AMBIVALENCE, CONTESTATION AND ACCOMMODATION IN A 'REFORMIST' SUFI SHRINE IN WEST BENGAL

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work embodied in the present dissertation entitled **'Ambivalence, Contestation and Accommodation in a 'Reformist' Sufi Shrine in West Bengal',** carried out under the supervision of **Prof**. **Vinod K Jairath,** Department of Sociology, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology from University of Hyderabad, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this dissertation has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any University. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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This is to certify that **ADITYA RANJAN KAPOOR** has carried out the research work in the present dissertation entitled **'Ambivalence, Contestation and Accommodation in a 'Reformist' Sufi Shrine in West Bengal'** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in Sociology. This dissertation is an independent work and does not constitute part of any material submitted for any research degree here or elsewhere.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is an outcome of a time when Islamophobia has reached new heights and crossed the geographical barriers to reach previously untouched areas like Scandinavia, Australia, and Canada. The present refugee crisis in Europe arising due to political instability in Muslim states in the Gulf region and Northern Africa, coupled with sporadic incidents of terrorist attacks, associated with Muslims in various cities of Europe have renewed the horrific memory of 9/11 and its aftermath. This scenario has multiple social and political dimensions. The increasing intolerance towards Muslims in Europe is accompanied by increasing racial profiling, discrimination and hate crimes that Muslims face commonly in their everyday lives. Such incidents go hand in hand with rising popularity of right-wing political outfits in several countries of Europe[1]. The situation of South Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar is no different, where Muslims constitute a significant minority and live side by side with the majoritarian ethnic communities[2]. The blend of cultural nationalism and majoritarian religion is one of the prime factors for resurgence of anti-Muslim rhetoric in the South Asian regions.

At the heart of these polar political discourses lies the notion of cultural purity that emanates from uncritical and unadulterated understanding of history tied with the sacredness of geographical area and conceived as nation. It is the pristine notion of culture that links history, perceived as grand and glorious with the geography of nation,

[1] As for example, Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) in Germany, Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, and Sweden Democrats (SD) in Sweden can be cited as some right-wing conservative parties in Europe, that gained prominence in recent past over xenophobic anti-migration rhetorics.

[2] Some prominent anti-Muslim majoritarian right-wing political consolidations in these countries include – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political affiliates in India, The Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) of Sri Lanka and nexus between military junta and a section of Buddhist monks in Myanmar.

conceived with sacred character. Unfortunately, the essentialised understanding of culture ignores other possible reasons like the low economic growth and crisis in American and European economy or the failure of neo-liberal economy to tickle down in society as instrumental in rising incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bias in the society. Looking culture within essentialised frames also supports axial theories like 'clash of civilisation' (Huntington 1993) or what Aslan (2005) terms as 'clash of monotheism' indicating cases of increasing perception of clashes between the Christian West and the Islamic East. Culture in this context may refer to eternal essence that can speak about the people who follow it. The timeless and unchanging depiction of culture plays an instrumental role in the portrayal of Islam and Muslims as static, anti-modern and as a homogeneous community. Such depictions are products of an uncritical and one-sided understanding of culture that projects itself as the social and psychological blueprint for a community. Instead of observing culture in terms of carrier of certain civilizational essence from an uninterrupted perception of history, we can also see it as a process, mediated and determined by other social forces (Azmeh 2009, Zubaida 2011). Arguably, it is an important academic exercise to explore and contextualise the complex interrelations between culture and various social factors. Needless to say, this out rightly leaves out the homogenisation and creation of stereotypes associated with any religious community. The present research takes on the emerging sociological debates focusing on Muslims. It attempts to break the negative stereotypes by exploring and exposing the diversity within various modes of 'being a Muslim.'

From focussing Islam to studying Muslims

The sociological study of Muslims differs from the sociology of religion in certain important aspects. The epistemological divide between sociology as a discipline to study modern society and anthropology as a discipline to study primitive communities played

an important role where Islam was relegated to the arena of anthropological inquiry. Moreover, sociology of religion focusses on religion as a social institution and its relevance and changes with respect to forces of modernity. Thus, we find issues like secularisation, formation of civil religion, understanding religious experiences, new religious movements and understanding religion in contemporary globalised world as central concerns of the sociology of religion. In this respect, sociological studies of Muslim communities move beyond religion (Islam) and place everyday lives of Muslims as its primary concern. The idea behind this move is to depart from the monolithic construction of Muslim subjectivities and illustrate Muslims as part of interpretative community with plurality as an important dimension in their day-to-day lives. It does not accentuate religion (Islam) in the lives of Muslims, but attempts to understand how the scriptures are understood, deployed and transmitted in particular time and places (Bowen 2012:4).

Over the years, there has been a gradual shift in this field of study from anthropological/sociological perspective. It can be seen as a shift from focussing Islam as an object of inquiry to studying Muslims in their diverse contexts. This shift is significant in many respects. First, it displaces Islam as a central object in the study of Muslim communities. Instead, it underlines a fluid understanding of Muslim communities that embraces diversity lying therein and their notion of being and expressing Islam. Therefore, the focus shifts from Islam as a religion with a coherent set of values to the study of Muslims as followers of Islam that can be studied like any other religious community. Second, it also points towards a shift from focussing religion (Islam) to studying culture, where Islam may or may not play the determining factor in conditioning Muslim lives. This approach tones down the exclusivity attached with Muslims and places Muslim communities within the confines of their socio-historical contexts. Third, a

shift towards the study of Muslim communities provides us with avenues to understand the differential relationship that Muslim communities in their diverse socio-historical and geographical contexts maintain with Islam. It is important to understand that Muslims on day-to-day basis maintain a varied relationship with Islam. Fourth, the shift enables us to capture the agentive aspects of Muslims and the complexities associated with their religious worldview in relation to other equally important aspects of their lives. It underlines the multifaceted relationship of Muslims with various other social institutions without emphasising religion as a determining factor. Finally, the shift helps us to evade the spurious binaries between textual/orthodox Islam versus lived/folk Islam that has influenced the study of the Muslim communities to a greater extent in the past.

Statement of the problem

This research is based on ethnographic work concerning everyday life of Muslims in the state of West Bengal. A good number of scholarly works pertaining to Muslims in West Bengal has focussed on the issue of duality of identity – being a Muslim and being a Bengali. One of the basic questions that influences this area of study is how the use of the adjective 'Bengali' helps us in understanding the condition of Muslims over there? Or, to what extent the adjective 'Bengal' influences the life-world of Muslims of this region. Most studies concerning 'Bengal Muslims' are carried out by historians. They have mainly focussed on the issues like dual identity, the process of Islamic reformation, and the historical context that had considerable influence on the formation of a distinct identity and communal disharmony especially in 20th century. In a nutshell, the key points highlighted in earlier works with respect to Muslims in Bengal are:

1. The socio-cultural and geographical factors responsible for the emergence of Muslim community in Bengal.

2. The historical and social divisions prevalent among Muslims in Bengal as rural and cultivating class and the urban elites, signifying two different cultural manifestations of Muslims living in Bengal.
3. The process of Islamisation and Islamic reformation, which under certain context of 19th and early 20th century helped in the formation of exclusive Muslim identity.
4. The role of elites in politicisation of identity.

Bengal had predominantly rural Muslim population. The historical records of the period from 16th to 19th century suggest the prevalence of syncretic culture in Bengal (Roy 1983). In this regard, Eaton (1994: 279) points:

Such expression of tensions between Bengali culture and the perceived 'foreignness' of Islam were typical among those who were outsiders to the rural experience. The rural masses do not appear to have been troubled by such tensions, or even to have noticed them.

The reform movements like the *Fairazi* movement and *Tariqa e Muhammadiya* movement that emerged in early 19th century were led by the religious elites. These movements addressed the grievances of the depressed peasantry in response to the new colonial socio-political order after the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. They also tried to reform the popular practices associated with Islam by eradicating anything local as Hindu and thus un-Islamic. The combination of religious reformation with the concrete economic grievances created a politically volatile situation susceptible for communalist propaganda by the end of 19th century (Ahmed 1981). Concerning this, Roy (2008) identifies two waves of Islamic reform movements in Bengal. He observes that the reformation movement in early 19th century set the ground for the reform movements that took place in later part of the 19th century. The later reform movements were initiated by the Muslim elites, who were critical to the issue of their communal identity in the new

socio-political situation where the public space was dominated by upper caste Hindu *bhadralok* community. Importantly, it was not just the religious zeal among the elites which led to such reform movements. Instead, as Ahmed (1981) points; the religious expressions in the form of reform movements were complexly intertwined with economic and political issues pertaining to interests of the Muslim elites from *ashraf* community. These issues became prominent by 1930s, leading to communal polarisation in Bengal which eventually led to the partition in 1947.

Focussing on a 'reformist' Sufi shrine named Furfura shareif, located in the village named Furfura in Hooghly district of West Bengal; I intend to explore the social and historical contexts in which the shrine came up. I also focus on the everyday life of Muslims to understand the contextual embeddedness of their lives and emphasise on the complex relationship between religious and other social institutions. Everyday life of Muslims also provide us with avenues to understand the agentive aspect of being Muslim by exploring the diverse ways by which Muslims relate to Islam.

Objectives

The following are my research objectives:

1. To map the historical process of Islamic reformation in this region and explore the historical foundations of the 'reformist' Sufi shrine of Furfura shareif.
2. To understand the social and historical context in which the movement by Abu Bakr Siddique (d.1939) began and was sustained after his death. The emphasis here is to understand the how a religious movement started by a charismatic leader was transformed into a Sufi shrine as the socio-political circumstances changed.

3. To focus on the everyday life and understand the social composition, power structure and changing social dynamics among the Muslims in Furfura.
4. To understand how in everyday life, ordinary Muslims construct the notion of 'being a Muslim'. The focus here will be to understand the inter-sectionality of everyday life and explore its enmeshed character through which Muslims constitute diverse ways of 'being Muslim' in multiple contexts.

Introduction to the field site - Furfura

The major part of my fieldwork was conducted in a village named Furfura, situated in Hooghly district of West Bengal. It is famous for the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (1846-1939), who was a prominent Muslim social reformer in eastern India especially in undivided Bengal and Assam. The village named Furfura is located in Jangipara block under Srirampur (Serampore) sub division in Hooghly district of West Bengal. It is around 25 kilometres south from Srirampur en route to Jangipara. According to 2011 census, the total number of households in Furfura is 1140, and the total population of the village is 6720 (3489 males and 3231 females). Furfura gram panchayat office is situated in the heart of village market called Taltala haat. The gram panchayat comprises of 17 revenue villages including the village named Furfura.

Just like any other village in this region, the name of the locality in the villages and the settlement pattern gives us a rough idea of the composition and the social structure of the Furfura. Most of the hamlets in the village are named in relation to the social identity of the inhabitants. As for example, in Bagdi para most of the people are from Bagdi caste, Pir sahib para is inhabited by the pirs of shrine of Furfura Shareif or in case of Kasai para most of the inhabitants are from Muslim kasai (butchers) community. In some cases, we

also find heterogeneous localities which are inhabited by people from different social groups and the name of para (locality) does not reflect its social composition.

The Mazar Shareif area in the village, where the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (d.1939) is located is the prime location in the village. It is also one of the busiest locations in the village as Muslims from across West Bengal and neighbouring states including from Bangladesh frequent the shrine. The religious dimension of this location helped in coming up of various economic activities in the surrounding of the shrine. As for example, there is a shopping arcade, owned by one of the pirs with shops given on rent. Apart from the shopping arcade there are some other business outlets by other villagers that may include road side eateries, shops selling religious items like books, recorded sermons of pirs in CDs, mats for performing namaz, burqa, and ittar (oil-based and alcohol free perfumes). One can also find shops selling readymade clothes, hardware items and grocery shops in the vicinity of the shrine. Almost all the households in this area belong to Muslims. An important aspect of this area is the Islamic motif that dominates the landscape of this area. It is especially reflected in the architecture with prominent Islamic symbols and the ambiance constructed by playing of recorded sermons in some of the shops. One can also find Muslim males from pir families in jalabiya – a long full sleeve, ankle length kurta without collar, which is generally worn by Arab Muslims. Common Muslims generally wear traditional Bengali dress. Women generally do not frequent this area, and in case they have to come out to this area, they maintain strict purdah by wearing burqa.

The Mazar Shareif (shrine) is located adjacent to the main road that connects Srirmpur and Jangipara. A private madrasa owned by one of the pirs is situated in front of the shrine. Adjacent to the madrasa, one can locate ‘Mujjadded-e-Zaman Islamic Research Centre’ along with a musafirkhana (guest house) owned by the pirs of the shrine. Adjacent to musafirkhana the respective durbars of pirs are located where they meet their

devotees. The residential area of the pirs is situated on the backside of the durbar which is fortified by high boundary walls and only a narrow lane in between durbar provides the access to their quarters. Common people are not allowed inside the residential premises of the pirs. But, one can see the well maintained buildings with modern amenities like air conditioners and other facilities from a distance. Opposite to durbar there is a mosque, which the pirs claim to be the oldest mosque in the region built in 13th century. A Khanqa (Sufi hospice) is situated in front of the mosque which further paves the way to a three storied hostel accommodating students of private madrasa. The Furfura pirs run several religious outfits and charitable institutions. The offices of some of the organizations like Hezbollah, Neda e Islam and others are situated in the ground floor of the building. The lane further gets divided in three directions. Right side goes towards Halder para and Molla para. The left side of the road joins main road at Khatun bus stand, whereas going ahead straight leads to Kasai para.

The shrine is located in pir sahib para which is relatively a big locality. This locality is also varied demographically. All the pirs live in this locality. There are two important shrines in this locality. The first shrine compound is of Abu Bakr Sidddique (d. 1939) and his first four sons, which is known as mazar shareif adjacent to the mazar shareif bus stop and other shrine, known as chotto huzoor durbar is of his youngest son popularly known as Chotto Huzoor, who was buried near his home away from the mazar shareif. Sons of Chotto Huzoor are settled in the vicinity of Chotto Huzoor durbar, whereas the families of other four sons of Abu Bakr Siddique are settled near mazar shareif. Apart from the pirs, most of the families settled in mazar shareif area are from Muslim upper caste – Siddiques, and they are related to the pir families through kinship ties. Taltala haat is the last bus stop of Furfura and is the biggest bazaar of Furfura. One can find shops selling fruits, vegetables, fish, poultry, beef, clothes, grocery items, eateries and even television,

air conditioners and other home appliances in the market. Panchayat office is situated in the heart of Taltala haat. The spatial dimension of Taltala haat is discussed elsewhere in the thesis. It is a place where shops belonging to Hindus and Muslims are situated side by side in close proximity. Importantly, one does not witness such a close proximity between people from both the communities in other localities.

Methodology

The year 2011 was a turbulent period in West Bengal. After 34 years of rule, the incumbent Left Front government lost the 2011 assembly elections. I started my fieldwork during this politically vibrant period focussing on Muslim communities which played an important role in defeating the Left Front government. One of the basic questions related with my position in the fieldwork was my identity of being a Hindu and from a non-Bengali ethnic background studying 'Bengali' Muslim communities. I do not see this situation in binary terms of insider and outsider perspective to the field. In certain terms, I consider myself as an insider to the field. Irrespective of being from a non-Bengali ethnic background, I was raised in West Bengal and this equips me with the cultural sensitivities of the region, which is one among the many other important factors for conducting any field work. On the other hand, I am also aware of my limitations of being a Hindu and studying Muslim communities. To this end, I will argue that no community is a homogeneous entity and thus, there cannot be a unified experience or expressions of 'self' at all the levels and situations. To a larger extent, the situations of everyday life play an important role in the consolidation of expressions and experiences in a unified whole. Anthropological studies conducted by Ewing (1998) and Marsden (2005) highlight the importance of context in formation of identities, which in other situations may appear fragmentary. To his end, it is important to import other ethnographic works highlighting similar problems. As for example, the work of Patricia

Hill Collins (2000) is important, where she explores different experiences of Black women in American society and questions the homogeneous construction of experience of Black feminism. Similarly, Smith (1994) questioning the feminist political activism based on identity politics points the limitations of identity as a factor of political mobilisation and argues for a political mobilisation based on an intersubjective terrain where the sensitivity towards the issue supersedes the identity of the participants, as an effective political strategy.

Another way to see the problem of externality can be through the debate surrounding the issue of lived experience. The recent debate on this issue between Guru and Sarukkai (2012) is an important intervention in this regard. Sarukkai's position to understand the practice untouchability transcends the limits imposed by lived experiences. He argues that, through the process of supplementation the site of untouchability (in its pure state) can be located within the idea of Brahmins, which is one of the features of being a Brahmin, failure to which necessitates the construction of category of untouchables. Sarukkai's arguments provide us with an avenue to explore the other forms of epistemological insights to understand the construction of any particular ontological experiences. Extending this position to the issue of insider and outsider to any field site, I argue that lived experience is one among many other form of acquiring knowledge. It is a valid form of knowledge and become important in certain specific situations but it is not free from its own limitations. On the other hand, an ethnographer can always explore the inter-subjective spaces between him and his interlocutors[3], with certain degree of sensitivity to build a subjective understanding of the field. The limitations also open up opportunities to explore methodological interventions which are unique to any field site.

[3] An important work in this regard can be of Marjorie Shostak (1981), where she explains how she was able to get through the inner life of Kung women in Africa.

Due to a lack of sociological studies concerning everyday life of Muslims of West Bengal, I started my fieldwork with an exploration visit from November 2010 to February 2011. It was conducted in Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, 24 Pargana North and 24 Pargana South districts of West Bengal. These districts share international border with Bangladesh from north to south of West Bengal. Muslim population in these districts is high and the prime objective in this phase was to select an appropriate area of field study. For this purpose I stayed 5 to 7 days in each of these districts, and interacted with people, academicians, and also looked at the administrative data of these districts.

One of the important aspects that emerged during this phase was the predominantly rural character of Bengal Muslims, which was also highlighted in the historical studies by Asim Roy (1983), Rafiuddin Ahmed (1981) and Richard Eaton (1994). According to 2001 census, around 83.10% of Muslims living in West Bengal live in rural areas. Muslims constitute 25.25% of total population in West Bengal against only 13.43% overall in India. It reflects the high concentration of Muslim population in this region, primarily located in rural areas.

In this phase I also visited several Sufi shrines and attended some religious gatherings, popularly known as *jalsa*, conducted by Muslim organizations like Jamat-e-ulama-e-Hind, Jamat-e-Islami and Sufi shrines. *Jalsa* as socio-religious gatherings are basically oriented towards preaching how to be a good Muslim but, it also acts as a platform for these organizations to propagate their respective ideologies among the rural Muslims.

It was during this phase that I came across the name of Furfura Sharif, a popular Sufi shrine located in Hooghly district of West Bengal. The peculiarities associated with the shrine at Furfura motivated me to selected Furfura Village as my field site, where the shrine of late Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) is located. Selecting Furfura Sharif as a field

site also provided me an opportunity to understand the historical process of islamisation and a distinct identity formation among Muslims that took place in Bengal in late 19th and early 20th century Bengal. The second phase of my fieldwork lasted for around 12 months at Furfura from March 2011 to February 2013 with gaps in between.

It takes a considerable degree of time and patience to get into the field. The initial phase of the fieldwork is the most difficult phase. Getting into the field is a creative exercise and the strategy varies according to the strategy adopted by the researcher. My initial days at Furfura were no different. I tried to interact with as many people I can, and with every new interaction, I tried to explain the purpose of my visit. It was a difficult task to explain everyone in the village whom I met about my research interest and the issues related to it. To overcome this, I met teachers of village primary school and madrasas and explained them my purpose. It helped me to a greater extent as teachers were in a better position to understand my position. Teachers also helped in explaining the purpose of my visit to lay villagers, who were initially suspicious of my moves.

In village, people generally meet every day during morning or evening hours for tea or snacks at specific locations, where they also discuss issues pertaining to their everyday life. To identify the locations where villagers meet periodically is an important step to familiarize oneself and get a feel of the village. I identified two important locations, one near mazar shareif and one near panchayat office at Furfura, where villagers usually meet. To register my presence, I also paid attention to the everyday routine of villagers, and made sure of my presence at the said location.

To intervene in the lives of interlocutors to grasp certain understanding needs probing. For me it was a difficult task, as in my initial days most of my questions were answered in a standard format. As for example, Muslim villagers mostly answered my questions

related to their everyday affairs like, they do so because Islam permits/prohibits such acts, and so on. Slowly, I realized that my interlocutors were 'self-conscious subjects' and were answering my questions based on their perception of my quest. My identity as a non-Muslim and my motive to study everyday life of Muslims motivated the villagers to formulate their responses in a particular standard format. To get out of this situation, I stopped asking direct questions. Instead, I became a silent observer of their discussions and probed whenever required to make sense of their arguments and descriptions. Most of the data in my research was collected through this indirect process of observation and probing whenever required. My life was like an open book to them, and common villagers also probed questions pertaining to my personal life, my life as student of University of Hyderabad, about my family and other similar questions, information to which I provided without any hesitation. This exercise was an important trust building exercise. I also used to participate in their everyday work, helping them whenever I felt it was necessity. As for example, sometime the shopkeeper of the tea shop where I spent a good deal of time used to leave the shop in my responsibility, when it was necessary for him to go for some other work. In such situation I used to sell tea, and prepare paan (betel leaf) for the customers. Similarly, during the ramzan month, I kept fasting along with them for the entire month and be with them at their shops. By evening after ablution and performing namaz, my interlocutors used to break their fast and they used to bring extra food for me. In due course I became very close to a number of them during my stay at Furfura and I still maintain a good relationship with them.

Most of the data in my research were collected through in-depth observation of the everyday life of Muslims at mu field site. It was supplemented by occasional probing and unstructured interviews. Data was also collected pertaining to the history of the shrine by structured interviews of some of the pirs and other Muslims in the village and scholars on

this subject at various locations. To construct a historical account of the reform movement and the emergence of Sufi shrine I have used secondary sources like, historical books related to the shrine, political pamphlets and other scholarly articles were used. I have used pseudonyms to protect the identity of y respondents.

Introduction to chapters

Apart from introduction, review of literature and conclusion, the chapters of the thesis can be broadly divided thematically into two sections. The first section consists of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, focusing the genealogy of Islamic reform movements in India and how the ideological and practices surrounding the shrine of Furfura shreif underwent historical and contemporary changes with shifting social context. The second section consists of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 that focusses on everyday life of common Muslims in the village and attempt to demonstrate their everyday activities, their diverse relationship with Islam and their struggle to produce themselves as a 'good' Muslim. In this respect, I have decided to use the conceptual category of transphanisation of Islam and polyphanisation of Islam to show, how religion becomes important in certain aspects of everyday life of Muslims and how in many other aspects of everyday life Islam becomes a peripheral concern for Muslims and they can dispense off with their religious identities. The brief discussions of the chapters are as follows.

Chapter 3 of the thesis deals with the historical account of Islamic reform movement in India, with particular emphasis on Bengal. It starts with a brief account of devotional practices associated with the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) and attempts to trace its historical roots. The historical roots of Islamic reform movements in India can be traced back to the thoughts of Shah Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624), who refuted the philosophical position of Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) and reformulated the Sufi philosophy

representing the hierarchy between the God and the man. The ideas of Shah Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624) were creatively used by Shah Waliullah (d. 1762), who during the last days of Aurangzeb (d. 1707) tried to revitalise fading Mughal Empire by providing a grand schema of society with the necessity of ulema (learned men) in everyday affairs of state. The Muslim reformists of 19th century owe a great deal to Waliullah's notion of polity and society. In this regard, I have illustrated how the ideological moorings of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) go back to tariqa movement which in turn was inspired by Shah Waliullah's thoughts to re-establish the political glory of Indian Muslims. The Sufi practices of Furfura shareif can be located with this historical terrain. The chapter also provides an account of life of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939), his reformist message and his political activities pertaining to Muslim community of Bengal.

Chapter 4 of the thesis deals with the situation after independence. It focusses how the ideology and practices surrounding the silsila Furfura shareif (order of Furfura Shareif) underwent shifts with changes in the socio-political environment. It captures the time period after the death of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939), to illustrate how after his death and after independence, his sons toned down the exclusivist rhetoric of reformation and tried to reconcile the reformist agenda with socio-political reality of Independent India. The chapter then exhibits various activities surrounding the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) and demonstrates how the reformist message of the pirs of Furfura shareif is closely linked with the local cultural and religious threads of the region. This questions the popular perception of Islamic reformism, which is perceived as critical to local cultural accretions and paints Islam monochromatically. It questions the meanings associated with the superficial binary between Sufism, as heterodox, local and tolerant vs Islamic reformation, as orthodox, global and scripturalist Islam.

Chapter 5 departs from the focus on Islamic reformation and moves to the issue of everyday life of common Muslims. It provides a socio-economic analysis of the field site and focusses on the issue of social stratification and its socio-political implications among Muslims in Furfura. I argue that, there cannot be a uniform and general understanding of social stratification among Muslims and the local socio-historic factors play an important role in constitution of any community. In this chapter I provide how socio-historic emergence of the social category of 'aimadar' among the Muslims of this region cut across the traditional understanding of Indian Muslim community in terms of ashraf-ajlaf divide. The issue of caste within Indian Muslims, its everyday dynamics, the basis of its functionality in everyday life and the various forms of resistance of low caste Muslims that emanates from it is discussed in this chapter. I illustrate this by household survey of 300 household in Furfura in terms of land holding, literacy level, and migration to demonstrate how changes in socio-economic profile of low caste Muslims in due course of time motivates a quest for equal treatment and question the prevalent power relations in the village.

Focussing everyday life of Muslims in Furfura, chapter 5 explores the multiple ways of being a Muslim. In doing so, it distinguishes between Islam as a religious category and being Muslim as a cultural category. Within this conceptual terrain I situate the idea of 'muslimness', which encompasses a wide array of ideas, ways of being, and cultural traits that are historically integral part of Muslim culture, but need not be exclusively Islamic. I frame this phenomenon by introducing the conceptual category of polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam. This chapter also engages with the ideas behind the construction of Muslim pious subjectivity as forwarded by Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006), and argues that Muslim subjectivity and construction of pious 'self' cannot be seen as singularly constructed by the quest to be 'good' Muslim. In their

everyday life Muslim engage with variety of other sources which may be instrumental in formulating everyday ethics. Islam here may or may not be an important determiner, and one must not discount other sources as peripheral in understanding various ways of being a ‘good’ Muslim.

Chapter 2

From approaching Islam to studying Muslims: a review of literature

The production of knowledge to a large extent is dependent on the socio-historical and the intellectual context in which it is produced. The approaches to study Muslims and their diverse relationship with Islam in a variety of contexts provide us with an opportunity to understand this nexus. The preliminary step to study Muslims and their relationship with Islam begins with the basic questions pertaining to what to study and how to study?

Let us start with the oriental perspective that has casted a long shadow on the ways through which we look or imagine Islam, Muslims or issues pertaining to them. Orientalism has influenced anthropological study of Islam to a great extent. Said (1978) in a powerful critique of orientalist perspective points that orientalism at its base is a nexus between power and knowledge. Historically, its emergence during the period of European enlightenment and colonial expansion has created a perspective by which the West looks and judges the Orient from its own perspective. The knowledge of the Orient blended with the political power of dominance of the East creates a dichotomous divide between the Orient and the Occident. This divide is important to understand with respect to the studying of Muslims and their relationship with Islam because of following reasons. First, it conceives the Orient and the Occident as separate and exclusive cultural zone, ignoring the historical and cultural engagement and interaction between the two. In this sense, Orientalism as a perspective ignores history and link culture with geography. Culture conceived within any geographical limits is an essentialist conception in itself because it sees culture as static and confined within the matrix of space ignoring the factor of time, in which any culture evolves, interacts with other cultures and constantly undergoes conditioning. Second, the timeless and eternal portrayal of culture leads to the

construction of stereotypes where culture talks about people, their civilisation, politics, religion, everyday life and their psychological construct. Mamdani (2004:17) points this as 'cultural talk', which assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it explains politics as a consequence of that essence. Therefore, the argument emanating from 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' (Lewis 1990) and 'The Clash of Civilisation' (Huntington 1993) pointing towards incompatibility of Islam and democracy are reflections of the 'culture talk'. Such arguments are based on presupposition that the culture followed by Muslims is homogeneous, static and eternal in contrast to the open and dynamic culture of the West, where values like individualism, liberalism and democracy are considered to evolve through historical and political processes, which gets manifested in everyday life, culture and psyche of the West. Lastly, Orientalism also constructs the episteme through which the Orient ruminates itself. The logic of cultural divide based on essentialism promotes the quest for authenticity in any culture that manifests in the form of labour for the 'recovery of self' through the epistemological boundaries between the home and the exile. Therefore, third world intellectuals fall in the same trap by isolating and searching the essence in their own culture by ignoring the multifaceted dialogue between the currents of various cultures and the processes through which the native culture is constantly in the state of becoming.

The question of what to study among Muslims and their relationship with Islam is determined by the framework of the academic discipline. But, situating the object of study within the confinement of academic discipline also demands a caveat that each discipline has its own limitations and understanding any religion, its varied experiences and lives of its adherents goes obliquely beyond the limitations of any academic discipline. The primary agenda herein being sociological and anthropological studies concerning Muslims and their relationship with Islam, I now focus on the intellectual

trajectory of the last hundred years where anthropological studies have ventured into studying Muslims and Islam. Irrespective of dearth of anthropological studies in this area, the ethnographic-fieldwork approach as a methodology claims to provide us with the first-hand account of Muslims in any spatial and temporal settings and their relationship with Islam.

The search for the 'object of study' in anthropology of Islam

The move from the textual analysis of Islamic scriptures to the ethnographic study of Muslims in a variety of context was one of the earliest shifts in the anthropological study of Muslims. But, this shift was not free from the orientalist gaze that marked the previous studies. Cohn (1996) in context of colonial India points towards the nexus between the forms of knowledge and the quest for colonial power. He argues that, in the process of empire building the cultural hegemony of the British rule went hand in hand with the political control. The process of construction of cultural hegemony consisted multifaceted study of the natives which included their worldview, language, legal system, everyday life to the extent of their clothes. His study is seminal in the sense that it exposes how orientalism as a framework went hand in hand with anthropology as a methodological tool in the service of the Empire. We can extend his argument further to incorporate anthropological studies undertaken to study Muslims and Islam. What then can be the object of study for anthropology of Islam?

One of the earliest ethnographies from the perspective of social anthropology concerning the study of Muslims is 'The Sanusi of Cyrenaica' by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in 1949. This work is ignored by a good number of scholars in mapping the debate concerning the development of anthropology of Islam. But, Evans-Pritchard's work is important to be considered for several reasons. This work is a major shift from the sociological and

anthropological study of religion in that period, which generally focussed on any tribal community to study religion in its pristine state. 'The Sanusi of Cyrenaica' is not a work on anthropology of religion, as Evans-Pritchard is known for his theory of religion by his work on the Nuer[1] tribe. But, 'The Sanusi of Cyrenaica' is a study of a religious community – the Sanusi Sufi order, which came up in the middle of 19th century among the Bedouins of Eastern Libya. Evans-Pritchard departs to a considerable degree from the British anthropological way of doing ethnography that focuses on here and now, and delves into the historical contexts in which this order emerged. He attributes human agency to the founder of this order and charts out the socio-political, religious as well as historical context in which the origin and the development of the order took place. In this sense, it was also a departure from the Orientalist and scriptural understanding of any religion, where the object of study was a religious community and not religion per se, and it focussed on the socio-political and historical contingencies that shaped that community. It was also a break from early anthropological studies of religion, where religion was understood as an organic component of a social whole interlinked with other social institutions for proper functioning of any society. Attributing human agency to the historical subjects was a novel step in itself in the study of any religious community, parting from the functionalist tradition of French sociology and the structural-functionalist approaches of British anthropological traditions.[2] Irrespective of the major shift in ethnographic study of Muslim community and their religious order, Evans-

[1] The Nuer is a tribe from South Sudan. Evans-Pritchard has done extensive fieldwork on this tribe, where he has studied their kinship, politics and religion in a traditional way of British anthropological school. His book – 'The Nuer Religion' (1956), is an outcome of his fieldwork, where he has developed a theory of religion.

[2] In 'The Sanusi of Cyrenaica' Evans-Pritchard charts out the historical context and shifts in which Senussi Sufi order was founded (by Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senussi (1787–1859) and underwent several socio-political shifts in due course of time. 'The Sanusi of Cyrenaica' depicts how a religious order transforms into political order with changes in socio-political order. Irrespective of its rich ethnography, this work is often ignored from consideration of anthropology of Islam. Perhaps, because of the local nature of this study that focusses more on the socio-political aspect of a Sufi order than its religious nature. Second, being focussed on local issue it hardly connects with trans-local nature of Islam. In a way, this ethnography is a study of a little localised tradition at the expense of the great Islamic tradition.

Pritchard's ethnography raises some important questions. Can we study Muslims and their society by isolating them from Islam? How do we make sense of everyday practices of Muslims, their local traditions and their interactions with the Islamic great traditions and where to locate Islam in the lives of Muslim?

The major breakthrough in anthropological study of Islam and the study of Muslims came with Clifford Geertz's 'Islam Observed' in 1968. It is considered as the first anthropological study that made 'Islam' as an object of its inquiry. Geertz gave a culturological understanding of religion, and in this he was motivated to provide a paradigm to study Islam (Varisco 2005:24, Marranci 2008:37). Religion for Geertz is a cultural system consisting of real, objective and symbolic elements, which are the carrier of meaning that constitutes the worldview and ethos for those who subscribe to it. He posits a triangular frame consisting of religious symbols, social structure and individual psychology through which meanings can be discerned (Pals 2006). To study and understand religion, what is required is a 'thick description' consisting an in-depth understanding of what the religious symbols mean to people and how it is connected with social structure and individual members of that society. By taking two different Muslim societies, Geertz attempts to show two different manifestations of Islam, which has its roots in different social-political, geographical and cultural contexts. Focussing on two geographical regions at two extremes of Islamic world – Morocco and Indonesia, Geertz argues how different cultural zones produce different expressions of Islam. His comparative approach to study Islam is supported by interpretative approaches where he uses Weberian ideal types to construct two prototypes of expressions of Islam. The militaristic, Sufi and dogmatic Islam of Morocco followed by the tribes, which he portrays as '*maraboutic'* Islam and the syncretistic, reflective, and intellectually appealing Islam of Indonesia followed by the peasants, which he portrays as scripturalist

Islam. By providing an ideal type prototype of Moroccan or Indonesian Islam Geertz homogenises and thus freezes what it mean to follow Islam in both the countries. He reifies other social and historical aspect of Moroccan and Indonesian culture into the tropes of 'cultural style'.

El-Zein (1977) critically engages with Geertz's argument and points that anthropologists studying religion should not concern themselves with the authenticity of meanings or practices. He argues that, Geertz homogenises Islam, by providing a unified view of Islam, as the multitude of individual experiences in Geertz's framework contains the traces of a universal characteristic of religious experiences. As Marranci (2008: 36) points, for el-Zein the particular historical, cultural and social differences between Islam in Morocco and Indonesia in Geertz's view are all expressions of Islam. El-Zein adopts structuralist position. For him, the meaning that any religious experiences carry (Islam in this case) is dependent on its relationship with other entities of any social system. He points that any attempts by anthropologists to understand meaning in isolation will be futile because, symbols are to be studied in relation with the changing social structure. Thus, there cannot be any fixed meaning associated with it. To study Islam as an anthropological category, el-Zein adopts a relativistic position and transcends any rigid boundaries between Islamic great tradition of orthodoxy and little tradition of folk Islam. He strongly argues that the focus of anthropology should be - how Islam is locally practiced without attempting to construct any grand view. The dependence of meaning on the entire system allows him to enter the anthropology of Islam from any point, as there are no autonomous entities in the system and within the system any point can be accessed from any other point.

Recently, Varisco (2005) provide a powerful critique of Geertz's depiction of Islam. Citing Crapanzano's fieldwork on Morocco during the same time period, he points to the

shallowness of Geertz's ethnographic details in Morocco. Against Geertz's portrayal of religion as a system of symbols, Varisco points towards the flaws in Geertz's way of describing and defining his field and Islam. He points two important aspects in Geertz's methodology. First, ethnographers or fieldworkers cannot just describe their field without imposing any meaning at the same time. This critique is important because in 'Islam Observed', Geertz is the sole representative of his field. The entire ethnographic detail does not contain any narrative of the natives. Second, Geertz provide us an idealised and reductionist model of Moroccan and Indonesian Islam. He ignores the issue of class, ethnicity, global economic forces and political ideologies and explains the civilizational sense of Islam as a hermenutical play between labels – scripturalist vs. illuminationist and maraboutists (Varisco 2005:32). Extending this argument further, Marranci (2008: 37) points that Geertz's analysis offers a counterproductive essentialist view of what Islam is, rather than what Muslim is.

These critiques raise some important issues. Can we study Muslims and their relationship with Islam isolating it from other aspects of their society? Or, can we study Islam in itself? How do we make sense of global factors affecting the lives of people in any given context? Gellener (1981) tries to provide us with an answer to the abstraction that Islam underwent in Geertz's formulation. Following British social anthropological traditions, Gellner's book 'Muslim Society' attempts to explain Muslim society through kinship theory, tribalistic alliances and unchanging socio-political dynamics. But, Gellener attempt to provide a solid foundational perspective to study Muslims fails to create a major breakthrough in the long run. The title of the book – 'Muslim Society', gives us an impression that there is only one Muslim society. The homogenisation of Muslims into a single category and the factor of timelessness involved in canvassing them, reminds us the nexus between orientalism and anthropology as suggested by Cohn (1996). The

methodology followed in the book also creates an impression that Muslim societies operate in a single model across space and time. In contrast to Geertz and El-Zein, Gellner (1981) attempts to provide a grand schema to understand Muslim society in all its diversity. His blueprint of Muslim society is derived from medieval text – *'Muqaddimah'* by Ibn Khaldun, where he sees social-political change in Muslim society through an eternal tension between city dwellers and tribesmen, mediated by *ulama*. In the hands of Gellner, Islam is essentialised as the blueprint for Muslim societies, which is monolithic and undergoes homogenisation. Varisco (2005: 74-75) points that Gellner provides us a Eurocentric view of Islam that goes hand in hand with reducing Arabs to Bedouin tribes. In this sense, Gellner follows Geertz in canvassing Islam in similar terms by reducing it to certain ideal types. They differ only in methodology towards approaching their subjects.

Meanings and functions of social categories are not frozen, they emerge and materialise through concrete social processes in any given context. To understand these processes can be one of the avenues to study Muslim societies. Zubaida (1995) criticises Gellner by providing a historical overview of the socio-religious category of *ulama*, which Gellner uses as sociological constant to project a static Muslim society. Using examples from Ottomon Empire, he illustrates the historical shifts that *ulama* as a social category underwent in different socio-political contexts. Zubaida's framework can be useful to understand Muslim societies as he emphasizes history as a significant factor in determining various aspects of present society. The emphasis on history is antithetical to static representation of any culture. It represents culture as a process that is open to be determined by multiple social factors.

A significant contribution in this area was made by Gilsenan (1982). His book 'Recognising Islam' based on his ethnographic studies in Arabian Peninsula and Northern Africa is free from the dichotomy of local and global, and orthodox and folk Islam. In

fact, he emphasises how Islam evolves in relation with socio-political, economic and cultural variations in a variety of contexts. Gilsenan's position breaks the monolithic portrayal of Islam and places Islam in multiple and shifting contexts. Marranci (2008: 39) points that Gilsenan provides two important methodological insights in sociological understanding of Islam. First, he focusses on the everyday life of people who describe themselves as Muslims and engages with discourses of authority which are taken for granted or struggled over. Second, he employs the insight gained to critically reflect on how Western scholars have approached this issue. An important shift in the standpoint of el-Zein (1977) and Gilsenan (1982) is acknowledgement of the element of diversity which through their works got incorporated within anthropological studies focussing Muslims and their relationship with Islam. Gilsenan's analysis demonstrates a nascent distinction between Muslims and their diverse relationship with Islam, mediated through varied social processes. The distinction becomes important in later works, especially after the episode of 9/11 by anthropologists like Soares and Osella (2010) and Marsden and Retsikas (2013), where to illustrate the multifaceted relationship between Muslims and Islam becomes an important exercise to counter demonization of Muslims as a whole.

A radical shift came with Talal Asad's articulation on the object of study for anthropology of Islam. For the first time, Asad (1986) sets a conscious agenda for anthropology of Islam. He critically engages with the previous debates on this issue and takes his argument to a different terrain. In 1986, Asad wrote - 'The idea of an anthropology of Islam', with an aim to formulate a conceptual framework for studying Islam anthropologically. This paper was an attempt to search for a coherent object amidst spatial diversity which can be an object of anthropological inquiry of Islam. Engaging with Geertz's view of religion as a symbolic system embedded in cultural patterns, Asad introduces an element of power, and points that religious truths are created out of

religious symbols by mediation of power embodied in multiple social bodies (Asad 1986, 1993: 33). He criticises el-Zein and Gilsenan for ignoring the theological aspects to which Muslims are firmly bounded. He out rightly rejects the idea of multiple understanding or manifestations of Islam as in case of el-Zein and Gilsenan. For Asad, Islam is neither distinctive social structure, nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artefacts, customs or morals (ibid. 1986: 14).

