



Religious Discourse in Tablighi Jama'at A Challenge to Female Sexuality?

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Abstract

This paper is an empirical research on women's participation in Islamic revivalist movement of Tablighi Jama'at. In the current discourse on religion and female sexuality, I intend to look within Islam, as a religion and as an assertion of identity in the form of Tablighi Jama'at and Tabligh's articulation of its weltanschauung on Muslim way of life, with excessive focus on female sexuality. Here I will discuss Tabligh's conceptualisation of gender and gender roles through my field experience and analysis of women participation in the movement. In recent years we see that there is an upsurge in religious movements across the world exerting their identities and attempting to claim their rights. Since women have always been central to the political and social imagination of the Muslim mind we see an increased level of women's participation in these movements with defined sexual morality and gender equality.

It is through the role of women in the transnational Islamic revivalist movement of Tablighi Jama'at, which arose as a response to Christian missionary and Hindu revivalist movements in the early 1920's in pre-partition India, that I have explored their level of engagement and their practices in order to bring into light tabligh's understanding of the female agency in the Muslim social order. In the backdrop of the feminist project and keeping in view tabligh's Orientalist understanding of the female, I raise the following questions, 'Is Tablighi Jama'at another such assertion within Islam that prescribes laws to define and control the female sexual desire through their understanding of sexuality and gender relations? Is the female tabligh member an agent of 'reform' or is she 'socialized' to believe that that men are superior and that what is described as masculine precedes and has priority over the feminine?'

Keywords: Islam Islamic Revivalism Tablighi Jama'at Women Islamic Feminism

Introduction

The subject of women in Islam is one that elicits mixed responses, ranging from pity to fascination and anger to sympathy in both the Muslim world and the West. As women have always been central to the political and social imagination of the Muslim mind, we see an increased level of women's participation in these movements, whether political or social in nature. The main aim of this article is to study Tablighi Jama'at¹, a transnational missionary Islamic revivalist movement, and its impact on the understanding of

women, as agents of 'reform', and on their sexuality. I will focus on the role of women and their level of participation in the advancement of the spiritual goal of the movement, outlining their increasing religious awareness and ritual practices in specifically defined private sphere of the Tabligh. Here I have explored how traditional Islamic discourse intersects with gender relations and social processes that shape the everyday lives of tablighi women. Tablighi Jama'at is aimed at individual spiritual reform and elevation of the self to the rightly guided path of the Prophet.

The couplet on female sexuality, "pleasure and danger", is recited by the tabligh in an attempt to privatize it as an experience within the closed walls of the household. The idea of female sexuality in tabligh revolves around high morals, both religious and cultural, and shame that is exclusively attributed to the women. But here the ascription comes not only from the male patriarchs of the movement, who in the early years of tabligh laid the foundation of patriarchal understanding of female sexuality, but also the female patriarchs, who as agents of female sexuality further perpetuate this idea of submissiveness, shame and morality. In fact, for tabligh, knowing and being conscious of one's sexuality is considered potentially dangerous, a cause of fitna (chaos) in the world.

In exploring and investigating the role of women and their level of participation in the advancement of the spiritual goal of the movement, I will first give a background of the tabligh that emerged in the early twentieth century India as a response to local challenges and thereafter spread in reaction to global changes.

Emergence of Tablighi Jama'at: From Political to Social

In an attempt to qualify tabligh as an Islamic revivalist movement I will first discuss the background and premise on which the movement was founded and then the further developments with the coming of women in tabligh. Islamic revivalism, both Political and Social, has occupied a major portion in the academic discourse, given the present role that it has played in world politics, its impact on the world, and the potential to influence the society and polity of Muslim nations. Contemporary Islamic revivalism manifests itself in multiplicity of forms. To discuss further, Islamic revivalism manifests itself in two broad categories. Former, that is, 'political' and is further sub-categorised as Islamic radicalism, fundamentalism, Islamism, or the more popular and overt in action, Islamic extremism. The latter, 'social', is religious atavism, social conservatism, traditionalism and also fundamentalism. This second category is also referred as Islamic orthodoxy, and a covert form of action called missionary activism. Noticeably, the term 'fundamentalism' runs common to both the categories because it is a wider term that is defined as a theological tendency to preserve the essential doctrines and scriptures of the faith and also to going back to the true fundamentals of Islam practiced during the 'golden age.'

Further, the question of women and Islam is one that brings our attention to the recent rise in religious fervor in India and the rest of the world. Amidst this gradual rise of different religious movements with distinct modus operandi and shared overlapping aspirations, we observe the emergence and spread of the tabligh, that has spread across the world, emerging in early twentieth century with a strong sense of Islamic community consciousness in the historical context of pre-partition British India. At that point in history, revivalist movements emerged as a quest for 'purity', unflinching 'fidelity' and adherence to a body of foundational sacred texts, with distinction from 'others' and in continuation of the past. Today, this re-enactment, in preaching and action, is presented as the ultimate goal for the 'infallible' revivalists and their followers. The Tablighi Jama'at is one such movement that emerged as a response to other revivalist trends in a political and social setting post the failure of Khilafat movement in twentieth century India. In an attempt to assert a distinct Muslim identity, the Jama'at transcended space and time, expanding globally in their mission to 'reform' the practice of the Islamic faith. Emerging from the Deoband School of thoughtⁱⁱ, Tablighi Jama'at can be termed as the representation of endeavours of 'pious' Muslim men and women to revive the now religiously estranged 'ummah'. Although, originally,

the Tablighi Jama'at was founded to focus on the revival of Islamic practice among the Muslims, it however, over a period of time, came to be identified as a proselytising group, with some success expanding its domain of activity to non-Muslims.

In his discussion on "Other-Worldly" and "This Worldly," Wilfred Cantwell Smith refers to the extraordinary vigour and passion that rushed through the veins of Muslims across the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Robinson, 2007, p. 47) for the revival and resurgence of Islam as a force in domestic and world politics with great visibility and influence. Smith remarked (1957, 89.),

...dynamism, the appreciation of activity for its own sake, and at the level of feeling a stirring of intense, even violent, emotionalism...the transmutation of Muslim society from its early nineteenth century stolidity to its twentieth century ebullience is no mean achievement. The change has been everywhere in evidence.

The foundation for this religious fervor was laid much before by the early revivalists in sixteenth century when Islamic political thought and Muslim societies across the world surged towards renewal (tajdid), revival (ihya), and reform (islah), expressed differently in different contexts. The reform and revivalist movements have contributed to the formation of and adherence to a distinct religious identity. These movements began during the period of Western colonisation and continue in the present times emphasising various faces and voices of Islam. With no single set pattern, these movements have taken myriad of forms and manifested accordingly. Tablighi Jama'at is one such revivalist movement.

