media provided an alternative way to connect the Kerala Muslim community with pan-Islamic current thought.²² At the beginning of the 20th century, reformation ideas developed rapidly and spread to all corners of the world. The printing culture that emerged in Western colonized Muslim countries, such as Egypt, played a critical role in the development and dissemination of reform literature in Kerala.

The publication of *al-Manar*, a reformist magazine from Egypt filled with articles on Islamic reformation, created ripples of new thinking in the Muslim community and led to the birth of other reform-oriented magazines in other parts of the Muslim world.²³ In Kerala, a large number of magazines sprang up in Malayalam. Examples are *Muslim Review*, *Ansari*, and *Al-Manar* (a Malayalam magazine with an Arabic name). Many of the writers of these magazines were influenced by the trend of Islamic reform in Egypt.²⁴

The emergence of Muslim reformist movements and spread of their literature among Kerala Muslims sparked a response from traditional *Sunni* Muslims.²⁵ The traditional Muslims recognized the significant influence that print culture was having on the spread of reformist ideas, and as a result, the *Samastha Kerala Jamiatul Ulema* (an organization of traditional *Sunni* Muslim scholars) decided to publish a monthly magazine called *Al-Bayan*,²⁶

²² Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

²³ M Abdullah, S Arifin, and K Ahmad, "The Influence of Egyptian Reformists and Its Impact on the Development of the Literature of Quranic Exegesis Manuscripts in the Malay Archipelago," *Arts and Social Sciences Journal* 52 (n.d.).

²⁴ Abraham, *Islamic Reform and Colonial Discourse on Modernity in India*.

²⁵ R Santhosh, "Contextualising Islamic Contestations: Reformism, Traditionalism and Modernity among Muslims of Kerala," *Indian Anthropologist* 43, no. 2 (2013): 25–42.

²⁶ Shameer T.A, "Colonial Modernity and Diffusion of Power: Identity and Community Formation among Mappilas of Malabar," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 34, no. 1–2 (2022): 105–19; M. Abdul Samad, *Islam in Kerala: Groups and Movements in the 20th Century* (Kollam: Laurel Publications, 1998).

a monthly magazine in *Arabi-Malayalm*²⁷ script. The magazine was first published in 1929, but only lasted for a few issues before it was discontinued. It was later revived in 1950 and continued to be published in the same script until the 1980s. Prior to the 1980s, traditional Muslims had a minimal presence in Malayalam print media. Prominent *Sunni* leader M.A Usthad describes the lack of traditional Muslims in the Malayalam print media space:

The first magazine I came across is *Yuvakesari* published by the *Mujahid* movement. If my memory serves me correctly, this was during 1944-45. I noticed that the ideas and content in this magazine had nothing to do with what was taught in the religious texts I had studied or taught by my religious teachers. I have noticed that the ideas and contents of this magazine have nothing to do with what I learned and what was in the religious books taught by my religious teachers.²⁸

He continues:

I was convinced that the magazine was wrong and misleading. However, we inquired as to whether there were any magazines that would cover our ideas. At the end of that investigation, we received information about *Al Bayan*, a magazine published in Kozhikode. On those days, the magazine was published in *Arabi-Malayalam*. After some time, it began to be published in Malayalam.²⁹

Usthad believes that this is a significant issue because traditional Muslims are not being accurately represented in the media, which can lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions about their beliefs and practices. He believes that it is important for traditional Muslims to have a voice in the media so that their perspectives and experiences can be accurately

²⁷ Arabi-Malayalam is a system of writing Malayalam in Arabic script developed by the Kerala Muslims.

²⁸ M. A. Usthad, "Sahana Jeevithathinte Kaalpadukal [Footprints of a Life of Suffering]," *Poomkavanam*, September 2013, 92.

²⁹ Usthad, 92.

represented and understood by the wider public. And he considers *Poomkavanam* as one of successful attempts from traditional Muslims of Kerala in this direction.³⁰

Magazines for Muslim Women during Early 20th Century

The history of Malayalam women's magazines is closely linked to the social reform movements of Kerala. Every community uses magazines as a powerful means of articulating their 'reform' ideas. *Sahodari*, *Sthree*, and *Sngamithra* were circulating among women's circulating among Ezhava community.³¹ Mosakkutti Sahib's *Muslim Mahila* (Muslim women), and Haleema Beevi's *Muslim Vanitha*, and *Bharatha Chandrika* and *Annisa* (The women) were magazines aimed at Muslim women of the early twentieth century.³²

While the Muslim male reformers like Vakkom Abdul Kader Moulavi, Chalilakath Kunhammad Haji, K.M.Moulavi etc. were working for the modernisation of the community, the women writers like Haleema Beevi and Ayesha Mayan, were setting the models for social activism of Muslim women based on Islamic perspectives with their publication. Shamsad Hussain notes that many Muslim women of the social reform period worked for women's own upliftment and the upliftment of the community; their efforts were strongly rooted in both modernity and Islam.³³

Hussain explores the literary life of Muslim women during the twentieth century. She documents activism and literary contributions of critic and journalist M. Haleema Beevi who had started the first magazine for Muslim women 1938 which was later renamed to *Adhunika Vanitha* for wider circulation. Due to the criticism from the community and economic reasons

³⁰ Usthad, "Sahana Jeevithathinte Kaalpadukal [Footprints of a Life of Suffering]."

³¹ Sreebitha P V, "Ezhava Social Reform Movement in Kerala: Women's Education and the Question of Community," *Historicity: International Research Journal*, January 1, 2018.

³² B. S. Sherin, *Gendering Minorities: Muslim Women and the Politics of Modernity* (Orient BlackSwan, 2021).

³³ Shamsad Husain, *Nyunapakshattinum linga padavikkum itayil [Between minority and gender status]* (Trivandrum: Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2009).

like hike in the rent of the building where the publication housed, heavy printing duty and non-co-operation of agents she was not able to continue with *Adhunika Vanitha*. From 1945 to 1948, with a strong political nature at the peak of independence movement she had run the magazine--with strong political overtone—*Bharatha Chandrika* with Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and Vakkom Abdul Kader as sub editor.³⁴

Sherin B. S. observes that Muslim women in Kerala played a significant role in the socio-religious reform movements by contributing frequently to reformist magazines during early 20th century. Additionally, these women also published their own magazines during this time period.³⁵ In 1983 Haleema Beevi started a magazine for Muslim women. The magazine discussed issues such as women's education and the need to reform religion and eradicate superstition. Sherin also observes that barring recent feminist efforts to reclaim Haleema Beevi's place in the history of the feminist movements in Kerala, there has been a disturbing absence of this figure in discourses on early women's movements.³⁶ Husain observes that education was one of the major concerns of the women writers and publishers during that period. In 1938, at the Muslim women's conference held in Thiruvalla under the leadership of M. Haleema Beevi, the participants demanded elimination of school fees for Muslim girls, making primary education compulsory for girls, and they also demanded that the Government provide employment to qualified Muslim women.³⁷

The eighties witnessed the rebirth of Muslim women's magazines. In 1985, *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kerala Chapter started *Aramam*. Four years later, in 1988, a group of *Sunni* intellectuals launched *Poomkavanam* magazine. *Jamaat-e-Islami* is an influential Islamic organization in India founded by Syed Abul Ala Maududi in 1941 with the aim of Islamic

³⁴ Husain.

³⁵ Sherin, *Gendering Minorities*.

³⁶ Sherin, 128.

³⁷ Husain, *Nyunapakshattinum linga padavikkum itayil [Between minority and gender status]*.

social order in the Indian subcontinent. After independence in 1948, it reorganized as *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind* (JIH) and became active with its policies and programs. The Kerala unit of *Jamaat-e-Islami* came into being in 1944. Haji Muhammad Ali is the founder of its Kerala chapter. Using the existing network of the *Mujahid movement*, a locally rooted social reform movement, Muhammad Ali established the *Jamaat-e-Islami* in Kerala. Most of the early leaders of *Jamaat-e-Islami* belonged to the same school of reformists

Contemporary Context of Emergence of Magazines for Muslims

I will also examine specific contemporary issues and investigate their impact on these magazines. The *Mandal/Mandir* issue, the Shah Bano case, and the Uniform Civil Code debate marked a new trajectory in the history of Kerala Muslim print culture. In 1982, *Siraj* and 1987, *Madhayamam*, two daily newspapers, was born. These newborn newspapers find space in the growing discontent of the Kerala Muslim community with how the prevailing secular media handled the above issues, which seemed critical to their socio-cultural existence. Another strong trend that emerged in the 1980s was the development of counter-reform literature from the *Sunnis*, the traditional Muslims of Kerala, who were considered reform targets. The period witnessed a massive growth of magazines from the traditional Muslim, i.e., *Sunni*, in Kerala. *Sunni voice* (1977) *al Mubarak* (1980), *al-Dawa* (1983), *al-Irfad* (1984), and *Risala* (1984) were some of the *Sunni* publications that emerged in the 1980s.

The inflow of petrodollars from the Arabian Gulf countries, particularly after 1970, had a significant impact on the restructuring of the Muslim community in Kerala.³⁸ The mass emigration of people from Kerala to the Gulf countries resulted in crucial shift in the socio-

³⁸ Holly M. Hapke and Devan Ayyankaril, "Gulf Migration and Changing Patterns of Gender Identities in a South Indian Muslim Community," in *Gender, Work and Migration: Agency in Gendered Labour Settings*, ed. Megha Amrith and Nina Sahraoui (Routledge, 2018), 175–92, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315225210-11>.

economic conditions of the Muslim population in the state. These changes have affected various aspects of life in Kerala, including consumption patterns, investment patterns, lifestyle, religion, and education. The impact of Gulf migration can be seen in almost every family in the state, as it has had some effect on their lives in one way or another.³⁹

Migration changed the Muslim community in several ways. It gave them a renewed competency in the educational sector and equipped them to think beyond day-to-day survival. In the 1980s, there was a significant increase in the demand for English medium education among the Muslim community. This was largely due to the growth of the middle class in this community, which was largely composed of migrants. These migrants were attracted to English medium education because they believed it would provide their children with more opportunities and increase their chances of success in the future.⁴⁰ As a result of this increased demand, English medium education began to spread throughout the Muslim community, reaching a much larger portion of the population than it had previously. Before the eighties, English medium education was limited to a small minority of the community, reformed by the social reform movement.

Taking a cue from their Hindu and Christian counterparts, In the 1980s, Muslim religious organizations established numerous English-medium schools throughout the state in order to provide better educational opportunities for their communities.⁴¹ Along with these unaided schools, a number of CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) affiliated schools with the also emerged at this time. This increased interest in education among

³⁹ K.c. Zachariah, E.t. Mathew, and S. Irudaya Rajan, "Social, Economic and Demographic Consequences of Migration on Kerala," *International Migration* 39, no. 2 (2001): 43–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00149>.

⁴⁰ Myron Weiner, "International Migration and Development: Indians in the Persian Gulf," *Population and Development Review* 8, no. 1 (1982): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1972688>.

⁴¹ Mohd. Sanjeer Alam, "Community Organizations and Educational Development among Muslims: Lessons from the 'Kerala Experience,'" *Journal of Civil Society* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 63–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2021.1886762>.

Muslims was also evident in the construction of large college campuses that were funded by money from the Gulf region. The desire for quality education for their children was a major driving force for the first generation of Gulf migrants. In order to fulfill this need, they helped to establish schools and colleges in the region. This increased access to education for a wider range of people, spreading the availability of educational opportunities across the region. Overall, Gulf migration played a crucial role in promoting and expanding access to education in the community. Gulf migration paved distributive access to education.

Both these phenomena, the newly emerged prosperity and the political situation of the 1980s, have an impact on the gender dynamics of the community. The prosperity that emerged during this time may have led to shifts in traditional gender roles, as individuals were able to access more opportunities and resources. The historical role undertaken by Muslim women's magazines in this context is to inform, accommodate, domesticate and even facilitate these changes in gender regime. This work attempts to unravel this process.

Present Study

Partha Chatterjee famously argued that by locating the women's question into the inner domain, the nationalist elite attempted to resist any colonial/outside intervention with respect to women's status. He also argued that absence of active women's rights movements in India does not mean that status of woman was static during the period of the national movement; rather significant changes occurred during that time. To understand the contestations around the figure of the woman during this period, one has to look at autobiographies, religious tracts, literature, theatre, songs, paintings, personal diaries, family histories, personal letters and other historical/familial documents that depict the intimate, familial and cultural lives of the middle-class home. It is primarily because the nationalist

movement displaced the women's question into the inner domain. The domain where the new idea of womanhood was sought to be actualized was the home.⁴²

Reflecting on the position of the state vis-à-vis the women's question in post-colonial India, he argues that large sections of Muslims felt excluded from the state; they considered it as ushering in a new set of colonial relation into existence. The structure of inner/outer, home/world, feminine/masculine was now to be constructed in the context of the Muslim community. As Chatterjee posits, reforms which touch upon the inner sense of the identity of the community can only be carried out by the community itself, not by the state. As he points out, it is indeed revealing to note how little institutional change has been allowed in the civil life of Indian Muslims in post-independence India and compare it with Muslim countries where nationalist cultural reform was part of the successful formation of an independent nation-state.⁴³

Taking cue from Chatterjee, in order to map the contestations over 'Muslim women' in post independent India, one must look at the contestations within the inner domain of the community rather than in the public domain of politics. In post-colonial India, political claims of the Muslim community are mainly centred on preservation of community identity.⁴⁴ Therefore I consider the magazines exclusively for women that came up during the 1980s as a critical site to understand the contestations over women in post independent India.

This study explores the moment when the Muslim community in Kerala actively engaged in reconstruction of womanhood situated within the massive social and economic transformation of the community as a result of Gulf migration and the pressure of secular

⁴² Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," in *Empire and Nation: Essential Writings*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 1989).

⁴³ Chatterjee, 632.

⁴⁴ Hilal Ahmed, *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory, Contestation* (London: Routledge India, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315733951>.

(state and non-state) actors to ‘modernise’ the principles and practices of Islam. The socio-political environment of the Shah Bano affair and the subsequent campaign for a Uniform Civil Code was one of the critical factors that influenced the community's efforts to remake the gender regime within the community. The central focus of this thesis is to explore how the question of gender emerges in contemporary Malayalam magazines for Muslim women while engaging with the present context.

Methodology

This study mainly employs feminist discourse analysis method to understand notions of womanhood that Malayalam magazines for Muslim women are constantly attempt to create and recreate. Feminist discourse analysis is a method used to examine the ways in which language and communication contribute to the construction and maintenance of gender inequality. This method is used to study a wide range of texts, including written texts such as books and articles, as well as spoken texts such as interviews, speeches, and conversations. The goal of feminist discourse analysis is to identify and critique the ways in which language and discourse reproduce and reinforce gendered structure of the power.

Apart from the text of the magazines the informal interviews I conducted with the people who work for these magazines such as editors and contributors also helped me to understand the contexts and ideological frames in which these magazines are operating. Coming from a village in Malabar region which has a strong Jamaat presence, I could find some acquaintances and connections in the *Aramam* office. They facilitated my access to their archives and back issues of the magazine. My contacts and conversations in the *Poomkavanam* was more through a snowballing approach. Initially I walked into their bookstore located at Markaz Complex, Calicut. I took some time to create a rapport with the executives in the store. During my first visits, I sensed some amount of distrust on their part,

as I introduced myself as a researcher who intended to analyse the ideology and content of their magazine. On a subsequent visit, I went there with my partner, also a research scholar working on the question of gender and Islam at the University of Hyderabad. They were happy to meet a Muslim woman pursuing research in a prestigious university. I feel this contributed to a certain ease and trust in our interactions. The office executives introduced me to their magazine editors and I was allowed to access their archives. I spoke about my research area, and I felt that my researcher's identity was acceptable to them. During our informal conversation, they would speak about how a magazine from within *Sunni* Muslim contexts was conceived; what its objectives and visions were.

My interactions with the *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam* have contributed to a broader understanding of the ideological and institutional perspectives within which these magazines were located and the teams that foregrounded their visions and positions during embattled times.

A Review of Literature: Mapping Critical Debates

Bellow I map critical positions and texts that set the theoretical and conceptual background of this study. I look at these texts/debates in five areas; personal law/uniform civil code, women's clothing, re-emergence of purdah, purdah Wave in Kerala and gender role and Islam

Personal Law/Uniform Civil Code

Partha S. Ghosh, in his article "Politics of Personal Law in India: The Hindu–Muslim Dichotomy" contends that the inter-communal politics of personal law debates in India can be seen as a politically charged site of identity construction. Gosh demonstrates that European colonial encounters in Asia and Africa facilitated the emergence of the concept and

practice of legal pluralism in a modern sense. Confronted with alien justice systems and resistance of the natives, colonialists took recourse to legal pluralism. This paved the way for the emergence of personal laws in British India.⁴⁵ He also shows that apprehensions about status Muslim personal law in post-independence 'Hindu India' was one of the major items of the political campaign of the Muslim league. Against this background, to counter this and convince Muslims, James Chiriyankandath argues, as a guarantee of minority rights in secular India, Jawaharlal Nehru persuaded the Constituent Assembly not to press for a uniform civil code and assured the Muslim representatives that Muslim personal law would be protected.⁴⁶

However, Werner Menski argues that although India has rejected the idea of a Uniform Civil Code on statutory terms, there are constant pressures for 'uniformisation' of the personal laws, processes in which both Indian state and civil society actors, including feminists are actively engaged. He underlines that while in principle, the Indian family legal system adhere to a plural character, but in substance it is headed towards steadily pronounced uniformity 'harmonisation'.⁴⁷ Muslim Personal Law (MPL) remains one of the most contentious issues of the public life of post-colonial India. Its existence in its present form in Indian legal architecture is described as a severe challenge to the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. As a religious code of conduct for Muslims, it is seen as a symbol of communal politics strong enough to threaten and dictate a secular state.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Partha S. Ghosh, "Politics of Personal Law in India: The Hindu–Muslim Dichotomy," *South Asia Research* 29, no. 1 (2009): 1–17.

⁴⁶ James Chiriyankandath, "'Creating a Secular State in a Religious Country': The Debate in the Indian Constituent Assembly," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 38, no. 2 (July 1, 2000): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040008447816>.

⁴⁷ Werner Menski, *Modern Indian Family Law* (Routledge, 2013).

⁴⁸ Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, "Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s-1990s," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 29 (1995): 1869–78.

Hilal Ahmad observes that the nature of collective Muslim politics in the early independent era was centred on the protection of Urdu, the minority character of the Aligarh Muslim University, and Muslim personal law.⁴⁹ The formation of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on April 7, 1973, at Hyderabad, was a significant moment in post-colonial Muslim politics. The main objective of the AIMBLB was to safeguard Muslim Personal Law. Interestingly, Hilal Ahmad observes, unlike the defensive approach of the 1950s and 1960s, the AIMPLB adopted a powerful language against the state's policies.⁵⁰

For Zoya Hasan Muslim personal law and the mobilisations around it is a fundamental source of communalism, backwardness, and patriarchal dominance. She explores the processes through which community identities have been created in modern India, and argues that gender and community intersect with each other and these two elements interact with government policy. The author argues that the government and religious leadership are reinforcing community identity. The article explores the questions in relation to the debates about personal law and legal reform in the aftermath of the Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Bano case, its meaning and strategic importance for minority identity, women's equality and secularism. The author argues that women's rights could be turned into ammunition against a secular state which was prepared to revoke the judgement to mollify Muslim fears.⁵¹

Nida Kirmani argues that a sudden focus on 'Muslim India women' emerged during the mid-1980s and early 1990s, in the wake of the Shah Bano incident and the question of Muslim Personal Laws. The author argues that a series of studies have been published and circulate in the public domain since this moment, dealing with the social problems of Muslim women. This most often begin with the fundamental premise that Muslim women are

⁴⁹ Ahmed, *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India*.

⁵⁰ Ahmed, 133.

⁵¹ Hasan.

disprivileged because of their religious identity and gender and focusing on issues related to personal laws and purdah. As a result, Kirmani argues, the idea that ‘Muslim women’ are a separate category with both common identity and set of interests has come to dominate the wider discourse of ‘communalism’ in India. Notably, within this socio-political debate, ‘Muslim women’ surface only as symbols and markers of the Muslim community both for Muslim conservative groups and the Hindu Right. Thus Kirmani draws our attention to the appropriation and reduction of the Muslim woman in both discourses.⁵²

Nawaz B Mody observes that during the Shah Bano affair, the English press in India took a seemingly secular position while vernacular Hindi and regional language print held a communal line. He explains the differences according to language, such that the Urdu print coverage predominantly gave voice to conservative Muslims, the Marathi press contained shades of Hindu communalism, and the dominant English print media coverage was relatively secular.⁵³

Women's Clothing: Modernity, Nationalism and Communal Identities

There are several studies which look in to how modern nation-building and community-building projects forced communities to alter their sartorial practices. Partha Chatterjee explores how sartorial alterations played a significant role in creating an imagination of modern Indian women. He argues that in response to colonial condemnation of the treatment of women in India, nationalists constructed a “reformed tradition” that they proclaimed was not oppositional to modernity. The process invested *sari*-clad women with the honor of representing a distinctively modern national culture. The nationalist movement

⁵² Nida Kirmani, *Questioning the ‘Muslim Woman’: Identity and Insecurity in an Urban Indian Locality* (London: Routledge India, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315540924>.

⁵³ Nawaz B Mody, “The Press in India: The Shah Bano Judgment and Its Aftermath,” *Asian Survey* 27, no. 8 (August 1987): 935–53, <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.2307/2644865>.

bestowed *sari* an ideal status by envisioning it as a modern woman's sartorial code yet rooted in Indian tradition.⁵⁴

J. Devika looks at the sartorial changes that happened among various communities in Kerala during the period of socio-religious reform movements. Though she claims that it is the history of Kerala women through, she mainly focuses on the communities within the Hindu fold. Devika argues that these sartorial changes are primarily desired and designed by male reformers and colonialists to adapt women to a changing world. She holds that very few accounts demonstrate women's active participation in this change process and forcefully argues that the changes are imposed on women against their will to satisfy male reformers' desires.⁵⁵

Sharmila Sreekumar, in her article argues that the regional variant of traditionally rooted modern femininity is the *Kasavu sari*, which is the dominant representation of women in the official documents and advertisements of Kerala state.⁵⁶ J Devika also explores the question, how adaptation of the *sari* into the official symbol of women's representation had a hegemonic impact. Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, in their article, "Muslim Style in South India", argue that by the twentieth century, the *sari* has gradually replaced various regional dresses to become a quintessential pan-south Asian female garment.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 629.

⁵⁵ J Devika, *Kulastree'yuum 'Chanthappennum' Undaayathengane? Adhunikamalayalistreekalute Charitrathinu Oru Aamugham [The Birth of the 'Well-Born' Woman and the 'Market Woman': An Introduction to the History of Malayalee Women]* (Trivandrum: Centre for Development Studies, 2010).

⁵⁶ Sharmila Sreekumar, "The Land of 'Gender Paradox'? Getting Past the Commonsense of Contemporary Kerala," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 34–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370601118966>.

⁵⁷ Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, "Muslim Style in South India," *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 2/3 (2007): 1–20.

Re-emergence of Purdah

Leila Ahmed in her book, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*, attempts to account for the global resurgence of the veil. She argues that reappearance of veil in the 1980s started first among educated women and the process seemed to be largely voluntary, taking place in countries where no coercive laws that mandate women to cover. Ahmed sees it as the influence of Islamist movements like Muslim Brotherhood because they used to affirm the veil as a fundamental Islamic requirement and used it as opposition to western modernity. Ahmed traces the root of this resurgence in the anti-colonial struggles in the Middle East. In the early twentieth century, she writes, unveiling became a symbol of modernity as defined by colonisers. Responding to this Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt called for a revival of Islamic values and, with it, a repudiation of Western imperialism. Veil was central in this scheme. Ahmed notes that, Brotherhood's call for women to veil was an assertion of Islamic identity; modest dress and gender segregation did not necessarily connote a misogynist agenda. Ahmed attempts to find out what prompts women to choose veil. Many women consider veil as a way of signifying their religious commitments. Many others admitted to her that they picked the veil as they succumbed to pressure from Islamists in their communities. Many others choose it for a more explicit political agenda: For them the veil is a way of rejecting the materialism of Western capitalism and endorsing a program of social justice based on Islam.

In *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Saba Mahmood problematizes the way veiling women's agency is understood within secular feminist perspectives. She questions the overwhelming tendency within poststructuralist scholarship to conceptualize agency in terms of subversion or re-signification of social norms. Mahmood criticises the feminist scholars, who fails to problematise the universality of the desire to be

free from relations of subordination and, for women, from structures of male domination. Mahmood's ethnography follows ritual lives of a select group of pious female Muslim informants. Central to their reformist orientation is a conception of what being a pious and virtuous Muslim involves in terms of embodied comportment and commitment. Borrowing from Foucault and Butler, she argues that what may appear as passivity and docility from a progressive point of view, may actually be a form of agency that can only be understood from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment.⁵⁸

Kirmani observes that, in the Indian context, historically, the veil has often been identified as a religious code and a sign of segregation, and a mark of backwardness.⁵⁹ However, the sudden surge in Muslim women wearing the veil in the 1980s is interpreted as the result of the sudden growth of right-wing communal politics and a subsequent sense of victimhood within the Muslim community. Using ethnographic and historical data and analysing interviews with Muslim women across the city of Mumbai, Samira Khan, in her article, "Negotiating the Mohalla: Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai", investigates Muslim women's participation in public spaces and whether wearing the veil facilitates their mobility. In other words, the author asks how and to what extent visible markers of community identity inflects women's access to public space and their ability to engage in risk. The author argues that since the Mumbai riots during the 1980s, there has been a significant increase in the number of women wearing *burqa*. This encouraged the segregation of women and limited their participation in life outside the community.⁶⁰

Purdah Wave in Kerala

⁵⁸ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵⁹ Kirmani, *Questioning the 'Muslim Woman.'*

⁶⁰ Sameera Khan, "Negotiating the Mohalla: Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007): 1527–33.

Researchers like Abid Saitu and Ansiya Rahiman have demonstrated that Kerala also witnessed a veiling wave during the same period. An increasing number of Muslim women began to adopt the *purdah* as their sartorial practice. Ansiya Rahiman, in her article, “*Political Economy of Migration in Muslim Matrilineal Families of Kerala*”,⁶¹ observes that the *purdah* was not common among Muslim women in Kerala before the late seventies. During the late seventies and early eighties, *purdah* emerged as one of the ideal clothing for Muslim women. For the author, the widespread use of *purdah* is an essential influence of gulf migration.⁶² Abid Saitu, in his article, “Identity, Ethics and Fashion: An Ethnography of Muslim Women's Dress Culture in Malabar, North Kerala”, also argues that *purdah* is one among the many commodities that came to Kerala through transcultural transactions born of Gulf migration. “Such was the volume and impact of the Gulf migration that this sartorial shift soon established as the standard dress code of the Muslim woman.”⁶³

The current *purdah* wave in Kerala is viewed as an emerging threat to Kerala model of development. Read observation of Thomas Isaac T. M. and Michael Tharakan P. K. “In the recent period, there are visible and disturbing signs of erosion of progressive attitudes to gender issues like the spread of dowry system, *purdah* among Muslims, degrading depiction of women in the mass media, sexual harassment, and violence.”⁶⁴

The recent scholarly attempts to understand the tendency of widespread acceptance of *purdah* among Kerala Muslims give us a more complex picture. Anthropologists Osella and Osella disagree that the *purdah* is an entirely new addition to Muslim dress culture due to the

⁶¹ Ansiya Rahiman, “Political Economy of Migration in Muslim Matrilineal Families of Kerala,” *Arts & Education International Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2017): 80–87.

⁶² Ansiya Rahiman, 85.

⁶³ Abid Saitu, “Identity, Ethics and Fashion: An Ethnography of Muslim Women’s Dress Culture in Malabar, North Kerala,” *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (March 2016): 40.

⁶⁴ Thomas Isaac T. M. and Michael Tharakan P. K., “Kerala: Towards a New Agenda,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 31/32 (1995): 2001.

Gulf migration that began in the 1980s. Drawing from their anthropological expertise, Osella and Osella argue that the veil surge of the eighties had less to do with the Gulf boom.⁶⁵ The authors tend to see the enormous popularity of purdah during the eighties as merely a continuation of the older veiling culture with significant rapture in the sixties to eighties. However, they observe two significant differences in the new purdah wave. "First, the styles now in use are quite different from the old tent-like white purdah or black *burqa*, and secondly, contemporary veiling is indicative of a more developed consciousness towards Islam and is linked to global styles of Islamic 'decent dress' in which only the face, hands, and feet are revealed."⁶⁶

Osella and Osella concentrate on contemporary movement rather than the significance of the historical shift of the eighties that witnessed the revealing movement among Kerala Muslims and its changed meaning. There were forms of Islamic modesty among Kerala Muslims even far before the eighties. However, the veiling movement of the eighties has two significant features left mostly unexplained by the authors. Firstly, a large number of women suddenly started wearing hijab or the clothing that is termed as Islamic clothing with the high popularity of hijab among the young generation. Secondly, whether any changes in the meaning attached to purdah significantly changed during the eighties. Women's magazines played a crucial role in conceiving and disseminating the new meaning.

Julien Abdelhalim, in her article, "Paradoxes of Pardha and Agency among Muslim Women in Kerala",⁶⁷ argues that the broader acceptance of purdah among Muslim women in Kerala is a result of a 'conspiracy' of patriarchy and the market. For the author, creating a trend like purdah dislocates women's agency in deciding their dressing style. Although

⁶⁵ Osella and Osella, "Muslim Style in South India."

⁶⁶ Osella and Osella, 11.

⁶⁷ Julien Abdelhalim, "Paradoxes of Pardha and Agency among Muslim Women in Kerala," *Urban People/Lidé Města* 15, no. 2 (2013): 237–56.

women were not involved in determining and designing this fashion, her ethnographic research among Muslim women in Kerala revealed that the cloth, initially designed by men and the market to displace women's agency, acted as an emancipatory tool for women to wear it. Read her ethnographic encounter with a purdah-clad student. The author describes this seemingly contradictory result as a paradox. The author sees the purdah, a sign of identity and a confining framework of traditional patriarchy, becoming a tool of Muslim women's emancipation. The author describes this phenomenon as a paradox.