Three important points that emerge from his quest to formulate a theoretical framework for an anthropology of Islam are as follows. First, for Asad the beginning point for an anthropology of Islam is by treating Islam as a discursive tradition, that include and relates itself to the founding text of the *Quran* and *Hadith*. He elaborates tradition as discourses that instruct the practitioners regarding the correct forms and purpose of a given practice that further relates to a past (when the practices were instituted), a future (how the practice can be transmitted and secured), through a present (how a tradition is inter-linked with other practices and institutions) (Asad 1986, 14). Second, he explicitly mentions that,

> *not everything Muslim say or do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition. Nor is an Islamic tradition in this sense necessarily imitative of what was done in the past. (ibid. 1986, 14-15).*

Third, he considers orthodoxy not just a body of opinion, but as a relation of power. It operates wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and condemn, exclude, undermine and replace incorrect ones (ibid. 1986, 15). Elsewhere in the paper elaborating on power dimension, Asad points that reason and arguments are intrinsic to any discursive tradition which constitutes the site where power and resistance to any tradition are located.

Some observations that can be made out of the brief sketch of his arguments are as follows. First, as he mentions, Islam as a discursive tradition does not capture everything that a Muslim does. This implies that anthropologist will have to be selective in dealing with only those elements which Muslims generally relate to foundational texts – *Quran* and *Hadith*. Or, they may be forced to find the relationship between what Muslims do with their foundational texts. This is the junction, where Asad brings anthropologist in face to face with Islamologists. To investigate selectively only those practices that relate itself to the foundational text may ignore a vast area which influences Muslims and their relationship with Islam. Selectivity on the part of anthropologist may also encourage a selective bias which may encourage the anthropologist to emphasize certain findings and neglect others. Marranci (2008) points, not all Muslims are well versed with the foundational Islamic texts. Asad is silent on this issue. Second, the foundational texts are not referred uniformly by all the Muslims, neither there is any convincing consensus among Muslims regarding how they are to be referred. There is diversity in the ways through which Muslims belonging to various dispositions relate themselves to the foundational sources. Finally, the issue of power possess a certain degree of ambiguity in the overall schema of Asad's argument. Anjum (2007) points that, Asad's advocacy for the foundational texts when looked in the background of orthodoxy as relations of power gives an impression of something, which Asad wants to avoid at the very first place. Orthodoxy understood as relation of power may lead to the emergence of multiple orthodoxies at multiple levels of society. Anjum (2007) encounters this problem by selective borrowing of John Voll's idea of 'Islam as a World System' (Voll 1994). He argues that the local orthodoxies cannot be separated from the global orthodoxies. Anjum thus, urges us to focus on the spaces of mutual interaction between the local and the global orthodoxies as a way out of this problem. But, this strategy may create further

problems. First, what may appear to be global orthodoxy may not be a homogeneous set of discourses. Multiple orthodoxies in Islam manifested at various levels can be treated dialogically as interplay of 'discourses of self' that are constantly influenced and reconstructed by the 'discourses of the other'. Therefore, discursiveness of any tradition becomes a function of interactive space between various claims of orthodoxies, which may take place at multiple levels of society and are facilitated by social and technological factors like modern communication technology, rising literacy levels, migration and the emergence of public sphere. These factors coincide with the factors that lead to the objectification of Muslim consciousness (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 37-45). Asad's argument of orthodoxy as set of power relationship connects the foundational texts of Islam with the agentive role of Muslims to articulate what Islam is and what it means to be a Muslim. Further, the role of social and technological factors that are open to be manipulated by various social forces becomes important in construction of Muslim consciousness. Islam thus, is what Muslims do and produce in relation with other social factors. Therefore, it is not the foundational text of Islam but the subjective role of Muslims, embodied with agentive potential that becomes the point of origin for anthropological study of Muslims and their relationship with Islam. In this regard, Marranci (2008: 3) points 'feeling to be Muslims' as the starting point for anthropological study of Islam. On similar grounds, Marsden and Retsikas (2013) came up with the conceptual framework of 'systematicity' and 'articulation' that they project as methodological concepts to understand the dynamics of Muslim societies and their diverse relationship with Islam.[3]

Studying Muslims after 9/11

[3] Elsewhere, in this chapter I have dealt with 'systematicity' and 'articulation' as methodological concepts.

The event of 9/11 can be seen as a major turning point in the anthropological and sociological studies pertaining to the issues related with Muslims and Islam. The global socio-political environment witnessed blatant rhetoric portraying Muslims as terrorists and Islam as an ideology that promotes terrorism. The episodes centring 9/11 brought forward the reminiscence of axial theories of Lewis (1990) and Huntington (1993) to the centre stage of socio-political affairs. Islam thus, underwent essentialisation and Muslims underwent homogenisation in popular imagination. Sociologists, social anthropologists and historians played an important role in breaking the stereotypes associated with Muslims and deconstructing the essentialisation of Islam. To show the diversity within Muslims, in their ways of living, the diverse relationship that they maintain with Islam and the multiple ways of interpreting the foundational texts of Islam became important strategy to counter the gross homogenisation and essentialisation of Muslims and Islam.

Social stereotypes are social constructs are indicative of presence of power relationships between social categories. It attempts to freeze the meaning by imposing certain attributes that serves interests of specific groups against the others. A way out to break social stereotypes can be by placing issues related to them in a historical context and to demonstrate the historical shifts in the meanings and attributes that constitute any stereotype. As for example, Zaman (2007) provides us a historical analysis of socio-political and religious role played by the *ulama*. As a socio-religious category *ulama* in Islam are generally perceived as a passive, backward looking, anti-modern and reactionary set of orthodox people, who are responsible for keeping Muslims against any progressive ideas. Zaman focusses the role of *ulama* as historic agents in a variety of contexts. His analysis ranges from historic role *ulama* played in modern times in regions like South Asia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Philippines and illustrates how *ulama* were active agents in moulding the debates concerning the Islamic traditions and

laws in context of modernity. Zaman's analysis of *ulama* supplements Zubaida's (1995) historical account of *ulama* in Ottoman Empire, where he draws attention on how historically *ulama* negotiated between the sacred and the secular realms of society. Similarly, Jalal (2008) provide us with a genealogy of *jihad* in South Asian context. *Jihad* in post 9/11 context became a controversial term constructing Muslim stereotypes and supporting axial theories like west vs rest. Jalal tries to breaks the stereotypes associated with *jihad* by providing a historical account of *jihad* in South Asia when it was first proclaimed by Muslims against the non-Muslims in 1831. She charts the shifting terrain of the history of *jihad* in South Asia, from its first proclamation in 1831 by a Muslim Sufi *pir* supported by some Hindu kings and Afghan tribes against the Sikhs in North-West Indian frontier to its latest incarnation in the late 1990s, when it was proclaimed in Afghanistan (against USSR) and in Kashmir (against Indian occupation).

The post 9/11 events gave a new lease of life to axil theories and created new barriers in forms of stereotypes. The personal profile of young Muslims who high jacked airlines and crashed it to World Trade Centre and other locations raised some new set of questions. The perpetrators of violence were educated in modern and secular environment; they possessed scientific and technical skills and were anti-west, if not anti-modern in their orientation. Their Arab-ethnic background raised questions regarding the role of ultra-orthodox Saudi regime in spreading fundamentalist trends among Muslims. One of the important contributions to debunk the 'clash of civilisation' thesis was forwarded by Aslan (2005). He provides us with a historical account of how Islam was shaped by multiple pre-Islamic traditions in its formative period and how many of its traditions and practices underwent shifts historically. Aslan emphasises the interaction of Islam with modernity and charts out how in wake of colonialism Muslims tried to reconcile Islam with modernity. The process of reconciliation took multiple trajectories from liberal,

modernist and reformist positions to radical and extremist standpoints, where none of these positions are sociological constants and exist in their ideal forms.

The historical and dynamic overview negates any static and timeless image of Islam. In recent times there have been attempts to link some of the existing Muslim monarchy and dictatorships with extremism. This perspective goes with the idea of democratic deficit in Muslim countries because of incompatibility of Islam (perceived as archaic) with the democratic ideas (perceived as modern). The present Wahhabi regime in Saudi Arabia is generally considered as an extreme version of Islam that influences radical responses against Western culture and nations. Commins (2005) provides us with an elaborative and historical account of present Saudi regime and its alliance with Wahhabi doctrine since its inception in late 18th century. He aims to uncouple the simplicist nexus between Wahhabism and terrorism by canvassing the uneven path that Wahhabism covered historically and examines the contingent situations in which it gained popularity in several parts of Muslim world. Even the Saudi regime that follows strict Wahhabi ideology is not a static and frozen entity. It is undergoing slow but significant changes in its socio-political spheres. Recently in 2015, the regime provided voting rights to women in local bodies for the first time[4].

The radical voices that emanates in the name of Islam are not monolithic entities. They differ considerably in their modes of action and motive for existence. Ismail (2003) debunks the notion of political Islam that presupposes Islam as inherently political. She illustrates diversity within Islamist political activism and points that not all forms of Islamist standpoints encourages violence. To understand Islamism, we need to place it within its local context, which is constantly moulded by global political currents. She focusses on the political and economic situation of post 1990s, where the state receded

[4] For details please see: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35075702 (accessed on 29/03/2016).

from welfare activities and thus facilitated the emergence and flourishment of non-state actors like Islamist groups in the mainstream socio-political arena. But, her work is a landmark in the sense that in post 9/11 context, it is one of the early works displaying the diversity within the Islamist groups with varying degree of socio-political and religious standpoints. Islamism is a contested space where several voices compete to be heard. On similar grounds, Meijer (2009) in his edited book – 'Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement, focusses on recent surge in Islamic socio-religious movements and questions its monolithic construction. Meijer provides us with the diverse historical origins of *Salafi* movements by decoupling it Wahhabism and supplements it with its variety of contemporary shades in different countries. The contributors of the book provide a panoramic view of *Salafi* movement in various parts of the world that came up in a variety of contexts. They vary widely in terms of their origins, their aims and their methodology of social activism. Importantly, Meijer (2009:5-9) demonstrates that *Salafism* can adopt the strategy of quietist submission or it can take the shape of activist confrontation, or it may be a combination of both; all depends to a large degree on the local situations in relation with the global reformist currents.

Politics within Muslims is an important dimension that connects various other aspect and institutions of Muslim society. To explore the social roots of Muslim politics is an important exercise to deconstruct Muslim politics and unpack its various dimensions. Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) argue for placing Muslim politics in multiple and shifting context. They trace multiple dimensions of Muslim politics and point that Muslim politics is neither concerned with only politics of religion and identity, nor do the *ulama* are the only actor in this political arena. It encompasses an array of social factors like any other politics. With examples from across the world they demonstrate how other social factors like of family and kinship ties, ethnicity, Muslim political party, religious elites and other

political actors like housewives, women, students, workers and peasants influence and shape Muslim politics. Bayat (2007) tries to deconstruct the static notion of Islamism. Advocating a methodological shift Bayat rejects 'Islam' as an object of anthropological inquiry and argues for focussing 'Muslim societies' in its plurality and as a concrete social entity for sociological or anthropological studies. This methodological shift provides dynamism to agentive aspects of Muslims and allows self-conscious Muslims to define their own social and ontological reality. Bayat traces the shift of Muslim politics from Islamism of early 1990s to a post-Islamic phase by early 2000s and tries to demonstrate the socio-political background behind this shift. He points how with neo-liberal economic agenda in the late 1990s the character of the welfare state changed and the state slowly receded from welfare activities. This phase also created disenchantment for a majority of Muslims from middle classes who were affected severely by privatisation and informalisation of labour. The space left void by the welfare state was occupied by Islamism, which shifted its political stand from capturing state power through radical and extremist means to much peaceful yet resurgent and radical means to reaching out to a vast section of common Muslims, who are the worst sufferer of the neo-liberal economic policies. The resultant lumpenisation of labour[5] gravitated towards a new form of Islamism, which Bayat (2007) calls the post-Islamic turn of Muslim politics.

An important shift that we witness in the disciplinary approaches towards anthropological study of Islam was the shift from search for a coherent object of study in anthropology of Islam to focussing to the study of Muslims. This shift is also marked by the shift in focus from study of exclusive aspects and institutions pertaining to Muslims to study of

[5] Elsewhere I have mentioned that Ahmad (2014) also maintains the role of neo-liberal economy for lumpenisation of working classes. Ahmad uses this idea to demonstrate how neo-liberal economy fostered communal disharmony in India. For details see: 'Communalisms: Changing Forms and Fortunes', speech given by Aijaz Ahmad at Sundarayya Vigyan Kendra, Hyderabad in May 2014. The web link of the speech is: www.sundarayya.org/sites/default/files/papers/**aijaz**%20final.pdf (accessed on 20/02/2016).

everyday life of Muslims in all its complexity. As Azmeh (2009) points that there are two major standpoints in this enterprise. First, emphasising culture and identity as their locus of inquiry and second, emphasising history and contextual background in this endeavour. Culture, here is to be understood as a process that is opened to be determined by historical and social processes. Zubaida (2010, 2011) analyses this issue with respect to contemporary Middle Eastern societies and explores the various dimensions of everyday life by focussing issues like alcoholism, homosexuality, Islamic finance, state and citizenship to point the contingent aspects of Middle Eastern culture. Zubaida (2011: 4) uses the term 'spray on Islam' to demonstrate many aspects of everyday life of Muslims that are considered to be Islamic, without being necessarily religious. Similarly, Bayat (2009) in his study of everyday life of marginalised sections of Muslims uses 'non-movement' as a concept to make sense of social mobilisation of dispossessed in contemporary Egypt and Iran. Non-movement as a concept denotes collective actions of non-collective actors representing a large number of ordinary Muslims whose fragmented, uncoordinated but similar actions trigger social change in due course of time. Non-movement in this respect is not just a departure from traditional social movement approaches, but it also provides agentive potential to the marginalised and dispossessed sections of society.

One of the important aspects in approaches towards studying Muslim communities is to bring back the agentive potential of Muslims and their relationship with Islam, to illustrate their everyday striving to be a 'good' Muslim amidst their constant struggle, accommodation and adaptation within shifting context of the modern life. Marsden (2005) ethnographic account of everyday lives of Muslims in North-Western province of Pakistan explores the quest to be a Muslim. Close to Afghanistan border, the North-Western province is affected by radical Taliban movement as well as it has a history of

social unrest and violence because of tribalistic loyalties. Marsden question this typical image of Muslims from this region by providing avenues from everyday life of common Muslims where they debate, question and discuss various modes of their representations of being a Muslim.

Islam plays an important role in shaping the ethical dimensions of everyday life of Muslims. Following the trajectory of Talal Asad, Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) present a critical overview of agency, subjectivity, religiosity and public sphere, defined by western liberal traditions in a universalistic mould. Mahmood (2005) in her ethnographic study of women based piety movement in urban Cairo, urges to move beyond the binary of subjugation and resistance to understand feminist conception of agency. She points that agency can be seen as attempts on behalf of the subjects to cultivate certain desires. Questioning the way religiosity is understood in western liberal traditions as a privatised entity interior of the subject; Mahmood offers a radical alternative and argues that belief may also be a product of external bodily acts consisting of rituals and ways of worships. Thus, it is not the inward belief of the subject, but the external bodily acts as reflected in rituals, liturgical acts and ways of worship, which may constitute religiosity of subjects. Hirschkind's (2006) takes this argument further and delves deep into the psychological realm to explore the nexus between inner sensorium of subjects and the acts of self-cultivation of virtues in constituting public ethics. Hirschkind presents an ethnographic study of production and consumption of recorded sermons by Muslim preachers in Cairo. He points that cassette sermons have inflated the space and time of religious sermons which was traditionally confined to mosques mostly on Fridays. The wide reach of cassette sermons functions has a mode of pious entertainment and has become an instrument for cultivation of Islamic virtues affecting the everyday life of Muslims. The conscious cultivation of Islamic virtues helps in shaping the ethical

dimensions of public sphere, where it encourages common Muslims to question and reflect upon their piety and practices associated with it. It facilitates public deliberations and articulations, leading to the formation of 'Islamic publics'. Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) emphasize the role of Islam in inculcating certain moral dispositions among Muslims, which in turn have transformative potential to change the political landscape of Muslim societies by encouraging debates and deliberations.

It is important here to recognise that Islam is not the sole determiner shaping the agentive potential of Muslims. Elsewhere, I have mentioned how there exist diverse sources of ethics for common Muslims in everyday life. In Furfura, Muslims follow a tripartite division between *farz*, *niyom* and *parampara* that determine their life cycle rituals, ethical standards and other aspects of everyday life. Das (2011) focusses on the everyday dimension of construction of ethical 'self' among Muslims living in old Delhi. She points that ethics in everyday life can be understood as moral striving for a better life in relation to other activities of everyday life. Therefore, highlighting the relational aspect concerning ways of ethical living with other dimensions of everyday life, she argues that there cannot be any singular understanding of being a moral and ethical being. The struggles to live up to certain moral and ethical dispositions should be seen as part of everyday struggle in a variety of context. Similarly, Rsanayagam (2013: 102) points that moral reasoning is not confined to objectified values and discourses, but it is also conditioned by everyday engagement in social and material world. Thus, moral self emerges through social participation of Muslims in everyday affairs of family, community and society as a whole.

The focus on everyday lives of Muslims to develop a framework to understand the diverse relationship that Muslims maintains with Islam is an important shift after 9/11. It

also encouraged the idea of studying Muslims in their social context. But, how to treat Islam as a factor influencing the lives of Muslims remains an elusive question. Bowen (2012) proposes a framework for 'a new anthropology of Islam' where he highlights the importance to texts and ideas in the lives of Muslims. But, the role of texts and ideas are to be studied in pretext of how they are understood and transmitted in any particular time and space (ibid. 2012: 4). To this end, Osella and Soares (2010) have coined the term – '*Islam mondain'* to understand the diversity involved in constitution of Muslim subjectivity in our contemporary world. As an analytic concept, *Islam mondain* refers to the efforts by Muslims to produce themselves as modern religious subjects, within their socio-political context (Osella and Soares 2010). It analyses the role of Islam in conjunction with other social factors in a discursive terrain of everyday life. *Islam mondain* goes beyond the micro-politics of ethical self-fashioning, as suggested by Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) and encompasses wider societal processes like the role of the state, religious elites and other actors, including the role of individual Muslims, their ambivalences, contradictions and struggles and their relationship with non-Muslims, that underlines in the constitution of modern Muslim subjectivities.

Muslim subjectivities are also moulded by ethical standards and discourses of other religious communities. Globally Muslim population is scattered throughout a vast geographical are and majority of Muslims live outside the Arabian Peninsula, to which we generally associate them geographically. Recent studies show that Muslims living in Indonesia and in Indian sub-continent comprising India, Pakistan and Bangladesh consist around 43% of total Muslim population[6]. Globally majority of Muslims live in areas, where they share geographical and cultural spaces with people from other communities.

[6] This is based on data provided by Pew Research Center. It was published in April, 2015, and is based on Muslim population in 2010, of top ten countries.
For details see: http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/pf_15-04-02_projectionstables74/. (accessed on 31/03/2016).

There are significant overlaps in between people from Muslim background and people from other religious background, as they share common language, ethnicity, nationality and other aspects of everyday life[7]. Jairath (2011) proposes studying the embedded character of Muslim communities in their social context as a methodology to understand the diversity within the Muslim community and to explore the multifaceted interaction that Muslims maintain with people from other religious background. The notion of systematicity and articulation (Marsden and Retsikas 2013) can be helpful to capture this complex picture. The notion of systematicity captures the agentive potential of Muslims to evoke Islam amidst socio-historic contingencies. It focusses on what people from Muslim background do to relate their life with Islam. The notion of articulation suggests the ways, through which Islam is produced, reproduced or transformed in any socio-historic context (ibid. 2013: 2). Together the notions of systematicity and articulation attempt to encompass the contextual contingencies and agentive aspects of people from Muslim background.

Towards polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam

One of the ways to understand and reconcile the structural facets of Islam and other socio-historic contingencies influencing everyday life of Muslims with the agentive and creative aspects of Muslims can be through the notion of polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam[8]. Polyphanisation of Islam refers to the multiple manifestations of Islam in the lives of Muslims, whereas transphanisation of Islam seeks to understand the contours of everyday life of Muslims where Muslims transcend Islam in their

[7] Several studies provide the evidence of common and shared traditions between Muslims and people from other religious background. As for example see, Roy (1984), Eaton (1997), Mayaram (2000, 2004), Gottschalk (2001), Sikand (2003), Ahmad and Reifeld (2004), Assayag (2004), and Ricci (2011).

[8] The word '*polyphanisation'* is derived from two words – poly meaning multiple and phany – meaning manifestations or appearances, thus, multiple manifestations or appearances. The word '*transphaisation'* has been used combining, trans – meaning beyond, and phany- meaning manifestations beyond sth (Islam in present case). Elsewhere in the thesis I have discussed this in detail.

mundane life. The purpose of notion of polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam is to study the intersectional fields of mundane life in which people from Muslim background register themselves. Islam is represented in diverse ways and influences multiple aspects of life of people from Muslim background. These interactions are neither monolithic in representation nor they are constant and timeless. Polyphanisation of Islam can be helpful to understand the portrayal of Islam in all its complexities and vastness by people from Muslim background. Islam is not the blueprint of life, nor do Muslims relate to it in a monochromatic fashion. Therefore, polyphanisation of Islam attempts to capture this complexity by exploring how Muslims relate themselves with Islam in their mundane life. Another important aspect in studying the everyday life of Muslims is to explore the instances of everyday life, where Muslims do not resort to Islam to inform their actions and transcend Islam. Religion is neither the sole determining factor nor the residual category in their life. Transphanisation of Islam attempts to understand the moments where the religious identity of Muslims does not influences their engagement with the wider society in any particular specific socio-historic context. The notion of polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam can be helpful to understand the cultural and creative expressions of Muslims, especially in those societies like India, where Muslims share a common historical and cultural heritage with people from other religious background. As for example, it can be useful to analyse literature and artistic expressions whereby, Muslims exhibit a complex and dynamic relationship with Islam. Importantly, as an analytical concept, it can be extended to study any other religious community. Polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam as an analytical frame can be helpful to de-exceptionalise the study of Muslims, as it is open to other important socio-cultural and geographical determiners that shape the life of people. Polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam recognises the important role of Islam in the lives of Muslims, it

acknowledges multiple ways of being a Muslim, yet it does not obscure other possibilities of being for people of Muslim background.

One of the important aspects that emerge out of this review is to de-exceptionalise the study of Islam and to focus on Muslims and their dynamic and varied relationship with Islam. There cannot be unanimity on which approach is best suited for anthropological/sociological study, but we can identify certain important yardsticks which may be helpful to pursue this study further. It is also important to see how in the recent past the focus shifted from anthropology of Islam with its search for a coherent object of study to the study of Muslim communities exploring their embedded character in a variety of socio-historic context. Islam here is an important determiner but its influence is open to be determined by other socio-political and historical factors. These issues will be discussed with historical and empirical examples in the chapters to follow.

Chapter 3

Life and times of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939)

In 1903, Lt. Col. Crawford, who was an officer in Indian Medical Services and was appointed as civil surgeon of Hugli district of Bengal, wrote 'A Brief History of the Hughli District'.[1] At the end of the report, he also provided an account of religious composition and folklore of people living in the district. He mentions that there are three centres of Muslim influence in the district – Pandua, Sitapur and Phurphura (Furfura). With respect to Furfura, he mentions folklore that there was a Bagdi king, who ruled Furfura and was defeated by a Muslim army contingent led by Hazrat Shah Halibi and Hazrat Karamuddin. Both of them were killed in the battle.[2] He also mentions that their shrines were revered both by Hindus and Muslims.

This account provides us with an important insight concerning popular religiosity of people. He explicitly mentions that Furfura is known for the tomb of these two warriors and is revered by both Hindus and Muslims of this region. Today, this observation may not sound convincing. Furfura today is known for the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939), who was a prominent Muslim social reformer of his period. Popularly known as Dada Huzoor, Abu Bakr Siddique is known for his title – *Mujjaded e zaman* (renewer of faith of his times).[3] Apart from the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique and the shrine of "martyred" warriors as mentioned above, there is one more shrine known as Bukhari Shareif in Furfura. It is

[1] A Brief History of the Hugli District, published in 1903.
[2] Elsewhere in the report, the author mentions this incident took place in the 14th century.
[3] There is no historical evidence for how he got that title. The present generation pirs claim that he was conferred by that title when he visited the shrine of Shah Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624); the caretaker of Sirhindi shrine conferred this title on him.

believed that this shrine is of the Sufi pir, who accompanied the invading Muslim army contingent in this region. But, today it is only the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique, for which Furufura is known and it is this shrine which is highlighted on the tourism map of West Bengal and in other government documents. Interestingly the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique is not frequented by Hindus and devotees from other religions, which is unusual in context of South Asia. How this shrine came up and how it became a popular Sufi shrine of Bengal is a major theme I will explore in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

I start with a discussion on the foundational narrative of Furfura. I was informed about this narrative by both Hindus and Muslims during my fieldwork in Furfura. Despite some differences in the narratives by respondents of different communities, largely the narrative is more or less consistent. The narrative goes on as follows:

The older name of this region was 'Balia Basanti'. It was ruled by Bagdi[4] Kings, who were viewed as autocratic rulers. To liberate the oppressed masses from exploitation, Bhaktiyar Khilji, the ruler of Bengal in 14th century sent an army contingent. The Muslim forces fought bravely but were unable to defeat the Bagdi King. One day, a spy informed them that there was a pond known as '*jyot kund'* inside the palace, which had magical properties to heal any wounds. Because of this the soldiers of Bagdi King are able to fight relentlessly. In order to destroy the magical power of that pond, a Muslim soldier in the guise of a *fakir* went inside the palace and polluted the *jyot kundh* by a piece of beef which he carried with him concealed in his garments. The piece of beef destroyed the magical power of the *jyot kund* and as a result the Muslim army contingent was able to defeat the king. But four commanders attained martyrdom in this battle. The stick of the commanders fell near Howrah, their horses fell at Bandhpur (near Furfura), their heads fell at Pandua and their bodies fell at Furfura.

[4] Bagdi is a local Hindu low caste group of West Bengal. It is recognized under schedule caste category.

Nevertheless, the victory liberated the oppressed masses and out of happiness the name of this area was changed to Furfura, which was a derivation of the Persian word – Farrefarra, meaning extreme happiness that was generated after victory. At the four locations associated with the martyred commanders, shrines were constructed, which later became popular sacred location of this region, visited by both Hindus and Muslims.

As mentioned earlier, Lt.Col. Crawford in his report mentioned one of these shrines at Furufra. In the report he also mentioned this foundational narrative in the section regarding folklore of Hughli district. But there is a difference in the report; this story is not associated with Furfura, but with a place named Dwarbhashini, near Arambagh, where a king named Dwarpal ruled, belonging to Sadgop caste. Some important issues in this regard are worth discussing. Firstly, the notion of military conquest of this region is justified on ground of ensuring justice. Second is the notion of the use of beef to pollute the magical power of the pond. Lastly, the identity of this region is engraved on the egalitarian ethos and rationality of Islam which is portrayed as an egalitarian and rational religion, which provides justice to oppressed masses and destroys all types of superstitions and magical powers. On the other hand, it is also interesting to see how shrines came up at different sites where body parts and things associated with the warriors fell. This incident suggests links to the myth of Kali, which is very popular in Bengal.[5] It may be possible that in due course of time this narrative structure was imported from other regions and superimposed to Furfura. There is also a difference in how people belonging to Hindu and Muslim community interpret this narrative. In opposition to Muslim interpretation related to emancipatory role of Islam, Hindus in the village interpret this story as an act of invasion by Muslims in this region. The latter claim

[5] According to this myth, when sati's (Kali) body was severed in heaven, it fell on earth in several parts at a number of locations. At those locations *shaktipeeth* came up. *Shaktipeeth* are divine sites of Mother Goddess.

that Balia Basanti was a prosperous region and it was its prosperity which attracted invasion by Muslim forces. To support their argument they often cite the example of an old Kali temple in Furfura, which has a grand architecture. The authenticity of these narratives is not the concern here; what matters is how it is interpreted and how it contributes to construction of identity of this region. This helps us understand the discourse of exclusive Muslim identity associated with the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique.

Anyone visiting the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique will find certain things peculiar. At first instance, one will witness silence inside and around the shrine. There is no *pir* inside or around the premises of the shrine. At the entrance of the shrine, certain written instructions are given to the devotees: kissing or touching the grave, doing *sajda* in front of grave, lighting a candle or scented sticks, offering rosewater, flower, or *chadar* on the grave are strictly prohibited. Other activities like music – *qawali* or any other use of musical instruments are also prohibited, and the shrine is open only to males; females are not allowed inside, not even inside the premises of the shrine. There is no annual *urs* celebration and there is no tradition of *gaddinashin* in this shrine. Instead of annual *urs* at this shrine, *isale swahab* – transferring of rewards to the dead and reciting Quran for the dead – is conducted every year on 21st, 22nd and 23rd day of *Falgun* month of Bengali Hindu calendar. All these activities which are proscribed and prescribed for the devotees are based on the reformist ideology of Abu Bakr Siddique which is mentioned in his *wasiyatnama* (will). He was the founder of the *silsila* (order) of Furfura Shareif, and belonged to *Ahle Sunnat wa la Jamaat* school of thought. For his reformist activities, he is also known as *Mujjaded e Jaman* - One who renewed the religion in his times. Interestingly, this shrine is not frequented by Hindus, which is the common case with other Sufi shrines of this region. It is important to note the

social and political context of 19th century India, and Bengal in particular, to understand the peculiarities of this shrine. Therefore, now I attempt to trace the reformist discourse among Muslims in the Indian subcontinent and will try to show the major shifts it underwent in due course of time.

Mapping Islamic Reformation in context of South Asia

Religious reform movements can be seen as response to particular social and historical context. They emerge within a social context and attempt to address certain set of social, political and religious issues. Reformist currents in Islam are no exception to this. These currents across time exhibit certain common tendencies, but the approach to reform taken is contextual and rooted in the social and historical grounds of any society.

The modern Islamic reform movement in context of South Asia, which started from early 19th century, has a number of important features. First, unlike medieval reformist currents in this sub continent, which was generally addressed to the political ruler, modern reform focuses on individual believers. It attempts to construct a sense of self responsibility and self instrumentality.[6] It came up in response to the decline of Muslim political power in Indian sub continent. This situation necessitated that, in the absence of any central political authority, it was now incumbent on individual Muslim to follow and uphold their religion. This leads us to second point where the role of family becomes important in reformist discourses as a social institution to harbour and transfer 'correct' Islamic practices. This meant that family was to be protected from the ills of the external world, especially modernity. It led to redefining of gender roles and emphasized the role of women as active agents in this process. Thirdly, it attempted to construct an imaginary of an ideal Muslim

[6] For details regarding defining features of modern Islamic reform movements, see to Francis Robinson (2006).

community (*ummah*), based on historical Muslim community established by Prophet Muhammad and his companions in Medina. This necessitated proper social conduct on the part of Muslims in their everyday lives and proper organisation of society according to *sharia* – the divine law. Thus, modern Islamic reform movements attempt to construct a new self identity, a notion of family based on redefined gender roles and an imaginary of an ideal society, which are linked together in a seamless plane of religiosity. But this religiosity is 'this worldly' (Robinson 2006), where the relationship between God and individual Muslim is redefined. God is portrayed as a sovereign of this world – the king of kings and individual Muslims are his *khalifas* (viceregent). This one to one relationship of a believer with God eliminates any intermediary worldly authority – either spiritual or temporal. It emphasizes activism both at personal and at social level, on the part of the individual believer to uphold the sovereignty of God. This can be done only by following God's revelation – the *Quran*, his rule – *sharia*, and by following the traditions of the Prophet – *hadith*. The call for upholding the divine plan can be fulfilled by following Prophet Muhammad. Unlike Sufis, who portray Muhammad as 'the perfect man' (*Al-insan al-kamil)* in spiritual terms, reformers portray him as a man in his historical context, who can be emulated by others[7] (Schimmel 1994, Robinson 2006, Pearson 2008).

The intellectual roots of modern Islamic reform movements in South Asia go back to Shah Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624). Initiated in Naqshbandi Sufi order, Ahmad Sirhindi's time period coincides with the reign of Akbar and Jahangir, when the Mughal Empire was at its peak. His points of contention were everyday religious practices of Muslims, especially at

[7] The Sufi portrayal of Muhammad is of 'the perfect man', who is the true mystical seeker (Schimmel 1994). Francis Robinson (2006) points that in modern *sirat* literature, Muhammad's qualities like his loving nature, his sense of duty towards God, his status as servant of God etc. are emphasized. This is in contrast to Muhammad's portrayal as mystic – who has inner mystical knowledge, in Sufi literature.

Sufi shrines, the religious initiatives *(Din-e Ilahi)* taken by Emperor Akbar to promote social harmony, and the influence of Shiism in Akbar's court. The doctrines of *Din-e Ilahi* (religion of God), as propagated by Emperor Akbar was seen as *bidat* (innovations), just like some practices at Sufi shrines like venerating the grave. It is important to note that, the critique of Sufi practices and patronage to Din-e Ilahi by Ahmad Sirhindi was modelled within the frame of Sufi doctrine. On the other hand, it will be wrong to assume that Sirhindi's concerns with respect to political authority were peripheral.[8] Most of his writings are in the form of letters (*maktubat*), where his prime concern is *bidat* in everyday religious practices.[9] A good number of letters were addressed to the ruler and the nobility to ensure correct religious practices, in accordance with Sunnah. He also opined that customary practices can be followed, but within the limits of sharia. For Ahmad Sirhindi, the path to reality (*tariqa*), the reality (*haqiqa*) itself and the divine law governing everyday affairs (*shariat*) - all are part of one ultimate reality (Buehler 2003). The most important contribution of Ahmad Sirhindi was his philosophical engagement with Ibn-e Arabi's Sufi doctrine – *wahadat-al wujud* (unity of beings). Interestingly, in his own philosophical standpoint – *wahadat as-sujud* (unity of appearance) he does not reject Ibn-e Arabi completely, but points that *wahadat-al wujud* preceded his formulation of *wahadat as-sujud* (Schinimel 1973).

Ibn-e Arabi's *wahadat-al wujud* sees a corresponding link between the essence of God that exists in God's mind and the particular beings. It states that all particular beings are intrinsically linked with God, and are reflection of his divine presence. This link between

[8] Harlan O. Pearson (2008) maintains that Sirhindi's concern with respect to political authority was peripheral. Annemarie Schinimel (1973) in her review of Yohanan Friedmann's book on Ahmad Sirhindi describes the political orientation of Naqshbandi Sufi order across Muslim lands and points that what may appear to be apolitical and sublime, for Ahmad Sirhindi, may be highly political in background.

[9] For details on ideas of Ahmad Sirhindi, see to Yohannan Friedmann (1971), Annemarie Schinimel (1973), Arthur F Buehler (2003) and Fazlur Rahman (2006).

God and beings constitutes the divine plan where whatever exists corresponds to the essence of divine. In this divine plan, God's law of descent (*tanazzul*) which takes place in several stages, everything including evil corresponds to God's attributes, and evil is seen as apparent not ultimate (Rahman 2006). Ahmad Sirhindi attacks the corresponding continuity of essence between God and beings as the ultimate stage of realization in Sufi philosophy. He argues that there is only one being – God, rest are shadow beings (Buehler 2003) or non beings (Rahman 2006). God alone exists and the rest of the objects in this world came up when he cast shadow of his attributes on them. By doing this God transforms them from non-being to being. Important here is to note the emphasis on the word – 'transformation'. God only transforms the non-being to being, it does not destroy evil, but transforms them into positive good (Rahman 2006). Therefore to uphold this divine plan and to realize the potentials of being, the divine law – *sharia* becomes important. It is only through following *sharia* and engaging in everyday moral struggle that the being can uphold the divine plan and realize its full potentiality. This formulation is the base of the doctrine of *wahadat as-sujud* (unity of appearance). This for Ahamd Sirhindi is the ultimate stage of realization in Sufi philosophy which comes after *wahadat-al wujud* (unity of being), when the Sufi realizes that he is only the shadow of God and a small part of the larger divine plan. The Sufi journey thus, does not end but is an ongoing moral struggle in this world. This human centric philosophy of *wahadat as-sujud* emphasizes the primacy of *sharia* and Prophethood (*nubuwat*) over closeness to God (*walayat*) (Buehler 2003). This also implies the importance of the role of the Prophet over Sufi saints. The moral struggle in this world, which is incumbent on being, a Sufi goes to God and forsakes this world, whereas a Prophet brings God to this world and seeks to transform this world into something nobler (Rahman 1973).

The ideas of Ahmad Sirhindi were revived by Shah Waliallah (1702-1762), but in a different socio political context, he took a different trajectory. Unlike Ahmad Sirhindi, whose articulations were radically in opposition to prevalent Sufi philosophy and practices, Waliallah's approach was of synthesis *(tatbiq)*, which can be interpreted as reconcialliation of divergences. In the socio political context of 18th century India, when Mughal Empire was on the verge of decline, and regional non Muslim powers like the Marathas and the Sikhs were advancing fast. Shah Waliallah tried to unify the Muslim community. The political instability was compounded by British advances in North India in the second half of 18th century and by the plunder of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739.

Shah Waliallah attempted to bring together the roles of ulama (learned theologians) and Sufis. Interestingly, his views were actually embedded in Sufi philosophical framework. His viewpoint was synthesis of various traditional disciplines like philosophy (*kalam*), law, theology, history including Shia philosophy. He tried to construct a philosophical system linking God, the universe, society and man. For Waliallah, the material world consists of three basic kingdoms – mineral, vegetable and animal. Man, who possess both animalistic and angelic nature is actually the link between the material and spiritual world. To elaborate this, Waliallah comes up with the concept of universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*), who constituted and governed the universe. He then tries to construct an organic connection between man and the universal man. This organic analogy constitutes the base of his reformist viewpoint concerning individual self, family and community. Here, I intend to describe how Waliallah uses classical Sufi framework and works on it to formulate his reformist philosophy.

Waliallah starts with describing the seats of human psychic nature in relation to divine. He points four important seats – soul (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*), intellect (*aql*) and liver (*kabad*).

It is the heart (*qalb*) which is superior to the intellect (*aql*) in brain. The soul (*nafs*) of a man is connected to the soul of the universal man (the God) through heart. The hierarchy where liver, which performs lower bodily functions associated with animalistic being is inferior to heart which is associated with angelic being performing spiritual and physical function and has wider connotations in his worldview. A point to note here is that, this classification is actually in accordance with classical Sufi philosophy, but classical Sufi philosophy also pays importance to human body in physical sense. Parts like hair, nails, blood, nose, beard, breath, legs and other bodily parts are considered to be bearer of *baraqa* (spiritual power) and play important part in overall Sufi cosmology.[10] Waliallah's emphasis is selective and this has important socio political implications which I will demonstrate later. He points that the natural tendency of the heart is to seek God, but at the same time heart can also be contaminated by lower desires. Therefore, there is a constant need to cleanse heart. The metaphor of cleansing heart is in accordance to Sufi philosophy, which considers heart to be the centre point of human body and a polished mirror, which reflects divine. Classical Sufi philosophy considers man to be macrocosm and the universe including divinity to be microcosm. Man as macrocosm is the totality of all the multiplicity of the universe just like two mirrors placed in front of each other. Classical Sufi philosophy illustrates this with the metaphor of drop and ocean, where it is said that even a drop contains the ocean in itself. This inner delve of classical Sufism is inverted by Shah Waliallah who considers human to be microcosm and the great body and its universal soul (nafs al-Kulliyat) as macrocosm. It means that the ontological inquiry which is an important pillar of Sufi philosophy was

[10] For details on the role of human body in Sufi philosophy, refer to Schimmel (1994).

inverted and now according to Waliallah, the self has to conform and bear the responsibility of upholding the universal order. What constitutes this universal order is the point to which I turn now.

After elaborating the natural system of humans, Waliallah juxtaposes the human system on society. By using organic analogy he points that the Great person (*shaks kabir*) consisting of totality of universe and whole humanity including smaller units of humanity like city states – all functions in similar way (Pearson 2008). Therefore, in society the heart is the *imam* (religious and social leader), the brain is the theologian who advices *imam*, and the liver is the chief administrator (Pearson 2008). By saying this, Waliallah emphasises the role of imam and confers a spiritual halo around his status. Later we will see how Waliallah's conception of history emphasises the central role of imam in ensuring *sharia* and creating a just society. Interestingly, imam here is defined in accordance with the Shia doctrine, where the position of imam in society is central and he is the socio political and religious leader of the community.

His metaphysics dealing with primacy of sharia starts with his engagement with Ibn-e Arabi's philosophical viewpoint. He rejects Ibn-e Arabi's simple causal deterministic approach signifying reciprocal correspondence between the absolute and the being. Instead, Waliallah points towards multiple manifestations in the physical world and endorses a relative vantage point where the nature of being in the physical world is contingent. This distinction helps him to set humans apart from other beings. Focusing his attention on humans, he points that humans are gifted by reason, so their actions are based on certain forms of knowledge. Emphasizing on human actions, Waliallah's argument is – Humans are what they do, and it is their actions which is the central concern of sharia, as all the notions

of afterlife, rewards and punishments and destiny of human are based on his actions (Rahman 2006). Actions are important because it cast its effect not only on external world, but also on individual soul. So, it is through actions that the internal soul of human is linked with external social world. Therefore, desirable actions can have cleansing effect on the soul of a person and it can also create desirable impact on society. It implies that actions link the microcosm with the macrocosm[11], and they can effectively balance the personality and social system. To achieve this, human actions are to be in accordance with divine laws, enshrined in *sharia*.

