

**FROM SPECTRAL TO HYPERVISIBLE: THE CULTURAL
PRODUCTION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN
THE INDIAN PUBLIC SPHERE, 1992-2024**

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**From Spectral to Hypervisible: The Cultural Production of Muslim Women in
the Indian Public Sphere, 1992-2024**

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**From Spectral to Hypervisible: The Cultural Production of Muslim Women in the Indian Public Sphere, 1992-2024**” being submitted by **Shyista Aamir Khan** to Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a bona fide record of the research work done by her under our guidance and supervision. In our opinion, the thesis has fulfilled the requirements and has reached the requisite standard for the submission relating to the degree. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Shyista Khan

Abstract

The thesis explores Muslim women's participation in the public sphere from the 1990s to the present. It examines their transition from non-vocal participants to articulating their aspirations and asserting agency. The work shows how Muslim women claim their right to speak in the public sphere and reclaim their agentic sovereignty. Their assertions are accompanied by new forms of expression and articulations that contribute to a new language of resistance in the public sphere. This newly acquired confidence by Muslim women in the public sphere poses a challenge to the stereotyped understanding of marginality. It indicates that their concerns and aspirations are very different from the historically perceived concerns of Muslim women in the dominant public sphere. The challenges encountered in speaking indicate their marginalized status. The regulatory mechanisms controlling the speech/act of Muslim women comprise discursive violence, denial of choices, conditional access to social and political mobility, and promotion of exclusionary politics. Biases, prejudices, and stereotypes are created and reproduced, culturally and socially, to undermine the legitimacy of their voices. There are multiple ways in which they are 'othered' and 'violated.' I focus on the cultural production of Muslim women to demonstrate that literary and artistic expressions offer significant sites for studying the cultural production of stereotypes.

My work further demonstrates how the inclusion of non-literal forms enriches feminist epistemology about the conditions of marginality and recovers the agency of silent participants. The unchallenged importance given to the speech act in the public sphere undermines non-verbal expressions of the underprivileged. At the same time, one must note that hegemony often operates through signs and symbolic expressions in the public sphere, where many dominant meanings are asserted and communicated without naming them. The domination of such hegemonic discourses can only be pierced through an alternative transcoding of meanings. These alternative articulations are communicated through intimacy, intersectional alliances, and visual practices in the public domain.

सार

स्पेक्ट्रल से हाइपरविजिबल तक: भारतीय सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में मुस्लिम महिलाओं का सांस्कृतिक उत्पादन, 1992-2024

शोध प्रबंध 1990 के दशक से लेकर वर्तमान तक सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में मुस्लिम महिलाओं की भागीदारी का पता लगाता है और गैर-मुखर प्रतिभागियों से लेकर अपनी आकांक्षाओं को व्यक्त करने और एजेंसी का दावा करने तक के उनके संक्रमण की जांच करता है। यह कार्य दिखाता है कि मुस्लिम महिलाएँ सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में बोलने के अपने अधिकार का दावा कैसे कर रही हैं और अपनी एजेंटिक संप्रभुता को पुनः प्राप्त कर रही हैं। उनके दावों के साथ अभिव्यक्ति और अभिव्यक्ति के नए रूप हैं जो सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में प्रतिरोध की एक नई भाषा में योगदान करते हैं। सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में मुस्लिम महिलाओं द्वारा अर्जित यह नया आत्मविश्वास हाशिए पर होने की रूढ़िबद्ध समझ के लिए एक चुनौती पेश करता है और यह दर्शाता है कि उनकी चिंताएँ और आकांक्षाएँ प्रमुख सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में मुस्लिम महिलाओं की ऐतिहासिक रूप से मानी जाने वाली चिंताओं से बहुत अलग हैं। बोलने की प्रक्रिया में आने वाली चुनौतियाँ उनकी हाशिए की स्थिति को इंगित करती हैं। मुस्लिम महिलाओं के भाषण/कार्य को नियंत्रित करने वाले नियामक तंत्रों में विवादास्पद हिंसा, विकल्पों से इनकार, सामाजिक और राजनीतिक गतिशीलता तक सशर्त पहुँच और बहिष्कार की राजनीति को बढ़ावा देना शामिल है। पूर्वाग्रह, पक्षपात और रूढ़िवादिता सांस्कृतिक और सामाजिक रूप से बनाई और पुनरुत्पादित की जाती है, ताकि उनकी आवाज़ की वैधता को कमज़ोर किया जा सके। मैं मुस्लिम महिलाओं के सांस्कृतिक उत्पादन पर ध्यान केंद्रित करती हूँ ताकि यह प्रदर्शित किया जा सके कि साहित्यिक और कलात्मक अभिव्यक्तियाँ महत्वपूर्ण स्थल प्रदान करती हैं जहाँ रूढ़िवादिता के सांस्कृतिक उत्पादन का अध्ययन किया जा सकता है। मेरा काम आगे यह दर्शाता है कि कैसे गैर-शाब्दिक रूपों का समावेश हाशिए की स्थितियों के बारे में नारीवादी ज्ञानमीमांसा को समृद्ध करता है और मूक प्रतिभागियों की एजेंसी को पुनः प्राप्त करता है। सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में भाषण अधिनियम को दिया जाने वाला निर्विवाद महत्व वंचितों की गैर-मौखिक अभिव्यक्तियों को कमज़ोर करता है। साथ ही, किसी को यह ध्यान रखना चाहिए कि सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में अक्सर आधिपत्य संकेतों और प्रतीकात्मक अभिव्यक्तियों के माध्यम से संचालित होता है, जहाँ कई प्रमुख अर्थों को नाम दिए बिना ही मुखर और संप्रेषित किया जाता है। ऐसे आधिपत्यपूर्ण प्रवचनों के वर्चस्व को केवल अर्थों के वैकल्पिक ट्रांसकोडिंग के माध्यम से ही भेदा जा सकता है। इन वैकल्पिक अभिव्यक्तियों को अंतरंगता, अंतर-संबंधी गठबंधनों और सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र में दृश्य प्रथाओं के माध्यम से संप्रेषित किया जाता है।

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Introduction

The thesis “From Spectral to Hypervisible: The Cultural Production of Muslim Women in the Indian Public Sphere, 1992-2024,” examines Muslim women’s participation in the public sphere through their articulations and voices from the 1990s to the present. This thesis explores the mobility of Muslim women and the anxiety it generates in the contemporary public sphere. The tension in the public sphere caused by the participation, articulations, and representations of Muslim women provides a space for investigating the politics embedded in the very praxis of the public sphere in India. This space becomes a site to question constructions of marginalities, highlight the reiteration of existing power relations in new ways, and to interrogate the very concept of Indian womanhood as an exclusive category. My thesis further illustrates how these hegemonic practices disrupt the level playing field in the mainstream public sphere, violate the egalitarian principles enshrined in the Constitution, and reinvigorate existing power relations between the majority and minority communities. Therefore, the cultural production of Muslim women in the public sphere examined in this thesis does not entail a conventional understanding of Muslim women as passive and non-agential beings; instead, it locates them as political subjects in a public sphere dominated by neoliberalism and communalism.

In doing so, the thesis highlights challenges Muslim women face in the form of cultural and discursive regimentation that informs the concepts of the nation and Indian womanhood. Their articulations are systematically excluded from the public sphere in ways that disrupt the exercise of agency. This research foregrounds the strategies adopted by Muslim women to critically confront these disruptions and claim legitimacy in the public sphere. Critical strategies accompanied by new forms of expression and articulations in Muslim women’s

writings strengthen a subaltern counter-public within the mainstream public sphere. Muslim women's occupation of this new counter-public space challenges the conventional understanding of marginality as it offers a nuanced engagement with essentialist discourses that shape their selfhood and subjectivity. Their writings flag how biases, prejudices, and stereotypes are created and reproduced, culturally and socially, to undermine the legitimacy of their voices. There are multiple ways in which they are 'othered' and 'violated.'

The examination of mainstream public perception about Muslim women, shaped by media images and other cultural prejudices, unravels the construction of images and uncovers linkages that magnify, distort, or reiterate these images. The images stereotype 'Muslim women' as helpless, backward, and uneducated and portray them without any agency. These stereotyped images dictate that the narrative about Muslim women be framed in a formulaic manner. The discursive domination of these stereotypes overwhelms the social and political engagement of the larger public with Muslim women. Most of the research and theoretical work places the vulnerabilities of Muslim women within their religious and communitarian orthodox practices, while their 'other' vulnerabilities are not sufficiently investigated. This thesis critically analyses vulnerabilities embedded outside the paradigm of family and community and argues that these vulnerabilities obstruct Muslim women's social, cultural, and economic mobility. Therefore, the thesis contributes to a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of the vulnerabilities of Muslim women, which now challenge their position as equal citizens of the nation. I want to draw attention to how hate speeches, threats of physical harm, denial of employment, denial of civic amenities, and denial of the right to choose and protest jeopardize Muslim women's participation in the public domain.