Abdelhalim reads purdah from the perspective that any marker of community identity is inherently a male invention that eliminates women's agency. Thus, by nature, it appears oppressive to women. However, in her ethnographic account, purdah appears to be a relatively flexible sartorial choice of women with complex significations rather than just a sign of confinement or oppression. To resolve this contradiction, the author resort takes a cue from the literature that theorise gender in the context of Kerala development.⁶⁸ Abdelhalim adopts paradox as an analytical category and conceives purdah and its implication in Muslim women's life as a paradox. She further illustrates the paradox of purdah in the life of Kerala Muslim women, especially those who embraced the reformist conception of womanhood by adopting the sartorial code prescribed by reformist organisations. Admittedly, explaining this perceived contradiction as a paradox unsettles the certainty that any community identity by default is a male design that results in the stripping of women's agency and guarantees their oppression.

Mohanty C. T., in her article, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”,⁶⁹ argues that physical similarity in the veils worn by women should not lead us to conclude that the meaning of this practice does not shift according to the cultural

⁶⁸ Sreekumar, “The Land of ‘Gender Paradox’?”

⁶⁹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 333–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/302821>.

and ideological contexts. Taking cue from Mohanty, attending to the particularities of Purdah and gender roles in Kerala, I will argue that purdah narratives frees us from the notion that purdah has a fixed universal meaning; oppression, seclusion, and confinement. Historically, purdah referred to female seclusion from the public space in general; however, this historical depiction does not guarantee that it acts similarly across cultural and historical contexts. This thesis investigates the particularities of the veiling movement in Kerala by reading the clothing-related content of *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam*.

Gender Role and Islam

In his book, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities*,⁷⁰ Amanullah de Sonny examines the way Islamic traditions continue to endorse the sex role notions surrounding an Islamic masculinity. He considers Abul A'la Mawdudi and Persian poet Mirza Ghalib as two conflicting figures who are effective in influencing current formation of Muslim gender regimes. De Sonny elaborates conception on some very important terms in the Islamic worldview such as honor, marriage, power, hegemony, and egalitarianism by two figures to make the contrast between them more visible. He argues that Ghalib's notions of ultimate submission to God, including his skepticism of God, indicates that Islamic masculinities, as a whole, escapes narrow definitions. In contrast Maududi, De Sonny argues, embedded in a context where the discussion of Islam almost intertwined with nationalist movements, cultural frustration and anxieties regarding modernisation and therefore his conception of gender roles are more rigid and defined.

Humeira Iqtidar, in her article, "Conservative Anti-Colonialism: Maududi, Marx and Social Equality",⁷¹ attempts to explain the question, how Maududi could reject the idea of

⁷⁰ Amanullah De Sonny, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁷¹ Humeira Iqtidar, "Conservative Anti-Colonialism: Maududi, Marx and Social Equality," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 2 (July 2021).

social equality between men and women as he otherwise explicitly built on Islamic idea of equality to critique nationalism and modern racism. The author considers this particularly puzzling given Maududi's noticeable employment of a Marxist critique of marketisation of society and liberal conception of freedom in his controversial book *Pardah* written in 1939. By analysing the structure of his argument in *Pardah* in detail and emphasising hitherto engagement with Marxist ideas in his thought, Humeira shows that Maududi rejected a specific version of social equality, wherein equality amounts to interchangeability.

Irfan Ahmad in his article, "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress': *Jamaat-e-Islami's* Changing Discourse on Women",⁷² question the assumption that Islamism sanctions gender hierarchy. Focusing on ethnographic works and published sources of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, he argues that from 1970 onwards many *Jamaat* members began a critique of Abul Aala Maududi, the founder of the organisation, (b. 1903), position regarding women's role in the society. Maududi relegated women as 'the mightiest fortress of Islamic culture' and invoked the teachings of Quran and the traditions of the Prophet to argue that women should not step outside of the four walls of their homes, and must cover themselves from head to toe. Maududi stood against the political role of women. Ahmad argues that 1970s and its following decades witnessed a critique of *Jamaat* from many members within, and offered alternative reading of the Islam. They argued that women could leave home and be active in public life, assume political, economic and roles of power, and unveil their faces. By highlighting such voices and critically analysing the sociological nodes of the contestations within the *Jamaat*, Ahmad underscores the *Jamaat's* discourse and its transformation.

Chapter Outline

⁷² Irfan Ahmad, "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress': *Jamaat-e-Islami's* Changing Discourse on Women," *Modern Asian Studies* 42 2, no. 3 (2007): 549–75.

The second chapter looks into two aspects of the gender discourse in the Kerala public sphere by looking at the gender-related content of two prominent Malayalam mainstream magazines in Kerala, such as Mathrubhumi weekly (The Mother Land)⁷³ and Deshabhimani weekly (The Patriot).⁷⁴ One, their discourse on the category of Muslim women, and two, their discourse around the women category. A detailed understanding of mainstream magazines' gender discourse would enrich one's ability to delineate the functions of Muslim women's magazines as the latter predominantly responds to mainstream gender discourses, especially concerning Muslim women. For this purpose, I am reading gender-related content from the Mathrubhumi and Deshabhimani weeklies of the early 1980s. Since discourses related to gender, especially Muslims, Islam, Muslim women, and personal law, were rare in the Mathrubhumi weekly prior to the Shah Bano verdict of 25 April 1985, most of the content I have used for my analyses are from the Deshabhimani weekly.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks into the discourse on the category of Muslim women. The 'Muslim women' category is constructed through various discursive channels, including the media, the state, academia, women's organisations, and the discourse of religious groups and leaders. In this section, I explore the constitution of 'Muslim women' in the spaces of media. In attempting so, I focus on the ways in which Malayalam mainstream news magazines construct this category through their content. Within this discourse, 'Muslim women' are represented as markers of the Muslim community in its entirety. The notion that 'Muslim women' present a distinct category with a shared identity and shared set of interests serves the purpose of both Muslim groups and their opponents. For

⁷³ Mathrubhumi Weekly is a Malayalam language general interest weekly magazine published by the Mathrubhumi printing and Publishing Company in Calicut on 18 January 1932. The magazine carries political commentaries, literary works and columns on science, films and literature.

⁷⁴ Deshabhimani started in Calicut on 6th September 1942, is a Malayalam weekly magazine and the organ of the State Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Deshabhimani started its daily newspaper in 1946.

Muslim groups, this can be used as a defensive mechanism to consolidate religious identity. For secular left and Hindu right-wing groups, it serves as the excuse for peddling state interventions in the minority religion. Therefore, it is important to locate those discourses which construct and stereotype Muslim women's identity.

In the second section, I am mapping the discourses in *Deshabhimani* weekly related to gender with a special focus on women's bodies and their role in the domestic and public spheres. This section is designed to provide context to the similar discourses in the Muslim women's magazines as they are largely engaging and dialoguing with mainstream magazines. The second part of this chapter discusses three major gender-related concerns in the *Deshabhimani* Weekly during the 1980s. It will reveal the main elements of the 'women's issue' in the mainstream leftist political party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI [M]) in the eighties.

This analysis will reveal that in the mainstream discourse, *purdah*, along with polygamy and personal law, emerges as a significant tool used to render Islam antithetical to modern values and women's freedom. Muslim women's sufferings are attributed to Islam and amplified for political ends. It is suggested that the root cause of gender discrimination in Muslim personal law is Islam itself, and the reformation in Muslim personal law means radical rehauls in the basic principles of Islam. In this discourse, coming out of the *purdah* is portrayed as a progressive act, a guarantee of better public participation of Muslim women, and a sign of social development of the Muslim community. In mainstream discourses, doing away from the *purdah* is considered a precondition for Muslim women's entry into the secular public sphere.

Despite this depiction in the mainstream media, the increased sight of young women dressed in Islamic models, either in *churidar kamiz* with hijab or in *purdah*, in modern and

public spaces such as schools, universities, markets, working places and sometimes driving a car or riding motorcycles, seems to demand an explanation. The 1980s, saw two seemingly contradictory phenomena among Kerala Muslim women; a rise in their visibility in public settings like schools and workplaces, and a broad acceptance of the purdah. Without any evidence to support it, academics frequently view these two events as distinct from one another. This chapter makes an effort to explain these events by carefully examining the articles about clothing from Muslim women's magazines published in the 1980s and early 1990s, *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam*. The widespread use of the hijab among Muslims in Kerala has always been credited to the publications of Muslim women. It should be mentioned that these magazines receive significant funding from a number of hijab brands and showrooms. In prevailing discourses, the hijab has continued to hold a virtually unchanging status, as a sign of oppression and male domination, for women's magazines, the hijab has had a different trajectory. This chapter looks at magazine content with regard to Muslim women's clothing to formulate a nuanced understanding of what hijab or purdah mean for women's magazines in Kerala. The attempt is also to understand how it provides narratives for enabling Muslim women's occupying of public spaces, educational institutions and workplaces.

In the third chapter, I will attempt an exploration of the significance of contemporary practices of veiling among Muslims in Kerala by critical analysis of the content of *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam* on Islamic clothing in the broader context of contemporary Islamic movements in the region. What prompts Muslim women to adopt new forms of clothing at a particular time? Why have some women willingly, with enthusiasm and eager, adopted a practice branded as foreign, restrictive, extremist, and oppressive by many? In attempting to answer these questions, I argue that the emerging new Islamic clothing both affects and implies a transformation of Muslim women in Kerala. This transformation is informed by and

contributes to larger processes of social change. By noting the discursive strategies that are used to introduce and describe Islamic clothing in women's magazines, I attempt to show how Islamic clothing reflects an aspiration for modernity that is primarily different from mainstream modernity.

I also argue that the growing tendency among women to wear Islamic clothing in Kerala challenges local models of modernity. Analysis of the content of Muslim women's magazines, against the background of contemporary Islamic organisations, reveals that discourse on Islamic clothing aims to initiate a process of subjective transformation intertwined with larger processes of social change, along with the creation of a new historical consciousness. It helps Muslim women to produce themselves as modern Muslims and envision a society that breaks from traditional versions of Islam as well as dominant versions of modernity. Islamic clothing, the attached values and practices link them to an image of alternative modernity that is clearly marked off from Western as well as local models of modernity.

In Chapter four, I will examine how these magazines dealt with the turbulences that the reshaping of Muslim womanhood in the eighties may have had in domestic spaces. And how new notions of Muslim womanhood in the eighties called for a reconfiguration of domestic spaces to enable Muslim women to pursue new aspirations. Assuming the role of a representative of the community in public spaces by wearing Islamic dress requires a significant investment of time. To assume positions in public life, one has to develop several skills; modern education, professional training, and leadership skills to take a leading role in various ways of the organization. *Aramam* readers actively encouraged embarking on such initiatives; this constitutes a remarkable difference from her internal other, the traditionalist *Sunni* women. This time women are removed from the domestic work they engaged in

earlier. This demands rearrangement in the present family regime. This chapter explores how *Aramam* conceives this rearrangement by reading content related to domestic roles and women's work.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines how gender roles are conceptualized in the writings of Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, an Islamic movement in the Indian subcontinent. The second section investigates the discourse on gender roles in *Aramam*. Finally, the third section examines the gender role discourses in *Poomkavanam*.

The fifth chapter is the conclusion to the dissertation. It maps the critical points and contexts of the arguments. I also reflect up on possible future direction and limitation of the study.

Chapter Two

FIGURING (MUSLIM) WOMEN:

CRITICAL READING OF MALAYALAM MAINSTREAM MAGAZINES

This chapter explores two aspects of the gender discourse in the Kerala public sphere by looking at the gender-related content of two prominent Malayalam mainstream magazines in Kerala, such as *Mathrubhumi* weekly⁷⁵ and *Deshabhimani* weekly.⁷⁶ One, their discourse on the category of Muslim women, and two, their discourse around the category of women. A detailed understanding of mainstream magazines' gender discourse would enrich one's ability to delineate the functions of Muslim women's magazines, as the latter predominantly responds to mainstream gender discourses, especially concerning Muslim women. For this purpose, I am reading gender-related content from the *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabhimani* weeklies of the early 1980s. Since discourses related to gender, especially Muslims, Islam, Muslim women, and personal law, were rare in the *Mathrubhumi* weekly before the Shah Bano verdict of April 25, 1985, most of the content I have used for my analyses is from the *Deshabhimani* weekly.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks into the discourse on the category of Muslim women. The 'Muslim women' category is constructed through various discursive channels, including the media, the state, academia, women's organisations, and the discourse of religious groups and leaders. In this section, I explore the construction of

⁷⁵ *Mathrubhumi* Weekly is a Malayalam language general interest weekly magazine published by the *Mathrubhumi* printing and Publishing Company in Calicut on 18 January 1932. The magazine carries political commentaries, literary works and columns on science, films, and literature.

⁷⁶ *Deshabhimani* started in Calicut on 6th September 1942, is a Malayalam weekly magazine and the organ of the State Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). *Deshabhimani* started its daily newspaper in 1946.

‘Muslim women’ in the media space, looking at ways Malayalam mainstream news magazines construct this category through their content. Within this discourse, ‘Muslim women’ stand as symbols of the Muslim community as a whole. The notion that ‘Muslim women’ represent a distinct category with a common identity and set of interests serves the purpose of both Muslim groups and their opponents. For Muslim groups, this can be used as a defensive mechanism to consolidate religious identity. For secular left and Hindu right-wing groups, it serves as the excuse for peddling state interventions in the minority religion. Therefore, it is important to locate those discourses which construct and stereotype Muslim women's identity. In the second section, I am mapping the discourses in *Deshabhimani* related to gender with a special focus on women's bodies and their role in the domestic and public spheres. This section is designed to provide context to the similar discourses in Muslim women's magazines as they largely engage with mainstream magazines. The second part of this chapter discusses three major gender-related concerns in the *Deshabhimani* during the 1980s. It will reveal the main elements of the ‘women's issue’ in the mainstream leftist political party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)), in the eighties.

Section One

Muslim Women in Mainstream Malayalam Media Discourses

The ‘plight of Muslim women’ regularly appears in the Indian media. These discussions often focus on the issues of purdah, polygamy, and personal laws, with Muslim women usually positioned as symbolic bearers of the identity of the Muslim community.⁷⁷ In response to the national debate around personal laws during the Shah Bano affair, Indian Muslim women became a focal point of debates during the 1980s and early 1990s. As a result, frequent news attention has been dedicated to Muslim women since the beginning of

⁷⁷ Nida Kirmani, “Deconstructing and Reconstructing ‘Muslim Women’ through Women’s Narratives,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 2009): 47–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589230802584253>.

the 1980s, exploring and showcasing Muslim women's issues from the vantage point that they are underprivileged in specific ways due their gender and religion. Predictably, this coverage predominantly focused on purdah and personal law-related issues. Therefore, this chapter examines the popular discourses that largely contribute to shaping Muslim women's identity.

In this section, I look at how contemporary mainstream magazines represented Muslim women in their content through a critical reading of *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabhimani* weekly during the 1980s. Nawaz B Mod observes that during the Shah Bano affair, the English press took a seemingly secular position while vernacular Hindi and regional language print held a communal line.⁷⁸ He explains the differences according to language, such that the Urdu print coverage predominantly gave voice to conservative Muslims, the Marathi press contained shades of Hindu communalism, and the dominant English print media coverage was relatively secular. However, critical reading of Malayalam magazines like *Deshabhimani* and *Mathrubhumi* would suggest that along with holding a seemingly secular line, Malayalam print media have consistently painted an archaic notion of Islam. They also suggested that personal law is regressive and that a uniform civil code is inevitable to fulfill the nation's secular and progressive commitments. Muslim women's sufferings are attributed to Islam and amplified for political purposes. This discourse renders Muslim women the legal subject of the nation who needs legal protection from a regressive religion and community. In this discourse, the Indian state positions itself as the savior whose interventions are well sought for and justified to protect Muslim women and national security.

The first part of this section maps the discourse around Muslim personal law and uniform civil code. The second part investigates how Muslim women's sartorial practices

⁷⁸ Nawaz B Mody, "The Press in India: The Shah Bano Judgment and Its Aftermath," *Asian Survey* 27, no. 8 (August 1987): 935–53, <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.2307/2644865>.

emerge in popular discourse with a particular focus on the signification of purdah in mainstream discourse and how Islam appears in the context of gender discourse in Mainstream magazines. Finally, the third part explores the portrayal of Muslim women's grievances in *Deshabhimani* magazine with a special focus on the narratives on *Arabi Kalyanam* and sees how such descriptions contribute to the formation of the image of Muslim women as the victims of Islam.

Personal Law/Uniform Civil Code

European colonialism in Africa and Asia led to the development of the concept and practice of legal pluralism in a modern sense. Colonialists encountered difficulties and resistance from the natives when they tried to impose their legal system on the colonized. Confronted with native judicial systems, colonisers took recourse to legal pluralism.⁷⁹ This paved the way for the emergence of personal laws in British India. Colonial administration implemented separate family and civil laws for various communities while uniform criminal procedure treated all people precisely the same, regardless of differences in cultural background or religious belief. This separation of civil and criminal law also functioned as a sign of religious freedom and the colonial norm of non-interference in the cultural affairs of natives by the colonial power. Prior to the partition Muslim the League had constantly propagated that Muslim personal law would be challenged in post-independence 'Hindu India.'⁸⁰ Against this background, as a guarantee of minority rights in secular India, Jawaharlal Nehru convinced the Constituent Assembly not to proceed with the idea of uniform civil code and took Muslim representatives into confidence by assuring them that the

⁷⁹ Partha S. Ghosh, "Politics of Personal Law in India: The Hindu–Muslim Dichotomy," *South Asia Research* 29, no. 1 (2009): 1–17.

⁸⁰ Partha S. Ghosh.

Muslim personal law would be protected.⁸¹ The demand for a uniform civil code was made nonmandatory by putting it under the directive principles of state policies.⁸²

However, Muslim Personal Law (MPL) remained one of the most contentious issues of the public life of post-colonial India. It is often presented as an antithetic of ideals of gender equality and justice.⁸³ Its existence in its present form in Indian legal architecture is described as a severe challenge to the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. As a religious code of conduct for Muslims, it is seen as a symbol of communal politics strong enough to threaten and dictate a secular state⁸⁴ and a fundamental source of Muslim communalism, backwardness, and patriarchal dominance.⁸⁵ For many Muslims, preserving Muslim Personal Law has become the criterion to prove their capacity to safeguard their religious identity in the modern Indian nation-state.⁸⁶ Hilal Ahmad observes that the nature of collective Muslim politics in the early independent era centred on the protection of Urdu, the minority character of the Aligarh Muslim University, and Muslim personal law.⁸⁷ The formation of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on April 7, 1973, at Hyderabad, was a significant moment in post-colonial Muslim politics. The main objective of the AIMBLB was to safeguard Muslim Personal Law. Interestingly, Hilal Ahmad observes, "unlike the defensive

⁸¹ James Chiriyankandath, "'Creating a Secular State in a Religious Country': The Debate in the Indian Constituent Assembly," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 38, no. 2 (July 1, 2000): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040008447816>.

⁸² Jyoti Rattan, "Uniform Civil Code in India: A Binding Obligation under International and Domestic Law," *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 46, no. 4 (December 2004): 577–87.

⁸³ Sylvia Vatuk, "Islamic Feminism in India: Indian Muslim Women Activists and the Reform of Muslim Personal Law," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 2–3 (March 2008): 489–518, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X07003228>.

⁸⁴ Indu Agnihotri and Vina Mazumdar, "Changing Terms of Political Discourse: Women's Movement in India, 1970s–1990s," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 29 (1995): 1869–78.

⁸⁵ Zoya Hasan, "Minority Identity, State Policy and the Political Process," in *Forging Identities* (Routledge, 1994).

⁸⁶ Justin Jones, "'Signs of Churning': Muslim Personal Law and Public Contestation in Twenty-First Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2010): 175–200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X09990114>.

⁸⁷ Hilal Ahmed, *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory, Contestation* (London: Routledge India, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315733951>.

approach of the 1950s and 1960s, the AIMPLB adopted a powerful language against the state's policies."⁸⁸

The Adoption Bill, which was introduced in parliament by Union Law Minister H.R. Gokhale and was viewed as a violation of Muslim religious guardianship norms, served as the first impetus for the establishment of the Uniform Civil Code. The AIMPLB prioritised protecting MPL and eliminating any interference from the civil or criminal codes in its implementation. The AIMPLB has a significant public influence on issues pertaining to Muslim personal law and Indian Muslims, despite not having the formal authority to decide on rulings or the method of MPL implementation. This is due to the organization's outspoken stance on issues, large membership, and status within a vast network of eminent *ulama*.⁸⁹ Many Muslim women have approached courts challenging the unjust provisions of MPL in their cases. In 1983, Shehnaz Sheikh challenged the validity of MPL in the Supreme Court concerning oral divorce. She argued that as per Articles 13, 14, and 15 of the Constitution, every Indian citizen is granted equality before the law, and there can be no discrimination based on religion, caste, or sex and that provisions in MPL are against these articles.⁹⁰

Such cases and debates around reformation in personal law and demand for unification of civil laws resonated in the Kerala public sphere too. The following part of this section investigates how such discourses are occurring in Kerala's public sphere, the image of Muslim women in such narratives, and how such narratives contribute to forming a dominant version of Muslim women's identity. For this, I am looking at related contents of *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabhimani* weeklies, two prominent players in the Malayalam print that enjoyed, are still enjoying, and have a significant role in shaping public opinion.

⁸⁸ Ahmed, 133.

⁸⁹ Jones, “Signs of Churning.”

⁹⁰ Raziya Patel, “Indian Muslim Women, Politics of Muslim Personal Law and Struggle for Life with Dignity and Justice,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 44 (2009): 44–49.

Personal Law/Uniform Civil Code: The Kerala Public Sphere

Both magazines follow different trajectories regarding MPL and uniform civil code. Before Shah Bano's verdict, the discourse around personal law in *Mathrubhumi* was not mainly centered on Muslim women. Instead, it was focused on achieving desired benefits of a uniform civil code applicable to all citizens and bulldozing the perceived privileges and marks of difference of the Muslim community under the religious-based personal laws. However, *Deshabhimani* hardly raises the question of equality before the law argument or privileges of the Muslim community in the discussion about MPL. Still, it squarely concentrates on the gender discrimination Muslim women face, the status of women in Islam, the archaic nature of Islam, and the inevitability of reforming it to achieve modernity.

For *Mathrubhumi*, before the Shah Bano verdict, the question of MPL was more about equality before the law (in terms of community, not in terms of gender), national integration, and national security. For example, in the February 9, 1984, issue of the Magazine Yettumanoor Gopalan wrote about the need for a uniform civil code. The article is titled *Yekeekrtha Civil Niyamam: Kalathinte Avasyam* (Uniform Civil: Need of the hour). It focused on achieving desired benefits of the 'common law system' by implementing 'public law,' which applies to all citizens.⁹¹

The trigger for arguing for such common law for all is to challenge the seemingly 'legal privileges' Muslims in India enjoy under the premise of minority rights and personal law. "Section 129 of the Transfer of Property Act provides special protection to Muslims. Accordingly, the rules regarding voluntary gifts do not apply to them. According to Section 2 of the Shariat Act, voluntary donations can be made according to Muslim law."⁹² The author

⁹¹ Yettumanoor Gopalan, "Eekeekrtha Civil Niyamam Kalakhattathinte Avasyam [Uniform Civil Code is the need of the hour]," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, February 19, 1984.

⁹² Yettumanoor Gopalan, 19.

cites another example, "The law relating to wills mentioned in Part VI of the Indian Succession Act is also not applicable to the Muslim community. Section III of the Shariat Act gives them protection in this regard."⁹³ Though the personal laws are not for Muslims alone in India, in Gopalan's account, the differences that Muslim laws make get visibility, and personal laws of other communities are left unmentioned. So, it is clear that the argument for the unification of personal law is explicitly aimed at perceived privileges Muslims enjoy or the religious-based differences in the legal provisions. During the pre-Shah Bano judgment era, the discourse concentrated much on the supposed privileges and differences of Muslims in India as a community.

In Gopalan's account, the rationale behind the unification of the civil laws has three aspects. One, personal laws are a hindrance in achieving Indian national unity and democratic values. Second, India can achieve national unity only through a common public law that does not differentiate citizenry based on their religion or any other aspects. Finally, "articles 29 and 30 of the constitution that grants protection for minorities does not mandate preserving of personal laws".⁹⁴ In short, in the *Mathrubhumi* weekly, women's right or gender discrimination does not occur as a reason to bat for a uniform civil code; rather, national integration and national unity does.

In the 1984 March, 11 issue of the weekly, M Prabha Ernakulam wrote a note appreciating Gopalan's article on the need for a uniform civil code in India.⁹⁵ This note also follows the same pattern. Gender issues or women's rights are not focus of such concerns that highlight why India needs unification of civil laws.

⁹³ Yettumanoor Gopalan, 19.

⁹⁴ Yettumanoor Gopalan, 19.

⁹⁵ M Prabha Ernakulam, "Yekaroopamaaya Civil Niyama samohitha (Uniform Civil Code)," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, March 11, 1984.

We have framed the Constitution; one of its main objectives is to make India one nation. Thus, if a nation is to be formed, we must become one *janatha* (people), and not many *janatha*. Every citizen should feel that he is an Indian first and foremost. But unfortunately, there was no such 'Indian' here. There is only Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, etc. Religious and other differences stand in the way of India's national unity and brotherhood, and the emotional integration that should take place among its people. Different personal laws keep the distance between them intact.⁹⁶

Implementing a uniform civil code is a prerequisite for achieving India's national integration. Legal pluralism in personal matters is identified as a hindrance to a high standard of national integration and national security. In this account, personal laws signify different loyalties of citizenries other than to the nation, which is considered detrimental to attaining national unity. The nation is imagined as a culturally and religiously homogenized entity yet to be achieved in the Indian context. Homogenizing religion-based personal law is identified as the inevitable step towards it. In this view, there must be one law for all; equality under the law means that all people should be treated in the same way by the legal system, irrespective of differences in religious belief or ethnic background. This conception views India as one nation and one people who had to be governed by a single legal system. In this framing, India is not just a territorial entity but also a cultural entity that has to be protected from internal and external enemies. In this territorial and cultural nationalistic conception of India, Muslim personal laws are seen as being incompatible with the nation's unity and its fundamental principles.

Response from the Muslim's side defends the Muslim personal law by arguing that the differences in laws should not be considered harmful to the integrity of the nation rather, it must be considered a developed form of democracy. "In a democratic country, how would

⁹⁶ M Prabha Ernakulam, 4.

differences in divorce style, marriage, or norms of inheritance affect the integrity of the nation? Such rights for minorities are common in any progressive democratic system. Attempts to curtail such provisions are narrow-minded and one-sided."⁹⁷ For him, the right to be different and legal recognition for such differences through legal pluralism denotes the progressiveness of a democracy. In his opinion, it is undoubtedly not antithetical to national integration. He also hints that the desire for unification is one-sided, as minority communities do not favour it.

Prior to the Shah Bano judgment, Unlike Mathrubhumi weekly, there were plenty of discussions about MPL or the Uniform civil code in Deshabhimani as CPI (M) was actively involved in the debate. In the 1983 September issue of the *Deshabhimani* magazine, Muhammad Faris wrote an article titled *Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam* (Change is Must in Muslim Personal Law). For the author, Muslim personal law begs changes for two reasons. First, India needs a single code for all Indians, "it is necessary for a secular democratic country like India to have a common civil code applicable for both believers of all religions and non-believers."⁹⁸ To make India secular enough, there must be a common civil code regulating the personal affairs of all citizens of the country. In this account, Muslim personal law appears as a mark of non-secularity in the Indian legal system. It implies Muslims are responsible for it, especially community leaders, "they oppose the timely changes in Islam to maintain their dominance in the Muslim community."⁹⁹

Muslim leaders' opposition to reform is described as an attempt to secure their vested interest in the community. As he describes the vested interest of the community leaders, the author conflates personal law with Islam itself and suggests that reform is required for

⁹⁷ E Anvar Thiruvanthapuram, "Yekeekrtha Civil Niyamavum Muslimkalum [Uniform Civil Codes and Muslims]," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, March 11, 1984, 4.

⁹⁸ Muhammad Faris, "Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam [Change is Must for Muslim Personal Law]," September 11, 1983, 6.

⁹⁹ Faris, 6.

personal law and Islam itself. To justify the assertion, the author refers to reforms carried out by monarchs in west Asian countries and argues that for Muslims, a re-alignment in faith and practices is inevitable to cope with modernity.

The second reason for changes in MPL is that the change is necessary for the progress of the Muslim community. Here the author holds MPL responsible for the backwardness of Indian Muslims. "The insistence that there should not be any change in existing personal law is nothing but dragging back the Muslim community. All should come together to remove the obstacles Muslim personal law creates in the path of progress of Indian Muslims."¹⁰⁰

To argue that change is inevitable in personal law for the progress of the community, the author cites many reforms in the social practices of various Muslim societies and argues that historically Islam has transformed in accordance with the requirement of the changing time and space. So, he suggests, "In the journey from yesterday to today, the values of the past will have to be written off. That is what prompted Saudi King Fahd to say that he is considering making the necessary changes in Islamic law. If someone wants to preserve Islamic laws as it is in their original form, one has to put a halt on social change."¹⁰¹

‘Yesterday’ refers to religion/tradition and ‘today’ refers to modernity, secularity, and progress. Muslims are yet to make that journey from yesterday to today. This lag is the fundamental reason for the social backwardness of Muslims in India. He considers personal law an ‘anachronism’ that has persisted in India’s modern ‘secular’ society. The Saudi examples suggest that there are Muslims elsewhere in the globe who have already taken this journey, and Indian Muslims are encouraged to take the path, the path of progress

Muhammad Faris' article aimed at building a case for transformation in existing Muslim personal law. However, the subsequent discussion focused more on the status of

¹⁰⁰ Faris, 7.

¹⁰¹ Faris, 7.

women in Islam. It is partially because of the way the author framed arguments. The main argument for change in personal law is based on the assumption that Islam and progress cannot go hand in hand. He tried to explicate the opposing relationship between Islam and modernity and suggested that Muslims must give up elements that are perceived as antithetical to modernity. In the Indian context, he believes, Muslim personal law, an 'anachronism' that has persisted in India's modern 'secular' society, is the first thing to do away with in the course of modernization.

