Doctoral Dissertation

Negotiation for Extended Gender Roles in Islam: Women in Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh

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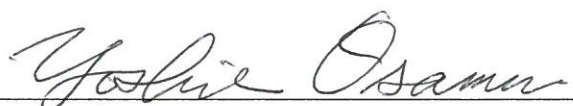
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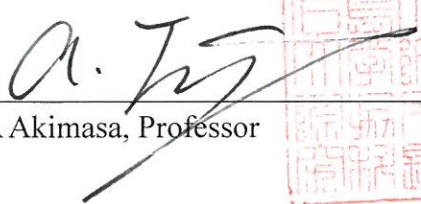
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Table of Contents

Tables, Figures and Photographs

Notes on Transliteration

Throughout the thesis, I use many Arabic, Persian, and Bengali words by using English translation. Within the whole thesis, I use the words Tablighi Jamaat and Masturat Jamaat in many times. To write both these two words I borrow the commonly used spelling, used in earlier studies. In some cases, the word Tablighis (Tablighi followers) is used to make it plural by adding with 's'. Although the word madrasa is used in many styles, i.e. madrasah, I render the usual spelling –madrasa, used in many recent academic works. The word Jamaat-e-Islami is used in different ways such as Jamaat-i-Islami, in this study I use the official spelling which the party in Bangladesh use– Jamaat-e-Islami. For all transliteration used in italic form, I avoid the diacritical marks. The Bengali transliteration is used according to their phonetic sounds, for example, *Akheri Munaja*t*, burqa*, *purdah*, *dua*, *salwer-kameez* etc. Meaning of the loan and transliterated words are given in the glossary at the end of the dissertation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Islam as a religion and culture has historically been dominated by men's scholarship and authorship. On the questions of female religious leadership and authority, examples are often drawn from a small number of female scholars and Sufi masters in the early period of Islam. However, the differing gender roles are visible in the way men and women propagate, teach, and promote Islam in many Muslim societies. Modernity and the inevitable social changes that follow it have transformed or, at least, seem to have transformed Muslim women's roles in the religious sphere in modern Muslim societies. This study aims at deciphering the changing gender roles in Islam by taking into account the case of Tablighi Jamaat (Propagation Party/Group), a missionary Islamic faith renewal movement widely known in academic scholarship for its pietistic, apolitical, ascetic, and transnational nature.

Like all other Islamic movement in modern times, Muslim women's participation in Tablighi Jamaat (hereafter TJ) has significantly increased in local, national, and transnational levels. Women's increasing involvement in mosque-based Islamic movements and religious reading circles suggest the evolution of new forms of female leadership in Islam as entailed in recent studies (e.g. Kalmbach, 2012; Bano, 2012; Dessing,2012), but their growing participation in TJ, the largest Islamic movement, has relatively been unexplored. Does women's involvement in TJ change their historically patterned and conventional

gender relationship in the public religious sphere? Or can Muslim women, who share the responsibilities of Islamizing self and society equally with their male counterparts through the TJ movement, pose resistance to the dominance of men's leadership and authority or attain some form of religious leadership? To explore these questions in the light of a general and emerging trend in women's participation in the religious sphere and in modern Islamic movements, I take the case of TJ in Bangladesh.

Women's participation in TJ is popularly known as 'Masturat Jamaat'[1] (the literal meaning is 'unrevealed group/party; hereafter MJ), which usually refers to the female Tablighi group who participate in the movement with their male partners and companions. The name also suggests that the women in this group will not be revealed to others, which is based on the veiling doctrine of Islam. From its origin, MJ has been working as a front of TJ specially arranged for Muslim women. Recently, it operates in Muslim communities and societies across the world like the mainstream TJ for Muslim men. Studies on MJ, as compared to the mainstream TJ movement for men, are relatively fewer in number, and this is why the theme on what roles are played by the women in TJ in advancing the

[1] In this thesis, I use female Tablighi group and Masurat Jamaat in same sense. Usually Masturat Jamaat means the group of the unrevealed women who are in veiled. Since the female Tablighi followers never exposed them in outer world without wearing veil, I use frequently female Tablighi Jamaat and women Tablighi Jamaat to understand the group of Masturat Jamaat. Similarly, Masturat or female Tablighi or women Tablighi is used to mean the female followers of Masturat Jamaat..

Islamization project remained untold. The very intention of this study is to fill the gap by providing an ethnographic account on TJ women in Bangladesh, a country whose national history has witnessed both decreasing and increasing roles of Islam in the dominant political discourse since its founding in 1971. The independence movement of Bangladesh against Pakistan upheld the secular-liberal nationalist discourses by denouncing Islam as an integrative force for nationalism. Political Islam had been denigrated in the emerging nationalist movement of Bangladesh; however, Islamist revivalist movements re-emerged in the latter period, and Islam regained its power as a political and socio-cultural force in the last several decades. Also, since the nineteenth century the Bengali-Muslims in Bangladesh have experienced the unrelenting effect of various forms of Islamic reformist-revivalist movements, of which many originated from and were led by the thoughts of the elite northern Indian Islamic scholars, and these have aimed to reconfigure a sense of Muslim-ness and of local cultural tradition in close conformity to the thoughts, ideas, and doctrines of Islam (see, Banu 1992; Ahmed 1996; Uddin 2006; Kabir 2009, 2012; Begum and Kabir, 2012). TJ gained ascendancy as one of many Islamic reformist-revivalist movements in Bangladeshi society. That thousands of devoted Muslim people attend TJ's annual gathering denotes not just the popularity of TJ but also how Islam is becoming more visible in Bangladeshi public life. The Islamic reformist appeal to women, especially the practice of wearing the burqa (veil) has been the subjects of critiques by modern secularists, for it is seen as an obstacle to women's emancipation, freedom and empowerment (Rozario, 2006). Nevertheless, a large numbers of Bangladeshi women embrace Islamic appeals and become