I aim to foreground narratives about Muslim women as political subjects within the neoliberal economic framework amidst rising extremist politics. The research further affirms how neoliberal capitalism, communalism, and patriarchy collude to curtail the agency of Muslim

women. The interface of gender, community, and class highlights the complicated socio-cultural and economic situatedness of Muslim women. The location of Muslim women as the ‘citizens’ of the State demands a comprehensive understanding of their marginalized identity and the paternalistic role of the State. This relationship between Muslim women and the State has been a largely neglected area of research and study. They are, according to Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, “unequal citizens” whose role in the world’s largest representative democracy remains unrecognized and underrepresented. It is worth examining how these women make their daily negotiations with the state and whether their subjectivities transform while confronting the rise of extremist politics. From Shah Bano to Shaheen Bagh, the stories of/about Indian Muslim women articulate a deep political consciousness that needs to be marked in the public perception.

The thesis pertains to the following research questions:

1. How are Muslim women’s articulations and agency disrupted within the public sphere in India?
2. How do such disruptions impact the workings of the public sphere in India?
3. What strategies are Muslim women adopting to reclaim their agency and voice?

The multilayered complexity regarding the “situated knowledge” about Muslim women remains under-represented, and a highly selective narrative surfaces in political discussions. The positioning of Muslim women in the public sphere is constituted by both (hyper)mediated representations and self-articulations. To study the cultural production of the image of Muslim women and its subsequent crystallization, it is crucial to understand the production of knowledge about the social category of “Muslim women.” To do so, I look at how representation is informed by the social imaginary and the question of identity more closely.

This transformation from spectral to hypervisible over the last three decades, as the thesis title suggests, must be examined to assess Muslim women's agentic sovereignty. The word spectral conveys an incorporeal, invisible, ghost-like quality, denoting a presence that is either not persistent or can easily disappear. Spectrality marks the inconsistent presence of Muslim women in the public sphere, which is often deployed for political gains but can be strategically invisibilized. Thus, it emphasizes the disembodied presence of Muslim women devoid of agency. This presence exists as a prescribed script by the majority community in the public domain, rather than as a subject capable of agency. The political establishment employs this script to gain leverage for control and containment of the larger Muslim community. One such script is a narrative of rescuing Muslim women from their patriarchal community. Such narratives become more prominent through issues like Triple Talaq, restrictions imposed on wearing hijab, and the abrogation of Article 370. Despite the prevailing narrative promoting the need to rescue Muslim women, the state does not make any effort to rescue or address their oppression. Therefore, I use spectral presence to mark their superfluity and to indicate how dispensable they are in the public imagination and within the ambit of the nation. In addition, Jacques Derrida uses the concept of spectrality in the book *Spectres of Marx* to highlight the continuity of the past in the present. This critical use of spectrality to emphasize the persistence of the past (social and cultural) in the cultural memory of the present is explored in the thesis.

The "hypervisible" attested by their visual presence in the public domain entails political events that necessitated Muslim women's participation in the public sphere. The events marking the visibility of Muslim women comprised the Shaheen Bagh protest, the controversy regarding the Sulli/Bulli deals, and the Karnataka High Court judgment upholding the ban on hijab. These events led to widespread discussion about Muslim women and placed them at the centre of media attention. The surfacing of these issues attracted media attention and created a hypervisibility of Muslim women in the public sphere. The term hypervisibility was coined by

Saidiya V. Hartman¹ to “describe the experience of being black in relation to visibility and representation in society” (69). She explains how blackness is historically associated with hypervisibility as it places the individual on display in what Hartman calls the “afterlife” of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The expectation of black bodies performing in public continues to this day, making the performances of black people visible as part of a spectacle. However, according to Hartman, visibility, even hypervisibility, cannot guarantee emancipation or agency. Instead, it lubricates the performance in accordance with social expectations. Andreea S. Micu extends Hartman’s claim about the performance of blackness to the visibility of minority groups to assert that “... gaining visibility in society does not always necessarily mean gaining more power” (69), but he also argues that such visibility can be disruptive. The presence of burqa-clad women in public spaces or the circulation of their images through digital technologies does not indicate any sense of empowerment or attest to their presence in the public sphere. What is important here is the kind of meaning that is attributed to the presence of burqa-clad women. For instance, Tabassum Ruhi Khan in *Beyond Hybridity and Fundamentalism: Emerging Muslim Identity in Globalized India*, finds the presence of Muslim women (burqa-clad) in malls, marketplaces, and public spaces as a sign of empowerment assisted by the neoliberal push towards education and financial stability. Even though I disagree with Khan’s levelling of presence in public spaces with that of empowerment or agency, I agree with Micu’s argument that performances (through visibility) can be sometimes disruptive and not always conformist (8).

It is necessary to highlight the 1990s as a specific and new historical juncture to delineate the extraordinary communal polarization achieved in Indian society. The communally charged atmosphere that arose with the ‘Ram Mandir Movement’ worsened further after the Babri Masjid demolition (1992), rendering this category of Muslim women even more vulnerable

¹See *Performance Studies: The Basics*

than before. A series of large-scale acts of violence in the form of the Bombay riots (1992) and the Gujarat pogrom (2002) had further restricted Muslim women within the confines of the community. As a feminist researcher, I feel compelled to investigate whether the communal polarization has rendered this category of 'Muslim' women even more vulnerable than before and has interfered with their mobility in the public sphere. Contrary to the promise of secularism, a process of transformation of pre-existing religious differences into newer forms of communal polarization is underway, making religious markers more prominent than ever. The heightened level of communalization has made people much more conscious of their differential (minority/majority) identities and their associated disadvantages/privileges. These ascribed identities allow differential access to political power and other resources within the Indian polity. The religious/communitarian identity of Muslim women becomes predominant, making her other aspirations or claims subservient to this larger marker of identity.

The 1990s are also significant, as they mark the beginning of neoliberal policies and the opening of the economy to foreign capital, which would transform India's economic, social, and cultural landscape for years to come. It is imperative to investigate how the public sphere in India has been reconstituted both by communal polarization and economic liberalization during the time frame selected for this study, i.e., the 1990s to the present. I attempt to understand how this reshaping of the public sphere has impacted the emerging subjectivities of Muslim women and influenced their self-articulations. The issue I explore is whether the reconstituted public sphere presents itself as a more enabling or disabling space for Muslim women (and by extension, other marginalities) to realize their potential and agentic sovereignty. More importantly, this thesis draws attention to how the marginality of Muslim women has become more pronounced in the public sphere in the 2000s. The collusion of neoliberal economic forces with established structures of patriarchy and communalism fosters further marginalization of Muslim women. Global capital flows have provided more opportunities for

self-realization and self-actualization, promising equitable opportunities for all. Whether this neoliberal promise is also extended to the occupants of marginality or whether the hierarchical structures of power are merely replicated in neoliberal regimes requires examination.

Research Gap

Even though substantial research is available on Muslim women, it does not pertain to the representation of Muslim women in the popular cultural imagination of the nation. One of the goals of this research is to develop an understanding of the exclusionary politics embedded in popular culture. There is a significant gap between the representation of Muslim women in popular media and the academic research on the community (contributed by fact-finding committees, sociologists, ethnographers based in academia, NGOs, and other mass-based organizations). Most of these academic works deliberate upon the economic disenfranchisement and the political invisibility of Muslim women. However, most of these works do not address the politics of representation embedded in the literary, artistic, and cultural narratives that shape public perception through these representations. The popular discourse in the media about Muslim women affects their mobility in the public sphere. It is extremely important to investigate the construction of these images and uncover linkages that magnify, distort, or reiterate these images. Through my investigations of the cultural production of Muslim women, I demonstrate that literary and artistic expressions offer significant sites where the cultural production of stereotypes or (even majoritarian fantasies) can be studied. Such a study of popular cultural productions also reveals the processes through which stereotypes can crystallize. However, it must be noted that representations and images of Muslim women in popular culture are competently contested and challenged by Muslim women through new creative expressions, using unconventional genres and digital/visual technologies. A part of the project is to recover not just the lost voice of Muslim women, but also to excavate their deeply embedded political consciousness. It aims to unearth a new

language of resistance through visual storytelling, ekphrastic methodologies, and performing arts. My work is also invested in the peculiar marginality of Muslim women that has not been explored under the rubric of Indian feminism. This work addresses the question of gendered Muslimness to fill the lacuna both in Indian feminist studies and minority studies by radically transforming the understanding of the cultural representation of Muslim women.

Archive

The conceptual vastness of the public sphere demands a large canvas of diverse materials. It is also necessary to distinguish between the ‘print publics’ (depending on literacy) and many ‘non-print publics’ that might interact through visual and oral mediums. The interventions of the visual and the sonic are as crucial as the print culture in the public sphere. In this research, I have tried to include both textual and non-textual study materials ranging from fiction, cinema, and memoirs to journalistic writings, testimonial narratives, prison writing, life writings, poetry, and a study of a resistance movement. At the stylistic and formal level, my archive is highly diverse. I have tried to relate questions of form and style to the representation of marginal voices (certain forms and styles are more amenable to representations of marginality than others). The limited archive does not allow us to engage with the complexity of the caste equation within the category of Muslim women. Therefore, the position of *Pasmanda* Muslim women will remain unexplored. This archive consists of texts in English and Hindi, translated texts from Urdu, Gujarati, and Malayalam, audio-visual renderings of protest poetry, etc. I have translated the Hindi text as required. Besides literature, my archive includes events such as the Sulli/Bulli deals, the Karnataka High Court judgement on wearing hijab, and the Shaheen Bagh movement.