As a continuation to Muhammad Faris's article in 1983, October 9th issue of the Magazine, Jameela Said Muhammad wrote an article titled *Islamamile Sthreekal* (women in Islam).¹⁰² This article engages with a set of writings of Muslim scholars in various community-run magazines and mainstream magazines. She responds to Muslim scholars' rendering of reformist interpretations regarding polygamy, inheritance, public participation, dowry, divorce, and family maintenance. Similar to Muhammad Faris, Jameela Said Muhammad also links seemingly unrelated issues to personal law and offers an explanation for the perception of backwardness among Muslims. "In short, this world and the hereafter are hell for women. The position of women in Sharia law is still under the purdah, even in this modern world. The Muslim community has been degraded to such a level by leaders who cannot accept the need for timely reform in personal law."¹⁰³ The author suggests that a radical change in Muslim Personal law would also mean a radical change in the clothing norms of Muslim women. However, Muslim personal law in India has nothing to do with the clothing norms of Muslim women. Reforms in Personal law are depicted as a panacea for Muslim community development.

Purdah and Unreformable Islam

¹⁰² Jameela Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal [Women in Islam]," *Deshabhimani*, October 9, 1983.

¹⁰³ Said Muhammad, 25.

The basic proposition that *Deshabhimani* makes about MPL is that Islam is regressive and archaic regarding gender justice and MPL, too, as it emanates from Islam. So, any reformation in the MPL equally means the reformation of Islam. Such reformation is inevitable for Islam's existence in modern times. In other words, the root cause of gender discrimination in the MPL is Islam itself, and the reformation in MPL means radical rehauls in the basic principles of Islam. This proposition made it inevitable for *Deshabhimani* to present Islam as antithetic to modernity and MPL anti-women.

This eventually shifted the focus of discussion on MPL in *Deshabhimani* from minority rights to have a different legal framework to govern their personal affair in a democracy to whether Islam is women-friendly or not and its compatibility with modernity and modern gender justice values. In other words, focus of the debate shifted from Indian democracy's ability to accommodate religious and cultural differences to Islam's ability to change following modernity. In such context, the reformation of MPL is predicated on Islam's incompatibility with modernity. This part of this section investigates *Deshabhimani's* contestation over what Islam is with respect to women's status and gender justice.

Jameela Said Muhammad's articles mentioned above is an excellent example of the contestation over what is 'true' Islam in *Deshabhimani* magazine during the eighties.¹⁰⁴ Her article *Islamile Sthreekal* (Women in Islam) engages with a set of writings of Muslim scholars in various community-run and mainstream magazines. She responds to Muslim scholars' rendering of alternative interpretations regarding polygamy, inheritance, public participation, dowry, divorce, and family maintenance. Such narratives were the attempts to highlight women's rights in Islam and to represent Islam as women-friendly and its gender norms as compatible with modernity. As such discourse proposed a new understanding of

¹⁰⁴ Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal [Women in Islam]"; Jameela Said Muhammad, "Prathikarangalum Sathyavum [Reactions and Truth]," *Deshabhimani*, November 13, 1983.

Islam as a culture that better protects women's interests, it challenged secular narratives that call for radical reform in MPL and Islam. Challenging such alternative discourses of Islam and gender from Muslims became imperative for the *Deshabhimani* to sustain a secular liberal call for a radical reformation of Islam and the MPL.

In her article *Islamile Sthreekal* (Women in Islam), the author deals with each of these issues and provides counter-arguments. She suggests that Muslim writers' reading of Islam as a woman-friendly religion is false, misleading, and, therefore, unsustainable. Also, the author investigates the 'real' status of women in Islam, as the article titled *Islamile Sthreekal* (Women in Islam) suggests. She quotes from the Quran, Hadith (sayings of the prophet Muhammad), and writings of other Muslim scholars in her attempt to find the 'real' place of women in Islam. In effect, the author prioritizes a particular reading of Islam over the other and makes conclusive remarks on the status of women in Islam, an attempt to fix meanings and interpretations of Islam in the authors' favour. In another article, she makes a similar observation on Muslim scholars' position on women's work outside the home; she observes:

Some Muslim scholars support women going out for work in offices and factories. They are the people who dress up as the situation demands (*Avar kalathinu anusarichu kolam kettunnavaaranu*). Nonetheless, according to some scholars, women's work is something that tarnishes the sanctity of womanhood and family security. In their understanding, women's work is nothing but exploitation of femininity.¹⁰⁵

The phrase '*Kalathinu Anusarich Kolam Kettunnavar*' refers to those who are not true to their own ideology and take positions that suit the situation based on momentary interests. For the author, Muslim scholars who take a stand favouring women's work are not genuine and honest with their religion. They are faking their ideology to be relevant in changing

¹⁰⁵ Said Muhammad, "Prathikarantalum Sathyavum [Reactions and Truth]," 25.

times. According to her, genuine scholars would not encourage women to work outside the home. By doing so, the author attempts to define who a genuine scholar is and what genuine Islam is. In her other article regarding purdah and Muslim women's social activism, she writes:

The argument that Islam forbids not the social activity of women but the exposure of her body in public is untrue. Islam teaches that women should stay behind the curtain when talking to a stranger, even in their own homes, and not go out without purdah. Nevertheless, contemporary Muslim women have rejected all these dictates. If all women stayed home to raise children, they would sometimes starve.¹⁰⁶

In this, the author not only asserts that Muslim women have rejected the idea of purdah as cloth and norm but also debunks a particular narrative regarding purdah, which is in circulation within the community, that Islam is not against women's social activism and it mandates certain sartorial prescriptions to be in public; whether it is for work or social activism. Her self-assured assertion—the contemporary Muslim women have rejected all these dictates—indicates that during the early eighties, purdah was not that popular among Muslim women, though a different narrative about purdah's distinct popular narrative was in circulation within the community. The meaning purdah assumes in this text is oppressive; it signifies a 'hell-like' situation of women, the epitome of oppression, unfreedom, and torment. Moreover, purdah is presented as something antithetical to women's social activism and public presence. The assertion, "If all the women stayed at home only to raise children, they would sometimes starve,"¹⁰⁷ suggests that conforming to purdah norms is to accept domesticity by default. Purdah-clad women are expected to be at home, only engaging in reproductive roles. The public is not their space. And any reading of purdah as it facilitates

¹⁰⁶ Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal [Women in Islam]."

¹⁰⁷ Said Muhammad, 25.

social activism or public presence is rendered as an un-Islamic and unauthentic reading of Islam. In popular magazines, any narrative that portrays purdah as a means for women to participate in social activism or have a public presence, are often criticized as being misleading and a misrepresentation of 'authentic' Islam. In these magazines, authentic Islam is portrayed as being fundamentally anti-women and incompatible with modern values. Thus, any modern secular state is entitled to reform it to safeguard women's interests. Muslim women's magazines are meddling with this representation of purdah and attempts to produce new signification to it both within and without the community. The purdah's later history shows that many Muslim women embraced the meaning rendered by Muslim women's magazines¹⁰⁸.

Like in Muhammad Faris¹⁰⁹ account, one can see that Jameela Said Muhammad also connects issues unrelated to personal law to offer a reason for Muslim's perceived backwardness. The author concludes, "In short, both worlds, here and hereafter, are hell for women. Women's place in sharia law is under purdah, even today. The Muslim community was brought to this low by leaders who could not admit that timely reform in personal law is necessary."¹¹⁰ The author creates a notion that a radical change in the Muslim Personal law also means a radical change in the clothing norms of Muslim women. However, there is no contiguity between Muslim personal law in India the clothing norms of Muslim women. Reforms in Personal law are depicted as the panacea for Muslim community development, and other unrelated perceived notions of the backwardness of the community are somehow conflated with personal law.

¹⁰⁸ MP Basheer, "Malayalam Magazines Drive Women into Purdha," in *The Hoot Reader: Media Practice in Twenty First Century India*, ed. Sevanti Ninan and Subarno Chattarji (New Delhi: Oxford, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Faris, "Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam [Change is Must for Muslim Personal Law]."

¹¹⁰ Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal [Women in Islam]."

In response to Jameela Said Muhammad's article, Rahmathulla wrote a note to *Deshabhimani*. The note is titled *Pardhayodu Enthinee Paka*¹¹¹ (Why Too Much Grudge on Purdah). He attempted to provide a secular rationale for the 'Islamic' way of clothing, especially for the non-Muslim/Secular audience of *Deshabhimani* weekly. To showcase Islam's compatibility with modernity, he suggested that purdah has contemporary relevance like any other Islamic norm.

Purdah is a symbol of women's liberation; a purdah-clad woman is safe from the unwanted gaze of the men folk. She earns everyone's respect as she dresses respectably. Women's chastity is safe under the purdah. Women venturing out without proper clothing might lead to anarchy in society.¹¹²

He emphasizes the vulnerable nature of the female body, "A woman's chastity can be destroyed when she exposes the parts as it arouses certain desires in men. Therefore, a woman's chastity is safe within the purdah."¹¹³ He holds that Islam has historically contributed to women's rights "It was with the victory of Islam that women, who had been enslaved and deprived of all their rights, rose to the horizons of humanity and culture."¹¹⁴

Muhammad Faris' take on MPL and subsequent rendering of Islam as a sign of backwardness and Jameela Saith Muhammad's association of purdah with MPL and Muslim backwardness got a spiraling response from the readers and reflected within the *Deshabhimani* and various periodicals and literature of Muslim community. This portrayal of Islam as antithetical to modernity, progress, and women's right caught the imagination of the Muslim respondents to the Magazine. They wrote a rejoinder to the Magazine. Articles and

¹¹¹ KPO Rahmathulla, "Pardhayodu Enthinee Paka [Why Too Much Grudge on Purdah]," *Deshabhimani*, October 23, 1983.

¹¹² Rahmathulla, 22.

¹¹³ Rahmathulla, 22.

¹¹⁴ Rahmathulla, 22.

letters from opposing sides appeared in the following issues of the Magazine and various magazines run by different Muslim organizations. This eventually led to an exclusive issue dedicated to discussing the topic of women's liberation in 1983 November. Although the issue is titled *Mochanam Thedunna Sthree* (Liberation seeking Women) majority of the article are on Muslim women's issues alone. The cover page caption of the issue of the magazine, *Mochanam Thedunna Sthree*, alludes that the issue is dedicated to discussing women's liberation. However, the discussion was exclusively on Muslim women. Rather than going socio economic roots of Muslim women's perceived backwardness, the narratives squarely blame Islam and MPL as root cause of Muslim women's backwardness and propose secularization as a solution to Muslim women's issues.

The discussion on liberation-seeking women starts with T Devi's article, *Sthree Socialist Lokathi*¹¹⁵ (Women in the Socialist world). The article presents socialist societies as desirable for women and gender relations. The author asserts that the teaching of Islam at its origin was liberatory for women in that generation.

Prophet Muhammad started his struggle for a better life in a world were killing and selling of women folk considered as normal and privilege of men. He brought forward many ideas for the emancipation of women, which were vital to the world's very existence. He proclaimed to that barbaric community the idea that heaven lies beneath the feet of your mother.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ T Devi, "Sthree Socialist Lokathil [Women in Socialist World]," *Deshabhimani*, November 13, 1983.

¹¹⁶ Devi, 14.

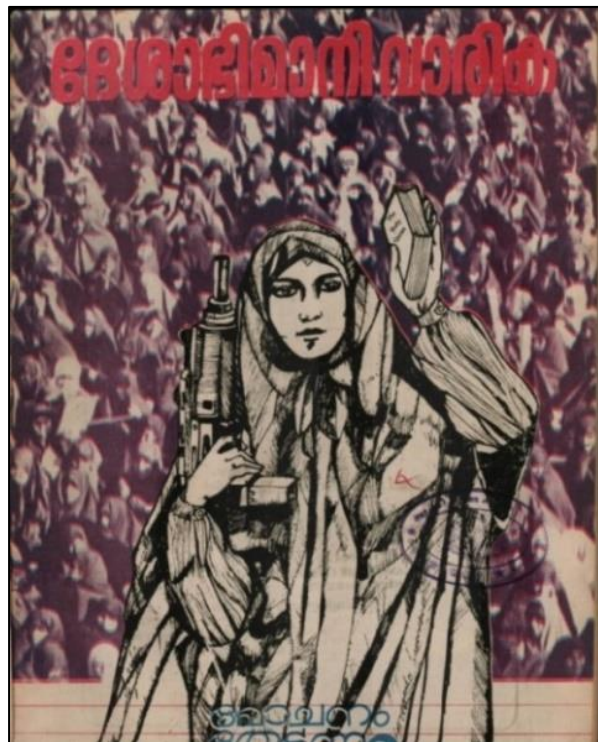


Figure 3: *Mochanam Thedunna Sthree* [liberation Seeking Women] Cover picture *Deshabhimani* Weekly November 12, 1983.

Here, the author partially agrees with the claim with response to Islam's historic role in conceiving women's rights. However, soon after endorsing the historical emancipatory role of Islam in its time and emerging contexts, she argues that no society has a record of women's equality in contemporary times: "However, no society to date has achieved man-woman equality or equality among men based on the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet."¹¹⁷ To support this argument, she mentions instances of social stratification that prevail among Kerala Muslims. The article concludes with the testimonies of various Muslim leaders who visited Uzbekistan, then part of the USSR, to indicate that Muslim women in such countries enjoy greater freedom and are on equal footing with other women. Interestingly, the Soviet Union is portrayed as a great place not only for women's emancipation but also for religious freedom.

¹¹⁷ Devi, 14.

In the context of the turbulent communal situation of the eighties, the author suggests that the communist USSR was the better place for Muslim women in terms of both gender and religious freedom. "Uzbeki Muslim women, while working as civil servants and scientists, simultaneously observe religious rituals and practices."¹¹⁸

However, the historical role of Islam in women's rights, a recurring theme in the Muslims writers position on women in Islam and is endorsed by Devi in her article, is not a settled idea among *Deshabhimani* writers. For instance, Ramla Beevi MA, in her article *Vekthi Niyamathinte Baliyadukal*, (Victims of Personal Law) contests the idea¹¹⁹. For her, the narratives of the pathetic state of pre-Islamic Arab women and Islam's positive impact on them are 'propaganda' Islamists make to highlight Islam's historical relevance.

Even if it is admitted for the sake of argument that Arabian women were inferior before the arrival of Islam, prior to Islam women were well respected in almost all countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, and Yemen, conquered by Islam. It is a historical fact that their rights were already respected and recognized in such societies. However, as Islam expanded, the plight of women worsened.¹²⁰

Both Jameela Saithu Muhammad and Ramla Beevi indicate that purdah is falling out of favour of Kerala Muslims, as the latter holds that even most conservative women are giving up purdah. "Any norm, let alone purdah, will transform from time to time. Even the most rigid fanatics are folding up the purdah. Pity those who still justify all this."¹²¹ As the title of the article suggests, for Ramla Beevi, women have been victims of Islam; historically. Here personal law is used as synonymous with Islam. One could use either Islam or personal law to mean the same. In Ramla Beevi's account, examples of contemporary women victims

¹¹⁸ Devi, 15.

¹¹⁹ M M Ramla Beevi, "Vekthi Niyamathinte Baliyadukal [Scapegoats of Personal Law]," *Deshabhimani*, November 13, 1983.

¹²⁰ Ramla Beevi, 30.

¹²¹ Ramla Beevi, 31.

of personal law are young brides of Hyderabad who were married off to Arab traders. "Poor girls and young women living in Muslim homes of Hyderabad, who have been deceived by wealthy Arab elders, are the victims of Muslim personal law."¹²²

During the eighties, debates and protests over cabaret and the objectification of women's bodies became a matter of contestation and public protest by the left-leaning youth movement. It became imperative for the ruling dispensation to engage with the situation. On 1983 September 6, there was a women's convention against cabaret in Calicut city conducted by the state women's commission. Many purdah-clad Muslim women attended the meeting, and two of them were panellists. Like other panellists, they shared their views. This provoked the author, Hameed Chennamangalloor, a usual columnist in mainstream magazines, to write an article in *Deshabhimani* on September 25, 1983. The article is titled *Kabre Aruthu Pardha Aavam* (No to Cabaret, Yes to Purdah). For him, purdah-clad Muslim women's presence in such an event is a matter of joke and wonder. "Cabaret is undressing woman. Purdah is suffocatingly covering her and throwing her into darkness. Both are wrong. These are the two boundaries woman are confined by in a patriarchal society."¹²³ For him, It is poverty and starvation pushing women into 'filthy' jobs like prostitution and cabaret. No woman willingly does such jobs. Then he moves on to describe how oppressive Islam is for Muslim women by stating various sharia provisions concerning inheritance, legal witnessing, women's political participation, and leadership. What is puzzling him is how come representatives of such regressive religion be allowed to participate in a women's convention against cabaret. Are they ready to speak against discrimination within the religion? He concludes, "as long as they are under feudal and capitalist control, they cannot do it."¹²⁴ In this narrative Muslim women's

¹²² Ramla Beevi, 30.

¹²³ Hameed Chennamangalloor, "Kabre Aruthu, Pardha Aavaam [Yes to Purdah, No to Cabaret]," *Deshabhimani*, September 25, 1983, 34.

¹²⁴ Chennamangalloor, 34.

participation in public debates like nudity, any such debate for that matter, must first be predicated on the disavowal of sartorial practice that signifies Muslimness.

It is interesting to note that the author's agony is arising not out of Muslim women's sartorial practice like purdah, but rather their act of public appearance, sharing the stage with other feminists from Hindu/left background and making a common cause while keeping their sartorial preferences intact. For him, in order to do such an activity, Muslim women should first do two things. One, they must go through sartorial correction; second, before talking against anything they think is wrong, they should take a position against what the author thinks is regressive in Islam.¹²⁵ Here, for Hameed, in order to have any public presence and utterance, Muslim women should prove their legitimacy by calling off Muslim patriarchy, an unavoidable prerequisite for any legitimate public presence for Muslim women. Purdah-clad women's presence in a 'progressive' space, such as feminist convention against cabaret dance, disrupt purdah's signification in Kerala's public sphere, where it signifies patriarchy, male domination, voicelessness, and invisibility of self within the dominant discourse.

Hameed writes in the same article;

Just as no woman willingly performs prostitution and cabaret, no woman wear purdah willingly. Patriarchal religions and medieval culture imposed purdah up on her. It is the symbol of women's oppression. This style of clothing is imposed on a woman by men to constrain her under men's control, to cut her from public spaces.¹²⁶

Here purdah has fixed signification as oppression, a sign of patriarchy, and medieval culture. One cannot come to terms with women, with a sartorial code considered regressive, expressing themselves in a women's forum against cabaret, which is symbolic of feminist activism. Such a presence is antithetical to the popular signification of purdah. The author's

¹²⁵ Chennamangalloor, "Kabre Aruthu, Pardha Aavaam [Yes to Purdah, No to Cabaret]."

¹²⁶ Chennamangalloor, 34.

wonder and anguish come from this crisis of signification. In short, the purdah is presented as antithetical to activism and public presence. How do those women, who appeared there in purdah and spoke, see purdah? Does Muslim woman have a different signification for purdah? If so, what are the constitutive factors of such signification? The next chapter of this thesis interrogates such questions.

In the 1879 December, 30 issue of *Mathrubhumi* O V Vijayan wrote an article on Iranian Revolution. It was a critical take on the after effect of the revolution. He considers it a regressive development. The Khomeini led post-revolutionary government's ban on music, female seclusion through the forceful implementation of the purdah system, and uncompassionate treatment of supporters of the erstwhile regime are the issues that led O V Vijayan to reach the conclusion that the Iran Revolution was an anti-democratic regressive revival of Islam¹²⁷. Responding to this V.A. Kabeer wrote a letter in the 1980 February 3 issue of the weekly, as a counter to O.V. Vijayan's take on the purdah norm of the post-revolution Iranian regime as regressive: "Purdah is a modest dress that covers the face and forearms. If it is argued that women cannot make any contribution to social progress if they accept this norm, then the answer is Mother Teresa, who won the Nobel Prize."¹²⁸ Then, to explain the plight of women in post-revolutionary Iran, he quotes a western journalist who visited Iran just after the revolution:

When he visited the cold storage factory on the outskirts of Mashhad, men and women were working together on the assembly line. Women did not wear *chador*. 'Islamic law does not dictate that we should sit at home wearing *chador*.' Mrs. Hamam Yusuf, who runs the laboratory at the factory, said. She is a twenty-nine-year-old graduate of Mashhad University.

¹²⁷ O V Vijayan, "Iran Viplavam: Islaminte Punarudhanamo...? [Iran Revolution: Revival of Islam..?]," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, December 30, 1979.

¹²⁸ V. A Kabeer, "Islaminte Punarudhanam [Revival of Islam]," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, February 3, 1980, 4.

***Arabi Kalyanam* (Arab-Marriage)**

Following a fierce discussion regarding Muslim personal law from September to November 1983, *Deshabhimani* started to serialize the plight of poor Muslim women in the coastal areas of Kerala. In the month of December 1983, *Deshabhimani* featured the life and miseries of child brides involved in *Arabi Kalyanam*, a practice of older Arab men marrying local Muslim women (often under-aged). This part of the section explores the portrayal of Muslim women's grievances in *Deshabhimani* with special focus on its narratives on *Arabi Kalyanam* and see how such a portrayal contribute to the formation of the image Muslim women as a victim of Islam. This part situates *Deshabhimani's* narratives surrounding *Arabi Kalyanam* in the broader context of the emerging campaign for a uniform civil code and application of secular law on the personal affairs of Muslims in the eighties. I argue that such narratives were closely implicated in the politics of sexuality, gender, community, and nation.

Taking a cue from Ramla Beevi's article, the 1983 November 13 issue, which suggests young and poor Hyderabad women were married off to Arab men, thus becoming victims of Muslim personal law, *Deshabhimani* featured similar practices among Kerala Muslims. The 1983 December 11 issue appears with a cover picture of a young bride in traditional Muslim bridal costumes. With this issue, *Deshabhimani* serializes the practice of *Arabi Kalyanam* (Arab Marriage), the practice among coastal Muslim communities of Malabar where an older Arab man marries an underage bride. The series features ordeals of young girls abandoned by elderly Arab men within a few weeks or months of after marrying them. The first story in the series is the story of Rasiya,¹²⁹ a fourteen-year-old widow. She got married to a forty-year-old Arab man when she was thirteen years old. The narrative caricatures poverty of her family, the lavish life the Arab man lived while he was in the city,

¹²⁹ Smrithi and T D Smitha, "Arudeyo Manavaattikal [Brides of Unknown]," *Deshabhimani*, December 11, 1983.

violence in the short-lived conjugal relationship, and the exploitation by middlemen. It also explains how she and her mother were deceived by her brother-in-law, who acted as the agent between her family and the Arab man. The same pattern follows in the second story of the series,¹³⁰ though the characters are changed the exception in the second story is the Asma the bride featured in the story decides to migrate to the Gulf, find a suitable job to make enough money, and find a suitable alliance for future life. She is confident that she would find a match in her locality if she could make enough money by migrating to Gulf. An unconvinced journalist asks her, "till what standard you studied?" subtly implying the idea may not work out as she is not educated enough. "Fourth standard," she responds as she registers the implication of the question: "I will do any work that comes in my way... have to make money...then there would be many matches coming my way."¹³¹ In the third story, the victim, Amina, files a police case against her Arab husband, who deceived her after three months of marital life and fights her case in court. For these stories, *Deshabhimani* sent two women journalists to the coastal settlement of Calicut city along with one photographer and an interlocutor to build rapport with the 'victims.'

The stories contain photos of Rasiya and Asma. Asma's story reveals that while the photographer was trying to take a photo of Asma, she asked him not to take her picture at first. "Suddenly, she said to us, looking at the photographer, 'Don't take my photos; you may ask me whatever you want to know' However, by that time, our photographer had already taken several her photos."¹³² Despite her objection, the photographer took her photos and *Deshabhimani* published two photos in different poses along with the story. In these photos, she appears happy and confident. While the photographer made another attempt to click her naked baby's photo, she stopped him once again. Her confident look, the way she responded

¹³⁰ Smrithi and T D Smitha, "Asmayude Theerumanam [Decision of Asma]," *Deshabhimani*, December -24, 1983.

¹³¹ Smrithi and T D Smitha, 29.

¹³² Smrithi and T D Smitha, 29.

to their questions, and her smiling face, it seems, was not the expectation of the journalist team of the *Deshabhimani*. “She was smiling at us generously as if she was posing; she had been replying to us clearly without any delay or uncertainty. That beautiful young girl remains a *prahelika* (mystery/enigma) for us, till now.”¹³³ It appears as if the team was looking for a more suitable victim, the one with a broken voice incapable of telling her story in her own voice with clarity. However, Asma's confident look and the way she was engaging with them remained as a *prahelika* (mystery/enigma), a question incomprehensible and unexplainable to the authors.

I would like to draw attention to a few critical points that emerge here. Asma is pacified by the very interlocutors who intend to ‘save’ her. Her bodily integrity and privacy - her ‘consent’ - are denigrated and dismissed. Second, her presence, speech and demeanour as ‘strong women’ need to be explained away on gendered terms (‘Woman is a mystery’) for her to be established as a ‘victim’ of a regressive tradition. As Lila Abu-Lughod points out veiling is automatically conflated with lack of agency in an Euro-centric/Muslim-phobic discourses. To cite Abu- Lughod:

What does freedom mean if we accept the fundamental premise that humans are social beings, raised in certain social and historical contexts and belonging to particular communities that shape their desires and understandings of the world? Is it not a gross violation of women’s own understandings of what they are doing to simply denounce the *burqa* as a medieval imposition? One cannot reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing. And we should not underestimate the ways that veiling has entered political contests across the world.¹³⁴

***Arabi Kalyanam* (Arab Marriage): The Historical Context**

¹³³ Smrithi and T D Smitha, 29.

¹³⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

Trade relations with Calicut and Middle Eastern societies resulted in cultural ties, including marriages. The migration of substantial merchant communities from widely dispersed lands is significant salience of the development of trade in Malabar. The long-distance trade necessitated a situation in which the trading communities had to settle for a long period at Malabar Coast.¹³⁵ In Calicut, marriage and prosperity historically went along together: Arab traders and sailors were able simultaneously to make alliances with local trading partners and to take local wives.¹³⁶ Arab men marrying local women was quite a normal affair till recently, as Arabs were engaged in active trade with the city.¹³⁷ However, the meaning and form of marriages have changed dramatically after the Gulf boom. *Koyas*, the dominant local trading community in Calicut city, distinguished themselves from other Muslim communities based on their kinship by claiming descendants of Arabs traders who settled in the city. Arab merchants and sailors had to stay in the city for a long time; they married local women. Local rulers often encouraged such relations as it was perceived as a boost to the local economy. Thus, they became naturalized into their host society through dynamic participation in the economic and social activities.¹³⁸ Systems of family, household, and marriage of Calicut Muslims are all distinctively linked to the town's history as an Arab trading port and long-standing kinship links with Gulf Arabs.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends* (Madras : Orient Longman, 1976), <http://archive.org/details/mappilamuslimsof0000mill>.

¹³⁶ Ilias, "Mappila Muslims and the Cultural Content of Trading Arab Diaspora on the Malabar Coast," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 35, no. 4–5 (January 1, 2007): 434–56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853107X240288>.

¹³⁷ Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "'I Am Gulf': The Production of Cosmopolitanism in Kozhikode, Kerala, India," ed. Edward Simpson and Kai Kress (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2007), 323–55, <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/10626/>.

¹³⁸ Abdul Jaleel P.k.m, "Arab Immigrants under Hindu Kings in Malabar: Ethical Pluralities of 'Naturalization' in Islam," in *Arab Immigrants under Hindu Kings in Malabar: Ethical Pluralities of "Naturalisation" in Islam*, ed. Ray Jureidini and Said Fares Hassan (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 196–214, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342_012.

¹³⁹ Caroline Osella, "Desires under Reform: Contemporary Reconfigurations of Family, Marriage, Love and Gendering in a Transnational South Indian Matrilineal Muslim Community," *Culture and Religion* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 241–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2012.675508>.

The social meaning of such marriages has changed over time. Earlier, getting into a marriage contract with Arab traders was considered normal, and a means for social and economic upward mobility.¹⁴⁰ Hameed C.K in her article, “Marriages and Cosmopolitanism in Kozhikode”, argues that while the western scholars considered such relationship as a variety of prostitution, neither the local culture nor the Arab traders considered it as prostitution or an act of immorality or against their religious values.¹⁴¹ Such marriages got legitimacy among the locals as well as traders through a two-way process. The author argues that the matrilineal kinship system of that time provided legitimacy and cultural sanction for local women to enter in to such relationships. The practice of *Mut'a* marriage,¹⁴² which was common among Arabs, offered them social legitimacy. Therefore, marriages between Arab men and local women did not cause any cultural disruption or raise any moral concerns of a modern nature for both parties involved.¹⁴³

There was an active presence of Arabs as traders in Calicut till the 1970s. However, with the invention of oil, Arab presence in the city declined, and so did the marriage between Arab men and local women. After the gulf boom, the migration pattern reversed; Malayali Muslims started to migrate to Gulf countries for jobs instead of Arabs coming to Calicut for business. However, the practice of Arab men marrying local women continued and morphed

¹⁴⁰ P.k.m, “Arab Immigrants under Hindu Kings in Malabar: Ethical Pluralities of ‘Naturalization’ in Islam.”

¹⁴¹ Hameeda C. K., “Marriages and Cosmopolitanism in Kozhikode,” *Café Dissensus* (blog), February 15, 2016, <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/02/15/marriages-and-cosmopolitanism-in-kozhikode/>.

¹⁴² *Mut'a* marriage is type of Islamic marriage practice for a limited time period. The ceremonies and other components of a typical marriage are observed in *mut'a* with the exception that the union is just temporary.

Children are deemed legitimate and capable of inheriting from both parents, but there are no mutual rights of inheritance generated between the spouses. When the stipulated period expires the marriage automatically ends unless it is prolonged. Although there is no right to divorce for husband and wife, the husband might end the marriage sooner by giving the woman a "gift of the term" (*hiba-i-muddat*). The wife would then be entitled to full dower. The woman has the option to end their relationship before the expiry of the marriage term. In such cases the husband has a right to deduct the proportionate part of the dower for the unexpired period.