active agent in various forms of Islamic movements including TJ. On the other hand, initiatives for reducing the gender gap in Bangladeshi society, both by state and non-state programs, have been successful to some extent, and as a result of which Muslim women's increasing visibility in Bangladeshi society, such as in education, employment sectors, and political arenas, are worth noting. Paradoxically, Bengali-Muslim women are also increasingly visible in the wider Islamization project in Bangladeshi society. Therefore, the social and political context affecting the twisting visibility of women needs to be re-examined. The case taken in this research—women's involvement in TJ movement—is an attempt to answer not just the paradoxical context of women's visibility but also changing gender roles in religion which has hitherto been dominated by men's action, authority and scholarship in wider Bangladeshi society.

In this chapter, I briefly introduce the TJ movement and then move to a broader context of Islam and women in Bangladesh. Also, I try to explore how academic scholarship conceptualizes the Muslim women's participation and role in Islamic movements. By engaging with previous studies analytically, I problematize the gender perspective in Islam and then formulate the research objectives to be inquired in this study. As to how I conceptualize the theoretical and analytical issues, I discuss some of the core discourses on gender and Islam, and before presenting the outline of this study I describe my ethnographic encounters with the interlocutors in the field.

1.1 Tablighi Jamaat and Women

TJ originated in India and aims to perfect Muslim life with the moral and spiritual guidance of Islam. One of the central aspects of Tablighi reformism is *dawa*. The word *Dawa* literally means 'to call' or 'to invite' people, particularly in the Islamic sense. From the perspective of the TJ movement, *Dawa* is used to call people to the right path of Islam. Tablighi *Dawa* emphasizes 'enjoining good and forbidding evil'. TJ organizes its *Dawa* mission following the method of travelling with a group (*Jamaat*) touring from one place to other. Usually, a group of five to ten people travel from one place to other, stay at a mosque in a community, and preach to the 'common' Muslims to return to the true path of Islam by observing daily religious observances and an Islamic life-style modeled upon the Prophet Muhammad. People engage in *Dawa* tours for three, ten and 40 days or even for one year. The Tablighi project of individual moral reform is embedded in the group tour in which one cultivates Islamic faith through repetitive performances of Islamic practices, observances, and of engaging in *dawa*. If one led his life in accordance with Islamic principles, then other people, to whom Tablighi men will go with the message of Islam*,* would follow and maintain the life-styles according to the tradition of the Prophet and guidance of Islam. Individual reform is the central focus of Tablighi revivalism (see, Masud, 2000; Sikand, 2002; Haq, 1972).

In the formative period of TJ in the 1920s, Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944)[2], the founder of the movement, started its reformist activities among the peasant class in Mewat city in British colonial India. Although during his

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[2] On Mawlana Ilyas's life history, see Nadwi (2012).

lifetime, TJ had not been as popular as it is today, it spread from local to national to the transnational, and now it is recognized as the largest Islamic movement in the world. Its presence has been observed in some 165 countries, and its annual gathering, which is known as '*Biswa Ijtema*' (World Congregation of TJ), is held in Bangladesh with more than one million participants, the second largest Islamic gatherings after the hajj in Mecca (Faruqi, 1992; Sikand, 2002).

Considering men and women's shared responsibility in Islamic preaching, Muslim women were encouraged to participate in TJ since the 1940s, despite severe objections from the Islamic scholars (Metcalf, 1998). As mentioned earlier, TJ activities for Muslim women do not only consist of female participants but also of their male companions such as husband and unmarriageable kin. The MJ group is formed by five to ten pairs of females and their male relatives who attend in the *Dawa* tour, the core component of the TJ movement. What is distinctive in female TJ activities is the separate arrangement for accommodation for male and female participants in a community where they visit to preach and propagate Islam in the Tablighi *Dawa* tour. Unlike males who usually stay at a local mosque in the community, the female participants stay at the house of a Tablighi follower chosen prior to the *Dawa* tour. The women in TJ perform several activities, in addition to their daily observance of regulatory religious prayers, such as *Talim* (reading/lesson circle), *Bayan* (religious sermon) during the *Dawa* tour in order to cultivate their pious selfhoods. After the *Dawa* tour, every Tablighi follower is strongly recommended to observe the regulatory religious observances and prayers, and to organize and arrange the Tablighi activities such as *Talim* and

Bayan for other women in their neighborhoods and communities. Janet Bauer (1997) contends that the politicized religious movements often appear as male dominated from a distance, but closer observation usually shows a large number of active female participants and members. In the case of TJ, it may seem like a men's movement because of their visible activities, leadership in religious institutions and forums, and their mobility for religious preaching and propagating. However, a closer look into the TJ movement can depict a higher, though less visible, women's participation in these reformist activities in many Muslim societies including Bangladesh.

Some studies have already illustrated the increasing popularity of female Tablighi activities both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, such as in Indonesia, Pakistan and Australia (Amarullah, 2011; Metcalf, 1998; Ali, 2006). Women's involvement in TJ has been a phenomenon in Bangladesh at least since the 1970s. Now it can be found in almost all areas including urban, semi-urban and village areas. Some recent studies found women's involvement in the Tablighi movement among modern educated or semi-educated women of both middle and lower middle classes in different rural and urban settings (e.g. Hasan and Suborna, 2008; Rozario, 2006; White, 2010). However, since the focuses of these studies were not to illuminate the changing gender relationship in the Islamic movement, the role of women in Islamizing Bangladeshi society largely remained unexplored.