Most of the existing literature on the subject constitutes ethnographic and sociological work that foregrounds some of the concerns of Muslim women and captures the stories of

development, modernity, and a desire for integration with the mainstream. These works deliberate upon the economic disenfranchisement and the political invisibility of Muslim women. However, most of these works do not address the politics of representation embedded in the literary, artistic, and cultural narratives that shape public perception through these representations. The diversity of my archive demands an equally diverse reading methodology. The reading methodology deployed in the thesis is sensitive to the complexity of the public sphere, where the textual and the non-textual communicate differently. Different reading methods accommodate diverse participation registers, making the public sphere more inclusive.

Social Imaginary and the Public Sphere

I find the work of Serge Moscovici about the theory of ‘social representation’ and Charles Taylor’s concept of “social imaginary” instrumental in advancing the notion of ‘social representation’ in the public sphere. Moscovici, in his essay “Why a Theory of Social Representation?” argues that ‘social knowledge’ or ‘social categorization’ is a dynamic interplay of information gathering processes (such as the role of memory, perception, dissonance, etc.) and an embeddedness (of “conventions,” “values” or “myths”) in social psychology. The inflow of social psychology and cultural memory calls for replacing the term ‘social category’ with Charles Taylor’s “social imaginary.”

The term is used by Charles Taylor in his essay “Modern Social Imaginaries” to denote the emerging social sphere that led to the rise of Western modernity. He argues that “social imaginary” is “not a set of ideas, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society” (2). He elaborates on this sphere by focusing on “... the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images

that underlie these expectations” (23). He distinguishes between social imaginary and social theory to emphasize that “imaginary” is indicative of ordinary people’s practices of imagining/understanding their social surroundings that may not be expressed in theoretical terms but are manifested through images, stories, legends, etc. He also points out how a small group of people handles theory while these imagining practices are shared by ordinary people and therefore enjoy broader legitimacy. He also indicates the possibility of social imaginary “infiltrate(ing)” (24) social theory and vice versa.

The social imaginary is what Taylor calls a “repertory” (25) of accumulated actions/understandings that shape social practices and is distant from the immediate/particular reality. It is the repository of “unstructured” (25) and “inarticulate” (25) dimensions of social practices that inform the imaginary. It is important to note how people imagine their social existence with others within the social imaginary and to develop an understanding of the shared norms that underlie their “collective practices” (24). These practices not only inform our expectations of the “normative” (24) but are also implicit in it, “missteps” (24) that can invalidate a particular practice. He further states that, even though shared social and cultural understandings can shape public-sphere discussions, they remain part of the social imaginary. Taylor distinguishes between the “social imaginary” and “public sphere” as he attributes a critical edge to the public sphere, calling it a “mutation of the social imaginary” (85). The use of the word “mutation” suggests both alteration and continuity. The complex relationship between the public sphere and the social imaginary needs to be foregrounded to explore the participatory potential of the public sphere. The continued presence of the social imaginary in the public sphere, particularly in engagements with marginalized groups, shapes their representation.

It is crucial to understand how the accelerated hyper-nationalism, communal polarization, and global participation (facilitated by economic liberalization) reconstitute the functioning of the

public sphere in India. Habermas has popularized the public sphere theory in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Habermas captures the socio-economic transformations that signify changes in the meaning of the 'public.' He refers to the concept of the public sphere to demarcate that space where people can come together and discuss societal problems. The bourgeois public sphere can become a space for rational or critical political debate. These debates then lead to the formation of 'public opinion' that can further influence political action.

The Habermasian understanding of the public sphere, where debates are carried out on the merit of arguments rather than on the identity of the speaker, inviting open participation for everyone, is critiqued by many theorists who argue that this public sphere is a conclave of the educated and the literate and therefore is guided by privileges of class. Sandra Jovchelovitch points out specific drawbacks of the Habermasian public sphere as it is guided by the assumption that everyone has equal access to the public sphere, everyone is equal before the law, and everyone is valued for their arguments (entailing logic or rationality) rather than authority or power that they represent. While Jovchelovitch underlines the idealism beneath such a concept of the public sphere, she also remarks upon its lack of reality. Habermas's public sphere assumes an egalitarian society and does not account for various social exclusions. Since the neoliberal public sphere is guided by the privileges of class and factional interests, it is vital to investigate the role of identity within it.

The Question of Identity

In the world of representation, social identities are a way of categorizing people. Gerard Duveen, in his essay 'Representation, Identity, Resistance', problematizes the notion of identity by introducing the concepts of 'self' and 'social identity', where the 'self' refers to the individual 'I' and social identity to group membership. To further the argument, Duveen states

that this understanding about social identity and the relation of self to it facilitates a mechanism where “self becomes a function of the constructions of identity, rather than identity being a subset of the self” (258). It means that the individual’s understanding of the self is derived from “...his knowledge of his membership of a social group (groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (258). Therefore, the “Who am I?” question becomes subservient to social identity, marking a group membership. Here, Duveen argues that individuals/persons/agents come to realize who they are by recognizing their position within the “symbolic space” of their culture. This symbolic space, ascribed within a cultural context, is also subjected to hierarchical power structures.

If social identity is determined by group/communitarian identity, it is also circumscribed by relations of power negotiated by the group. Group membership can be enabling and disabling, depending on its proximity to the power center. Most social identity theory has been framed as a discussion of how identity is sustained or manipulated rather than on the content of these identities. It is necessary to investigate ‘what goes into this ‘identity’ and then explore its various manifestations.

For instance, what goes into the making of the identity of ‘Muslim women,’ and how do people perceive it? How do Muslim women adhere to the membership of this community? Is it even possible for them to reject these markers of identity and emancipate themselves? Is it possible for Muslim women to resist social identity and refuse to accept such an identity? And most importantly, how do others (non-Muslim/majority) perceive this identity?

I investigate the hegemony of social representation that burdens the identity of Muslim women in India, weighing down the voice of the individual Muslim woman by the monolith of ‘Muslim women.’ It is important to pay attention to the making of the identity of ‘Muslim women’ and determine what is entailed in adhering to the group membership of this communitarian identity.

The question of 'Muslimness' intensifies the degree of marginality for the bearer of the identity. For Muslim women, the overlapping structures of gender, class, and caste situate them at the intersectional axis of oppression. This social identity also interferes with their realization of the individualistic, entrepreneurial self. Perceptions regulated by the social imaginary compel a conflation between the social identity and the individual self. This agglomeration of identities, according to Muslim women's experiential narratives, produces anxiety regarding their subjecthood. At the same time, they also assert this 'essentialized' identity more prominently in contemporary writings. Most recent writings foreground this essential social identity for subversive purposes. Instead of attempting to exclude oneself from the group identity, it is asserted more prominently against the backdrop of majoritarian politics.

Methodology

The interdisciplinary nature of the archive used in this research required a more flexible methodology. Michael Warner, in his discussions of counterpublics, endorses a flexible methodology for analysing publics, given the temporality of their formation and the repository of earlier social ideas they carry. I have used textual analysis, close reading, cultural studies, ekphrastic methodology, critical race theory, and media analysis. To critically analyse how representation works in both the mainstream public sphere and subaltern counterpublics, and to engage with the emerging field of public sphere in India, it was essential to employ interdisciplinary methodologies. The aim of the methodology is to be inclusive.

Theoretical Framework

To elaborate on the workings of the public sphere, attention must be paid to the division of the public and the private in India to assess if the boundary has sharpened or blurred since the 1990s. A discussion of the public sphere further demands an investigation of both dominant/mainstream and marginal/subaltern voices, as well as the interrelationship between

the two. Since my study specifically engages with the voices of marginality, it is essential to discuss the conditions that make such articulations possible and the limitations under which they operate. The articulations and expressions are critical to the meaning they convey and the intention with which they appeal to the public. These attempts at communication can be interpreted in many ways, as they register complaints, resist, and counter the dominant propaganda about them. At the same time, they simultaneously critique the unequal power structures surrounding them. The thesis explores possible avenues for the articulations of Muslim women and for recognizing the counterculture they represent. I use the phrase ‘counter culture’ to mark Muslim women’s resistance to the dominant stereotypes and their attempts to resist discursive oppression in the public sphere. It is also a contribution to the standpoint epistemology embedded in the situatedness of Muslim women. I argue that this space for counterculture is achieved by creating what Laurent Berlant calls the “intimate publics” (*Intimacy: A Special Issue*, 2). The thesis examines the creation of intimate publics as a space where writing can be utilized as a mode of resistance and how this space can bridge broader intersectional solidarity. The structuring of socio-economic power relations is evident in Muslim women’s writing through the experiential lens of the individual. The personal experience of living with a Muslim identity is used to highlight the struggles of the many who share similar experiences of the derailment of their upward social mobility. The essentialism imposed on their identity is critically inverted in Muslim women’s writings. The intertwining of the personal and the political opens space for bonds of intimacy and intersectional alliances. Further, the thesis highlights alternative concepts of citizenship, in which performing acts to assert citizenship or showcasing belonging are privileged over documentary evidence. Such acts of performativity pave the way for a nuanced understanding of plebiscitary democracy, and mere presence in the resistance movement can be read as participatory. The thesis is more focused on how the public sphere operates in India and how the conceptual understanding of

the public sphere has transformed with the emergence of nation-states and the development of neoliberalism. The conceptual understanding of the public sphere draws from the works of Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. However, this quintessential idea of the public sphere becomes complex and layered as a stratified society evolves. The question of democratic representation in the public sphere acquires importance. Some of these questions are addressed throughout the thesis, drawing on the works of Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Lauren Berlant, Kimberle Crenshaw, Robert Hariman, John Louis Lucaites, and Jeffrey Edward Green.