Waliallah then classifies two types of knowledge – the first type is of salutary and un-salutary knowledge which is qualitative in nature and deals with prescribed and proscribed actions. The other from of knowledge is of quantitative nature which is explicitly mentioned in sharia. This type of knowledge deals with quantification of duties and obligations. The primacy of *sharia* as the authentic source of human knowledge makes him to consider *qiyas* (analogical reasoning), which was one of the important sources of knowledge in medieval times, as inferior source of knowledge. The understanding of human actions and its connection with types of knowledge helps him to construct human psychological typologies (Rahman 2006). As Waliallah points, humans are marked by a constant tension between their lower animalistic self and their higher angelic self. The first type is of those who by virtue of self discipline have attained emancipation. These types of people generally isolate themselves from the world and subdue their animalistic self by self discipline. The second type of people goes for synthesizing approach towards the tension between their animalistic

[11] The concept of microcosm and macrocosm is one of the important themes of Sufi philosophy. Ibn-e Arabi considered human body (al-jism), soul (al-nafs) and spirit (al-ruh) to be part of macrocosm. According to Ibn-e Arabi both macrocosm and microcosm are like two mirrors placed in front of each other, thus the man's knowledge of himself can lead him to knowledge of the totality (Chittik 2005). This also symbolizes the essential unity which is a recurrent theme in Ibn-e Arabi's Sufi philosophy.

and angelic self. It is for them that *sharia* is important. It is they who have ability to lead the mankind according to the divine plan of God. Prophets are sent for this type of people. Therefore, the primacy of *sharia* and importance of the prophetic model is established for guidance of common people.

Waliallah's understanding of the nexus between knowledge and actions and its impact on two types of personalities makes a clear distinction between a mystic and a Prophet. He criticizes mystics and Sufis for whom haqiqa (ultimate truth) is the ultimate goal, which is to merge with the divine. He views their elaborate rituals as a negation of social life which is in contradiction with sharia. On the other hand, Waliallah proclaims that sharia is haqiqa. He lays primacy of action in social life, and emphasizes self responsibility on the part of Muslims to uphold the divine plan. It is through the model of Prophet and primacy of sharia through which Waliallah proposes the law of social development, and uses the term '*irtifaq'* (cultural achievements of society) to denote various stages of society. There are four stages of irtifaq – the first stage is of primitiveness, the second stage is of cultural achievement, the third stage is of political and cultural development and the last stage is of development of internationalism and universal socio political order. The fourth stage is the ideal stage, where human society has developed both spiritually and materially.

Waliallah also points the practical difficulties in achieving the ideal fourth stage of irtifaq. He cites two reasons for that. It is because of unnecessary innovations in law and undesirable person taking charge of society (Rahman 2006). Therefore, he advocates the need for a rightly guided leader (imam) to emerge. To support this argument, Waliallah creates a distinction between two systems of governance on earth. The first one is headed by Prophets and saints, whom he terms as *khilafat-i batini* (rulers of inner caliphate), dealing with

spiritual affairs, and the other is the caliphate of king - *khilafat-i jahiri* (king of outer caliphate), dealing with worldly affairs. Both these systems are parallel but, there is a hierarchy. The khilafat-i batini is subservient to khalifat-i jahiri, and it is implied on the king to seek guidance from saints, who are the heart of the society. The use of term imam in Waliallah's socio political blueprint is quite intriguing. The word imam has different meaning in context of Sunni and Shia theological position. Considering that, Waliallah was on a mission to synthesize various schools of thoughts, we can decipher that imam for Waliallah, has both the spiritual and socio political role and status in society. The socio political blueprint of Waliallah points that the leader (imam) should unite the various communities into one religion. He should ensure that Islam is the supreme religion and ensure the public promulgation of the rites of Islam over other faiths. These acts like observing Friday prayers, practice of circumcision etc should be public affairs, which will strengthened the foundations of Islam in society. Interestingly, Waliallah's model is based on elitism and centralised authority. He maintains that rites of Islam should be imposed on people, without giving them any justification as laity are not capable of understanding the inner meanings of these rites and may go for innovations. He should ensure that Muslims are preferred in state administration and should constantly promote activities which will present Islam as a natural and rational religion for humankind. The imam should maintain supremacy of sharia and prevent members of other religion from exercising their rites over those of Islam (Rahman 2006). Sharia is considered as one of the organic faculties in the later writings of Waliallah, which comes into play when all other natural faculties fail (Pearson 2008). The emphasis on sharia is also supported by his advises to his fellow Muslims to revert back to basic scriptures and read them instead of seeking spiritual guidance from

saints. The urgency to discard any type of temporal authority has its roots in the dismal state of Muslim political power in India and popular religious practices of Muslims, which revolved around Sufi institutions. To elaborate this, Waliallah comes with the concept of *tauhid al-mahabbah* (love for the unity of God). By this concept, Waliallah integrates faith (*tauhid*) which is an innate quality of mind, and worship or love which is the acquired quality of heart (Pearson 2008). The integration of heart and mind is also the integration of Islamic theology and Sufi philosophy. This philosophical synthesis was the core of Waliallah's thoughts which sought to reconfigure the piety of Muslims in the late 18th century.

To advance his agenda, Waliallah also translated the Quran into Persian, with the objective of making basic text available to the vast Muslim population in India for whom Arabic was an alien language. This was also a shift in the reformist discourses in Indian subcontinent. Ahmad Sirhindi who is considered to be founder of Mujjaddediyya tariqa in Sufism which had a reformist inclination had focussed his thoughts on the nobility. He saw the popular religious practices of Muslims and the working style of Emperor Akbar as contradictory to Islamic tenets. To push his views he focussed on Muslim nobility by writing numerous letters, urging them to get rid of such un-Islamic practices in Mughal court. Waliallah, on the other hand focussed on common Muslims. It was for the first time, in the history of Indian subcontinent that common Muslims were considered as active agents to uphold true religion. Reformist discourses after Waliallah laid excessive emphasis on self responsibility and self reflexivity of common Muslims to act and uphold the religious and communitarian values.[12] This endeavour was taken forward by his sons and disciples who were associated with tariqa e Muhammadiya, to which we turn now.

[12] The notion of self responsibility and self reflexivity in relation to reformist discourse was taken from Francis Robinson (2006).

Waliallah died in 1762, a year after the third battle of Panipat. He wrote a letter to Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan ruler, to invade India and re establish Muslim political power. Abdali invaded India, defeated Marathas who were the emerging power in Western India, but also looted Delhi. Unfortunately, Abdali was more interested in looting wealth for fortifying his newly established empire in Afghanistan than for any religious commitment. In 1764, the British East India Company defeated the combined army of Nawab of Bengal, Nawab of Awadh and Mughal king Shah Alam II. This battle firmly established the Company rule in India and East India Company got the *diwani* rights to collect revenue of Bengal comprising modern state of Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh. The third military blow to Muslim political power in India was in 1803, when Delhi was occupied by East India Company and the Mughal emperor was allowed to rule on pensions.

This politically unstable period initiated numerous socio political and religious responses among Indian Muslims. One such response was the emergence of tariqa e Muhammadiya, which was the first well organised Muslim reform movement in Indian sub continent in modern times. It was founded by Syed Ahmad Barelvi (1786-1831) who was a soldier in the army of Nawab of Tonk and was initiated into three Sufi orders – Chistiyah, Qadiriyah and Naqshbanddiyya. He was a disciple of Shah Abd al-Aziz (1746-1824), son of Shah Waliallah and was the spiritual guide of tariqa e Muhammadiya. This movement was supported by Shah Muhammad Ismail (d. 1831), who was a nephew of Shah Abd al-Aziz and disciple of Syed Ahmad Barelvi. The tariqa e Muhammadiya was not a separate Sufi order, but a reform movement to purify Muslim society in India. Initially, its activities were confined in Delhi and its suburbs. Interestingly, the focus of this reform movement was everyday practices of common Muslims. For this, Shah Ahmad Barelvi accepted Muslims in this fold irrespective

of their previous initiation in other Sufi orders, but also pointed that the ritualistic aspect of Sufism should be reserved for few. This movement spread to other parts in early 1820s, when Shah Ahmad Barelvi started his journey for haj touring entire Northern and Eastern India. During his tour he visited several places and initiated several hundreds of Muslims in this order. He also appointed his representatives (Khalifas) in all the places where he visited to take care of the activities in his absence.[13] He returned back in 1823, but in Mecca, it is said, he was influenced by a similar puritan movement in Arabia founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab (d. 1792). After returning back from haj he proclaimed jihad against Sikhs in 1826 in North West frontier of India. This was the first time in history that jihad was proclaimed in context of South Asia, and the prime motivation behind jihad was to re establish Muslim political power in North India. The episodes during this entire endeavour provide us with a complicated picture of internal politics within Muslim community in India. Though this episode is not a part of the discussion, but it is worth mentioning that in 1831, in a decisive battle at Balakot, Syed Ahmad Barelvi and Shah Ismail were killed by Sikh forces.

After the failure of jihad in 1831, in the absence of no clear leadership to take the movement ahead and compounded by ideological differences within, the movement got divided into three major fragments. Maulana Wilayat Ali (d. 1852) and Maulana Inayat Ali (d. 1858), who were *khalifa* of Syed Ahmad Barelvi at Patna continued jihad at the frontier. They were instrumental in supplying men and material for jihad at frontiers. For this they vigorously preached in Bengal to recruit common Muslims for jihad.[14] The second group of followers of

[13] The appointment of Khalifas in different location was a new practice started by Ahmad Barelvi. Earlier, Sufi masters used to give bi'ah (oath of allegiance) to a murid (disciple) after he had proved himself for initiation in the order. It was an elaborate and time taking process. In contrast to this, Syed Ahmad Barelvi gave bi'ah to anyone who touched his hands or turban, as it happened in Calcutta, when he visited the city before going for haj (Hunter 1871). Clearly, this strategy along with the flexibility to include anyone in his fold had less to do with Sufism and more with building an organizational network.

[14] For details refer to W. W. Hunter's – The Indian Musalmaans (1871), reprinted in 2002.

tariqa e Muhammadiya in Delhi under Shah Muhammad Ishaq (d. 1846) gave up the idea of armed struggle and tried to reconcile their position in the light of changed situation. Shah Muhammad Ishaq was grandson of Shah Abd al-Aziz, who initially supported jihad, but after its failure in 1831 he changed his position. He became in charge of Madrasa-e Rahimiya, which was a prominent madrasa in Delhi established by Shah Abd-al Rahim, father of Shah Waliallah. The third faction of the movement was in Bengal under Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri (d. 1873). He broke away from tariqa movement and in 1867 he started a reform movement in Bengal named *Taiyuni*. '*Taiyun*' is an Arabic word meaning 'to identify'. The focus of the movement was to reform Muslim community in Bengal so that they can identify themselves with the basic tenets of Islam. Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri was from Jaunpur (Oudh), and was a student of Maulana Ahmad Allah Annami, who was one of the grandsons of Shah Abd-al Aziz. Therefore, we see that after the death of Syed Ahmad Barelvi, the tariqa movement split into three factions. The prime issue behind the split was whether to continue the armed struggle on frontiers or not. Another important issue was much more ideological in nature. It can be seen as binaries between *ijma* (community consensus on certain issues) on one hand, and *ijtihad* (interpreting religion in new light), on the other and between *fiqh* (school of jurisprudence) and *hadith* (traditions of Prophet).

Patna clerics were against *ijma* and *fiqh*, which traditionally was the approach to deal with everyday and theological matters of the community. Taking an extreme position they considered Quran and hadith to be the only source to guide everyday affairs of Muslims. Their approach of reform was to revert back to the fundamentals of Islam. On the contrary, Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri taking a pragmatic position was in favour of *ijma* and *fiqh*. Taking this moderate position was also pragmatic in nature as most Muslims in India follow

traditional Hanafi fiqh. Keramat Ali's view on tariqa e Muhammadiya was also different. He considered it as 'Muhammadiya tariqa'. This change of vocabulary also meant that he considered this movement nothing more than a higher mystical understanding (Pearson 2008). We see that the reform movement by second half of 19th century became more pragmatic in nature, shedding its rigid ideological baggage. It changed its focus and strategies of reform. This pragmatism is clearly deciphered by the creativity exhibited by the second generation of leaders. As Pearson (2008) mentions that students of Muhammad Ishaq were pioneers in India to establish printing press for propagating reformist message. Some of his students opened new madrasas and educational institutions. Interestingly, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, founder of Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh and Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, who established Deoband madrasa, were students of Maulana Mamluk Ali, who in turn was student of Muhammad Ishaq. One of the students of Muhammad Ishaq, founded Ahl e Hadith. Therefore, we see how tariqa e Muhammadiya movement shifted its focus from militant jihad to peaceful reformation in due course of time and how it came up with numerous innovative ways to achieve its ends. Interestingly, all the major modern Muslim reform movements of colonial India were, in some way or the other, associated with tariqa e Muhammadiya. It is also interesting to see how the family members of subsequent generations of Shah Waliallah were pioneers in crafting reformist message in the Indian subcontinent.

In the next section we turn our attention to Bengal which was an important base for the reformist activities. Bengal exhibits an interesting case study to show how the regional history, political economy, colonialism and religious reform movement interacted with each other and constructed 'new' subjectivities.

Islamization in context of medieval Bengal

In this section, my basic approach is to see the process of islamization in Bengal and the reform movement in relation with socio political and economic changes that took place in this region. It enables me to see these religious processes as being embedded in wider social processes. Bengal as a geographical region is a geographical, cultural and political frontier and Bengali Muslims/ constitute the second largest Muslim ethnic community after Arabs (Eaton 1993). The emergence of such a large Muslim population in a geographically isolated region raises some basic questions pertaining to spread of Islam in this region.

In Bengal the conversion of local population to Islam was very slow and gradual process.

As a cultural frontier, Bengal inhabited multiple and heterodox religious traditions. Bengal was never fully under the influence of sanskritic – brahminical traditions. During medieval times, its religious traditions were influenced by a variety of alternative traditions ranging from yogic – tantric, nathism, Buddhism to animism. The coming of Islam was a breach in the historically conditioned cultural milieu of Bengal (Roy 1983), but Islam adapted creatively with the socio cultural conditions of medieval Bengal. As Eaton (1993) has shown, the process of islamization was intrinsically linked with the eastward expansion of agrarian economy along with the eastward shift of river Ganges in 16th century. It was also the period when the Mughal Empire in North India was expanding politically and consolidating its power. To deepen its authority in this vast stretch of uncharted land and to maximize the economical return out of it, the fertile land under forest was to be converted into agricultural tracts. To achieve this objective, Mughal administration provided tax free land grants to the pioneers who were supposed to clear the land under forest and make them

arable. Most of the pioneers were from gentry class – both Hindus and Muslims, and among them most were Muslims – pirs, preachers, mullas and even Mughal administrators. These pioneers cleaned the forest and established religious institutions like a temple or a mosque, for which they were given free land grants. One of the purposes to support the religious institutions was to ensure administration in this region, which was not fully penetrated by Mughal administration. Around these religious institutions developed small settlements of labourers who were mainly from lower social strata like chandals, pod or namashudra castes. Once such small settlement developed in the virgin lands of Bengal, islamization took place as a slow and gradual process which Eaton (1993) describes in three stages of inclusion, identification and displacement. In the first stage, Islamic supernatural entities were included alongside the already existing cosmology of people. In the second stage, the Islamic supernatural agencies were identified with the local cosmology of people. It is the stage where Islamic supernatural agency like *Allah* got identified with *pradhan purush* (chief deity) and both were worshipped simultaneously. It led to the third stage where, slowly local cosmology of people was displaced by the monotheistic principles of Islam.

This entire process was facilitated by a group of people whom Asim Roy (1983) calls as 'cultural mediators'. Their role was necessitated by the fact that the religious conversion to Islam was a slow process which extended to several generations. Secondly, it was a group process and does not mean any sudden change in the spiritual realm of the converts. Initially, it only meant change of fellowship at social level marked by social acts of inter-dining, inter-marriages and commensal relationship. The prime concern of 'cultural mediators' was the prevalence of heterodox elements in religiosity of fellow Muslims. It is important here to understand the social composition of Muslims in Bengal during medieval period. The

Muslim immigrants, who were mostly Mughal administrators were confined to urban areas. They spoke Urdu and there was a language and cultural divide between the nobility and the common Muslims, who were Bangla speaking and confined to rural areas. This social composition was intact in the late 19th century when vigorous reformation started in Bengal and attempts were made to bridge the gap between these two extremes (Ahmad 1981).

The 'cultural mediators' in medieval period worked at ground level and had an access to both Islamic great tradition and mass contact with people. They belonged to upper social strata of society; most of them were petty officials in Mughal administration. With the zeal to disseminate proper Islamic knowledge and etiquettes to their fellow co-religionists, they produced a vast set of literature, known as *'puthi sahitya'*, where they attempted to present Islamic knowledge within the framework of local cultural idioms of the region. The local cultural and religious milieu of Bengal in medieval period was exhibited by heterodox belief system as we find it in one of the medieval texts – 'mangal kavya', which glorified local deities, magical practices and other supernatural entities. The 'cultural mediators' wanted to create a similar type of cultural environment, where Islamic agents, myths and stories will replace their heterodox counterpart and which will be equally appealing for their co-religionist. To materialise this they creatively negotiated with the local heterodox cultural milieu of Bengal. According to Asim Roy (1983) they adopted four strategies for this:

1. By substituting the prevalent mythical stories by Islamic ones and superimposed Muslim super human agencies and stories on prevalent ones. As for example, Saiyid Sultan in his nabi-vamsa recreated the birth of Prophet Muhammad similar to birth of Lord Krishna. Similarly, Meccans were represented as followers of vedic Gods and the mission of Islam was to establish true religion against idolatry.

2. To search parallels from the heterodox tradition and to re-cast it in Islamic frame. Such endeavour retained the cultural environment of region, but attempted to introduce Islamic figures in more intelligible way. As for example, Iblis was shown parallel to Narad of Hindu tradition and Fatima, daughter of Prophet Muhammad was represented as equivalent to Maa Tara.
3. By reducing the polarity between both the traditions, by bringing together elements of both the traditions and mediating them with idioms and symbols of both the traditions. As for example, the notion of *rasul* finds its engagement with Hindu notion of avatar. Prophet Muhammad was presented as avatar i.e. as incarnation of God and was presented with other Hindu avatars like Rama and Krishna.

In their attempt they tried to paint their narratives in colour of their immediate local surroundings, and set their stories in accordance with landscape of delta. But, in doing so they also compromised on many fronts, which became a contentious issue in modern times and reason for vigorous reform movement in 19th century.

Another set of people who played important role in islamization process were pirs[15], and were popular object of veneration. Unlike 'cultural mediators' they operated at folk level. Their popularity was marked by their power to assert their will over nature, intercede in everyday life of people, and rescuing people from dangers and uncertainties of everyday life of delta. The pirs and the cult of pir provided an emotive touch and personalised deity to the everyday affairs of people. In fact, the pirs and the cult of pir mediated between the mundane

[15] Pirs in context of Bengal have different meaning. They can be historically legendry figure and they can also be any fictitious figures like legends of *satya* pir or they can be unreal pirified objects like a tree or a rock. For details, refer to Asim Roy (1983).

and the divine and helped in construction of popular religiosity of Bengal.[16] Their popularity can be gauged by the fact that even today we find shrines of pirs, which are site of popular veneration across every locality of Bengal. It was this set of popular religious practice which came under vigorous attack by reformers by early 19th century. It is interesting to note that such composite religious practices, which was embedded in cultural history of Bengal were attacked by both Hindu and Muslim reformers by the advent of 19th century.[17]

Reformation in 19th century Bengal

In this section I will discuss how reformation started in 19th century Bengal which was different from the attempts to reform Muslims in medieval period. I will argue, how reformation was a response to certain socio political situation of early 19th century Bengal and will illustrate how it underwent shifts with shifts in socio political dynamics of the region.

The reform movement can be seen in the background of expansion of colonial regime. It was the changing socio political situation after 1757 and the economic and administrative policies of East India Company which led to discontent among masses. Bengal in this regard is a classical case study to understand how modernity through colonialism, motivated by capitalistic ventures (in this case East India Company), interacts within a religion. It is an interesting to see on one hand, how modern colonial regime created a class of emerging new bourgeoisie comprising mainly Hindu *bhadralok,* and on the other hand it created a disenchanted and alienated masses, who were mainly low caste Muslims. It was this alienated masses who were drawn towards extremism and religion played an important role

[16] Many of the practices associated with pirs are heavily influenced by Vaishnavism practices of medieval Bengal, which also emerged in same time period. For details, refer to Asim Roy (1983) and Ralph Nicholson.
[17] For details refer to Jyotirmaya Sharma, Parna Sengupta, Mahua Chatterjee, Saugata Bose, Rafiuddin Ahmad, Asim Roy, and Richard Eaton.

in this by providing a base for organisation and formulating its ideology of rebellion. It started as a peasant rebellion, but later in due course of time it got entangled with religious reform movement. This shift was context dependent and it was the particular social situation of Bengal which facilitated this shift. One of the prime agendas of the reformers was to break themselves form medieval religious practices, which they held as corrupt accretions and responsible for their degradation. But, this response was also very innovative and creative where modernity itself was used as a means with all its technological advancements to cast an imaginary of authentic Islam.

The Islamic reform movement in Bengal was not a unidirectional process. It underwent changes depending on shifting context. Asim Roy (2006) points that these movements should not be seen as unilateral, flat and linear processes, rather a contextual understanding of these movements is important. Initially in early 19th century, reformation took an ideology of protest and was a spontaneous reaction against the new tax regime of company rule. The reactions were responses to a particular situation when, after Permanent Settlement Act of 1795, most of the *zamindars* were from Hindu *bhadralok* community, while most of the peasants were low ranked Muslims. Moreover farmers were alienated from their land because of their failure to pay tax on time, which was astronomically high in comparison to tax before Permanent Settlement Act. They were also forced to cultivate indigo, which was actually beneficial for colonial regime in terms of revenue it generated in international market. Permanent Settlement Act also gave immense power to the landlords, and they levied taxes according to their whims. As for example, Hindu landlords prohibited Muslim peasants, who were in majority, to follow their religion, they levied special tax on Muslims for sporting beard and banned cow slaughter in their estates. Though, both Hindu and

Muslims peasantry suffered hardship and the situation of peasants was not better in case of Muslim landlord, but these acts with religious overtones did facilitated in polarization of society on communal lines. The first organized reform movement in Bengal was *tariqa e Muhammadiya* movement[18], initiated by Syed Ahmad Barelvi. The *tariqa e Muhammadiya* or the order of Muhammad was a movement which tried to purify the religious practices of Muslims, but it had a socio political agenda of regaining the lost Muslim political power in India. In late 1820s, tariqa e Muhammadiya gained popularity in Bengal. The rural Bengal was already tuned to receive its reformist message because a background was already constructed for it by the early local level spontaneous movements like Fairazi movement[19] and by efforts of reformers like Titu Mir (d. 1831), who himself was a Tariqa follower. The religious overtones were more explicit in case of Faraizi and tariqa e Muhammadiya movement where the leaders were able to penetrate among masses and organize them against Company rule and tax created free zones. The egalitarian values of Islam provided them with an ideology by which the leaders supplanted their own *Khalifa* (representatives) in these free zones and levied their own tax for local self governance. Religious markers like sporting beard, a distinct Muslim dress and public slaughtering of cows were encouraged. In this time period, Tariqa movement penetrated interiors of rural Bengal, spreading its revivalist message. Its prime targets were local shrines, village mullahs and everyday practices of ordinary Muslims. When Syed Ahmad Barelvi initiated jihad against Sikhs in 1831, Bengal became an important base which provided men and material for sustenance of jihad in North West frontier of India. It was also because of the fact that Muslim peasantry in Bengal were

[18] The Tariqa e Muhammadiya movement emerged in North India in 1818. It became popular in Bengal by 1820s.

[19] Faraizi Movement was an indigenous reform movement, initiated by Haji Shariatullah (d. 1840). It came up in eastern Bengal to address the concerns of poor Muslim peasantry. It attempted to eradicate all un-Islamic beliefs and practices, by relying on Quran as their sole spiritual guide.

alienated masses as I have discussed above, and were easily drawn towards extremist views of reformers. After the death of Syed Ahmad Barelvi in 1831 and subsequent failure of jihad, the militant revivalist message of the movement was toned down in the new socio political context; it became more pragmatic and the focus now was to reform the Muslim society.

In this changed context, the role of Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri (d. 1874) is worth mentioning. The prime concern of Maulana Keramat Ali was opposition to certain prevailing Muslim customs like maintaining vegetarianism on certain days, disregard for widow marriage, veneration of saints' grave and other 'heterodox' practices, which he considered as unwanted accretions from Hinduism. The focus of his movement was to eradicate the 'corrupt' practices of Muslims and lead the community towards 'right path'. The movement was very active in rural Bengal and played an important role in constructing a *distinct* Muslim identity among Bengali Muslims. An important role of Keramat Ali was to declare India as *dar-ul-aman* (abode of security) in 1870, where Muslims can follow their religion freely. This was in contrast with Tariqa e Muhammadiya and Fairaizi movement which declared India as *dar-ul-harb* (abode of war). This political articulation on part of Keramat Ali is important to note as it marks a shift of the movement from more ideological to practical requirements. Unlike Fairazis and Muhammadis, Maulana Keramat Ali was in good books of British rulers. He was also associated with Muslim elites of Calcutta like Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur and with Muhammadan Literary Society[20]. Taiyuni movement paid more emphasis for correcting everyday practices of common Muslims and construction of homogenized corporate identity of Muslims. Importantly, *taiyuni* movement was in

[20] Muhammadan Literary Society was an earliest Muslim socio cultural organization, which was founded by Abdul Latif in 1863. Its prime agenda was to promote western education within the traditional Islamic educational system.

accordance with Hanafi fiqh (Hanafi school of jurisprudence), which is followed by most of the Muslims in Indian subcontinent.[21]

This effort got its biggest support from urban Muslim elites after the census of 1871, which for the first time pointed to vast Muslim population in eastern Bengal. To fortify their fading socio economic status in comparison to Hindu *bhadralok*, urban Muslim elites of Bengal, who till then were unconcerned with the situation of their co religionists in rural Bengal, now, felt the need to harness their support. It started with the demand for separate reservation for Muslims in education and government services which later took more vigorous shape in the wake of separate representation in local bodies which provided rich ground for such activities. The reformers like Maulana Keramat Ali were the link between the urban Muslim elites and rural Muslims, and were prime contributors in construction of Muslim exclusivity in Bengal. It is important to understand that reformism in Bengal was not a homogeneous attempt of Muslim elites. There were internal factions. At one level the contestation was in between reformists and traditional rural ulama who had tight grip on rural Muslims and the reformers, who were mainly urban based. The reformers were further divided among Muhammadi (followers of Syed Ahmad Barelvi and later Patna clerics), Faraizis (which was an indigenous movement) and Taiyuni (followers of Maulana Keramat Ali), who were also known as Hanafi, because of reliance of Hanafi fiqh. The major point of contention between Muhammadis and Faraizis on one hand and Taiyunis on the other was related to question pertaining to congregational prayers and questions related to recognition of mazhabs in Islam (Ahmad 1981).

[21] Earlier reform movements like Faraizi and Tariqa movements were against any Islamic school of jurisprudence; they considered only the Quran and hadith as authentic source, as following any school of jurisprudence also meant following the consensus of traditions (taqlid), which evolved in due course of time and was opposed to earlier reformers.

Abu Bakr Siddique was the product of this time. He was a reformer and was initiated in four Sufi tariqas – Chistiya, Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyya and Mujjaddediya. He was disciple of Fateh Ali Waisi (d. 1886) who was a noted Sufi pir and a noted poet of his period. Fateh Ali Waisi was disciple of Noor Muhammad Nizampoori (d. 1858), who in turn was disciple of Syed Ahmad Barelvi. He was also very active in political affairs of that period. He was registrar of Calcutta High Court and was personal assistant of Nawab Wajed Ali Shah (1887), the last nawab of Oudh, who was disposed by East India Company and exiled to Metiabruz, Calcutta[22]. He was also associated with Mohammedan Literary Society founded by Abdul Latif. Mohammedan Literary Society was one of the earliest Muslim civil society organisations in India and provided the platform for meeting of influential personalities. Fateh Ali Waisi was associated with Maulana Keramat Ali Jaunpuri, who was also associated with Muhammedan Literary Society.

Abu Bakr Siddique was one of the *Khalifas* (representatives) of Fateh Ali Waisi, and was influenced by the reformist zeal of Keramat Ali Jaunpuri[23]. We get the reflection of this period in his *wasiyatnama* (will), which was written in the 1930s. After his death in 1939, his *wasiyatnama* was considered as the written source of his tariqa by his *Murids* (disciples), *Khalifas* (representatives) and his five sons, popularly known today as *paanch pir kebla* or *paanch huzoor keblah*[24] - who were the immediate custodians of his shrine and the order of Furfura Shareif.

[22] This information was picked up from an interview of Dr. Ahmad Ali, who is the chairman of Waisi Memorial Trust at Kolkata. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFTQQegTMbI. Accessed on 25th August 2014.
[23] Abu Bakr Siddique himself has declared his relationship with Fateh Ali Waisi and Keramat Ali Jainpuri in his wasiyatnama (will).
[24] Though Abu Bakr Siddique points in his wasiyatnama that after his death, he expects his five sons to take forward his reformist message, but no where he mentions the word paanch huzoor kebla. I think, the word paanch huzoor kebla became popular after the death of Abu Bakr Siddique, where the next generation had an

He has mentioned seventy points to be followed in his *wasiyatnama*. These instructions can be broadly divided under four categories:

1. Instructions pertaining to religious affairs, emphasizing what constitute *shirk* and *bidat*.
2. Instructions pertaining to community affairs regarding how Muslims should uphold their communitarian life.
3. Instructions pertaining to proper conduct in everyday life regarding what constitute *halal* and what constitutes *haram*.
4. Instructions pertaining to welfare measures regarding issues related to education, marriages, property distribution etc.

The prime emphasis of his *wasiyatnama* revolves around the issue of how to live in this world by following proper Islamic way. It focuses on how to be 'good Muslim' and how to act properly in this changing world. The *wasiyatnama* is addressed to his *khalifas* (representative), *murids* (disciples) and common devotees.

According to his *wasiyatnama*, apart from religious instructions to save Muslims from committing *shirk* and *bidat*, he also advises Muslims to re-constitute their everyday life on the model of Quran and Hadith. Therefore, it means that it is not sufficient on the part of Muslims to pray five times a day, keep fasting during the month of ramzan or perform pious

urgency to legitimize their authority and popularize themselves. Paanch Pir, which literary means five pirs has an important genealogy in medieval Bengal. People in lower Bengal worship five clay mounds in Noakhali district of Bangladesh as paanch pir. There is no evidence that these mounds are graves of pirs, but it is popularly believed that these pirs protect boatmen from dangers in their voyage. Interestingly, it was Maulana Keramat Ali, who reformed people of this region pointing that worshiping these five pirs amounts to shirk. But, nonetheless paanch pir remain in popular imagination of people. By invoking this imagery, the pirs of Furfura Shareif intended to legitimize themselves on similar model. The suffix 'kebla' actually signifies 'qiblah', which in Sufi philosophy represents the pir (murshid), who is like a pole/axis around whom the cosmic energy of this universe revolves.

acts but, it is equally important for Muslims to be and behave like proper Muslims in their everyday life. This can be done only by following sharia and modelling ones life on that of the Prophet, who was portrayed as true believer. Therefore Muslim exclusivity in social sphere meant drawing boundaries between what constitutes Islamic and what constitutes un-Islamic. In his *wasiyatnama*, he starts with attacking popular religious practices like venerating the shrines, celebrating *urs*, and celebration associated with sabe barat. In doing so, he clarifies what constitutes *shirk* and *bidat*. Second, his concern with everyday life of Muslims allows him to focus extensively on what constitutes *halal* (prescribed acts) and what constitutes *haram* (proscribed acts). He instructs Muslims to avoid usury, to choose occupation that is permissible in sharia, not to hear popular music[25], not to participate in *tajia* procession, beware of proper *halal* food etc. With respect to community life of Muslims, he emphasises community markers and its social role. Therefore, he asked Muslim men to keep a beard, wear long *kurta* unlike those that were worn by Hindus, to keep women in *purdah*, pray five times a day, keep fast during *ramzan* month, not attend *jatra* and *kirtans* of Hindus which are frequent in rural Bengal (influenced by *vaishanvism*, as propagated by Chaitanya), not sell raw products like milk, flowers etc to Hindus for their *puja*, not have sweets and other products made by Hindus, not to participate in Hindu festivals, not beat drums and listen to music, not fire crackers on *sabe baraat*, not allow music and other local customs in marriages, not play games like football and be aware of what constitutes *halal* and *haram* in everyday life. An important component of his *wasiyatnama* is his views regarding other sects in Islam. It can be said that he was against all those sects or Muslims who were lax or did not follow sharia. He was also against those who were against any four Islamic school of

[25] Though he allows Islamic ghazals, by which he means couplets in praise of God alone, sung without any musical instruments. It should be sung for religious purpose, not for entertainment and without any presence of women.

jurisprudence and did not follow *sahaba* (companions of Prophets). Thus, he rejected Sufis who focussed on *marifat* without *tariqat*[26], and on same basis he also rejected sects like shia, qadiyani, khariji, wahabis and others like Ahle Hadith, who did not follow *sahaba*. In case of any dispute on any issue within Hanafi sect, he urged the disputing parties to sit together in presence of a learned ulama and get things right amicably.

He also pointed a set of ideas which were in accordance to hadith dealing with welfare of community. As for example, he advocated strongly regarding education of women. He also supported English and modern education, but not by compromising the religious education. He supported property distribution to women in accordance with *sharia*, he urged Muslims not to take dowry and abandon superstitious practices. He also established few madrasas, including a madrasa for girls near Furfura. Interestingly, the present generation of pirs at Furfura emphasizes these ideas as a marker of Abu Bakr Siddique's progressiveness, which I will deal in my next chapter.

To push his agenda into practice, Abu Bakr Siddique formed several socio religious and political organizations of which *Anjuman-i-Wazin-i-Hanafia (1911)* was prominent. Two years later in 1913, he established a separate organisation for ulama named – Anjuman e Ulama e Bangla. He was the chief patron of the organization. The Anjuman was a body of Hanafi Ulama of Bengal. It was influenced by Taiyuni movement of Maulana Keramat Ali. Its main objectives were religious preaching for reforming Muslim community of Bengal and to save the community from propaganda of Christian missionaries and Qadiyanis. They had no faith in Congress, which was dominated by leaders of upper caste Hindu *bhadralok*

[26] Following Waliallah, Abu Bakr Siddique mentioned in his *wasiyatnama* that – there can be no *marifat* and *haqiqat* without *tariqat*, and the real *tariqat* is *sharia*.

community. On the other hand they also wanted to guard the Muslim community from extreme reformism of Muhammadi and Faraizis. The mouthpiece of Anjuman – '*Islam Pracharak*', which produced communalised cheap vernacular tracts in 1920s and was instrumental in creating the communal divide in Bengal.[27] He was closely associated with an organisation named Mihir-o-Sudhakar, consisting prominent reformers like Munshi Meherullah (d. 1907), Sheikh Abdul Rahim (d. 1931), Muhammad Rezauddin Ahmad (d. 1933) and Pandit Rezauddin Ahmad Mashali (d. 1919). Sudhakar group[28] was an important turning point in reformist activities in Bengal. Earlier there was a clear internal division between the reformist and traditionalist ulama in Bengal. The reformists were further divided into Muhammadi, Faraizi and Hanafi (Taiyuni). Considering the rural character of Bengal Muslim, they were more inclined towards traditionalist ulama, who were rural based and closely associated with masses. This internal division was also a hindrance for the reformists to convey their message to rural Muslim folks. The Sudhakar group's importance lies in mitigating this difference. Unlike reformists, who were mainly from upper social strata, Munshi Meherullah came from a humble background. He was influenced by reformism of Maulana Keramat Ali, but he never joined him and remained formally a traditionalist (Ahmad 1981). He wrote extensively in vernacular, which had wider reach in comparison to tracts in urdu. Moreover, he was an excellent organiser and was instrumental in organising several small organisations called *anjuman* at local village level. He also stopped bahas (religious debates), which was an important feature of rural Bengal by end of 19th century. Instead of bahas, which emphasized debate, he initiated waz mehfil, which was like rural

[27] For brief detail of Anjuman and role of Abu Bakr Siddique in elevating communal politics in Bengal refer to Rafiuddin Ahmed (1981), Sumit Sarkar (2002), Mahua Sarkar (2008), Ashoke Kumar Chackraborty (2002), Shiela Sen (1976) and Ian Talbott (1988).
[28] For details refer to Rafiuddin Ahmad (1981).

Muslim congregational assembly and was monologic unilateral preaching (Sarkar 2002). In addition to this he was instrumental in production of cheap vernacular reformist literature, known as *nasihat nama* (book of religious instructions), which played an important role in construction of exclusivist identity among upcoming middle class Muslims of Bengal. After death of Munshi Meherullah in 1907, Abu Bakr Siddique came up with his organisations. Later these organizations played an important part in political mobilization of Muslims for separate Muslim nation. To achieve this end, Abu Bakr Siddique appointed *Khalifas* (representatives) in almost every district of Bengal.[29] The Anjuman leaders played an important role in Khilafat Movement, but by being out of Congress. Later, on model of *Jamat e Ulalma e Hind*, Abu Bakr Siddique established *Jamat e ulama e Bangla* in 1936. This organization was similar to Anjuman, but in changed socio political situation of 1930s it had an important political objective. In 1937 provincial elections Jamat e Ulama e Bangla leaders preached against Congress and Krishak Praja Party and campaigned for Muslim League. On the other hand, Jamat e Ulama e Hind, which was the political outfit of Deoband ulamas was in support of Congress. Abu Bakr Siddique supported Muslim League and issued several *fatwas* in favour of Muslim League candidates. He also denounced non co-operation movement led by Congress (Sen 1976, Talbot 1988). An important observation that I want to make at this point is that the extreme viewpoint of Abu Bakr Siddique pertaining to communal issues in Bengal were not exclusive in his case. We need to understand the social context of Bengal in that period where we see that Muslim reformers were articulating such views right from late 19th century.[30] On the other hand, Hindus were also articulating in

[29] The practice of appointing Khalifa in a geographical zone was actually started at mass scale by Syed Ahmad Barelvi. Refer Pearson (2008).

[30] For information on such polemics refer to Rafiuddin Ahmad (1981), Sumit Sarkar (2002) and Ashoke kumar Chackraborty (2002).

similar ways. During partition of Bengal in 1905 and Swadeshi movement they vigorously campaigned against Muslims and even against Hindu low castes, who refused to go by their standpoint. They also resorted to violence which at times it led to communal riots.[31]

Abu Bakr Siddique died in 1939. After his death his eldest son Maulana Abdul Hayy took charge of Anjuman, but the organization was disbanded after Independence. The changed socio political context after independence shifted the focus of reformism. The shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique was constructed by his sons and today it is a popular Sufi shrine, with a difference from other Sufi shrines of Bengal region. But, there is one more difference which is subtle in nature, i.e. the shifts that took place in reformist ideology in post independent period. These shifts are the focus of the next chapter.

Conclusion

To conclude, we see how the trajectory of reformism changed its course at different times in accordance with shifting socio political contexts. These shifts are highlighted in the meaning, strategy and agenda of reformism. The act to trace these shifts in multiple and shifting contexts is to engage with the politics involved in the process of reformation. We see how Shah Ahmad Sirhindi came up with his reformist ideas, following Naqshbandi tradition in a context, when Mughal political power was at its peak. His agenda was to preserve the purity of Islam and his concern was Mughal nobility. This idea of reformation underwent change in the late 18th century, in a different socio political context, when Mughal Empire was declining. Shah Waliallah followed a synthesizing approach to reformation. He emphasized the primacy of activism and reformulated the Sufi philosophy by circumscribing it in the

[31] For details refer to Sumit Sarkar (1977) and Sufia Ahmad (1974).

frame of *sharia*. The primacy of *sharia* and his construction of organic analogy with spiritual body and the universal body necessitated understanding of Muslim 'self' in new light. This 'self' is not divorced from community just like his conception of *haqiqa*, which is not divorced from *sharia*. It is activism, which links these two extremes – self and community and *sharia* and *haqiqa*. Based on this ideological framework, he charts out his reformist mission which envisions an imam for the community. Taking an elitist approach he points that, the prime duty of imam will be to enforce *sharia* and uphold true values of Islam. The position of imam is like king of this world, similar to the position of heart (qlab) in human body and the position of God as king of kings in the universe.