Historically, the period from mid nineteenth to early twentieth century India was a crucial one for Muslim social reform. It threw up forces that reassessed the status of women in the face of increasing political struggle and social transformation. Set in this backdrop, the salvation oriented Tablighi Jama'at arose as a movement of social reform. This essay examines the emergence of, and the subsequent social and cultural ramifications of, the transnational Islamic revivalist movement Tablighi Jama'at that was founded by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas in 1926 British India. The political vicissitudes of nineteenth and twentieth century India had a tremendous political, social and psychological impact on Muslim India, giving them opportunities and reasons for vigorous religious expressions. Facilitated by a new political climate of British rule, the Tabligh arose as a response to successive political and social religious revivalist movements, serving as a medium, in search of a sense of belonging and identity, for a wider aspiration to emulate the Prophet in entirety for a pious self.

The social religious activism of Tabligh can be viewed as "a critique of, and engagement with modernity" (Lapidus, 1997, p. 445). The basic tenet of these movements is that the salvation of Islamic societies lies in a return by each and every individual to the morality taught in the Qur'an and the Sunnaⁱⁱⁱ, the teachings of Prophet. They call, at least in theory, for a return to the Sharia'h, the Islamic law. They call for a stripping away of many of the traditional practices and beliefs of Muslims as a false historical accretion to the pure Islam. They call for a renewed commitment to Islam in the hearts and minds of individuals as the basis of communal solidarity, social justice, and fair treatment of the poor. They want women to return to family roles.

In order to achieve their immediate goal of self purification and larger goal of community religious uprightness, the tablighis move around their neighbourhood and across border in cloistered groups preaching fellow Muslims to practice the faith. I refer to them as "cloistered" because of their isolationist approach towards achieving salvation and their preaching on the life of the hereafter. With this aim in mind, the tablighi men and women engage in spiritual patrolling, convincing the "lesser Muslims"^{iv} to follow and adhere to the puritan version of Islam as advocated and preached by them. Hence, in tabligh, both men and women are the agents of 'reform'. Though the approach is male dominated, women, nevertheless, play a very significant role in it, engaging in spiritual elevation and proselytisation.

While the peripatetic preachers of Islam, the tablighi men and women, spread their reformist tentacles globally, there are major feminist concerns that emerge from its study and need to be addressed objectively. The apolitical piety preached by the Tablighi Jama'at fits in the broader discussion on Islamic Revivalism, which constitutes both Political and Social Islam. Any examination of Islam in the modern world must take the past experience into account to understand the present better, with considering Islam to be a closed doctrinaire persuasion. Since society is always in flux with different conjunctions, they influence different persuasions or introduce different trends in the same persuasion. So, contexts transform texts. Much has been said and written about Islam as a religion and its various manifestations. The quest for a rehabilitation and revitalisation of the lost Islamic history is the driving force for both moderate and radical Islamic revivalists. The idea of a 'golden age' runs common to both, Political and Social. I see Tablighi Jama'at as a grassroots social religious reform movement within Islam with a bottom-up approach towards meeting its ends. I have made an attempt to study Tablighi Jama'at as a part of Social Islam, which I would define as that realm of Islam from where the tablighis embark on their 'spiritual journey' by means of indulging in individual self reform, missionary activism and going back to the fundamentals of Islam. As opposed to Political Islam, Social Islam proposes grassroots social reform that aims at achieving a higher level of spirituality and proximity to God. Though both Political and Social Islam are thoroughly globalised, they have had different set of repercussions for the community at large. While the immediate aim of Social is personal reform and societal regeneration, the Political has to do with capturing of state power and imposition of the Islamic doctrine.

Within the discourse on Islamic resurgence Muzaffar Alam had argued that a shift has been observed in religious revivalism. "Religious revivalism in the Islamic world had earlier sought to purify Islam itself from social practices that had gradually been incorporated into Islam through cultural borrowing. Now, it seemed time to cast its gaze outside the faith, to purify its world by eliminating not merely the internal enemy but the enemy outside. This radical notion of purification now turned to violence, using the call to jihad as a call to arms" (Alam, 2004, p. 19). It is important to note that the development of the Islamic community and its interaction (different Muslim experiences) with the pre-modern and modern world makes the history of Islam. Alam's point on the shift from social to political holds true for movements within the political category of Islam. Nonetheless, among the diverse revivalist movements within Islam, Tablighi Jama'at can be seen as a 'recall' to the social, that is, it emphasises on social purification and reform, and 'revocation' of the political, that is, they do not hanker after state power. Tabligh's duality lies in being social and religious. Contrary to Alam's argument, I argue that Tablighi Jama'at is a retreat from the political to the social.

In both Political and Social Islam, it is the women who bears the onus for 'reform'. This article is based on my field work in three different Indian cities of Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), New Delhi and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) from 2010 to 2013. With an aim to strengthen the struggle to restore Islam to ascendancy in a world that has derailed from the true path of Allah, the Tablighi Jama'at has gone to include women in their single most important goal of Islamic revivalism. Historically, an overview of Islamic revivalist movement determines the reinvigorating role of the religious movements in asserting Muslim traditionalism that has dominated Muslim societies along with their own cultural specificities. It has come to evidence that male dominance in these societies has shaped the role and position of women, both in public and private spheres.

As part of Social Islam, the tabligh members incessantly work in the direction of religious reform. In their call for reform they start by Islamising the society first. It is here that the role of women comes into focus. It is through the workings of tabligh that I observed women as the purveyors of orthodoxy and patriarchal practices. As, in tabligh, women are seen to be reservoirs of culture and repertoires of Islamic values, essentially those concerning with family, femininity and female sexuality, the burden of personal religious reform falls on them. This individual religious reform then later transforms into community reform, as the women gather in Muslim neighbourhoods reading the 'prescribed' literature necessary for a woman to lead an upright Islamic life.

Deeni Behen^v and the Religious Patriarchs: A Synthesis of Patriarchy and Puritanism

Before I start writing my experiences in the field, I would first like to mention that I have, on request, maintained confidentiality in names of the women interviewed. I have changed all names and at certain places I have avoided mentioning any names. Surprisingly, this confidentiality has only to do with purdah. The women in the Jama'at clearly stated to not to be named for reasons of their inviolable sanctity, which they associated with purdah of their names along with multiple other sorts of purdah that will be discussed later in the chapter.

A full-fledged revivalist movement, the women participants in the Jama'at are consciously involved in the development of alternative arguments regarding the role of Muslim women in accordance with the statutes laid by the founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas and his contemporaries, which are contrary to the progressive understanding of women rights and identity. Apart from the interviews conducted, there is a whole corpus of tablighi literature produced by the stalwarts of Tablighi Jama'at.