¹⁴³ Hameeda C. K., “Marriages and Cosmopolitanism in Kozhikode.”

somewhat into a different form and earned the nickname *Arabi kalyanam* (Arabic Wedding). It is characterised by short-lived marriages between Arab nationals, mostly elderly and underage brides. This current form of practice is characterized by (a) an underage bride, (b) payment to brokers and parents, (c) and, a short duration of the conjugal relationship. The period of the marriage could be as brief as four days to six to seven months.

While the reminiscences of historical links between Arabs and communities in Calicut city is still active in some form, the short-lived contract marriage between the visiting Arab national and the underage bride earned the nickname of *Arabi Kalyanam*. However, the popular narratives of *Arabi Kalyanam*, like in the series in *Deshabhimani*, examine neither a range of causal factors contributing to the practice nor the historical root of the practice. Thus the ‘deception of the foreigner’ is highlighted while the social forces and material conditions driving the practice are either taken for granted or relatively muted in comparison.

In this part of section one attempted to situate the narratives surrounding *Arabi Kalyanam* in the wider context of the increasing contestation between the secular left and various stakeholders in Muslim communities in the early 1980s on uniform civil code and the application of secular law on personal affairs of Muslims in the 80s. It also focused on the relationship between notions of childhood and discourses of community and gender. Without dismissing the need to protect children from these illegal marriages, this section attempted to analyse the agendas that shape the discourses of child marriage and the Muslim community in the narrative of *Arabi Kalyanam* in *Deshabhimani*. In these representations, girls like Asma and others became a symbol of minority identity, projected as victims of Islam and its practices of marriage and conjugal relationship, and are rendered as an object of protection by the secular state.

A reading of Malayalam Magazines like *Deshabhimani* and *Mathrubhumi* suggests that print media have consistently painted a stereotypical and orientalist notion of Islam to present personal law as regressive and uniform civil code as the only mode to fulfill both the secular and progressive commitment of the nation. Muslim women's sufferings are attributed to Islam and amplified for political purposes. This discourse renders Muslim women as the legal subject of the nation who need legal protection from the regressive religion and community to which they belong. In this discourse, the state of India positions itself as the savior and protector, whose interventions are legitimised for the protection of Muslim women and national security.

Within Malayalam mainstream news magazines 'Muslim women' become the symbols of the Muslim community. For Muslim groups, this can be used as a defensive mechanism to consolidate religious identity. For secular left and Hindu right-wing groups, it serves as the excuse for proposing state interventions into the minority religion.

Section Two

Discourse on Gender in Mainstream Magazines

In the second section, I will map the discourses in these magazines related to gender with a special focus on women's bodies, domestic roles, and their roles in the public spheres. This section is designed to provide context to the similar discourses in the Muslim women's magazines as they are respond and dialogue with mainstream magazines. In this section, I discuss the coverage of gender issues in the *Deshabhimani* weekly during the decades of the 1980s. I argue that during the late 80s, the gender discourse in *Deshabhimani* centered on three aspects. First, one perceived a cultural anxiety about the female body. Specific forms of female body presence in public are perceived as a threat leading to the degradation of

womanhood. Second, the protection of the culture from western influences. Ideas that mark a deviation from existing understandings of sexuality and marriage are perceived as a threat to ‘our’ culture and social institutions such as family and marriage and thus to Indian culture. Third, women's presence in public life that does not necessarily disrupt the traditional functioning of the family; or does not radically alter the division of the traditional roles in the family, and hence, may be more desirable.

Culture and the Female Body: Gender Discourses in *Deshabhimani* during the 80s

*Puthan Sadacharamo?*¹⁴⁴ (New Morality?), is an article written by Frances Xavier in *Deshabhimani* 1981 December sixth issue. The article is on the idea of ‘new morality’ and introduces Osho Rajaneesh as its Indian spokesperson. The author anticipates its danger in society. For him, the new morality is a western idea that stands for the unregulated sexual freedom of men and women. People like Osho propagate this in India using scriptural references from Indian cultures. Osho was born in 1931 in the village of Kuchwada, Madhya Pradesh, to a family of twelve. Rajneesh Chandra Mohan's parents died when he was small, and he was raised by his grandparents, a wealthy Jain couple. From an early age, Rajneesh reports having had various ecstatic experiences, finally achieving ‘full enlightenment’ at age twenty-one. In 1981 he travelled to America and propagated his version of ‘neo-tantrism’ to the American audience. Hugh B Urban observes that Osho Rajneesh's version of *Tantra* commodified and commercialized that tradition.¹⁴⁵ His path was beyond conventional morality, good and evil, and founded on the explicit rejection of all traditions, doctrines, and values.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Frances Xavier, “Puthan Sadacharamo? [New Morality ?],” *Deshabhimani*, December 6, 1981.

¹⁴⁵ Hugh B Urban, *Tantra Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (London: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁶ Urban, 236.

For the author, such 'new morality' harms India's cultural heritage. He anticipates a collapse in cultural, legal and health sectors are inevitable; if this new morality gets spread in our society. He warns, "Beware of these mentally ill aristocrats who come with poisoning verses, though they are less in numbers."¹⁴⁷ The article includes two pictures. The caption of first one reads: 'Rajneesh with woman disciple.' The second picture is of a few half-naked men nearing the entrance of a Rajaneersh Asram with the caption: "followers of a new morality at the gate of Rajaneesh's Asram."¹⁴⁸ The author considers Osho's ideas about sex, sexuality, marriage, and family as western ideas and depicts them as dangerous and harmful to Indian culture and life. Here the author shares the anxiety that western cultural dominance over Indian culture and morals and holds that Indian practices are worthy of protection from the influence of western culture.

The editorial dated 10th July 1983 of the magazine is titled *Kabare Samskaaram Pala Roopathil* (Cabaret Culture Takes Many Forms).¹⁴⁹ The editorial congratulates *oru sangam yuvaakkal* (a group of young men) who are up in arms against the cabaret dance performance in a hotel in Kozhikode. The first part of the editorial rationalizes the action of the youth and praises them for what they are doing. For the author, 'moving the body,' i.e., dancing, for the purpose of entertainment, cannot be considered a job that is a part of the right to livelihood, a fundamental right. Instead, any woman earning money in this way is regarded as a national shame: "The fact that the only job a girl knows is to show off her nude body indicates the piteous state of the nation."¹⁵⁰ So stopping their performances in commercial hotels does not amount to disruption of livelihoods of any; instead, it is an attempt to stop this practice and restore the image of the nation.

¹⁴⁷ Xavier, "Puthan Sadacharamo? [New Morality?]," 30.

¹⁴⁸ Xavier, "Puthan Sadacharamo? [New Morality?]," 30.

¹⁴⁹ T S, "Editorial: Kabare Samskaaram Pala Roopathil [Cabaret Culture Takes Many Forms]," *Deshabhimani*, July 10, 1983.

¹⁵⁰ T S, 5.

The second part of the editorial explains the root cause and solution of issues like cabaret dance. As expected from any Marxist print, the author states that the capitalist system is the root cause, and eliminating capitalism is the permanent solution to issues like cabaret dance or any other commercialization of the female body. "There is no point in putting cotton wool on the wound without diagnosing the disease and providing appropriate treatment. Diagnosing the disease is essential for proper treatment. Often, as part of the treatment, it may be necessary to wash the wound before applying the medication".¹⁵¹ Cabaret is seen as a symptom of a capitalist system. There is no point in dealing only with symptoms without knowing and treating the root cause. However, the author does not discourage the act of protesting and stopping such 'social diseases' using street power rather ask the youth to be aware of the fundamental issues and work for fundamental changes too. The editorial concludes by claiming that communist countries such as the USSR and Cuba do not have cabaret dancing or red light areas.

In Xavier's article and this editorial, one can see a palpable of cultural anxiety about certain expressions of the female body presence in public that forms a deviation from existing understandings of sexuality and marriage. In both writings, tradition itself is left without any criticism. Rather any change in what is perceived as tradition is rendered as abnormal calling for censorship and prohibition.

(Re) Arranging Domestic Space

During the first half of the eighties, *Deshabhimani's* discussion on women, focused mainly on the backwardness of Muslim women and the role of Islam as the root cause of such backwardness and discrimination. As a result, Muslim women and Islam were hyper-visible. Various commentators and Muslim intellectuals questioned this hyper-visibility during the

¹⁵¹ T S, 5.

first phase of *sharia* controversy. Whereas, by the second half of the eighties, conflict in the family regarding women's roles within and outside the family became a highly discussed topic in *Deshabhimani*.

In the latter half of the 1980s, there were intense discussions in the *Deshabhimani* on women's participation in socio-political activities. These discussions show that in the latter half of the 1980s, conflict in the family regarding the role of women within and outside the family becomes a focal point in *Deshabhimani*.

Familial Roles as Antithetical to Women's Public Life

Deshabhimani's debates on women's space in public life started with an article written by C P Omana in the February 25 issue of the magazine. The article is titled *Manasundu Pakshe Enthu Vazhi?* (Willing, but in what way?).¹⁵² C P Omana introduces herself as a nurse. Drawing from her own life and colleagues, she argues that working women often face a second shift at home. As a result, they take disproportionate shares of domestic labor compared to their spouses:

This situation makes women completely engaged in paid work or domestic work. This keeps them away from other engagements, be it reading or socio-political activity. However, men in the family consider they are free after working hours and do not even care about school-going children who struggle to complete their homework. That too is considered as women's work.¹⁵³

If this situation continues, no one can expect women to assume and excel in any public leadership roles. So, she asks for a change in the traditional division of labor based on gender and reminds the members of left parties of their ideological commitment.

¹⁵² C P Omana, "Manasundu Pakshe Enthu Vazhi? [Willing but in what way?]," *Deshabhimani*, February 25, 1986.

¹⁵³ C P Omana, 12.

Omana concludes the article by arguing that this disproportionate division of domestic work and burdening women with the entire task of domestic work severely impact women's participation in the socio-political and cultural arenas. In her account, the reason for women's lesser participation in social-political and cultural activities is the never-ending domestic chores in which they are involved. She critiqued the attitude of men in the left parties as they, too, are not willing to share domestic responsibilities. "When it comes to women in their own families, progressive men forget ideology and become selfish and uphold traditional gender divisions."¹⁵⁴ She termed it as the hypocrisy of progressive men. For her, progressive leftist ideology is against the traditional division of labor, so one's claim to be part of the leftist movement must be reflected in his conduct in the domestic sphere. In her account, men should take up an equal share of domestic work to improve women's place in the public sphere. "Men should change their attitudes towards domestic work and participate in household activities. They should view it as a responsibility, not as charity,"¹⁵⁵ she continues. She ends the article by asking the readers of the *Deshabhimani* to reflect upon the matter.

Family as the Natural Space for Women

Omana's article triggers a series of discussions in the *Deshabhimani* weekly. Women from different walks of society have participate in the discussions, followed by her articles. Issues such as women's freedom, gender role in family life, women's work, expectations in a conjugal relationship, and domestic work are discussed in the following issues of the magazine. Anitha N R writes the first response to Omana's article. In the article *Ente Purushan Swarthan Akane* (My Man must be Selfish), the author discusses what women's freedom means. The author introduces herself as someone who loves to be a traditional housewife. And she provides a rationale for that choice in the article. She begins by asking

¹⁵⁴ C P Omana, 13.

¹⁵⁵ C P Omana, 13.

what the word freedom means to women. What follows in the article is her answer to that question:

I know myself well as a woman. I know that there is a bird sleeping inside me that longs to fly free in the blue sky. But when I have a family tomorrow, will I complain that my husband and children are a nuisance? of course not. What is the reason? The glory of womanhood lies in self-surrender. Are those women who clamor for freedom satisfied? Not even one, at least in my knowledge. For her, her own family is curse. Her man comes home only because there is no other way for him. What about the children? While father and mother settle their scores, they also run away somewhere. Do we need this freedom?¹⁵⁶

She acknowledges that family is confining space for women. The woman must give up certain notions of freedom to sustain it. The author believes that such freedom must be contained as it causes danger to women and families. A woman cannot fly like a bird, implying there should be some limitations to women's freedom. "It is not fare that we demand more freedom than our culture grants us."¹⁵⁷ She believe that a woman's greatness lies in her self-surrender for the family's welfare. She also holds that seeking life beyond the family is not a good option for women as none, in her knowledge, could succeed in cultivating happiness by doing so. Instead, such freedom causes disaster in conjugal relationships and affects children's well-being. Embracing self-surrendering wholeheartedly is the way forward in cultivating happiness in a woman's life. She asks women to uphold a healthy attitude towards family life. "Every girl who wears a *bindi* on her forehead should know. For you, your husband is everything. Your wealth is your children." Knowing this is the first step in holding a 'healthy attitude.' Then one can:

¹⁵⁶ Anitha N R, "Ente Purushan Swarthan Akane (Be Selfish My Man)," *Deshabhimani*, March 23, 1986, 17.

¹⁵⁷ Anitha N R, 18.

Make family a paradise and then reign in it as a queen. If you are a smart housewife, you will not have to complain about domestic work. Know that when we accept the responsibility of housework as our fate, our men are struggle at offices for us. Isn't it for the good of our own children that both of us are struggling? If that is the main goal of life, then make home an adobe.¹⁵⁸

In Anitha's view, existing gender division in the family, women as caretakers and domestic managers and men are breadwinners, are a matter of fate; the fate of being men or women. She also considers it as a nurturing role assigned to women by nature, and wearing *bindi* means accepting this law of nature. One has to accept it as given and live up to the gender role to cultivate happiness within oneself and in the family. Her reference to *bindi* on the forehead as the symbol of marriage shows she considers the Hindu family as normative. So, in her account, the women mean Hindu women, and what is referred to as 'our culture' is Hindu culture. She concludes her article: "A man will be selfish towards his wife, even if he flies around the whole universe. Let it be like that; that is good. My husband must be extremely possessive of me! Let him build a fortress of safety around me, no objection—So long as we are friends and content within it!"¹⁵⁹

Anitha's account tries to address the conflict of existing gender role division in the family. She acknowledges that family is confining place but reframes the conflict faced by the women of her generation, and provides the rationale to stick to the existing division of gender roles and expectations. The author asks women to fit into the protective fortress that men build for them by conforming to gender roles and thus have a harmonious relationship with their husbands. Through the article, she provides essential rationalization that would help the process of fitting in.

¹⁵⁸ Anitha N R, 17.

¹⁵⁹ Anitha N R, 17.

For Omana, the reason for women's lesser participation in the public arena is the gender division of labor in the family. For Anitha the home is the domain of women which the outside/public is the domain of men. Since both roles as complementary, transgressing each other's boundaries will disrupt the smooth functioning of the family. Hence, women should stick to their roles for the wellbeing of the family.

The Progressive Working Woman

Ananthi's *Sthreeyude Lokam Samoohya Prashnangal* (Woman's World and Social Issues)¹⁶⁰ is the third intervention in this debate. The author addresses the question of lesser participation of women in the public arena by categorizing women into three groups. The first one is the educated middle-class housewife. According to Ananthi, they are influenced by mass media and soap operas. They believe in the hyper-masculine construction of manhood by the media and confine themselves within the household performing traditional gender roles. This group does not really bother about the freedom to go out and be part of public activities such as socio-political activism. The second group is that of working-class women who engage in menial daily wage jobs. "Among lower income groups, women go to work to generate income for the family. It is only among agricultural workers and traditional workers men and women work side by side. (It is also true that women's freedom is excessive among them)."¹⁶¹ Then she moves on to the next group, middle-class working women without pausing to analyze the reasons for the lack of participation of lower-class working women in the public arena.

It is important to see why Ananthi makes this jump from category one to three and why she is not considering working-class women having potential enough to assume public

¹⁶⁰ Ananthi, "Sthreeyude Lokam Samoohya Prashnangal [Woman's World and Social Issues]," *Deshabhimani*, April 13, 1986.

¹⁶¹ Ananthi, 23.

roles. It seems the author does not consider them a potential group capable of taking such responsibilities. She reorganizes and acknowledges that working-class women are equal to men unlike their middle-class counterparts. In her narrative of working-class women, the author can be perceived as denying their ability to assume positions in public life for two reasons. One, "Among lower income groups, women go to work to generate income for the family";¹⁶² thus, their foray into the outside world is to meet up the economic need of the family. Two, they enjoy 'excessive' freedom. Although she dismisses their equal position with men as 'excessive' freedom and considers them unfit for public office, the author does not explain how 'excessive' freedom hinders women from taking public office. In Ananthi's account, it seems that women who undergo a certain enlightening process either via modern education or modern working places are capable of assuming positions in the public arenas. Ironically, she undermines working-class women's capacity to successfully negotiate gendered spaces and navigate gendered power structures such as lower-class working places. Clearly, then is a moralistic undertone underlying 'excessive.' The description implies a middle class bias against working class morality.

According to Ananthi, there are three reasons for the lesser presence of middle-class working women in public: "One traditional division of labor at home, Two, men are not allowing women to participate in organizational works or anything other than job-related tasks. The third is the laziness of women themselves."¹⁶³

In the concluding paragraph, the author illustrates how to improve women's presence in the public domain. "Women can get rid of these conditions only when they understand their problems by themselves."¹⁶⁴ In Ananthi's account, the solution is a shift in how women perceive women's issues. "Women should understand that they have all the same rights as

¹⁶² Ananthi, 23.

¹⁶³ Ananthi, 23.

¹⁶⁴ Ananthi, 23.

men. They should not limit their social work to ladies' clubs, baby shows, cake shows, fashion parades, and the occasional distribution of free food among the poor. They should also participate in platforms that fight for women's rights."¹⁶⁵ In this account, 'the women' maps on to the middle-class woman who earns better and has enough time to participate in social activism. Ananthi implies that a shift in such women's perception of women's world and a reorientation of their social activism towards the fight for women's rights can solve the problem of women's under-participation in the public arena. In her account, the other two categories of women, middle-class housewives, and working-class women, do not appear with potential enough to hold positions in the public arena. Those eligible are clearly women of the middle-class, educated and employed. It is also interesting to note that Ananthi does not focus on the importance of spouses sharing household activities. Rather she focuses on need for a change in the consciousness of women themselves and the reorientation of 'women's activism' set against ladies clubs for instance. By doing so, Ananthi leaves C.P Omana's call for freeing women from domestic work through a radical rearrangement in the traditional gender role division in progressive left families unengaged.

MN Janamma's article, *Anubhavathinte Velichathil* (In the Light of Experience), deals directly with questions of domestic work and women's participation in socio-political and cultural activities.¹⁶⁶ The author introduces herself as a teacher and leader of the teacher's association. She begins her article by suggesting that scientific methods such as surveys or group discussions should be used to determine the cultural constructs that influence women's participation in social arenas. "It is not clear whether any of these scientific methods supports Omana's claims."¹⁶⁷ However, the title of Janamma's article, *Anubhavathinte Velichathil* (In

¹⁶⁵ Ananthi, 23.

¹⁶⁶ M N Janamma, "Anubhavathinte Velichathil (In the Light of Experience)," *Deshabhimani*, June 15, 1986.

¹⁶⁷ M N Janamma, 38.

the Light of Experience) indicates that the author draws authenticity of her arguments not from any survey or group discussions but from her own experience as a professional teacher and teachers' union leader. She addresses the concern raised by the Omana by categorizing women into three groups. One is 'housewives' who engage only in housework, and two, is "Working women who are burdened with the responsibility of housework."¹⁶⁸ The third category consists of the working women who either stay away from home or have the luxury of home maids. They are not burdened with household chores. Then she argues;

If domestic workload was the only reason for women's lesser presence in social and cultural sectors, there should have been a large number of women belonging to the third category in such sectors. But do we experience like that? As a teacher and an organizational worker, my understanding is that the women who are most hesitant to enter the field of organizational activities are the women from the third category.¹⁶⁹

According to her, women in the second category- working women also burdened with house work- are more active in socio-political activities, although their numbers are not as high as expected. This implies that those who take up both domestic and professional jobs are excelling in the socio-political and organizational fields too. She maintains that the first step towards leadership positions in any socio-political and trade union activism is regular participation in its meetings. Such meetings are the primary phase of organizational participation. "Even if you have heavy household chores, if you are interested in participating in such meetings that are held occasionally, you can participate by planning the domestic work in advance."¹⁷⁰ According to the author, women's domestic roles do not have much to do with their lesser participation in the public arenas. For her, the reason for that is the influence of feudal as well as capitalist cultures. Due to the influence of this culture, both

¹⁶⁸ M N Janamma, 38.

¹⁶⁹ M N Janamma, 38.

¹⁷⁰ M N Janamma, 39.

women and men think participating in socio-political activism is not good for their social status. Capitalism consciously encourages this attitude through media, literature, and soap operas. According to her, women are more influenced by this culture than men. So in her account, getting out of capitalist cultural influence assumes primary importance in enhancing women's better participation in public life than rearranging gender-based division of roles prevails in families. "If there is a sense that social life and family life are related to each other, even if you have to do household chores, you can move forward by adjusting the family and the public life to each other."¹⁷¹ So the way out is to strike a balance between familial and public roles and not compromise. The author also upholds the complementary nature of traditional gender role division within the family. "While women bear the burden of domestic work, men bear the burden of other things necessary for family life. Family life is not just domestic work."¹⁷² In her narrative, the ideal women are those who strike the right balance between three roles, professional commitments at the workplace, domestic roles at home, and organizational responsibilities in formal social spaces.

Hindu Tradition and Gender Socialization

Vazhi kandethukaI (Find out the Way)¹⁷³ in this article Savithri Moosath engages with an article written by Omana. Savithri holds that changing men's attitudes towards domestic work alone will not ensure women's better social participation. For her, the difference in the upbringing of girls and boys in society is the reason for the lesser participation of girls in social and cultural activities. This creates a negative attitude in women towards socio-cultural activism and idealises their domestic role. So, according to her, the solution is not only for men to share domestic responsibilities but also to educate women about the true role of women in society.

¹⁷¹ M N Janamma, 39.

¹⁷² M N Janamma, 39.

¹⁷³ Savithri N Moosath, "Vazhi Kandethuka (Find the Way)," *Deshabhimani*, April 27, 1986.

In the next (1986 May 11) issue E.K Rajalakshmi engages in the discussion. She starts by thanking *Deshabhimani* for discussing this issue of ‘contemporary relevance’. According to her reason for the lack of women's presence in the public arena is their lack of interest that emanates from the influence of the Hindu traditional view on women. According to her, there is no point in blaming men for this lack of interest: "It is not fair to place the entire blame for our incompetence and lack of courage on anyone else."¹⁷⁴ She holds that the existing influence of Hindu tradition is responsible for inculcating a slave mentality in women.

Ever since Vedic times, efforts have been made to establish that women are not free. Learning of the *vedas* was forbidden for *shudras* and women. The *acharya* religion says that a woman must be protected by her father in her childhood, by her husband in her youth and by her sons in her old age, and she is never entitled to enjoy freedom. Sheela and Shilavati are role models for women. In the rush to emulate that lifestyle and ideology, woman forgets her personality.¹⁷⁵

For Rajalakshmi, men in society also subscribe to these ideas. Men also expect their women to be confined to the domestic sphere. Even politically progressive men hold a traditional view of the domestic space and women's roles. In Rajalakshmi's account, eliminating the influence of traditional Hindu notions of female domesticity is important for female emancipation. In the absence of such a process, mere men sharing domestic chores will not make much difference.

The Progressive Housewife

The article *Vyavasthithi Raksahppedunnu* (System Escapes) written by Hiranmayi provides another perspective to this discussion. She introduces herself as the wife of a leader

¹⁷⁴ E K Rajalakshmi, "Velicham Kayaratte [Let the Light In]," *Deshabhimani*, May 11, 1986, 34.

¹⁷⁵ E K Rajalakshmi, 34.

of a left political party. She considers being a housewife as a contribution to socio-political movements. Responding to Omana's take she writes;

My husband is the one who stays away from home many nights without notice and attends union events. Although he is worried about the children, I am not getting any help from him in raising them. He used to have committees and meetings on weekends. Early on, during initial days of our relationship, I felt as angry and sad as Omana feels now. All that time he extended me a helping hand and supported me. So, although I had to let go of many of my old colourful dreams, I now try to see it as my contribution to the movement.¹⁷⁶

For Hiranmayi, men's arrogant and insensitive behaviour at home is the result of the existing social system. Therefore, there is no point in blaming men alone for such behaviour without seeing the social condition that incites them. As men engage daily with the harsh realities of life, such as poverty and unemployment, they may become harsh and tough. She suggests that we need to take in to account the social conditions that make men behave in a particular way. Any critique of such male behaviour without considering the underlying social context is tantamount to letting the system that creates inequality and poverty disappear.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, her article title *Vyavasthithi Rakshappedunnu* (System Escapes) is a one-sentence-reply to the takes of CP Omana. She concludes her article by saying, "In today's conflict-ridden social environment, the man's last refuge is the wife who stays at home as a housewife".¹⁷⁸ Through this counterargument, she is engaging with Omana and other writers such as Ananthi and Janamma. In their narratives, the category 'housewife' emerges as lazy and ignorant of socio-political reality, thus incapable of participating and contributing to public life. However, in Hiranmayi's narrative, housewives appear as significant contributors

¹⁷⁶ Hiranmayi, "Vyavasthithi Rakshappedunnu [System Escapes]," *Deshabhimani*, June 15, 1986, 41.

¹⁷⁷ Hiranmayi, "Vyavasthithi Rakshappedunnu [System Escapes]."

¹⁷⁸ Hiranmayi, 41.

to the movement by taking care of politically active men and their children and managing household affairs to provide relief to men engaged in tough daily struggles outside the home.

In the June 15, 1986 issue of the magazine P R Kamalam engages in this debate.¹⁷⁹ She argues that in the current context, it is very difficult for both housewives and working women to actively participate in public life. Like Hiranmayi, her advice to women is to support their husbands who lead a public life instead of leading a public life themselves. "For a man active in the socio-political and cultural arena, a wife who acts as a facilitator would be a strength. Do those who enter every field and shine in the public arena feel satisfied as women? If we avoid exaggeration, my reply is no." For her, public life is not satisfying for women. She further rationalizes her position by stating, "We have heard enough stories of familial conflict. There are a few exceptions. Wives of many of our political leaders and literary figures are not in public life."¹⁸⁰ For her, women who lead in public life will inevitably face familial conflict. Both cannot go together well. The author concludes the article by saying, "Be a bit progressive. Keep a mind to do what is possible for social progress. That is enough. I think that is a lot."¹⁸¹ In her account, an ideal progressive woman is not someone who is active in public life, but one who is progressive and has a progressive mind and is supportive of his partner to lead him to a better public life. In short, her reply to Omana's question, 'Willing but in what way?' is willingness itself is enough, and in fact, a lot.

As the above analysis attempts to demonstrate, *Deshabhimani's* discourses about women's participation in public life do not anticipate or call for a radical change in power relations and role divisions in the domestic space. In such narratives, too, women are asked to aspire for public life not by radically altering the existing traditional division of roles but by

¹⁷⁹ P R Kamalam, "Manassu Mathi: Dharaalam [Intention Is Enough; a Lot]," *Deshabhimani* 17, no. 51 (June 15, 1986): 41.

¹⁸⁰ P R Kamalam, 41.

¹⁸¹ P R Kamalam, 42.

analyzing and performing such roles as per existing societal expectations. In the narratives which support women's better participation in public life women who strike a delicate balance between familial, professional, and public roles, are presented as the ideal. Such narratives also emphasize the complementary nature of gender role divisions in the family. In many narratives, the housewives were rendered as incapable of assuming positions in public life. However, in another set of narratives in the same debate, housewives emerge as a valuable participant in the movements via their traditional role in the family. Such narratives foreground the notion of a 'progressive housewife' and defend the traditional gender division in the family. Women's domestic roles are seen as their contribution to social life as it facilitates and eases their male comrade's socio-political responsibilities.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to map the historical context of the contemporary Malayalam Muslim women's magazines in Kerala. In the chapter, I have looked at two aspects of the gender discourse as they unfold in two prominent Malayalam mainstream magazines in Kerala—the *Mathrubhumi* weekly and *Deshabhimani* Weekly. One, their discourse on the category of Muslim women, and two, discourse around the category of women and gender. In the first section, I trace how the discussion about Muslim personal law started as a question of minority right in a democracy in post-independence India. Initial discussions on Muslim personal law pitched it against the discourse of one law for one nation. In that narrative, legal plurality was rendered as a hindrance to national unity and integration. The Muslim response attempted to paint personal laws as a sign of a more inclusive and egalitarian form of democracy as it accommodates minority cultural autonomy. During this phase, the questions of personal law and uniform civil code were set in contests and debates around ideas and perceptions of democracy, the secular nation, national security, and integration. However,

subsequently, one finds the discussion getting actively reframed in terms of Islam's compatibility with modernity which in turn is mapped on to its treatment of women and its notions of gender.

A reading of Malayalam Magazines like *Deshabhimani* and *Mathrubhumi* suggests that mainstream Malayalam print media has consistently painted an archaic notion of Islam to suggest personal law is regressive and uniform civil code is the only mode of fulfilling the secular and progressive goals of the nation. Muslim women's sufferings are attributed to Islam and amplified for political purposes. This dominant discourse renders Muslim women the legal subject of the nation-state, in need of legal protection from the regressive community to which they belong. In this discourse, the Indian state positions itself as the saviour whose interventions are sought and justified for the protection of Muslim women and national security. I have chosen to look at these mainstream Malayalam magazines that are not specifically characterized as women's magazines, nor do they have a primarily women readership/addressee. Why do they get so embroiled in the gender question with specific reference to Muslim women in the 1980s? As their very titles suggest they are invested in the nation—with a sense of pride and patriotism. It has been my contention that these magazines participate in a re-imagination and reconstitution of the nation—where an upper caste Hindu normativity automatically maps on to the modern—and this process is closely entwined with the representation of the Muslim woman as victim, as someone in need of rescue and reform.

In the first section, Islam and Muslim traditions appear archaic and anti-women. However, as we see in the second section, the debate takes a different turn when it comes to Hindu tradition. In the context of a nationalist history, tradition appears as something to be protected. While discussing women's position in public life, the relegation of women to the domestic sphere in Hindu tradition is discussed by many contributors in these magazines.