Metcalf (2000) contends that the dearth of studies on TJ in general, and the women's involvement in the movement in particular, is due to TJ's apolitical

characteristics and its low institutional profile. Most of the studies conducted so far are silent on the involvement of women because TJ presents itself with a wholly masculine face. The men in TJ take the leading roles in preaching Tablighi reformist appeals to the lay Muslim masses. Therefore, the 'masculine face', as Metcalf (2000) dubs it, of TJ dominates the present scholarship. With the backdrop of increasing female Tablighi activism, some scholars have partly conducted studies on women in TJ in which gender ideology has been taken as a primary focus (Metcalf, 1998; Sikand, 2002). Metcalf (1998) argues that TJ revitalizes an old theme of Islamic understanding by holding the notion of shared nature between men and women: both have the same responsibilities and the same potentialities. Sikand (1999) shows that TJ also reinforces the traditional notion of the gender division like all other Islamic movements, however, women's participation in TJ, according to him, can be seen as a new source of their mobility, which can transform them as active agents. Ali (2011), Amarullah (2011), and Janson (2005) are in the opinion that TJ women can be seen as active agents in Islamization against the Western representation of women's passivity in religious and patriarchal discourses.

This study aims at looking into the interrelationships between personal piety and social reform. Like all other Islamic movements, TJ also upholds the agenda of social reform, and historically women's personal reform is seen as important for reforming her family and close relatives. The roles of women's in TJ are sought in this study beyond the narrow space of the family i.e. in the wider society in which women play extended roles as Islamic agents against their

8

conventional religious practices and boundaries. Western emancipatory discourses and empowerment issues overwhelmingly influence gender studies in Bangladesh, and women's capability to resist the patriarchal religious norms and practices have not been considered as a mode of change in unequal gender relations. Some recent studies on gender and Islam in Bangladeshi society suggest that Muslim women are seen to have an increasing inclination to certain forms of Islamic practices, identity, and movement partly derived in response to social malaise and partly to Western cultural and development changes that favor the Islamists agenda, such as the party of *Jamaat-e-Islami*[3] on the one hand and, on the other, to have a negotiation with and resistance to the Islamists' agenda and the Western discourses according to their own life-context (see, Rozario 2006; Huq 2006; Hussain 2010; Naher 2010). This study takes into account the social and cultural contexts in which Tablighi women embody the core gender discourse and norms of Islam and pose some forms of resistance to those norms by forming new boundaries of religious practices, preaching and interaction for women (I shall discuss in detail about the issue in Chapter Five).

Studies that have highlighted some cases of Tablighi women followers and leaders in Bangladesh did not take this paradoxical issue—embodying and cultivating Islamic piety on one hand and resisting the restrictive gender rules of TJ on the other (see, White, 2010; Ashraf and Suborna, 2008). As my detailed

[3] *Jamaat-e-Islami* is the most prominent Islamic political party in Bangladesh, which was originated in British colonial India and spread as a transnational revivalist movement in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

ethnographic account reveals (in Chapter Six), women's resistance against the restrictive gender rule of TJ can be seen in the formation of a separate TJ group known as *Char Sathir Dal*, Group of Four Companions (GFC). With essential similarities to the mainstream TJ for women, what characterizes this group is that it is maintained, managed, and guided by women, unlike the mainstream TJ in which men decide and authorize all the activities. The earlier studies, very limited in number, and less detailed with their account on women's in TJ, ignore the way in which TJ women play a strategic role in negotiating for the accommodation of their 'own point of view' and for justifying their extended activities beyond the home within the unequal structure of TJ. To some extent, they may respond in a creative and strategic way to the conventional and structured gender relations in religion, and making a new group from the TJ movement that allows not abiding by the established gender norms of the mainstream TJ, would be an example as such of a creative and strategic response. By examining Tablighi women's activities both in the mainstream group of TJ and GFC, this study provides a holistic perspective on the TJ movement in Bangladesh.

1.2 Women, Islam, and the Socio-political Context in Bangladesh

Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in 1971 based on the secular principle but has increasingly identified itself with Islam. Although the secularist-nationalist forces extremely opposed and condemned the Islamists because of their controversial roles in liberation war of Bangladesh, now the country is experiencing an Islamic revival (Huq, 2006). The secular government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the independence movement of

Bangladesh, was overthrown in 1975 and a military regime emerged with Ziaur Rahman as the head of the state. In 1977, President Zia removed secularism from the constitution and replaced it with 'faith' in the 'Almighty Allah' (Huq and Akhter, 1987, p.206) and the Islamist political parties that were banned in the years after Bangladeshi independence returned to politics in 1979. General Ershad (1982-1990) reinforced the politics of Islam by declaring Islam as the state religion in 1988 (White, 2010). Later, during the period of democratic governance, the two main liberal-democratic parties (the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-BNP) were increasingly seen to make allies with the Islamic groups and parties in the hope of maintaining power or of destabilizing the ruling party (Riaz, 2003). The BNP formed an electoral alliance with *Jamaat-e-Islami*, and the political fronts of Islam were given a share of the state power when the BNP-led alliance formed a government in 2001.