This article provides an empirical scholarship on the lives of Muslim women active in the Tablighi Jama'at. The various dimensions of Muslim women's lives, viz. religion, family, ethics, and ideology, female sexuality, and gender relationships, are discussed. My fieldwork in Lucknow, Nizamuddin Dargah in New Delhi and Bhopal made me discover the Tablighi conception of women, which was in strict conformity with Islamic orthodoxy, affirming the biological differentiation that leads to distinct sexual compartmentalisation of space and subsequent differences in the patterns of behaviour. In India, Bhopal is the most vibrant centre of tabligh activity with millions attending its ijtema (annual congregation) at Eeth Khedi in Ghasipura area of Islam Nagar village. Entry of women is strictly restricted during the annual ijtema organised here. A gathering of one hundred thousand tablighi men from all parts of the world attend this ijtema, while women stay indoors to avoid male-female interaction. However, a few women told me that they accompany their men for the ijtema but hide themselves inside their cars. "It is the love for tabligh and passion to participate that we come in our cars and hide ourselves to prevent the male gaze. It is the most exciting part of tabligh where this huge ground is filled with people who have moved out of their homes to serve Allah," one of the women in Bhopal said, adding, that women should not be seen by men as they can prove to be a distraction to the men involved in Allah's work.

In my attempt to give an objective analysis of women's participation I do not want to sound as someone articulating the plight of the 'oppressed' tablighi women. The women in my study, for sure, are not oppressed, or precisely, they don't appear to be oppressed, primarily because this is something that they willingly adopt in a conscious attempt to assert their religious and sexual identity. The assertion and consciousness of their identity goes beyond the discourse on oppression and liberation. They are the actors. What needs to be probed here is their conceptualisation of gender and sexuality.

In these three places of exploration, I not only interacted with women jama'ati's who narrated their experience in the Jama'at but also participated in the regular religious sessions, called taleem (religious instruction). During the taleem sessions, which is a collective exercise by neighbourhood women listening to Hadith (sayings) of the Prophet and other 'prescribed' books, the women pointed out that western education and women's employment are the two important reasons for fitna as western education makes women too conscious of their sexuality which is dangerous for the woman and the society at large.

Notably, women's inclusion in tabligh is restricted primarily to the domestic sphere, wherein they carry out the tabligh work in forms of regular taaleem sessions and also providing accommodation to their fellow tabligh women who come with the Jama'at during the forty days chilla round. However, women's accessibility to the forty day Jama'at is contingent upon the ritualistic qualification of their mehram, primarily their husbands. These practices highlight the nuances of the working of the Jama'at that works differently for different genders and subsequently has an impact on the male-female relationship ratio. It emerges that the household is an important theatre of reform for women, where they are involved in the sacred mission of re-strengthening the faith.

A significant contributory role in textual validity of Tablighi Jama'at and genre of Islamic writings was played by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's voluminous traditional writings that had serious implications on complicated gender roles and specifically on women. Unsurprisingly, his writings further embedded and reproduced such regulations in constructing a framework where the mehkoom (subordinate) female subjects and ha'kim (master) male authority could peacefully inhabit and perform their rightful duties in accordance with the Sharia'h. He had a very complex view of women, which has come down to his present followers. I call it complex because women, according to Thanawi, are a "necessary evil," that is, they are necessary for tabligh's normative religious pursuits and also a cause of fitna, if uncontrolled. One of his important traditional Islamic writings includes, *Bihishti Zewar*^{vi} (Heavenly Ornaments), which occupies a prominent place in Muslim households and is considered as 'sacred' for both men and women. Thanawi's another important text is *Ashraf-ul-Jawab* that deals with his answers to the questions raised by some concerned Muslims on issues of social behaviour, including women's education.

In his *Bihisti Zewar*, Thanawi theologically constructed women's inferior status, with emphasis on their weaker nafs (self) and aql (intelligence). He laid down rules for the upright religious life and also directly urges women to improve their moral conduct and religious practices. It is directed towards Muslim women, and may be the first book of its kind in Islamic adab literature (Naim, 1984, p. 307). His writings are helpful in elucidating his understanding of the gender roles. An excessive emphasis on social conduct and clear demarcation of specific male-female roles and space segregation are the central points of his books that urge the community to move away from deviations, and follow the faith in 'true' Islamic spirit. The subject of morality also highlights his traditionalist understanding of man-woman relationship that doesn't move beyond dozakh (hell) and jannat (heaven). Intermingling of the two genders is considered to be the most horrific act, which ultimately takes the person to dozakh ki aag (the fire of hell).

His writings and the other Tabligh narratives suggest that that the institution of marriage and family are central to the Tablighi discourse. Viewing women as the centre of preserving tradition and culture, the religious scholars and a few ideologues associated with the Tablighi Jama'at have argued in their works for strict guidelines on gender relations, specifically, rhetorical discussion on women's dressing and their role in the society. Maulana Thanawi's writings are in high esteem and his teaching adhered to in daily lives. After a perusal of his writings on reform it becomes clear that Thanawi was mainly concerned about the excessive control of and domination over women because he presents women as fitna - a source of potential disorder, "always on the verge of moving out of control, of displaying excess, of spilling over – in where they go, what they buy, how much they talk and what they eat" (Metcalf, 1992, p. 14). The overemphasis on sexuality dominates the Tablighi discussion. Plethora of restrictions on women, hence, proves Thanawi's point, "women are a centre of all the sin in the world." Propagating a low profile, secluded and veiled life for women, Thanawi laid the cornerstone for women subjugation, thus bringing 'reform' the Islamic way.

"According to Thanawi, women, through their actions, affect not only their children, but also their husbands, thus what they do or do not do affects society as a whole" (Naim, 2008, p 354). He was against the newly opened all girls schools vehemently discouraged these schools and the feminine literature emerging at that time. Towards the end of *Bihishti Zewar*, he enlists the names of some 'harmful' books, including the four novels of Nazir Ahmad Dehlvi.^{vii}

Thus, the writings of the Tabligh scholars or more rightly the religious patriarchs argue that Islamic teachings encourage gender traditionalism, where a woman's position is within the four walls of the house and her role confined to being a doting mother, rearing up true Muslim children; and a dutiful wife, assisting her husband in his tablighi ambitions. Relying extensively on 'selective' Hadith, the women in tablighi Jama'at reiterate Maulana Yusuf Kandhlavi, "Aurto ko bahar nikala hai ghar ki taraf lane ke liye." (The [tablighi] women have been brought out on the streets for tablighi work [with their mehram] only to be taken back to their homes) because "when a woman emerges from her house, shaitaan (Satan) lies in ambush for her." Indeed, in tablighi jama'at women are not encouraged to move out of the house. It is preferred that they stay at home performing their larger duties of being a woman. Making home the

“central target of reform” and emphasising extreme restrictions on women from venturing out, Maulana Thanawi in Book VI of his *Bihisti Zewar* (Metcalf, 1992) identifies no fewer than thirty two sins in these imagined outings and warns that these are only few of those actually committed. The trips are morally corrupting, becoming occasions of pride, extravagance, financial pressure on the husband that might lead him to sin, financial dealings that are beyond the law. Immodesty and mingling of sexes occur at every turn. Thanawi’s entire perception of women as “uncontrollable”, “possessing suppressed intelligence” and bearing a “weaker character than men”, has, today, led to such religious and cultural practices within Tabligh that have revived and strengthened religious conservatism on women negatively impacting the women themselves.