His mission took an extremist militant turn, under Syed Ahmad Barelvi and Shah Abd-al Aziz, after the demise of Mughal Empire and the rise of new regional powers in India. Tariqa e Muhammadiya was the first organised reform movement on the Indian subcontinent and it addressed directly to common Muslims. After the failure of the militaristic adventures in North West frontier in 1831, the tariqa movement underwent multiple ideological divisions. In new socio political context when colonial power was firmly established in India and subsequent attempts to overthrow the colonial regime failed, the reformist movement took an inward turn. It toned down its extremism and focussed on reforming common Muslims by preaching and educating them in proper Islamic tenets. This pragmatic approach underwent further shift, as we have seen in the context of Bengal when the question of political representation in local governance after 1872, motivated reformers to pitch for exclusive Muslim identity. The construction of exclusive Muslim identity by early 20th century was by no mean a typical feature of Muslims in Bengal. Similar socio religious processes were going on among Hindus. The Hindu reform movement also tried to construct a homogeneous Hindu

community.[32] The prime motivation of social and religious elites, irrespective of their religious affiliation, in this endeavour to create a homogenised identity was to grab new opportunities in electoral politics and to protect their hegemony. By 1940s, when the idea of two nations got momentum, the already polarised communities on grounds of communal politics became a handy tool to flare one of the worst communal riots in pre partition Bengal.

At this junction of my argument, we find how reformist ideology among Muslims, amidst multiple shifts in its core values and strategies can be traced back to the initiatives of Shah Ahmad Sirhindi. But, it also raises an important question. Can we say that identity politics acts as a solvent for other forms of politics say class and region based political mobilisation? I argue that identity based political mobilisation is *one* of the forms of the politics which is always in relation to other forms of political mobilisation. It is neither the primary substrate of any political mobilisation, nor any community is homogenised to the extent that it pacifies emergence of other forms of political mobilisation. In the context of Bengal, as Sumit Sarkar (2002) has illustrated through archival resources how politics based on agrarian class structure was an important dimension of political environment of Bengal in this period. Similarly, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2004) has demonstrated the rise of low caste mobilisation (of *matua* sect) by the end of 19th century Bengal. An important aspect of such movements was the fluidity and pragmatism that they exhibited in due course of time. The short term experimentation of Krishak Praja Party in 1936 opens up a new avenue in political landscape

[32] For details please refer to Jyotirmaya Sharma (2013) for an in depth analysis of how Vivekananda tried to construct a masculine robust majoritarian nationalism. Also see Sumit Sarkar (1998, 2002) for analysis of how Bengali bhadralok community tried to construct a homogeneous identity by experimenting with caste consolidation and limiting caste based mobilization by low castes. For details on subaltern caste mobilization in Bengal, refer to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (2004).

of Bengal. Krishak Praja Party (Party of peasants and people) won 36 seats in 1937 election[33] with an agenda of abolition of zamindari system and providing propriety rights to peasants. Importantly, out of 36 seats, it won 33 seats from Eastern Bengal, which was the centre of Muslim reformist activities since the dawn of 19th century. The rapid decline of Krishak Praja Party aftermath the 1927 election is a different story and not the part of my analysis. My intention to intervene with the example of Krishak Praja Party was to show the other political possibilities in addition to the identity based political polarisation between Muslim League and Congress.

Religion and politics, as I have discussed in this chapter, interact at multiple levels and with a number of other social institutions. These are embedded in the social context, conditioned by history which provides the stage for such diverse interaction. Therefore, any essentialised viewpoint to see them in isolation is a political project, which results in partial understanding of wider and complex social phenomena. Instead of focusing on religion as an essentialised category, focus should be on the social processes, which also embody religion along with other institutions. In my next chapter I attempt to demonstrate this complexity by evidence from my ethnographic data on the present generation of Furfura pirs.

[33] Krishak Praja Party fought against Congress which won 52 seats and Muslim League which won 39 seats, out of total 250 seats. The rest 123 seats were won by independents and various other groups. The large number of seats won by non party entities also points towards multiple political possibilities.

Chapter 4

Ideology, power and constestation: contextuality and malleability

This chapter is about how the descendants of Abu Bakr Siddique transformed the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique into a popular Sufi shrine in Eastern India. It also discusses the everyday life and multiple activities of present generation of Furfura *pirs,* to show the shifts in their ideology and practices. I attempt to demonstrate how Furfura *pirs* in due course of time modified their views on reform and incorporated questions pertaining to identity and developmental issues of community. By citing examples from my ethnographic data on everyday life of *pirs*, their various business ventures and political alliances, I will show how market economy, religious authority and state actors interact in diverse socio political terrain. It will argue how shifts in ideology and practices are context dependent and fluid in nature. It is important to understand the multiple ways through which ideology is interpreted and practiced by different set of people. Such interpretations are based on the habitus[1] and social position of the agents, who embody certain cultural dispositions that are embedded in particular social context and act in relation to particular situation. To exhibit this complex interaction is the objective of this chapter.

The Transition Period

Abu Bakr Siddique died in 1939. A shrine was constructed by his sons at his grave at Furfura. The construction of the shrine also institutionalised the sufi tariqa – *silsila e Furfura*

[1] I use the term habitus as Bourdieu (1977) uses it to describe the set of acquired depositions of thoughts, behavior, and taste that links social structure and social practices.

Shareif [2] (order of Furfura Shareif). His five sons were the immediate custodians of the shrine and the heirs of the silsila[3]. After his death his eldest son Maulana Abdul Hayy took charge of his reform activities. He took forward the organisational works started by Abu Bakr Siddique, but after Independence in 1947, organizations like *Anjuman e Ulama e Bangla* and *Jamat e Ulama e Bangla* started by Abu Bakr Siddique were disbanded. The association of Furfura *pirs* with Muslim League boomeranged after Independence. In the new political situation, Furfura *pirs* changed their working style. This led to a sort of separation of zones between the five sons of Abu Bakr Siddique. His eldest son, Abdul Hayy, who was more prominent in Muslim League politics, migrated to Dhaka, East Pakistan and took charge of activities there. Eastern Bengal was the hub of reformist activities since early 19th century. Abu Bakr Siddique was a popular figure in Eastern Bengal[4]. Therefore, the move by his eldest son was also a political necessity on his part. The remaining four sons of Abu Bakr Siddique remained in Furfura, West Bengal and carried forward the task of reforming Bengali Muslims, but in a different tone, according to changed socio political situation.

In order to reconcile with the new socio political environment of secular India, the separatist attitude focused on Muslim exclusivity was toned down in favour of a liberal rhetoric of religious preaching. To illustrate this shift I take the example of a small pocket size book

[2] In popular imagination, the shrine of a dead Sufi becomes a sacred site. In that respect the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique, led to construction of sacred geography in Furfura. In his *wasiyatnama*, Abu Bakr Siddique referred several times about 'his tariqa'. Moreover, his *wasiyatnama* is addressed to 'his' disciples and followers. Though the word – *silsila e Furfura Shareif* does not appear often, but the present generation *pirs* constantly try to construct a separate exclusive identity based on legacy of Abu Bakr Siddique and his thoughts.

[3] Following the wasiyatnama of Abu Bakr Siddique, there is no tradition of gaddinashin, where the prime disciple or the eldest son of the *pir* becomes the heir of s*pir*itual lineage and custodian of shrine. Therefore, the five sons of Abu Bakr Siddique (popularly known as paanch *pir* kebla) were collective heirs of the shrine.

[4] I was informed by one of the *pirs* in an interview that he also owned property in Dhaka.

published by one of the grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique.[5] The book is about how to follow the *tariqa* of Furfura Shareif. Its focus is more on s*pir*itual issues, without compromising on issues pertaining to reformism, rather than constructing a communal discourse. The book contains topics like - how to lead a pious life as per *sunnat*, how to perform *dhikr*, rules pertaining to four major Sufi *tariqa* (*Chistiya, Qaderiya, Naqshbandiya and Mujjadediya*) and a selection from *wasiyatnama* of Abu Bakr Siddique. Interestingly, in his *wasiyatnama* Abu Bakr Siddique has mentioned the word – 'Hindu' twice, where he advises his followers to discard the Hindu rituals, not to attend their celebrations and not to sell raw products like fruits, milk etc which may be used by Hindus for their rituals. In the book under consideration, the word – 'Hindu' was replaced by the word 'non-Muslims'. Though a small change of word, nevertheless it is important. The shift can also be traced when we compare the contents of websites which are supported by the present custodians of the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique and the scholarly works on modern history of Bengal.[6]

Now, I will discuss the nature of the shift that took place in reformist discourses after the death of Abu Bakr Siddique. I have already demonstrated by an example citing a book showing how the emphasis shifted to more s*pir*itual concerns and how the explicit communal remarks were modified. But, it was not a shift in the agenda of reformation, but a shift in rhetoric and strategy. The reformist agenda of religious purification along with construction of a homogenised community based on exclusive Muslim identity was still an important issue, but perused differently in the changed context. While the narratives directed explicitly

[5] The title of the book is: *'Tariqat-e Tassauf o Wasiyatnama'*, published in 1993. It was published by Syed Ashraf Hossein, on behalf of Muhammad Sebagatullah Siddique, who is a grandson of Abu Bakr Siddique.

[6] Websites like: http://furfurasharifmdt.com, www.furfurasharif.com, www.furfuradarbarsharif.com are hosted by grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique. The contents of the websites relating life and mission of Abu Bakr Siddique give a different impression from the evidence that we get from scholarly historical works on modern Bengal (Sarkar 2002, Sen 1976, Talbot 1988, Sarkar 2008, Chackraborty 2002).

towards Hindus and 'other' religious communities were discarded, the emphasis was not on the 'other' community, but on the Indian government. The minority status of Muslims in India, the question of their social and religious security, and their social backwardness became the new ground for constructing the logic of Muslim exclusivity.[7] Therefore, the reformist discourse went along with the emphasis on Muslims to be aware of their minority status and thus, the call was to be united.

Everyday Life of the *Pirs*

A) Pir-Murid Interaction

In this section, based on ethnographic materials, I attempt to construct a picture of the shrine and the piety associated with the shrine. At present the thirty two grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique are the custodians of the shrine. Following the *wasiyatnama* of Abu Bakr Siddique, there is no tradition of *gaddinashin* at Furfura shareif.[8] Unlike other Sufi shrines of Indian subcontinent where hubbub surrounding the shrine is a common scene, the shrine unlike the other Sufi shrines is silent. There is no *pir* or any official in the inner premise of the shrine. Devotees go inside the shrine, they pray and they come out silently. Devotees are not allowed to offer flowers, or *chadar*, or rosewater; they are not allowed to light a candle at the grave or do *sajda* or kiss the grave. The dos and don'ts at the shrine are mentioned near the gates of the shrine. The *pirs*, instead of being present inside the shrine, sit in their respective *durbars*

[7] This statement is based on undated jalsa recordings (religious preaching) of three sons of Abu Bakr Siddique. The only proof of authenticity of these recordings is the fact that the CDs of these recordings are produced by a charitable organization, owned by one of the grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique. The cover of the CD claims that the CD contains authentic audio recording of the concerned persons.

[8] I was informed in an interview by one of the *pirs*, that the son of the eldest son of Abu Bakr Siddique did claim the title of *gaddinashin*, which led to contention between him and other grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique. Still on certain occasions he uses the title of *gaddinashin*, which is rejected by the other custodians of the shrine.

which are situated outside the shrine. Devotees from all over Bengal visit Furfura throughout the year. After doing *ziarath*[9] at the shrine they visit their respective *pirs* and pay them *nazrana* (gift, usually money, out of devotion), or they pay *zakat* to the charitable institutions and madrasas which are run by the *pirs*. Most of the time they come to the *pirs* with their day-to-day problems and they are charged for amulets and *paani pora* (sacred water of the shrine), *tel pora* (sacred oil given by *pirs*) which are considered to have medicinal properties[10]. It is not only humans who are given amulets but amulets are sold even for new vehicles, ponds (to obtain good yield of fish), commercial shops, cattle (for good milk production) or any other aspect of everyday life. Interestingly, amulets for commercial purposes are charged much higher, at times in five figures, if the commercial stakes are high. The *pirs* also give *phoonk* (blow of exhaled air) on devotees, which are considered to be a blessing that fills the devotee with positive cosmic energy and wards off evil forces from body.[11] Devotees also collect *phoonk* of *pirs* in a bottle for their family members who are unable to visit the *pirs*. At times, the *pirs* consider the individual requirements of a devotee and recommend to them to recite a particular *kalima* at particular times of a day. It is popularly believed that the recital of *kalima* in accordance with the instructions of the *pirs* can solve many problems of everyday life. While meeting the *pirs*, generally the devotee gives the reference of a *murid* (disciple) of his local area, who usually arranges such a visit to the shrine on weekends and acts as the agent of the *pir* in his locality. Murids also sell amulets, *pani pora* and other sacred items, in their respective areas after procuring them from

[9] The actual meaning of ziarath is to visit or to see. In case of a Sufi shrine it means to visit the shrine and the grave of the deceased Sufi saint.

[10] *Pani* in Bangla means water, and *tel* means oil. Pora means recited. Thus, it means water or oil in which certain medicinal properties have been infused by recitation of certain Quranic verses.

[11] The meaning of *phoonk* is based on my interaction with several devotees, who visit Furfura *pirs*. *Phoonk* is not an exclusive Muslim practice, it has biblical origin, where it is said- God breathed life in Adam. In Indian subcontinent, this practice is also seen among other religious communities. Breath also has a sacred meaning in Sufi practices. For details, refer to Schimmel (1994).

Furfura. For this Furfura *pirs* maintain a good network of murids throughout West Bengal, lower Assam and Bangladesh. Most of the times the murids are also members of any socio political outfit of Furfura *pirs* like – *Jamat e Ulama e Bangla*, which operates at individual *thana* (police station) level. Many times some important devotees are given food coupons by the *pirs*, which can be used for lunch at Chacha Hotel – a local eatery adjacent to *mazar shareif*.[12]

The *pirs* sit everyday during morning time usually by 9:30 till 1pm at their respective durbars, waiting for devotees. Sometimes the meeting is fixed earlier over telephone. If a devotee comes with women of his family then, because of strict *purdah* rule, the women members are taken inside where wife of the *pir* preaches and performs similar set of activities. Women devotees are expected to be in *burqa*, but if they are not in burqa then they need to cover their head either by *dupatta* of *salwar kameej* or *aanchal* of their *saari*. Most of the devotees come on Friday (being a day for *jumma* prayer) and weekends; thus some *pirs* who stay in Kolkata, and are also engaged in other activities, make sure that they reach Furfura by Thursday night.

At each durbar, there are a few *khadims* (disciple who personally serves the *pir*), who stay at the *khanqa*[13] and serve the *pir*. Apart from their religious commitment, service towards the *pir* is a mark of their personal devotion to the *pir*. They stay at *khanqa* and take care of daily

[12] There are three eateries in the vicinity, but the coupons can be used only at Chacha eatery.The present owner of that eatery is married to one of the sisters of present generation Furfura *pirs*.

[13] Khanqa means Sufi hospice. At Furfura there are one or two rooms attached with the durbar of the *pirs* where a khadim ca stay. *Pirs* stay at backside of the durbar, but the entry is restricted to any external males except the servants of household. The houses of *pirs* are usually two and three storied with a garden and surrounded by a wall usually 6 to 8 feet high, to avoid any external gaze.

activities of durbar like cleaning the durbar, maintaining it, arranging the *gaddi*[14], books, pamphlets etc. When the *pir* interacts with a devotee, the *khadims* either stand at one side of the *pir* or they sit kneeling down as a mark of respect. They generally do not maintain eye contact with the *pirs* and whenever they give anything to the *pir* they do so with their right hand and while giving, their left hand touches the elbow of their right hand.[15] While leaving, the devotees are given some pamphlets, booklets or a calendar as a small gift from the *pir*. At some durbars, chocolates are also given to children accompanying their parents. Generally, the pamphlets, booklets and calendars contain information ranging from important dates in the month of *ramzan*, the story of Furfura shareif, social work done by the *pirs* and ideological differences between Furfura shareif and *Deobandi* and *Wahabi* ideologies. These pamphlets and booklets are important tools to disseminate their ideology. Generally pamphlets and booklets are of different colours for easy identification and are stacked together near *gaddi* of the *pir*. One of the important jobs of the *khadim* is to arrange these pamphlets and booklets according to their respective colour. This helps in efficient working as during peak hours, generally during weekends and festivals, the devotees come in large numbers and stand in a queue to meet the *pir*. The meeting is for a few minutes only, holding the hands of the *pir* or by touching his feet. Then the devotee gives *nazrana*[16] to the *pir*, which the latter transfers to one of his *khadims* without looking at it. The *khadim* collects the *nazrana* and periodically transfers it to another *khadim* who sits in the backroom keeping an account of it. The *pir*, after handing over the *nazrana* to the *khadim*, gives to the devotee

[14] A gaddi is usually a carpet with mattress where devotees can sit and at one end there is an elevated platform made up of mattress, and two cylindrical long pillows where a *pir* sits and interacts with devotees.
[15] This gesture is a mark of respect and not exclusive among Muslims. One can see similar gesture among Hindus when they offer anything to their deity or to the purohit (priest).
[16] *Nazrana* is the gift which the devotee gives to the *pir* after visiting him. It can be anything which is given out of love and respect towards *pir*. Generally, it is given in monetary terms.

some pamphlets, booklets or chocolates. On days when the inflow of devotees is less, the *pir* depending on the profile of the devotee, asks the *khadim* to give a pamphlet of a particular colour. According to one of the *pirs*, not all the people who visit are literate and intelligent enough to understand the theological issues, printed in certain pamphlets. So there are certain pamphlets which are common to all like important dates of *ramzan*, major duties of Muslims, but certain pamphlets which are given exclusively to the initiated disciples.

The *khadims* also perform secretarial jobs for the *pir*. They are given a mobile phone through which they manage everyday activities of the *khanqa* or fix appointments of the *pir*. In certain situations, like an invitation to a *pir* for *jalsa*, the *khadims* are the intermediary link between the *pirs* and the devotees. They play an important role when devotees visit *pirs* to invite them for some important functions in their locality like inaugurating a school, madrasa etc, or for *jalsa*.[17] They keep a diary of events and engagement of their respective *pir*. The devotee at first meets or calls the *khadim* and inquires about the desirable dates. Based on the negotiation, the *khadim* forwards the specific request to the *pir*. The category of *khadims* is very versatile. Some of the *khadims* who are aged are associated with older *pirs*, live in khanqa and have devoted their entire life in service of the *silsila*. But, there are also young *khadims*, who are associated with young *pirs*. They are very efficient in communication skills and some are educated in modern institutions. Some of these younger *khadims* are resident of the village and are associated with *pirs*, as being a *khadim* is a lucrative means of employment. They accompany *pirs* when they go to *jalsa* and are paid a monthly salary by

[17] *Jalsa* can be seen as a *daawa* activity. It is usually an overnight religious function in open air, where preachers who are generally local mullas, *pirs* etc speak about how to be good Muslim and other religious and socio political issues pertaining to the community. It is conducted by local clubs or by local *mulla* by collecting funds from locality. They invite the speakers who are religious elites of the region. Certain amount of remuneration is paid to the speakers.

the *pir*. Other sources of income also include the commission they receive for organising any event on behalf of *pirs*. Some of the *khadims* are madrasa students, who came to Furfura to study at Furfura Senior Madrasa, and after their education, they get associated with the *pirs* as khadims.

B) The Everyday Routine of Young *Pirs*

Now, I will discuss some of the other facets of everyday life of young *pirs*. The young *pirs* (around the age group of 35 years) are tech savvy and one can find their fascination towards latest smart phones, and some of them are active on social networking sites. It is not just the electronic gadget that amuses them. They are also fascinated with latest motorbikes, luxury sedans and SUVs. Some of the young *pirs* change their phones frequently, while some also change their sedan after a couple of years. In evening time, when the shrine is less frequented, they generally come to mazar shareif in their cars or on bikes for tea or *paan* (beetle leaf). Common Muslims, who also frequent mazar shareif area during the evenings for snacks, pass satirical comments on such acts of *pirs*. But such comments are never on the face of a *pir*. They usually see such moves on the part of *pirs* as acts of showing off, and at times they say that such acts by *pirs* are contrary to the prestige associated with their status.

Young *pirs* are also very active in sports. Most of them are members of Diamond Club, Furfura, which is a sporting club. During evening one may find some *pirs* at the club, playing carrom or watching a football or cricket match. They are also enthusiastic about watching a cricket match if it is on at the Eden Garden at Kolkata. I was informed that some of them have also represented the district in volley ball team. Apart from playing and watching sports channels, they are also very active on internet, where issues pertaining to religion and

national and international events are of special interest. But, some of the *pirs* preach against watching television. Interestingly, playing football, cricket and other games are proscribed according to the wasiyatnama (will) of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939), which provides guidelines to the order of Furfura shareif.

The organisational network of Furfura *pirs*

Reform and matters pertaining to s*pir*ituality are not the only concerns of Furfura *pirs*. Almost all of the *pirs* at Furfura have an NGO arm or own a charitable institution. The venture into NGO is a recent development which came up during the late 1990s. They carry out their philanthropic work through these institutions. They distribute clothes to poor, organise health camps, organise mass marriage ceremonies for the poor, and send relief materials in case of any natural calamity or during communal riots. The work done by such institutions has less to do with religion and more to harness the social and economic capital. Such activities are not restricted only to Furfura, but by an efficient network of their *kahlifas* and *murids*, they conduct such activities at various places of West Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh. These activities are managed by the *murids*, who are responsible for collecting funds at local level and arranging the entire logistics for such events. Often senior political leaders and bureaucrats of the state are invited at such events. Every year the *pirs* come up with booklets or souvenirs with coloured photographs, exhibiting the philanthropic work done by them. Such booklets or souvenirs act as a publicity tool. They are kept at durbar and are given to devotees and press reporters when they visit the *pirs*. The photographs and description of such events are also uploaded on the website of the respective NGO or institution which is owned by the *pirs*. I was informed by common villagers at Furfura that

most of the funding for such event comes from *murids*, who are rich businessmen and people of influence in their respective areas. They generously donate in cash or in kinds for such events. The job of collecting money for the events is distributed among the murids, who in their respective areas collect resources on the name of *pirs.*

Ideology and construction of boundaries

It is interesting to inquire how amidst their interaction with market economy, they articulate their ideology and their own sense of being a true follower of the *silsila*. In this regard, I interviewed some of the young *pirs*. With respect to their *silsila* they say that Abu Bakr Siddique, who is also popularly known as *Dada Huzoor* by this generation, was a *pir* and a *mujjadded* (renewer of faith). They pay more emphasis on Dada Huzoor being *Mujjaded*, as a *pir* can be anyone, but a *mujjadded* is sent by Allah, and he comes once in a hundred years. They want to see themselves as preachers, as it is by preaching "correct way" to follow Islam, one can do service to Allah. The emphasis on being a preacher sets Furfura *pirs* apart from other Sufi shrines. It also reflects how "reformism" is the primary objective of this *silsila*. With respect to the foundational ideology of *silsila-e-Furfura Shareif*, one of the *pirs* informed me that:

> *We are followers of Syed Ahmad Barelvi (d.1831), and we should not be confused with followers of Ahmad Reza Khan Barelvi (d. 1921). We believe in wasila, but not the corrupt way which is prevalent in most of the Sufi shrines. The role of a Sufi is just to guide people to reach divinity. As for example, we need legs to move from one point to another, similarly a Sufi can be a medium for a true follower to reach the divine. Sufis can do this because they are close to Allah. But, in no way Sufis are capable themselves to intercede in the mortal life of followers, as it will constitute shirk. Sufis are the vehicle, a medium which can help a devotee to reach the Supreme Being. It means that they can help you to reach your destination, but they can never guarantee you! It totally depends on your individual capacity. It is also not the case that*

> *pirs are destination in itself. No, they are not and they can never be. No one can surpass Allah…. Its shirk. Therefore, if you have that love and enthusiasm towards Allah, if you are able to take that hardship, then a Sufi can just help you or guide you in achieving that.*

He further elaborated that Islam has three important components. And there is no emphasis on one at expense of others. All are necessary for this world to move in the right path. He said, the three part consist of:

> *1) Shariat – deals with laws to govern this material world*
>
> *2) Haqiqat – deals with knowledge of what is going on at present in this world*
>
> *3) Maarifat – deals with spiritual knowledge.*
>
> *All three should go together. Barelvis ignore shariat and haqiqat and only focus on maarifat. Maarifat alone can not exist as it may lead to shirk and bidat.*
>
> *Even the concept of wasila – intermediation – has different meaning for us and Barelvis. Barelvis say – Allah enke wasila se khaja de de.*
>
> *We say – Allah enke wasila se khaja dila de."*

When I asked him on what grounds, do they differentiate themselves with other Sufi sects? He said:

> *With respect to Barelvis, while doing Qayyaam (an act in praying), they think that Prophet is in front of them and in doing so they almost equate Prophet with Allah. But for us, it is not so. We think that his ruh (spirit) can come to mehfil or it may not come. We in no way can do any act both physically or at psychic level by which Prophet can become at par with Allah. Secondly,with respect to ilm e ghayab: ie knowledge of the unseen. Barelvis think that Prophet is noor of the world and has the power to see the unseen. He has the knowledge of the unseen. But we believe that Prophet may know about the seen, and he does not have any a priori knowledge of the world. It's only the creator of the world who has a priori knowledge of what he has created. We believe that if ruh of Prophet wants to know the unseen then he may know by grace of almighty, but it is not necessary that he knows. We also do not believe in the concept of haazir and naazir. For us qayyam is optional it is mustahab – desirable, good, but not obligatory. For wahabis it is haram, and for Barelvis it is obligatory.*

It is important to understand how their understanding of ideology and prevalent practices like selling of amulets, *pani pora* etc. gives us a conflicting picture pertaining to reformism and

traditionalism associated with Sufism. Now I will discuss, how reformist activities and traditional activities associated with Sufism in general, are gelled together in some religious events organised by Furfura *pirs*. I will also demonstrate how the reformist agenda of the *pirs* and their everyday interaction with the market economy influences their discourses highlighting the questions of identity.

The ethnography of *Jalsa* and *Isale Sawab*

Furfura *pirs* organise several religious events in Furfura. *Pirs* in their individual capacity organise *iftar* in the month of *ramzan*, where they invite Muslims from all over Bengal. Some *pirs* also organise *milad* on days on which their family members died. *Murids* associated with the *pirs* play an important role in mobilising people at local level for such events. But, *isale sawab*[18] is the most important religious event at Furfura organised by *pirs*.

Urs is not celebrated at the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique, as urs is associated with shirk. Instead isale sawab, is celebrated at Furfura. Isale sawab is an Arabic word which means pleading Allah to forgive one's sin and conferring rewards to dead. It is generally done by reciting Quran. It has an importance in reformist discourse as practices associated with *urs* like singing, lighting candles and offering flowers are seen as *shirk* – elevating the dead Sufi saint to the status of God. On the other hand, practices associated with *Isale Sawab* are limited to praying to God at an individual level. It is collectively organised by all the *pirs*. The arrangements of *isale sawab* usually start a month before. Murids donate funds in their

[18]Association of everyday practices with the Arabic equivalent is a modern phenomena associated with reformism, which portrays Arabic practices as authentically Islamic against the local practices which are seen as heterodox practices linked with 'folk' Islam. Secondly, the individualization of piety serves an important agenda of modern reformism, which focuses on this worldly Islam and confers individual responsibility on the part of every Muslim to uphold the religion. For details on emphasis on shift in piety of Muslims in modern times refer to Francis Robinson (2006).

individual capacity, and also arrange funds in their local vicinity. All the devotees, who visit shrine during *isale sawab* are given food, usually rice and beef curry. Lot of makeshift shops selling sweetmeats, books on topics pertaining to Islam, clothes like burqa, skullcaps and eateries are also established near mazar-e-shareif area. The shopkeepers pay a fixed amount to the organising committee for establishing shops. Big shopkeepers also donate money for some activities pertaining to the occasion like donation for *shamiana*, sound system etc. It is important to note that Islamic literature and other objects which do not conform to ideology of Furfura shareif are not permitted by the organising committee for display in these shops. In 2011, I witnessed a group of volunteers headed by a mufti, who visited each and every shop and asked shopkeepers to remove books written by Syed Abu ala Maududi, Golam Mustafa, Zakir Naik etc from display at shops. They objected to the display of pendants with any un Islamic symbols pertaining to Hindu or Christian religion. But, ironically they did not object to sale of cola! *Pirs* through their NGOs and charitable institutions also establish facilities for clean drinking water and health camps where free check up and medicines are provided to the devotees who visit during isale sawab. Interestingly, one of the *pirs* distributed packaged mineral water bottle to the devotees during *isale sawab* of 2012. It provides us with a conflicting notion where religion in its interaction with forces of market economy is restricted only to the realm of symbols and theological debates. It appears to be more as a construction of religious identity, which has nothing to do with the ontological questions that any religion seeks to answer. What we see is an act of transformation of religion into an ideology, where the worldview is narrowly defined and confined to issues mentioned in some sacred scripture. It does not see religion as a process, which is interacting with several other social processes in any context. Studying any religion by isolating it from

wider social processes and reifying it at the level of scripture is a hallmark of modern religious reformation, and Islamic reform movements are no exception to it.

Isale sawab was started by Abu Bakr Siddique, but today it has become a grand event surrounding the shrine. It is celebrated on 21st, 22nd and 23rd of *Falgun* month of Bengali calendar. A month before, the entire mazar shareif area is cleaned and the shrine is given a new coat of paint. Around 50,000 pilgrims from various parts of West Bengal, Bangladesh and Assam visit Furfura every year on this occasion. They enter the shrine quietly, pray inside quietly, they come out of the shrine and meet their respective *pirs*, who sit outside the shrine in their respective durbars, pay *nazrana* to them and donate zakat for madrasas, and pray collectively in *mehfil* for *namaz* and leave. There is no music, no loud speakers, no offering of any food items can be offered at shrine which the devotees can take back home (the way Hindus take *prasada* out of temple after their prayers). No one is allowed to touch the graves or do any activities which may be seen to constitute shirk. During evening, a *dhikr* session[19] is organised, which is silent. After that young graduates of madrasa give sermons sharing the dais with the *pirs*. It becomes an important platform for the madrasa students to get acquainted with jalsa activities and expand their reach among followers, who later invite these students on any religious occasion in their locality.

It is also an occasion which facilitates meeting of individual devotees and the *pirs*. Such meetings help devotees to invite *pirs* for jalsa in their locality. On the other hand, *isale sawab* is also an occasion when all the *murids* and *khalifas* gather at Furfura. Most of them are

[19] The dhikr according to silsila is silent, much like the dhikr of Naqshbandiya tariqa. Silently, they chant Allah – Allah, regulated by their breath. At Furfura Shareif, a public dhikr session is organised by eldest son of *mejhla huzoor* (second son of Abu Bakr Siddique) every third Thursday of the month. Some Furfura *pirs* also organise dhikr sessions in different parts of West Bengal on specified dates.

members and office bearers of several organizations that are run by Furfura *pirs*. The office bearers and members of these organisations meet, discuss the work done during the previous year, discuss the financial details and other activities of organisation and decide on the future course of action. Therefore, we see that *isale sawab*, apart from being an occasion of religious importance also has many dimensions, which has much more to do with social and political spheres, to which Furfura *pirs* are related.

It is also important here to understand how *isale sawab* is perceived by common Muslims. I attended this event thrice during 2011- 2013. It is noted that common Muslims in their everyday conversation do not use the word *isale sawab*, rather they call it *boro jalsa* (grand jalsa). The idea behind conducting *isale sawab* by Abu bakr Siddique was to stop *shirk* associated with *urs*. He imported this concept with its Arabic roots and attempted to transplant it in the cultural setting of Bengali Muslims.[20] But, interestingly, for common Muslims it serves the same purpose that *urs* does in case of other sufi shrines. Migrant Muslims from the village make it a point to visit their home during *eid* and *boro jalsa*. Common Muslims buy new clothes for these occasions and there is much enthusiasm. Shopkeepers based near Mazar Shareif area bring new materials for display anticipating icreased sales during this period. The shrine of Abu bakr Siddique, the shrine of his youngest son, which is situated at a distance from Mazar Shareif area, and some mosques are freshly painted for *isale sawab*. Madrasas are closed and the entire landscape of Furfura changes for three days. Though *isale sawab* is a different concept altogether, but in general perception the

[20] On the question of importance of Arabic culture at the expense of local cultural setting in Bengal, see Asim Roy (1983, 2008), Rafiuddin Ahmed (1981) and Parna Sengupta (2011).

change of vocabulary does not translate into the effect it creates on psyche of common Muslims.[21]

One of the reasons for this is the Arabic origin of the word. To relate anything associated with Muslims to Arabic is a reformist agenda that promotes the monolithic portrayal of Islam, devoid of any ethnic diversity (Zubaida 2011). It has two dimensions. First, it reifies anything related to Arab culture at the expense of the local roots is an important marker of Islamic reformist discourses. In doing so, it creates and legitimises a hierarchy between Muslims, where the life lived in accordance with Arabic cultural ethos is considered as more pious. Secondly, by reifying anything that is Arabic the reformers attempt to create a separate niche for themselves in opposition to the traditionalist. Both influence each other to a larger degree. Now I will shift to description of *jalsa*, where I will demonstrate how the discourses of Sufis, reformists, traditionalists and modernist differ in certain field, but nonetheless they also share lot of similarities in their construction of what Islam is.

Jalsa is a Persian word which means public gathering or congregation. Historically, in Bengal it evolved from *bahas* (debate), during colonial period. *Jalsa* is also known as *waz mehfil* (meeting for religious preaching), but common Muslims use the term *jalsa* for any congregation where preaching takes place. *Bahas* started in mid 19th century Bengal, in wake of Christian missionary activities in this region. It was a public gathering where Muslim preachers of different sects, Christian missionaries or other preachers debated religion openly. The idea was to prove their respective religion as authentic at the expense of other in public. *Jalsa* can also be seen as a *daawa* activity to propagate the message of Islam among

[21] This statement is based on my interaction with common Muslims, who belong to Furfura and also with those who visit Furfura from distant parts of West Bengal on this occasion.

Muslims and invite people to the fold of Islam. Historically, it has been an important instrument of socio political mobilization and islamisation in context of Bengal. By the end of 19th century, the Muslim reformist tried to replace *bahas* with monologic *waz mehfil* (Sarkar 2002)[22].

Jalsa is usually an overnight Muslim socio religious program. It takes place frequently in rural Bengal, where Muslims in any village gather together and attend the sermons given by religious leaders. It is generally organised in an open space in village, where a dais is constructed for the speaker and *shamiana* is erected all over to facilitate sitting of audience. It is generally organised by Muslim youth clubs in village, local mosque committees, or any Muslim charitable institution at local level. Speakers are either pooled locally or from various madrasas, mosques or Muslim organizations, which are well known for their theological knowledge. At times important Muslim political leaders are also invited. If the *jalsa* program is overnight then on an average five to seven speakers speak for at least an hour. Many a times speakers with different sectarian affiliations are invited. They preach and leave the stage one by one and there is no actual co-ordination between the speakers. There is also an ambiguity with respect to the content of preaching by several speakers affiliated to various ideologies. I attended several *jalsas* of different Muslim sects in different parts of West Bengal. At times, the sermons presented at *jalsa* are recorded and the CDs are sold. I have also collected some CDs of *jalsa* session by important Muslim personalites in West Bengal. Though, *jalsa* takes place round the year in rural West Bengal, but it is frequent during the winter season, particularly during November, December and January. November and

[22] The shift from *bahas* to *waz mehfil* points towards a more pragmatic and communal turn in Muslim reformist activities. Often *bahas* were inconclusive and to judge the arguments, religious experts from other community (Hindu) were invited. The shift also symbolizes more inward turn in construction of Muslim exclusivity. For details, refer: Rafiuddin Ahmad (1981), Sumit Sarkar (2002), Ashoke Kumar Chackraborty (2002) and Asim Roy (2008).

December being harvest season, it gives adequate time for the organisers to organise such events.[23] Even the audience of common Muslim peasants in village has sufficient time during this season to spare time for such activities. One more reason for the timings is because of the fact that rural Muslims who are mainly peasants who earn some money during the harvest season, so they can donate money generously for such religious activities.[24] Other occasions like *Eid ul Fitr* and *Eid ul Adha* (locally known as *Qurbani*, or *bakrid*) are also prime time for *jalsa* as it is the time when people who have migrated come home on holiday.

The site of jalsa also attracts several make shift shops of eateries, toys, jewellery, religious books and ready made clothes. These shopkeepers pay a fixed fee to the organising committee for establishing their shops at the site of *jalsa*. Men and women generally mix freely without any inhibition around these shops and engage themselves in socialising, chatting and buying whereas in *jalsa* women are separated from men by a cloth partition and they are not allowed to see the speakers, who are men. For them a projector is arranged. For common Muslims *jalsa* is perceived not just as a religious event, but also as a location for socialising with others and as an occasion for celebration. To understand this, we also need to consider the cultural context of West Bengal, when across Bengal most of the village fairs take place in this season. To participate in this event people come well dressed – one can see children with enthusiasm and women dressed nicely, they listen to speakers at the *jalsa*, eat at eateries and most of them go home by 10pm. I found hardly a handful of people who attend it for the entire night. At some *jalsas*, food is also provided by the organising

[23] *Agrahan* and *Pous* month are the harvest months according to traditional Bengali calendar. It roughly corresponds to mid-November to mid-January. Most of the village fairs locally known as *mela*, which at times are associated with local Hindu deity, also take place in this harvest season. Thus, *jalsa* is not an exceptional event in these months.

[24] Most of the Muslims in Bengal live in rural areas and are engaged in agricultural activities. According to 2001 census, around 83.10% of Muslims living in West Bengal live in rural areas. Out of which 20.30% Muslims are cultivators and 26.59% Muslims are agricultural workers. Muslims constitute 25.25% of total population in West Bengal.

committee, but it is optional and is solely dependent on the financial condition of the organising committee.

Jalsa is not just a religious event where Quran is recited and Muslims are informed about correct 'Islamic' ways. It serves multiple agenda of different stake holders of the event. Now I will discuss different aspects of *jalsa* one by one.

The emergence of Muslim youth club

The emergence of Muslim youth clubs in rural West Bengal is quite a recent phenomenon.[25] During the colonial period, youth clubs were an important institution to mobilize people for political actions. Apart from being an institution to facilitate political mobilisation, the clubs generally organised sports and cultural activities. Earlier, majority of the clubs were the initiatives of Hindu youths coming from middle class and it had an urban character. Today, one can find such clubs in almost every locality of West Bengal. It is important to note that clubs in West Bengal do not just conduct sports and cultural activities. They play an important role in local communitarian life. They act as a mediating agency between two parties in case of any conflict. They take care the wider interests of their locality, due to which their penetration is quite deep in community life of the locality. Many a times, if the influence of club is big, it has been seen that they are inclined towards certain political

[25] Youth clubs in Bengal, historically came up during Swadeshi movement in early 20th century, but they were mainly restricted to urban and moffusil areas. Most of the clubs were the initiatives of youths from Hindu community coming from middle class background. Its penetration to rural areas and emergence of Muslim youth clubs in rural areas are recent phenomena. In my fieldwork, most of the youth clubs that I came across were formed during the last 20 to 25 years. But, in Furfura, Furfura Young Muslims Association – a Muslim youth club is an exception as it was formed in early 1960s.

parties. At times, political parties also fund their activities, as it serves the interests of both the parties.

The emergence of Muslim youth clubs in post 1980s, especially in villages of West Bengal is a new phenomenon related in some respect with upward social mobility among them. In the Furfura area, most of the Muslim youth clubs were formed by those who were first to get educated in their families and by those whose parents or they themselves had migrated to other states in search of jobs and better living.[26] Migration of Muslims from villages in search of jobs is widespread in West Bengal and it has changed the economic and social status of deprived Muslim community to a large extent.[27] Once they are economically well off to certain extent, the newly acquired economic status is reflected in their social status. Clubs were the reflection of this newly acquired socio economic status.

But, these clubs have an exclusive character as in many cases it was found that it was open to Muslim members only. Organizing events like *jalsa* gives a degree of social legitimacy for existence to these clubs in their immediate social context. They also organize other activities like sports, blood donation camps, celebration of festivals like *eid*, or national festivals like Independence and Republic day. Many times they invite local political leaders, religious leaders or high ranking administrative officials as chief guests. The funding for these clubs is raised locally by donations and at times by local political parties and by some Muslim

[26] I have discussed in Chapter 1, how Muslim youths in Furfura belonging to *kasai* (butcher) community came up with a youth club in their locality in last decade. The role of socio economic mobility because of migration is one of the important factors that encouraged such socio political assertion among Muslims coming from depressed social strata.

[27] There is no data available on out migration of Muslims for search of jobs to other state. In West Bengal the discourse of migration with respect to Muslim is dominated by influx of Bangladeshi Muslims in West Bengal. This issue has taken a political turn with Hindu right wing forces accusing the Left Front and ruling Trinamool Congress of appeasing Muslims. But, the socio economic condition of Muslims in West Bengal is alarming. Sachar Committee Report (2006) highlights that only 2% Muslims in West Bengal are employed in government sector. Majority of them are in Group C and Group D post. My views on migration are supported by my fieldwork. I have discussed the issue of migration among Muslims in Furfura in Chapter 1. The discussion is based on my household survey of 300 households in the village.

organizations. What is important here is to understand the devolution of power in its local context. Muslim youth who come forward to constitute such clubs belong to different social strata and status. Through the institution of club they are actively engaged in communitarian life of Muslims at local level. Such initiatives today are not the exclusive endeavours of traditional Muslim elites. By engaging in such activities they are in constant process of negotiation with the traditional elites, political parties as well as the state. Clubs have given them a legitimate voice to negotiate with superior agencies. The power of political bargaining is quite new for Muslims coming from lower social strata and is reflective of the democratization of socio political as well as religious spaces. Cultural and religious activities like *jalsa* give them a social legitimacy to operate in their respective locality. On the other hand, it also helps the preacher in constructing a base in that locality. It enhances his popularity in that area. In this matter, Furfura *pirs* act like any other stakeholders. Many a times they fund several activities of local clubs, they are invited as guest of honour to initiate any community program like blood donation camp, starting of ambulance service for a particular locality or sending relief material for any natural calamity. As for example the clubs help in mobilisation of Muslims from their local vicinity whenever Furfura *pirs* conduct a *dharna* (protest march) in Kolkata. They also collect money from Muslims to fund several activities of Furfura *pirs*.