However, immediate intervention from outside actors, such as the state or political movement, is never sought or desired. In contrast, in the case of Islam and personal law, Muslim women are depicted as victims of tradition, and state intervention is called for unambiguously.

Chapter Three

DISCOURSES OF PURDAH AND NEW WOMANHOOD IN MAGAZINES FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

As I discussed in chapter two, the mainstream Malayalam media of the 1980s consistently drew on an archaic notion of Islam to suggest that personal law is regressive and that a uniform civil code is needed to fulfil the nation's secular and progressive commitment.¹⁸² In that discourse, purdah, along with polygamy and personal law, emerges as a significant tool used in the mainstream discourses to render Islam antithetical to modern values and women's freedom.¹⁸³ The sufferings of Muslim women are attributed to Islam and amplified for political ends.¹⁸⁴ It is suggested that the root cause of gender discrimination in Muslim personal law is Islam itself, and the reformation in Muslim personal law means radical rehaul in the basic principles of Islam.¹⁸⁵ In this discourse, coming out of the purdah is projected as a progressive act, a guarantee towards better public participation of Muslim women, and a sign of the social development of the Muslim community.¹⁸⁶ In mainstream discourses, doing away with the purdah is considered a precondition for Muslim women's entry into the secular public sphere.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Muhammad Faris, "Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam (change is Must for Muslim Personal Law)," *Deshabhimani*, September 11, 1983; Jameela Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal [Women in Islam]," *Deshabhimani*, October 9, 1983.

¹⁸³ O V Vijayan, "Iran Viplavam: Islaminte Punarudhanamo...? (Iran Revolution: Revival of Islam...?)," *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, December 30, 1979.

¹⁸⁴ M M Ramla Beevi, "Vekthi Niyamathinte Baliyadukal (Scapegoats of Personal Law)," *Deshabhimani*, November 13, 1983.

¹⁸⁵ Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal (Women in Islam)."

¹⁸⁶ T Devi, "Pardhayum Sthreedhavum (Dowry and Purdah)," *Deshabhimani*, April 1, 1984.

¹⁸⁷ Hameed Chennamangalloor, "Kabre Aruthu, Pardha Aavaam (Yes to Purdah, No to Cabaret)," *Deshabhimani*, September 25, 1983.

Despite this depiction in the mainstream media, the increased sight of young women dressed within Islamic norms, either in *churidar kamiz* with hijab or in *purdah*, in modern and public spaces such as schools, universities, markets, working places and sometimes driving a car or riding motorcycle, seems to demand an explanation. The eighties witnessed two seemingly contradictory phenomena among Kerala Muslim women; their increased visibility in public spaces such as educational institutions and workplaces and widespread acceptance of the *purdah* among Kerala Muslim women. The researchers often tend to see these two phenomena separately without any substantive reference to the interconnection between them. This chapter attempts to unpack these phenomena through a detailed analysis of the two women's magazines for Muslim women- *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam*, with focus on clothing-related content of the eighties and early nineties. Extensive adherence to the hijab among Kerala Muslims always has been attributed to the account of Muslim women's magazines. Also, it must be noted that various hijab brands and showrooms are major donors for these magazines. While the hijab has been assigned an almost static status in dominant discourses, as a sign of oppression and male domination, for women's magazines, the hijab has had a different trajectory. This chapter looks at clothing related contents of these magazines to arrive at a contextual understanding of the complex and shifting meanings of hijab or *purdah* in women's magazines in Kerala and how it has provided enabling narratives for Muslim women to occupy public spaces and educational institutions and workplaces.

In this chapter, I investigate the significance of contemporary veiling among Muslims in Kerala by analysing the content of *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam* on Islamic clothing in the broader context of contemporary Islamic movements in the region. What prompts Muslim women to adopt new forms of clothing at a particular time? Why have some women been willing, even eager, to adopt a practice which is branded as foreign, restrictive, extremist, and oppressive by many? In attempting to answer these questions, I argue that the reemergence

and refashioning of the purdah both affects and implies a transformation of Muslim women in Kerala, and this transformation is informed by and contributes to larger processes of social change. By attending to the discursive strategies through which women's magazines introduce and describe Islamic clothing, I attempt to show how Islamic clothing reflects an aspiration for modernity that is primarily different from mainstream modernity.

I also argue that In Kerala the growing trend among women toward wearing Islamic clothing challenges local models of modernity. Analysis of the content of Muslim women's magazines against the background of contemporary Islamic organisations reveals that discourse on Islamic clothing aims to create a new historical consciousness and a process of subjective transformation tied to more extensive processes of social change. It helps Muslim women produce themselves as modern Muslims and vision a society that distances itself from their past and dominant versions of modernity. Islamic clothing and attached values and practices link them to a concept of alternative modernity that is also conceived in contrast to Western and local models of modernity.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section looks at the role of women's sartorial practices in the Indian nationalist movement; the second section discusses the increasing practice of purdah in national and local contexts during the 1980s. It maps this process with the help of literature. The third and fourth section investigates discourses of *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam* on purdah, respectively.

Section One

Women's Clothing: Modernity, Nationalism and Communal Identities

Modern nation-building and community-building projects forced communities to alter their sartorial practices in many ways. Communities abandoned many ways of clothing and

adopted new ones to adapt to modern/national aspirations. *Sari*, as the symbol of modern Indian nationalism, emerged during the national freedom movement. Partha Chatterjee, in his article, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India”, explores how sartorial alterations played a significant role in creating an imagination of modern Indian women. He maintains that modern Indian women are rooted in Indian culture yet superior to western women, traditional Indian women, and lower-class women. It was in response to colonial condemnation of the treatment of women in India. He argues that the nationalist response was to construct a reformed tradition and defend it on the grounds of modernity. The process invested *sari*-clad women with the honor of representing a distinctively modern national culture. He says:

The dress of the *bhadramahila*, for instance, went through a whole phase of experimentation before what was known as the *brahmika sari* (a form of wearing the *sari* in combination with blouse, petticoat and shoes made fashionable in *Brahmo* households) became accepted as standard for middle-class women. Here too, the necessary differences were signified in terms of national identity, social emancipation, and cultural refinement-differences, that is to say, with the *memsahab*, with women of earlier generations and with women of the lower classes.¹⁸⁸

He continues to foreground how the spiritual purity of women is necessary to protect the spiritual core of the nation, especially at a moment when the men must venture into the material world:

Further, in this as in other aspects of her life, the spirituality of her character had also to be stressed in contrast with the innumerable surrenders that men were having to make to the pressures of the material world. The need to adjust to the new conditions outside the home had forced upon men a whole series of changes in their dress, food habits, religious observances, and social relations. Each of these capitulations now

¹⁸⁸ Partha Chatterjee, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 629.

had to be compensated by an assertion of spiritual purity on the part of women.¹⁸⁹

The nationalist movement bestowed a privileged status to the *sari* by envisioning it as a modern women's sartorial code yet rooted in Indian tradition. This move eventually made several other ways of clothing less modern and tradition-bound. In Kerala, socio-religious reform movements and subsequent modernization altered the sartorial practice of lower-caste women in a significant way. This caused *Kallumala samaram* and movement for breast covering. In all these movements, the common thread was to embrace modernity in a culturally informed way.

J. Devika in her book, *Kulastree 'yuum 'Chanthappennum' Undaayathengane? Adhunikamalayalistreekalute Charitrathinu Oru Aamugham* (The Birth of the 'Well-born' Woman and the 'Market Woman': An Introduction to the History of Malayalee Women) looks at the sartorial changes that happened among various communities in Kerala during the period of socio-religious reform movements. Though she claims that it is the history of Kerala women, she mainly focuses on the communities within the Hindu fold. Devika argues that these sartorial changes are primarily desired and designed by male reformers and colonialists in an attempt to re-arrange the figure of the women in a changing world. She argues that very few accounts demonstrate women's active participation in this change process and the changes are imposed on women stemming not from what they desire but from the aspirations and ideologies of the male reformers.

In this process, the modernized versions of sartorial practices become dominant. It became the symbol of modern Hindu womanhood and, thus, of the Indian nation itself.

¹⁸⁹ Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 629.

Bharat Mata is always imagined draped in a *sari*.¹⁹⁰ The regional variant of traditionally rooted modern femininity is the *Kasavu sari*, which is the dominant representation of women in the official documents and advertisements of the Kerala state.¹⁹¹ The adaptation of the *sari* as the official symbol of women's representation has a hegemonic impact. *Sari* becomes the uniform for working women in the formal sector. This hegemonic representation of the *sari* thus made other sartorial practices less modern and inferior. As a result, a lot of sartorial traditions were given up by different communities.

Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella note that by the twentieth century, the *sari* has gradually replaced various regional dresses to become a quintessential pan-south Asian female garment.¹⁹² However, suddenly during the eighties, a resurgence of *purdah* happened. Muslim women widely started to accept *purdah* as their sartorial choice.¹⁹³ Analyzing the sartorial content of two prominent Malayalam Muslim women's magazines, this chapter examines how *purdah* has replaced modern yet traditionally rooted *sari* in practice and discourse. Before moving on to the clothing-related content of Muslim women's magazines, in the next section, we will see how various scholars have understood this reconstruction of the *purdah* in Kerala. This will help us better understand the role of Muslim women's magazines in this process.

¹⁹⁰ Sumathi Ramaswamy, "Visualising India's Geo-Body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, no. 1–2 (February 1, 2002): 151–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/006996670203600106>.

¹⁹¹ Sharmila Sreekumar, "The Land of 'Gender Paradox'? Getting Past the Commonsense of Contemporary Kerala," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 34–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370601118966>.

¹⁹² Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, "Muslim Style in South India," *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 2/3 (2007): 1–20.

¹⁹³ Abid Saittu, "Identity, Ethics and Fashion: An Ethnography of Muslim Women's Dress Culture in Malabar, North Kerala," *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (March 2016).

Section Two

The Re-emergence of Purdah

The eighties and nineties witnessed a resurgence of hijab and veiling among Muslims worldwide.¹⁹⁴ Forceful veiling of the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran and vigorous unveiling by regimes of Egypt and Turkey followed.¹⁹⁵ This trend was not confined to Muslim-majority communities. Regions wherein Muslims are a minority, like Bulgaria and India, too witnessed the veiling movement in the same period.¹⁹⁶ Researchers have focused on various significations of hijab, such as gendered dimension, identity components, and empowering potential, as a bodily practice that shapes pious disposition. Veiling has been explained as an assertion of cultural authenticity, Islamic feminism, a sign of both resistance and submission to patriarchy, a rejection of modernity, western imperialism, and corrupt local secular regimes, and a genuine desire of women to live more piously¹⁹⁷ and practice born out of economic necessity.¹⁹⁸

In the Indian context, historically, the veil has often been identified as a religious code and a sign of segregation, and a mark of backwardness.¹⁹⁹ However, the sudden surge in Muslim women wearing the veil in the 1980s is interpreted as the result of the sudden growth of right-wing communal politics and a subsequent sense of victimhood within the Muslim community. Using ethnographic and historical data and analysing interviews with Muslim

¹⁹⁴ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁹⁵ Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Cultures* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003).

¹⁹⁶ Sameera Khan, "Negotiating the Mohalla: Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007): 1527–33.

¹⁹⁷ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁸ Nadia Fadil, "Not-/Unveiling as an Ethical Practice," *Feminist Review* 98 (2011).

¹⁹⁹ Nida Kirmani, *Questioning the 'Muslim Woman': Identity and Insecurity in an Urban Indian Locality* (London: Routledge India, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315540924>.

women across the city of Mumbai, Sameera Khan investigates Muslim women's participation in public spaces and whether wearing the veil facilitates their mobility. In other words, the author asks how and to what extent visible markers of community identity inflects women's access to public space and their ability to engage in risk.²⁰⁰ The author argues that since the Mumbai riots during the 1980s, there has been a significant increase in the number of women wearing *burqa*. This encouraged the segregation of women and limited their participation in life outside the community.²⁰¹

Purdah Wave in Kerala

Kerala also witnessed a purdah wave during the same period. An increasing number of Muslim women began to adopt the purdah as their sartorial option. The typical dress of Muslim women was a long cloth wrapped around the waist and legs to cover the lower part of the body, a blouse, and a head covering, usually a small black or white plain cloth. Ansiya Rahiman in her article, “Political Economy of Migration in Muslim Matrilineal Families of Kerala”,²⁰² observes that the purdah was not common among Muslim women in Kerala before the late seventies. *Kuppayam*,²⁰³ *Kachi*²⁰⁴, and *Thattam*²⁰⁵ were the everyday attire of Kerala Muslim women. During the late seventies and early eighties, purdah emerged as one of the ideal clothing for Muslim women. For the author, the widespread use of purdah is an essential influence of gulf migration.²⁰⁶ Abid Saitu, in his article, “Identity, Ethics and Fashion: An Ethnography of Muslim Women's Dress Culture in Malabar, North Kerala”, also argues that purdah is one among the many commodities that came to Kerala through

²⁰⁰ Khan, “Negotiating the Mohalla.”

²⁰¹ Khan.

²⁰² Ansiya Rahiman, “Political Economy of Migration in Muslim Matrilineal Families of Kerala,” *Arts & Education International Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2017): 80–87.

²⁰³ *Kuppayam* is a blouse with sleeves reaching beyond the elbow and but not covering the stomach.

²⁰⁴ *Kachi* is a cloak around the waist reaching beyond the knee sometimes till the ankle.

²⁰⁵ *Thattam* is a plain cloth that is used to cover the head.

²⁰⁶ Ansiya Rahiman, “Political Economy of Migration in Muslim Matrilineal Families of Kerala,” 85.

transcultural transactions born of Gulf migration. "Such was the volume and impact of the Gulf migration that this sartorial shift soon established as the standard dress code of the Muslim woman."²⁰⁷

According to a survey conducted in Calicut, there was a notable increase in purdah usage from 3.5 percent in 1990 to 32.5 percent by 2000.²⁰⁸ This increasing use of purdah is seen as a point of apprehension in the Kerala public sphere. According to M N Karassery, the 'purdah-craze' is a result of a deliberate attempt on the part of fundamentalists to deprive Muslim women of all progress.²⁰⁹ V.P. Suhara, president of *Nissah*, a Progressive Muslim Women's Forum based at Calicut, expressed similar concern "Clerics and orthodox organisations want Muslim women to be confined to their traditional roles in the kitchen and bedroom. The purdah provides an effective weapon to restrict their progress."²¹⁰ The current purdah wave in Kerala is viewed as an emerging threat to Kerala model of development. To cite Thomas Isaac T. M. and Michael Tharakan P. K "In the recent period, there are visible and disturbing signs of erosion of progressive attitudes on gender issues like the spread of dowry system, purdah among Muslims, degrading depiction of women in the mass media, sexual harassment, and violence."²¹¹

During the 1980s, accounts of the purdah in public debates, as well as in academic discourses, is not seen as an impact of Gulf migration. For example, M. Indu Menon, in her article, "Education of Muslim Women: Tradition versus Modernity", considers purdah as part of the tradition of Muslims of Kerala. In the article, written in 1989, based on her field studies investigating the reasons for the low participation of Muslims in school education, the author

²⁰⁷ Abid Saittu, "Identity, Ethics and Fashion: An Ethnography of Muslim Women's Dress Culture in Malabar, North Kerala," 40.

²⁰⁸ Basheer, "Malayalam Magazines Drive Women into Purdha."

²⁰⁹ Basheer.

²¹⁰ Basheer, 89.

²¹¹ Thomas Isaac T. M. and Michael Tharakan P. K., "Kerala: Towards a New Agenda," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 31/32 (1995): 2001.

argues that the presence of certain structural and institutional factors in Islam contributes to depress women's education and keep them in an inferior position. "The conservatism of parents towards the education of girls, together with the practice of purdah or seclusion, early marriage, and lack of socially defined occupational roles are the main factors hindering Muslim women's educational progress."²¹² Purdah appears in her account as one of such structural and institutional elements in Islam, a sign of conservatism and contributing to women's segregation in public spaces a practice that severely limits women's education. She posits an oppositional relationship between purdah and modernisation. The author predicates women's progress upon the practice of purdah among Muslim women becoming less prevalent. "But with the disappearance of the purdah system, this condition gradually changed. Now the number of Muslim girls going to schools and even attending mixed schools is on the increase. But the traditional attitude remains."²¹³ For Menon, the precondition for women's educational advancement is the disappearance of the purdah system. It signifies conservatism and seclusion and separation of women from public life and, thus educational backwardness of the community. However, as I have pointed out, in Menon's account, purdah is not a new sartorial element for Kerala Muslims due to Gulf migration; instead, it is part of the existing tradition of the community.

In the 1980s, there were a lot of articles and discussions on the Gulf migration, Gulf money, life in the Gulf, its impact on the domestic market, etc. in *Deshabhimani*. The effect of migration on Kerala's cultural and economic sectors was the subject of these discussions. In addition, the discussions highlighted the significant role of migrant workers' remittances in changing the material culture of Kerala. And yet, none of these articles conceptualized purdah as an impact of Gulf migration. In these discussions, purdah does not find a place in

²¹² M. Indu Menon, "Education of Muslim Women: Tradition Versus Modernity," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 10, no. 1 (1979): 83.

²¹³ Menon, 86.

the list of impacts that Gulf migration had on the socio-cultural life of Kerala. However, purdah became an important theme in *Deshabhimani's* discourse on Muslim personal law.

The recent scholarly attempts to understand the tendency of widespread acceptance of purdah among Kerala Muslims give us a more complex picture. Anthropologists Osella and Osella disagree that the purdah is an entirely new addition to Muslim dress culture due to the Gulf migration that began in the 1980s. Drawing from their anthropological expertise, Osella and Osella argue that the veil surge of the eighties had less to do Gulf boom.²¹⁴ The authors tend to see the enormous popularity of purdah during the eighties as merely a continuation of the older veiling culture with significant rapture in the sixties to eighties. However, they observe two significant differences in the new purdah wave. "First, the styles now in use are quite different from the old tent-like white purdah or black *burqa*, and secondly, contemporary veiling is indicative of a more developed consciousness towards Islam and is linked to global styles of Islamic 'decent dress' in which only the face, hands, and feet are revealed."²¹⁵

Osella and Osella concentrate on contemporary movement rather than the significance of the historical shift of the eighties that witnessed the reveiling movement among Kerala Muslims and its changed meaning. There were forms of Islamic modesty among Kerala Muslims even far before the eighties. However, the veiling movement of the eighties has two significant features left mostly unexplained by the authors. One is the large number of women suddenly started wearing hijab or the clothing that is marked as Islamic clothing, with the high popularity of hijab among the younger generation. Second, whether any changes in the meaning attached to purdah significantly changed during the eighties. Women's magazines played a crucial role in conceiving and disseminating the new meaning.

²¹⁴ Osella and Osella, "Muslim Style in South India."

²¹⁵ Osella and Osella, 11.

Julten Abdelhalim, in her work *Paradoxes of Pardha and Agency among Muslim Women in Kerala*, argues that the broader acceptance of purdah among Muslim women in Kerala is a result of a 'conspiracy' of men and the market:

Male-based cults conspired with market mechanisms to create trends that dislocated the agency of women in deciding or 'coding' their dressing style. During the last ten years, the consequent forces of social change and globalization have led to an interesting alteration in conceptions of fashion, especially in a society characterized by strong traditional rural values.²¹⁶

For the author, a trend like purdah dislocates women's agency in deciding their dressing style of dressing. Although women were not involved in determining and designing this fashion, her ethnographic research among Muslim women in Kerala revealed that the cloth, initially designed by a nexus between patriarchy and the market to displace women's agency, acted as an emancipatory tool for women to wear it. Read her ethnographic encounter with a purdah-clad student:

What is witnessed in Kerala is the constant regulation of the public space of freedom of choice within a secular democratic state. An interview respondent spoke to me about how she perceives the relationship between the dress-code and freedom on the one hand and building a model on the other hand. To her, an important question was in whose hands does legitimacy lie? "Why should we not follow the Arabs, but why should we follow the upper caste Hindus? The *sari* was never a south Indian dress. It is a northern brahminical dress. We all know that certain women in the south were allowed to wear only a piece of cloth from her waist onwards to the knee. So, is this what we are supposed to go back to wearing? (Calicut University MPhil Student, January 2011)" For her, the *sari* appeared as an imposed national dress with an upper-class Hindu identity (the cream and gold embroidered handloom *sari*). Resisting this enforced image of the Keralite woman was an important task in her fight against

²¹⁶ Julten Abdelhalim, "Paradoxes of Pardah and Agency among Muslim Women in Kerala," *Urban People/Lidé Města* 15, no. 2 (2013): 240.

casteism.²¹⁷

The author describes this seemingly contradictory result as a paradox. "The paradoxical formula where purdah was enforced as a marker of identity but had nevertheless created emancipatory tools out of the confining frameworks of traditional patriarchy as characteristic of much of *Keralite* society."²¹⁸ Here, the author sees the purdah, a sign of identity and the constraints of traditional patriarchy, paradoxically emerging as a tool of Muslim women's emancipation. The author describes this phenomenon as a paradox. Abdelhalim summarizes her ethnographic findings of what purdah means to Muslim women in Kerala as follows:

To some, *pardha* gave an opportunity to be fast and spontaneous and in many cases the housewife found in the *pardha* a tool to temporarily escape the traditional confines of class and fashion. For others, *pardha* was their access key to education and employment and while some were obliged to wear as a uniform, they still had the option to shift to any dress of their choice.²¹⁹

Abdelhalim reads purdah from the perspective that any marker of community identity is inherently a male invention that eliminates women's agency. Thus, by nature, it appears oppressive to women. However, her ethnographic encounter with women who wear the purdah in their daily lives suggests otherwise. In her ethnographic account, purdah appears to be a relatively flexible sartorial choice of women with complex significations rather than just a sign of confinement or oppression. To resolve this contradiction, the author resorts to gender paradox theory which is familiar in debates around the Kerala model of development.

²¹⁷ Abdelhalim, 254.

²¹⁸ Abdelhalim, 237.

²¹⁹ Abdelhalim, 254.

In her article, Sharmila Sreekumar explains what the ‘gender paradox’ means in the debates surrounding the Kerala model of development.

The social indices of Kerala display a gender equality that one scarcely encounters in developing regions of the world. These favourable indicators coexist with pervasive female unemployment, increasing incidence of dowry, gender violence and an escalating sense of danger in women's lives. This has baffled developmental experts and exercised many who seek to represent the predicament of women in contemporary Kerala, including feminists.²²⁰

Taking a cue from the literature that theorise gender in the context of Kerala development, Abdelhalim adopts paradox as an analytical category and conceives purdah and its implication in Muslim women's life as a paradox. She further illustrates the paradox of purdah in the life of Kerala Muslim women, especially those who embraced the reformist conception of womanhood by adopting the sartorial code prescribed by reformist organisations.

A great paradox of the reformist agenda appears. Not only do the reformist *ulema* allow women to go to mosques, but they also encourage them to do so, unlike the prevalent and dominant attitude of the Sufi (called *Sunni* in Kerala) trend to ban women from entering mosques. *Mujahids* and *Jamaati Islami* reformers stress education for girls and women (both secular and religious). Their social, cultural, and educational activities are always intermingled (both sexes are in same classrooms and same conference venues) without any physical barrier separating them. Girls are given spaces to voice their opinions through GIO (the *Jamaati Islami* Girls Islamic Organization) and MGM (The *Mujahid* Girls Movement). However, all this is performed while a strict dress code is being inscribed.²²¹

²²⁰ Sreekumar, “The Land of ‘Gender Paradox’?”

²²¹ Abdelhalim, “Paradoxes of Pardah and Agency among Muslim Women in Kerala,” 249.

Admittedly, explaining this perceived contradiction as a paradox unsettles the certainty that any community identity by default is a male design that results in the stripping of women's agency and guarantees their oppression. Mohanty C. T., in her article, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, argues that physical similarity in the veils worn by women should not lead us to conclude that the meaning of this practice does not shift according to the cultural and ideological contexts. She cites examples of veiling practices in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

For example, as is well known, Iranian middle-class women veiled themselves during the 1979 revolution to indicate solidarity with their veiled working-class sisters, while in contemporary Iran, mandatory Islamic laws dictate that all Iranian women wear veils. While in both these instances, similar reasons might be offered for the veil (opposition to the Shah and Western cultural colonization in the first case, and the true Islamization of Iran in the second), the concrete meanings attached to Iranian women wearing the veil are clearly different in both historical contexts. In the first case, wearing the veil is both an oppositional and revolutionary gesture on the part of Iranian middle-class women; in the second case it is a coercive, institutional mandate. Only through such context-specific differentiated analysis does feminist theorizing and practice acquire significance.²²²

Here my purpose is not to attempt to explore how agential purdah-wearing Muslim women in Kerala are (or are not) in adopting a sartorial code that is signified as more Islamic. Rather, I argue, taking cue from Mohanty, that attending to the particularities of purdah in Kerala frees us from the notion that purdah has a fixed universal meaning; oppression, seclusion, and confinement. Historically, purdah referred to female seclusion from the public space in general; however, this historical depiction does not guarantee that it acts similarly across cultural and historical contexts. The next section of this chapter investigates the

²²² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/302821>.

particularities of the veiling movement in Kerala by reading the clothing-related content of *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam*.

Section: Three

The Discourse of Purdah in *Aramam*

Muslim women's magazines adopted various strategies to engage with the clothing style of their readers. One of *Aramam*'s main strategies to make hijab desirable among its readers is to introduce successful women who adopt hijab and present them as representatives of the faith. For example, the third issue of its inaugural year (1985, August) contains a report on the Nairobi International Women's Conference. The reports cover significant discussions and themes of the conference²²³ Iranian women delegate to the conference, Mahin Fayas Barsh, receives special coverage in the report because of her dressing style and stance on women's clothing. The report describes her as a black purdah-clad woman. "We can maintain our cultural identity by distancing ourselves from foreign influences and Westernization. Our clothing style emphasizes comfort and practicality. For a woman, internal qualities such as thinking, faith, and chastity are more important than physical beauty."²²⁴ Here, *Aramam* presents the Islamic dress style as a move against westernization and cultural imperialism.

Aramam's October 1985 editorial is about Islamic dress.²²⁵ It uses a range of strategies in making desirable/acceptable change in clothing style, safety, modesty, anti-colonial act. It considers clothing that attracts men's gaze to be dangerous to women's safety, and such clothing is 'immodest.' The source of 'indecenty' is fashion and 'liberation.' Islamic way of dress is capable of preventing this danger. The editorial explains why Islamic clothing is

²²³ "Antharashtra Vanitha Sammelanam (International Women's Conference)," *Aramam*, September 1985.

²²⁴ "Antharashtra Vanitha Sammelanam (International Women's Conference)," 7.

²²⁵ "Editorial," May 1985.

unpopular and undesirable. It posits the westernization and imitation tendencies of colonized societies as reasons for the undesirability of purdah and hijab. The editorial suggests that Islamic dress is an anti-colonial act. It says:

Are we abandoning the modest way of clothing? It is not a wrong question if someone asks that while seeing the new turn of fashions. Dressing to attract men is bad for women, be it in the name of liberation or fashion. Indeed, we are ignorant of the fact that many western women are abandoning such sick culture. Many of them find liberation in purdah. Girls in veils are not an uncommon sight in Western universities these days.²²⁶

The magazine projects western models in arguing for the purdah, even though westernization is presented as the reason for abandoning the modest style of dress. Here, the appearance of Islamic dresses in the west is foregrounded over examples from the so-called Islamic world. The argument propagating modesty, safety, and the emergence of purdah in the west as a desirable mode of dressing for women continues to dominate several articles of *Aramam*.

Aramam's effort to develop an Islamic dress style is integrated with GIO's work in this direction. In September 1985, the GIO held a table talk on the subject, and *Aramam* produced a detailed report of the table talk. The report is entitled *Maanyamaayi Vasthram Dharikkuka* (Dress Modestly).²²⁷ Participants in this table talk are Muslim women who are part of public life either through work and education or through association with political parties. In the case of working women and politicians, *Aramam* gives details about their profession. This detailing suggests that the Islamic dress *Aramam* wishes to propagate is not a barrier to women doing any work. Such women serve as examples for readers to follow. Haseena, a

²²⁶ "Editorial," 3.

²²⁷ "Manyamaayi Vastraa Dharikkuka (Dress Modestly)," *Aramam*, October 1985.

student at Farook Training College, argues there is a connection between clothing and violence against women. She says:

Prescribing a particular dress for women is unacceptable. However, there should be general standards for clothing. It should not display our beauty. People look down on a woman who wears luxury clothes. No one will say that all attacks on women are because of their dress, but it cannot be denied that dress plays a role in such crimes.²²⁸

KM Suhra, a Mathematics teacher at Farooq High School, believes that the purdah prevents a woman from becoming an eye-warming object for men. Also, it will reduce immorality and strengthen the family structure. To quote her:

Nowadays, many women interact with men outside their families daily. They find ample opportunity to go out and engage in paid work. Moreover, the current (economic) situation calls for doing so. In this context, women should be careful about their attire. Carelessness in dressing may affect family life.²²⁹

Here the purdah emerges as a guarantee of morality and family stability, a means of going out, working, and earning. Purdah emerges as a crucial negotiating point allowing women to step out of the family and engage with the society without offending the existing structures of the family. At the same time, it calls for a restructuring of traditional gender divisions: men for bread, women for cooking.

PT Safia, a former member of a local body, tries to engage with existing stereotypes of purdah:

There is an accusation that Islamic clothing is against progress. It is a baseless allegation. A Muslim woman can do any job by wearing clothes that cover her body

²²⁸ “Manyamaayi Vastraa Dharikkuka (Dress Modestly),” 4.

²²⁹ “Manyamaayi Vastraa Dharikkuka (Dress Modestly),” 5.

except her face and hands. Women should never wear clothes that display their physical beauty. Women must hide their physical beauty from men's eyes. Only then will the actual value and culture of women be recognized and appreciated.²³⁰

In combination with Islamic clothing, Safiya's political engagement serves to represent her an active role model challenging the stereotype. The relationship between work and Islamic dress continues to receive detailed coverage in the magazine. For example, the article titled *Purdayum Thozilum* (Purdah and Job)²³¹ illustrates that purdah does not prevent women from doing any work, drawing on models from the life of Prophet Muhammad.