Conceptualising Gender: Archangel Versus Levianthan

The notion of pleasure leading to danger is visible in my interaction with the female Jama'at's. Subscribing to the most narrow form of gender ideology the creedal shibboleth of Tabligh is male-female segregation, as their interaction leads to sinful pleasures which is dangerous for the Islamic moral society. The troubling trend of women living in prolonged seclusion has further emboldened the religious patriarchs, who with their pronouncements not only keep women away from the job market, but also make them internalize inferiority and submission to men. Women from diverse backgrounds share the lingua franca that women are ‘objects’ that adorn the house and exclusively accessible to their husbands. Ignoring values like compatibility and equality in marriage women rationalise male domination and female submission as an act of God. These women declare, “It is Allah’s will that men are superior to women in all aspects, whether it is leading the congregational prayers or going for work. Allah has chosen men for professional jobs and women for looking after the house and that too in accordance with their husband’s wishes. Women should fear from breaking through seclusion and indulging in illicit work through jobs or interaction with na-mehram^{viii} bringing shame and dishonour to family.”

During my interaction, I became an available target of their puritan advice and reform. Everything that they discussed was immediately applied on me, whether it was purdah, education, work or marriage. For instance, the discussion on today’s Muslim women seeking good jobs and pursuing education drew their displeasure towards me. One of them notoriously asked me, “What will you do after completing Ph.D?” I said that I will start working. This was enough to invite their disgust. All of them looked at each other nodding their heads to and fro in utter disdain for my ‘un-Islamic’ ambitions. The eldest among them in her late forties said aloud, “This is not Islam. Who has given you the permission to seek a job? In the first place you are doing harm to the community by remaining unmarried for so long and pursuing worthless degrees. This can give you temporary worldly comfort but you can never be upright in the sight of Allah. Before doing all of this you should consult an ‘alim because Islam doesn’t allow women to do jobs and interact with men,” adding, If you think you are busier than us then you are sadly mistaken because we in the jama’at are busier than any god forsaken women going for adulterous work. We are busy doing Allah’s noble work and abstain from indulging in unnecessary endeavours that derailed Muslim women aspire. I advise you to work towards your akhirah (life of the hereafter).”

This was quite a shock for me and for a moment I felt asphyxiated with their regressive ideas of being a Muslim woman. To me, they didn’t appear anything less than specimens of middle class morality, who live their lives in two extremes of black and white. There are no other shades. It’s either jannat or jahannum, and the tablighis, as they claim, are the seekers of jannat, which is exclusively reserved for them. This brigade of Allah that is scattered all over the world today is busy preaching and practicing a life of the hereafter. The notion of akhirah is predominant in tabligh literature. It is popularly believed that one should devote himself to the worship of Allah and this will alleviate his poverty and discontentment. But if he is busy with worldly engagements Allah will not bless him and he will continue to live a life of poverty and deprivation.^{ix}

Interestingly, with the coming of this advice on akhirah, I noticed that in split seconds I became a topic of research for them – research on an unmarried Muslim woman pursuing worthless goals. Along with being custodians of Islam these women assume to be the archangels, guiding the 'misguided' Muslim women. Speaking on behalf of Allah, she sounded parochial in her understanding of women living independent lives. For them the entire notion of an independent woman draws “the wrath of Allah,” and unsurprisingly, they do not view the public domain as anything more than a place “doomed to hell” as it encourages immorality and illicit relationships. The high morals of right and wrong that they state are derived from their superficial parameters that they have laid for being a noble Muslim woman. They are bereft of deeper meanings of life, where colours change, where a woman has to move out of the binary of good and bad, where compulsions abound and choices of survival supersede choices of morality.

Legitimising their high morals as ‘sacred obligations’, the women in the Jama’at reconfirm restrictive codes of female behaviour, dress and living; and strongly hold doctrinal positions of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’. Time and again, the notions of male superiority and female inferiority are discussed at length, even in casual conversations. The women seem to be incredibly falling under the conservative trend relentlessly pursuing other Muslim women to join and conform to their religious ideology. In an attempt to reproduce their own domination one Nazreen (single; 24), a graduate in B.Com, who was inspired by religious books to join the Jama’at said that she has witnessed an extreme transformation in herself after joining the Jama’at. The first step was to endorse a strict purdah and to discontinue her studies. Laying excessive stress only on religious education, Nazreen, completely rejected the idea of mainstream secular education. Quick to cite fitna as a reason for sex segregation, she overemphasised the use of purdah as a part of Islamic gender system.

Indeed, they rationalise the use of niqab from their interpretation of the Qur’an. One Khatoon (married; 22 years) who joined the Jama’at before marriage said that a woman’s body is only for her husband and no other man should even look at any part of a woman’s body even if it is a nail of one’s finger. With no restrictions on the male gaze, she iterates, “Men are born with these instincts, it’s only women who have to discipline themselves by wearing a niqab in order to avoid any kind of attention from a na-mehram. If a woman fails to wear a niqab, she is bound to be living in hell. Allah loves those women who guard their chastity, not those who leave it unguarded for the world.” As stated earlier, these interpretations legitimising purdah are not read by the women themselves as the male ideologues of tabligh have always discouraged people, especially women, from reading any interpretation or explanation of the holy text. I observed that this influence has made women to naturally surrender to the subtle sexual politics shaped and patterned by a closed reading of the religious texts, and any deviation is considered reprehensible and an offence.

The increasingly pervasive defence and practice of purdah and domination comes from the reading of the tablighi ‘sacred’ books. When faced with criticism and objection over purdah Maulana Thanawi (1976, pp. 342-346) stated, “Allah has said that women are not adornments of the world, instead they are to adorn their homes. The meaning of woman is an object of concealment and should be educated within purdah as that is best suited for her,” adding to the misery, “since women are of fragile determination they do not have the right to give divorce. They are prone to change their marital partners every month. Men are patient and deal with their impatient wives with noteworthy patience.” The early reading of these texts has a contributory role in the formation of female psyche that reproduces and reformulates existing gender inequalities. While I discussed the rationale behind the use of purdah with young single women in the jama’at, one of them promptly asked me, “If I give you two toffees, one covered with the wrapper and one without the wrapper which one will you eat?” To this, I replied, “Wrapped one.” Rejoicingly she exclaimed, “See that is why we wear purdah. We are like wrapped toffees and do not wish to lie unwrapped because everyone prefers eating wrapped toffees.” Shockingly, the women while performing their religiously ‘upright’ duties have reduced themselves as mere sexual objects. Adding to this discussion another woman said, “We are like diamonds and should be locked in the safe.” I felt that the women are inflicted with delusion, unaware of their affliction of being trapped in overtly regressive sexual discourse, perpetuating their concealed objectification. I discovered that it is not only men who

gladly come together to oppress women. Rather, here, it is women who are instrumental in making patriarchy work in its best applicable form.