If we look at the social profile of the preachers in *jalsas*, we find there has been a remarkable shift. Apart from some prominent speakers, who are famous for their theological knowledge or are affiliated with some important Muslim organisations or parties, most of the speakers are pooled locally. Pooling speakers locally are also cost effective. These speakers are locally affiliated to madrasas, or local mosques or local branch of any Muslim organization.

Interestingly, majority of the speakers are not traditional elite. A good number of them are madrasa educated low caste Muslims. Arshad Alam (2011) in his study of madrasas in Uttar Pradesh, shows how madrasas helps in creation of some sort of social and cultural capital for the poor Muslims from rural areas, which otherwise is impossible for a person coming from such low strata. Nilanjana Gupta (2010) in context of West Bengal also mentions the role of local madrasas in uplifting the social and cultural status of poor Muslims. But, it does not translate into upliftment of economic status. Nevertheless, the point here is to understand the increasing democratization and secularization in religious spheres. Previously, it was quite uncommon for a person belonging to low social status to speak for Islam publicly. On the dais they share the same space with other prominent preachers and thus command a certain degree of respect.

Furfura *pirs* run and support several madrasas in West Bengal. The products of these madrasas, after passing out get associated with local level mosques or any institution run by Furfura *pir*. Many a times, the passed out students of Furfura madrasa invite Furfura *pir* and act as an agent of their respective *pirs* in their local area. When they share dais with Furfura *pir* in any *jalsa*, it also gives them a degree of legitimacy and patronage among his local community. On the other hand, this network of *madrasa* students also consolidates power base of Furfura *pir* in any locality.

The content of *jalsa*

Now I will briefly discuss the contents of *jalsa*. The speakers start with Quranic verses, and then shift to examples of prophetic traditions and *hadith* focusing on how early Muslims during initial days of Islam led their life according to God's commandments. The examples of Prophet *(sunna)* and his companions are set as an ideal model on which every Muslim

should mould their respective life. They always compare the good deeds of Prophet and his companions with the contemporary degraded situation of Muslims in West Bengal. In one of the *jalsa* that I attended the preacher directly asserted that 'we in Bengal are second grade Muslims. It is only by our devotion and changing our everyday habits that we can improve our filthy situation'. Secondly, the preacher attempts to compare the contemporary socio political situation with some incident in early days of Islam. By doing this, they try to instil a degree of inferiority complex among Muslim audience, and attempt to construct an ideal notion of Islamic past and society, where Prophet and his traditions are foundational blocks of everyday affairs.

Though *jalsa* is supposed to be a religious function, but often it becomes a political arena, where the preacher comments on contemporary political issues like which political party is good and working for Muslim community, which political party Muslims should support etc. At times they also engage in polemics with respect to other Muslim sects: in a *jalsa* attended by me, a preacher who was affiliated to *Jamat e Ulama e Hind*, branded Sufis as lax in maintaining proper Islamic codes. Topics may range from issues highlighted in Sachar committee report[28], marginalization of Muslims in Indian society, gross neglect of community by state, demolition of Babri mosque, Gujarat riots, conflict between Muslim personal law and state laws, issue of Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan and the western propaganda to malign Islam.

The overall emphasis is to create an awareness of victimization of Muslims along with an increased and exclusive consciousness of identity of being a Muslim. The speakers are also aware of the contemporary socially contingent processes of the local context like migration

[28] Sachar committee report was tabled in Indian Parliament in 2006. Constituted under Justice Rajinder Sachar, this report pointed to the poor socio economic conditions of Indian Muslims.

of Muslims to earn livelihood and consumerism and they emphasize quite pragmatically that in contemporary times it is difficult to follow religion in totality because of non conducive socio economic situation. To manage this contradiction and to provide a way out of this crisis, they import the notion of *halal* (prescribed) and *haram* (proscribed), and speak of what constitutes *halal* and what constitutes *haram* with reference to our contemporary lifestyles. The focus here is on external lifestyle and Islam is presented as a rational and scientific religion.

The *jalsa* sessions of prominent speakers are recorded in CDs and cassettes and are sold. One can also see many youngsters recording clippings of *jalsa* on their mobile phone for their personal use. Interviews with some of these youngsters suggest that these clippings and CDs serve as mementoes which they carry with themselves when they are away from home. They play these clippings in their free time. These clippings at times also act as authentic guide when they debate on some issues of everyday life among themselves.

But *jalsa* also creates lot of controversies and ambiguities. Often speakers belonging to different ideological orientations are invited in *jalsa*. Being an overnight activity, speakers come, preach and go. Then it is the turn of next speaker, who may be from a different ideological orientation. In a jalsa, which I attended, speakers from *Jamat e Ulama e Hind* and from Furfura Shareif were invited. Though their content was more or less similar in many respects in terms of what constitutes true Islam, what constitutes *haram* and what constitutes *halal*, and regarding Prophetic traditions, but they were also different in terms of the role of Sufism in Islam, and some other theological issues. At times, the internal politics among speakers also finds reflection on dais. As for example, I was informed by a respondent in Furfura, how Furfura *pirs* belonging to two different groups debated on certain issue with

opposite viewpoint. Moreover, in contemporary times of digital age, a believer is flooded with numerous discourses on similar issues. Which one among them he subscribes to is a matter of personal choice.

The recent work of Hirschkind (2006) points the role of recorded sermons in the construction of pious subjectivity in context of middle class Muslims in urban Cairo. He argues that recorded sermons on cassettes and CDs act as a source of everyday ethics for Muslims and expands the limits of sermons from mosques to the realm of everyday life. On this point, I disagree with the argument that recordings of events like sermons, *jalsa* or *dawa* activities create an ethical background which conditions the external behaviour and internal perception of believer[29]. I argue, that recorded sermons do have an impact on conditioning of piety of common Muslims, but such recordings have no privilege over other agencies and discourses, which also assert their influence on individual Muslims. Like in my field site, discourses on being a good Muslim also went hand in hand with an ethnic identity of being a Bengali and being from South Bengal.[30] It is the context which determines which identity will gain prominence over others. I see religious sermons as one of the many influencing factor in behavioural modification of a Muslim. Religion is not the only concern of common Muslims, nor it is the sole object of focus for the religious preachers. Most of the times, religious sermons are cast in accordance with local conditions and local socio political situation also influences the content of such *dawa* activities. To talk of religious ethics and supporting it with historical tradition without considering the contemporary socio political context can only provide a partial picture. Religious traditions and their interpretations are not static and

[29] I have dealt in details with the debates emerging from works of Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) elsewhere.

[30] I have discussed the issue of complex interface between multiple identities and contextual conditioning in my next chapter.

the intertwining of religion and ethics is only one dimension among the multiple ways by which religion interacts with wider social processes.

Therefore, we see that how Furfura *pirs* are engaged in diverse activities. Their activities are not just limited to reform activities and construction of Muslim exclusivity. They have evolved beyond the confines of religion and politics and have ventured in business and other social fields. It is important to note how they have utilised the inherited religious capital[31] by venturing into various political and economic arenas of everyday life. This endeavour is not at the expense of their religious capital, but to facilitate it, the religious ideology underwent significant shifts in due course of time to incorporate such changes. This interaction also illustrates the fluid interface between religious ideology and practices with modernity and market economy.

Ideology, Practice and Market Economy

Now I will discuss how Furfura *pirs* manage and sustain their endeavours in various fields and how it expands? To answer this we need to look at the various mechanisms that are deployed by the Furfura *pirs* for this purpose, which make effective use of modern bureaucratic structure, information technology, efficient logistical network of men and institutions, social and political links, and diversifying their operations effectively with changing times. In doing so, their ventures are not much different from any business enterprise which strives to operate in modern competitive market situation. Let's briefly take up these mechanisms one by one.

[31] I use the word 'religious capital' in similar terms as Bourdieu defines cultural capital. Religious capital denotes non financial acquired set of religious knowledge, skills and expertise which provides a person an advantageous position in any social hierarchy.

We know how the role of modern print technology revolutionized the religious sphere of society[32]. In contemporary period, it is not just modern print technology, but also the digital and information technology that is effectively put into use by the *pirs* of Furfura Shareif. One can find both audio and video CDs of their sermons delivered during various *jalsa* sold at very cheap rate (Rs 30 to Rs 35 per CD) in shops near the shrine. Such CDs are produced by small local companies and even by the NGO arm of some of these *pirs*. The sale of these CDs also provides monetary benefits to the *pirs* as they receive one time amount to allow their lectures to be recorded. One can also find cheap printed books written by some of the Furfura *pirs*, regarding correct ways to follow Islam and propagation of their ideology. Some *pirs* also come up with souvenir type booklets, describing what social work they have done in past one or two years with coloured pictures of some of their works, or their photographs with socially influentially people like top politicians and bureaucrats to show that their initiatives are also endorsed by them. Such initiatives provide them a sort of social legitimacy and propagating religious message through these media provides them with a religious legitimacy, indicating that they are capable enough to take forward the order of Furfura Sharif that was started by Abu Bakr Siddique.

Similar is the case with propagation of their sermons through CDs and other means of information technology like websites, social networking and group SMSs. Though the network of khalifas and use of print medium for propagation of ideology existed earlier, but certainly these avenues took a different turn with the advent of new technology. Another avenue which they successfully ventured into is the educational field. Earlier, Furfura *pirs* used to establish madrasas and build mosques, but, now the prime emphasis is on

[32] For details regarding the impact of print technology on Muslims, please refer to: Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), Zaman (1999), Robinson (1993, 2008), Pearson (2008), Green (2011).

establishment of, what they call - mission educational institutions[33], which is basically a residential institute, where religious education is given along with modern secular education like computer literacy. Moreover these institutions also provide coaching to boarders for various competitive examinations. Such ventures point towards the changing socio-economic structure of Muslims in the region. With the growth of market economy, more and more Muslims are migrating out of their villages in search of livelihood. This has enhanced their economic status. Most of the Muslims who migrate to various metropolitan cities of India are basically semi skilled labourers and are first in family to migrate. I have conducted a household survey of 300 households (out of 1140 households) of Furfura in 2013. The survey suggests that most of the Muslim migrants are from intermediate and low castes, and are educated till middle school. Secondly, when they migrate, in most cases, their family stays behind in village. With increasing economic mobility of this underclass Muslims, their demand for better lifestyle also increases. Education of their children is one of the prime concerns for this upward mobile class. In my survey, I find that most of the Muslims are sending their children to English medium schools and government schools, instead of madrasas. So, venturing in educational field becomes a lucrative activity which is also portrayed as 'social work' for improving the condition of the community.

[33] Such educational institutions are modeled on *Al Ameen Mission*, Howrah, WB. This residential educational institute started in 1976, where modern secular education is provided along with religious education. Students, who are mainly poor Muslims, are also provided free coaching for various competitive examinations for further education in engineering or medical field or for government jobs, especially in civil services. Al Ameen Mission has been successful in attaining this target, and it was awarded at several forums, including by previous Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya for the good work. For a similar study of how Furfura *pirs* ventured in educational institutions in Bangladesh, refer to Humayun Kabir (2011).

Some of the *pirs* are also linked with business and some are entering indirectly into real estate business.[34] Therefore, these instances indicate the cumulative growth of power - how the power in one sphere (in this case, religious sphere), is used to consolidate the power bases in other spheres like in socio political and economic spheres. In this inter convertibility of power, one needs to focus on the shifts in the discourses and practices of Furfura *pirs* to understand the multiple and shifting ways how religion, politics and market economy are interlinked.

Second is the aspect of efficient network. The *pirs* of Furfura Shareif have appointed *Khalifas* (representatives) in almost every district of West Bengal, lower Assam and Bangladesh. These representatives are in turn connected with their own network of *murids* (disciples) at block and village level. The network of *khalifas* is linked together by a religious organization named – *Jamat e Ulama e Bangla*[35], which was revived in early 2000s mainly to counter *Jamat e Ulama e Hind*, which is an outfit of Deobandi ulama. This move was to counter the political influence of *Jamat e Ulama e Hind*, as at national level *Jamat e Ulama e Hind* was close to Indian National Congress and in West Bengal was in alliance with the ruling Left Front government, headed by Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI(M). *Jamat e Ulama e Bangla* in its current avatar is very different from its earlier version. Today it advocates communal harmony and development of Muslims in West Bengal, but does not compromise on the exclusive Muslim identity. By re inventing this organization Furfura *pirs*

[34] I was informed that one of the influential *pirs* purchased a vast tract of land near the proposed Furfura Railway Station. This purchase was done just a few months before the official announcement of the project. Some of the *pirs* are in business of boutique, books, and some have rented out their apartments in Kolkata. Some of the *pirs* have also invested in village in shopping arcade, where they have rented shops.

[35] Jamat e Uama e Bangla is a religious organisation, which was established by Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) to counter other Muslim organisations in colonial Bengal. This organization was instrumental in publishing communal tracts and mobilising Muslims on the communal grounds. After his death this organization was disbanded.

wanted a fair political share in the local affairs of West Bengal. The *Khalifas* or representatives of this organization, not only invite Furfura *Pirs* for *jalsa* or any other socio religious purposes, but also arrange means in their vicinity, so that common Muslims from their locality can visit the shrine. They also manage other important occasions at local level which can be religious, or socio political ceremonies like opening of charitable institutions which is attended by Furfura *pirs* and senior political dignitaries. Such actions serve two purposes. At one level it reaffirms the significance of and reproduces authority of the *pirs* before the common Muslims and at other level it also consolidates the legitimacy of the *khalifas* in their respective locality. Moreover, mobilization of Muslims on such a large scale also elevates the position of the *pirs* signifying that they have a mass following, which becomes an important issue during elections[36].

To achieve this end Jamat e Ulama e Bangla came up with a bureaucratic organizational structure. At the bottom is a local committee which operates at the *thana* (police station) level; above it is the *zila* (district) committee; and at the top is the central committee comprising *pirs* and senior *khalifas* and it is based at Furfura. *Pirs* generally go for *jalsa* round the year, but such trips become important during election times when the Furfura *pirs* visit numerous places in West Bengal for *jalsa* and campaigning for respective political leaders with whom they are associated. But, their association with political parties does not insulate them from power politics within and as a result, factionalism is visible today among the *pirs*.

The differences within – rise of factionalism

[36] The Furfura *pirs* have never fought any elections and they maintain that they are politically neutral. But, they have supported major political parties in West Bengal in elections.

The eldest son of Abu Bakr Siddique had based himself in Dhaka, now in Bangladesh after the partition in 1947. Over there he and his heirs associated with political parties. I was informed by one of the *pirs* at Furfura that his uncle (eldest son of Abu Bakr Siddique) amassed huge property in Bangladesh, and in due course of time he turned *Wahabi* which helped him to harness Saudi funds for opening madrasas and mosques in different parts of Bangladesh. After his death, his son and son-in-law are taking forward the work of their father. They have constructed a new Furfura durbar at Dhaka, and also run a website: Furfura.com. Their website does not contain much information about the Furfura Shareif in West Bengal, and concentrates much on their *dawa* activities and their social work in Bangladesh. On other hand, the present generation of Furfura *pirs* in West Bengal are divided among themselves. It also led to factionalism in the newly formed organization – Jamat e Ulama e Bangla, which is dominated by sons of the second son of Abu Bakr Siddique. The other dominant group is of the sons and grandsons of the youngest son of Abu Abkr Siddique. They have constructed a new durbar in Furfura around the grave of the youngest son of Abu Bakr Siddique.[37] They run a separate website: *www.furfuradarbarsharif.com*, and by the late 2000s they came up with a separate organization named: *Anjuman e Ulama e Bangla*, in opposition to *Jamat e Ulama e Bangla*. Interestingly, Anjuman supported Trinamool Congress (TMC) in Gram panchayat election of 2008 and later in 2011 assembly election, in opposition of Jamat e Ulama e Bangla which was close to CPI(M). This new faction was instrumental in harnessing Muslim votes in West Bengal in favour of TMC. One of the murids of a *pir*, who belongs to the second son of Abu Bakr Siddique informed me that an important point of contestation between the two group is with respect to the status of the

[37] Out of five sons of Abu Bakr Siddique, the eldest son's grave is in Bangladesh, while the youngest son's grave is at a different location in Furfura, popularly known as Choto Huzoor Durbar. The graves of rest of the three sons are along with the grave of Abu Bakr Siddique, popularly known as Mazar Shareif.

son- in- law of second son of Abu Bakr Siddique. He is a faculty member at Furfura Senior Madrasa and secretary of Jamat e Ulama e Bangla. The demand of *pirs* belonging to other group is that the important positions in the organisation should be given within the blood line of Abu Bakr Siddique.

The shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique is not the only shrine in Furfura Sahreif. One historical shrine is of four warriors, who invaded this region in 14th century. Before Independence, this shrine was a popular site and was visited by people from Hindu and Muslim communities. Abu Bakr Siddique stopped the popular practices at this shrine and imposed rigid 'Islamic' practices by eradicating practices like offering flowers, doing *sajda* etc. During my fieldwork, I find that today this shrine is not frequented by people from Hindu community. At the gate of this shrine posters giving instructions pertaining to permissible practices are pasted. This shrine is managed by a committee in which Furfura *pirs* play an important role.

Another shrine at Furfura is of the s*pir*itual guide of the army contingent which invaded Furfura and is known as Bukhari Shareif. It is managed by its heir – Syed Amjad Hussain, who is also a faculty member at Furfura Senior Madrasa. The practices associated with this shrine are similar to the practices at the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique. Today, some *pirs* who are great grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique are in conflict with the heirs of Bukhari Shareif. The issue of contention is the claim over history regarding who came first and established Islam in this region. Grandsons of Abu Bakr Siddique claim that it was their forefathers who came first in 14th century and brought Islam in this region. This position is refuted by the heirs of Bukhari Shareif who also claim the same in similar terms. Both the parties propagate their views by means of pamphlets which are distributed to the devotees who visit the

shrines. I was informed by one of the *murids* associated with the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique that this conflict over history is only an outward manifestation of inner conflict over control of financial resources. It is an issue of monetary resources which come from *jalsas*. The heirs of Bukhari Shareif have also established a similar type of bureaucratic structure of *murids* in different parts of West Bengal, who do similar type of religious activities like *jalsa* or other philanthropic activities. This has resulted in conflict over the issue of area dominance. Jalsas, as I have mentioned, have economic angle. Firstly, the Furfura *pirs* are paid well for delivering their sermons, which may range from Rs.5000/- to Rs.15,000/- for a session of two to three hours. The amount paid is dependent on the popularity of the preacher. Secondly, the network of *murids* in an area collects money on behalf of *pirs* in their locality to support several activities initiated by *pirs*. This has led to competition over resources between *pirs* from these two shrines resulting in polemical articulations against each other.

Furfura *pirs* also successfully attempted to take over the shrine of Fateh Ali Waisi in Kolkata. Fateh Ali Waisi was the s*pir*itual guide of Abu Bakr Siddique and his shrine at Maniktala, Kolkata is under wakf board. It was taken care by an old *imam*, who was patronised by Waisi Memorial Trust[38]. When I visited that shrine in August 2011, I noted that the shrine complex was neglected with poor infrastructure. Several unauthorised buildings were constructed in the wakf property adjoining the shrine. The practices associated with that shrine were liberal like in any other popular Sufi shrine and it was venerated by people from both Hindu and Muslim communities living in that area. After Trinamool Congress government came to power in 2011, Furfura *pirs* in association with the new Wakf Board took over the governing

[38] Waisi Memorial Trust is a non profitable organization which took care the everyday affairs related to that shrine of Fateh Ali Waisi.

committee of that shrine and asked the previous *imam* to leave. They formed a new organising committee named – *Nooria Fatehia Siddiqueia Foundation,* which stands for the chain of Naqshbandiya Mujaddediya order in this region signifying Noor Muhammad Nizampuri, Fateh Ali Waisi and Abu Bakr Siddique. They appointed a new *imam* at the shrine and also abolished popular religious practices associated with Sufi shrines. Just like in case of the shrine at Furfura, they pasted posters on the gates of the shrine instructing do's and don'ts in that shrine. I was informed by one of the *murids* of Furfura *pirs* that the *pirs* considered the practices at that shrine as *shirk* and thus, it was necessary to take over that shrine. The new organising committee formed is headed by Furfura *pirs* and their organisation – Jamat e Ulama e Bangla along with members of wakf board. The new *imam* is a member of Jamat e Ulama e Bangla. Interestingly, to overtake this shrine *pirs* of both the factions of Furfura *pirs* came together on a common platform.

The popularity of a *pir* also fetches good dividents during election times as a good number of Furfura *pirs* are associated with political parties in West Bengal. They claim that they are non political, and do not associate themselves with politics. But, in reality they define politics narrowly and confine it to electoral politics. Their polemical articulation regarding sectarian differences, or against the government or political parties is covered up under the veneer of speaking for authentic Islam or their concern for Muslim community. During elections, in the name of just bargain for the Muslim community, they side with political parties. *Jalsas,* pamphlets and *dharnas* are some of the tools to articulate their political concerns. As for example, in 2008 panchayat elections some *pirs* of Furfura openly sided with Trinamool

Congress and played an important role in defeating the ruling Left Front government. Similar electoral tools were instrumentalised during the 2011 assembly elections.[39]

To put forward their political demand and show off their strength they organise dharnas in the heart of Kolkata[40]. As for example, just before the panchayat election of 2013, some Furfura *pirs* organised a dharna at Shahid Minar, Kolkata to show off their strength. The network of *murids* and other organisations supported by Furfura *pirs* play an important role in such mobilisation.

Madrasa students also play an important part in such mobilisation. A respondent (a madrasa student) informed that, some Furfura *pirs* were very close to 'Madrasa Students' Union' at Aliah University, Kolkata. Most of the students, who pass out from Furfura Madrasa, join Aliah University in Kolkata for further studies. The Furfura *pirs* are always on good terms with madrasa students, right from their stay at Furfura. When they join Aliah University, a good number of them are active in student politics there. The previous loyalty of students towards Furfura *pirs* which is built up for years in Furfura pays off as Furfura *pirs* most of time fund several activities of Madrasa Students' Union. On the other hand, students act as the reserve strike team, which can be mobilised any time by the Furfura *pirs*. Students from Madrasas and from Aliah University were instrumental in several dharnas as for example, they protested in front of United States Consulate office at Kolkata regarding issues ranging from Iraq, Afghanistan, drone strikes etc. In January 2013, during Kolkata Book Fair, just a few hours before Salman Rushdie, who was one of the guests at the book fair, was supposed

[39] This argument is based on recording of jalsa of some of the Furfura *pirs*. The recording was produced in CD by one of the charitable organizations of a Furfura *pir*.

[40] Most of the dharnas are organised at Shahid Minar, in Kolkata. We can consider Shahid Minar as similar to Tahrir Square in Cairo or Azadi Square in Tehran, where most of the political protests take place. This also gives them easy publicity by press and people around.

to land at Kolkata International airport, madrasa students were mobilised by Furfura *pir* at very short notice and they stormed the airport premises. The visit of Salman Rushdie as one of the guests of Kolkata Book fair had been kept a secret. As a result of the sudden protest by madrasa students, Salman Rushdie was asked to leave Kolkata right after landing in Kolkata. Similarly, in 2007 madrasa students conducted several protest in Kolkata against Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen. The aggressive ways of protest by madrasa students and their capacity to endure the resulting police action, makes them an extremely valuable asset for Furfura *pirs*.

Thus, we see how Furfura *pirs* have established a complex structure of an array of organisations to push forward their religious and political agenda. It is difficult sometimes to tell where religion ends and politics begin. These are so closely intertwined and feed into each other all the time. Such organisations depend largely on efficient network of various agencies at local level. The nexus between Furfura *pirs*, the organisations that they have floated and the network of various agencies is further based on a number of factors ranging from personal loyalty of key members towards *pirs*, efficient use of technology and media, their pragmatic approach towards market economy and to various ways of patronising the diverse set of agencies like Madrasa Students' Union and others. Their quest for religious authority is dependent on their pragmatic approach which can not be seen by isolating their endeavours from the notion of power and measures taken to reproduce it in diverse socio political settings.

Conclusion

To conclude, first I will discuss the question of religion and ideology. My concern with this question is to show how religion and ideology interact in diverse ways. But, before that we need to understand that religion as a system of belief enshrined in certain core scriptures is a modern construct of religion. This notion has constructed a standardised version of religious practices and has idealised religion. Anything that does not conform to this idealised version is considered as folk practices or deviant form of religion. Considering this, we can say that Islamic reform movements are a product of idealised version of religion and thus, they are product of modernity. We can see the tension between 'religion as practice' and 'religion as ideology' from the lens of modern conceptualisation of religion.

As I have discussed that, in classical Sufism, Sufis were considered as travellers on the path of perfection to reach *haqiqa* which means – 'the truth' and is considered as the last stage (*manzil*) where the Sufi encounters God. For this, classical Sufism charts out a route consisting of several stages (*manzils*) in hierarchy, which is in correspondence to the nature of the traveler. It starts with the first *manzil*, which is marked by nature of humanity (*nasut*), and at this stage the disciple must live according to the law of *sharia*. After this, the second *manzil* is of angels (*malakut*), for which there is a path to be followed (*tariqa*). These *manzils* ends at when the traveler is marked by the nature of *fana* (extinction), and reaches the truth (*haqiqa*).

Interestingly, the *pirs* categorically mention that *sharia* is the *tariqa*, and they do not see the entire journey of a Sufi in terms of *manzils* arranged vertically in the form of a hierarchy, rather their conception is of these *manzils* in a horizontal frame, without prioritizing one over other. Therefore, there is no conception of graduation of a Sufi from one *manzil* to another. All the three *manzils* are to be followed in everyday life of Sufi without any discrimination.

Equally important is the twist in the meaning of *haqiqa*, which in terms of ideology of *silsila e Furfura Shareif* is the phenomenal world. In this conceptualization, Sufi's role is reduced to the level of a s*pir*itual guide, who can mediate (*wasila*) between the devotee and Almighty. It also sees Sufis and the institutions surrounding the shrines as dry and devoid of s*pir*itual power (*baraqa*), as according to perspective of *silsila e Furfura Shareif*, only God can intercede in the life of a devotee. Equally, important is to see the status of Prophet Muhammad, who is seen in a historical context as a model to be emulated by Muslims. He is devoid of any s*pir*itual powers of his own like in case of *Ilm e Ghayab*. It is on wish of Almighty that he may or he may not have the power of unseen. On issue of *Qayyam*, demarcation is made between *silsila e Furfura Shareif* and *Barelvis*, who are accused of elevating the status of Prophet Muhammad to divine level, which according to *silsila e Furfura Shareif* is shirk.

The reform initiated by Abu Bakr Siddique and the subsequent pragmatic shifts engineered by his sons and grandsons points towards how in a particular socio political context religion is articulated as an ideology and how in other context the ideology is transformed into a different set of religious practices. I have illustrated, how in colonial Bengal, reformist like Abu Bakr Siddique tried to change the prevalent religious practices of Muslims. His attempts to eradicate shirk and portrayal of a simple understanding of religion in a 'culture free' framework in terms of what is *halal* and what is *haram* was carried forward by his descendants but in a different context. In new situation after Independence, slowly Furfura *pirs* reverted back to similar set of practices like selling amulets, *pani pora* etc. which reformist like Abu Bakr Siddique rejected in the early 20th century. This shift in practice not only symbolises a revert to old 'culturally embedded' religious practices, but the shift in

practices has also led to shift in ideological realm. Their understanding of concept of '*wasila'* or '*isale sawab'* and role of Prophet Muhammad as a historical personality conforms to the tenets of reformist discourse. On the other hand, the tales of miracle of Furfura *pirs* which is mentioned in their website is reflective of persistence of traditional understanding of religion marked by Sufism. The transformations are indicative of a fluid border between reform and traditional Islam. Considering this, one needs to see how ideologies get embedded in any local context. As in case of *silsila e Furfura Shareif*, it happened through two interlinked processes.

1. By incorporating elements from local context into the grand schema of ideology. This process makes any external worldview more appealing, familiar and provides certain degree of legitimacy to it. As we see, how local elements that are popular among Muslims in Bengal like conducting *islae swahab* in *falgun* month of Bengali calendar[41], the concept of *paanch pir* used to denote five sons of Abu Bakr Siddique, writing a *wasiyatnama* just the way Wali Allah did before his death, naming some of the sons of Abu Bakr Siddique based on the names of famous saints of *Naqshbandhiya* order etc points to the process of embeddedness of ideology in the local context of Furfura.
2. Second way to understand this is by understanding the shifts in meaning and practices that may happen in due course of time. As we have seen that how there is no annual *urs* in this shrine and instead *isale sawab* is celebrated. Both the terms have different

[41] Falgun month in Bengali calendar is an auspicious month and celebration associated with Manik *pir*, who is a fictitious *pir* and very popular across Bengal is celebrated in this month. Similar is the case with the concept of paanch *pir*. The cult of paanch *pir* has multiple genealogies which differs place to place. It may refer panjtani pak – consisting Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain in Shia tradition, or may include Muhammad and first four Khalifas. Some people also associate it with Mahabharata – paanch pandavas. Important here is to see that the cult of paanch *pir* is popular among both Hindu and Muslim communities. For details, please refer to Asim Roy (1983).

connotations, but the grandeur associated with isale sawab today makes it something to urs. Important here is to see how irrespective of different vocabularies, they are perceived by common Muslims in similar terms. Though there is no music, no touching or kissing the grave etc but, people perceive it in similar terms of *urs*. The common Muslims in their daily conversation never say *isale sawab*, but as *baro jalsa* (grand jalsa). Even though practices associated with it are peculiar, being an annual event it serves the same purpose that *urs* does in case of other shrines. Similar is the case with the notion of *baraqa* at Furfura shrine. Ideologically, there can not be any *barqa* associated with the shrine, but in practice *pirs* sell *paani pora*, *tel pora* and amulets.

Even the meaning of charisma underwent change, where *pirs* compete with each other in field of social work and political connection. All this is intrinsically linked with the assumed s*pir*itual capital of the *pirs*. Charisma today is not performed by doing some miracle, but by doing some social work for the community and invoking a sense of pride in the community, which is backward in most of the spheres of public life[42]. Lastly, the institutions founded by the *pirs* and the functions associated with it also change with new contextual realities. Today, *pirs* are not much interested in traditional *madrasas*, but they are more interested in mission schools and technical colleges for Muslims. They do not invest in constructing mosques, but frequently organize health camps in villages where government sector failed to provide adequate services. Therefore, to understand the interplay between practice and ideology, we need to understand the local contingencies in which such practices and ideologies are constituted.

[42] This view is based on Sachar Committee Report 2006, Government of India.

Second, there is the question of Muslim exclusivity and the socio political articulations by Furfura *pirs* in terms of identity. Furfura *pirs* take initiative in opening madrasas, modern mission schools, which is used by them to propagate their ideology. This is accompanied by an array of charitable institutions and NGOs, an efficient complex structure of organizations and a network of murids and khalifas who work at ground level to actualize the socio political agenda of Furfura *pirs*. The use of this set up for political tools like dharnas and bargaining with political parties throws some light on contemporary perception of Muslims in the democratic process in India. The quest for exclusivity and attempts to voice these concerns by Muslim elites is based on the assumption that questions pertaining to Muslims constitute a separate domain, which can be engaged only by treating Muslims differently. This is based primarily on the assumption that Muslims are different. It presupposes religion as a determining factor in engaging with the community. On the other hand, it gives legitimacy to votaries of identity politics as spokesperson of community, who can be engaged in any negotiation pertaining to the community. In such a scenario, both the government and the self styled spokespersons of the community banking on identity like the Furfura *pirs* are responsible for reinforcing the construction of stereotypes and homogenisation of Muslim community.

Lastly, there is this issue of secularisation. A good number of concerns pertaining to Muslim community raised by Furfura *pirs* are related to issues of development of community. They are secular in nature and have nothing to do with religious issues. In raising such concerns, Furfura *pirs* compete with others for legitimacy of their voice in the community. They bring religious idioms in the realm of political space, but on the other hand, they also expose themselves to criticism from other quarters of the political space. Therefore, politics

surrounding identities have not led to the creation of an exclusive political space, but it has led to much more fragmentation where multiple actors contest for their legitimate share. This is reflective of the process of secularisation, where religious actors come in public space, but by coming in, their articulations as well as their methods transform in accordance with other actors in public sphere. Therefore, we see how in certain contexts religion changes into ideology and how in other contexts the ideology is transformed into religious practices. The crux of the argument is to see everything in a state of flux, which is devoid of any essence or frozen meanings. Practices and meaning attributed to them are social constructs which attain their validity in the shifting social field of everyday life.

Chapter 5

The fault lines within: the dynamics of social stratification among Muslims

This chapter deals with the question of social stratification among Muslims in Furfura and the effects of changing socio-economic dynamics on their everyday life. It has two agendas. First, it attempts to argue that there cannot be a unified and general frame to understand social stratification among Indian Muslims and we must pay adequate attention to the locally conditioned socio-historic factors like land distribution, migration pattern and the cultural context to make sense of complexities involved in social stratification among Muslims. Second, it focusses on social mobility acquired by Muslims from lower social strata and attempts to trace its effects on diverse forms everyday interactions, which may include acts of assertion and questioning the existing power relations in both religious and non-religious spheres of everyday life.

Class as a sociological category is considered as a universal basis of stratification, whereas caste is seen as a social institution based on hierarchy and inequality, unique to India. The sociological study of caste in Indian sociology in till 1960s was motivated by certain presumptions. First, sociologists were pre-occupied with questions pertaining to the origins of caste as a system. Second, they tried to answer its operating ideology and the diverse patterns of its operation across India. Caste as a system was seen as based on the ideology of purity and pollution, sanctified by the religious scriptures. Third, caste as a social institution was considered unique to India. The focus was to develop a general analytical framework to define its characteristic features, its operational intricacies and its institutional support on which it is based and fostered. Lastly, sociologists were interested to analyse the changing

nature of caste system under the impact of modernising trends in independent India. Under the influence of modernising theory and secularisation thesis, it was presumed that in due course of time caste system will fade away leading the way for class as a basis of stratification. This assumption was based on western experiences whereby modern society was seen as shifting from community character and ascribed status to associational character and achieved status.

Understanding stratification among 'Indian' Muslims

Most of the sociological works on social stratification in Indian society in the early phase of Independent India was done keeping the Hindu society as the working model. It was understood that in the absence of any religious basis of social stratification among people from other religious communities, the prevailing social stratification in other communities came through the influence of Hindu caste system. Caste thus was considered as the defining feature of the Indian society which Dumont (1967) expands to 'pan Indian environment'. Dumont's view provides a geographical signifier to the cultural and religious category of caste. Caste thus becomes a marker of any 'Indian' social community, irrespective of its religious affiliations. How then we make sense of presence of caste in non-Hindu 'Indian' communities. One of the ways proposed to understand this is by accretion thesis[1], which states caste among other communities came through prolonged contact with people from Hindu background in Indian social environment or through conversion of indigenous people who carried their social structure with them after conversion. The absence of any religious or ritualistic basis for stratification among Muslims supports this view. It has two important

[1] Louis Dumont was among the earliest proponent of this view. He pointed towards presence of large numbers of social groups with graded status among Muslims which represents a replica of Hindu system (Dumont 206, 1988). Recently, Malik (2012) also supports this view with respect to presence of caste like features among Muslims in Indian sub-continent.

implications. First, it promotes reformist viewpoint that projects religion as a cohesive, homogenised entity that existed in 'pure' form and got polluted in due course of time by influences from Hindu caste system. Second, it ignores the diverse forms of interactions and emergent manifestations of social stratification among people living in any particular socio-cultural and historical context.

It was not until 1973, when a detail ethnography concerning stratification among Muslims in India came up in an edited volume by Imtiaz Ahmad. It was the first collection of empirical work on social stratification among Indian Muslims and it raised questions regarding the validity of using the term 'caste' to understand stratification among Muslims in India. The contributors to this volume agreed on the diversity present among Indian Muslims and pointed that the social stratification among 'Indian' Muslims should be understood in its local settings. Instead of using the term 'caste' to refer features akin to caste system in Hindu society, they preferred using the term 'caste like features' or caste analogues[2] to describe stratification among Muslims in India.

Muslims in India are broadly divided into three categories. The three categories are - *ashrafs* (who are from foreign descent and ethnic background), *ajlaf* (local converts considered as inferior) and *azrals* (Muslims considered to be from lowest rung, who are generally engaged in menial jobs). The basis for stratification is descent and ethnicity among *ashrafs*, whereas it also includes occupational status among *ajlafs* and *azrals*. The *ashrafs* are further divided into four hierarchical groups: *syed*- descendants of Prophet's family and thus, claim purity of blood, *sheikhs*- who consider themselves as noble from Arabian peninsula, *pathans* – Muslims who came to India from Afghanistan and Central Asia, and *mughals* – who were

[2] The term 'caste-analogues' was mentioned by Imtiaz Ahmad (1967), where in the footnote to the article, he also mentions the genealogy of the term, which was suggested to him by T. N. Madan.

aristocrats in Mughal courts. A*jlafs* and *azrals* are divided hierarchically into numerous groups based on their occupations. To a large degree, marital alliances and commensal relationship within Muslims are governed by the group dynamics.

Sikand[3] points that presence of caste among Indian Muslims because of cultural influences of Hinduism partly explains the problem, as it ignores the role of *ulama* in providing religious legitimacy to caste. Citing examples from medieval text *Fatwa –i-Jahandari*, written by Ziauddin Barani who was a leading courtier of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, he elaborates how *ulama* were instrumental in creating *ashraf* - *ajlaf* divide through the notion of *kafaa*[4]. Similarly, Malik (2012) argues that there is a quasi-caste system among Muslims in Indian sub-continent and caste among Muslims is more of a form of social stratification based on descent because of adoption of Arabo-Islamic forms (Malik 2012:155).

Recent ethnographic works have shown that there cannot be a general framework to understand the interrelationship between various groups among Muslims at the pan-India level. There are several reasons for this. First, there are no religious or ritualistic sanctity for stratification among Muslims in India and thus we find regional and local variations to a greater extent. Second, any general understanding of stratification based only on caste dynamics among Muslims in India ignores other bases of social stratification that are not captured in tripartite framework of *ashraf, ajlaf* and *azral*. Other social divisions among Muslims like sectarian, class and ethnic divisions are not paid much attention in this general framework. The inter-sectionality of social categories which cut across each other is

[3] Yoginder Sikand's article can be accessed on - http://www.countercurrents.org/sikand150204.htm (accessed on 25/02/2016).

[4] *Kafaa* (also spelt as *kafaah*), is an Arabic word that literally means equality. It is used in Islamic jurisprudence to govern marriage in Islam. It points towards maintaining marital relationship among equals. According to Sikand, the practices associated with *kafaa* were extended to other social spheres during medieval period, where it was implied that Muslims from low origins should be kept at distance from Muslims from noble origins.

overlooked and the complex interaction that takes place in between various social categories in multiple local settings is ignored. The fact that there are no religious bases for social divisions in Islam adds complexity to this issue. The fluid social relationship in between various social categories among Muslims based on socio-historic contextual settings defies any generalizations. Moreover, Muslim community is stratified everywhere on multiple grounds, and the features like endogamy, restricted commensality as well as differential social status among various groups are exhibited by different Muslim communities in diverse historical and geographical contexts[5].

Problematising *ashraf-ajlaf* framework of stratification; reflections from field

In this section, I problematise the *ashraf-ajlaf* understanding of social stratification among Muslims in India by providing examples from my field site. I will illustrate how social stratification among Muslims in Furfura is dependent on socio-cultural factors like cultural refinement, notion of '*adab*' and other economic factors like landholding of a group, that translates into social hierarchy in everyday life.

In Furfura, Muslims see themselves divided into hierarchical strata. Though there are no open social restrictions on commensality, but there are two basis of stratification among Muslims. Firstly, Muslims at Furfura see themselves divided into *shareif vansha* and *nichu log*[6]. This division sounds similar to *ashraf* and *ajlaf* division among other Muslim

[5] Several works can be cited that points towards social stratification among Muslims in different geographical contexts like, Zubaida (1995) points how *ulama* as a socio-religious category emerged in Ottoman Empire and historically occupied a privileged position. Similarly, Geertz (1968) talks about *santri* and *abangan* as two different social categories of Muslims in context of Indonesia. In Indian context we find wide variations in stratification among Muslims. For example, see Mines (1972), Momin (1975), Ahmad (1981), Ali (2002), Ahmad (2003), Zainuddin (2003), Ahmad (2009), and Ansari (2009).