The reestablishment of political Islam in state politics has increased the visibility of Islam in the everyday life of society. "A gradual but sustaining mainstreaming of Islam in public political life, in the representational practices of the state as well as in national policy and constitutional principles began in mid-1970. By the mid-1990, Islamic symbols and idioms had become part of everyday political vocabulary" (Siddiqi, 2006:2; cf. White, 2010, p.4). Also, the establishments of Islamic institutions and organizations have been increasing. For example, the number of mosques has grown, thousands of madrasas (Islamic seminaries) were set up where millions of male and female students have enrolled (Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2008; Begum, 2013), and Islamic media has

flourished. Significant numbers of newly mobile women including university students are seen to use the veil, which was previously less popular in Bangladeshi cultural life (Rozario, 2006). Women's active participation in Islamic movements, particularly in *Jamaat-e-Islami* and Tablighi Jamaat, are visible, and these two groups a have profound influence on the university campuses (Huq, 2006; Rozario, 2006).

Despite the growing visibility of Islam in Bangladeshi public life and state ideology, women's activities in the out-of-home spaces have also significantly increased due to development initiatives that primarily aim to equip women with economic and social empowerment. Bangladesh government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated various development programs for women that have increased women's access to higher education, employment, politics, and other development sectors. Particularly, the gradual shift of Bangladesh's development policy from 'import substitution' to 'export–led development' has created employment opportunities for women, and eventually a large number of women have had the opportunity to work in garment factories. Besides this, the microcredit programs of NGOs have opened up access for rural women in the developing economy. It means the traditional norms of gender that prohibit women 'to go outside' of households have shifted with increased needs for cash income in various employment sectors (White, 2011). In spite of this development, still large numbers of women remain confined in the domestic space and those who engage in outside work are concerned about physical security and interested in a congenial social environment. In some cases,

the women involvement in development programs, as clientele of the NGO's empowerment activities, are being opposed by the Islamists in the name of Islam and of protecting their 'honor' in a social context in which patriarchic norms are deeply rooted in the social institutions and nurtured and practiced by all classes (Naher, 2010).

In such a complex socio-political context, relationships between gender and patriarchy and between gender and Islam is far more complex than what has been discussed so far in academic studies. During the period of the 1970s to 1990, a vast corpus of published academic works focused on Islam as against the project of women's development and empowerment. Particularly, the rules of veiling in Islam was the primary focus, which is rendered as an obstacle to the 'development process', for it constrains women's mobility freely out of the home (Abecassis, 1990). Various studies have contended that the NGOs were attacked by the Islamist groups because these organizations brought women out of their home and made them *be-purdah* (unveiled) (e.g. Feldman, 1998; Hasmi, 1994; Shehabuddin, 1999; Naher, 2010). Others argued that the mushrooming of grassroots development activities, mainly targeting the women, have eventually changed the conventional power relations in rural Bangladesh, and this is why many poor young women in rural areas are being oppressed in the name of religion. Women are often the subject of human rights violation as in the case of *fatwa* (Islamic edict issued by religious clerics) which is exploited in the name of Islam both by the religious clerics and by the local power holders accusing women as violators of Islamic norms (Shehabuddin, 1999). The conflict between women's response to

the development program and the Islamists agenda cannot be understood in a simple binary division such as development as an emancipatory factor and religion as an antithesis to women's emancipation; rather, it is compounded with many other factors, as revealed in some studies, such as struggles for regaining power by local elites and Islamists in a changing social structure, changing cultural norms, class-based politics, NGO interests to donor agencies, the presence of weak state, etc. (e.g. Kabeer, 1991; Naher, 2010; Karim, 2004).

Other studies focused on women's response to development programs and showed how the poor women are negotiating between cultural demands of women's modesty and their economic crisis (Feldman, 2001). These women often negate secular and religious ideologies (Huq, 2010; Hussain, 2010). For the contradictory and complicated socio-political context, Bangladeshi women demonstrate their agency in multiple ways. Naher (2010, p. 6) argued that women in Bangladesh, within the limit of the existing cultural frameworks and social norms, resist the forces against them in various forms: silent resistance, verbal protests, networking, 'purposive agency'[4] kinship morality, redefining the notion of *purdah*, and with other everyday forms of resistance including gossip, jokes and songs. In a similar tone, Shehabuddin (2008) have explored poor rural women

[4]The term 'purposive agency' is used in Bourdieu (1977). It means that within the limit of habitus, individuals behave based on the calculation of interests. Since the goals of poor women are to change their socio-economic condition and to secure a better future for their children by engaging them in economic activities, they have consciously responded to the pressures accommodating themselves to the existing social values while they are also taking the benefits from the NGOs.

as social and collective actors in their own right and for their own interests.

The early scholarships mostly examined gender relations in Bangladesh in the context of economic development, which could have been affected by the thrust of economic development as a newly born, war-affected country. This study aims to go beyond the economic perspective of gender by taking into account women's active involvement in a faith-renewal movement. Some scholars argue that the growing rate of women's participation in the Islamic movement such as in *Jamaat-e-Islami* and in the practice of certain Islamic norms such as wearing the *burqa* contribute to the violation of women's rights in Bangladesh (Rozario, 2006). Such an argument may have importance in understanding how women are being subjected to maintain the patriarchic norms by promoting certain socio-cultural and religious values in Bangladeshi society. By adopting the discourse of development in which Islam is seen as an antithesis, these studies put aside the women from their own perspective, which is created and constructed through their everyday cultural and social experiences. This study intends to examine women's own perspective and their self-chosen decision in engaging with the TJ movement in light with the politics of gender in the Bangladeshi socio-political context (for details please see, Chapter Four). For a comparative perspective on women in the modern Islamic movement, I put the Bangladeshi women's participation in the Islamic movement in a broader context, and the next section illustrates the experiences of Muslim women involved in various forms of Islamic activism across the Muslim worlds including the Middle East.