Apart from the bodily covering, women in Tabligh are also encouraged to disassociate themselves from any public activity. Fetishizing themselves, one of the women remarked, “A woman’s voice is aurah^x and hence, women should be discouraged from public interaction.” The Tablighi’s consider a woman’s voice as aurah, though the exact interpretation varies between different schools of Islamic thought. I would like to point out that there are major differences in the interpretations of various schools of thought which leads to different legal practices in different countries. Although the Qur’an offers many proposals, each organisation develops the one that is most compatible with its social practices. Tablighi Jama’at, however, besides citing decisive Qur’anic verses also quotes Hadith that restrict the movement of women outside their homes, except for ‘valid’ religious reasons. “Women should dedicate themselves in their homes because all good and evil in house is the responsibility of women. Until the women do not give their best to their homes, evil will reside,” said a young married woman in the Jama’at.

One Zareen (married; 35) stated that women are the owners of the house and they should stay confined within the domestic sphere. She likes to say, “Women are mehkoom to men and that is why men should be out of the house to earn a living. Allah has ordained both men and women with specific abilities and it should be understood within the purview of Qur’an that women are the malika’s of the house, whereas men are the bread earners and their guardian.” Further, ignoring the practicality of the public space she adds, “In extreme circumstances, if a woman is without a male counterpart in her family she should move out of the house to earn a living but, in an environment where there are only women workers and no male worker.” Another woman said that she would quote a relevant verse on men as protectors and maintainers of women from the Qur’an. She said, “Since Allah has bestowed abundant bounties upon men than women, men should take complete care of their women.” In their attempt to explain men’s superiority over women these women ignore the fact that such biased religious underpinnings only ascertain orthodox Islam’s hostility towards women. Tablighi Jama’at like any other orthodox version of Islam is bereft of concepts like gender equality and social justice for women. For them, their husband is the hakim and deserves unflinching obedience. Pursuing practices and ideals embedded within a traditional framework, the Jama’at has accorded women a subordinate and subservient status. The women I interacted with spoke easily in an unbelievably discriminatory tone.

The above arguments also suggest that the institution of marriage and family are central to the Tablighi discourse with exaggeration on women’s code of conduct. A married woman in her early thirties while involved in dars during one halqah that I attended said that Muslim women should not live single. Abstaining from niqah is equal to not following Islam. In the discussion on marriage, she reads from one of the holiest books of tabligh (Zakariyya, 1956, p. 532), “The ‘ulema have advised that one should marry a woman who is poor than oneself, and not a wealthy woman. For he who marries a prosperous woman will have to bear many hardships...A wife should be inferior to her husband in four things or else he will not command her respect: age, height, wealth and lineage, and she should be superior to her husband in four things: beauty, manners, piety and good habit.”

Regarding niqah as obligatory and a deterrent for all sexual evils, the women in the Jama’at believe that marriage is a solution for all problems faced by women. Quoting some Hadith they said that Prophet commanded Muslims to marry as it helps in forming a sound character and keeps their modesty intact.

Tablighi Jama’at explicates reformist teachings for women. Viewing women as the centre of preserving tradition and culture, the religious scholars and a few ideologues associated with the Tablighi Jama’at have argued in their works for strict guidelines on women behaviour and rhetorical discussion on women’s dressing and their role in the society. Strong attitudes towards veiling and un-veiling dominate the discourse in the lives of the women active in the Jama’at. Elevating purdah and denouncing un-Islamic dress the women in the Jama’at reiterated Thanawi’s words, “The very meaning of women is something that needs to be hidden behind purdah” (Thanawi, 1976, p. 242). To sound ‘religiously

correct', the women in the Jama'at were prompt to put forward their views on purdah. One of the women said, "The meaning of women is 'hijab', 'chupana'. She is the glory of her husband who commands her first and highest allegiance."

The religious movement of Tablighi Jama'at that sanctifies hijab argues that the Muslim veil is a religious symbol. Rejecting the western perspective of Muslim veil as suppressive for women, the Tablighi Jama'at not only argues for its strict adherence as an Islamic practice and as a representation of Islamic identity, but as a traditional clothing to safeguard women from the gaze of na-mehram. Neglecting the scholarship within Islamic study that aims to establish an egalitarian reading of the Islamic text, the women in the Jama'at defend that the Qur'an and the hadith ordered women to stay at home, wear burkha, and live subservient to men. However, the system of purdah varies among different groups of people, representing different Islamic orientations. There are groups that wear burkha that covers everything except the eyes; others wear a burkha that covers everything, including the eyes, and another set of group wears a hijab –a head covering in the form of a chador or abaya. Among the three veiling styles, the Tablighi women prefer to wear a burkha that covers them from head to toe. Their strict orthodox style of veiling also includes the purdah of their voice. One of the Tabligh members that I met in Nizamuddin Delhi, stated, "We cannot speak outside the four walls as we have not been ordained to speak. It becomes a lasting sin on a woman whose voice is heard by men, other than her husband, father, son or any other relative she cannot enter into matrimony." Women are discouraged from speaking in the company of males (strangers) to avoid any kind of interaction that might inevitably lead to an adulterous relationship. The women in the Jama'at not only conform to the orthodox worldview, but also are instrumental in the dissemination of orthodox conventions amongst fellow women, thus creating and reinforcing the orthodox agenda. The Tablighi women themselves speak in the language that considers women inferior to men, responsible for sin in the world and greater in number among those assigned to hell (Metcalf, 1992).