Hannah Arendt theorizes the importance of public speaking in many of her works. Arendt has devoted a chapter, 'The Private and the Public Realm', in *The Human Condition*, and her preoccupation with the destruction of the public realm remains central to her understanding of the totalitarian state. Arendt discusses a neat bifurcation of the public and the private in the Athenian model of leading life in the *polis*. The *polis* denotes the public realm of words/speech and persuasion. For Arendt, the *polis* was the realm constituted by people coming together through their speech and action. Spatial boundaries do not denote it; instead, it is formed by "... the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose..." (198). This concept of the public realm formed by "acting and speaking men" is crucial to Arendt's understanding of the 'political.' Arendt explains how action and speech are conjoined in the Athenian political realm, as without a corresponding action, speech becomes only a medium of communication and without the accompaniment of speech, the actor is reduced to an automaton (178-179). In Arendt's political realm, speech and action can only take place in the presence of others. The communication with others is what makes the human condition of existence.

Therefore, for Arendt, the possibility of disclosing yourself can only be achieved through your speech and action in the political/public realm. Speech and action are part of what she calls

Vita Activa, a way of self-actualizing. The public realm "... was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were" (41). It allows the existence of a 'plurality' of human beings. However, Arendt points out that modern society is antithetical to the concept of plurality, "...for society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest..." (39). The destruction of plurality (having one interest and opinion) leads to conformism. In a nuanced reading of modern society, Arendt draws our attention to the blurring of the boundary between the public and the private, in contrast to the strict distinction between the two maintained in Greek society. The emergence of contemporary society coincides with the emergence of nation-states. The public and private categories get submerged in the conceptual category of the 'social.' The concept of mass society absorbs various social categories and family units within its fold and finally controls all its members. If the disintegration of the public and the private in modern society makes any possibility of political action redundant, as claimed by Arendt, what are its implications for the individual and his position in society?

Another point worth noting is the concept of equality in the *polis*, where men lived among equals or peers but displayed their differences/plurality through speaking. The realm of the household was different from the *polis*; it was here that power and violence were exercised on enslaved people. However, the realm of *polis* was the realm of equality, which meant neither to rule nor be ruled (32). Only speech could be used for persuasion. Arendt claims that modern mass society exercises equal control over all community members and thereby "equalizes" them (41). Thus, the concept of equality in contemporary society is based upon the erasure of individual differences, unlike the Athenian model, where equality was a precondition to exhibiting differences. Arendt's theorization of the political/public realm, highlighting its distinction from the private realm, her foregrounding of the performative power of speech, and

most importantly, her emphasis on the Athenian notion of equality necessary for maintaining distinction are significant contributions to understanding the functioning of the public sphere. She has not only proved to be an essential influence on Habermas's concept of the public sphere, but has also shaped the theoretical discussions on the public sphere.

Arendt's notion of *polis* demonstrates a sense of equality among its members, making speech possible for everyone. Thus, individuality is realised through speech acts; however, the polis is not equivalent to the public sphere. Since the *polis* was a place for political decision-making, the parliamentary government serves that role to some extent. Although the equalizing principle, i.e., the power to elect, is applied to everyone, it does not translate into equal access to the public sphere or equal access to decision-making. The concept of *polis* was operational in a largely unstratified society, but the contemporary South Asian field of the public sphere is layered with complexities of class, caste, religion, and gender divide. Therefore, the ideal functioning of the *polis* may be aspirational but not feasible. However, Arendt's insistence on speech-acts in the public realm and the performative power of speech have enriched the conceptual framework of this thesis. The performative power of speech is analysed both for its violence and destructive potential and its enabling effects. For Arendt, the performative power of speech can be harnessed to disclose a person's uniqueness and allow all members of the polis the potential to speak, mobilizing plurality. However, in contemporary India, the unequal power invested in the speech acts of the dominant group is often deployed to destroy the plurality and coerce a kind of homogeneity. Contrary to this, the power of the testimonial writings I have explored in the thesis derives from its ability to contest oppression and injustice, thereby maintaining the plurality in the field of the public sphere. Arendt's theorization of the destruction of the public and the private with the rise of the totalitarian state is necessary for our understanding of the public sphere in India. I have argued about the usurpation of the public/political realm and its substitution with agendas more suited to the fantasies of the

private realm within the social imaginary. The displacement of political concerns and the diversion of issues into the interior realm of faith and religious practices conflate the private with the political.

This preoccupation with public and private continues in Habermas. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas investigates various meanings of the 'public' till the emergence of the public sphere as a defined conceptual category in the eighteenth century. He reiterates the public-private distinction in Ancient Greek society and notes how it was erased in the Middle Ages. Habermas discusses the word 'public' and its subsequent transformation from antiquity to the eighteenth century. Habermas locates the origin of the phrase "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) in 18th-century Germany. The rise of mercantile capitalism led to the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in the century. It is a literary public sphere in which new genres such as pamphlets, satire, and essays cater to the needs of the mercantile bourgeoisie. The new economy led to the growth of urban centres, which agglomerated people in semi-private spaces of salons, cafeterias, etc. These spaces acted as suitable sites for the exchange of public opinion and the formation of consensus. Habermas associates these spaces (marketplaces) with civil society and family, and paradoxically calls them a sphere where "...private people come together as a public" (27). It is an intermediate space between the private realm of family and economy and the public realm of court and government. A critical rational space was developed to hold people in authority more accountable. However, Habermas observes an erosion of the bourgeois public sphere due to economic and structural changes in the twentieth century. These changes included a definitive blurring of the boundary between the state and society, leading to what Habermas calls "the refeudalization of society" (195), a phrase that indicates a return to state control of assets. The principles of the *laissez-faire* economy were now discarded in favour of protectionist policies, leading to the state's complete control of trade and commerce. With the simultaneous rise of

mass media and advertising, people are encouraged to believe they are expressing their political opinions through their consumption choices. Consequently, Habermas argues that the state treats its citizens like consumers. While mass media and advertising have replaced the public sphere and become thoroughly commercialized, turning the public into consumers, the private space is also undermined by the constant encroachment of the state through its social welfare policies.

Habermas is pessimistic about the public sphere being successfully replaced by mass media, as mass media is essentially a non-reciprocal platform. Neither radio nor television can engage in dialogue. Instead of a forum for critical debate, we get only an illusion of publicity. He argues that people are fed information through various media but do not engage, and this is consumption, not participation. Habermas claims that this consumption undermines the functioning of the public sphere as “The world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only” (171). Similarly, states learn to address their citizens as consumers instead of participants. Habermas calls this staging of political work through parliamentary procedures, “manufactured publicity” or “displayed publicity” (206). On one hand, more people are exposed to the public sphere, but their engagement with it is akin to consumption. The opening of new avenues of public platforms in the form of mass media (both print and digital) allows us to rethink the idea of the public sphere. In this thesis, social and print media are seen as part of the emerging public sphere where critical opinions are generated and some consensus is worked upon. However, my submission is that the literacy and competency required to participate in this emergent media space may be accessible to everyone. Contrary to Habermas, I see a potential for critical space in media but not so much in advertising. It is evident in the thesis that the machinery of mass media is used to propagate against marginalized sections, and concerted efforts are made to retain the hegemony of the dominant section. While Habermas claims the mass media (television and radio) as a space of non-engagement since it is non-

reciprocal, this thesis depends on a nuanced understanding of the public sphere in which mass media play a crucial role. The problem of non-reciprocity is addressed by the advent of social *media*, which opens space for dialogue and intervention.

Whether it is Arendt's Athenian polis model or Habermas's bourgeois public sphere of eighteenth-century Europe, the loss of the 'ideal' compels us to seek more sustainable models of the public sphere. Habermas's theory of twin structural changes brought into the public sphere, leading to its establishment and its subsequent disintegration, once when the mercantile economy governs the bourgeois trade relations and again with the emergence of the social welfare state, gives us crucial insights into the making and unmaking of a vibrant public sphere. However, Habermas has been critiqued for presenting a utopian model of the public sphere in his "inquiry into a category of bourgeois society." Nancy Fraser critiques the bourgeois claim to full accessibility of the public sphere, as stated by Habermas, and concludes that such a public sphere was exclusive as it was not accessible to women and "plebian men" on account of gender and property qualifications (118).

This thesis engages with the complex relationship between the public sphere and the questions of identity politics. The ideal Habermasian model, which relies on rational-critical debate focused on the validity of arguments instead of the speaker's identity, seems unattainable in a multiethnic society like India. The complexity of the public sphere is further heightened by the development of a neoliberal state, which initiates the withdrawal of social welfare mechanisms and deregulation of market forces.