[6] *Shareif vansha* can be translated as people from respectable descent. Whereas, *Nichu log* means people who are from lower rungs of society. In my fieldwork I find that *shareif vansha* generally consists of groups like, syed, siddique, kaazi, haq, choudhuary, munshi, khonderkar etc. whereas, *nichu log* consist of halder, molla,

communities in India and also to *bhadralok* and *chotto log* division among Bengali Hindu community. Muslims in everyday conversation deny any caste based stratification prevailing among them. The role of Islamic reformation is important to make sense of suc responses as Muslims deny presence of caste on the ground that Islam prohibits any such division and caste system is a Hindu social system. Therefore, to understand stratification present among Muslims in Furfura we need to focus on everyday interactions, rules governing endogamy and role of social prejudices that justify hierarchy.

As for example, in a personal conversation with Shamim, a middle aged man from a land owning family belonging to *kaazi* caste (upper caste) held Muslims from lower caste responsible for non-profitability in agriculture. He said,

> *Now a day's agriculture is not a profitable option. It is because of low caste 'chotolog' who are now out of our control. They work for anyone, even for a small margin of profit. The old patron-client relationship is no more. Even if anyone provides them with gosh-bhaat (beef-rice) for lunch along with the usual payment, they sell themselves to them. They work in a group and their group solidarity is intense. Earlier we used to employ 2-3 people for 2-3 days to complete a job. But now they work in small groups of 10-12 people and try to complete the job in a day so that they work for someone else for the next day. They are also very conscious of their minimum wages and often negotiate for higher wages. They learnt this union baazi (collective bargaining) from the communists. Second, many of the earning members from that background have migrated to cities and so, they are less dependent on us.*

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mallick, kasai, sheikhs, biswas etc. These groups are not caste groups. Most of them are surnames, which Muslims in my fieldwork term as *upadhi*. But, irrespective of these being surname, they are treated similar to a caste group in everyday interaction. These groups also have traditional occupational and cultural status. Like, syeds are descendants of Prophet Muhammad, siddiques are descendants of Abu Bakr Siddique – the first caliph, kaazi were legal experts, halder, mallick and biswas are considered to be peasants and so on. Interestingly, even schedule castes among Hindus in West Bengal also share titles like halder, biswas and mallick. Therefore, because of their working in everyday life, I treat them as similar to caste groups.

The above narrative gives us a glimpse of prevailing stratification among Muslims in Furfura, and the changes happening because of changes in political economy and poiticl mobilisation in the village.

An interesting aspect of stratification among Muslims is its close resemblance with the Hindu stratification pattern in some respects which points to the embedded social character of both the community. The Bengali Hindu community is broadly divided into *bahdralok* and *chotolok. Bhadralok* as a social category consists of three important upper castes like *brahmins*, *kayastha* and *baidya*. *Chotolok* are further divided hierarchically into numerous caste groups based on occupation. Therefore, *bhadralok* and *chottolok* can be seen as two blocks. Interestingly, marriages within the blocks are generally allowed and are not seen as a deviation. Similarly, among Muslims we find *sharif vansha* and *nichu log* as two blocks and marriages within the blocks are permissible with some exceptions. As for example, I was informed by one of my respondents named Irfan, who belonged to *kaazi* caste that, they can inter-marry with *syeds*, but they generally do not take daughters from *syeds*. When I asked him about the reason for this asymmetry, he replied,

> *Syeds are the bloodline of Prophet Muhammad. If we bring their daughters then they will have to obey us. How can we place our self above the bloodline of our Prophet! It is not desirable to do such things.*

Inheritance and ownership of charitable land grants among some social groups of Muslims in Furfura also provide them privileges of being superior to others. Charitable land grants are locally known as *aima* property. The beholders of *aima* property are considered to be those Muslims, who have foreign ancestry and who came and settled to this region during Muslim rule in India (Eaton 1994:124). Therefore, the foreign ancestry of some Muslim groups became a status symbol and a basis of social hierarchy. During my fieldwork, I was informed

that historically Muslims from *kaazi* caste are the real inheritors of *aima* property because they were the government agents at local level and were responsible for maintaining law and order. In due course of time, because of inter-marriages between *kaazis* and other Muslim groups, the *aima* property got divided among other social groups[7]. Today, beholders of *aima* property call themselves as *aimadar*, and it is exclusive to certain Muslim groups like *syeds*, *siddiques* and *kaazis*, who constitute upper caste. But, in Furfura some lower caste groups like *halder* and *molla* are also owner of *aaima* property, because of their inter-marriage with other social groups who are beholder of *aima* property[8]. As a result of which they claim themselves to be of higher status and can inter-marry with other upper Muslim social groups.

In everyday interaction, *aimadars* take pride of being beholder of *aima* property. They try to maintain strict Islamic codes to support their puritanical status. As for example, their women maintain strict purdah, they pray five times a day, they generally dress themselves in long *kurta* and *payjama* or *lungi* to exhibit their muslimness by using a variety of Islamic symbols and claim that they practice 'authentic' Islam. In their everyday interaction they generally maintain a social boundary and avoid interaction with other Muslims from low status.

As for example, at tea shops near *mazar shareif* Muslims from different caste group assemble for their evening tea. But, *aimadar* Muslims maintain some degree of sophistication in their behaviour. They are generally silent, soft spoken (to exhibit their cultured manners) and do not participate in any casual discussion or arguments with Muslims from low caste background.

[7] According to Islam, women have right to inherit paternal property. The share of women is generally half the share of what the son is entitled to get.

[8] It is important here to mention that *Halders* are categorised as Other Backward Classes Muslims by the West Bengal government. But, in Furfura they are considered as *aimadars* and hold upper social status.

Bhattacharya (1978) in his study of Muslims in West Bengal argues that the absence of any doctrinal basis for stratification among Muslims in West Bengal, make stratification pattern among them more fluid in appearance. The diversity in stratification pattern among Muslims at local level can be motivated by several factors which may include traditions like preference for maintaining commensality with a particular status group, or it may also include secular factors like economic and political preferences. Ali (2002) in his ethnographic study of changing caste dynamics among *Qureshis* and *Medhavi Pathans* of Hyderabad points towards the nexus of caste with economic and political resources. He argues that the caste as a corporate identity gets reconfigured in any social setting under the influence of economic and political opportunities. We find similar dynamics among Muslims in Furfura.

It is a general observation that, Muslims from upper caste group do not inter-marry with Muslims from lower caste groups. In Furfura, a*imadars* generally exhibit endogamous marital alliances. Some recent cases suggest that such trends are changing and socio-economic status of family is becoming an important factor in marital alliances, but such cases are rare. *Aimadars* constitute a separate social category in itself, which operates locally and it cut cross other axis of social stratification. Let me explain this by an example. At Furfura, one of the female members of *pir* family[9] is married to a person named Faiz who is from Halder community. Therefore, we see that though halders[10] are not from *shareif vansha*, but they are *aimadars* which made this alliance possible. Another reason for this alliance is the business relationship between the two families. Faiz's father was *murid* (disciple) of one of the *pirs* of Furfura Shareif. Faiz own an eatery near *mazar shareif*. Devotees who visit the

[9] *Pirs* of Furfura Shareif claim themselves to be of noble descent and descendants of first caliph Abu Bakr.
[10] Halders are also listed in 'Other backward Caste' category by the Government of West Bengal.

shrine generally go to Faiz's eatery for lunch. The *pirs* also promote Faiz's business by sending devotees to his eatery[11]. This mutual relationship facilitated the marital alliance between the two families.

We see that stratification among Muslims in Furufra can be understood in terms of two blocks – *shareif vansha* and *chotto log*. This model is close to *ashraf-ajlaf* divide and also to local Hindu pattern of stratification – *bhadralok* and *nichulok*. But, the category of *aimadars* based on their landholding and historical lineage of being associated with nobility cut cross this general schema of stratification. This questions any general frame of stratification among Muslim community in India and necessitates understanding of stratification at the local level.

Role of '*adab*' in legitimising stratification

Adab actually means respect and it indicates respectful and polite behaviour, which is considered as a marker of cultural refinement among Muslims. In this section I will discuss from my ethnographic data that, how *adab* along with other Muslim symbols of cultural refinement are used as a basis to legitimise prevailing social stratification. In South Asian context, the dichotomy of *adab* and *be-adab* has been a basis of hierarchical ordering corresponding to other dichotomous divisions like, *ashraf* and *aam log* (common people), *aql* (behaviour or decisions linked with mind) and *nafs* (behaviour or decisions linked with emotions) and *khalis* (authentic) and *roz marra bolchal* (everyday pedestrian language) (Ewing 1998). The behaviour of Muslims within his community is generally analysed on basis of above patterns, which is concomitant with the social status of his group to which he belongs. As for example, a Muslim who is an *ashraf* is expected to follow *adab* properly, his

[11] As a goodwill gesture, *pirs* generally provide food to devotees who visit them. After the meeting, they give tokens to devotees, which can be exchanged for food at Faiz's eatery.

decisions should be motivated by his rational faculty of his mind (*aql*) and he is expected to speak *khalis* (authentic) language like, Urdu or Persian which is linked with Muslim culture in South Asia.

In context of West Bengal, Bhattacharya (1978) mentions that the notions of cleanliness and hygiene along with proper 'Islamic' conduct like maintaining *purdah*, keeping fast during *ramzan* and praying five times a day are considered as desirable acts and are linked with high status groups among Muslims. Interestingly, these traits are linked with social status and not with economic status of an individual. This point to the notion of purity and pollution attached with Muslim groups in West Bengal. Similarly, Siddique (1978) points to the prevalence of notion of purity and pollution attached with Muslims groups in Calcutta. In this pretext, the role of *adab* is not restricted to acts of piety of a Muslim, but it encompasses varied situations of everyday life like social behaviour, display of piety in everyday life and maintaining cleanliness and hygiene at home and in appearance. Therefore, notion of *adab* constitute a cultural complex linking everyday life of Muslims with continuity and maintenance of Islamic traditions. In Furfura, Muslims from upper and middle status groups justify their supremacy over Muslims of lower status groups like *kasais* (butchers) by invoking *adab* as a parameter for justification. Therefore, notions of hygiene and cleanliness, their lax attitude towards religion and their rustic behaviour in everyday life become the basis for upholding social hierarchy. Let us understand this by some examples from field.

Khalid is a retired Headmaster of a government madrasa and belongs to *aimadar* family. Earlier he was an active member of CPI(M), but later he left the organisation because of some differences within the party. With respect to prevalent notions of social hierarchy within Muslims in Furfura, he informed me that,

Caste is deep rooted in Muslim society just the way it is among Hindus. Earlier in the village, the differential treatment of low caste Muslims was much more pronounced. In marriage or in other public occasions, Muslims from lower caste were given food separately on ground, whereas we used to sit on the benches. We were aaimadaars and were educated. When we were young, we tried to stop such ill practices. Once we did not accepted food in a marriage ceremony because, Muslims from Kasaipara were served food separately on ground. The coming of left front government also helped in changing such dynamics. Left Front government conducted panchayat elections regularly and several candidates from deprived category were given opportunity to go for panchayat elections. But, still much is to be changed for them. On many occasions low caste Muslims themselves are responsible for their plight. They are lax in following Islam. They never pray five times, they gamble and at times drink liquor; their women never do purdah and work in open. There is no salinta (chastity) among them and the entire locality is dirty and filthy.

In another example, Mazhar a mid-aged man who is in teaching profession and belongs to *aimadar* category said,

There is not much difference between a low caste Hindu's way of living and their Muslim counterpart. Migration has helped some of them to earn money, but they lack adab. Most of them work as artisan in jewellery shops, and have accumulated some money by unethical means. Even men from their caste are insensitive to such issue. They always fight on small provocation, use rustic language and at times drink liquor. What they do is shirk. One can visit kasaipara anytime to see the real picture. How unhygienic and uncivilized they are. Few years back there was a proposal for their development from BDO office. The proposal was to construct a modern slaughter house in their locality along proper drainage facilities in that locality. But they opposed it fearing that government wants them to abandon their trade by allowing some well to do Muslims to use that facility. They even opposed polio vaccination program fearing that it may lead to infertility. No scientific logic works for them. They are Muslims for namesake.

Therefore, we see how certain behaviours in society like lax attitude in following religion, maintaining *shalinta* (chastity) of women, preference for ‘modern’ scientific outlook and

notions of cleanliness are associated with the notion of *adab* that functions as a marker for cultural refinement of a social group. Though *adab* is a parameter to judge an individual but in everyday interaction it is extended to incorporate lower social groups and their worldview, creating a stereotype. A*dab* therefore, serves as a standard model of behaviour considered to be Islamic. It is linked with the practices of Muslim elites generally associated with 'Islamic' great traditions.

Islamic reformism need not always promote a break from traditional social practices against which it is generally oriented. Osella and Osella (2008) in their ethnographic study of Islamic reform movements in Kerala point that Muslims associate reformism with a self-consciously 'modern' outlook whereas, the traditional ways are considered as 'backward', superstitious and un-modern practices associated with rural and low status Muslims. The notion of a*dab* is an important component of modern Islamic reformation. In *jalsa* sermons, the preachers emphasise on what constitute correct ways of following Islam, and how to behave like a 'good' Muslim in everyday life. But, it is also appropriated by certain Muslim social groups to justify their privileged positions. Islamic reformation instead of eradicating prevalent stratification among Muslims also reinforces it in certain specific situation. The construction of a unified, monochromatic and coherent way of being a Muslim creates a new situation whereby everyday lives of Muslims can be judged in accordance with 'proper' way of being a Muslim.

Household Survey and analysis

To understand the empirical basis of social stratification and changing social dynamics among Muslims in Furfura, a household survey of 300 households (out of 1140 households

in the village) was conducted. The survey was conducted to collect data on four areas – caste, educational attainment, land holding and migration. The survey was conducted to understand the relationship between caste groups and other social indicators like educational attainment, land holding and migration. The location of the survey was confined to the hamlets around *mazar shareif* and it includes *pir saheb para*, *halder para*, *kasai para, aadivasi para, molla para*, and some areas of *kazi para* and *mir saheb para*. *Mazar Shareif* being a central zone is surrounded by a number of hamlets inhabited by various Muslim caste groups.

In the household survey it was found that *sheikh*[12] constitute the largest segment. Interestingly, Muslims living in *kasaipara* claim themselves to be *sheikh*, which was disputed by *sheikh* Muslims from other hamlets. For them, Muslims living in *kasaipara* are not *sheikhs* but *kasais* (butchers). *Sheikh* is not a homogenous social group, there is a hierarchy within which is based on hereditary occupation. Ahmad (1981) points that several low caste Muslim social groups identified themselves as *sheihks* in 1901 caste enumeration. Citing census data, Ahmad points towards a phenomenal growth of *sheikhs* between 1872, when the 1st census of Bengal took place and 1901. Simultaneously, there was a sharp decline in the numbers of other occupational caste groups among Muslim[13]. Citing the census reports of 1872 and 1901, Ahmad (1981) provides us with the figures based on census of 1872 and 1901. He points that in 1872 the total number of Muslims in Bengal (including Sylhet and Cachar) was 17,609,135, whereas the total number of *sheikhs* were 2,32,189. Whereas, in

[12] *Sheikh* as a caste group in West Bengal is generally associated with peasantry. They form the middle rung of social stratification among Muslims in West Bengal.

[13] In another study, James Wise (1883) lists around 86 Muslims castes and trade names from the District of Dacca, whereas Risley (1891) in the census report lists around 73 Muslim castes and trade names, in addition to what Wise has listed in 1883. In majority of the cases, these castes and trade names work as occupational groups.

1901 census (excluding Sylhet and Cachar), the total number of Muslims was 21,500,000 and the total number of Sheikhs was 19,527,221.

Ahmad (1981) points towards the Islamization process of 19th century Bengal for the phenomenal increase in the number of *sheikhs*. As I have discussed elsewhere, Islamic reformation by end of 19th century with its wide reach in rural areas attempted to create a corporate identity for Bengal Muslims and fostered this process along with modern administrative initiatives like, opening new school and advancement in communication and print technology. Ahmad (1981) points that the census process was perceived by people not as an exercise to enlist number, but to fix social positions of different social groups in the eyes of the administration. This is evident from the large number of petitions by people of different castes received by local administration to recognize their respective castes as superior. Dirks (2001) points to a similar situation in Tamil Nadu in colonial India and argues that the process of enumeration and ethnographic surveys actually raised consciousness about castes. Identities based on caste thus become a tool for expressing, organizing and synthesizing India's diverse forms of social identity, community and organization (Dirks 5, 2001).

The following represents the data collected through household survey.

Caste composition in relation to education, landholding and migration pattern

Caste	House-holds	Un-educated	Educated (till class 10th)	Educated (till class 12th)	Graduates	Post-Graduates	Workers	Migration	Land holding
Syeds	12	3	23	8	14	7	17	6	5.37
Siddiques	95	54	215	91	39	8	141	18	11.8
Kazi	17	17	47	18	1	0	22	2	1.10
Khonderkar	12	10	31	1	2	0	13	4	1.33
Haq	2	2	3	2	1	0	2	1	2

Halder	12	22	15	13	6	4	22	5	2.41
Molla	6	15	15	3	1	0	13	5	0.33
Mallick	15	31	49	6	1	1	25	5	0.87
Sheikh	93	300	231	14	1	0	183	86	0.44
SC (Hindu)	7	7	32	6	10	0	17	10	5.71
ST	29	64	61	3	0	0	53	6	0.29
Total	300	525	722	165	96	20	508	148	
Total persons	1528								

The chart shows:

1. Column 1: Name of caste
2. Column 2: Total number of households of each caste
3. Column 3: Total number of uneducated members
4. Column 4: Total number of members educated till matric level (class 10^{th})
5. Column 5: Total number of members educated till +2 level
6. Column 6: Total number of graduates
7. Column 7: Total number of post graduates
8. Column 8: Total number of working members
9. Column 9: Total number of migrants
10. Column 10: Average land holding (in *bigha*, In West Bengal, 1 *bigha* of land is equivalent to 33 decimal of land.)

Major Observations

a) Caste structure

From the table, it is evident that the *mazar sharief* area is mainly inhabited by people belonging to two castes- *siddiques*, consisting of *pirs* and their family members and *sheikhs*, consisting of numerous occupational groups hierarchically arranged within. Siddiques claim

themselves to be descendents of Abu Bakr, the 1st caliph and claim themselves just next to *syeds*. On the other hand Sheikhs are from lower rung of social structure and there are numerous occupational groups within them with contested hierarchy. Within sheikh, those who are peasants claim themselves superior to other occupational groups like *jolla* (weavers) or *kasais* (butchers). Interestingly, while conducting the survey, unlike Muslim upper caste Muslims from lowest rung never disputed the prevalence of caste among Muslims.

An interesting observation was the household survey among Hindu scheduled caste locality known as *mondol para*. Out of seven households that constitute that locality, we find that most of them are literate and a good number amongst them opted for higher education. They also own a good deal of land, with average land holding of 5.7 *bigha* and a good number of them are in government white collar jobs.

b) Educational attainment

With respect to educational attainment among the upper caste Muslims, higher education attainment is a recent phenomenon associated with the present generation. On the other hand almost all of the Muslim belonging to Sheikh and other low caste groups are either illiterate or are educated till primary school level. It was found that there is a generational shift in this picture as children from sheikh community are now going for higher education. It was also observed that except for some upper caste Muslims, in which majority are from *pir's* family, other Muslims do not send their children to senior madrasas for religious education.[14] Most of the Muslims from middle and low rungs send their children to government run primary

[14] An important observation in this regard is that out of around 650 students in senior Madrasa, only 3 students are from Furfura village. All other students in senior madrasa are outsiders who live in senior Madrasa hostels or as paying guests in village.

and high schools. Interestingly, no Muslim child from *kasaipara* goes to madrasa, instead majority of them go to an English medium private school in the village.

In case of female child, it was found that a good number of them go to high madrasa, and there are multiple reasons for that. I was informed that the syllabus of high madrasa is relatively easy when compared to secular schools, which encouraged parents to send their girl child to high madrasa. Secondly, to encourage female education government of West Bengal spends considerable amount of money, by providing scholarships, school dress, books and stationary free of cost to female students. High madrasa also offers some vocational courses like stitching, knitting and courses in computers to female students which are seen as an added advantage and encouragement for sending a girl child to high madrasa.

An important observation was that among Muslims belonging to low castes, education attainments of girl candidates are higher than the education attainment of male candidates. The encouraging data of girl candidates do not translate in job attainment. One of the reasons this is high dropout rates among male candidates who generally after attaining the age of 13 to 15 years they migrate to support their family. The average age of migration in case of males among Muslims from *sheikh* caste was around 14 years.

c) Landholding and migration

The table illustrates that *siddiques* have average landholding of 11.8 *bigha*[15] and they own the maximum land whereas *sheikhs* have average landholdings is only 0.4 *bigha*. Interestingly, out of 93 household only 20 households own land among *sheikh* and a majority of them are landless. Only 2 of the *sheikh* family own land more than three *bigha*. Difference of landholding is also reflected in the migration pattern. Most of the migrants are from *sheikh* community. The nature of job of migrants is also an important indicator. While *siddiques*

[15] 1 *bigha* of land is equivalent to 33 decimal of land.

constitutes minimum number of migrants (only 18 persons out of 95 household) and most of them are working for government jobs and have migrated because of their job requirements. On the other hand, almost all of the migrants among s*heikhs* are unskilled labours who migrated to different Indian cities and work in low paid jobs as artisans in gold jewellery shops, in *jari* works, as construction workers, or in hotels.

During the survey, when I inquired about the inter-generation occupation structure of three generations for *sheikhs*, it was evident that migration among them for earning their livelihood is a recent phenomenon. Most of the first generation members were not migrants but they were agricultural labourers or were engaged in beef business. Migration started with second generation 20-25 years ago and it helped them to improve their economic status. It is reflected in upbringing of third generation, as I have mentioned earlier with respect to their education. Interestingly among 93 household belonging to *sheikh* caste, all the children belonging to third generation are going to school.

Earlier a majority of Muslims from sheikh caste were engaged in the local economy of the village. Being landless, most of them worked as agricultural labour for landholding castes. Migration from village gave them economic mobility and thus, they are no longer dependent on landowning castes for their sustenance. Rapid migration among *sheikhs* also created a shortage of labour supply for agricultural works. This led to an increase in wages for labour in the village for agricultural activities. This problem was compounded by introduction of MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) in 2005, as government raised minimum wages up to Rs. 150 per day and ensured 100 days employment guarantee[16]. Another impact of this scheme was enhancement in bargaining power as labourers generally prefer working for MNREGA because of daily payment in cash and

[16] In 2015, wages were further increased to Rs. 174 per day in West Bengal.

lesser amount of work when compared to working in paddy fields. This situation has created problems for landowning caste. I was informed by one of the *pirs*, that because of raising labour cost and unprofitability in agricultural sector now they prefer to lease their land to middle level peasants who are mainly from intermediary castes like *Halder, Mallick* and *Molla*. This has fortified the position of the intermediary castes in the village. With improved economic status, intermediate castes have raised their lifestyle in material terms and by *ashrafization* process they are now slowly asserting themselves in public spaces. They are buying agricultural land in village and thus diluting the dominance of landowning castes. The upward economic mobility is also reflected in their lifestyle. Most of them have renovated their houses and one can see their cultural assertion by appropriating certain Islamic symbols like engraving Islamic symbols and calligraphy on the external walls of their houses, dressing in white *kurta pyjama* with white skull cap, especially during *eid* celebrations. Women from *sheikh* category generally do not observe *purdah* in their locality, but they wear *burqa* when they go outside of their locality.

Elsewhere, I have discussed how economic mobility acquired by *sheikhs* led to questioning of existing power relationship in the village. I was informed that since last few years, Muslims of *kasaipara*, who are sheikhs and engaged in butchery; oppose calling their locality as *kasaipara*. They consider it to be derogatory and renamed their locality as *'majherpara'* meaning ‘middle locality’ which is a common name devoid of any connotation of their low caste identity. The assertion of socio-cultural dignity is backed by their changing socio-economic situation in the village. Other villagers do not adhere to their assertions but to avoid any conflicting situation with them, villagers do not call their locality as *kasaipara* in

public. In personal conversation, they say that changing name of the locality cannot change their real character.

In another example, Muslims from *kasaipara/majherpara* bargained hard with the village panchayat members for maintenance of a road which links their locality to *khatun* bus stand. This road under question is not metallic road. It is around 500 metres long and during monsoon it becomes muddy to cross. But, Muslims of *kasaipara/majherpara*, take this long road to reach *khatun* bus stand, but they avoid taking the other short cut route of 200-250 metres which passes through *pir para*. One of the members of *kasaipara/majherpara* informed me that earlier they were treated as inferior and there was a notion of pollution attached with their community. Therefore, in an act of protest a good number of Muslims of *kasaipara/majherpara* avoid using short route to bus stand via *pir para*.

Political assertion by depressed classes often incorporates other social groups from similar status in social hierarchy in their struggle. In Indian context, Srinivas (1955) uses the term horizontal solidarity to signify consolidation of various caste groups of similar social status. For Srinivas, the pretext of modernization process facilitates this process by appropriation of new technology in print and communications, emergence of representative politics, where number plays an important role to harness the political power and development of mass media and transport network linking various parts of the country. At the local level in Furfura, one can see this in an incident where low caste Muslims from *kasaipara/majherpara* supported Hindus from *bagdi*[17] community instead of Muslims from upper caste. *Bagdi* are low caste Hindu and in Furfura their hamlet is adjacent to *Baganipara*- a Muslim locality. During my stay at Furfura, a feud took place between a *bagdi* family and a Muslim family of *kaazi* caste. The dispute was over a small piece of land in between their houses, which was

[17] *Bagdi* is a Hindu caste group enlisted as schedule caste in West Bengal.

claimed by both the famlies. Though the dispute was old, but one day it took a different turn when in the heat of debate, the man from *bagdi* family slapped the woman from his neighbouring Muslim family. The situation became alarming as the news spread as wildfire in the village. First Information Report (FIR) was lodged by both the parties and police arrived on spot to control the situation. The local committee of CPI(M) and TMC also came and tried to mediate for peaceful settlement. An important intervention in this entire episode was by youths from *kasaipara/majherpara*, who openly came in support of *bagdi* family. This unexpected move eased the tension, as it prevented any physical retaliation by the *kaazis* and lastly, the issue was resolved peacefully in presence of the police. When I asked about this incident from a local CPI(M) leader named Said, who belongs to *kazi* caste, he said,

Kasais are more close to Bagdis, both socially and politically; for them we the kazis and aimadars are prime enemy. They think we are their oppressors.

Therefore, we see how in certain situation enables the emergence of horizontal solidarity between various social groups that may cut cross religious divide. But, such cases are isolated and there are no widespread caste based political mobilisation in West Bengal. As mentioned earlier, caste based discrimination are present in context of West Bengal, but it operates in a different way in comparison to other states. We generally do not find open discriminatory practices and violence based on caste identity.

Anjan Ghosh (2001) traced this issue by linking it with political economy and colonial history of Bengal. According to Ghosh, because of Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, the upper castes among Hindus- *brahmin*, *kayastha* and *baidyas* came to control most of the agricultural land and functioned as absentee landlords. Being settled in urban areas and by

being closely influenced by colonial education system and lifestyle, these castes appropriated most of the bureaucratic jobs in the public realm.

The picture of rural Bengal was somewhat different. The dominant middle peasant castes were too much dispersed geographically to pose any challenge to the *bhadralok* community. The localised nature of middle peasant was further segregated, because a section of the peasant groups who became proprietary tenants and provided western education to their children, also participated in the social reforms of the society. The social reform movements had a strong Hindu and *sanskritic* overtones, which didn't allow these intermediate sections of Hindu society to challenge the overall hegemony of *bhadralok* (Sengupta 2012). Second, because of localised nature of the intermediate peasant castes, their engagement with social reform did not produce any big social impact in Bengal region.

Muslims who constitutes the bulk of middle level peasantry. The emerging Muslim middle class in colonial Bengal failed to pose any serious challenge to this existing social order. They had to fight a triangular battle - fighting *bhadralok*- Hindu hegemony in public sphere, against Muslim landlords, who behaved much like their Hindu counterparts and against the emerging Hindu middle class. On the other hand, Islamic reformation which emerged in middle of the 19th century diluted any such strong initiatives against the existing power relationship within Muslim community as the agenda of reform movement was to consolidate Muslims in a homogeneous socio-political block. Muslims from intermediate castes did find an alliance in *namasadra* community, but this caste was geographically confined to South-East Bengal.

After independence, migration of middle class and elite Muslims to East Pakistan and migration of Hindus to West Bengal changed the socio-political dynamics. The political

focus shifted towards rehabilitation and other aspects of refugee influx and the caste question (in Hindu as well as in Muslim community) somewhat took a back stage. For Muslims the situation was more alarming, as a good number of them belonging to elite and middle class, who could have given leadership to poor rural Muslim population of West Bengal, migrated to East Pakistan. In absence of a vibrant middle class politics, this constitutes one of the factors because of which the religious elites (like the *pirs* of Furfura shareif) took the centre stage in articulating the social demands of the Muslim community in West Bengal.

Therefore we find that caste because of multiple socio-political and geographical factors caste as social category never became an important platform for political mobilization in West Bengal. Moreover the over emphasis of Bengali cultural identity and a sense of superiority because of its cultural heritage and social reformation in last 200 years, the issues of caste remained hidden beneath the cultural assertion of Bengali identity as a whole.

The situation of Muslims in West Bengal is not different. Being a minority with a large population (around 25%) their politics focussed on maintenance of group solidarity and identity. Everyday issues like the question of caste and gender were grossly overlooked. But, the situation on ground is constantly changing. As we have seen in this chapter how *aimadar* as a social category evolved historically and provide a different dimension to understand stratification among Muslims in its local context. Islamic reformation in certain situation supports traditional social hierarchies which further opens up to a greater variety of possible social configurations in any given context. The changes in economic status of low caste Muslims initiate several changes in other spheres of everyday life. Islamic reformation as we see thus at as a double edge sword. The seeds of fragmentation of any unified authority or a homogenised community is present in the very act of constructing a homogenised Islamic

community and a corporate identity. This is true of any other religious reformation in modern times.

Chapter 6

Explorations in the embedded character of 'being a Muslim'

Abu Bakr Siddique, while writing his *wasiyatnama* (will) in 1930s, had a mission to reform his contemporary Muslim society. His concern was to purify everyday practices of Muslims by eradicating local cultural accretions which he considered had polluted the way Islam is practiced in everyday life. Initiated as a Sufi, and rooted in traditional *Hanafi* doctrines, his reformist ideas were directed towards a radical transformation of everyday life. In this sense, his *wasiyatnama* (will) can be seen as a guide, a source of everyday ethics for his followers, guiding them on how to live their everyday life as a pious Muslim[1]. The shift of piety from the ritualistic aspects of religion to encompassing of everyday aspects of life is a hallmark of modern religiosity, which Robinson (2008) terms as 'this-worldly turn of piety'. Religion under the influence of modernity, is reconfigured as less esoteric and formalistic, and becomes more secular and civil by getting entangled with the pragmatics of everyday life, defining the subjectivity and the identity of the believers (Metcalf 1990, Robinson 2008, Cassanova 2012).

The articulations of South Asian Muslim reformers in early 20th century can be seen as responses to the dual threats of colonialism and modernity, which reconfigured the political, economic and cultural spheres of society along with the intimate spaces of everyday life. This historically turbulent period marked by the loss of Muslim political power and the cultural threat of modernity and Christian missionaries forced Muslim reformers to focus on the private spaces of household as a sanctuary to preserve Islam in its pristine form. Developing pedagogic tools like self - help manuals, journals, religious preaching and other means to impart 'correct' knowledge to lay Muslims became a tool to

[1] There are 70 points mentioned in the *wasiyatnama*. I have presented some of them after translating them in English. Please refer Appendix – A for details.

transmit and preserve authentic 'Islamic' traditions. As Barbra Metcalf, points that this knowledge was beyond certainty; it was comprehensive encompassing all dimensions of human life, which is to be worked upon by the believers in the everyday lives. Thus, to know is to act and to act is to deepen the knowledge (Metcalf 1990, 18).[2]Therefore, one of the ways to understand modern religious reformation can be by situating it within the matrix of knowing and performing accordingly in everyday life, creating a bridge between the epistemological sources of everyday ethics and one's ontological reality.

This chapter focusses on what 'people of Muslim background' do[3] in their everyday life. How do they produce themselves as Muslims and in doing so how do they relate themselves with Islam. These questions are based on the premise that there are multiple ways of being a Muslim and the interaction between people of Muslim background and Islam is diverse depending on the contextual socio—political and historical contingencies. Situating 'being Muslim' in a cultural milieu, where Islam plays an important but not the sole determining factor necessitate an understanding of diverse social processes in which Islam is one among many factors which produces Muslim subjectivities.

Within this cultural milieu, 'Muslim' subjectivity is closely associated with the idea of 'muslimness', which can be broadly defined as a way of life associated with the way people from Muslim background live in everyday life. It can be understood as a qualifier for any material or non-material aspect of culture, which makes them exclusively

[2]The emergence of religious self-help books and guides for Muslims to lead a pious life can be seen as an outcome of this larger social process. The *wasiyatnama* (will) of Abu Bakr Siddique was one among many such instructional guides which came up in this period. It was highly influenced by Ashraf Ali Thanawi's (1863-1943) *'BihishtiZewar*', written during early 1900s in northern India. For English translation and a descriptive introduction of '*BihishtiZewar*', see Barbara Metcalf (1990).

[3]The phrase 'people of Muslim background' has been taken from Marsden and Retsikas (2013). I use this phrase to posit that being a Muslim is a cultural aspect of life. Islam plays an important role but, it is not the only determiner. Being a Muslim is simultaneously conditioned by other socio-cultural and historical factors in which life of people from Muslim background is embedded.

'Muslim'. It is to be emphasised that 'muslimness' is a cultural construct, which may or may not be explicitly related to Islam. In everyday life, people attach a range of items and ideas like food, dress, architect, design etc. with Muslim way of life and eventually with Islam. The symbolic baggage which these cultural traits carry is to be unpacked and the historical process of construction of 'muslimness' should be highlighted. Culture, here is to be conceived as a social process (Zubaida 2011, Azmeh 2009), which is not given *apriori*, but which evolved historically in a particular social context. Study of Muslims in South Asia should consider the importance of historical and social context for a number of reasons. First, the social and historic context of South Asia necessitate to discard any definition of culture which depict any community as a culturally bound unit that is defined uniquely and exclusively emphasizing cultural traits as a marker of difference. The physical proximities and the historical socio-cultural interaction in between people of different faith in South Asian region refute any disembedded and essentialised understanding of culture that portrays culture as a monolith. Second, the historical and social conditions which helped in the spread of Islam in South Asia demands a perspective which recognises the historic contingent factors that conditioned the religious environment of this region[4]. Considering these factors, the notion of being a Muslim, the construction of Muslim subjectivity and their way of life, must focus on its contextually embedded character of everyday life in wider society.

My arguments are based on two presuppositions. First, Muslims engage with a variety of situations in their everyday life and not everything that concerns them or every situation that they come across have religious signifiers. Second, in their social life Muslims interact with people who may or may not be Muslim. Similarly, they actively engage with

[4]For details of such historic and protean process of spread of Islam in Bengal, please refer to Asim Roy (1983), Richard Eaton (1993); for details in case of South East Asia refer to Ronit Ricci (2011); for details in South India, please refer to Eaton (1996).

a number of social institutions, consisting both religious and secular institutions. The question here is to understand and describe the context in which religious dispositions become important for the role play and in what situations a Muslim can dispense without it. How in certain situation being a Muslim gets defined by religious dispositions and in other situation it is not. The task is to illustrate the multiple ways through which Muslims project themselves and their relationship with Islam in diverse situations they encounter in their everyday life. Looking this question from the other way round is equally important to see, how certain context shapes certain type of 'Muslim' articulations, their subjectivity and in what ways does Islam in relation with other social categories influences Muslim subjectivity and articulations. Therefore, we need a comprehensive analytical frame to comprehend the complex relationship that people of Muslim background maintain with respect to Islam. To this end, I propose polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam as an analytical frame to understand and describe this complexity.

Polyphanisation and Transphanisation of Islam

One of the aspects of studying everyday life of Muslims is to study the intersectional fields of mundane life in which people from Muslim background register themselves. The other and related way to see this aspect can be to identify and analyse those areas and contexts of everyday life where Muslims go beyond Islam and their conscious efforts of self-fashioning as a 'good' Muslim takes a backstage. Not everything that people from Muslim background do in their everyday life is related to Islam or its scriptural traditions, nor all of them consciously pursue the efforts for ethical self-fashioning by being inspired by religious scriptures and looking everything they do through the lens of Islam. To capture this complexity, one of the frameworks can be through the dual process of

polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam[5].As an analytical concept, they supplement the concepts of Islam *mondain* (Soares and Otayek, 2007) and systematicity and articulation (Marsden and Retsikas, 2013).

Islam *mondain* highlights new ways of being Muslim in our contemporary world, which is marked by secularising trends, uncertainties and disenchantments of modern life. Soares and Otayek (2007) go beyond the construction of pious subjectivity and ethical self - fashioning of Muslims as pointed by Saba Mahmood (2005) and Charles Hirschkind (2006) and open up such acts of subjectivation to other domains of everyday life. Similarly, Marsden and Retsikas (2013) emphasise the enmeshed character of Islam with multiple contextualities of everyday life. Systematicity refers to how Islam as a religion moulds everyday affairs of Muslims whereas, articulation refers to the process by which Islam is produced and reproduced amidst contingencies of everyday life. The idea behind both these concepts is to place Islam in conjunctions with other vagaries of everyday life.

Polyphanisation and transphanisation gels with above concepts by accentuating everyday life and exploring how Islam is manifested in everyday interactions of Muslims. It also considers those multiple situations and interactions in our contemporary modern and secularising world, where Muslims go beyond Islam, and their identities as Muslim goes behind the stage. Polyphanisation refers to the multiple manifestations of Islam that emerges out of the diverse engagement of people of Muslim background with Islam in a variety of context in their everyday life. Polyphanisation underlines the agentive aspect of the Muslims and emphasises how they interact with Islam and produce their sense of 'being Muslim' in varied context of everyday life. The privileging of what people from

[5] The word '*polyphanisation'* is derived from two words – poly meaning multiple and phany – meaning manifestations or appearances, thus, multiple manifestations or appearances. The word '*transphaisation'* has been used combining, trans – meaning beyond, and phany- meaning manifestations beyond sth (Islam in present case).

Muslim background do helps in transcending the binaries like the public and the private, individual and the community, tradition and modern and the textual and lived. Therefore, Islam can be seen not as a set of doctrines, from which people from Muslim background deductively deduce a blueprint of action, but as something which is in constant production and reproduction along with other social factors and institution in the everyday life of Muslims. The important question here is how Islam is reflected and manifested independently as well as in relation with other social factors.

In modern period, religion is characterised by two different and opposite social process. At one end, we find dis-embedding of religion from a number of social institutions and practices, where these institutions are free from the clutches of religion (Zubaida, 2011). On the other hand some social institutions and practices are forged with religious sensibilities and symbolism, which are determined by other social and political factors. The dis-embedding of religion in certain fields of modern life and its simultaneous materialisation in some other fields provides us with a complex situation leading to reconfiguration of the public and private spaces of everyday life. In this background, I propose transphanisation of Islam as a concept to understand the nodal junctions of everyday life, where people from Muslim background go beyond Islam and engage with modern contemporary world[6].

Transphanisation of Islam may incorporate two levels of analysis. First, it can focus on micro level engagements by people from Muslim background like cultivation of particular taste and preferences like quest for a particular type of food, dressing sense or any other aesthetic sensibilities which may be perceived as 'Islamic'. On the other hand,

[6] The concept of transphanisation is influenced by the work of Sami Zubaida (2011), where he attempts to desacralize Middle Eastern societies by illustrating how religion is dis-embedded from modern social institutions and practices. Zubaida's work is analytical and historical in nature; nevertheless it provides us with a new perspective to look at Muslim societies by looking 'beyond Islam'.

transphanisation of Islam entails that in our mundane life religion is not the sole criterion of everyday ethic or sources of self – cultivation of subjectivity. Therefore, the self and identities that it inhabits cannot be perceived homogeneously and as being constituted solely by religion. This necessitates studying the multiple identities which Muslims harbours in various situations of everyday life and how they are enmeshed with other social factors. Second, it can focus macro social processes where Islamic sensibilities are used symbolically to make any social practices or institutions appear like 'Islamic', as for example, 'Islamic' charitable institutions, NGOs, educational institutions or questions like human or women rights in Islam, but in actuality it functions like any other non - religious institutions. The purpose here is to unpack these institutions from its 'Islamic' baggage and to explore how other social factors and processes operates beneath the veil of Islam.

Both the concepts concern multiple social dimensions of everyday life. They take into account the holistic, enmeshed and embedded viewpoint where multiple axis our mundane life intersect and influence each other. Transphanisation and poyphanisation of Islam captures the agentive aspect of Muslims, but it also encompasses collective actions of Muslims in their everyday life. In certain situations, both the concept can be seen as a co-joined occurring simultaneously without exhibiting any conflicting tendencies. It takes Islam as an important factor, yet it also attempt to grasp situations where people from Muslim background move beyond Islam, relegating religion to backstage in certain situations of everyday life. As analytical concepts, both have potentialities to break social stereotypes associated with Muslims and they can be extended to study other religious and ethnic communities as well. This is illustrated by ethnographic accounts from the field in the following part of this chapter.