The overemphasis on sexuality dominates the Tablighi discussion. Plethora of restrictions on women, hence, proves Thanawi's point, "women are a centre of all the sin in the world." Propagating a low profile, secluded and veiled life for women, Thanawi laid the cornerstone for women subjugation. Certainly, perpetrating this parochial insight in relation to women, Thanawi wrote texts that did not encourage education for women. Calling girls' schools and women's education as "zehr-e-qatl" (poison leading to death), he vehemently discouraged girls from pursuing education. In one of his speeches addressing a male congregation on female education Thanawi had said (1976, pp. 243-244),

Avoid intermingling of girls, even if it includes schooling, because when more women meet they become shameless and it is then that the seeds of sin are sown. If possible, make your girls study at home, only two at a time, as a group of girls is the root cause of shamelessness. When bunch of girls meet they tend to engage in pervert talks. Try to avoid sending them to schools, especially English schools, and appoint an ustani to impart religious education to them. While appointing an ustani keep in mind that she is not of a liberal frame of mind because then she will liberal in her teachings. More importantly, avoid everything and see that you yourself teach your girl child. If something in the text appears that you cannot tell your girl, ask your wife to teach that portion. While I narrate these important points for female education, I would like to say that in all possibilities monitor their reading of the Qur'an and prevent them from reading the meaning of the Qur'an. All this done, make sure that your girls do not learn to write.

Regrettably, it was at this time that Muslim men took a firm drastic step and withdrew their daughters from schools, depriving the women of their educational, social and political freedom, and preparing a generation of ignorance and ignominy. Notably, the Tablighi Jama'at is responsible for furthering stereotypical gender roles, limiting women's space, and restricting women's participation in religious or other matters. The present socio-economic fabric of Muslim society was laid down in the early twentieth century by religious patriarchs like Thanawi and others who preceded and proceeded him. The above

speech made by Thanawi, evidently shows the current thoughts and ideologies propagated by the Tablighi Jama'at is making all attempts to take the community backwards, worsening the condition of women by making them speak in a gender bias language of 'restrictions' and 'sins'. From leading a life of 'invisibility', the women participants need to first, know their rights, and then voice them, contrary to the popular Tablighi belief that a woman is to comply with all instructions given to her either by her husband, or father, brother or by any male elder (mehram).

The restrictions on women's dressing are not only confined to the veil but also what they wear under the veil. Preaching an austere life the women in the Jama'at are discouraged from wearing loud perfumes and jewellery, particularly gold. The rationale given by these women for not wearing ornaments is twofold. First, same as the one stated above - to avoid male attention and the dangers that come with it, and second, to disarm vanity. However, there are several Hadith stated in tablighi literature that give another logic on unlawful wearing of gold.^{xi} Among the Jama'ati's one Shabih argued, "Women should abstain from living a life of luxury, and most importantly, they should not wear perfumes if they have to move out of the house because men are attracted to women's odour. In order to avoid male attention women should refrain from anything that will bring sin on her. Similarly, wearing anklets in public is also not Islamic because the sound of anklets brings everyone's attention to one's feet." In addition to perfumes and anklets another younger woman jama'ati promptly stated, "Women should forbid from indulging in excesses, like talking or laughing loudly, wearing loud clothes or perfume, and growing nails and wearing nail enamels because all of these do not constitute the Islamic way of life."

The canonical bearings of these pious injunctions of halaal and haraam dominate the entire tablighi society. Giving undue importance to these concepts, Thanawi (1976, p. 203) writes, "Women stay dirty at home. However, when they have to move out of the house they dress up to show others. Such women dress up for others and not for their husbands. Therefore, in Islam women are discouraged to wear expensive clothes and jewellery. Any bodily adornment is "haraam" in Islam."

A persistent conventional misogyny comes across while reading the texts written by Thanawi and others of his ilk. Presenting women as fitna and as a source of potential disorder, Thanawi "clearly represents women always on the verge of moving out of control, of displaying excess, of spilling over – in where they go, what they buy, how much they talk and what they eat." (Metcalf, 2004, p. 14). Clearing doubts for men, and explicitly linking women to impulsive and childish qualities, Thanawi has described women's behaviour as largely uncontrolled and emotional. Depicting women with suppressed aql, Thanawi said (1976, p.242), "...To attain the experience that they deserve, women need to live within the four walls of the house, as moving out will turn them mischievous and spoil their character. (sic.)

Perusing of religious books or books written by religious scholars is one major activity during the taaleem sessions organised by the women. I observed that Maulana Thanawi's writings are held in high esteem and his teaching adhered to in daily lives. Belonging to the second generation of Deobandi 'ulama, Thanawi and his works are of cultural importance to tablighi men and women. Most striking of all is the fact that women themselves speak of a man's control over woman. One of the women in the Jama'at said that a woman should listen to her husband and it is compulsory to obey his orders, with the exception of his insistence on going against Islam. Aware of the gendered stratification and reinforcing the gender roles determined by orthodox Islam, one of the women said, "I am on strict diet and trying to lose weight because my husband wants me to do so. Since Islam accords a higher authority to men the women should obey them in all matters and not get into argument with their husbands. I do everything according to my husband because it is true that Allah is happy with women who keep their husbands happy and content. I will obey him in all that he says but not if he asks me to leave tabligh." With this long period of interaction with the women in the Jama'at in all three theatres I came to know about tablighis' understanding of Islam, sexuality, gender roles and relations. Regarding women as subordinate, inferior and potentially out of control, the main religious ideologues and their adherents have come to dominate women in all spheres of their lives and control female sexuality.

Categorizing men as ‘providers’ and women as ‘acceptors’, the Tablighi women retract to an illiberal understanding of Islam, which has made them the confined ‘rulers’ of their homes. This given space of the ‘homely ruler’ is further, shrunk with the obligation of answerability for their ‘written’ and ‘unwritten’ duties. One such interviewee says, “A woman is the ruler of her house. However, her rule is to be in consent with her husband. She is answerable to her husband for the conduct of her duties.”

Women in Tablighi Jama'at preach and practice soft-Islamisation, where there is no use of “jabr” or force, but gradual transformation to their religious ethos. Primarily, with a promise of heaven they strictly promote and adhere to heteronormative perspectives that reinforce patriarchy through gender binary roles. Throughout my personal experience with tablighi women I could sense a vigorous undercurrent of a male dominated system where gender roles and sexuality are not fluid, are socially constructed and religiously legitimised. This study shows the significance of religious ideology in shaping and understanding gender. It is in their pursuit of narrow objectives that women through the department of ‘Amar bil ma’ruf, wah nahi anil munkar’ (enjoining good and forbidding evil) trace their identity and organise their religiously acceptable virtuous demeanour. This tablighi style police system also transcends the self to include fellow Muslims in one of the “greatest obligations” of inviting people towards good and forbidding them from committing sin.

The religious sensibilities of women under this study are found to be endorsing a body of lifestyle norms that codify distinct gender roles embedded within a tradition that has historically legitimised women’s subordination and submission through perfunctory reading of the texts. All through my visits to these three different places I found it strange that women make disparaging statements based on some unheard and unknown Ahadith. I observed that their lack of knowledge and education in their religious field is working against them. Interestingly, all this indicates that women in the Jama’at act as agents of orthodoxy and active partners in their subordination continuously working within this closed Islamic circle, thus posing a potent challenge to the women within.