1.3 Women in Contemporary Islamic movements

Many studies have documented the emerging and popular trend of various forms of women's Islamic activism in different regions of the Muslim world including the Middle East, North Africa, South and South-East Asia (Reeves 1989; Sullivan 1998; Najmabodi 1989; Deeb 2006; Brenner 1996; Nagata 1980, 1996; Frisk 2009; Metcalf, 2000). Women's participation in Islamic movements are seen in relation to the politics of identity construction in Muslim societies in the early period of colonial India (Ahmad 1991). For example, Islamic reformist-revivalist movement advocated for women to be the 'preserver' of Islamic tradition who could contribute to transform their community from 'un-Islamic' and '*Hinduistic*' traditions to an Islamic one (Sikand, 1999). In the new ideological construction of Islamic movements in Middle Eastern societies, women are presented as the symbols and repositories of religious, national and cultural identities against the impact of Westernization (Moghadam, 1993).

In fact, the emergence and expansion of women's Islamic activism across the world is inherently linked with social, religious, and political changes. In the process of state formation, women's inclusion in Islamic movements was crucially felt (Kandiyoti, 1991). By increasing the relationship between politics and Islam, women's involvement in Islamic movements were somewhat necessary in order to spread the political agenda among a large number of the populations of all segments of society. The Islamic movement with its political agenda, which has been recognized and legitimized in the political struggles of Muslim countries, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Party for Justice and Development

in Morocco, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine etc., had paid great attention to the role of women to further their political goal and agenda. The women's branches of such movements are seen as important means of advancing the Islamic agenda to the women in wider society (Abedellatif and Ottaway, 2007). The same phenomenon has also appeared in Bangladesh too. Shehabuddin (2008, p.2) shows *Jamaat-e-Islami* upholds a dual agenda for women. It enjoins women to fulfill domestic obligations, although they "highlight Islam's recognition of women as 'individuals' with individual responsibilities to God and Islam" with acknowledging their right to study, work and vote. At the same time, the party has been transforming from their earlier agenda by "twin pressures": democratic polity and competing with other secular organizations for winning voter's mind (Shehabuddin, 2008, p.2).

Mahmood (2005) argues that both the theological and sociological bases contribute to women's inclusion into modern Islamic movements. Women's participation in Islamic activities for advocating the 'purist' Islam has been rationalized in Quranic verses, that enjoin women and men as equally responsible for undertaking the duty, and this is being interpreted and propagated by modern Islamic scholars. Many religious scholars associated with Islamic revivalist movements emphasized why women should actively participate in *Dawa* activities like men. The wave of modern Islamic movements in which women's participation and involvement are seen as instrumental both for identity construction and political agenda has influenced other Islamic activism like TJ, which believes in a shared and equal responsibility between men and women in

Islamic reformist project.

Some other studies suggest that women's socio-economic backgrounds encourage them to engage in Islamic movements. The most important catalyst of emergence and expansion of women's Islamic activism is their access to higher education and an increasing social mobility. Eickleman (1992) has demonstrated how the proliferation of mass higher education and Islamic activism in Middle Eastern and in North Africa societies, are closely interlinked, a premise that may be transposable to South Asia generally and Bangladesh specifically (cf. Huq, 2006). The higher educated Muslim who women joined Islamist movements during the last three decades became aware of their importance in the movements. Across the Arab world, in South East Asia and in South Asia, a large number of Muslim women are involved in mosque movements and other forms of Islamic circles[5], which have aimed to establish Islamic discourse in all spheres of society. The expansion of Islamic activism has been mobilized under different structures

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[5] In the last three decades of the 20th century, the emergence of educated women in Egypt, Syria, Iran, and others part of Muslim societies engaged them in learning Quranic lessons and Hadith, and their main goal was to return to the original sources of Quran and Hadith to establish a more perfect, Islamic way of life. These Quranic-reading groups of higher educated women are also connected to mosques. Either, they physically take place in mosques or women's groups belonging to a certain network of mosques organize them. Such study groups can also be held in private homes, schools, madrasahs or any other place. However, these mosque networks have a close association with the larger Islamic revivalist movements. For further details, see (Mahmood, 2005; Frisk, 2009; Minagati, 2012; Kuppinger, 2012)

such as the mosque, study circles, dense social networks (friends and family), Islamic non-governmental organizations, political parties, the *dars* (religious lessons), professional and student associations, and unions. All of these are utilized for effective recruitment and the launching of Islamic movements in a broader social aspect.

In this study, I argue that the emergence of female TJ in India was closely associated with social, religious and political changes brought about by forces including the colonial powers. Women's participation in Islamic religious movements in colonial India had been the result of the politics of identity construction in which Muslim women were considered as the repositories of Islamic culture. TJ has emerged and proliferated in Mewat, in the south–west of New Delhi (the capital city of India) in changing the socio-economic and religious context in which the Meo Muslim men became the subject of Tablighi agenda for construction of a Muslim identity (I shall elaborate the issue in Chapter Two). The women of Mewat, who were also equally victims like their menfolk because of a changing socio-economic and political context, become enthusiastic to participate in an Islamic movement like TJ. On the other hand, the founder of the movement, who wished to build a wider Muslim community in India, included women to fulfill his broader vision. In this community building project of TJ women are seen as protectors of community's glory, like other reformist movement of that time.