In the early days of Islam, women were engaged in jobs suitable to them according to availability of jobs. The Prophet encouraged it. Once Abdullah ibn Masud's wife introduced herself to the Prophet and said: "I do handicrafts, and we earn our living from it. My husband and I have no other means of income." Then the Prophet blessed her and said, "Allah will abundantly reward you."²³²

The article also mentions that one of the Prophet's wives, Zainab, used to donate the money she earned by processing animal skins to the poor around her. Hence, she was given the surname *Umm al-Masaqeen* (Mother of the Poor). The article also refers to women followers of Prophet Muhammad who participated in the wars alongside the Prophet and his male followers.

Ummu Ammara participated in the battle of Uhud. The Prophet acknowledged and appreciated her service by saying, "Ummu Ammara was there to protect me whenever I turned to the left or to the right." Ummu Hakim participated in the war against Rome and killed seven enemies. At that time, women were also involved in the field of

²³⁰ "Manyamaayi Vastraa Dharikkuka (Dress Modestly)," 5.

²³¹ "Purdhayum Thozilum [Purdah and Employment]," *Aramam*, October 1985.

²³² "Purdhayum Thozilum (Purdah and Employment)," 13.

health care. A woman named Rudaifah ran a hospital near the Prophet's mosque.²³³

The whole purpose of invoking the Prophet Muhammad's women followers and their actions outside the domain of domesticity is to propose that 'Islamic' clothing is not an obstacle to engaging in any profession, and there are enough examples from the life of the Prophet himself. These details are meant to emphasize that women's social roles outside the home have classical Islamic antecedents and are not merely modern innovations. The article continues, "Some may even wonder how these women did all these jobs or fought in battle wearing purdah. Purdah is only to cover the body except for the face and hands and not to withdraw oneself from society."²³⁴ The article concludes;

Islam does not prohibit social life of women, but Islam prohibits intermingling with the other sex freely and wearing revealing clothes. Both are two different things; one should be able to distinguish between them. Islam always embraces moderate views. It hates both extremes; confining a woman to the kitchen as a birthing machine and unrestricted mingling with men as in Western societies. Islam advocates a moderate path between two. It does not allow crossing the limit of morality.²³⁵

For *Aramam*, moderate Islam is symbolized by women's participation in public life while adhering to Islamic sartorial codes. The purdah appears as a public affirmation and symbol of her faith and religious beliefs. In addition to laying out theological justifications and logical arguments in favour of purdah and women's participation in public life, *Aramam* is careful to present models that resonate with the reader. For this purpose, the magazine introduces role models from within the readers' social contexts so that they can easily relate to them. The following part will discuss this pattern in *Aramam* in detail.

²³³ "Purdhayum Thozilum (Purdah and Employment)," 13.

²³⁴ "Purdhayum Thozilum (Purdah and Employment)," 13.

²³⁵ "Purdhayum Thozilum (Purdah and Employment)," 13.

Inspiring Role Models

The April 1986 issue carries a biographical note on Dr. Rabia.²³⁶ Dr. Rabia served as the Chief Medical Officer of Kozhikode district in the 70s. Rabia's hard work and family details are mentioned in the note. She graduated from Madras in 1953 and became an Assistant Surgeon.

She studied far away from home at a time when girls' education itself was forbidden. It is common for educated women to become materialistic and abandon their faith- in their manner of dress and comportment. But Dr. Rabia is not among them. She is happy and takes pride in dressing in the manner prescribed by Islam.²³⁷

Then the story moves to her blemish-free service record as a corruption-free officer with the state government. Apart from medical services, she writes in periodicals and mobilizes women to educate them. The note includes a photo of Dr. Rabia addressing the public in 'Islamic' attire. This note provides an exemplary model for a young reader to follow; maintain Islamic dress and demeanour in life; study well, excel in a profession, engage in social activism, and represent Islam in your professional and personal lives.

Another model that *Aramam* introduces to readers is a newly converted American woman. The story of her conversion and adoption of Islamic dress is detailed. The article is titled *Purdah Oru Nishabdha Prabhodanam* (Purdah: A Silent Message).²³⁸ The story goes like this, in the early stages of her life as a Muslim, she did not consider wearing a head scarf as essential as daily prayer or fasting during the month of Ramadan. Therefore, she decides to focus on studying and practicing other things and postpones her transition to purdah to

²³⁶ Hamsa Kadannamanna, "Sevanathinte Pathayil Dr. Rabiya (In the path of service, Dr. Rabia)," *Aramam*, April 1986.

²³⁷ Hamsa Kadannamanna, 12.

²³⁸ Kareem Umar, "Purdah Oru Nishabdha Prabhodhanam [Purdah: A silent Message]," *Aramam*, October 1985.

another appropriate time. "In an alien culture, wearing a veil may attract more attention, and in effect, wearing a veil in such a culture may go against the veil's original purpose of avoiding the male gaze."²³⁹ This was her reasoning for avoiding a shift to purdah. Though initially, she was not inclined towards purdah, she appreciates the clothing style of American Muslim women. "Some newly converted women show great courage and determination by wearing the veil."²⁴⁰ Based on the principle of 'intention is important,' she decides to wear 'modest' clothes but leave the head uncovered until she is convinced of 'Allah's rationale' behind the purdah. However, after a while, she admits that the logic of intention stems from her unpreparedness to adopt purdah. Subsequently, she believes that the female hair is an aspect of the body which attracts the male gaze, so she decides to cover it. She goes on to describe the experience her transition to wearing the scarf:

"Are you bald?" The sales girls started asking me. "She may have lost her hair due to laser treatment for cancer," some observed. "Is this the new fashion? Then the money we spend on beauty parlours will be in vain," that was some others' remark. "Don't you feel hot?" I face this common question. "No, no heat, certainly this heat is much less than the ordeal of hell," I would reply.²⁴¹

In conclusion, the author suggests that wearing the purdah is a silent way of spreading the message of Islam, as people will recognize this clothing as an expression of the religion and this eventually would lead to mutual interactions. In such exchanges, one can convey the message of Islam to the curious. In this article, the author uses different discourses to teach the relevance of purdah. First, the author asserts a religious imperative to adopt the hijab, arguing that women's hair attracts the male gaze. Secondly, she presents purdah-wearing women in western societies as courageous. Here the veiling is seen as an act of courage and

²³⁹ Kareem Umar, 18.

²⁴⁰ Kareem Umar, 17.

²⁴¹ Kareem Umar, 17.

confidence. Thirdly, by recounting the experience of different encounters with those around her as a veiled woman, she provides practical lessons for young women to deal with similar situations. Four, *purdah* appears as a visible marker of identity. Wearing it amounts to representing Islam in public. Ultimately, she brings up the concept of sin and retribution, saying that fear of God's wrath in the afterlife drives her to wear the veil. This narrative is clearly aimed to drive home the increasing relevance of the *purdah* even in western societies.

An important conversation about the Islamic dress in *Aramam* happens in the readers' notes sharing their thoughts and experiences regarding *purdah*. For example, the October 1985 issue of the magazine features a note by reader Tahira. The note is titled *Pathanam* (The fall).²⁴² It goes like this; Tahira's college mate preached her on the logic and the necessity of Islamic dress during their college days. She was initially unconvinced about the 'Islamic dress,' the *purdah*, the uniform mandated by the institute she was studying at. However, her friend's rational persuasion convinced Tahira of the significance of the Islamic dress, and she began to wear and enjoy it. After graduation, her friend married a *gulfukaaran* (literally translates as Gulf man. The word refers to a man working in a Gulf country,) and moved to the Middle East to settle there. After a long time, Tahira meets her friend by chance during a function and notices a great change in her old friend's dress and manners. The friend has abandoned the hijab and adopted a 'modern' style of dress.²⁴³ Here Gulf influence is portrayed as the 'villain'—an instrument of corruption, moving her friend away from Islamic culture and way of life. After becoming rich through Gulf migration, she adopted 'un-Islamic clothes.' This change is depicted as a *pathanam* (fall), a moral fall, a fall from the Islamic ideal to worldly materialism.

²⁴² Tahira, "Pathanam (The Fall)," *Aramam*, November 1985.

²⁴³ Tahira.

Aramam's primary project is to reinterpret the hijab/purdah_ a) by providing a working model for Muslim women and b) by offering an ideological and rational justification for adopting new forms of clothing or altering existing clothing styles as per the requirement of reimagined Islamic ideal. In these narratives purdah is presented as a unique and ideal style of dress. Notably, the attempt to create consensus in favour of purdah is carried out through different narratives and visual content rather than drawing on theological discourse and imposing a particular model. One can conclude that responding to a specific historical context that marks the greater entry of Muslim women into public life through education, employment, and at times as the head of a migrant family. *Aramam* uses Islamic clothing/hijab as a means of preserving Islamic values and as a tool to negotiate change. In the 1980s, the portrayal of the purdah in the mainstream media and public discourse in the context of the Sharia controversy portrayed purdah-clad Muslim women as symbols of conservative Islam and as backward and oppressed. So, in this context, providing alternative meanings for purdah is clearly a contingent response. *Aramam* attempts to provide purdah with this alternate signification and make it a superior sartorial choice of Muslim women enabling rather than preventing them from breaking the stereotypes regarding Islam and the status of women in Islam.

Section four

The Discourse of Hijab in *Poomkavanam*

In this section, I look at the discourse on the purdah among traditional Muslims in Kerala by reading the clothing-related content of *Poomkavanam* magazine, which represents traditional ideas. *Poomkavanam* disagrees with *Aramam's* conception of Muslim woman's clothing and its implication on two grounds. One is *Aramam's* approach which considers Purdah or sartorial conformity as the only prerequisite for women's engagement in non-

domestic roles. The second: what is appropriate for a Muslim woman's clothing- here, appropriacy is judged by the extent to which women's dress must cover body parts.

As we saw in the previous section, *Aramam* regularly publishes in the 1980s examples from early Islamic societies and contemporary societies to support an idea of Muslim womanhood. To legitimize this notion of womanhood, *Aramam* introduces women followers of the Prophet Muhammad, who was involved in warfare, trade, and crafts. Moreover, *Aramam* foregrounds models from the contemporary world, women who actively participate in public life while adhering to Islamic dress.

Poomkavanam, an initiative of Muslim traditionalists, dialogues with and responds to the idea of purdah in *Aramam* and its reframing of the traditional understanding of gender roles in the family and society. In the inaugural issue of *Poomkavanam*, in March 1988, Muhammad Musaliyar, a prominent figure of traditional *Sunni* Muslims, engages with the model offered by *Aramam*.²⁴⁴ He asks:

Did Aisha lead the battle of *Jamel* wearing a complete *hijab*? Moreover, she led the war sitting on a camel. Did Aisha lead the war like these contemporary female Islamic preachers? She led the battle in special political circumstances; Are we in such a situation now?

As Muhammad Musaliyar explains, Aisha's leadership role in the battle of *Jamel* can not be seen as a model for contemporary women to play similar roles for two reasons. One, Aisha led the war in a unusual political situation; such a situation does not exist now. Two, Aisha followed Islam's appropriate sartorial code and gender segregation norms while leading the battle. The next part of this section examines the following questions. Who are these

²⁴⁴ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, "Swathanthramaavaam, Pkashe.... (Can be Free; But.)," *Poomkavanam*, March 1988.

‘women Islamic preachers?’ What is traditionalists' criticism of their sartorial practice? What are the ideal sartorial practices traditionalists want to propagate?

Women Preachers of Islam of the Eighties: Traditionalist View on Women's Public Life

Muhammad Musaliyar's reference to ‘contemporary female preachers of Islam’ refers to the response of reformist Muslim organizations in Kerala to the socio-political contexts in the wake of the Shah Bano case and the debates about the Muslim personal law and status of women in Islam. Various Muslim organisations responded to this embattled situation in different ways. Community-run magazines were filled with discussions about various aspects of Personal law and many books were written.²⁴⁵ The *Mujahid* group, one of the reformist organisations in Kerala, began to organize women's conferences in the 1980s where speakers criticised perceived stereotypical narratives about the ‘pathetic condition’ of Muslim women that were prominent in Kerala's mainstream debates.²⁴⁶ Two Muslim women's organisations were created in this context; The Girls Islamic Organization (GIO), affiliated with the Kerala chapter of *Jamaat-e-Islami* in 1984²⁴⁷, and the Muslim Girls and Women's Movement (MGM) affiliated with the Mujahid Group in 1987.²⁴⁸

As discussed in chapter two, in the 1980s, even before the Shah Bano judgment, Muslim personal law gained prominence in Kerala's public sphere.²⁴⁹ Although the focus of debate in the initial period was on the need for a uniform civil code to unify a nation divided

²⁴⁵ V. A Kabeer, *Indian Muslinkalum Shariathum (Shariat and Indian Muslims)* (Kozikode: Islamic Publishing House., 1985); M A Abdul Kadir, *Muslinkalum Shariath Niyamangalum [Shariath Laws and Muslims]* (Kozikode: SYS Publication, 1984).

²⁴⁶ P. Shabna and K. Kalpana, “Re-Making the Self: Discourses of Ideal Islamic Womanhood in Kerala,” *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 24–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2021.2010907>.

²⁴⁷ “Girls Islamic Organisation,” accessed November 12, 2016, <https://www.giokerala.org/about.php>.

²⁴⁸ “Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen | Official Portal,” accessed November 12, 2021, <https://knm.org.in/>.

²⁴⁹ Yettumanoor Gopalan, “Eekeeekrtha Civil Niyamam Kalakhattathinte Avasyam [Uniform Civil Code is the need of the hour]”; Faris, “Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam [Change is Must for Muslim Personal Law].”

along religious communitarian lines,²⁵⁰ attention shifted to the status of women in Islam.²⁵¹ In this discourse, Islam and Muslim personal law were conceived as the main reason for the backwardness of the Muslim community²⁵² in general and Muslim women in particular.²⁵³ The Supreme Court's Shah Bano judgment and its recommendation to abolish separate religion-based personal laws and adopt the Uniform Civil Code opened up wide-ranging debate within the community and in the public sphere on personal law reform and the status of women in Islam.

As Muslim women became central to the debate in the mainstream secular discourse on Muslim personal law, reformist organizations such as the *Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen* and *Jamaat-e-Islami* began to encourage Muslim women to come to the forefront and defend Islam and Muslim personal law. Women from these reformist organisations took the leadership of women's conferences and meetings of newly formed Muslim women's organizations. They spoke in public in defence of Islam and the status of women in Islam. For example, during September-October 1985, the GIO held state-wide women's conferences as part of their *sharia* campaign.²⁵⁴ *Aramam* editorial writes, "Through these meetings, the Muslim women of Kerala declare that they will not tolerate any attempt to tamper with the Islamic *sharia*."²⁵⁵ The November 1985 issue of *Aramam* reports on the campaign with photos. All the images in the report show women leaders of *Jamaat-e-Islami* and GIO speaking to a large audience of Muslim women.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ Faris, "Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam [Change is Must for Muslim Personal Law]."

²⁵¹ Said Muhammad, "Islamile Sthreekal [Women in Islam]."

²⁵² Faris, "Muslim Vekthi Niyamathil Maattam Anivaaryam [Change is Must for Muslim Personal Law]."

²⁵³ Ramla Beevi, "Vekthi Niyamathinte Baliyadukal [Scapegoats of Personal Law]."

²⁵⁴ "GIO Shariat Pakshacharanam (Sharia Campaign of GIO)," *Aramam*, November 1985.

²⁵⁵ "Editorial," *Aramam*, November 1985, 3.

²⁵⁶ "GIO Shariat Pakshacharanam (Sharia Campaign of GIO)."

In this scheme, Muslim women assume the role of representatives and guardians of the faith. As we have seen in *Aramam*'s discourse on the purdah, this transgression of the traditional gender role of Muslim women is legitimized by drawing on examples from classical Islam. In addition, such narratives highlight the involvement of Prophet Muhammad's women companions in non-domestic roles such as war efforts or livelihoods. However, this emerging role of Muslim women as protectors and representatives of the faith is a contentious issue within the traditional discourse that *Poomkavanam* seeks to propagate and represent. Therefore, it is imperative for *Poomkavanam* to critically engage with the narratives of the *Aramam* that present Prophet Muhammad's female companions to facilitate and legitimize Muslim women's involvement in non-domestic roles.

The participation of Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha, in the battle of *Jamel* is one of the well-known examples of classical Islam used by Muslim reformists in Kerala to legitimize women's political leadership. So, K.V. Muhammad Musaliyar deals with it in the inaugural issue of *Poomkavanam* itself. He asks, "Aisha led the battle in special political circumstances; Are we in such a situation now?"²⁵⁷ According to him, Aisha's involvement in the *Jamel* war does not apply to contemporary women because, for him, the current political situation is not comparable to the situation in which Aisha was involved. However, one needs to note that the author does not entirely rule out Muslim women's involvement in non-domestic roles. However, according to Musaliyar under normal circumstances, Muslim woman must only be involved in the domestic sphere, and her participation in political affairs is only required under exceptional circumstances. The author achieves this goal by qualitatively distinguishing between the two situations and declares that Aisha's involvement in politics is unusual and cannot be mapped on to the eighties' political context.

²⁵⁷ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, "Swathanthramaavaam, Pkash.... (Can be Free; But..)," 13.

Kanthapuram A.P. Abubakar, Supreme leader of one of the prominent *Sunni* sects of Kerala, issued a similar statement restricting Muslim women's participation in recent nationwide anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests. This, too is not a blanket ban; he qualified the restriction at the end of the statement, "if women's support is required at a point of necessity, it may be sought."²⁵⁸ The regulation of women's engagement in political processes, such as protests, is not forever; instead, he suggests that it is not the right time for women to take to the streets. In the traditionalist discourse, the ban on women's engagement in the political process is not an ultimate one, but it is contingent upon the demands of the situation. In short, political activism and participation in traditional discourse is a normative role of men, while the exigencies of the case must qualify women's political involvement.

In the traditionalist discourse, the domain of women's contribution to society remains normatively child care and home management. Women should not venture into the realm of men. It will create chaos in society. Muhammad Musaliyar writes, "Both men and women have social responsibility; therefore, to fulfil them, both should travel through different paths."²⁵⁹ Although he uses the adjective 'social' before responsibility, he later clarifies that women's social responsibility is home management and child care.

Regarding women's education, he writes, "There should be a system for providing education only to women. They need to learn how to mould their roles in relation to God and their family."²⁶⁰ From the traditionalist perspective, the purpose of women's education is also tied to women's domesticity.

The Notion of Complete Hijab

²⁵⁸ Web Desk, "Sthreekal Purusanmareppole Theruviliragi Mushti Churutti Mudravakyam Vilikkaruth -Kanthapuram [Women Should not Take to the Streets Like Men; Don't Shout Slogans with Clenched Fists -Kanthapuram]," January 28, 2020, <https://www.madhyamam.com/kerala/kanthapuram-ap-aboobacker/662702>.

²⁵⁹ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, "Swathanthramaavaam, Pkashe.... (Can be Free; But..)," 14.

²⁶⁰ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, "Swathanthramaavaam, Pkashe.... (Can be Free; But..)," 14.

Muhammad Musaliyar asserts that Aisha led the Battle of *Jamel* while wearing a complete hijab, which suggests that her style of dress differs from that of contemporary female Islamic preachers, a role that *Aramam* actively encourages. He expresses his disapproval of this difference. Muhammad Musaliyar does not analyze what a complete hijab is in the article. However, subsequently, clothing-related content of the latter issues of the *Poomkavanam* repeatedly engage with and endorse the complete hijab. For example, In the December 1988 issue, O.M. Tharuvana writes about his visit to Aurangabad.²⁶¹ In the article, he appreciates Muslim women's style of clothing in Aurangabad. "Their style of clothing is comparatively better than that of Kerala Muslims. Men of all castes wear the Gandhi cap. *Pyjama* and *Kurta* are the normal attire for men. *Purdah* is common among women. Women of all religions cover their heads."²⁶² Here the author favours the *Purdah* of Aurangabad women over the conventional clothing style of Kerala Muslim women. The author compares and contrasts the sartorial practices of Muslim women in Kerala and Aurangabad and validates that the latter is superior, ideal, and more Islamic.

Nisaminte Nattile Sundarikal (Beauties of Nizam's land), an article published in the November 1988 issue, explains why the sartorial practice of Muslim women outside Kerala is said to be better than that of Muslim women in Kerala.²⁶³ The article is about the sartorial practice of Muslim women in Hyderabad. The author, Usman Kakkad, starts the article by saying, "Here is good news for women who wear *burqa*, a rare sight seen only in northern Kerala. Here are the beauties of Nizam's land with you." Because;

Purdah is a fashion among Hyderabad Muslims. They are not those who do not see the world nor are they old. They enjoy high status in society. From pre-university to

²⁶¹ M. O. Tharuvana, "Melkoorayillatha Jeevithangal (Roofless Lives)," *Poomkavanam*, December 1988.

²⁶² M. O. Tharuvana, 7.

²⁶³ Usman Kakkad, "Nisaminte Nattile Sundarikal (Beauties of Nizam's land)," *Poomkavanam*, January 1989.

MA and MPhil, *burqa*-clad women are a common sight at Osmania University. These girls know what *purogathi* (progress) is and what *parishkaram* (reform) is, and they wear full-body *burqa* when they go out.²⁶⁴

The author notes, "Many of our girls believe that to achieve a modern appearance, they should showcase some of their beauty."²⁶⁵ He brings examples from Nizam's land to represent 'right' model of womanhood to his readers. In this model, women inhabit modern spaces such as universities but do not feel pressure to display their bodies. So, he encourages *Poomkavanam* readers to wear *burqa*, the face veil: 'you do not have to feel like an old-worlder' among the girls who think they need to 'show off a little of their body' to get a modern look because *Hyderabadi* women inhabit modern spaces wearing purdah and face veils. For them, it is not an outdated practice but a contemporary fashion. So, women who wear *burqa* in Kerala should not think of it as an ancient custom or that those who practice it belong to an older generation who are not exposed enough to modernity. Purdah-wearing women in Hyderabad are presented as ideal not just because they wear the *burqa* when they go out in public. But they become ideal as they use the purdah in places like Osmania University and study in programs like MA and M Phil. "Be it purdah, *churidar*, or *sari*; sisters should know that any outfit that does not cover the entire female body, including the face and hands, is not a full hijab."²⁶⁶ Irfani defines what a full hijab is in his article; for him, the entire female body, including the face and hands, must be covered.

Conclusion

²⁶⁴ Usman Kakkad, 29.

²⁶⁵ Usman Kakkad, 29.

²⁶⁶ Salahudheen Irfani, "Nammal Purdah Dharikkumpol (When we wear purdah)," *Poomkavanam*, June 2009.

Purdah has always been a center of debate in Kerala public discourses. For the mainstream intelligentsia, purdah is sign of oppression and regression. Malayalam popular films, novels, etc., largely carry the same notion and representation. In such representations, a Muslim woman is accepted when she breaks/challenges the practice of purdah. This chapter critically reads two prominent Muslim women's magazines to know how these magazines place purdah at the center of discussion, and construct a parallel modernity through the practice of purdah. The chapter looks at how these magazines define purdah from their ideological background. The analysis shows that both magazines lead their readers to envision the purdah as a mode of resistance and a tool for empowerment. However, one can see subtle but significant differences in their content. *Poomkavanam's* normative ideals of clothing differ from that of *Aramam* in two aspects. First, the difference lies in the mode of clothing. The proper dress for women is the full hijab, which means women must cover their entire body, including their face, hands, and feet while *Aramam* does not stress on full hijab. Second, although sartorial codes mediate women's entry into the public in both magazines, the implications are different. *Aramam* encourages women's entry into the public and portrays them as the public representative of the faith. For *Poomkavanam* women's entry into public spaces can only be secondary to domestic life or sometimes that is necessitated by domestic contingencies. As we have seen in the earlier section, women performing in public life are well appreciated in *Aramam* and presented as a role model to readers in its purdah-related discussions.

Chapter Four

SHIFTING GENDER ROLES: DEBATES IN MAGAZINES FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

The previous chapter shows how Muslim women's magazines aimed to cultivate a new historical consciousness and subjective transformation process that is tied to a substantive mode of social change. The magazines assist Muslim women in developing themselves as modern Muslims with a vision of a society that differs from mainstream notions of modernity. The discursive strategies to introduce and describe Islamic clothing is one way to introduce this alternative modernity. In other words, *Aramam* was providing an alternative way of being modern for Muslim women, which is different from both the secular and traditional religious norms of participating in public.

This chapter examines how these magazines deal with the turbulences that the reshaping of Muslim womanhood in the eighties may have had in domestic spaces. And how new notions of Muslim womanhood in the eighties called for a reconfiguration of domestic spaces to enable Muslim women to pursue new aspirations. To assume the role of representative of the community in public spaces by wearing Islamic dress requires a significant investment of time. To assume positions in public life, one has to develop a number of skills; modern education, professional training, and leadership skills to take a leading role in various arenas of the organization. *Aramam*'s women readers actively encouraged embarking on such initiatives; this constitutes a remarkable difference from their internal other, the traditionalist *Sunni* women. This time women are removed from the domestic work they engaged in earlier. This demands a rearrangement in the present family

regime. This chapter explores how *Aramam* conceives this rearrangement through a reading of content related to domestic roles and women's work.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines how gender roles are conceptualized in the writings of Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, an Islamic movement in the Indian subcontinent. The second section investigates the discourse on gender roles in *Aramam*. Finally, the third section examines the gender role discourses in *Poomkavanam*.

Section one

Women in Abul Ala Maududi's View

Before going into the details of how contemporary Muslim women's magazines responded to these new aspirations and subsequent pressures to reorganize the domestic space, it is essential to look at how its founding figure conceptualized gender roles. Therefore, in this section, I will explore gender from the views of Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*.

Maududi was born on September 25, 1903, in Aurangabad, Hyderabad State. He grew up in pre-partition India in a religious family. He founded *Jamaat-e-Islami* in 1941 and sought the establishment of an Islamic State.²⁶⁷ The loss of Muslim power to the British prompted Maududi's appeal. Before establishing *Jamaat* Maududi backed the Indian National Congress and produced biographies of Gandhi and Hindu nationalist leader Madanmohan Malaviya. He was the editor of the magazine *Muslim*, the Urdu organ of *Jamiatul-Ulema-e-Hind*; an Ulama group affiliated with the Congress. In the late 1930s, Maududi became

²⁶⁷ Ifran Ahmad, "Islam and Politics in South Asia," The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics, November 8, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195395891.013.0021>.

disillusioned with Congress's nationalism because of its privileging of Hindus over Muslims.²⁶⁸ He saw the League as a carbon copy of the Congress because both parties cherished the idea of a secular state. He referred to future Pakistan as an 'infidel state of Muslims' since the Muslim League did not seek to construct a *sharia*-based state. To Maududi, secular democracy was haram (forbidden) because it replaced divine sovereignty with human sovereignty.²⁶⁹

By establishing *Jamaat* he aimed the restoration of a pure, uncontaminated Islam. The separation of men and women is central to Maududi's notion of 'uncontaminated' Islam. Thus, reinventing the 'uncontaminated' necessarily meant a strict gender regime with a defined roles for role men and women as the 'moral deterioration of women,' according to Maududi, was a primary reason for the decline of various human nations.²⁷⁰

In his book *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, he provides justifications for sex segregation, with women clearly located in the homes for men's moral authority over women, and the impossibility of eradicating social distinction among men and women.²⁷¹ He claimed that these divisions were part of a greater moral framework whose failure would have disastrous moral, spiritual, and civilizational consequences. To make this point, he provides gruesome details of Europe's 'moral degeneracy' and sexual chaos. Maududi refers to western authors to explain these alterations in morality, and to make the point that human attempts to reconfigure the moral limit set by God to reorganise society met with catastrophic results. To document the evolution of morality in European society, he extensively uses works of his contemporary European writers such as Edith Houghten Hooker's *Laws of Sex*

²⁶⁸ Ahmad.

²⁶⁹ Ahmad.

²⁷⁰ Syed Abul 'Ala Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1979), 24.

²⁷¹ Humeira Iqtidar, "Conservative Anti-Colonialism: Maududi, Marx and Social Equality," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 2 (July 2021).

(1921), Paul Bureau's *Towards Moral Bankruptcy* (English translation, 1930), Ben B. Lindsey's *Revolt of the Modern Youth* (1924) and George Ryle Scott's *A History of Prostitution from Antiquity to the Present Day* (1936).²⁷²

Maududi termed Western civilization an 'epidemic' and argued that Muslim men are mimicking it by promoting values antithetical to *sharia*.²⁷³ They urged women to leave their 'natural' space—their homes. Maududi considers this free mixing of men and women in public spaces such as the council, bazaar, college, theatre, restaurant, etc., a huge threat to morality. Art, literature, music, film, dance, and the use of makeup by women: were all signs of immorality.²⁷⁴ Though both Muslim men and women embrace the 'epidemic' - western culture, acceptance of women, for Maududi, is fatal as he considers women as the last refuge where Islam's culture might be preserved. He writes: "*Harem* is indeed the mightiest fortress of Islamic culture, built so that Islam could seek shelter there if it were ever defeated."²⁷⁵ Maududi uses *Herem* to mean both women and space, guarded and segregated. Maududi was very concerned about the impact of Western ideas and practises on Indian Muslims, and he held his harshest criticism for those who had succumbed to the West. One can see similar eager attempts to 'protect' women from westernisation by other contemporary Islamic reformation movements.²⁷⁶ Maududi devoted a significant share of his book *Purdah* to elaborate mechanisms for safeguarding families and women from the powerful attack of westernisation on Muslims.

²⁷² Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.

²⁷³ Irfan Ahmad, "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress': Jamaat-e-Islami's Changing Discourse on Women," *Modern Asian Studies* 42 2, no. 3 (2007): 549–75.

²⁷⁴ Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.

²⁷⁵ Abul A'la Maududi, *West Versus Islam* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2006).

²⁷⁶ Barbara Metcalf, "Women and Men in a Contemporary Pietist Movement: The Case of the Tablighi Jamaat," in *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women's Activism and Politicized Religions in South Asia*, ed. Basu Amrita and Patricia Jeffery (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), 107–21. And Faisal Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform, 1857–1900," in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State. Delhi: Kali for Women*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994).