The Question of a Stratified Society

Fraser contests the idea of a unified public sphere, as it cannot work in a stratified society. She offers a postmodern solution in the form of alternative public spheres and asserts the legitimate discursive claims of those who inhabit these alternative public spheres. Fraser terms these

alternative public spheres as “subaltern counterpublics.” These refer to “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses. Subaltern counterpublics permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (123). Fraser acknowledges that she has borrowed the concept of the ‘subaltern’ from Spivak and ‘counterpublic’ from Rita Felski and combined them to form her concept of subaltern counterpublics. Her contribution to the field underscores the limitations of the liberal public sphere, premised on the idea of people's common interests, while bracketing the inequalities among its speakers. The fallacy of common interest is a euphemism for majoritarian interests or the interests of the privileged. The interests of one group are often premised on the disadvantage of another. The marginalized, the less powerful, and the minority have an equal right to put forth their interests and needs. The bracketing of inequalities in the public sphere merely indicates a derecognition of disparities of class, caste, gender, religion, region, etc. To tackle such limitations, according to Fraser², a postmodern concept of publicness is required where either social inequality should be systematically eliminated to attain “participatory parity” (288), or the existence of multiple publics should replace a single public sphere. Fraser argues that “participation means being able to speak in one’s voice” (126) and she specifies this voice as encapsulating one’s cultural identity through a unique “idiom and style” (126). Therefore, we can conclude that speaking in the public sphere is a simultaneous act of performing identity. Foregrounding one’s identity without fear is of primary importance for this thesis. Whether it is Fraser’s multiple pockets of alternative spaces or Michael Warner’s counterpublics, all these spaces must establish communication with the mainstream/dominant public sphere, to press the need for a more egalitarian and democratic functioning of the mainstream.

² See Fraser, N. “Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere: Toward a Postmodern Conception,” in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, editors L. Nicholson and S. Seidman, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Warner further problematizes the concept of the ‘public.’ Warner defines the public as a “social totality” that can be organized as “the nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state, or some other community” (65). It can also be “autotelic,” that is, “a space for discourse organized by discourse” (67), a space that exists “by virtue of being addressed” (67). A public is also, according to Warner, “a relation of strangers” (74) united by participation. A public speech/address can be personal or impersonal; when an intimate detail is shared in public, it is also addressed to strangers. Warner claims that since a public is constituted by “virtue of address,” it requires attention. He clarifies further that a single speech/address cannot create what we call publics. Instead, it is a social space created by the existing repository of ideas/discourse familiar in the social imaginary and its circulation. Therefore, Warner’s public is as imaginary a community as Benedict Anderson’s “nation.” It is also limited by temporality as it is a temporary amalgamation and dispersal of people. To investigate the analysis of publics, he advocates “flexible methodology” (15).

Inspired by Fraser’s use of the term “counterpublics,” Warner defines it as conscious efforts by marginalized groups to constitute a space for critiquing power structures embedded in the mainstream discourse. Compared to Fraser’s framework of subaltern counterpublics, which apprise the public of marginalized groups’ needs and interests, Warner’s sees reflexivity as an essential part of counterpublics. Reflexivity entails strategies of dialogue, expression, and genres, formulated to counter and contest dominant discourses and expose their limitations and biases.

Therefore, my thesis examines self-expression among Muslim women, foregrounding their unique experiences as expressed through specific idioms, highlighting their peculiar positionality. Both the assertion of identity and the devising of a suitable methodology are evident in Muslim women’s writing explored in the thesis. Their writings are thus quite self-reflexive.

Communication and Counter-representation

Irrespective of the terminology, whether it is subaltern counterpublics or counterpublics, the need for an alternative arena of the public sphere is of utmost importance for articulating subaltern groups. However, I argue that it is more important to consider ways to establish communication with the dominant public sphere. It is only through communication that any contestation or counter-representation is possible. The thesis demonstrates how Muslim women's self-expression and representation contribute to the formation of subaltern counterpublics, challenging the hegemony of dominant discourse through their assertions. I propose three strategies to establish subaltern counterpublics. These strategies are used successfully in the selected texts of the thesis to the extent that they have the calibre to contest dominant narratives about Muslim women. Spivak's strategic essentialism, Berlant's intimate publics, and Hariman and Luciatas's insistence upon photographic/visual publicity are three potent strategies adopted by Muslim women to communicate their situatedness and limited mobility in the public sphere and establish a subaltern counterpublic. Although Fraser cautions against the domination of some groups within subaltern publics, it does not diminish the desirability of such publics. I have engaged with the internal contradictions of the subaltern counterpublics of the Muslim community, where the male members exercise their hegemony and control. Chapter 3 of the thesis highlights this internal contradiction and compels Muslim women to form their subaltern discursive space.

'Strategic essentialism' is a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in an interview with Elizabeth Grosz (1984), to refer to a political tactic or strategy employed by various minorities/subaltern groups to come together and form a collective to represent themselves and fight for their rights. This collective is based on their shared cultural, political, or gendered identity. Essentialism creates an expected image that may be very different from the subject's embodied experience. The subalterns/minorities/marginalized groups are often subjected to

essentialism to rob them of any real representation. Spivak's use of the word 'strategic' indicates the temporary nature of the concept's deployment. Spivak acknowledges that the 'category' or concept of 'essentialism' is problematic as it reproduces knowledge about the "Other," but it can be exploited to deconstruct essentialism. The use of 'strategic' is more a methodology for playing around with essentialisms, foregrounding them to contest the stigmatising discourse. Since ignoring essentialism within the dominant discourse is difficult, Spivak advocates exploiting these essentialisms to invert them. Every strategy opens new possibilities to counter essentialism. It works effectively in the field of representation, where one can occupy and invert these essentialisms. The performative strategy can attribute alternative meanings to the otherwise essentialist discourse. Strategic essentialism can become a performative instrument for Muslim women to counter bias and prejudices in the essentialising discourse around them.

Berlant's intimate publics foreground emotional attachment embedded in everyday life. They³ observe the emergence of intimate publics in women's culture in the US, promoted by women's magazines and consumerist culture, forming a collective of cohorts who share similar social experiences (*The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, 2008). They recognize the "circularity" (20) of intimate publics, in which intimate sharing promotes bonding only among group members, as this mediation fails to transcend the boundaries of group identities, making the intimacy insular. However, Berlant recognizes the "juxtapolitical" (10) or near-political nature of sharing intimacy in the public domain. Intimate writings can form bonds of belonging among people who share similar experiential realities in unprecedented ways and communicate through heightened emotions. The media of

³ They/Them are preferred pronouns for Berlant in professional life.

communication are emotion and empathy, yet these intimate/private feelings are shared in the public domain.

My claim in the thesis is that life writing as a genre exploits this intermediate space between the personal and the political and inaugurates the political dimension of the ‘intimate publics.’ I contend that intersectional alliances can puncture the insularity of intimate publics. Muslim women writers have produced life writings that share intersectional bonds with diverse publics. ‘Intersectionality’ is a term Kimberle Crenshaw uses. It refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations, such as race, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, etc., creating overlapping and concurrent forms of discrimination. It is an analytical framework that undertakes combined axes of oppression rather than taking them in isolation. The intersectional solidarity that Muslim women share with other marginalized groups broadens the conclave of intimate publics created through their writings. However, the real task is to leave this conclave. The potential of intimacy must be realised outside the group members and disrupt the hegemony of the dominant discourse through engagement.

Visual Practices and the Public Sphere

Another significant development in the concept of the public sphere is the shift towards visual publicity. This shift, as elaborated in chapter 5 of the thesis, is revolutionary because of its potential to represent the vernacular way of life. In the essay “Civic Sights: Theorizing Deliberative and Photographic Publicity in the Visual Public Sphere,” E. Cram, Melanie Loehwing, and John Louis Lucaites elaborate on how the visual has contributed to reshaping the public sphere. Now that images and spectacles function as a form of public address rather than as an addition to complement deliberative interaction, they refashion the relationship between the actor and the spectator. The advent of digital technologies, photojournalism, and selfie culture unlocks ways to understand what Jeffrey Edward Green calls “ocular democracy”

(7). The spectator now emerges as more than a passive audience for visual texts and practices. This reconfigures new ways of representation and inaugurates new practices of seeing to validate the spectator's standpoint. Social media allows the spectator to endorse or reject a particular representation. Using visual practices in the public sphere encourages what Green calls "plebiscitary democracy" (5). He argues that taking spectatorship seriously means respecting ordinary people's lives since they participate in political life mostly through spectatorship. Spectatorship can become a powerful tool in reflecting a collective expression of political will. However, it cannot replace political actions. The radical potential of the visual lies in its capacity to enable participatory space for non-textual participants. In this light, I have demonstrated how the visual aesthetics of the Shaheen Bagh movement have uncovered the participatory potential of the public sphere for marginalized sections of the public in India.

The attempt to create intimate publics and a shift to visuality are strategies of revising the concept of the public sphere to make it more inclusive. The power lies in the 'affect' that these attempts create. In *The Politics of Affect*, Brian Massumi emphasizes the importance of the "politicality" of the 'affect.' He clarifies that he uses the concept of 'affect' to discuss that "margin of manoeuvrability," the possibility of what can be done in every situation. This manoeuvrability can disrupt the dominant political discourse.