TJ as a transnational Islamic reformist movement has proliferated across

the world with its nearly unchanged Islamic ideology. In this study, I shall focus on the proliferation of female TJ in Bangladesh that provides insight on how TJ accommodates the movement among its female followers in the changing socio-economic and political context of this country (I shall discuss the issue in Chapter Four). I argue that in the contemporary social context of Bangladesh, both the secularists and Islamist leaders have taken various steps to include women in development projects, which in turn has increased female's visibility overall in the outer world. Women's increasing involvement in the outer world, however, does not limit the Tablighi activities because TJ could raise the concern about individual religious responsibility among its female followers. In contemporary Bangladesh, the Muslim women can be seen in close affinity to various secularist and cultural fronts on the one hand and in Islamic movements on the other.

I argue that the perceived notion of individual religious responsibility consciously make women responsible to organize female reformist groups. For the restricted gender ideology of TJ, female participation is not allowed without unmarriageable male companions, women may respond in different way by organizing their own group. Through an ethnographic account of Tablighi women's separate group of GFC in Bangladesh, this study explores new dimensions of women's participation in the Islamic movement.

1.4. Gender Roles in the Study of Islamic Movements

An innovative body of literature on women's roles in Islamic movements has appeared in last few decades in which two dominant trends are reflected. A group

of literature has shown women's roles confining them at home, and in contrast, other scholarship has contributed to the field of changing gender roles in Islamic movements by depicting female's roles in the public religious sphere. Islamic movements' call for domestication and motherhood for women constructs women as agents of Islamizing the family as good wives and good mothers, while the menfolk are considered for establishing Islam in the world beyond home. According to this perspective, Muslim women in Islamic movements are just bearers of cultural tradition whose roles are demarcated within the boundary of home (Stivens, 1998; Ong, 1995). The division of gender roles in Islamic movements is constructed on the basis of the ideology of separate duties and separate spaces for men and women as supported by prevailing social structures and cultural-religious norms. This frame of analysis manifested in some earlier studies has been criticized by recent scholarship because of its political manifestation. Various scholars contend that gender roles in Islamic movements are interlinked with the politics of building nations and economies (Bernal, 1994). Kandiyoti (1991) has insisted that Middle Eastern women have to be studied not in terms of an undifferentiated Islam or Islamic culture but rather through the differing political projects of nation-states, their distinct histories, relationship to colonialism and the West, class politics, ideological usages of an Islamic idiom, and struggles over the role of Islamic law in the state's legal apparatus. A major field of inquiry has emerged in this regard that shows how Muslim women are affected by both modernizing efforts taken by the state and by the Islamic movement. What characterized the Islamic revivalist movements in the colonial context is control of women in order to increase their political power or to meet

21

economic challenges (Moghadam, 1993). Threats to Islamic culture or the loss of their women were seen as direct threat to manhood, community, and family. Therefore, patriarchal control over labor, fertility, and the sexuality of women appeared as a systematic social order. In such a context, Islamic movements frequently appeared with a reductionist gender ideology that placed a high premium on motherhood and domesticity, similar to the right wing movements in Europe in the past. This ideology was manifested not just in Middle Eastern societies but also in the South Asian context, as Metcalf (1990) pointed out that the reformist leaders of the nineteenth century India have empowered women with literacy but relegate them to a newly created private sphere in order to meet the challenge from the colonial power. The ideology of domesticity, therefore, is closely justified by the notions of gender differences in which physical, physiological, and biological differences between men and women were translated both into universal and immutable differences in their social and intellectual capacities (Nashat, 1983).

TJ, like other Islamic religious reformist movements in colonial India has emerged to meet the challenge from the colonial modernity, and women's inclusion in it was accommodated in the context of the politics of women's reform between Islamist and colonial discourses. This background forces us to examine the genealogy of the gender ideology of the TJ movement in relation to the colonial gender discourse. In this study, I examine the gender discourse of TJ movement in relation to the colonial gender discourse that was manifested in the debate between modernists and Islamists on the issue of women's reform in

colonial India. Moreover, in earlier studies, gender roles were examined based on the ideology of the Islamic movement, and undoubtedly it was always a male-centered ideology (Frisk, 2009). In the last two decades, a growing body of literature has emerged that examines women's roles in Islamic movements based on their own perspective. My study about gender roles of the female Tablighi seeks to examine it based on their own perspectives.

The recent scholarship's shifts from ideology/discourse of religious movement to actor's practice in Islamization have shown the changing dynamics of gender roles in the religious sphere. Islamist women are shown as 'new women' who not only engage in various activities prescribed for them by religion or by culture but they are also questioning their roles and status (Moghadam, 1993; Macleod, 1991). They show that 're-veiling' ensures women's place in public (El Guindi, 1999) and that Islamist women are actively working to increase Islamization in society (Nagata, 1996; Brenner, 1996). Most of these studies have shown women as active agents in the public religious sphere that illustrate a new dynamics of gender boundary in Islamic movements. By questioning the conventional religious roles prescribed for women, as some other scholars contend that Muslim women are resisting men's interpretation of Islam about them and are also emerging as female religious leaders in some social contexts. The recent scholarship also explore the Muslim women in Islamic movements as Islamic feminists who are working to reshape or to redefine feminism in a religious sphere (Gole, 1996; Yamani, 1996; Hale, 1997).