Conclusion: A Counter-Narrative Within

The apolitical piety preached by the Tablighi Jama'at fits in the broader discussion on Islamic Revivalism, which constitutes both Political and Social Islam. I see tabligh as a grassroots social religious reform movement within Islam with a bottom-up approach towards meeting its ends. In understanding the degree to which women are included in or excluded from the main task of proselytisation, I conclude that the household is an important theatre of reform for women, where they are involved in the sacred mission of re-strengthening the faith. The primary reason for their selective inclusion in the Jama'at is contingent on their sexual identity. I observed that in discourses like these, women’s bodies are incessantly and relentlessly sexualised. This kind of engagement in discussions on women’s body and sexuality has negatively impacted the education and employment of Muslim women involved in the tabligh and has also led to the sexualisation of human relations.

While the women in tabligh are active agents in preaching and propagating the tablighi idea of gender relations and sexual identities, where the whole idea of fitna rests on the female body, there is another important force within Islam that gives a counter-narrative to the orthodox narrative of tabligh. It is this force, the Islamic feminists, that defies and confronts the challenges posed by tabligh on female sexuality. The recurring theme of fitna in the orthodox Islamic discourse has extended deep into Muslim societies where practice of veiling and seclusion has now translated into obsession, with the onus of family honour and societal order falling upon women.

Challenging tabligh's patriarchal assumptions that have led women to work as agents of their own subordination, the female Muslim scholars with their use of ijihad, (For a basic understanding of the term we can say that ijihad is independent juristic reasoning) have engaged in the un-reading of the

‘sacrosanct’ male interpretations of the Qur’an. Thus, Muslim women’s quest for rights, challenging the established conceptualisation of Islamic traditions, has been a crucial experience in demanding social change through a feminist reading of the cardinal text. There have been various attempts made by Islamic feminists “to educate Muslim women outside the conventional discourse that views woman as the passive depositor of culture and argue that the Qur’an is the root of democratic feminism in its broadest sense, a creative view egalitarian of active participation in the community’s decision making process” (Barazangi, 2004, p. x). Islamic feminists have brought the ‘non-negotiable issue of women’s rights and position in the society to the negotiating tables, with Islamic intransigence forcing Muslim women to fight for their rights, “openly when they can, subtly when they must” (Afkhami, 1995, p. 2).

Islamic feminists attempt to analyse the Qur’anic text and address complex problematic situations by devising a context based appropriate interpretation of the sources. Standing at the frontline of modernist Islamic reformism, Islamic feminists challenge the authority of traditional Qur’anic interpreters and their androcentric interpretations with their contextual rights based approach to Islam, and breaking the historical silence of female voices through the “instruments of scholarship concerning Islam”^{xii} (Barazangi, 2008, p. 406).

Endnotes

ⁱ Herewith, I will refer to Tablighi Jama’at as either Tabligh or Jama’at.

ⁱⁱ “The Deoband School of thought is rooted in Dar al-‘ulum at Deoband and emerged on May 30, 1866, in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857. By the end of the nineteenth century, any hope for the recovery of Muslim rule seemed impossible. Therefore, Deoband focused its attention on achieving a united front of Indian Muslims and made a common cause with the Hindus for greater autonomy (later independence) from Britain. The achievement of united Islamic front, however, was not an easy task, for it involved integrating indigenous converts to Islam and countering the Hindu right’s *Shuddhi* movement. Majority of the independent *madrassas* in India, as also in other parts of South Asia, are modeled on it and follow the curriculum set by it. The original objective of this institution was to establish a spiritual-intellectual base for revolution against what was generally perceived by this group of the elite as injustice, oppression, suppression of culture, knowledge and endowments. The three components of the *madrassa*’s objectives were: Central role of religion in individual and social life, freedom from slavery within and without, and simplicity and hard work.’ (See, David Singh: 2012, 17). Increasingly, the name Deoband has come to represent a distinct style, the tack of the Dar al-‘ulum Deoband will be Hanafite practical method in accordance with the *ahl al-sunna wal-jama’a* and the disposition of its holy founders, Hazrat Maulana Qasim Nanatawi and Hazrat Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi. (See, Reetz: 2006, 316). Thus, when we say that the Tablighi Jama’at emerged from the Deoband School of thought we mean to say that the Tablighi Jama’at agrees and endorses the basic principles and ideology of Deoband. Also, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of Tablighi Jama’at was a Deobandi scholar and was influenced by another prominent Deobandi scholar, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi. (emphasis mine)

ⁱⁱⁱ Sunna is the Arabic term for Prophet Muhammad’s way of life and legal precedent. It comes from the pre-Islamic Arab notion of Sunna as the way of life of a tribe, which is reflected in the Qur’an’s use of the word to mean the “ways of God” or “ways of life” of earlier people. The Sunna is an authoritative source of Islamic law because the Qur’an is understood as ordering Muslims to “obey God and obey the Messenger” and to “take what the Messenger has ordained for you and desist from what he has prohibited.” In the framework of Islamic law, the Sunna explains duties left unclear in the Qur’an, such as how to pray; replaces Qur’anic rulings; and adds new details of law and belief as well. Although the Qur’an is held by Muslims to be the literal word of God and the ultimate fount of all Islamic teachings, from the earliest period of Islam, Muslim scholars recognised that the Sunna’s role as the lens through which the Qur’an was understood made it in effect more authoritative than the Qur’an. The Sunna is not simply a list of Muhammad’s legal pronouncements about what is required and or prohibited for Muslims. It denoted his behaviour in general, from the details of his dress to his interaction with his wives. Although Sunni Islam takes its name from the term “Sunna”, Shi’ite Muslims are equally committed to the ideal of imitating the Prophet’s precedent. Shi’ite Islam simply has its own vision of the Sunna, namely the teachings of the Prophet as transmitted by the Twelve Imams and elaborated by Shi’ite scholars. (See, Brown: 2010, 3), (Also See, Brvmann: 2009, Hallaq: 1997, 2005, & Schacht: 1964)

^{iv} In tablighi lexicon "lesser Muslims" are the ones who are born Muslims but are not practicing ones. It is important to note that Tablighi Jama'at's first target are these lesser Muslims and then any other sect or community. They start with preaching in their neighborhoods, to Muslims who do not practice the faith, who are not aware of or fail to perform their ritualistic duties. The tabligh focuses on observing six *sifa't* or qualities. Following are the six qualities to be strictly adhered by all individuals of tabligh: (i) *Kalima Tayyibah* or the phrase, (ii) *Salat* or Prayer (iii) *‘Ilm aur Dhikr*: Knowledge and Remembrance (iv) *Ikram al-Muslim*: Honouring Muslims (v) *Ikhlās-e-Niyat*: Sincerity of Intention (vi) *Da'wa-wa-Tabligh*: Invitation and Conveyance.