Most of the theoretical conceptualizations used to make my argument are rooted in the context of the Western world. However, I have found them helpful in exploring Muslim women's participation in the public sphere in India. I take my cue (to defend the use of Western theories for interpreting the public sphere in India) from Edward Said's "Traveling Theory" and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Globalectics: Theory and Politics of Knowing*, where both writers grapple with the concept of translation and adaptation of Western ideas in new socio-historical contexts. Edward Said's "traveling theory" refers to the transmission of ideas across different contexts and disciplines, highlighting how theories are reappropriated as they travel from one context

to another. However, Said is cautious about the impediments accompanying such travel since it “necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those of the point of origin. This complicates any account of the transplantation, transference, circulation, and commerce of theories and ideas” (226). I am aware of the “complications” of mapping the Habermasian public sphere as it existed in eighteenth-century Europe onto twenty-first-century India. We have yet to develop a public sphere theory in a highly stratified Indian society. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’O proposes revised reading practices to allow texts to engage in conversations between the local and the global. According to Ngũgĩ:

This involves declassifying theory to make it accessible—a tool for clarifying interactive connections and interconnections of social phenomena and their mutual impact in the local and global space, a means of illuminating the internal and the external, the local and the global dynamics of social being. (61)

Given these limitations, I argue that only a conditional import of theories is possible, and that theories evolve in response to the new social conditions. For instance, the problem of caste and communalism produces a very different ecosystem within the public sphere in India than what is imagined in the Western world. Therefore, the challenges faced by Muslim women differ.

Literature Review

A lot of work that engages with Muslim women primarily undertakes sociological inquiry into their marginalized existence. Some of the works take up the issue of communalization, which has gained momentum in the last few decades, and acknowledge the complexity of the challenges Muslim women face. Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon brought out *Unequal Citizens: Muslim Women in India* (2004). Hasan also wrote “Gender, Religion and Democratic Politics in India (1998-2004) as part of a project for UNRID, in which she talks about minority women’s rights and points out that Muslim women suffer from triple disadvantage: as members

of a minority community, as women, and mostly belonging to the economically poor class. Many other surveys, like the one conducted on Zakir Nagar, *Questioning the 'Muslim Woman': Identity and Insecurity in Urban Indian Locality* (2013) by Nida Kirmani, interviews like *Mothering a Muslim* (2017) by Nazia Erum, and travel writings by Anees Jung and Nighat Gandhi are in the public domain. Some of the recent works include *Beyond Hybridity and Fundamentalism: Emerging Muslim Identity in Globalized India* (2015) by Tabassum Ruhi Khan, *Working with Muslims: Beyond Burqa and Triple Talaaq* (2017) by Farha Naqvi, *Muslim Women Speak: Of Dreams and Shackles* (2018) by Ghazala Jamil and *Madrasas and the Making of Islamic Womanhood* (2018) by Hem Borker. However, all these works are ethnographic studies. These studies engage with Muslim women's contemporary aspirations and everyday negotiations within and outside their community. They foreground some of the concerns of Muslim women and capture the stories of development, modernity, and a desire for integration with the mainstream. Most of these works deliberate upon the economic disenfranchisement and the political invisibility of Muslim women. These ethnographic studies express concerns about Muslim women and draw our attention to their struggles to keep pace with 21st-century modern living.

These studies enrich this research by providing empirical evidence of the socio-economic context that constitutes the lives of Muslim women. All these sociological enquiries have helped my research work by posing a challenge to the homogenized image of Muslim women. However, a fissure exists between Muslim women who are the subjects of these ethnographical works and the image of Muslim women as it exists in the popular imagination circulated through media discourse. My work seeks to investigate this lacuna that pushes the representation of Muslim women towards an 'ascribed' identity, by 'ascribed' I mean the cultural and discursive construction of Muslim women in the social imagination. Most of these

works do not focus on the politics of representation or the cultural discourses circulated in the public sphere.

Some of the other works that have enriched my understanding of the context in which Muslim women are perceived, include *The Hijab: Islam, Women and the Politics of Clothing*, edited by P.K. Yasser Arefath and G.Arunima, *Gendering Minorities: Muslim Women and the Politics of Modernity* by Sherin B.S., and *Indian Muslim Women's Movement: For Gender Justice and Equal Citizenship* by Zakia Soman and Noorjehan Safia Niaz. For instance, most of the articles in the book *The Hijab: Islam, Women and the Politics of Clothing*, critically examine the judgment according to constitutional provisions under Article 25 and evaluate its commitment to it. P.K. Yasser Arefath⁴ engages with how various practices of “hijabing” (55) and “dehijabing” (55) are perceived around the world. Hilal Ahmed in the article “Politics of Hijab: A Note,” illustrates how the hijab controversy is used to define the idea of secularism in a particular way that amounts to cultural homogenization. Tanweer Fazal⁵ reads the ban as a violation of multiculturalism. G. Arunima, in her article,⁶ finds optimism in the girls' confidence and awareness regarding hijab. However, the focal point of my study was the violence implicit in legal discourse, pronouncements, and seemingly unharmed public notifications. Such pronouncements (like the hijab judgment) make access to education conditional for Muslim women, thereby stalling their upward social mobility.

I am also intrigued by the question that Sherin B.S. poses in her introduction, i.e., “Are Sharia and Islamic jurisprudence positing a different destiny for women in Islam as legal subjects of non-Islamic countries...?” (1). She explains how questions related to Islamic jurisprudence become central to some recurrent issues about Muslim women and the Muslim community in

⁴ Arafath, P.K.Yasser. “Hijabing, Re-Hijabing, and De-Hijabing: Women in Scarves and ‘Triple Humiliation’ in Post-Mandal India,” pp. 55-63

⁵ Fazal, Tanweer. “Of Tolerance and Tradition: Thinking Through Hijab and Beef Ban,” pp. 41-47

⁶ Arunima, G. “Hijab Ban and the Politics of Clothing in Contemporary India,” 64-70

India, like the issue of wearing hijab, triple talaq, and the case of the Uniform Civil Code. However, she draws attention to the alternate meanings of women's agency embedded in their daily negotiations within their religious practices, social positionings, and dealings with patriarchy. The unique archive studied in the book, as cultural texts (particularly the study of Beevi worship in southern Kerala), deconstructs the conventional notion of the archive. The book engages with the complexity of Mappila identity and successfully contests the idea of Muslim women as a monolithic category by enriching our understanding of regional and cultural specificities. Therefore, the unique position of Muslim women in Kerala cannot be compared to the position of Muslim women in northern India. I argue in my study that, despite the regional and cultural heterogeneity, there is a political category of 'Muslim women' in India where their religious identity overrides their other identities. My work engages with this category and examines its cultural production in the hyper-masculinist and communally polarised public sphere.

Muslims and the Media Images (2009) by Ather Farouqui does engage with the politics of representation and the stereotyping of Muslims by media in the wake of post 9/11 islamophobia, but does not deal with the precarious positioning of Muslim women. It discusses how the Muslim community has been targeted because of islamophobia and how their image has been typecast as violent and radical. This book gives us a glimpse into how media images are created and news items are sensationalized to impact the community's representation in the public sphere. Though the book has genuine insights about the communalization of 'representation', it does not discuss the impact of islamophobia, specifically on Muslim women. The complex positionality of gendered minorities in the public sphere requires academic attention. Most of these works do not address the politics of representation embedded in the literary, artistic, and cultural narratives that shape public perception through these representations.

Ghazala Jamil's book, *Muslim Women Speak: Of Dreams and Shackles*, raises some critical issues related to this research. She points out the inadequacy of research invested in Muslim women's epistemological inquiry (knowledge production about their conditions and contradictions) about their subjecthood. Secondly, she also points out that constantly essentializing their victimhood position denies them agency (xiii). By inadequate research, Jamil does not mean that research work has not been undertaken on the Muslim community. She implies that despite a considerable increase in research on Muslims, the narrative they produce is not "edifying" (5). Jamil draws attention to the political invisibility of Muslim women due to a refusal to "listen" (34) to their voice. Both listening and speaking are equivocated with representation in Jamil's work. The act of "listening" (34) constitutes an obligation on the part of the researcher to unfold the cultural context of his/her work. Drawing from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of subalternity, where Spivak explains that the condition of subalternity is constituted by the political inability to speak for oneself, Jamil argues that it is not the inability to speak but a refusal to listen. Speaking implies a capacity for self-representation that, according to Jamil, is compromised by others' lack of listening capacity. The refusal to listen decapacitates the speech-act of the subaltern. Jamil holds the researcher responsible for hearing and suggests self-articulation as a "narrative strategy" (23) for self-representation. The self-articulation by Muslim women is considered the only alternative to designating someone (academicians or researchers) as their representative. Her work presents life stories from 23 centres located in 12 states in India. Jamil participated in these workshops as a participant and observer, compiling Muslim women's articulations for the book. She also interpreted and theorized their experiences of everyday marginalities and violence in the book's first eight chapters. The placing of Muslim women as a "subaltern" is commendable since the political inability to speak or assert one's position renders Muslim

women invisible. This political inability of Muslim women to assert themselves is also the subject of my investigation.

While I agree with most of the assertions that Jamil makes, it becomes increasingly clear that her work subsumes the self-articulation of Muslim women. The positioning of Jamil-the researcher, as an interlocutor mediates the speech act of Muslim women through selection, revision, editing, showcasing, etc. These workshops are conducted in a safe, contained academic/sociological research environment, and the methods deployed reduce Muslim women to subjects to be studied by the researcher. It differs from taking a position or articulations made in the public sphere.