Sources and Identities

Identities are fluid, contextual and are socially constructed by a variety of everyday situations and group affiliations in which people register themselves. It entails that the sources of construction of self are multiple, which is constructed amidst shifting experiences of people as they move across social terrain. Identities embedded in varied fields of everyday life question any homogeneous construction of self, inspired by say, religious precepts. Therefore, a pertinent inquiry in this regard can be to identify the multiple sources of self and how people from Muslim background navigate through multiple identities in their understanding of being a Muslim.

Let's take the example of veiling of Muslim women and the conflicting narratives surrounding it. Veiling is considered as an important marker of decency and chastity for Muslim women. Modern Islamic reformist discourses emphasizes veiling as an act of piety. It is an important symbol constituting identity of Muslim women, implying seclusion from males in public life. Veiling is also related to social status of a family, which tickles down to acts of distinction between *sharif* (honourable) family and *aam* (commoners) family. Veiling of women is emphasized during *jalsa* sermons and it is projected as a community marker.

Muslim preachers in west Bengal including the *pirs* of Furfura shareif emphasise that women should not indulge in outside activities and if it is a necessity, then they should be strictly in *burqa*[7].They maintain that gender segregation is a religious necessity and a compulsory element of ethical standards in public life. But, what constitutes veiling is a matter of debate amongst *pirs* and common Muslims, as justification for veiling and the question of burqa are two different things which is interpreted as one follows the another. As for example, a younger *pir* pointed the necessity of *burqa* by citing a Hadis as,

[7] Burqa is an outer garment that completely covers a female body, when they are in public. The purpose of wearing a burqa is related with ethical standards and modesty to avoid women from being gazed by males. It also imparts gender segregation among Muslim culture.

> *Islam does not allow women to move freely publicly. If it is necessary, then their bodies should be completely covered and they should observe purdah by wearing burqa. In our family once a woman attains her puberty, we do not allow them to move in public spaces. They are not even allowed to go to school, and they continue their education through distance education. On similar account, we do not allow women inside the shrine, because Islam prohibits such things. In Islam, men and women should be segregated as it may lead to chaos. Moreover, women undergo monthly menstrual cycles and during that period they are unclean.*

To enforce *purdah* for women from their family, the window panes and the open space between the back seat and the driver's seat of cars belonging to *pirs* are covered by thick curtains. But, another *pir*, who is his cousin, and an alumni of a famous seminary from North India gave a different interpretation of purdah. In a personal conversation he said,

> *Unfortunately, religious elites and mullas everywhere are misinterpreting sharia. It is because of their closed mind-set. There is no mention of burqa in our scriptures. Sharia says women should be purdahnasheen (within purdah), that is they should be secluded from males in public life. That does not necessarily mean burqa. The logic behind purdah is that their body is covered which is not an object of gaze for men and to maintain decency in public. But, some mullas preach to cover women from head to toe. Covering the body can also be done in other ways; it need not imply burqa where the entire body except the eyes are covered.*

He did not subscribe to the view that women should be confined at home, and taking a pragmatic approach, he said that in today's world such things are not possible. Women will have to go out for their education, earning livelihood and other activities, but they should maintain decency in their external activities. Veiling of Muslim women and gender segregation in context of Bengal was not a common scene in pre-colonial Bengal till early 17th century (Eaton 1993, 299). Mondal (2005) points that veiling among rural Muslim women does not mean burqa, but it meant that, when they come out of their home, they use a *ghomta*, i.e. using the edge of the *saari*, or using a separate dupatta to cover head and wrapping it over the upper part of the body. Interestingly, Mondal (79, 2005) also mentions that using *ghomta* in public life does not have much religious value,

but it is a marker of social prestige and higher status indicating social upliftment of woman and his family. It also provides a shield from unwanted social criticism.

Veiling is a contested issue within socio-political Muslim discourses signifying no unanimity on this issue. In one of the recent works, Mahmood (2005) in her study of a piety movement among middle class women in urban Cairo focusses on the external acts of self-fashioning like veiling of women, as reconstituting the internal pious self. Thus, acts like veiling with heightened religious sensibilities shapes the agentive potentiality of women which is different from the western understanding of agency in feminist discourses, casted in secular political dicourse. The notion of agency is to a large extent contextual. It cannot be separated from the social location and the identities which a subject inhabits. Therefore, the meaning of burqa need not be casted always in a religious mould. As for example, in Furfura, when one of the female members of the *pir* family got a job in Indian Railway, it instigated gossip and debate amongst other Muslims in the village. The issue was how can female members from *pir* family move freely in public and work outside. To counter this situation, wearing burqa and maintaining strict segregation in public life came as a handy solution. The concerned female member of the *pir* family went to office by wearing burqa and avoiding public transportation, which may attract public attention. Alam () through his ethnographic work amongst lower class Muslim women in Hyderabad suggest that, veiling can also be seen as empowering Muslim women who go out of her locality and work in a multi-national supply chain marts. Veiling here provides a social legitimacy to women venturing out by downplaying any social criticism. As an act, it is also related to the pragmatics of everyday life.

Veiling should not be interpreted solely in terms of heightened religious consciousness. Haniffa (2008) points to the importance of the social context in understanding intricacies of any piety movement. Focussing on *daawa* movement among Muslim women amidst

ethnic conflict and polarisation in Sri Lanka, Haniffa argue that, in a multi ethnic society of Sri Lanka, veiling among Muslim women acts as a community marker and thus, the selfhood acquired by Muslim women may use religious symbols, but its use need not be religious. The notion of community marker is problematized further when we find that markers like veiling of women is identified with certain upper caste groups among Muslims to assert their cultural refinement and superiority. In Furfura, Muslims from upper echelons maintain a distance from Muslims belonging to low caste like *kasai* Muslims (Muslims engaged in butchery). Irrespective of being followers of *silsila* of Furfura shareif, which prohibits any distinction among Muslims on the basis of caste, one of the arguments of the upper caste Muslims, to maintain this distinction is the notion of cultural refinement and *adab* (cultural manners and expectations). It is related with how womenfolk maintain the *shalinta* (modesty) publically. Muslim women from *kasaipara* (locality of butcher) are lax in observing purdah, and they venture out in their locality freely, which is unusual in the localities of upper caste Muslims in the village. But, examples like this challenges any homogenised understanding of 'Muslim' community. It questions the idea of 'muslimness' and its cultural assertion, signifying a way of life for people of Muslim background. There cannot be any singular interpretation or representation of 'muslimness'. We need to make a distinction on the basis of social location to account for the multiplicity involved in such cultural representations.

Sources of Identities in everyday life of Muslims

Religious rituals constitute an important marker of community identity in everyday life. As mentioned, one of the important features of modern Islamic reformation discourses is to purge local accretions from everyday practices of Muslims. Though there is no unanimity among the reformers belonging to different Muslim groups and sects regarding proper code of conduct to be a 'good' Muslim. Nevertheless a majority of modern Islamic

reformation discourses revolves around a set of scriptures that are perceived to constitute the core of Islam. Asad (1986) emphasise the importance of scriptures in formulating the subject matter for an anthropology of Islam. He considers Islam as a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding text of the Quran and Hadis (Asad 1986, 14). For Asad, the anthropological focus on Islam is restricted to the question of interpretation of the foundational texts and the power dynamics involved in it. Orthodoxy therefore is not just a body of opinion, but as a relation of power. It operates wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, or adjust correct practices, and condemn, exclude, undermine and replace incorrect ones (Asad 1986, 15). If the meaning is not dependent on text, but on the process of its reading and the location of the reader as Fish (1976) suggests, then how we can account for the politics that involve multiple reading of different texts to arrive at certain understanding of being. People from Muslim background do not always look back to their foundational texts to make a sense of their being. Culture as text for Muslims incorporates something more than the foundational text of Islam. Traditions followed in everyday life need not always have Islamic roots. Local traditions which are historically conditioned also influences everyday life of Muslims along with the foundational texts. In many respect local traditions set the course of interpretation by influencing reading strategy of foundational texts. The question here is to expose the enmeshed character of how understanding of foundational texts is intertwined with other non-Islamic sources.

Fruzzetti (1981) in her study of life cycle rituals among Muslims in West Bengal observe that in addition to the Islamic rules concerning life cycle rituals, Muslims follow a number of local rules, loosely defined as *desher adat* (customs of the land). With respect to life cycle rituals, common Muslims in Furfura make a tripartite division between *farz*, *niyom* and *parampara*. *Farz* is obligatory religious duties which are to be followed, like

praying five times a day. *Parampara* can be understood as local traditions, which Muslims follow in their everyday life or as rituals associated with life cycle events. As for example, pre-wedding rituals like applying turmeric paste on the body of bride which is discouraged by the *pirs*, but are widely followed by common Muslims as a tradition. *Niyom* are religious prescriptions which a Muslim is expected to follow. They are not obligatory in nature and generally consist of ritualistic aspects of Islam which are followed in everyday life. Rituals associated with birth, marriage, death and other aspects of life where *niyom* goes side by side with certain aspects of *faraz* and *parampara*. As for example, rituals associated with death of a family member may consist of something which is obligatory like offering *janazah namaz*, practices like *kul pora* which are expected to be followed where specific verses from Quran are recited for the deceased member on fourth days after the death. It may also consist of *milad*, a community event in memory of the deceased member after forty days, which is a *parampara*. On other occasions like during a marriage ceremony local tradition of *gayer holud*[8] (applying turmeric paste on the body of bride and groom) goes hand in hand with *nikah* followed by *olima* (Bangla version of *walima* – marriage banquet after *nikah*), which is understood as *niyom*. In another example, a madrasa passed student named Guffur, who practices medicine in Furufra as a quack informed that, it is not advisable for Muslims to slaughter animals on Thursday, because we consider Thursday as *lakhivar* (auspicious day for goddess *Laxmi*, according to Hindu religious views). He pointed that such views does not constitute *niyom,* but we follow it as a part of our *aanchalik parampara* (local tradition). He justified his point by importing religious metaphors as,

[8] *Gayer holud* ceremony is common to both Hindu and Muslim wedding in Bengal. In recent years, this ceremony has been opposed by some of the religious preacher on account for its Hindu accretion as there is no mention of this ritual in Islamic scriptures.

> *If a person dies on Thursday, we consider it to be gracious. In Islam, we believe that life does not end after death. Even a dead body has feelings as the soul does not leave the body after death. The body feels pain in the grave for the sins that the person has committed in his lifetime. The farista (angels) takes the soul only on Friday, after the jumma namaz (Friday prayer). So, if a person dies on Thursday, then his soul will spend less time in the grave and will part his body on Friday.*

The tripartite division between *farz*, *niyom* and *parampara* are not restricted in the realm of life cycle rituals; it permeates into other aspects of everyday life. Practice like maintaining caste hierarchy, which is alien to Islamic foundational text draws its social legitimacy in the name of *parampara*. In an incident during my stay at Furfura, a young man belonging to distant relative of the *pirs* married by eloping with a girl from low caste background. This inter-caste marriage initiated a mixed opinion among common Muslims in the village. One of the opinions against this marriage pointed that this marriage violates the *parampara* as marital alliance should be among equals. Some Muslims from privileged background who advocated this view maintained that, Islam prohibits any internal stratification and all are equal in front of God, but marriage in between equals is for the betterment for the couple. These time-tested rules are made by forefathers and cultural similarity between spouses forges better understanding in between them.

Therefore, we see that everyday practices are registered in multiple sources and Islam is one among many such sources. On certain issues like rituals associated with marriage and death, Muslims have constructed a clear understanding of what constitute Islam. On other issues including those which have no precedence in scriptures, Muslims recognise them as part of their *parampara*. Fruzzetti (1981) points to a fuzzy boundary that exists between *niyom* and *desher achar*, as both the sources complement each other and present an image of folk Islam, where Muslims negotiate with their Islamic and Bengali identities. Dichotomies like folk Islam and textual Islam are problematic; because

Muslims like any other religious community follow their religion not at the expense of their local traditions, just like Christians in Africa follow their tribal rituals along with the Christian injunctions. The co-existence of multiple traditions and sources of everyday practices should not be read as constituting a folk identity. Creating a binary like folk and textual Islam simultaneously constructs a hierarchy, favouring one as more authentic than other. The construction of authentic and pure incorporates power relations, which involves choice and is not detached from the social setting in which it operates.

Objectification of Muslim consciousness and the politics of distinction

The harmonious relationship between *niyom* and *desher achar*, or the attempt to create a tripartite division of *farz*, *niyom* and *parampara* involves an act of distinction. This is indicative of heightened awareness towards what constitute Islam and can be understood as objectification of Muslim consciousness (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996). Objectification indicates towards reification of religion, where religion is perceived as a self-contained system enabling the believers to describe, characterise and distinguish it from other belief system (ibid. 38). It facilitates segregation of culture into neat categories and its monopolisation as complete and authentic. Religion is thus seen by isolating it from its socio-historic context, as a comprehensive system in itself. Objectification subjects religion to conscious reflection, discussion and deliberation, and thus reconfigures the nexus of religion with other aspects of social life, including politics. The process of reconfiguration of religion is facilitated by de-sacralisation of religion (Zubaida 2011) – dis-embedding of religion from its traditional institutional structure of society. But, it is also facilitated by the process of sacralisation – secularisation of sacred

(Madan34, 2011), of various social institutions and practices, whereby religion gets linked with multiple aspects of society. The process of reconfiguration of religion through the twin process of sacralisation and de-sacralisation becomes the ground for identity politics of any religious community and quest for authenticity of any religious tradition.

Politics with and within identities

Politics cannot be conceived only in terms of quest for power or in dialectic terms of co-operation and conflict, for it is present in assertion and also in silence. The voices of authenticity and circumscribing identity within it become an act of politics as it is orthodoxy, involving power relationship in proclamation of what is authentic and correct. This brings the issue of language of politics and politics of language to the forefront (Eickelman and Piscatori 5-16, 1996). Understanding politics in this regard moves beyond the attempts of monopolising the meaning of symbols and thus capturing imagination of people or creating symbols to deliver the political messages. It also incorporates focus on various strategies whereby politics itself is made possible through use of a language, conceived as a sign system, in which absence of language also qualifies as a sign. This approach of politics can be seen in terms of Gramscian concept of hegemony and Scott's (1987) description of the weapons of the weak. No resistance in no way implies absence of politics. We can describe this by process through which politics becomes manifest in construction of symbols and monopolisation over its meaning to manipulate people's imagination. It can also be understood in terms of describing the context in which politics of resistance takes diverse forms.

Let me elaborate the multiple contours of identity politics by an example of madrasa. Madrasa is treated as an important symbol of Muslim religious identity. In modern times it is seen as an institution providing religious education. Opening a new madrasa or going

to madrasa[9] for religious education is considered as an act of serving *din* (religion). Funding an existing madrasa or constructing a new madrasa also provides cultural capital to the religious elite and gives them some degree of social legitimacy to operate in community as community leaders. The *pirs* of Furufra are associated with a vast network of madrasa in the state which are not affiliated to state government. These madrasas are run by the representatives or the followers of the *silsila* (order) in their respective areas. Some of the *pirs* have also taken initiatives to open 'mission' madrasas[10] in West Bengal. Madrasas do not function only to provide religious education, they are important medium to propagate respective ideology of a Muslim sect. As Sikand (2005) and Alam (2011) have shown through their ethnographic work in various part of India that madrasas primarily functions to push the *maslaki* (sectarian) identity among Muslims.

One of the young *pirs* at Furfura named Samir, have recently opened a mission madrasa near Kolkata. In an interaction he said that mobilisation of funds is a big problem for this endeavour. With respect to the question regarding searching sponsorship from Muslim industrialists of West Bengal who in the past have sponsored several such projects he pointed,

> *We need to be careful in approaching any sponsor, as they have their maslaki (sectarian) inclinations. As sponsors, they will be the member of the board and can influence decision making. Through this madrasa we want to spread the ideology of Dada Huzoor, as we need to have several platforms at our disposal to propagate and spread his message.*

[9] This point is emphasized by preachers during *jalsa*. Nilanjana Gupta (2010, 111) also highlight this point by stating that, in West Bengal there is a practice of sending at least one male child to madrasa for religious education.

[10] Mission madrasa concept was first followed by Al-Ameen Mission, which was established in 1986 near Howrah, West Bengal. According to Al-Ameen website www.**alameenmission**.org (accessed on 20th April 2015), the institution is modelled on Ram Krishna Mission. Currently, it has 32 branches spread across the state. It is a residential institution where Muslim students from underprivileged section are educated in modern secular subject along with religious education. Special emphasis is laid on competitive examinations, so that after passing from the institute, students can get a government job and serve the community. Mission madrasas are also gaining popularity in Bangladesh, where religious education is fused with modern education along with emphasis on physical training of cadets. For details see, Kabir (2011).

He further elaborated his plans as follows:

> *Muslims in West Bengal are educationally backward. My efforts are just a small step in this area. We already have other mission madrasas like Al-Ameen Mission, which have no doubt done remarkable work in this regard. But, now we find that most of these mission schools cater to certain class of Muslim children. They have some seats, for which scholarships are provided, but most of the seats are heavily charged. My target segment is the lower middle class families. I want to target Muslim children from this segment and provide them with modern education along with Islamic education. Students are future of community, so my focus will be on special coaching program in computers and to prepare them for medical and engineering entrance exams.*

Mission madrasas can be seen as an attempt on the part of madrasas to keep themselves abreast with the changing times. This challenges the image of madrasa as a static and backward looking religious institution. In recent years, Furfura Senior Madrasa which is a state government regulated madrasa added a new curriculum along with the existing religious curriculum[11]. According to this initiative, the madrasa authority have decided to provide technical skill based training in the areas of plumbing, repairing electrical appliances and other job oriented programmes during weekends.

The notion of community and serving the community is intrinsically linked with the politics of identity. But, all articulations of identity politics in the name of Islam need not be casted in sacred frames of religion. In 2001, a group of young madrasa students along with local youths came together with a proposal to coach other madrasa students for School Service Examinations and other government service examination. Some young faculty members of Senior Madrasa were also involved in this initiative. The Principal of Senior Madrasa readily agreed to provide them with classrooms and other infrastructural

[11] In West Bengal, there are three types of madrasas. Senior Madrasa and High madrasa are regulated by West Bengal Madrasa Educational Board, which is governed by State government. The prime purpose of Senior madrasa is to provide religious education, whereas in High madrasa students are provided secular education just like any other schools with additional papers of Arabic and Islamic theology. The third category consists of private madrasas which are not regulated by state and most of them function on maslaki (sectarian) lines. For details, see Gupta (2010).

facilities for this venture during the weekends. In the span of a few months these young students collected funds to buy question banks, and prepared three month weekend class schedule for this purpose and they named it as 'Furfura Institute of Competitive Education' (FICE)[12] . They approached locally available teachers of specific subjects from neighbouring villages to devote two hours in weekends to coach madrasa students. In 2010, when I visited FICE, it was already nine years old and every year on an average five to six students cracked Madrasa Service Examinations, conducted by West Bengal Madrasa Education Board. For the last two years, they have been getting students even from the remote and far area of Sunderbans.

A young faculty, named Faraz of Furfura Senior madrasa associated with FICE said,

> *The prime aim of FICE is to uplift the downtrodden Muslim students in West Bengal. The Sachar committee report points to the poor situation of Muslims in West Bengal. We find that madrasa students are struck after passing their fazil degree. They do not know what to do next. They take lots of pain to join mdrasa and after passing they do not have many options. So, we decided that to coach them for government examinations, which will help them as well the community. In future, they will be role models for the community, which will further boost this initiative.*

By 2011, around 50 students were enrolled in FICE. Most of its successful students cracked Madrasa Service Commission examination in Arabic subject. An edge over Arabic subject, along with coaching helped them to crack the examination. The instructors associated with FICE are locally pooled consisting both Hindus and Muslims teachers from adjacent villages who volunteered for this initiative.

Madrasas also caters to other secular issues. Kabir (2011) in context of Bangladesh suggest that madrasas play active role in production of Muslim culture, which is not

[12] FICE sounds similar to some of the big competitive examination coaching institutes in West Bengal like Roys Institute of Competitive Examination (RICE) and Majumdar Institute of Competitive Examination (MICE). The acronym used suggests a strategy to popularise the institute.

independent of pragmatic interests of those who are involved in it. By an example of a madrasa affiliated to a Sufi sect in Bangladesh, Kabir points that madrasa is also a source of personal income; it provides a base for social interventions by community leaders associated with the Sufi order and acts as a platform to sell sacred water and other religious objects of the Sufi shrine. Thus madrasas acts as an interface between the sacred, the symbolic and the community.

Madrasas also acts as a seat of different types of political activities. Madrasa students from Furfura and from other madrasas affiliated to Furfura shareif actively participate in political rallies organised by the *pirs* of Furfura to show off their strength. Most of these rallies are organised in Kolkata where these activities can get media publicity. The *pirs* and their representatives in different districts of West Bengal provide logistical support to these madrasa students to mobilise in Kolkata. As foot soldiers of the order they were in forefront in a number of political agitations in Kolkata like protests in front of American Consulate against American invasion of Iraq and protest against Taslima Nasreen to name a few. As a group of youngsters they can be mobilise in short notice, which is an important component in actualising political activities of Furfura *pirs*. In 2013, madrasa students stormed Kolkata international airport to prevent British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie from attending Kolkata Book Fair. This entire episode took place within few hours when the news of author's arrival became public through news channels. The *pirs* also cater to the demands of the madrasa students who are unified under the banner of Madrasa Student Union. They sponsor various cultural and religious activities undertaken by the students. *Pirs* also support them with financial help as and when the need arise. But the nexus between *pirs* and madrasa students is not one directional. Madrasa students are critical about several actions of the *pirs* and they also show off their dissent. In an informal discussion, several madrasa students complained about how the *pirs* have made

the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique a base to push their economic and political agenda. They are also critical about the various short term political alliances which the *pirs* make with various political parties. On other occasions, madrasa students mentioned that they respect the contemporary *pirs* of the order because of their respect to Abu Bakr Siddique. One of the students drew an analogy between the *pirs* with Nehru - Gandhi family, pointing that both are respected not because of their substantial contribution to society, but because of their bloodline. One of the madrasa students pointed,

> *The current custodians of the shrines are not pirs; they are pirzadas (sons of pirs). A pir is a respectable person, who is knowledgeable, truthful, close to almighty and a pious person. Pir is one who is benevolent, humble and understands the pain of others. But, none of these qualities are to be seen in present custodian of the shrine. The real pir is lying in the grave, because of whom people respect them and Furfura is considered an important religious site. We respect them because of the bloodline and support them whenever they undertake any issue pertaining to the development of the community.*

Madrasa students in Furfura do not form a homogeneous segment. They are critical of pirs on several issues and they are divided on lines of their affiliation to various charitable institutions floated by the *pirs* or their personal loyalty towards a particular *pir*. But as the above narrative suggests their support to the *pirs* are based on their piety towards Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) and their understanding of what constitute good for the Muslim community.

Understanding 'Muslim' communities; the lexical complexity with '*ummah*'

The importance of community has been highlighted by several writings of early sociologists, where the concept of community is explained by presence of 'we feeling', a common sense of identity, an emotional bonding, social cohesion and a geographical signifier. According to Nisbet (1966) the concept of community in sociological writings was developed in context of absence of its features in modern associational forms of

social life. Therefore, the characteristics of community are searched in non-modern and archaic forms of society. One of the stereotypes against Muslims is their uncritical attitude and loyalty towards Muslim community, which has a historical lineage in the definition of '*ummah*'. The usage of the word '*ummah*' in our contemporary times has been one sided, relating it with the notion of community of Muslims, bounded by faith.[13] It is characterised as an essential unity within Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical settings (Esposito et al. 2003). Etymologically '*ummah*' also have roots in Hebrew. It incorporates multiple meanings and it can be used to mean a people, a nation, or a sect. Thus, *Ummatu Ibrahim* in Arabic means the people of Abraham and *Ummatu Muhammad* means, the people of Muhammad. Aslan (2005) in discussing the historical evolution of Muslim community points that initially the term '*ummah*' was a generic term to denote a group of people and it did not have any religious meaning attached with it. The constitution of Medina, negotiated by Muhammad suggest that '*ummah*' incorporates people from other faiths like the Jewish, the Christians and the Pagans. Here, '*ummah*' is not religiously defined; rather its usage is linked with the people living in a geographical location, who were in agreement to live according to certain rules and regulations. The contemporary usage of 'ummah' as an exclusively Muslim community linked together by the fabric of Islam is a recent development. '*Ummah*' can be seen as a 'transformative concept', which can acquire different meaning in different situations (Hassan 2006). Envisioning '*ummah*' by detaching it from its historical and geographical context brings it close to the notion of imagined community of all Muslims, providing a stable base for self-identification and corporate identity. Nevertheless, it does not envisage that other modes of distinctions within the community are dissolved in the grand concept of '*ummah*'. Historically, Muslims have negotiated other identities along with their identity

[13] This definition is influenced by the way Oxford dictionary describes the term – umma or ummah. For details see, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/umma (accessed on 07/02/2016).

as Muslims and have forged multiple identities in their ontological status. Ignoring this, we cannot make sense of *basha andolan* (language movement) that led to the creation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. Or, the present crisis concerning Kurds, who are an ethnic but Muslim community aspiring to carve out a state for itself along Turkey, Syria and Iraq borders.

Muslims in Furfura have strong sense of other identities like being a Bengali which goes along comfortably along with their identity of being a Muslim. This is evident from their everyday interaction, where they distinguish themselves from Muslims of other regions. Like stereotyping other Muslims with a particular behavioural type, as for example Muslims from Bangladesh are not sensible and money minded or Muslims from *sunderbans* delta are *jahils* (ignorant) and be- *adab* (not cultured). Such language of distinctions is also visible in other fields of their everyday life related to an array of cultural traits. As for example, display of affection towards Bengali cuisine or language in relation to others. In a conversation with some of the Muslims in Furfura who migrated out to other states for work, pointed that they miss variety of fish and sweets which are speciality of this region. They often compare fish available in other region with the local varieties of fish with their inclination to the later. One of them informed me that modern transport facilities have made possible the availability of fish from Bengal even in areas like Mukherjee Nagar or Uttam Nagar in New Delhi, but even there one can never get the local varieties of fish, especially those which are from ponds. During their stay at Furfura they record the sermons of *jalsas* which are delivered in *bangla* in their mobile phone, they carry some food stuff like *sutki* (dried and salted fish), and sweets with larger shelf life, and buy garments like *gamcha* (a cotton light weight towel) or *taant sari* (cotton sari woven in traditional way) unique to this region. These examples are closely related to

cultural traits of a region and reflect their attachment to other identities like their regional identity.

The multiple identities which Muslims inhabit question the notion of a homogenised and unified '*ummah*' which think and act in a particular way. Concepts like u*mmah, sharia, shirk* and *bidat* gain their importance because of their references in scriptural texts. They invoke a degree of emotion, but they are not sociological constants. Even though their references keep coming historically in variety of context, the meaning and the ways in which they have been applied and interpreted historically has been diverse, without much in agreement (Aslan 2005, Azmeh 2009, Zubaida 2011). The preponderance of these concepts in our contemporary time reflect objectification of religion, whereby religion acquires object-like qualities leading to its reification, whereby it is made this-worldly by reducing its abstract philosophical content into simple, closed and complete system of ideas. Religion as a source of identity is an outcome of a wider social process where the relationship between religion and other social institutions got reconfigured with the advent of modernity. As a result, religion got dis-embedded from much of the social institution in which earlier it was firmly based. On the other hand, religion took an inward turn by becoming exclusive, ritualistic and got associated with a number of social institutions and practices in terms of identities and symbolic tokenism. The interplay of profanisation of religion as privatised and individualised acts to reflect upon goes hand in hand with sacralisation of non-religious spheres like secular space, knowledge and economy (Zubaida 2011, Cassanova 2012). In this episode, culture becomes the medium in which the dialectical process of profanisation and sacralisation takes place. The language through which culture is expressed as a closed, comprehensive and complete system by isolating it from socio-historical context becomes an important discourse of identity. Identity is thus expressed through cultural assertion of certain cultural traits

readily associated with group identity, symbolically manipulated for construction of alternative narratives in the cast of exclusivity.

Understanding 'Muslim' politics beyond symbolism

Political narratives provide us with an avenue to understand how certain symbols are chosen, interpreted and projected as markers of differences. In 2013, just before panchayat level elections in West Bengal, *pirs* of Furfura shareif close to ruling *Trinamool Congress* government organised a massive protest rally in Kokata. The venue of the rally was *shahid minar*[14] (martyr's monument) in the heart of the city, which is a famous location for many other political rallies in the city. The rally was called to put forward the socio-economic demands of the Muslim communities in the state, and against the statement of the Chief Minister that most of the issues pertaining to the Muslim communities in the state has been resolved by the government in last two years of its power. The speakers consisting of *pirs* who were close to ruling Trinamool Congress government and their associates emphasised the condition of Muslims in West Bengal as a community with great history but dismal future. They evoked the conclusions of Sachar committee report and pointed the negligent and selective approach by the erstwhile Left Front government towards the community and demanded more from the government to uplift Muslims in the state. Glorifying the role played by prominent Muslims in Indian history from Maulana Azad, Havildar Abdul Hamid to former president A P J Abdul Kalam, they placed Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) amongst them, who opposed British rule on the ground that it is not in accordance with the *sharia*. The speakers demanded 20% reservation in jobs for Muslim candidates, immediate filling of vacant positions in

[14] *Shahid Minar* formerly known as the Ochterlony Monument was erected in 1828 in memory of Major-general Sir David Ochterlony, to commemorate his successful defense of Delhi against the Marathas in 1804 and the victory of the East India Company over the Gurkhas in the Anglo-Nepalese War. After independence in August 1969, it was rededicated to the memory of the martyrs of the Indian freedom movement and hence renamed the '*Shahid Minar*,' which means 'martyrs monument'.

schools and madrasas and not to remove Arabic from the syllabus of high madrasas, because of its religious significance and its importance in opening up job opportunities for Muslims in madrasas. They demanded more scholarship for madrasa students along with recognising the degree offered in Islamic theology at Alliah University at par with any other under graduate degree by the UGC. They reiterated that Muslims in West Bengal played a crucial role by voting Left Front out of power and if *Trinamool Congress* government does not pay attention to their demands then they should start counting their days.

The venue, timing and the issues highlighted through this protest rally point towards the continuous process of negotiation amidst contradictions in any political activity. The way history is evoked by exclusively highlighting the role of prominent Muslims in nation building and placing Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) amongst them points towards the construction of a field that renders social acceptability to the *pirs* as legitimate spokesperson of the community. The symbolic value of bloodline and raising specific issues like recognition of madrasa degree and courses on Islamic theology and Arabic are acts to evoke community markers in the language of difference. Politics conceived in this way is a quest to control over the imagination of people which is accomplished by controlling the institutions and practices that produce and sustain the meanings of the symbols (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). In this regard, who invoke and define a symbol, in what context and how, becomes important questions.

Muslim politics cannot be reduced to the question of symbols and the contest over its meaning. A reductionist view to equate Muslim politics with symbolic politics emphasise the logic of difference and identity. It feeds to the Geertzian logic which conceives Islam as a cultural system consisting of symbols that constructs the world view of Muslims. Thus, Muslim politics seen as contest over symbols and meanings narrows it down to

politics of exclusivity over religious and cultural symbols. Politics encompasses diverse fields of everyday life and Muslim politics in this respect can be seen like any other political activity, where religion may or may not be an important factor.

In May 2011 after Trinamool Congress won the state assembly elections, a protest was organised by local Trinamool Congress leaders against Left Front led Furfura gram panchayat. This protest was the first protest against the Left Front led panchayat in last two decades. Around 300 villagers consisting both men and women with different religious and class background gathered in front of Panchayat office at the pre-determined time. A good number of them were Muslim men and women belonging to lower caste from *kasaipara* and adjacent localities. Importantly, Muslim women were not in burqa, and they used their *saari's aanchal* to cover their head. After the local Trinamool Congress leaders delivered their speech few Muslim women also voiced their concerns from the dais. The raised everyday issues like, non-delivery of old age pension or *Indira awas* funds, favouring CPIM cadres for BPL (below poverty line) cards and other government backed facilities. An elderly Muslim from *Kasaipara*, who was among protesters, pointed the nexus between the *pirs* and the panchayat members. He questioned,

> *Why street lights in the village are only in the locality of the pirs. The only source of direct water supply is in their locality; as if their family need water and we do not need it. The pirs always talk about good human values but in practice, their hypocrisy is evident.*

Politics in everyday life goes beyond the symbolic realm and questions the institutions that sustain them. It operates in a social field, where politics is determined by multiple and shifting context (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996). As we see that identities are open to be manipulated in certain context and it leads to rhetoric of exclusivity and difference,

whereas in other context identities dissolve to raise a different set of question, which makes Muslim politics a dynamic field of study.

Charity and social service in the name of Islam

One of the common features of modern religious movements is social activism, which cut across geographical and religious barriers. In Indian sub-continent, religious organisations have increasingly used social service as an effective instrument to reach out to wider sections of the society[15]. Social intervention by religious organisations has been used to forge religious identity with the notion of community and nation in a sacred cast (Jones 1989, Sharma 2003 and Patel 2010). On many occasions Muslim organisations have used the concept of *dawa*, as mentioned in the Quran to push their social activities. *Dawa* refers to the call of the God to find Islam as the right path for all humans. But it is not just a proselytising activity to spread the word of Islam among non-Muslims and to invite them to the fold of Islam. Islamists and other Muslim religious organisations have redefined *dawa* in a different way. *Dawa* may also mean propagating ideology of any specific group among Muslims who are not considered as 'pure' Muslims by that group. In this pretext, *dawa* activities are efficient mechanism of ideological or political indoctrination. Elsewhere I have mentioned how historically *jalsa* in Bengal as a *dawa* activity has been used by Muslim reformers to propagate religious and sectarian message to lay Muslims. The tradition of *dawa* is also being redefined to include the idea of social welfare activism like soup kitchens, free medical clinics and other activities in social sphere targeted towards certain sections of Muslim population (Eickelman and Piscatori

[15] Some of the examples of such organisations from South Asian Region include, Ramakrishna Mission, Aurobindo Seva Kendra and Arya Samaj among Hindus in India. Jamat –i- Islami Hind, Tablighi Jamat, Popular Front of India, All India United Democratic Front among Indian Muslims. Jamat-i-Islami is also active in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka under different names. Buddha Bala Sena among Sinhala Buddhists in Sri-Lanka. Jamat-ul-dawa along with Jamat-i-Islami and Ahle Hadis to name a few in Pakistan.

35, 1996). In this regard, social activism of Muslim organisations comes close to the working style of any other NGOs.

By late 1990s, *pirs* of Furfura shareif came up with several charitable institutions, which are named after Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) and his *sufi* order. The names of the charitable institutions suggest the efforts by the pirs to identify their welfare activities with the lineage of the order, which provides social and religious legitimacy to these institutions to operate among the Muslims in West Bengal. These organisations mainly work in rural areas of West Bengal, where at times religious activities like a *dhikr* session is fused with other welfare activities like free medical clinic, distribution of clothes to the poor, installation of hand pumps in the village, conducting mass marriage ceremony for poor Muslim families, donating ambulances to local Muslim clubs and sending relief material to the areas in the state which are affected by flood or other natural calamities. The charitable institutions are also associated with several madrasas and orphanages in West Bengal. Many of the welfare activities conducted by these organisations are not restricted to Muslims; they are also targeted to poor Hindus in the village. As for example, every year *Mujjaddediya Anath Foundation*, a charitable institution floated by a *pir*, distributes free clothes and conducts mass marriage ceremony irrespective of the religious affiliation of the poor. Often political leaders, prominent personalities and press are invited on such occasions that provide grandeur to these occasions. *Pirs* post the photographs of such occasions on their website and social media sites to spread the word. They also print colourful booklets containing the pictures of the occasions with prominent personalities and list of activities they perform in a year. But, such social activities are not always open for all the Muslims. At times, sectarian affiliations play an important factor in influencing these activities. As for example, the booklet published by Jamat-e-Ulama-e-Bangla in 2011, an organisation in which several Furfura *pirs* are associated mentions

around one hundred and twenty five activities undertaken by the organisation till 2009. It starts with specific detail of their success in stopping *Qadiani* propaganda in the region. The activities of these organisations are not restricted to social sphere, but on certain occasions it also encompasses the political sphere like, in the pretext of welfare activities the *pirs* also voice their concern on political issues like providing monthly salary to the imams and muezzins associated with mosques in West Bengal[16], issues pertaining to Muslim personal law and land grab issue in Singur and Nandigram. Similarly, one of the charitable organisations floated by the pirs, conducts an inter-faith religious meet every year in Kolkata on the last day of Durga Puja, where speakers from Ramkrishna Mission, Bishop from Church of North India and other *pirs* and eminent personalities are invited. But, on other occasion in the village they maintain the superiority of Islam as true faith over all other religions. As for example, one of the *pirs* associated with this said,

> *All Hindus are actually Muslims, which they do not realise. The Hindu pandit (priest) reads kalma after end of the rituals and to mask this, he asks his sub-ordinate to blow the conch shell and rings the bell. Islam being the true path of God acknowledges that God has send messengers throughout human history to show the right path, and Muhammad is the last of them. Messengers like Adam, Krishna, Rama, Abraham and so on; all were true messenger of God. You can read about them in the book 'biswa nabi' (Prophet of the world).*

Therefore, we see how the social, political and the religious spheres are fused through welfare activities undertaken by Furfura *pirs*. The superiority of Islam over other religious faiths is an example of how the 'other' is appropriated and its identity dissolved within a narrative claiming the authenticity of tradition. Myths come as a handy tool in this exercise of digesting the other (Sharma 2009).

[16] Trinamool Congress government after coming in power in 2011, decided to pay Rs. 2500 per month to the imams and Rs. 1500 to muezzins associated with mosques in West Bengal. This decision was declared un-constitutional by Kolkata High Court in 2013. For details see, http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/calcutta-high-court-scraps-mamata-banerjees-stipend-to-imams-533409 (accessed on 14th February 2016).

It is important to place these activities in its context in which it emerge and acquires its significance. One of the ways to understand the participation of common Muslims in Islamic social activism can be seen in context of uncertain economic and political situation triggered by neo-liberal economic policies and demise of welfarism in polity favouring lumpenisation of working class (Ahmad 2014[17], Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, Bayat 2007, 2010). The social profile of volunteers and activists provides us a window to understand the wider social processes identified with dispossession and pauperisation of working class in our contemporary times. Importantly, activism in religious organisations is not always motivated by the questions of identity, piety and religious zeal. Several studies on urban middle class and the poor including the migrant labours suggest that association with religious organisations engaged in social welfare activism also provides a sense of immediate security and a source of social capital – an opening to social network that may help these vulnerable categories of masses to sustain themselves and move ahead in their lives[18]. The nexus of social welfare activism and religious organisations is an important in third world urban landscape, but the rural areas are not exempted to its influences. Eickelman and Piscatori (1996) list several studies concerning Islamic social welfare activism in a variety of context at the countryside. Post 1990s neo-liberal economy has hard hit the rural economy and has reconfigured agrarian economy. The declining government subsidy, the raising labour cost and introduction of multi-national companies in agrarian economy have changed the agrarian structure and economy. One can see these changes in agrarian structure in Furfura. In a household survey of 300 households in Furfura, I found that around sixty five percent of the migrant

[17] This idea is taken from the speech titled - Communalisms: Changing Forms and Fortunes, given by Aijaz Ahmad at Sundarayya Vigyan Kendra, Hyderabad in May 2014. The web link of the speech is: www.sundarayya.org/sites/default/files/papers/**aijaz**%20final.pdf (accessed on 20/02/2016).

[18] For details on lumpenisation of working class and increasing dispossession pushing them towards religious activism, refer to: Hansen (2001), Ahmad (2014), Pattaniak (2016), Bayat (2007, 2010) Azmeh (2009), Zubaida (2010, 2011).

labours are from low caste Muslims whose earlier generations were agricultural labourers. Majority of migrants are first generational migrants, who left the village in last twenty years to major metropolitan cities of India. Second, by interacting with the activists, it was found that a good number of activists involved with the charitable institutions floated by the *pirs* are actually educated youngsters whose family members have migrated, which in turn have improved their economic status in the village. Other set of activists and volunteers comprises of petty businessmen, who have gained some economic mobility in the recent past and the middle class professionals in the village mainly working as teachers in a government school or as clerk in government offices, who are first among their family to join a government services. This illustrates the correlation between increasing economic mobility, rising educational standards and the process of objectification of Muslim consciousness. One of the explanations for this correlation can be the complex relationship between the emancipatory role of education and social hindrance that people from deprived background face because of their lack of some sort of cultural capital. An aspect of this situation can be seen as a relative lag between emergence of new aspirations and the cultural capital required to actualise it. It arises in a condition where the mobility gained by a particular set of people in economic sphere is not in correspondence with their acceptability in the socio-cultural sphere determined by ascribed characteristics. Activism in this sense can be seen as an attempt to open new opportunities to reclaim their rightful position in socio-cultural sphere.