^v *Deeni Behenis* is a term used by the *masturat* (women) jama'at while addressing their fellow women in the Jama'at.

^{vi} *Bihshiti Zewar* is defined as an "encyclopedic work" that includes extensive detailed discussions on the religious law, which not only includes ritual law, but also family, commercial and financial law; a section on household management; a section on the principles of Islamic medicine; a section on biographies of good women; and a section on personal formation. An enormously successful book, the book is widely available today. The book "includes women in teaching of behavioral propriety or *adab*, which was typically limited to male elite, and marks one significant dimension of the popular spread of scripturalist Islamic forms – a process that has been a central theme in the modern history of Muslim peoples." (See, Metcalf: 1984, 186) *I saw it in all the houses that I had visited during my field work in Lucknow, Delhi and Bhopal.* (emphasis mine)

^{vii} "Nazir Ahmad (1836-1912) is considered by many to be the first modern novelist in Urdu, especially those who prefer a novel to be a study of contemporary social life, and who like it to have a message. He became a novelist by accident. Educated at Delhi College, he worked first as a schoolmaster, then as inspector of education, and subsequently in various posts in the Revenue Department. His first novel, *Mirat al-Arus (The Bride's Mirror)* in 1869 was written for his own daughters to read privately; it was a moral tale to teach them the qualities required of a good and successful wife. A British Director of Public Instruction saw and manuscript and urged him to have it published. Because of its educational value and high moral tone, the Indian Government bought a thousand copies. He achieved his didactic aim by describing two sisters and comparing their married lives. Akbari is a spoiled girl who proves incapable of running her house; while Asghari is efficient and practical, almost a model of all the virtues. In 1873, he followed it with a sequel, *Binat al-na'sh*. Its subject is girls' education, but it is more like a series of lessons than story. *Tawbat al-Nasuh* (1877) is a more ambitious family tale. It tells how Nasuh, while ill, repents; and having previously allowed his children to do as they like, he now tries to reform them as well as himself. *Fasana-yi-Mubtala* (1885) treats of the evils of polygamy. Ibn al-waqt (1888) describes the troubles of an Anglicised Indian who shuns his fellow Indians. But when his only British friend leaves the country, he finds himself isolated. All these novels, then, are stories with moral, and the very names of many of the characters are descriptive of them: thus *Nasuh* (repentance) and *Mubtah* (affliction)." These novels were straightforward stories dealing with contemporary social problems and were reprinted up to the Second World War. His later novels were of superior quality in both character development and plot construction, though the earlier ones remained more popular. His *Ibn al-waqt* attracted attention because of its relevance to the last years of the British Raj. (See, Encyclopedia of Islam, Vol. V: 1980, 203)

^{viii} A *ghair-mehram* is a man who a woman can marry. The concept of *mehram* and *na-mehram*, which determines who a woman can or cannot meet, or which man she might be seen in the company of drove many these women into the *chaardevari* (four walls) of their houses. Therefore women were cut off from relating to the outside world and were further caught within themselves and their marital families. (See, K. Visweswaran:2011; 136)

^{ix} The women cited Hadith on the importance and preference of *akhirah* over *targheeb* (greed for worldly gains). Regarding the afterlife as everlasting, eternal and full of bounties, one of the women quoted a Hadith, "He who loves this world does harm to his *akhirah*; and he who loves his *akhirah* does harm to his worldly interests. Give preference to what is everlasting over that which is short lived." This Hadith, she said, "is a warning against love for the pleasures of the world." She further exhorted, "A person gets so involved in achieving his worldly goals that he trapped within this temporary love for the world," adding, "Fearing this enslavement the Prophet of Islam persuaded the *ummah* to work for hereafter and abstain from love of the world. Even a noble man can get corrupt and neglect his duty towards Allah with excessive interaction and love with the worldly affairs." *Surah al-Baqarah*: 86, "Such are those who buy the life of this world at the price of *akhirah*. Their punishment will not be lightened, neither shall they be helped." (See, Zakariyya, 1956, 319).

^x *Aurah* is an Arabic term which denotes intimate parts of the body for both men and women, and should be covered with clothing. Exposing the *awrah* is considered sin.

^{xi} According to tabligh literature, the logic for not wearing gold is applied to those who do not pay *zakaat* (an act of Islamic charity) on their ornaments. One Hadith quotes Asma, daughter of Yazid, as reiterating Prophet's saying, "Any woman who wears a gold necklace of fire round her neck shall be made to wear a similar necklace of fire round her neck on the Day of Resurrection; and any woman who puts a gold ear-ring in her ear shall have a similar

ring of fire put in her ear on the Day of Resurrection.” This Hadith indicates that it is unlawful for women to wear gold jewellery if they do not pay *zakaat*. Certain Hadith support this view. In one Hadith the same Asma was reported as saying, “I visited Rasulullah with my maternal aunt, both wearing gold bracelets on their hands. Rasulullah asked them, ‘Do you pay *zakaat* on your bracelets?’ and when we replied, ‘No’, he said, ‘aren’t you afraid of having bracelets of fire put on you by Allah *Ta’ala* on the Day of Resurrection? Do pay *zakaat* on them.” Thus, Muslim women have to be particular in paying *zakaat* on their ornaments otherwise the same ornaments would become blazing flames of *jahannum* (hell) and torture their bodies. According to other Ahadith the same rules apply to both gold and silver ornaments. Corroborating women’s logic of attention and vanity, a tradition transmitted by Abu Dawood and Nasaai states, “O women, don’t you consider silver good enough to make ornaments for adorning yourself? I assure you that nay woman who adorns herself with gold, which she displays, will be punished for it.” According to tabligh understanding, vain women do not set much value to silver ornaments because of their high birth and superior status. A woman wearing gold ornaments will do all that she can to attract other’s attention towards her and her jewellery. She would deliberately lift her hands to adjust her head covering or pretend to drive away a fly or make other gestures in order to draw people’s attention towards her bracelet. Thus, “it should be borne in mind that ornaments should not be worn for the sake of vanity and *zakaat* should be regularly paid on the ornaments. If someone doesn’t have regards for both these points, she will have to suffer punishment in *jahannum*. (Z. Kandhlavi, 1956, 290-292)

^{xii} While outlining the context and summarizing the challenges facing the contemporary process of rethinking Islam, Barazangi defines five “instruments of scholarship” in Islam: (a) *Ijtihad*: Individual systemic reasoning within the framework of the Qur’an, (b) *Fiqh*: Interpretive ruling. Traditionally recognised schools of *Fiqh* are four Sunni schools and one Shia, (c) *Shura*: Mutual consultative process among the Muslim community, (d) *Ijma*: Consensus of the *Ummah* (Muslim universal community). Often *Ijma* is unjustly limited to elite males, (e) *Qiyas*: Analogy to precedent cases.

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