In contrast, my thesis engages with the problems of representation in the public sphere and examines the articulations of Muslim women as the public sphere operationalizes it. The word operationalize suggests both deterring and facilitating. This thesis explores the hurdles in the way of self-representation of Muslim women and demonstrates how life writing as a genre can enable the speech act for the oppressed.

Another work, *Beyond Hybridity and Fundamentalism: Emerging Muslim Identity in Globalized India* by Tabassum Ruhi Khan, is an ethnography of Muslim youth in Jamia Nagar that offers a new perspective on mapping “Indian Muslim youth’s subjectivities” (3). Khan emphasizes the idea of “convoluted modernity” that transcends the binary of fundamentalism and hybridity. She presents an emergent identity of the ‘self’ and ‘community’ in globalized India, highlighting their desire for self-actualization and integration with the mainstream. She contributes a crucial study of post-liberalization India that facilitates an easy traffic between the ‘local’ and the ‘global,’ refashioning the identities of the ‘self’ and ‘community.’ Neither can the emergent identities be categorized as representing ‘fundamentalism,’ ‘backwardness,’

'regression,' or 'rigidity,' nor can they represent an identity solely symbolized by hybridity or alterity.

Khan situates the emergent subjectivities of Muslim youth within the consumerist culture of neoliberalism that accompanied the economic liberalization of the 1990s. She explains that economic liberalization comes with a surge of Western modernity that is not solely borrowed from Western countries but also displays new models of consumerist culture and material wealth, as seen in the luxury living of countries like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The new geographies of material consumption simultaneously promote themselves as models of Islamic life. Khan explains how these new awakenings promote sensibilities distinct from the postmodern concept of hybridity of the East and the West, as well as the conservatism of the older generation. Khan discusses this as "convoluted modernity" (43). To define this state of fluidity, she develops the concept of "convoluted modernity" to express the divergent multicultural influences upon the subjectivity of Muslim youth. She claims her research envisages a modernity "marked by social and political inequalities, but enthused by new flows of ideas, images, and opportunities for self-creation and imagination" (41). She explains how this neoliberal subjectivity of self-actualization is extended to the marginalized section of society (i.e., the Muslim youth) by promoting "consumer citizenship" (45). The social and political inequalities are elided in favour of private consumption of commodities. The discourse of consumption is peddled as empowerment by the media and advertisements. Khan sees the induction of Muslim youth into the wage-labour economy and subsequently their transition as consumers as a sign of "agency" (41). She draws on Nestor Garcia Canclini's political conceptualization of "expanded" (41) and transformed "citizenship" (41), which includes comprehensive rights to housing, healthcare, education, and access to other consumptive goods. (41) Khan sees potential in exercising these convoluted modernities as they open a world of choices and upward social mobility for Muslim youth and

women. Muslim women, according to Khan, can subvert the gender roles from within the traditional patriarchal framework through their newly acquired financial resourcefulness.

I do not share Khan's confidence in the neoliberal enterprise of enabling agency to Muslim youth/Muslim women. The problem of misreading consumer sovereignty as empowerment complicates the understanding of socio-political inequalities. Empowerment cannot be actualized as the heightened communalization of the socio-political rubric compromises the neoliberal agenda. My work demonstrates that the nexus between neoliberal ethics, communal polarization, and religious patriarchy constitutes the 'limits' to empowerment faced by Muslim women in India. Limits to empowerment are also extended to the feminist agenda of financial resourcefulness, as it can also become a ground for economic exploitation. Apart from our disagreement over the enabling effects of neoliberal subjectivities, the methodology deployed in this ethnographic work differs significantly from that used in the thesis. Unlike the observer-participant relationship evident in ethnographic interviews and questionnaires, my work engages in critical cultural studies, deciphering and decoding representations in the public domain. Both Jamil and Khan discuss the desires and aspirations of Muslim women/youth, focusing on how these aspirations differ from public perceptions of their desires. The assumption is that the public perception is coloured by prejudices that end in stereotyping the aspirations of Muslim women. However, both works do not deal with the challenges Muslim women face when they attempt to realize their aspirations in the social world.

My work highlights the peculiar marginality of Muslim women that has not been explored under the rubric of Indian feminism so far. The thesis contributes to filling the lacuna both in Indian feminist studies and minority studies by radically transforming the understanding of Muslim women. This work addresses the question of essentialized Muslimness that complicates the narratives of those who carry this ascribed identity. These narratives express anxiety about their social position and communitarian identity. The simultaneous

foregrounding and refusal of their identity contests Khan's easy transition to convoluted modernity. The compulsion to voice these anxieties is an attempt to recover agency and sovereignty by Muslim women. Understanding how these multifaceted challenges modulate strategies and methodologies that Muslim women use to communicate their standpoint is the need of the hour. The layered influence of gender, religion, class, political exclusion, economic disenfranchisement, and communal polarization on the subjectivity and everyday marginality of Muslim women has not been explored under the aegis of a single research work. The thesis examines nuanced and innovative ways of self-expression, representation, and articulation of Muslim women through a unique blend of creative writing, literature, and the visual arts that blur the boundary between art and activism. My research aims to unearth a new language of resistance through visual storytelling, ekphrastic methodologies, and performing arts.

Chapter Overview

Spread over five chapters, the thesis discusses the construction of marginality and its contestations through a complex interrelation between the social imaginary and the public sphere in India. All five chapters explore and illustrate the difficulties Muslim women face in the dominant public sphere in India and their everyday negotiations within it. Chapters 1 to 4 of the thesis explore the methods and strategies adopted by Muslim women to produce a counterdiscourse about their subjectivity and political consciousness. Using essentialism as a counter tool to reassert Muslim identity, Muslim women no longer desire to be seen as unmarked citizens with neutral identities. At the same time, there is an attempt to delineate how essentialism has been used to suppress their agency. The selected writings and articulations accompany a tone of complaint to express everyday experiences of dispossessed marginality and discursive violence. At the same time, these chapters individually also unravel how Muslim women are dealing with oppressive forces and asserting their voice within these marginal spaces. Their critical agency is evident in their speech acts, writings, and participation in

activism. Chapter 5 examines the political activism of Muslim women during the Shaheen Bagh movement. The movement becomes an opportunity to explore the place of Muslim women in the social imagination of Indian womanhood. All these chapters also highlight Muslim women's efforts to assert their political consciousness in the public sphere and challenge the prejudices and stereotypes that govern the social imaginary. By doing so, these chapters draw attention to the (un)democratic functioning of the dominant public sphere and the need to create a legitimate space for the voices of marginality through their self-articulation.

Chapter 1

Contesting 'Muslimness': The Politics of Stereotypes in Regimes of Representation

This chapter undertakes the formation and role of stereotypes in representation. The chapter examines some of the dominant stereotypes created around Muslim women to explain how stereotypes colour their representation in the public sphere. It is crucial to deconstruct stereotypes, as they are more than cultural signifiers; they are symptomatic of power structures. They determine the limits of inclusion and exclusion of the stereotyped person. Therefore, deconstructing a stereotype about minorities or other marginalized groups is akin to speaking truth to power. Stereotypes affect the subjectivity of the stereotyped person as they position themselves vis-à-vis stereotypes and find themselves trapped in them. They often internalize stereotypes, which often leads to their self-regulation and self-censorship. The chapter illustrates the complex workings of stereotypes on the subjectivity of Muslim women through selected fictional works. The most vital function of stereotypes is that they can be used as a regulatory mechanism to contain the articulations of Muslim women and undercut their agency. The chapter demonstrates that stereotypes can be countered through adopting 'strategic essentialism.' When Saidiya Hartman explains hypervisibility about socially expected performances of black bodies in public spaces, she refers to essentialized performances.

Essentialism requires continued performance. Essentialising discourse is used as a counter mechanism and methodology to foreground essentialism. By deconstructing the politics of stereotyping, the chapter demonstrates the possibility of alternative representation and self-representation of Muslim women in the public sphere. Only when the veil of stereotype is lifted can self-articulation become possible, and gendered minorities can take their rightful place in the public sphere.

Chapter 2

Injury, Intimidation, and Legal Rulings: Discursive Violence in the Realm of Public Sphere

This chapter explores the discursive violence against Muslim women and how this discourse of violence limits their agency and ability to speak. The chapter further explores how Muslim women deal with this challenge and claim their right to have a say in public. Chapter 1 demonstrates how stereotypes deter the performance of Muslim women as speaking agents, since the credibility of their speech and voice is compromised before the act of speaking. Discursive violence also adds to the propaganda machinery, but the threat of violence is more direct, whereas stereotypes work in insidious ways, are subtle, and avoid confrontation. The culturally rooted xenophobia usually inspires discursive violence in the social imaginary; however, it adversely affects the participation of marginalized groups in the public sphere. This chapter examines the frontal violence/assault of speech in the form of hate speech and the embedded violence of juridical pronouncements, and how this violence is routinely used against Muslim women. The chapter also brings forth aspects of violence that are not intended and cannot be apprehended easily, yet they produce violence. This nuanced concept of violation is most visible in the effects of juridical pronouncements, authoritative orders, public policies, notifications, etc. Robert Cover explains that the legal utterance is not violent, but its

pronouncement cannot be affected without some coercion or violence. Just as violence is embedded in the very performance of juridical laws, it is also embedded in abusive speech acts. The chapter illustrates the power of hate speech as it disorients the subject who is at the receiving end of the assaultive speech. The power of words/language is weaponized to create the category of the racial 'other' in the case of Muslim women.