Hence, if circumstances are to be the arbitrator, the conditions prevailing in India demand that the law of *Purdah* should be strictly enforced rather than relaxed. For the two pillars supporting our Social System have already been pulled down, and now the entire system stands only on the third one.... Therefore, let us not weaken *Purdah*, which is a bulwark against the sexual anarchy, especially of the present age.²⁷⁷

Acceding to Maududi, there are three pillars of Islam, moral purification, punitive laws, and preventive measures.²⁷⁸ The whole Islamic system is based on these three pillars. Muslims lost the first pillar, moral purification, due to their exposure to westernisation. They lost the second pillar—punitive laws—as colonial jurisprudence overthrew the sharia-based criminal laws and implemented the western legal system through the might of state power. So he is passionate about battling for safeguarding the third one, the ‘last standing’ of the Islamic way of life; preventive measures. “Obviously, both these pillars have been demolished. Now the whole superstructure of the Social System of Islam rests only on one pillar. Do we then intend to pull it also down?”²⁷⁹ To protect Islam from westernisation it is inevitable to activate preventive measures, and strict enforcement of gender segregation detailed in his work *Purdah* was the foremost among the preventive measures. Maududi’s notion of the principle of preventive measures stems from the cultural pressure of the colonial context. The next session outlines women’s role in Maududian understanding.

So, for Maududi, the decline of Greeks was a result of its women’s unlimited freedom and subsequent sexual anarchy. Western Christianity responded to it with stringent laws which rendered women as mere sexual objects without human dignity. This led to the decline of western Christianity. Same in the case of Indian civilisation. Maududi maintains that Islam holds a middle path between these two extremes by conferring both human dignity and

²⁷⁷ Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*, 98.

²⁷⁸ Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.

²⁷⁹ Maududi.

human right to women. The following part looks into the status of women as per Maududian ‘middle path’ of Islam.

Gender Role: in Maududi’s Perspective

Through his various writings, Maududi argued for the segregation of sexes in the public sphere, the home as women’s natural space, and its management as the responsibility of women and men’s moral authority over women.

In this organization, the woman has been made queen of the house. Earning a living for the family is the responsibility of the husband, while her duty is to keep and run the house with his earnings.”²⁸⁰ And people enamoured of ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’ cannot sincerely follow a religion that prohibits the respectable women from becoming society women, which inculcates *haya*- modesty, and chastity, and which forbids the queen of the house to become the ‘object of beauty’ for others outside the house.²⁸¹

He argued that historically in the West, being the wife is an embarrassment, while being the husband is not. Therefore, women are honoured when they engage in men’s jobs. However, men taking up household jobs are always looked down upon. Based on this premise, he argues that the West has not honoured women simply because they are women. According to him, Islam alone accomplished this by giving women pride in their natural site in society and civilization.²⁸²

In Maudidi’s view roles of men and women are very clear, well defined, and, most importantly, non-interchangeable. And any alteration in such an arrangement would cost the decline of civilisation itself. So, following this strict gender code is pre requisite for

²⁸⁰ Maududi, 98.

²⁸¹ Maududi, 128.

²⁸² Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.

rebuilding Islamic order in modern times, the crux of Maududi's, and thus *Jamaat's*, mission. In this schema women's education is inevitable, only to make her equipped to perform her gender role in a better way that satisfy the modern expectations.²⁸³

It, however, recognises a difference in the type of education meant for the man and woman, respectively. From the Islamic point of view, the right sort of education for woman is that which prepares her to become a good wife, good mother, and good housekeeper. Her sphere of activity is the home. Therefore, she should be trained primarily in those branches of knowledge that make her more useful in that sphere.²⁸⁴

Education is thus meant to perfect her in the role of mother and housewife, indicating that education for getting employment is undesirable. Other non-domestic sciences are for men and a few exceptionally bright women.²⁸⁵ He maintains that the Islamic civilization segregates men and women and employs them respectively for naturally assigned responsibilities, affording them equal opportunities to attain success, honour, and progress in their own natural spheres.²⁸⁶ Maududi does not endorse women's political role as the home is a natural space for them. He believed that if a woman became the ruler, it would be disastrous. The *Jamaat* was the first to grant women membership in the organisation.²⁸⁷ In organisations like the *Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind*²⁸⁸ and the *Tablighi Jamaat*,²⁸⁹ which were founded on Islam, women were not allowed to join. The constitutionally designated role of

²⁸³ Women's right to education was one of major contestation in India during early twentieth century socio-religious movements of both Hindus and Muslims. The major contestation was about education leading to Westernization of Indian women. This concern was expressed by a range of thinkers and reformers during that period.

²⁸⁴ Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*, 100.

²⁸⁵ Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.

²⁸⁶ Maududi, 103.

²⁸⁷ Ahmad, "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress': Jamaat-e-Islami's Changing Discourse on Women."

²⁸⁸ *Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind* is the oldest and largest socio-religious organization of Indian Muslims. It was founded in 1919. M

²⁸⁹ Tablighi jamaat was founded in 1926 in Mewat, India by Moulana Muhammad Ilyas. The movement's primary purpose is to encourage Muslims everywhere to be more religiously observant.

Jamaat's women members is to propagate Islam's ideals among women and families.²⁹⁰ Their organisational roles are also confined within the realm of family.

He considered the female body a source of *fitna* and a hindrance to attaining the high standards of civilization. The sight of an unveiled woman outside her home in public is a visual sin that incites a sexual storm in men, which leads to the ultimate sin—copulation. Maududi's insistence on women's confinement to the home stemmed from his idea that their introduction into the public arena promoted immorality, which, he claimed, was responsible for the decline of a once-mighty nation like Greece.²⁹¹

Section Two

Work, Domestic role, *Aramam*

This section looks into how *Aramam* deals with the rising aspiration of Muslim women to assume roles outside the domestic sphere and how it transforms traditional gender roles within the family to facilitate such ambitions. *Aramam* negotiates between this aspiration and its commitment to maintaining the consistency of the family as an institution. The question of women's work was a concern for *Aramam* from its inception. It carried various articles directly discussing women's employment in the initial year itself. Its depiction of purdah as a means of opening out ways for women to negotiate public spaces has been time and again debated in the magazine. I have discussed this in the earlier chapter. In this section, I look at the discourse on women's work and subsequent challenges and changes in domestic spaces as a matter of contestation in the *Aramam*. This section examines how these contestations develop in the *Aramam* and what are the different positions it adopts.

²⁹⁰ Ahmad, "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress': Jamaat-e-Islami's Changing Discourse on Women."

²⁹¹ Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam*.

In *Aramam*, one finds recurring themes that reflect the anxieties around women getting away from the traditional domestic roles such as child care, while there is also content that encourages women to engage in social activism. Articles attempting to influence and change male behavior in the domestic space that would lead them to ease women's overburden in the domestic spaces are there in the magazine simultaneously and even in the same issues.

This section draws on three seemingly contradictory discourses surrounding women's work and elaborates their implications for understanding the concept of women's work and domesticity in this magazine. First, texts discourage women from engaging in wage labor at the expense of family life. Second, the texts urge working women to balance work and family life through their efforts. Third, texts call for transformation in the traditional role of men in the family. Are these three independent discourses that do not feed each other? Or are all three serving a common purpose? If so, what are they?

Concerns about Children

One of the recurring contents of *Aramam* is articles on the negative impact of women's employment opportunities on the upbringing of the younger generation. Such narratives place childcare as the primary responsibility of women in the family. They share concerns about children's mental and physical well-being in the absence of women in families where women go to work. Although child care is traditionally considered women's job, the particular context of Gulf migration further contributes to this concern. J Devika argues that labour migration to the Persian Gulf from Kerala from the 1970s has been a significant flow that has impacted all aspects of life in the state.²⁹² The nature of women's responsibilities changed from caregiver to supervisor overseeing children's education. Turning towards the global job

²⁹² Devika, "Women's Labour, Patriarchy and Feminism in Twenty-First Century Kerala."

market, seeking economic and social upward mobility by large sections of *Malayalis* has transformed the nature of women's domestic responsibilities. This transformation resulted in decreeing women's participation in the labour market in Kerala. Devika writes:

In recent decades, the Malayalee family has been drawn closer to the global market: the affective labour of (mainly) the mother, along with the parents' material investment in education and training of children, plays a central role in converting them from 'raw labour power' to saleable skilled labour. In any case, even a preliminary inquiry into the educational network in present-day Kerala would reveal that now there is an entire apparatus—in which homes, schools, tuition centres, skill-building programmes, coaching classes, self-financing and government institutes of technical education, placement centres, and the regulatory machinery of the government form interconnected sites and nodes—which is now fully entrenched in our growing market economy.²⁹³

In this context, where the nature of women's responsibilities has changed from a caregiver to a supervisor overseeing children's education, *Aramam* engages and contributes to this process by publishing content that helps women better manage their children's education by informing them of new opportunities and techniques. This is one of the pedagogical tasks such community-based magazines are engaged in contemporary times. One of the recurring themes related to women's work in *Aramam* is the anxiety that women's work will have a negative impact on the upbringing of the younger generation. Such narratives encourage women to prioritize children's well-being over their own career.

For example, the March 1988 issue of *Aramam* contains an article, *Udyogam Bharikkunna Ammamaar: Anadatham Perunna Kunjungal* (Working Mothers: Orphaned Children). The article shares concerns about the children of working women and suggests that women's work negatively affects the well-being of children. For the author, Nadiya,

²⁹³ Devika, 91.

children's psychological well-being depends on the mother's availability at home. Therefore, the author urges women to prioritize the well-being of their children over their careers, as women's employment leads to their unavailability at home.

Children are the biggest losers in this situation. Studies indicate that 75% of children of working parents suffer from psychological problems. Working mothers' guilt about not paying enough attention to their children leads them to give their children more gifts and sweets. Such habit causes health problems. But no one seems to be concerned about its health impact or whether the child is satisfied with these gifts or not. This leads to a hard and rough childhood.²⁹⁴

The article then presents the sufferings of Beena, a working woman, and her children as a case study. Her busy schedule and lack of time to spend with her children are depicted in detail. We can see a similar narrative in *Oru Udygasthayue Diary*²⁹⁵ (Diary of a working woman), written by P Vathsala, a famous Malayalam literary figure. This story also paints the daily routine of the working woman by portraying her double burden and her inability to maintain work and home together.

Nadiya tries to show that the working women's income will not contribute to the family's prosperity as the lion's share of the working women's income is spent on additional expenses like the maid, tuition, babysitter, etc. in order to make up for their non-availability in the household. The purpose of the argument is to suggest that women's work is not as economically viable as many people would tend to think. The article reminds the readers of the possibility of child abuse by a babysitter or maid. The article warns that such abuse can have a long-term impact on a child's life. "Children will carry it for a long time; they may

²⁹⁴ Nadiya, "Udyogam Bharikkunna Ammamaar: Anadatham Perunna Kunjungal [Working mothers: Orphaned Children]," *Aramam*, March 1988, 4.

²⁹⁵ P Vathsala, "Oru Udygasthayue Diary," *Aramam*, May 1986.

take revenge on family and society.”²⁹⁶ In the concluding passage, author Nadia provides a possible solution to this problem.

Mothers need to have proper awareness of the problem. Be willing to take the middle ground. Choose wisely. If you have kids requiring more care, it is better to choose flexible work or part-time jobs. A mother's primary concern should be her baby's happiness, comfort, health, safety, and well-being. Everything else is secondary. She should set herself as a mother first, and being a professional should be only a second priority.²⁹⁷

While Nadia is not against women's employment in principle, she is concerned about its impact on children. In her account, it is women's responsibility to address this concern. The solution she suggests is that women prioritize the well-being of their children over their careers.

Women's Employment: Burden or Liberation?

In the second chapter, we discussed how working women are valorized, and the housewife status is often looked down on as undesirable. *Aramam* responds to such a notion of women's work. The editorial of the February 1986 issue of the magazine reads:

Are the promising slogans of feminism and women's equality losing their appeal? Today, more and more women realize that slogans that women of an era thought were beautiful and exciting are deceptive. Not just conservatives think so, but even leading figures women's liberation like Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer have backslidden (or should I say advanced?) on their positions. There is a growing trend among women in the West to leave even high-paying jobs and return to the traditional responsibilities of motherhood and domestic affairs. Their remorseful expressions of regret are remarkable. Illusions of liberation got them their careers, but the opposite

²⁹⁶ Nadiya, “Udyogam Bharikkunna Ammamaar: Anadatham Perunna Kunjungal [Working mothers: Orphaned Children].”

²⁹⁷ Nadiya, 5.

happened. They lost their peace of mind as working hours increased and leisure time decreased, and they were subjected to various forms of exploitation. Realizing that the condition of the 'liberated' woman was worse than that of the old 'housewife', the return journey began. Not only in the West, Indian cities like Bombay are also witnessing the same trends. Increasing numbers of working women are quitting their jobs and returning home. In the context of these women's experiences, this issue includes an article revisiting old slogans. We welcome open comments from readers.²⁹⁸

The editorial is followed by an article entitled *Mochanathin Bharam* (The Burden of Liberation) by VK Rabiha, who is a frequent contributor to the early issues of *Aramam*. “Come out of your homes and step forward as men along with men. All you have to lose are dirty kitchen clothes. It was one of the catchy slogans of the modern women's liberation movement that gave birth to a new class of women.”²⁹⁹ The author examines the outcome of this slogan and movement. She argues that while women have gained access to jobs traditionally held by men, they have had to compromise on many other things. It resulted in losing the peace and tranquility of their lives.³⁰⁰ Rabeeha argues that in difficult economic circumstances, one may find women's employment necessary and even desirable, but one cannot consider it as the source of equality between sexes.

Rabeeha introduces the reader to a 'new' discourse on women's jobs in feminist circles in the West. She claims, "Rethinking (regarding women's paid work) began in the United States, where the feminist movement began.”³⁰¹ To substantiate the point, she quotes a letter of American woman who resigned from a well-paid job. The letter is taken from a Bombay-based popular magazine's article, *The Trap Called Working Woman*. The letter

²⁹⁸ “Editorial,” *Aramam*, February 1988.

²⁹⁹ V K Rabeeha, “Mochanathinte Bharam [Burden of Liberation],” *Aramam*, February 1986, 4.

³⁰⁰ Rabeeha.

³⁰¹ Rabeeha.

describes her decision to quit her job and rest, and how her family and people around her reacted to that decision. The American woman laments that it has become impossible for the 'liberated woman' to rest unless she has reasons such as pregnancy, old age or illness. She testifies that she has not been able to enjoy her family life due to her long career. So she decides to quit her job and become a housewife.

Then, Rabeeha argues that working women get less resting time than their male counterparts. She substantiates this argument by drawing from a paper presented at the Nairobi international women's conference in 1985 on statistics of working/leisure hours per week for men and women. Rabeeha shows that men get an average of thirty-four hours of leisure per week while working women get only twenty-four hours. While men spend only eleven hours a week on household chores, working women spend thirty-one hours a week.³⁰² So she argues that the idea of women going to work outside the home is against women's equality as they have to work longer hours than men. The author also cites some anecdotes from 'Bombay magazine' describing the experiences of women who quit their jobs. These narratives have two tropes, an account of the calm they feel after the resignation and the family's reaction to the resignation. "The reaction of their husbands and children made them realize they were treated as money-making machines. No one applauded their decision, instead, their concern was the financial loss caused by the resignation."³⁰³ With this introduction, the author goes on to the central argument of the article:

Everyone will agree that the female anatomy cannot engage in strenuous and prolonged work. Therefore, as in any traditional society, it can be understood that it is more in harmony with nature for the man to work and the woman to take care of the house. How can it be called gender equality when women get more work than men

³⁰² Rabeeha.

³⁰³ Rabeeha, "Mochanathinte Bharam [Burden of Liberation]," 4.

and less rest than them?³⁰⁴

Rabeeha describes how difficult it is for women to go to work during their menstrual cycle and pregnancy. Such problems that women face foregrounds that it is the man's responsibility to work for the family and the woman's responsibility is to look after the family. She maintains that working women have less free time. Thus, women's employment, in effect, leads to gender inequality. If women do not go to work and take care of the family, women and men get equal rest time. The author suggests this combination, Men as breadwinners and women as housewives, is the best natural combination to maintain equality between the sexes. The author concludes the article by asking the readers to actively think and reflect about the concerns she raised in the article.

In this article, the author put forward the following arguments. First, engaging in a job does not automatically translate into women's liberation; rather, it leads to the burdening and exploitation of women. Second, engaging in a career makes women less equal to men as she gets fewer resting hours than men since she must manage domestic chores too. So it leads to inequality between sexes. Third, a woman's reproductive functions complicate her availability for work all the time. Based on these arguments, she concludes that a woman's natural place is home. The experience of American women is referred to as a sign of validation for her arguments.

Rabeeha critiques the idea of work as liberation rather than the women's work itself. In the article, she clarifies that women engaging in employment is a done question in the modern world. She does not think going back is possible in this regard, especially at a time of high inflation. Her position becomes clearer when she explains the advantages of joint families over nuclear families. Her article reads: "There are many practical benefits to

³⁰⁴ Rabeeha, 4.

women in a joint family; household work will be divided among women. If the husband is caught up with the busy job, the wife will not have to live alone. Working women need not have to worry too much about children.”³⁰⁵ In short, the author treats working women as a reality, their comfort in the family should be discussed, and she contests the liberatory potential of women's work.

Experience of American women and statistics of gender-based rest/work hours are drawn to show that men have not assumed traditionally female roles at home to the same extent that women have taken on historically male occupations. Based on this premise, she argues that the increase in women's employment is less a shift in the division of labour in the family; but an expansion of women's roles to include breadwinning. She maintains that, in such situations, the notion that work can emancipate women is a false promise. In her account, women's employment is not liberation for women but a burden.

Rabeeha bases her argument on strict gender role division in the family without anticipating any flexibility. For her, the resolution is to conform to existing gender division in the family rather than attempting to mend it. Instead of correcting existing notions of gender division in the family, her proposition is to conform to it; especially since American women have already failed in fixing it. However, in the following issues, *Aramam* chooses to publish readers' responses in favor of women's employment, presupposing a more flexible notion of the gender-based division of roles in the family. The following part looks at such narratives.

Reader's Takes on Rabeeha's Article

As evident in the February issue's editorial and Rabeeha's article, *Aramam* intends to engage with women's work and its implications for women's lives and family functioning.

³⁰⁵ V K Rabeeha, “Cheriya Kudumbam Santhushta Kudumbamo? [Are small families Happy Families ?],” *Aramam*, May 1986.

The May 1986 editorial declares that the issue's content includes readers' criticism of Rabeeha's article. It also encourages more readers to write their views on the topic.

Therefore, this issue features reader notes under the heading *Charcha: Mochanathinte Bharam* (Discussion: Burden of Liberation).

Rukhiya Umar writes, "If someone feels it is burdensome to leave home and try to solve the problems of the community or to ease the economic stress of the family a little, let us leave them alone."³⁰⁶ In her opinion engaging in employment is not about burden or liberation but rather an attempt to contribute to easing the family and community life. For her the American women in Rabeeha's accounts are not role models. "Let them live in the comfort of their life with their dogs and ice creams. Do we forget the realities we see because the founding movement has retreated or the popular weekly has published something?"³⁰⁷ She asks the readers to make decisions informed by their material conditions. To clarify her point, Rukhiya narrates a couple's life story.

There is a woman I have known for a long time. She and her husband leave home every morning after completing their household chores on time. The husband has to go to Kalikavu and the wife to Payyanad, a place six kilometers away from their home. This journey is not to enjoy the morning sun or the beauty of the dawn but to cut the bark of the rubber tree to 'liberate' latex and thus reduce the 'burden' of the rubber tree. She- the tapping worker- knows that as she works hard, her family's financial burden is reduced accordingly. Returning from work at eleven o'clock, the couple relaxes on wooden chairs and sofas, though not in the luxury of a sofa set decorated with stitched flowers. They pray regularly five times. They often enjoy those joyful moments with their grandchildren and pets. They may not know about socialist or imperialist blocs, but they seem to know one thing: about the collective responsibility of the family. Rather than seeing it as the 'burden' of liberation, should

³⁰⁶ Rukhiya Umar, "Charcha: Mochanathinte Bharam [Discussion: Burden of Liberation]," *Aramam*, May 1986, 18.

³⁰⁷ Rukhiya Umar, 18.

we not see it as the aesthetic of liberation?³⁰⁸

The reader perceives gender roles as flexible in this account. Both domestic chores and breadwinning appears to be the collective responsibility of both men and women. Gender roles are depicted as flexible and interchangeable. Women's work is considered a contribution to the family and the community. The author attempts to create a contemptuous view of American women's worldview of life described in Rabeeha's narrative, suggesting that their worldview is based on personal satisfaction and a sense of self-accomplishment. Regarding feminine vulnerability in public places, she writes;

The concern is what will happen to our dignity if we get on a slightly overcrowded bus. Should we run away from our responsibilities by following such childish reasons? Or respond firmly and boldly to the realities we see around us? The woman in Bombay magazine laments that "I have never experienced the taste of life"; we must read such lines along with the luxuries she enjoys in her home, which are not mentioned in her account. I am not saying that women should occupy the street just to create optics. However, only women can prove the fact that they are not weak.³⁰⁹

Job and Domestic Duties: A Balance

Other recurring contents related to female work are narratives that idealize women striking the right balance between professional commitments at work and household chores at home. For example, the April 1988 issue of the magazine contains an article entitled.³¹⁰ The article features the life of Dr. Aisha Guharaj, a Retired Principal of Calicut Medical College. Her ability to balance her familial role and professional commitments is the story's highlight. A list of her success includes her children's professional education and career success. To

³⁰⁸ Rukhiya Umar, 18.

³⁰⁹ Rukhiya Umar, 18.

³¹⁰ Sameeha, "Dr Aisha Guharaj," *Aramam*, April 1988.

borrow J Devika's phrase, her ability to transform her children from "raw labourers to saleable skilled workers"³¹¹ is depicted as an important achievement a woman should be proud of.

The first part of the article describes Dr. Aisha's family background in detail. "It is a traditional family; her father is rigid that the women in the family alone should do all the domestic work. So, she is exposed to all domestic work, including child care and cleansing utensils."³¹² Her professional growth and success and her ability to balance her domestic role and professional commitment occupy a considerable space in the write-up.

Her family is traditional; her father does not like engaging maids at home for domestic work. He always insists that the women in the family should do the household chores. So, from a young age itself, she is familiar with all the household chores, including taking care of the children and cleaning the dishes.³¹³

Dr. Aisha's acquaintance with housework from childhood is described as exposure to the necessary skills, not as a burden or extra work for women. Such exposures are desirable and appreciated and are portrayed as one of the reasons for Dr. Aisha's success in life. Her father's insistence on traditional gender role divisions in the family is taken for granted and thus not criticized.

Dr. Aisha's professional growth and success and her ability to balance her domestic role with professional commitments occupy a considerable space:

She said she had tried her best to balance her professional and family life. A woman cannot avoid family life. Men may be able to do so. For her, it is a double responsibility. However, with willpower, punctuality, hard work, and dedication,

³¹¹ Devika, "Women's Labour, Patriarchy and Feminism in Twenty-First Century Kerala," 91.

³¹² Sameeha, "Dr Aisha Guharaj," 29.

³¹³ Sameeha, 29.

women can succeed in it.³¹⁴

The story continues to narrate her achievements in life, showcasing her child's success in professional careers. The lesson for readers is that in order to excel in both professional and family life, one must be ready to take on dual responsibilities successfully. This writing takes women's domestic role as given and routine and romanticizes the dual role of working women.

Dr. Aisha's high caste/class position and occupation help the author present the traditional division of roles in the domestic space as dignified, universal, and desirable female roles. The story of a successful, modern, working woman serves as a model for Muslim women who want to note how important it is to balance traditional domestic roles and professional commitments in order to become a 'successful' woman. Although the idealization of the double burden of working women is an important part of *Aramam* discourse, it also constructs other alternative discourses and resolutions. Such discourses presuppose a more flexible and interchangeable notions of gender role in the family. The next part of this section will examine this.

Towards a Flexible and Interchangeable Domestic Role

This section looks at another important discourse on women's work and the gendered division of domestic roles in the *Aramam*. The April 1988 issue of the magazine includes a report on a debate conducted by its editorial team at Kannur. The report is titled *Kudumbinee Samvadam: Adukkalappani Purushanmaarkkum*³¹⁵ (Debate of Wives: Domestic Work for men too). Unlike the discourses discussed earlier, this debate focuses on the role of men in

³¹⁴ Sameeha, 29.

³¹⁵ V K Rabecha, "Kudumbinee Samvadam: Adukkalappani Purushanmaarkkum [Debate of Wives: Domestic Work For Men Too]," *Aramam*, April 1988.

the domestic sphere in the context of women engaged in livelihoods outside the home. In the debate, around 20 women gather in a hall and discuss their experience and expectations of men's role in household chores. Most of the participants in the discussion are engaged in occupations, mostly school teachers. There are few housewives; they also express their views on the role of the husband in the family of working women. This discourse foregrounds more flexible and interchangeable notions of gender roles in the family.

The central point of discussion is what is expected of the husband in a domestic space for the desirable functioning of the family. For housewife MC Sareena, "There should be cooperation and coordination between the man and the woman. Only then will there be a warm relationship between the couple. God-fearing men will willingly help their women in domestic work." Rukhiya, a school teacher, says, "It is only with my husband's full support and sharing mentality that I manage to juggle both family life and work life."³¹⁶ She has been in the teaching profession for twenty years.

"Why can't men work in the kitchen? Is there any law that only women can do such things?? M Hafsath asks. She explains her view on the role of husband and wife in the family:

Women should do housework, but since women are busy with housework, husbands should help them with their children's education and send them to school. There are few men who do not even know how to open a flask, and women have to do each work for them. Such men can create a lot of trouble in families where women also go to work. Some men say that only food cooked by women is good, and that is nothing but flattery.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Rabeeha.

³¹⁷ Rabeeha.

For Hafsath, the husband's role in household affairs varies depending on the wife's employment status. If the wife is unemployed, Hafsath prefers women to do the domestic work, and she expects husbands to help in some household affairs like taking care of the children and arranging the wardrobe when he is around. In the case of a working woman, she expects better participation and sharing from husbands in the entire domestic work. However, she does not object to the idea that the woman is primarily responsible for household management.

Asmabi, another participant, maintains that she does not expect her husband to share domestic work as she has a maid. In case of the absence of the maid, she expects her husband's help in the domestic chores.³¹⁸ “Cooking is not just woman's job. Men cook well for hotels and weddings,” says Rahmatunnisa, school teacher and state-level leader of GIO. She concludes the debate saying;

To succeed in family life, both men and women should think alike. ‘It's a woman's job; that is a man's job’ division of departments like this is not possible here, especially in this day and age when women are taking on many of the responsibilities of men. Everyone should cooperate and help each other according to their condition and circumstances. It is unfair and unjust for a woman, who stays at home all day, to demand and expect from her husband, who comes home after a hard day's work, to share all the household chores. It is equally unfair for a husband to spend all his time in an armchair and expect his working wife even to turn on the fan or pick up the newspaper. If a partner needs any help, both parties should not hesitate to provide it. As the Prophet said, only then will the home be the most beautiful place in the world.³¹⁹

One can note that none of the women are critical of men's breadwinning role in the family nor argue for women replacing it. Instead, they differentiate women who work and

³¹⁸ Rabeeha.

³¹⁹ Rabeeha.

women who do not work outside the home and make a case for better understanding and share in the domestic role by men. Non-working women expect men to respect domestic work and support them by helping them with child care or cutting vegetables. In the case of working women, they expect much more involvement from men in domestic affairs, including cooking.³²⁰

Section Three

The Discourse on Gender Role in *Poomkavanam*

This section, through a reading of *Poomkavanam*, looks at the discourses on women and their roles in this magazine and how it differs from *Aramam*. In its very first issue, *Poomkavanam* clarifies the magazine's official stance on various controversial issues surrounding women. To map traditional *Sunni* understanding of gender roles, I analyse writings and interviews of *Sunni* ideologues published in *Poomkavanam* magazine in 1988. These interviews and writings serve as basic ideological stances on those issues.

For example, the very first issue of the magazine has an interview with prominent *Sunni* scholar KV Muhammad Musaliyar. The interview is titled *Swathanthramaavaam, Pkashe....* (Can be Free; But...).³²¹ Questions are focused on the contestations surrounding Muslim women within and outside society. In the interview, Musaliyar responds to questions such as whether women deserve freedom or are allowed to hold public positions in Islam. While the issue of independence arose from a feminist vantage point, the question of women appearing in public to preach to mixed-gender audiences emanate the reform/traditionalist debate among Kerala Muslims. KV Muhammad Musaliyar is introduced as "an eminent

³²⁰ Rabeeha.

³²¹ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, "Swathanthramaavaam, Pkashe.... [Can be Free; But..]," *Poomkavanam*, March 1988.

scholar of the old generation".³²² His authority to answer such critical issues comes from scholarship and the generation to which he belongs.

The interview begins with the question of whether women are free in Islam. Musaliyar explains women's freedom in Islam, "They can own property and manage it in their own way."³²³ To authenticate this, he mentions that Maimoona, one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, freed an enslaved person without her husband's permission. According to him, the man leads the family, and the woman is the faithful follower of the man. Men's leadership is justified based on the notion that men are superior in mental and physical strength.

Competent people need to be held accountable for the family. Without leadership, the family will look like a book that lost the binding. Man's mandate is not to oppress woman but to lead them through the right way. Do not infringe on her freedom if the woman does good things.³²⁴

He believes that equal treatment of men and women is unnatural. "Men and women have distinct natural differences in various aspects."³²⁵ According to him, the domain of women's contribution to society is child care and home management. Therefore, women should not venture into the domain of men. It will create chaos in society. "Both men and women have social responsibility; therefore, to fulfil them, both should travel through different paths."³²⁶ Although he uses the adjective 'social' before responsibility, later, he clarifies that women's social responsibility is home management and childcare.³²⁷

³²² K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 13.

³²³ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 13.