The binary division of home/world or private/public needs to be re-examined in the light of the emerging new roles Muslim women are playing in the sphere of the religious movement. In modern Islamic movements, women are not confined to home; their involvement in Islam in outside of home suggests that they are taking part in an extended boundary. As mentioned earlier, the separate space and separate roles for women in Islamic movement manifests as a political discourse that is interlinked with social power relations. The male-centered Islamic movements have determined the women's roles and space in Islamic movements. The nineteenth century's religious movements including TJ in India upheld the boundary of home/world which resulted from the politics of nationalism, and in this politics the core concepts like material/spiritual, and inner/outer distinctions were maintained in the context of a nationalist struggle (Metcalf, 1991). However, women's wider visibility and participation in the Islamic movement may rearrange this material/spiritual distinction, and it is through this process the female Islamic activist may change her gender roles and gender space in the religious sphere. In this study, I seek to examine how the female Islamic activists utilize religion in extending their roles in the world beyond home. As shown later in this study, spirituality or religiosity does not only constrain the women activist to construct home-based pious selfhood rather it encourages them to engage in social reform, and the responsibilities of social reform, as pursued in TJ's agenda, provide them the opportunity to take extended roles in the wider Islamization process in the society. I argue that within the existing gender structure of Islamic movement the female Tablighi activist may organize themselves in different ways to increase their roles. In some cases, they even challenge the gendered ideology

of TJ and make a new religious group for women and by women. Although it does not mean that the female Tablighi activists are challenging the existing gender structure and the long established male–female relationship guided in Islam, a kind of ambivalence is appearing among the TJ women. The pious Tablighi women are more concerned about their religious responsibilities to the wider society rather than about their status against or in relation to their male counterpart. This particular ambivalence among the female Tablighi forces us to examine their subject formation process and agency for understanding their roles. It helps to understand the changing dynamism of gender roles particularly in the TJ movement as well as in the religious sphere as a whole.

1.5 Objective of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to show how the women in TJ are in a continuous negotiation process for enduring and legitimizing their new roles and positions in gender restricted Islamic movements and a patriarchic social structure in Bangladesh. Rather than depicting them as 'passive' subjects, I would argue that the women in TJ who cultivate and construct a pious selfhood through Tablighi lessons, practices, and activities can neither be seen as 'victim' of Islamic agenda nor the subject of male authority in Islam. The agency they can gain through their active involvement in TJ, though often under male guidance and authority, cannot be translated as equivalent to the notion that they are capable with certain power of resistance to challenge the patriarchic and gendered norms in religion and society. Rather, as I argue, their agency can be explained best if they are seen in their own perspective within the socio-cultural and political

context they live. The conventional binary framework—active/passive and resistance/subjectivity—seeks to liberate women from male dominance based on the Western egalitarian and emancipatory discourse and agenda, and it is not helpful to understand the women in TJ who are willing to submit to the God ordained gender division. By employing the notion of agency as "generative actions" and "creative conformity", discussed further in a latter section, I aim to depict the women in TJ and in other Islamic movements as well as capable actors and agents who take actions in multiple and creative ways in order to redefine their roles in the religious sphere without having a deliberate and conscious attempt to seek an equal gender status. In this sense, this research would be contributing to cast light on a theme that Muslim women's agency is capable of changing conventional gender roles in religion and social spaces without challenging and attempting to alter the gendered structure. Inadvertently, as this study shows, the actions of women bring changes in to gender relationships in Islam and leed them to a new socio-religious context where an evolving female leadership, though limited, continues to expand their scope of activities beyond the home.

This new kind of Islamic subjectivity and agency among women in TJ allow us to explore different capacities and diverse skills the women utilize to do creative action. They may engage in creative actions in which they employ in the process of negotiation with traditional gender structures of male dominance rather than resisting. At the same time, their pious subjectivity is submissive and conforms to God. For their willing submission and conformity to religion, we

cannot ignore or discredit their efforts to assert their capability for action. Since the agency of women in TJ is not a discrete phenomenon, the objective of the study has to be examined in accordance with a series of interconnected social, religious, and political issues as in the following.

First, how and why do TJ's reformist appeals become popular among Muslim women in Bangladesh, despite the modern Bangladeshi state's various development programs that aim to emancipate women from the oppressive and discriminatory gender structure?

Second, I examine the genealogy of the gender ideology of TJ in earlier historical documents that provide how gender in the Islamic movement is constructed in particular social and cultural context.

Third, I investigate how the women are reconstructing their pious selves through TJ lessons and practices and why being pious is important for many women in contemporary Bangladeshi socio-cultural context.

Fourth, what does the female Tablighi contribute to the overall Islamization project that TJ seeks, and what changes does it brings to transform the existing and conventional gender relationships in Islam, Islamic movements, and the religious sphere?

1.6 Conceptualizing and Theorizing Gender Roles

1.6.1 On Muslim Women's 'Willing Submission' and Resistance

In the last three decades, the notion of 'women's agency' has been the subject of scholarly debate among anthropologists. The debate on agency among feminist circles including secular feminists, anthropologists, and Islamic feminists attempts to transcend the simple binary of active/passive or resistance/dominance. In particular, the focus on women's agency provides a crucial aspect to justifying women in Middle Eastern societies where they have always been represented as 'passive' and 'submissive beings' by structures of male authority. Indeed, most of the previous studies have emphasized two key questions for understanding Muslim women's gender roles. First, does the women's Islamic activism strengthen the existing patriarchal structure of religion and society? Second, does women's engagement in religious activism increase their consciousness that resists male dominance? These questions are intricately associated with women's emancipation from men's authority and patriarchal culture.