Many Muslim women who express their opinion and flag the issue of marginalization of 'Muslims' in India are trolled and humiliated, both on social media and in real life. I investigate the recent events of "Sulli deals" and "Bulli Bai app" as a means of "regulatory threat" to deal with Muslim women who have aspired to claim their position as political subjects of the state in the public sphere. To highlight the impact of discursive violence of legal pronouncements, I investigate the Hijab controversy in Karnataka and examine how such legal pronouncements impact Muslim women. These two controversies are crucial sites of inquiry into the state's arbitration or mediation for Muslim women and into how far the state has ensured their participation in the public sphere.

Chapter 3

Performing Sovereignty through the 'Right to Choose': The Question of Agency and Limits to Empowerment in Muslim Women's Representation(s).

This chapter is a complex investigation of individual subjectivity shaped by neoliberal policies. The complication multiplies when the individual is gendered and belongs to a minority community. It requires a careful examination of what is meant by 'sovereignty' of the individual, where the self is, on one hand, bound by the social/material conditions of existence, and on the other hand, liberated by deregulated market forces, allowing numerous choices for the individual. The question arises whether the individual can overcome the limits imposed by social/material conditions of existence. The neoliberal optimism ingrained in the 'right to

choose' to ensure consumer sovereignty evades the issue of the denial of choices to the marginalized sections. The chapter questions whether the marginalized can make life choices, let alone simple consumer choices.

To understand these limits to the empowerment of Muslim women, it is imperative to study how the individual is made to read these choices within the neoliberal vocabulary. How is this new vocabulary or language of 'rights' used in the cultural representations of Muslim women, and does such a vocabulary enable their articulations? The question of agency is crucial to analysing Muslim women's mobility in the public sphere (in India) and understanding the concept of 'sovereignty' of the individual. Since the perception about Muslim women in the social imaginary as oppressed and backward rests on their 'supposed' lack of education and economic independence, this chapter is tasked with illustrating how their access to education and entry into the job market does not allow the desired agentic sovereignty.

It is worth noting that agentic sovereignty is a euphemism for consumer sovereignty. David Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, argues that neoliberal policies, such as deregulation, privatization, and the withdrawal of the state from welfare measures, seep into everyday life and affect social relationships and practices. The transformation from economic liberalism to neoliberalism is accompanied by a newer subjectivity and the prevalence of hyper-individualism, in which the individual is conditioned to be accountable only to him/herself. This ability to act according to one's calculations and a dependence on personal resourcefulness lead to the making of the entrepreneurial self. The cult of the entrepreneurial self is further co-opted by liberal feminism to fashion young women as authors of their destiny in a world of inauthentic choices. Such inauthentic choices in the world of commodity fetishism create an illusion of an empowered consumer. However, throughout the chapter, I argue that the hollow promises of the neoliberal regime have not countered the everyday marginalities of unempowered Muslim women. The rhetoric of girl power or female entrepreneurial self is

harnessed both by capitalist enterprise (using the labour force of women) and patriarchy (bargaining professional aspirations of women for economic exploitation). Although all women face the diminishing returns of the entrepreneurial self, Muslim women additionally encounter and suffer due to the compromise and collusion of neoliberalism with the communal majoritarian forces. The chapter raises questions regarding Muslim women's lack of empowerment by engaging with neoliberal feminism and its lack of commitment to affirmative actions. Questions of agency and empowerment are essential to operating in the public sphere, since speech acts can only be effective when voiced through specific positionalities. However, it demonstrates how neoliberal politics have successfully diverted the focus away from unequal socio-economic power structures and converged all gaze towards the individual entrepreneurial self.

Chapter 4

Subjecthood, Marginality, and Intimacy: Life Writing as a Critical Practice, and its Affective Politics

Chapter 4 is a study of life writings by Muslim women and how these writings can form what Lauren Berlant calls "intimate publics" in the public domain. To further this idea, I claim that Muslim women's life writings in the public sphere can form intimate publics by bringing people who empathize with each other together. While Berlant claims that a collective is formed by people who are moved by similar experiences and therefore leads to the "circularity" of the intimate publics, my submission is that these texts' emotive energy and affective charge can move beyond this circularity. Once the text is in the public domain, how its affective energies will be operationalized remains beyond the writer's control. The chapter unravels the risks of disclosing intimate feelings in the public domain. However, sharing intimacy can also be a strategy to communicate everyday living experiences. The non-canonical outreach of life

writing makes it an apt medium to convey the situated knowledge of varied experiences of marginality. The embeddedness of situated knowledge in the individual's experience furthers the standpoint epistemology. According to Sandra Harding, the standpoint of the marginalized can provide greater clarity into the structures of power that may not be visible to those within the dominant order. These perspectives offer what Harding calls "strong objectivity" (307), which requires a knowledge of contextual embeddedness to counter ahistorical normativity within dominant culture. Feminist standpoint theory is not particularly interested in narrating women's experiences per se but aims to develop a vantage point regarding these experiences. The selected life writings in chapter 4 by Muslim women provide that vantage point from where the oppression of Muslims (both community and of Muslim women) and communal targeting becomes apparent. These power structures strengthened by communalism are responsible for social discrimination and political marginalization and operate insidiously within the public sphere.

Besides providing a vantage point that generates concerns and questions about Muslim women's lives, the near-political character of life writings, or what Berlant would call the "juxtapolitical" character of intimate articulations, allows greater accessibility to these articulations. It provides a space for a section of the public that refrains from overt political engagement. On one hand, it skirts the political confrontation necessary for democratic functioning. On the other hand, sharing intimacy provides a space for empathetic exchanges where political understanding may fail. I argue that this space is significant within the public sphere, as it constitutes a link between the private/personal and the public, revealing the political implications of personal experiences. Therefore, life writings can contribute first to opening the public sphere by carving out a space for sharing personal experiences of oppression through intimacy. Secondly, it establishes a vantage point to view and understand Muslim women through their lives and unravel the power structures of systematic discrimination.

Thirdly, the affective energies of these writings can form intersectional solidarities that can break the insularity of intimate publics. The affective politics of any text, particularly of life writings, can extend beyond the intended readership and influence the members of dominant groups to recognise their positions of power.

Chapter 5

Exploring the Exclusions of Muslim Women in the Social Imaginary and Reclaiming the Public Sphere during the Shaheen Bagh Movement

The chapter explores the political participation of Muslim women in the Shaheen Bagh movement. This chapter highlights how Muslim women actively contested many of the dominant perceptions in the social imaginary that create a monolithic conception of Indian womanhood. The political activism of Muslim women is noteworthy as it challenges the patriarchal authoritarianism of the state in dealing with its gendered subjects, who also belong to the minority community. As indicated by media reports, the response to the movement becomes a site for questioning and debating the conceptualization of India as ‘Bharat Mata’ (Mother India), as it excludes various categories such as Dalits, minorities, and tribes. The chapter illustrates that a category like ‘Bharat Mata’ invokes symbols from Hindu goddesses in a manner that promotes the deification of the motherland and encourages cult worship. Such a concept of the nation in the social imagination precludes the representation of Muslim women within the fold of Indian womanhood. Since the conflation of the bodyscape with the nation requires visual attention, contesting and challenging such narratives through visual rhetoric is crucial. The movement successfully used the new visual vocabulary to modulate the public sphere. This new vocabulary of the visual validates and registers spectators' participation. The accommodation of non-textual expressions of participation is a part of what can be termed a plebeian effort to democratise participation in the public sphere. The chapter focuses on

plebeian efforts during the movement and highlights new strategies deployed in the protest. The transformation of a residential area into a protest site, using the walls of the residential buildings as a canvas for graffiti, reiterations of the Preamble of the Constitution, performances of protest poetry, and sit-in protests; all these measures constitute everyday practices of resistance. The ordinariness of the methods of resistance created a new language of protest in India, rather than organized protests on designated sites like Jantar Mantar. The methods further attest to the participants' marginalized status.

The chapter further develops the inquiry in the thesis about the democratization of the public sphere. The movement attempted to reclaim Muslim women's agency and testify to their presence in the public sphere. The organization of the movement facilitated Muslim women's articulation to contest the propaganda surrounding them in the social imaginary.

Conclusion: Freedom of Speech and Expression

The first basic principle for the democratic functioning of the public sphere is to ensure the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by the constitution. The laws require that this freedom be protected for all citizens, regardless of community, without fear of retaliation, legal sanction, or other forms of censorship. However, the concluding chapter reiterates the thesis's key highlights, laying bare the differences between law and its praxis, as evident in the functioning of the public sphere in India. The concluding chapter asserts that fair representation in the public sphere is political and must be engaged to attain a democratic function. These questions also draw attention to the kind of public sphere in India while suggesting a need for further research. The conclusion also underscores the importance of tracing the intellectual history of Muslim women in post-independent India to build their confidence.