³²⁴ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

³²⁵ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

³²⁶ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

³²⁷ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

He also clarifies that women should not occupy public positions. He rebuked reformist narratives portraying Aisha's leading role in the battle of *Jamel* as an example of women's entry into public office and political affairs. In the battle of *Jamel*, Aisha, one of Prophet Muhammad's wives, fought against her political rival. For reformists, the story is a classic Muslim example of women's political office and leadership. "Aisha led the Jamal war in a particular political atmosphere. Does the same atmosphere prevail now?"³²⁸

He does not consider Aisha's leading role in the battle of *Jamel* as a role model for contemporary common Muslim women because, he maintains, it occurred in an extraordinary political circumstance and thus Aisha's act does not authenticate similar act of Muslim women in normal situations. He distinguishes Aisha's style of purdah while leading the war and the seclusion she maintained vis-à-vis her male companions from the purdah practiced by reformist women. "Aisha led the battle of *Jamel*³²⁹ wearing complete *hijab*. Moreover, she led the war sitting on a camel. Did Aisha lead the war like these contemporary female Islamic preachers? She led the battle in special political circumstances; Are we in such a situation now?"³³⁰

He clarifies that religious scholars are not against women's education, but they are critical of the current co-education system. "Religious scholars objected to co-education, as such intermingling of men and women would create anarchy in society. That is unIslamic."³³¹ Since co-education leads to chaos in the society, he prefers an alternative education system for women. "There should be a system for imparting special education to women alone. They

³²⁸ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

³²⁹ The Battle of the Camel, also known as the Battle of *Jamel*, took place outside of Basra, Iraq, in 36 AH (656 CE). The battle was fought between the army of the fourth caliph Ali, on one side, and the rebel army led by Aisha, on the other side. Ali was the cousin and son-in-law of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, while Aisha was a widow of Muhammad

³³⁰ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, "Swathanthramaavaam, Pkashe.... [Can be Free; But..]," 14.

³³¹ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

need to learn what to do with God and family.”³³² Women's education is aimed at perfecting their ability to manage family affairs and religious practices.

Women are not required to work outside the home as it is the religious duty of men to provide maintenance for women and children. “It is wrong to send her to work when her man can take care of her.”³³³ For him, women can work outside the home if necessary to survive. “If you can only survive by going to work, what would you do without going? That is a special case. During such compulsory stages, women can go to work without violating the *sharia* rules.”³³⁴ In the traditional Sunni discourse, women are seen as having a religious duty and a special privilege in their role as mothers. Therefore, they suggest that women were designed for domestic and motherly duties, and they should willingly embrace this role. For them, women can only succeed in their ‘natural’ gender roles. *Poomkavanam*’s discourses on gender aim to validate women's domestic role.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at three different discourses on gender roles. The first section examined how gender roles are conceptualized in the writings of Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami*, an Islamic movement in the Indian subcontinent. The second section investigated the discourse on gender roles in *Aramam* magazine, a women's magazine published by the *Jamaat Islami Hind* Kerala chapter. The third section examined the gender role discourses in *Poomkavanam* magazine, a traditional *Sunni* publication for women. In this concluding section, in addition to summarizing three different perspectives on gender, I offer a comparative analysis juxtaposing the three positions.

³³² K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

³³³ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 14.

³³⁴ K V Muhammad Musaliyar, 15.

By establishing *Jamaat*, Maududi aimed to restore a 'pure' Islam. The separation of men and women is central to Maududi's notion of 'pure' Islam. Therefore, he argued strongly for a strict gender system with defined roles for men and women, neither flexible nor interchangeable. For him, women's place is in the home, and it is impossible to eliminate the difference between men and women. He claims these divisions are part of a greater moral framework whose failure would have disastrous moral, spiritual, and civilizational consequences. In this schema women's education is inevitable, only to make her equipped to perform her gender role in a better way that satisfy the modern expectations. Maududi does not endorse any political role for women because for her the home is her natural place.

However, the subsequent concept and debates of gender role in *Aramam* significantly deviates from the notions of its founder Maududi. *Aramam* presents a more flexible gender regime with interchangeable gender roles. In line with Maududi's perspective, showing the female body without a veil in public spaces can be seen as a matter of concern in the *Aramam* discourse. However, unlike Maududi, *Aramam* suggests that sartorial discipline can be an antidote to these concerns and encourages Muslim women to pursue modern professions, hold political office, and take on leadership roles in social organizations.

Despite encouraging women to participate in public life, family concerns are still a priority for *Aramam*. In contrast to Maududi, who advocates for adhering to a strict gender regime, *Aramam* promotes a balanced distribution of domestic responsibilities within couples.

Aramam emphasizes the significance of family. It holds the viewpoint that women should have the freedom to choose between different roles, including pursuing professional careers or dedicating themselves to being wives and mothers. *Aramam* aims to enable both options for women simultaneously. Its discourse on gender roles goes against the traditional

belief that women should only stay at home and not have political rights or the opportunity to work outside the home. On the other hand, it highlights the importance of women's reproductive responsibilities and suggests that society should recognise and value family and domestic duties more.

A crucial similarity can be seen in the views of Maududi and the traditionalist *Sunni* scholars of Kerala. In their conception, women's place is in the home, and they have no political right to contest for political leadership. In both discourses, women's work is conceptualized as exceptional.

In *Poomkavanam*, since men have a religious duty to provide for their families, women are not obligated to work outside the home. However, women may work without violating religious rules if it is necessary for survival. Thus, it is a path open to women only in exceptional circumstances. This perspective emphasizes motherhood as a religious duty and special a privilege for women, as women are best suited for domestic roles and hence should willingly accept this role. *Poomkavanam* foregrounds and justifies the idea that woman's place is in the home. One can observe crucial similarities in the views of Maududi and the traditional *Sunni* scholars of Kerala. In their conception, women's place is in the home, and they have no right to contest for political and organisational leadership. In both discourses, women's work is perceived as exceptional. However, as we note, the subsequent *Jamaat* would significantly deviate from such a perspective.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This study explored the moment when the Muslim community in Kerala was actively engaged in ‘remaking’ women in the context of the massive socio-economic transformation of the community. This process of transformation is informed by the socio-economic contexts of the community as a result of several critical factors: the migration of large number of Muslim men to the Gulf in search of jobs and opportunities and the pressure from the secular (state and non-state) actors to modernize the principles and practices of Islam. The socio-political environment during the period of the Shah Bano controversy and the subsequent campaign for a Uniform Civil Code, a campaign led and endorsed by secular/feminist groups as well as right wing groups, were the critical factors that influenced community's efforts to remake the gender regime within the community. The central focus of this thesis is to unpack how the question of gender emerges in contemporary Malayalam Muslim women's magazines, actively dialoguing and engaging with the contemporary contexts.

The second chapter attempted to map the historical context of the contemporary Malayalam Muslim women's magazines in Kerala. In the chapter, I have looked at two aspects of the gender discourse as they unfold in two prominent Malayalam mainstream magazines in Kerala—the *Mathrubhumi* weekly and *Deshabhimani* Weekly. One, their discourse on the category of Muslim women, and two, discourse around the category of women and gender. In the first section, I trace how the discussion about Muslim personal law started as a question of minority right in a democracy in post-independence India. Initial discussions on Muslim personal law pitched it against the discourse of one law for one nation. In that narrative, legal plurality was rendered as a hindrance to national unity and

integration. The Muslim response attempted to paint personal laws as a sign of a more inclusive and egalitarian form of democracy as it accommodates minority cultural autonomy. During this phase, the questions of personal law and uniform civil code were set in contests and debates around ideas and perceptions of democracy, the secular nation, national security, and integration. However, subsequently, one finds the discussion getting actively reframed in terms of Islam's compatibility with modernity which in turn is mapped on to its treatment of women and its notions of gender.

A reading of Malayalam Magazines like *Deshabhimani* and *Mathrubhumi* suggests that mainstream Malayalam print media has consistently painted an archaic notion of Islam to suggest personal law is regressive and uniform civil code is the only mode of fulfilling the secular and progressive goals of the nation. Muslim women's sufferings are attributed to Islam and amplified for political purposes. This dominant discourse renders Muslim women the legal subject of the nation-state, in need of legal protection from the regressive community to which they belong. In this discourse, the Indian state positions itself as the saviour whose interventions are sought and justified for the protection of Muslim women and national security. I have chosen to look at these mainstream Malayalam magazines that are not specifically characterized as women's magazines, nor do they have a primarily women readership/addressee. Why do they get so embroiled in the gender question with specific reference to Muslim women in the 1980s? As their very titles suggest they are invested in the nation—with a sense of pride and patriotism. It has been my contention that these magazines participate in a re-imagination and reconstitution of the nation—where an upper caste Hindu normativity automatically maps on to the modern—and this process is closely entwined with the representation of the Muslim woman as victim, as someone in need of rescue and reform.

Within Malayalam mainstream news magazines 'Muslim women' stand as symbols of the Muslim community. The notion that 'Muslim women' represent a distinct category with a common identity and set of interests serves the purpose of both Muslim groups and their opponents. For Muslim groups, this can be used as a defensive mechanism to consolidate religious identity. For secular left and Hindu right-wing groups, it serves as the excuse for state intervention into the minority religion.

In the first section, Islam and Muslim traditions appear archaic and anti-women. However, as we see in the second section, the debate takes a different turn when it comes to Hindu tradition. In the context of a nationalist history, tradition appears as something to be protected. While discussing women's position in public life, the relegation of women to the domestic sphere in Hindu tradition is discussed by many contributors in these magazines. However, immediate intervention from outside actors, such as the state or political movement, is never sought or desired. In contrast, in the case of Islam and personal law, Muslim women are depicted as victims of tradition, and state intervention is called for unambiguously.

In third chapter, I investigate the significance of contemporary veiling among Muslims in Kerala by analysing the content of *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam* on Islamic clothing in the broader context of contemporary Islamic movements in the region. What prompts Muslim women to adopt new forms of clothing at a particular time? Why have some women been willing, even eager, to adopt a practice which is branded as foreign, restrictive, extremist, and oppressive by many? In attempting to answer these questions, I argue that the reemergence and re-fashioning of the purdah both affects and implies a transformation of Muslim women in Kerala, and this transformation is informed by and contributes to larger processes of social change. By attending to the discursive strategies through which women's

magazines introduce and describe Islamic clothing, I attempt to show how Islamic clothing reflects an aspiration for modernity that cannot be clubbed with mainstream modernity in any simple, reductive way.

Purdah has always been at the centre of debates in Kerala public discourses. For the mainstream intelligentsia, purdah is sign of oppression and regression. Malayalam popular films, novels, etc., largely carry the same notion and representation. In such representations, a Muslim woman is accepted when she breaks/challenges the practice of purdah. This chapter critically reads two prominent Muslim women's magazines to know how these magazines place purdah at the centre of discussion, and re-present/re-interpret the practice of purdah as the shaping of a parallel modernity. The chapter looks at how these magazines define purdah from within their ideological contexts and backdrops. The analysis shows that both magazines lead their readers to envision the purdah as a mode of resistance and a tool for empowerment. However, as I have analyzed, one can see subtle but significant differences in their content.

Poomkavanam's normative ideals of clothing differ from that of *Aramam* in two aspects. First, the difference lies in the mode of clothing. The proper dress for women—as put forth in *Poomkavanam*—is the full hijab, which means women must cover their entire body, including their face, hands, and feet. *Aramam*, on the other hand, does not stress on the full hijab. Second, although sartorial codes mediate women's entry into the public in both magazines, the implications are different. *Aramam* encourages women's entry into the public and projects them as the public representative of the faith. In contrast, *Poomkavanam* advocates that women's entry into public spaces can only be secondary to domestic life or one that is necessitated by domestic contingencies. As we have seen in the earlier section, women

performing in public life are well appreciated in *Aramam* and presented as role models to readers in its purdah-related discussions.

The fourth chapter examines how these magazines deal with how new notions of Muslim womanhood in the eighties called for a reconfiguration of the domestic space to enable Muslim women to pursue new aspirations. To assume the role of representative of the community in public spaces by wearing Islamic dress requires a significant investment of time. To assume positions in public life, women need to develop a number of capabilities—modern education, professional training, and leadership skills and so on—skills that enable them to take a leading role in various arenas of the organization. *Aramam*'s women readers are actively encouraged to embark on such initiatives; this constitutes a remarkable difference from their 'internal other', the traditionalist *Sunni* woman. However, both magazines call for a rearrangement in the present family regime—albeit in different ways.

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the difference between men and women. He claims these divisions are part of a greater moral framework whose failure would have disastrous moral, spiritual, and civilizational consequences. In this schema women's education is acceptable, but only to make her equipped to perform her gender role in a better way that satisfy the modern expectations. Maududi does not endorse any political role for women because for her the home is her natural place.

However, the subsequent concept and debates of gender role in *Aramam* significantly deviates from the notions of its founder Maududi. *Aramam* presents a more flexible gender regime with interchangeable gender roles. In line with Maududi's perspective, showing the female body without a veil in public spaces can be seen as a matter of concern in the *Aramam* discourse. However, unlike Maududi, *Aramam* suggests that sartorial discipline can be an antidote to these concerns and encourages Muslim women to pursue modern professions, hold political office, and take on leadership roles in social organizations.

Despite encouraging women to participate in public life, the familial responsibilities of women remain a priority for *Aramam*. In contrast to Maududi, who advocates for adhering to a strict gender regime, *Aramam* promotes a balanced distribution of domestic responsibilities between couples.

Aramam emphasizes the significance of family. It believes that women should have the autonomy to decide between various roles, such as pursuing professional careers or focusing on being wives and mothers. *Aramam* aims to enable both options for women simultaneously. Its discourse on gender roles does not conform to the conventional notion that women's place is at home, without political rights and the right to paid employment outside the home. However, it emphasizes women's reproductive roles and argues that

society should give greater attention and value to the familial and domestic roles shouldered by women.

A critical similarity can be seen in the views of Maududi and the traditionalist *Sunni* scholars of Kerala. In their conception, a woman's place is in the home, and they have no political right to contest for political leadership. In both discourses, women's work outside home is conceptualized as a matter of exception, justified only in exceptional circumstances.

In *Poomkavanam* discourse on gender roles, men have a religious duty to provide for their families, and therefore women are not obligated to work outside the home. However, women may work without violating religious rules if it is necessary for survival. It not normative choice women can make. This perspective emphasizes motherhood as a religious duty and special privilege for women, and believes that women are best suited for domestic roles and should willingly accept this role. *Poomkavanam* discourse on gender also supports this idea that women's place is in the home. Thus, one observes a significant similarity in the views of Maududi and that of the traditionalist *Sunni* scholars of Kerala. In their conception, women's place is in the home, and they have no political right to contest for political leadership. In both discourses, women working outside or taking on public roles is seen as justifiable only when necessitated by extraordinary contingencies.

As I reach the end of my dissertation, I note that Muslim women remain at the centre of debates around equality, nation, modernity, Indianness and so on. The raging controversy around the hijab in Karnataka and the legal contestations that led to the ban on hijab in the state is a case in point. In the wake of the controversy, several Muslim women have expressed how the hijab could not be seen as an imposition, they wore it due to a range/combination of reasons—as a marker of religious identity, political beliefs, and most often as something that allowed 'privacy' in public spaces such as the educational institution.

When the Supreme Court, on 13 October 2022, delivered a split verdict on Karnataka's Hijab ban, one of the judges, Sudhanshu Dhulia diverged from the Karnataka government's ban order by stating that secularity meant tolerance to 'diversity'. Wearing or not wearing a hijab to school was "ultimately a matter of choice." For girls from conservative families, "her hijab is her ticket to education."³³⁵ As Sherin B.S. has posited in her critical work *Gendering Minorities: Muslim Women and the Politics of Modernity*, the realities of Muslim women cannot be understood without embedding them in their history and political contexts.³³⁶ Muslim women have routinely been looked upon as a homogenous group in desperate need of liberation from their religion without addressing their heterogeneity.

I hope my dissertation, through its analysis of the magazines for Muslim women in Kerala, is a small step towards tracing the divergent, heterogeneous histories and contexts within which Muslim womanhood is shaped, reshaped and contested. Given the limitation of time, I have not been able to make connections between the current situation in different regions and movements in India involving Muslim women (the veil controversy in Karnataka, the presence/leadership of large number of Muslim women in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)³³⁷ protests and the visibility of Muslim women in various protests in university campuses. Similarly, a very valuable book such as that of Sherin's mentioned above was published only towards the fag end of my research. However I hope to draw from these insights and debates and further reflect upon how the figure of the Muslim woman

³³⁵ Krishnadas Rajagopal, "Supreme Court Delivers Split Verdict on Karnataka Hijab Ban," *The Hindu*, October 13, 2022, sec. India, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sc-delivers-split-verdict-on-hijab-row-case-likely-to-go-to-a-larger-bench/article66004319.ece>.

³³⁶ Sherin, *Gendering Minorities*.

³³⁷ The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 was passed by the Indian Parliament on December 11, 2019, which amended the Citizenship Act, 1955 to grant Indian citizenship to religious minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who arrived in India before December 31, 2014. However, the law does not extend this eligibility to Muslims from these countries.

remains irreducible and contested. As my dissertation attempts to demonstrate, *Aramam* and *Poomkavanam*, attempt to create new ideals of the Muslim woman in the 80s. The current contexts indicate that while there is a powerful effort to regulate the identities and indeed, the bodies of Muslim women, especially of those in the public domain, these women are simultaneously politicized and resistant. I hope I will be able to draw these phenomena into my future research.

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~ Department of Sociology ~

Two Day National Conference on
Language, Culture and Minorities:
Issues and Challenges

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Language of Resistance In Muslim Women Magazine In Kerala

in the "Two Day National Conference held on "Language, Culture and Minorities: Issues and Challenges", organized by
Department of Sociology, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad, on 22nd & 23rd March 2018.

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This is to certify that ~~Dr./Mr./Ms.~~ **Muhammadi kovan kulangara** ~~attended/presented~~
a paper/ ~~chairing a session~~ at Theorising Space: Three Day National Conference on the Intersections of Space and Culture
organized by the Department of Humanities, Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST), Thiruvananthapuram
in collaboration with Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Kerala and Litcrit on 14th to 16th December 2017.

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NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Course: Ph.D.
Subject: Gender Studies

Month & Year: November, 2011
Semester: I

S.No	Regn.No.	Name of the Student	Course No. Credits-4
			GS 801
1	11CWPG01	Julia Guenther	PASS
2	11CWPG02	Meenal Tula	PASS
3	11CWPG03	Suchitra Boro	PASS
4	11CWPG04	G.S. Chaya Devi	PASS
5	11CWPG05	Layana Anand	PASS
6	11CWPG06	Sarmistha Kabi	PASS
7	11CWPG07	Muhammadali Korankulangara	PASS
8	11CWPG08	Charanjeet	PASS
9	11CWPG09	Bagmi Priyadarshani	PASS

Course No. Title of the Course

GS 801 Feminist Theories and Research Methodologies


Controller of Examinations



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Subject: Gender Studies

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1	11CWPG01	Julia Guenther	PASS
2	11CWPG02	Meenal Tula	PASS
3	11CWPG03	Suchitra Boro	PASS
4	11CWPG04	G.S. Chaya Devi	PASS
5	11CWPG05	Layana Anand	PASS
6	11CWPG06	Sarmistha Kabi	PASS
7	11CWPG07	Muhammadali Korankulangara	PASS
8	11CWPG08	Charanjeet	PASS
9	11CWPG09	Bagmi PRiyadarshani	PASS

Course No. Title of the Course
GS 802 Pedagogy of Gender Studies

Signature

अध्यक्ष / HEAD
महिला अध्ययन केन्द्र
Centre for Women's Studies
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
हैदराबाद / HYDERABAD-500 048.

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UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Course : Ph.D.
Subject : Gender Studies 590

Month & Year: May, 2012
Semester: II

Sl.No	Regn.No.	Name of the Student	Course No./ Result
1	11CWPG01	Julia Guenther	GS 826 - PASS
2	11CWPG02	Meenal Tula	GS 827 - PASS
3	11CWPG03	Suchitra Boro	GS 828 - PASS
4	11CWPG04	G.S. Chaya Devi	GS 829 - PASS
5	11CWPG05	Layana Anand	GS 830 - Pending
6	11CWPG06	Sarmistha Kabi	GS 831 - PASS
7	11CWPG07	Muhammadali Korankulangara	GS 832 - PASS
8	11CWPG08	Charanjeet	GS 833 - PASS
9	11CWPG09	Bagmi Priyadarshani	GS 834 - PASS

Course No. Title of the Course

GS 826	Women's Movement in Andhra Pradesh
GS 827	Courtesans & Representation
GS 828	Bodo History (Broad Area)
GS 829	The Role of Voluntary Organisations in the Promotion of Health Awareness Among under privileged Women
GS 830	Education in Aided Schools in Kerala
GS 831	Trafficking of Women-Review of Literature
GS 832	Muslim Women Magazines in Kerala
GS 833	Desertion and Deception in the case of NRI Marriages: A Case Study from Punjab
GS 834	Gender and Migration

Controller of Examinations

Negotiating Public Space : An Analysis of Hijab Discourse in Contemporary Malayalam Muslim women's magazine

- *Muhammadali Koran Kulangara*, PhD Research Scholar, Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad.

Abstract :

Eighties witnessed two seemingly contradictory phenomena among Kerala Muslim women; their increased visibility in public spaces such as educational institutions and workplaces and widespread acceptance of hijab among Kerala Muslim women. The researchers often tend to see these two phenomena separately without any substantiated reference to the interconnection between them. This paper attempts to unravel these phenomena by a detailed analysis of Muslim women magazines' hijab related content of the eighties and early nineties. This article looks at contents related to clothing published in *Aramam* magazines to arrive a nuanced understanding of what it means by hijab or purdah for this magazine in Kerala and how it is providing an enabling narrative for Muslim women to occupy public spaces and educational institutions and work places.

Key words : Gender, Public place, job, Modesty, Hijab.

Introduction :

Eighties and nineties witnessed a resurgence of Hijab and veiling among Muslims world across (Ahmed, 2011). Forceful veiling of the newly formed Islamic republic of Iran and vigorous unveiling by regimes of Egypt and Turkey followed (Shirazi, 2003). Regions wherein Muslims are minority, like Bulgaria and India, too witnessed veiling movement in the same period (Khan, 2007). Researchers have focused on various signification of hijab such as

gendered dimension, identity components, empowering potential, as bodily practices that shape pious disposition. Veiling has been explained as an assertion of cultural authenticity, Islamic feminism, a sign of both resistance and submission to patriarchy, a rejection of modernity, Western imperialism and corrupt local secular regimes, a genuine desire of women to live more piously (Mahmood, 2005) and a practice born out of economic necessity (Fadil, 2011).

The increased sight of young women dressed in Islamic model, either in churidar kameez with hijab or in purdah, in modern and public spaces such as schools, universities, markets, working places and sometimes driving car or riding motorcycles, wearing helmets over their head cloths, are seems to demand an explanation. Increasing visibility of purdah is seen as a point of apprehension in Kerala public sphere (Arr, 1979). This paper attempts to unravel these phenomena by a detailed analysis of *Aramam*, one of leading Muslim women's magazine in Malayalam, magazines' clothing related content of the eighties. The history of Malayalam women's magazines is closely related to the social reform movements of Kerala. Plenty of magazines were published during the early twentieth century. *Muslim mahila* and *Annisa* (the women) were the two Muslim women's magazines of the early twentieth century (Samad, 1998). 1980's witnessed rebirth of Muslim women's magazines. In 1985 June

Aramam was started by Jame-ete-Islami's Kerala chapter (Salaam, 1992). This article is a critical reading of *Aramam* women's magazine.

Extensive adherence to *hijab* among Kerala Muslims always has been attributed to the account of Muslim women's magazines (Basheer, 2012). While *hijab* has been maintaining almost static status in dominant discourses, as a sign of oppression and male domination, for women's magazines *hijab* has had a different trajectory. This article attempts to arrive a nuanced understanding of what it means by *hijab* or *purdah* for women's magazines in Kerala and how it is providing an enabling narrative for Muslim women to occupy public spaces such as educational institutions and work places.

Review of literature :

Rhys h. Williams and Gira Vashi in their "Hijab and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves" (Williams & Vashi, 2007) argues that the second-generation American Muslim women are negotiating social and religious identities in contrast both to non-Muslim Americans and to their immigrant families. Hijab has multiple meanings as a religious and social symbol; it provides a clear identity marker at a life-course transitional time, and it provides culturally legitimate space for young women who are formulating Muslim-American identities. Ashraf Zahedi in her Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes (Zahedi, 2007) argues that through imposed unveiling and re-veiling, various Iranian regimes have constructed an ideal image of Iranian women. This essentialised singular conception of veil, which disciplines women's access to public spaces,

has led to the empowerment of some women while marginalizing others.

Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella pointed out a considerable brake in the veiling culture during the 60s to eighties among Kerala Muslims. Before that break, veiling was considerably predominant among local elites and in the families of Ulama (Osella & Osella, 2007). The authors tend to see that the enormous popularity of *hijab* during the eighties is just a continuation of the older veiling culture. Earlier the *purdah* was worn by majorly women folks in the *ulama* class or wives and daughters of elite families (Osella & Osella, 2007). The domain of *purdah* largely shifted or rather extended to Muslims of all classes. Wide adherence of *hijab* among Kerala Muslims always attributed to the Muslim women's magazines. In fact, *hijab* brands and showrooms are major ad donors of these magazines (Basheer, 2012).

Arguments :

Through a critical reading of the magazine's discourse related to clothing I argue that the emerging new Islamic clothing both effects and implies a transformation of Muslim women in Kerala, and this transformation is informed by, and in turn contributes to, larger processes of social change. Armaam magazine played a crucial role in it. In Kerala, the growing trend among women toward wearing Islamic clothing challenges local traditional models of Islamic modesty. Discourse on Islamic clothing is aimed at to create a new historical consciousness and a process of subjective transformation that is tied to larger processes of social change. It helps Muslim women to produce themselves as modern Muslims and vision of a society that distances itself from the past. The production

of new meaning for Islamic clothing simultaneously helps Muslim women to cop up with marked change in social and personal identity and to create potential disruption in traditional gender roles. Meaning attached to purdah significantly changed during eighties. In Muslim women's magazine purdah and hijab emerge as modern dress suitable for aspiring pious Muslim women.

Analysis :

This section of the article will look into contents related to clothing of *Aramam* magazines in order to understand the meaning of hijab or purdah for this magazine. How is the idea of modest mode of clothing presented in these magazines? What are the strategies employed to acquaint its readers with new notions of modest clothing are the main focus of this analysis. The magazines have employed a variety of discourses in order to introduce, defend and familiarize hijab, ranging from 'personal safety' to 'entrepreneurship' women. The editorial of *Aramam*, October 1985 October issue, is on 'Islamic' clothing ("Editorial," 1985). It places westernization and imitation tendencies of the colonized communities as reasons for the undesirability of traditional clothing styles such as purdah and hijab among colonized societies. By implication, the editorial suggests that the act of Islamic clothing is an anti-colonial act. Though it considers the desire for the 'west' is the reason for giving up 'decent' way of dressing, the magazine uses examples from the 'west' in favor of purdah. The editorial continues "But we are not aware of the fact that lots of western women are giving up such sick culture. Many of them are finding liberation in Purdah. Nowadays purdah-clad girls are not an unusual sight

in western universities ("Editorial," 1985, p. 2)". Here Islamic behavior in the West is presented more desirable than any model from any Islamic world. The decency/harm argument and presenting west as desirable model for Islamic clothing further employed in many content of the magazine. The relationship between the job and Islamic clothing attracted detailed coverage of the Magazine. The article *Purhayum Thozilum* (Purdah and profession) (Safiya, 1985) suggests that Islamic modest forms of clothing such as purdah and hijab is not a hindrance to women to do any job using examples from the life of Prophet Muhammed,

During early days of Islam woman used to engage in jobs which were 'suitable' to them based on availability. The Prophet encouraged it. Once wife of Abdullah-ibn-Masood, while introducing herself to the Prophet, she said, 'I do handicraft, we are making our livelihood out of that. For my husband and me there is no other means of earnings' Then the Prophet replied, 'you will get enough reward from the God' (Safiya, 1985, p. 13).

The article also mentions that one of Prophet's wives, Zainab used to do the animal skin processing and donate the earnings among the poor around her. So she is given the surname *ummul masaakkeen* (Mother of the poor) (p, 13). This article features another woman follower of prophet Muhammed who participated in wars. "Ummu Ammara participated in the Uhad¹ war. The Prophet recognised and appreciated her service by saying 'when-ever I turned right or left, Ummu Ammara was present there to protect me'. Ummu Hakeem participated in a war against Roman and she killed seven enemies. Women are also engaged

in the health care sector. A woman named Rudaifa ran a hospital near to Prophet's mosque." The whole purpose of this feature is to propose that the 'Islamic' way of clothing is not an obstacle to engage in any job and there are enough examples from the life of the prophet Muhammed. The article continues, "There may be people who wonder how these women have done all these jobs or participated in war by wearing purdah. Purdah is means only to cover body except face and hand but not to withdraw oneself from the society." The article concludes,

It is not the social engagement of woman prevented in Islam but the revealing woman's beauty to men and casual mingling with men. Both are two separate things; one should be able to differentiate between them. Islam always embraced moderate views. It hates both extremes; women's free engagement with men like in western societies and confining her in kitchens as birth-giving machines. Islam adopted a moderate path between them. It does not allow crossing the limit of morality (Safiya, 1985, p. 13).

The examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad's women followers serves as the legitimising discourse as such instances are jurisprudentially important for practicing Muslims. For *Aramam*, a hijab-clad women engaging in the public life symbolises the moderate way of

Islam. Hijab appears as a guarantee and symbol for her faith and religiosity even if she is out in public. Apart from producing ideological justification and argumentations in favor of purdah, *Aramam* consecrates existing role models from the immediate locations of the readers.

Conclusion :

By attending to the discursive strategies through which women's magazines introduce and describe Islamic clothing, I tried to show how Islamic clothing reflects an aspiration for the public sphere through making themselves visible in different public spaces. During the eighties, the primary concern of *Aramam* regarding hijab/purdah was to provide a working model for Muslim women. It also provided ideological and rational justification for the adoption of new kinds of clothing or alteration of the existing style of clothing according to Islamic ideals. It is not just an introduction to a new style of clothing but to build consent for it through different narratives and visual content rather than imposing a particular model by drawing scriptural discourse. One can conclude that while responding to a particular historical context marked by Muslim women's large entry to public life through education, employment and as a head of the migrant family, *Aramam* uses Islamic clothing as a means to preserve Islamic values and the same time as an enabler of the change.

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