Education promotes common Muslims to read scriptures for themselves, but also promote them to raise certain questions. Activism cannot be explained completely through the dynamics of raising economic standards and quest for socio-cultural assertion. It may be a medium to attain certain concrete pragmatic ends. As for example, one of the volunteers named Sameer associated with a charitable institution used the *pir's* recommendation to

get his son admitted in a mission madrasa at a concessional rate. Similarly, Salim who is a wage labourer in the village and works as a salesman regularly accompanies one of the *pirs* as his personal helper whenever the *pir* goes for *jalsa*. He is provided food for the entire day and money on daily basis as remuneration for his services. These examples provide us with an avenue to understand the wider process of de-sacralisation of religion in our society, where many aspects of our religious life like religious activism are determined by non-religious secular concerns.

Objectified Islam and emergence of multiple voices

Objectification of Muslim consciousness also promotes fragmentation of religious authority, whereby Muslims increasingly question and debate the existing ways of practicing Islam. In this sense, objectification helps to articulate the dissent in terms of deliberations, disagreement and at times in the form of outright protest. Articulations against the authorities whether active, passive or silent are indicative of the language of politics, which can be understood as emergence of multiple voices, contesting to be heard. What is the nature of this contested space and exploring the ways by which multiple voices interact is the subject of inquiry.

The order of Furfura shareif cast strong influences on the religious views of Muslims living in Furfura but, that does not stop them from engaging with different other articulations of Islam propagated by other agencies. As for example, *pirs* of Furfura strongly oppose Zakir Naik's[19] version of Islam and term it as soft *wahabism*. Similarly, Bangladeshi preacher Syed Delwar Hossain Saidi[20] another Muslim tele-evangelist and

[19] Zakir Naik is a doctor turned preacher and tele-evangelist of Islam. He is famous for his preaching activities, where his primary emphasis is to prove that Islam is a rational and scientific religion, and is compatible with modernity.

[20] Delwar Hossain Saidi is a prominent leader of Jamat-i-Islami Bangladesh and a famous preacher. He was sentenced to death by Bangladesh war crime tribunal in Bangladesh for his crime against humanity during

preacher affiliated to *Jamat-i-Islami* Bangladesh is opposed by the *pirs* on grounds of different ideology. *Pirs* oppose sale of their books and CDs during three days *isale swahab* ceremony. Interestingly, both the preachers are very popular in Furfura amongst youngsters, madrasa students and common Muslims. As a tele-evangelist and a powerful speaker they have carved a niche for themselves in the minds of common Muslims. Their sermons are sold in CDs and one of the best-selling CDs of Zakir Naik is his debate with Sri Sri Ravishankar[21]. Common Muslims while discussing among themselves, often bring the reference of Zakir Naik or Syed Delwar Hossain Saidi to compare the actions and lifestyle of the present generation of the *pirs* on religious as well as non-religious issues. Importantly, the everyday behaviour of the younger *pirs*, their modes of representation, their lifestyle and other aspects of everyday life are constantly monitored and judged by common Muslims by the yardstick of their objectified consciousness. The complex interactive sphere where Muslims come in terms with other ways of being Muslims helps in raising certain basic questions on existing ways of following Islam, which reconfigures the self-identity into a reflexive project[22] (Giddens 1991). Objectivity thus, encourages a dialogical and reflexive understanding of self, whereby self is continuously constituted by a variety of sources and social processes. In this context, the efficacy of any ideology to homogeneously influence self-identity is a big question.

Bangladesh independence war of 1971. In September 2014, Bangladesh Supreme court reduced the punishment from death penalty to life imprisonment.

[21] In the debate on Vedanta and the Quran between Zakir Naik and Sri Sri Ravishankar, both the preachers attempted to prove the authenticity and greatness of their scriptures. Implicit in this debate was the issue regarding whose scripture is greatest. Zakir Naik's argument that the Quran is more scientific and contains everything that Vedanta talks about instils a feeling of pride of being a Muslim. Religion here becomes an issue of pride, a marker of identity, an issue of self-dignity which is devoid of the transcendental and mystical aspects.

[22] For details on reflexivity, refer Giddens (1991), where he points that self-identity is made constantly by the agents by reflecting upon the wider social processes. Media and communication plays an important role in this reflexive project.

Modes of self-fashioning and construction of piety

Recent studies have highlighted different modes of 'being a Muslim' in our contemporary world[23]. The primary emphasis of some of these works is on how Muslims produce themselves in variety of context in modern life marked by secularising society. Focussing on diverse aspects of pious self-fashioning as a mode of construction of a 'Muslim' feminist subjectivity, Mahmood (2005) contest the western secular notion of agency. Similarly, Hirschkind (2006) focusses on cultivation of aural sensibility by listening religious sermons on cassettes to construct a notion of 'Islamic' counter public. Both Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) have underlined the role of interiority of subjectivity through the acts of self-cultivation of piety on its external manifestation as agency. They use the pretext of micro-politics in everyday life to contest the prevalent western understanding of agency, subjectivity and politics, and emphasize the role of religious sensibility in shaping them.

People from Muslim background do many things in their everyday life that has nothing explicitly to do with religious ethics. Moreover, ethics can have multiple roots and its meaning is contingent. We have seen elsewhere, how Muslims talk about the tripartite division of *farz*, *niyom* and *parampara*, which influences their life rituals and provides them with a sense of 'being a Muslim' in a community. Ethics can be associated with non-religious sources. As discussed earlier, 'being a Muslim' is a cultural category and there can be multiple ways of following Islam. I came across some Muslims in Furfura who believe in Marxist ideology. In an interaction, one of them informed me that the two ideal personalities for him to draw inspiration are Prophet Muhammad and Ernesto Che

[23] Some of the studies on this topic includes: Mahmood (2005), Marsden (2005), Hirschkind (2006), Soares and Otayek (2007), Osella and Soares (2010), Khan (2012), Marsden and Retsikas (2013).

Guerava. It is the notion of social equality that unites these two different personalities for him.

It is important to see that the efforts of self-fashioning acquire its significance in a particular social context. Haniffa (2003, 2008) highlights the importance of social location of those involved in piety movement. In her study of a piety movement among Muslim women in Sri Lanka, she explores how piety movement have affected Muslim women from diverse social strata, especially marginal families affected by economic distress and civil war in Sri Lanka. She highlights how ethical self-fashioning issues like of veiling acquires different meaning for different set of Muslim women which may range from the issue of social identity to other social concerns like protecting oneself from male gaze and feeling safe in society marked by rampant sexuality. The cultivation of self as pious subjects is not independent of the political motivations. Haq (2008) in context of Bangladesh study a piety movement among young college going women. She points that the movement is a wing of *Jamat-i-Islami*, an Islamist political party in Bangladesh, and is instrumental in propagating Islamist ideology among young college going women.

The cultivation of piety through bodily acts is also reflective of varied manifestations of Islam in everyday life of Muslims. But, Islam can be made manifest by Muslims in numerous ways, and not all its manifestations are religious or restricted to the acts of self-fashioning. Moreover, cultivation of pious practices can have different meaning in different situations. As for example, in Furfura smoking or playing music is not allowed in the vicinity of shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939). These acts are considered *haram* (prohibited acts as per Islam) and are mentioned in the *wasiyatama* (will) of Abu Bakr Siddique. But the restriction does not prevent Muslims from smoking when they are away from the shrine. Similarly, villagers who generally gather in a tea shop near the shrine for the regional news broadcast at 7:30pm always switch off the radio set while the musical

commercial advertisement goes on in between the news. But, on other occasions like in comfort of their homes or in club, they freely listen to music. Many of them have downloaded popular Bollywood tracks s ringtones of their mobile phone. Examples like this question the heightened consciousness associated with cultivation of piety. The examples cited above suggest that in everyday life, not everything with religious signifiers that Muslims do are motivated by cultivation of piety.

The acts of self-fashioning can be motivated by any particular context or it may gain its importance in a particular situation. Like one of my respondents Sajjad, who is a sheikh by caste and runs a small shop, does not shave in the month of ramzan. He prays five times without fail and maintains very pious routine for himself. For this display of occasional piety, others poke him as 'seasonal namaji'. When I asked him, why he does not prays five times every day. He said,

> *I know I will go to hell. But what can I do, in order to run my family and make my end meet, I cannot follow din (religion) properly. I do not have time every day to follow Islam strictly, but whenever it is required like in the month of ramzan, I do my best to follow my din.*

Similarly, madrasa students are not allowed to wear western clothes, watch television, movies or listen to music. Earlier they were not allowed to use mobile phones, but being a residential madrasa where students come from far flung places, the madrasa administration later allowed students to use mobile phone, but with conditions like the mobile phone should be basic set and it should not have any facilities for multimedia activities. They are not allowed to play and there is no particular period for outdoor activities and games in their daily routine. Some of the madrasa students who lived outside the hostel by paying house rent informed me that,

> *The rules and regulations in the hostel are very strict. Like we need to pray five times without fail, there is no television set or radio and any type of entertainment is absolutely prohibited. But, we have improvised things accordingly. Now even basic mobile sets have inbuilt FM radio and a memory card holder. At night, we used to listen to music, cricket score or play games on mobile phone hiding it from teachers and staffs of madrasa. Or else we play ludo to get out of boredom.*

One of the students, Hasib who lives in a rented accommodation said that leaving madrasa hostel was an advantage for him and his friends. His friends keep western clothes like T-shirt and denim trousers at his residence and every Friday, which is a holiday in madrasa, they change their clothes from traditional *kurta* and *lungi* to T-shirts and trousers at Salman's residence before going for movie in adjacent town. I asked him doesn't he thinks that being in madrasa he should not be doing such things? He answered:

> *Nobody raises a question when some of the young pirs wear western outfits when they are in Kolkata. It is true that the rules and regulations of madrasa are strict and at times harsh. We are expected to abide by the rules as we study in madrasa. If we aspire to wear T-shirts and watch movies, then why should we study in madrasa. We study in madrasa not only to learn things that are in books, but also to learn a way of life. But, how can we live without some entertainment and minimum luxuries or life. After all, at this young age, it is difficult to ignore and isolate ourselves from such things.*

Therefore, we see that acts of self-fashioning are not independent of the context in which it takes place. It raises certain specific questions like, who are those who go for acts of self-fashioning, to what extend we can separate these actions from larger socio-political context, and under what social condition the acts of self-fashioning becomes important and gains popularity.

The social construction of religious identity

The assertion of identity can go beyond the acts of self-fashioning. Religion as a source of social identity follows from wider social processes associated with de-sacralisation of religion and its consequent materialisation in other aspects of life. Zubaida (2011) explains this by using the metaphor of 'spray on Islam' whereby Islam is symbolically used to make appear various aspects of everyday life as Islamic. But what constitute Islamic is a matter of contested debate. Nevertheless, many actions in the everyday life of Muslims are performed in the name of following Islam. As for example, no flag (of any political party or of any organisation) is allowed to be hoisted near the vicinity of mazar shareif. In November 2012, when leaders from All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)[24] visited Furfura to meet the *pirs*, then before entering the mazar shareif area, the villagers stopped their vehicle and removed their party flag from the vehicles. Similarly, Furfura Young Men's Association, a cultural organisation of Muslims in Furfura that was established in early 1960s, organises a cultural program every year on the day of *eid*. The program consists of Islamic quiz (quiz on Islamic history or famous Muslim personalities), *kirat* competition (recitation of particular verses from Quran), poetry competition, facilitation of outstanding Muslim students of the village etc. This funding for this event is collected from donation by the Muslims in the village. The open space in front of village panchayat office is used to erect *shamiana* (an open tent) where this event takes place. Women are not allowed to attend this cultural event. During the event, people are instructed periodically through microphone that they are not allowed to clap or whistle after any performance, as it is un-Islamic. Nevertheless, audience clap and whistle when someone answers a difficult question in quiz or when somebody recites a

[24] AIUDF is a political party mainly comprising Bengali speaking Muslims from Assam. It is prime opposition party in Assam State Legislative Assembly. Badaruddin Ajmal, a Deoband educated industrialists floated this party in 2005 to protect interest of Muslims in Assam. After 2011 West Bengal Assembly election People's Democratic Conference of India (PDCI), led by Siddiqullah Chowdhuary, another Deoband educated maulana and president of Jamat-e-Ulama-e-Bangla, merged his party with AIUDF.

Quranic verse beautifully. Photography is prohibited and people are instructed specifically not to take photograph, as Islam prohibits the depiction of an image of any human.

At times the heightened consciousness of 'being a Muslim' can also be used as a language of protest against the religious elites who use the language of Islam to assert their hegemony. In certain situation acts of self-fashioning can be counterproductive to the religious elites and challenge their hegemony and their attempts of monopolisation of Islam as source of their socio-religious authority. Hirschkind (2006) demonstrates this in his work on urban middle class Egyptians in Cairo where cultivation of pious practices like, listening to the sermons on cassettes encourages debates and questioning the religious elites associated with ruling government and lead to formation of 'Islamic' counter public. But as we have discussed that what is correct Islam is a contested matter and much depends on the power dynamics involved in such deliberations and in what situation such claims are made. The religious preachers of Hirschkind, whose sermons are instrumental in questioning the authorities, are not politically innocent and neutral. Neither, their sermons make sense in a socio-political vacuum. Common Muslims in Furfura, criticise *pirs* on numerous grounds. The utterance of dissent at times is premised on the authenticity of Islam. As for example, common Muslims question religious practices of the pirs, like what they do with the money that they receive as *zakat*[25]. These questions when raised by Muslims who themselves have undergone a transformative self-fashioning acquires different significance. Shafique, who works as a salesman and comes from sheikh caste, is well known for his pious practices in the village. Unlike many

[25] Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam, and thus is obligatory based on the economic status of the Muslims. It is not to be considered as a charity. It is customarily 2.5% of the total wealth and savings that has to be given for community development.

others, he prays five times a day without fail and tries to maintain his lifestyle in accordance with the *silsila* (order) of Furfura Shareif. He questions,

> *Muslims from far flung areas visit this shrine; they pay a good amount of money as zakat. But, these pirs never came out with any public account of the money that they receive as zakat. It is not their personal money as zakat is paid for the community. Over here, we are struggling day and night to feed our family, but these pirs they are buying cars and flats in Kolkata every year. They have become just like Babas or other modern spiritual gurus. Islam never permits them to misappropriate zakat. But, I also question those Muslims who come here and pay them money. Muslims in this state are poor. They migrate, live without family for years and earn some money. But, instead of spending that money for happiness of the family, they spend on pirs! Is this the way they think they are following Islam?*

This question gains its significance when resources distribution in the village like land and wealth is skewed in favour of the *pirs*. As I have discussed elsewhere, most of the backward caste Muslims in the village are landless, and work as wage labourer or have migrated to other cities for work. When they compare their hardship with the lifestyle of the *pirs*, they find it in contradictory terms. This pushes them to question the lifestyle and everyday conduct of the *pirs*. Many of the villagers with whom I have interacted have said that, *pirs* are supposed to be humble and down to earth, but looking at the present custodians of the shrine this seems to be contradictory. As for example, during the *ramzan* of 2011, Akhtar, who works in Kolkata as a salesman got in conflict with one of the young *pirs*, when the *pir* stopped him from using slang in the month of *ramzan*. Akhtar shouted on the *pir*,

Your Allah may prescribe and proscribe many things which suits you people, but my Allah does not do so.

The *pir* replied back in anger, saying that his views are un-Islamic as he cannot make a distinction between your Allah and my Allah. Akhtar replied in rage,

> ……*that it is apparent, how you people have all the luxuries of life, but see us, we struggle every day to meet our ends. It proves who is favoured by Allah!*

One of the *khadims* of *pirs* tried to defend the *pir*. This further elevated the anger of Akhtar and he shouted at that *khadim* saying,

> *You people are parrots of the pirs. Have you ever read the scriptures carefully? Like fools you mug up scriptures and vomit it everywhere. Instead of roaming with these pirs, you go back to your home and serve your old parents, take care of your family. You will gain more dua (blessings) than doing nothing and just chanting Allah…Allah.*

Villagers who were around when this episode took place were silent spectators, and no one came in support of either of the parties. But on several occasions, even after months in private discussions several villagers said that they supported Akhtar's argument and were happy to see someone confronting the *pirs* openly. The dissent against religious authorities need not always acquire religious language for an effective protest. Elsewhere, I have discussed how Muslims from *kasaipara* have renamed their locality as *majherpara* and have avoided using the road to bus stand that goes crisscrossing the *pir* para. Similarly, the protest organised against Left Front led panchayat demonstrates how protests and language of dissent uttered by Muslims can be free from the metaphors of Islam. This shows how religion has undergone changes in modern times, where it has been de-sacralised from traditional social institutions but has been simultaneously materialised in several other aspects of our social life.

What follows from this discussion is that 'being a Muslim' is an act embedded in specific context and conditioned by the situation in which Muslims display a diverse relationship with Islam. In everyday life various identities are integrated together along with the religious identities of people from Muslim background. Therefore, 'being a Muslim' is a

cultural construct in which religion is an important but not the only signifier. To emphasize a single way of self-fashioning of subjectivities is a subjective bias. As an act of distinction, it fortifies the notion of social exclusivity and feeds identity politics. It attempts to mask other possible ways of 'being a Muslim'. In this pretext, objectification of religious consciousness does not lead to the process of homogenisation of identities. On the contrary, it has led to the emergence of multiple voices, all claiming for authenticity.

The concept of polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam attempts to grasp the complexities involved in 'being a Muslim'. It does not ignore Islam as an important qualifier in the lives of the Muslims; neither Islam it privileged over other determinants of the everyday life of Muslims. Focussing on everyday life it tones down Muslim exclusivity and views 'muslimness' as a dynamic and socio-historic construct. Muslims in their everyday life can be studied just like any other communities. To de-exceptionalise the study of Muslims and to unpack the complexities involved in construction of Muslim subjectivity along with explorations in multiple ways of 'being a Muslim' is a methodological necessity. 'Being a Muslim' has an enmeshed character whereby different aspects of everyday life get entangled with the struggle on behalf of Muslims to produce themselves as Muslim subjectivity. Islam thus, is an important but not a deterministic signifier.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Let me start the concluding remarks with the question, that motivated this ethnographic inquiry and kept coming repeatedly at various junctures of this study – how to study Muslims and their relationship with Islam. In recent past, there has been a considerable shift in the ways anthropologists/sociologists engaged with this question. The shift towards various aspects of Muslim communities with the focus on their everyday life is an important move in this respect. The important question today is not what can be an anthropology of Islam, but how to study the diverse relationship that Muslims maintain with Islam in a variety of contexts. The focus is now on - how do we understand everyday practices of Muslims in various locations and situations of everyday life with reference to their understanding of scriptures. There cannot be a single methodological approach to it, but let me seek this opportunity to highlight some of the important landmarks in this field of study.

One of the major shifts was the break from orientalist portrayal of static, unchanging and essentialised character of Muslims and the social institutions to which they are associated. It has two important dimensions. First, the static portrayal of Muslims leads to construction of stereotypes, which is also indicative of the power relations embedded in it. To unpack this power relationship can be an important contribution on the part of any anthropological/sociological inquiry. Secondly, focussing on Muslim exclusivity either in the form of anthropological/sociological gaze or in the form of uncritical self-portrayal of Muslims obscures the real picture and supports the logic of difference and identity. As Azmeh (2009) points that the logic of difference is not boundless. It is primarily political and performative but, not substantive in nature. Important here is to understand how we

understand culture and engage with history. To contextualise the ideas and practices and to see them as shifting categories open to be influenced by historical forces amidst spatial contingencies can be a way out from an unchanging, timeless and stereotyped portrayal of Muslim communities.

Normative and moral considerations influences our everyday practices. The relationship between ideas, as enshrined in the scriptures and the ways in which it is followed provides us with a rich avenue to understand diversity within the Muslim community. The diversity in religious practices raises certain important methodological questions which are related to the criteria of classification of Islam. From the religious point of view, as a monotheistic religion with a written scriptural source, Islam contains universalistic message which are binding on Muslims. How then can we comprehend the diversity in practices among Muslims living in different socio-political and historic contexts? This question has divided our approaches in terms of binaries of – authentic, textual or theological Islam vs lived, local and folk Islam. The former remains the area of inquiry for theologians and *Islamologists*, who deal with texts, while the later remains the domain of anthropologists. Binaries can act as conceptual baggage which in turn freezes the meaning and may exhaust any other possible outcomes or interpretations (Ahmad 2004). In recent years there has been a tendency among the anthropologists/sociologists to engage with the foundational texts of Islam and to focus on how they have been interpreted in different time and spaces. One of the ways to capture this diversity can be through the critical understanding of the notion of 'roots and routes' (Gottschalk 2004). He argues that the prevalent understanding of 'roots', as point of origin of any tradition, and 'routes' as the path taken or the process by which a tradition is carried forward in time and space, lead us to the dichotomy of core/centre vs periphery. Such binaries are not free from power relations, where core/centre is privileged as authentic and

periphery/marginal is relegated as marginal, inauthentic and aberrations. How justified is it for any anthropological/sociological inquiry to begin with religious practices of any community as inauthentic, aberrations and marginal. Gottschalk (2004: 16) provides a different viewpoint where 'roots' and 'routes' can supplement each other to provide a three dimensional perspective by linking the diachronous view with the synchronous view of any religious tradition. We can extend this argument with the use the notion of embedded character of any tradition or a religious community (Jairath 2011) to get a wider picture of this phenomenon. Therefore, following Gottschalk (2004) a comprehensive three dimensional perspective to study a tradition and its relationship with any religious community may include the following steps. First, it may study the historical context in which an idea or a tradition emerges. Second, it may focus diachronically on the routes through which the tradition travelled geographically underwent historical shifts in its meaning and practices across the geographical expanse. Third, it may include multiple identities and the diverse levels of self-expressions where none is privileged over the other. And lastly, the inquiry should include the inter-relationship of members of a community with the members of other communities who share the cultural, historical and the geographical identities together to a greater extent. This perspective can also be extended to include the realm of ideas, where ideas that emerge in one context, and can get inter-related and meshed up with ideas of other streams and take different forms in other contexts and times.

Beyond the binary of Sufism vs Islamic reformation

This thesis attempts to question certain binaries associated with the study of Muslim communities and unpacks the power dimensions entwined with it. As for example, let us reflect on the binary of Sufism and Islamic reformation. Sufism is generally seen as a set of heterodox religious practices in the discourses of Islamic reformation, and is

considered as un-Islamic by orthodox theologians. The heterodox nature of Sufi philosophy and practices relegates Sufism to the realm of folk and local Islam. Scholars generally associate Sufism with lived Islam which is considered as tolerant, composite and peripheral in nature when compared to the claims of orthodox Islamic reformist discourses. Any religious practice is embedded in the context in which it evolves and, Sufi practices are no exception to it. Sufism too is much influenced by the historical and global forces of reformism and puritanism which emerged in the historical context of colonialism and religious reformation in late 19th and 20th century. The Sufi order of *Furfura shareif* (also known as *silsila Furfura shareif*) emerged in early 20th century. The practices associated with this order like prohibition of Sufi music, kissing the grave of the saint, lighting a candle before it, offering *chadar*, flowers and other products or prohibitions on doing *sajda* (prostration) breaks the stereotypical image of other Sufi orders in Indian subcontinent. By placing the ideas behind *silsila Furfura shareif,* we see how historically the stream of Sufism got intertwined with the Islamic reformist ideology in last two centuries. Important here is to understand the relationship between the socio-political contexts and the intellectual traditions in which any idea or a stream of thought emerges or is evoked to achieve certain ends. We therefore, see how the reformist ideas of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) emerged in a particular socio-political context, which was revived and further developed by Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) in another context and later carried out by his followers in a totally different context. Important here is to recognise the major shifts that the reformist ideas underwent amidst continuity in due course of time in different context. The practices behind the order of *Furfura shareif* reflect the creative zeal of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939), who reformulated the idea of Sufism by incorporating some of the prominent ideas of Islamic reformism of his time which can be seen as one among the many manifestations of the ideas of Shah Waliullah

(1703-1762). Therefore, the ideas and practices behind the order of Furfura *shareif* point towards the diversity that exist within Sufism and it further destabilises the sharp distinctions between Sufism and Islamic reformations in terms of binary oppositions.

Mapping the everyday life of the contemporary *pirs* of Furfura *shareif*, we have seen how the exclusivist and reformist ideas of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) before Independence was toned down into accommodative frames promoting social harmony, in a different socio-political context of Independent India by his descendants. In this regard, we can place the *wasiyatnama* of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) as a product of the time when it was written. The exclusivist and communal overtones in the *wasiyatnama* can be seen as a reflection of communal tension prevailing in pre-Independent Bengal. Focusing on everyday activities of the present custodians of the shrine of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1939), we see how the contemporary *pirs* of this Sufi order are adapting and accommodating themselves with modernity and market economy. Activities like, establishment of madrasas and Islamic charitable institutions, selling of amulets and other religious products, selling recorded sermons on CDs, their relationship with political parties in West Bengal, and their articulations pertaining to the developmental issues of the community that is casted with the rhetoric of religious piousness, demonstrates the accommodative shifts that the *pirs* of this order are struggling with in changing times. This underlines the important relationship of concept and the context. Social categories are not sociological constants. Here it is necessary to understand that the meaning of such categories always emerges from contestation at multiple levels conditioned in different socio-political contexts at different time periods.

Beyond textual understanding - questioning dominant conceptual frames

Muslims by virtue of following Islam are considered to constitute one homogenised group of the faithful, united by Islam. The global Muslim community – *ummah* is an over generalised term which in certain occasions helps in creating a homogenised picture of Muslims, where religious identity gains preponderance over other social identities. The concept of *ummah* can be treated as an example to demonstrate how a unified understanding of religion can distort our understanding of a religious tradition and community. A concept can provide us with explanations pertaining to any particular phenomenon, but it may also ignore other possible explanations. On the other hand, a concept may also represent the dominant version at the expense of the peripheral explanations. To question the basic premises on which a social concept is constructed and to trace the historical lineage whereby a concept acquires acceptable meaning can be an important exercise to uncover other possibilities associated with any social phenomena. My attempt in this thesis has been to question the neat, self-explanatory, patterned, static, and taken for granted conceptual frames through which Muslim communities are generally understood. The act of questioning becomes an important exercise in situations like studying Muslim communities, which is historically perceived as inert, unchanging and frozen entity leading to the construction of certain stereotypes. As Ahmad (2004) points that meaning associated with any social phenomena can be fluid and indeterminate. A concept being an abstract and objectified entity stabilizes the meaning by providing a finite and well bound frame which may overlook the continuous production of meanings and other possible interpretations.

Elsewhere in the thesis I have discussed the concept of *ummah* and illustrated how the meaning of *ummah* underwent historical shifts. A unified Muslim community is also questionable if we look at the prevalent social divisions among the Muslims which to a larger degree determine the social relationships like marital relationship and commensal

relationship among Muslims. Social stratification among Muslims points towards how Muslim community is divided into various social groups. It also provides us with an avenue to understand diversities that exist within the Muslim community. As a religion, Islam is an egalitarian religion and does not recognise any logic of stratification within. But, in practice we find Muslims are divided into various hierarchical social groups, based on their lineage and ethnicity. In Indian context, Muslims are broadly divided into *ashrafs*, *ajlafs*, and *azral* groups. But, this tripartite division cannot be generalised throughout the Indian sub-continent. There exists regional diversity that cut across these broad divisional patterns. As for example, in Furfura we find that the social group of *aimadar* play an important role in providing a basis for social divisions among Muslims. Importantly, it cut across the *ashraf-ajlaf* divide among Muslims, as some caste groups like *haldars* also claim *aimadar* status. The social category of *aimadar* emerged historically with the ownership of charitable land grants which in due course of time solidified as a social group with privileged status. This necessitates us to acknowledge the local contingencies that play important roles in the shaping of Muslim community. Furthermore, a detailed study of landholding pattern in the village when seen in relation to the educational standards and caste groups and economic status among Muslims, reflects the nexus between the religious, social and economic realms of everyday life. The social category of *aimadar* problematizes any general frame work to understand the stratification pattern among Indian Muslims, demands paying adequate attention to the regional and local contingent factors in shaping stratification.

The social division among Muslims may go beyond the social stratification prevalent in community. It may also include other socio-religious divisions like sectarian and denominational divisions which may operate like different social group restricting the degree of commensality in between them. As we have seen from the *wasiyatnama* of Abu

Bakr Siddique (d. 1939) and from articulations of contemporary *pirs* of the order, where they preach other Muslim groups like Shias, Kharijites, Qadianis and Wahhabis and several others as un-Islamic and ask their followers to oppose them and keep them away from spreading 'un-Islamic' messages. The sectarian and the denominational angle in understanding social stratification among Muslims also question the dominant and popular mode of understanding stratification among Indian Muslims in terms of *ashraf-ajlaf* divide. The conceptual framework of immanent critique and transcendental critique (Ahmad 2011) can be a useful tool to make sense of the denominational and sectarian divisions among Muslims. Ahmad (2011) defines the immanent critique as a form of critical inquiry which uses tenets, histories, principles and vocabularies internal to any tradition to judge and form opinion in its own terms. On the other hand transcendental critique evaluates the subject on the principles that exist beyond it. As a methodological tool, we can use it in a number of other occasions, including the ways by which any Muslim group separates itself from other Muslim groups. But, one sided emphasis on the notion of immanent critique faces the danger of becoming exclusivist and may support the politics of difference and identity. As Ahmad (2011) points that, who decides what is internal to any tradition is also a question of power relationship. Moreover, the shifting nature of the field makes it difficult for the notion of immanent critique to grasp the complexities that emerge out of interaction of a tradition with other factors. As a way out, Ahmad (2011) proposes a balanced approach by combining disciplinary interventions to identify the contextual underpinnings suggesting when and how the act of critique or formations of opinion becomes immanent or transcendental. This issue is dealt in the next section concerning the varied relationship between Muslim subjectivity and Islamic traditions.

The embedded character of 'Muslim' subjectivity

The construction of Muslim subjectivity and their agentive aspect is another important topic that is dealt in this thesis. My observations in this regard are against any neat, well ordered and one-sided understanding of Muslim subjectivity, whereby the agentive aspect of Muslims is understood within the frames of Islam. Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) deploy Foucauldian notion of ethics to understand the acts pertaining to cultivation of virtues and pious self-fashioning as instrumental for the construction of subjectivity. Their argument links subjectivity and construction of agency with the acts of ethical self-fashioning. This formulation of subjectivity and agency can be seen as an example of what Ahmad (2011) calls - the immanent critique. The position of Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) becomes problematic for following reasons. First, the sources of everyday ethics can be multiple and religion can be one among many other sources that can influence the constitution of 'self' in everyday life. As we have seen, Muslims in Furfura make a tripartite division between *farz, niyom,* and *parampara* which to a greater extent influences their life cycle rituals and everyday ethics. Similarly, the influence of a local Hindu deity – *lakhi* (Goddess Lakshmi) on everyday affairs of Muslims points to multiple sources of construction of ethical standards. Importantly, *farz, niyom* and *parampara* are not neat categories of everyday life that may provide an ethical standard for Muslims to prioritise and classify their actions accordingly. There exist a degree of ambiguity and contestation over these categories through which Muslims struggle to live up as 'good' Muslim. Second, what is perceived as ethical and religious by people in their everyday life may not be religious. At times certain universalistic ethical principles are claimed by people from any religious community as their own. Moreover, religious traditions may inhabit multiple other sources, which in due course of time may become integral part of religious worldview of its followers. Aslan (2005) demonstrates that a number of Islamic traditions, which Muslims consider to be an internal part of their

religion, are actually continuation of pre-Islamic religious practices comprising of Jewish and pagan lineage.

Pandian and Ali (2011) reflecting on the ethical traditions of South Asia argues that ethical traditions should be viewed in their historical and contextual specificity, paying adequate attention to the relationship between any tradition and the social processes like caste, class, regionalism, political developments and other social processes. The polymorphic sources of ethical traditions become important to be recognised in regions like South Asia, where several religious communities live together in close physical proximity and share similar history and cultural heritage. It becomes difficult to identify when a tradition of a religious community seeps into the worldview of the other and become an integral entity of their cultural stock (Das 2011). Therefore, the enmeshed everyday life of people in our contemporary world, marked by multifaceted globalisation, migration and a quest for a social identity necessitates a new methodological approach that goes beyond the confines of unidimensional approach of the immanent critique and embraces multiplicity, fragmentations and diversity.

The way ahead: beyond the binary of 'book view' and 'field view'

In recent years there have been attempts to fuse the 'book view' and the 'field view' pertaining to study of Muslim communities. But, these attempts are not akin to place an anthropologist and Islamologist or theologian face to face. On the other hand, there has been a greater degree of awareness and sensitivity among the anthropologist to pay attention to the religious and ethical dimensions of everyday life. As we have seen the conceptual categories like Islam *mondain* (Osella and Soares 2007), Bowen's conceptualisation of a new anthropology of Islam (2012) and the notion of systematicity and articulation (Marsden and Retsikas 2013), all point towards the attempts to

demonstrate the diversity exhibited by the varied role of Islam in the lives of Muslims living in different socio-political and historical contexts.

Beyond the frames of foundational texts of Islam and the diversity in which we can observe Muslims in their everyday life, these new approach attempts to understand how Muslims relate themselves with the foundational texts in different contexts. An important intervention here can be not to restrict our study of Muslims in their everyday life within the frames of Islam, but to explore the horizons where Muslims go beyond Islam. The notion of polyphanisation and transphanisation of Islam can be seen as a step taken in this regard. As conceptual categories they try to capture the multifaceted manifestations of Islam in everyday life of Muslims, but it does not restrict itself to understand Muslim subjectivities within the boundaries of Islam. Rather, it tries to capture the diverse ways by which Muslims transcend Islam on numerous occasions in their everyday life and yet may produce themselves as Muslims. It is important here to distinguish Islam (which is a religious category) from notions of being a Muslim (which is a cultural category). There may be deep overlap in between the two, but none overshadows the other completely. I will like to situate the study of Muslim communities within the inter-sectional zone representing the enmeshed character of our life, where one cannot discern the boundaries between the multiple social factors, which are in the state of flux in our everyday life.

The present study suffers some shortcomings. Some of them are as follows - the feminine voice is entirely absent in the ethnographic details, it is silent on the role of Furfura *pirs* in Bangladesh which has not been studied, it does not provide any descriptive overview of wider political processes and its impact in West Bengal and it does not deal adequately with the interactions between the religious authorities of the shrine and the organised political parties in Furfura. These shortcomings may lay the foundations for future inquiries. Yet, the present study attempts to provide a contextually contingent view to

study Muslims in all their complexities. It attempts to highlight that just like any other social categories; religion (Islam in this case) is always in the state of flux. Meanings therefore, are functions of interpretation, which acquires its significance in relation to other social factors and situations. They undergo shift, they are fluid and are contested across time and space. To freeze the meaning and bound it with any particular essence, represents the power relationship rooted in the social process through which meaning is solidified in a particular way. Lastly, this study also attempts to demonstrate that the forces of modernity have reconfigured Islam in a different ways. At one end, we find fragmentation of religious authority (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996) whereas, on the other end we find consolidation of certain cultural traits of everyday life like a particular way of dressing, or particular type of food, or behaving in a particular way in social life, into a uniform perception, constituting Islam[1]. Several social and technological factors are responsible for these simultaneous acts of fragmentation and consolidation in the lives of Muslims. We need to be aware of this process while studying Muslims in their everyday life and it requires a careful approach to understand the process through which cultural modes of being are transformed into religious modes of being. To understand the polymorphic and embedded nature of religious practices of Muslims and to situate Muslim subjectivity within the terrain of diverse interaction of various social institutions including Islam and contingencies of everyday life is a central objective of this study. A de-essentialised understanding of Islam and a multifaceted portrayal of Muslim subjectivities is an important precursor to proceed in this endeavour.

[1] Ahmad (2011) also points to this simultaneous process of fragmentation and consolidation of Islam. But, my take is different from his to the extent that I identify the social process through which cultural traits among Muslims are increasingly associated with Islam. The social and technological factors play an important role in this process of consolidation.

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Appendeix - A

Selection of w*asiyatnamah* (will) of Abu Bakr Siddique (d. 1979)

1. The preservation of *Imam* is a very difficult job in our contemporary period. As Muslims we must stand to preserve *imam.* In this time of distress one must recite:

   - Kalima Toyaba – la illaha
   - Kalima Sahadat

Keep *imam* on these two *Kalima*. Don't believe anything except these. If anyone does any modification of these two *Kalima,* he is a *be-iman* and *kafir*.

2. Don't indulge in activities of *Hazir/ Nazir* of any live or dead *pir*. This leads to being *be-iman*.

3. Education, is essential for both son and daughter especially secular education including English. But, not at the expense of religious education by going to the madrasas and Islamic colleges. It is important to educate them with Hadith.

4. Instruction to parents, husbands, brothers and all male members of the family: please keep women of your family in *purdah*. They must be educated by qualified persons. Both of these are important to follow or else there will lead to sin.

5. Occupation of the individual should be *halal* and must be according to *Shariat*. Dress code, *roza* and *namaz* should be followed as per *Sunnat*.

6. Those who charge interest on loans are indulging in *haram*; whether to give money on interest or to take loans on interest for business – both are *haram*. One should not maintain any commensal relationship with those who takes or gives money on interest. Such persons cannot be his follower/*khalifa*.

7. Dowry is also a form of *haram*. If any of my followers / *khalifa* indulges in the practice of dowry by giving or by taking dowry, then others should not follow him.

8. Property should be divided among brothers and sisters as per Islam. If someone gets property out of fraud, then he should follow rectification measures through *namaz* and by *tauba*.

9. Muslims should not follow those, who do things contradictory to the *Koran*, *Hadith*, *fekah* and against his *wasiyatnama*.

10. Muslims should not help Hindus or participate in Hindu *puja*, *mela* or *kirtans*. Muslims should not eat with them and should not sell them stuffs like goat for ritual sacrifice, Bananas, sugarcane, milk etc. should not be sold to Hindus, which may be used for worshipping. Muslims should not send gifts to Hindus.

11. He advises people not to accept any *dawat.* (from Hindus).

12. Muslims should not to shave, or keep long moustache, French cut beard or fancy haircut. They should not wear dresses of others, or wear coat, tie, pants or any European dresses. They should dress according to the *Sunnat* and wear skull cap. Dresses that can be worn are skull cap, *lungis*, *pyjamas*, long kurtas, turban, *achkan*, *chonga* etc. They should not wear dresses the way a Hindu does.

13. Muslims should not to play- cards, chess, football, cricket, horse race, bull fight or any other type of fight. They should avoid such events. But for self defense one can go for horse riding, archery, sword fighting and other arts.

14. Muslims should wear their dress below their knees. They should not play any musical instrument.

15. During marriage they should not burn cracker, they should not sing song, indulge in stick fighting etc. they should not waste money unnecessarily for show off.

17. If there are any differences between *alims,* then they should sit together and settle their differences as per scriptures. They should present correct views to public. They should not fight in public. It is very important for religion that *alim samaj* should forget their respective differences for community.

18. Muslims should not believe in rumours about any religious views given by any *alim* unless the person have listen it personally, or seen it as written document by that *alim*. *Alims* and *pirs* should be careful as Satan is alive and he will always try to antagonise *alims* and *pirs* against themselves.

19. Any forms of songs are *haram.* But *ghazals* praising the Allah and *rasool* are allowed. However it should be without *rag-ragini* (instruments).

20. Muslims should not take money from others who have amassed money by unfair means.

25. There is no concept of *gaddinashin* in my silsila.

26. *Isalle Swawab* should be celebrated on 21st, 22nd, and 23rd of the *falgun* month of Bangla calendar. It is not any type of *urs*. During this occasion there is *dawat* to all including learned men for *uwaj*. It can be an occasion to sort out the differences between *ulama*. It is an occasion for the remembrance of the Prophet, all *aluiya* and all Muslims for peace of their soul. It is not *urs*. Any Muslim can organise it. However, this is not for personal benefits and greed. People should not show off anything by organising this *mehfil.*

27. One should avoid spurious *pirs* who organise *urs* etc. on *purnima, amavasya* or death anniversary of *pirs*. The shrines where j*amiyat namaz* are organized and women folk are allowed constitute *haram*.

28. Muslims should not conduct *dhikr* at such places. *Dhikr* which interrupts sleep of a man are spurious. Such *Dhikr* also interrupts recitation of *Quran* or *namaj*.

31. Animals slaughtering should be done as per *sunnat* of Prophet Adam. Those who oppose this are against the *sunnat* of Prophet Adam. Keep distance from them.

32. Those who oppose eating halal beef or food are against Quran.

33. Various law schools and sects like *Shia, Rafiji, Khariji* etc, *aquida* are *haram*. There are four law schools which are genuine and one should not discriminate in between them. They are based on the Quran *shareif, Hadith shareif* and *Fekah shareif*. *Fekah sharif* is a translation of *quaran* and *hadith sharif*. Anything which is not clear in *Quran* and *Hadith sharif*, it is explained in *fekah sharif*. Those who will not follow any of these four *majhab* are *Kafir*.

34. There are three types of *Sunnat- Sunnat Nababi, Sunnat Sahabi, Sunnat Ummat.* There exist a hierarchy among the three *Sunnat*. It deals with what is obligatory and what is optional.

35. Doing *quyyam* in *milad* is *Sunnat Unmat*. One should not be forced to stand up or sit down while doing this. If anyone recites *taulud Shareif*, then he should not be forced to get up. There should not be any partisanship in the community for such small issues.

36. Maintain distance from Hindus. Remember their *halal* is our *haram*.

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