A set of feminist works emerged in the 1970s, primarily focusing on Middle Eastern societies, which challenged the dominant Western discourse that Muslim women are incomparably bound by unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression. These studies took into account active voices of Muslim women in Middle Eastern societies and portrayed them as active agents whose lives are far richer and more complex than what the Western narratives and discourses suggested so far (Abu-Loughod, 1986; Altorki, 1986; Dwyer, 1987). A new scholarly discourse beyond the construction of Muslim women as victims of

long established religious traditions and structural patriarchy focuses on the operation of human agency within the structures of subordination and have sought to understand how women resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and by redeploying them for their own interests and agendas. This was a gradual shift from the popular conceptualization of 'third world women', the Muslim women, in particular, as oppressed and victims of male authority. Thus, the debates on Muslim women's agency revolved around two contradictory discourses: "victims of Islamic movements" (Esfandiari, 1997) or "active agent resisting against male dominance" (Abu-Loughod, 1986; Fernea, 1985).

A growing body of scholarly literatures argues that women's agency should be examined on its own instead of through the male's perspectives and within their social and cultural contexts, not by separating the women from their culture. The feminist scholars, historians and sociologists have surmised that Muslim women's inferior status is caused by complex processes such as the politics of Islam and the modernizing efforts taken by the nation-states (Kandiyoti, 1991; Moghadam, 1993). While examining female subjects in their own socio-cultural context, some studies have explored the modern Muslim women with the notion of resistance to power exercised by their individual choices for being Muslim. These women resist Western culture as well as male dominance, and at the same, want to cultivate a Muslim identity. Many scholars observe 'new veiling' among women as means of restoring cultural identity, a marker of providing space for women in public, free from the gaze and harassment from

men, and a way of resistance against male dominance (El-Guindi, 1999; Macleod, 1992). The new veiling is also identified as a form of freedom for Muslim women by some other scholars.

If agency, in particular, for Muslim women, is conceptualized as the active subject against the representation of the victimized subject of Islamists' agenda and Islamic movements, we need to examine whether the women are willing to or really struggling for liberating them from male dominance in the religious sphere. If so, then how does the power to resist against subordination ensure women's freedom while they are socially and culturally habituated in an unequal structure of gender? Frisk (2009) criticized that the earlier scholars had the desire to liberate women from the male that is an essential tool of feminism as a political project. The pioneer works of Mahmood (2001, 2005) reveal a strong critique of the feminist conceptualization of agency as resistance to socio-cultural and religious norms of male dominance. Mahmood argues that when feminist scholars give priority to resistance and pursuit of female autonomy as primary areas of investigation, this set of desires becomes universalized and naturalized, while others (like cultivating piety and submission to God) are viewed as artefacts produced by the imposition of patriarchal power (2001, p. 206). She further argues "the laboratory goals of feminism should be rethought in light of the fact that the desire for freedom and liberation is historically situated desire whose motivational forces cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in light of other forms of desires, aspirations and capacities that inherent in a culturally and historically located subject" (2001, p.223). Thus, for understanding

the true desire for freedom, it is necessary to examine the social context and conditions in which it shapes and different forms of desire emerge.

Mahmood's analysis explores Muslim women's agency in a different way. She conceptualizes historically and culturally specific forms of agency acquired by subjecting oneself willingly to the discursive traditions (here, in Islam). In her study about the women's mosque movement, she argues that "agency not as a synonym of resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 18). For understanding the women's actions, she emphasizes the process of pious selfhood formation in which the pious subjects cultivates Islamic piety "through practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women in a subordinate status and seek to cultivate virtues in association with feminine passivity and submissiveness (e.g. shyness, modesty, perseverance and humility" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 205). According to her, without linking the idea of agency with progressive change for women's emancipation, docility or willingness should be reread as a practical ways in which individual works become the 'willed subject' of a particular discourse. From this perspective, it is not enough to simply point out, for example, that a tradition of female piety or modesty is reinforcing women's subordination. Rather, by exploring these traditions in relation to the practical engagements and forms of life in which they are embedded in we can come to understand the significance of that subordination to the women who embody it. Women's willing submission to the norms of discursive tradition will be useful to analyze the Tablighi women's submissiveness

31

to male dominance that is not simply equitable to as a means of reproducing gender inequality; rather, their willing submission is closely related with their practice of social and religious orders of men's authority over women.

Mahmood's critiques to the liberal feminist interpretation of agency have been reflected in many other studies. Bucar's (2012) study about pious women's agency is another good example in this respect. In order to understand the moral agency of religious women in Iran, she conceptualizes agency as 'creative conformity', the idea which particularly reexamined the tendency of past studies to show women's agency as a form of resistance. She contends:

"…agency as creative conformity moves away from an idea of empowerment that depends on an autonomous place of perfect freedom. In contrast, creative conformity considers self-representation of women who still see themselves as existing within the structure of other representations and as operating inside those lines" (Bucar, 2010, p. 682).

In her theory of "dianomy" for moral agency, Bucar argues that "dianomy" means dual sources of the moral law, that relies neither exclusively upon the self as a source of moral authority nor exclusively on religious traditions. In this model of 'dianomy', agency asserts that a woman formed within a specific discursive and performative environment is able to interrogate that environment. She argues that for doing creative actions, it does not need to be an autonomous subject that has a level of positive freedom or free will of the subject. However, it

does not mean that creativity originates in some space of pure freedom. Instead, 'dianomy' urges one to consider how creativity occurs within the tradition itself through conformity (Bucar, 2010, p. 679).

The notion of agency as delineated by Mahmood and Bucar as critiques to the liberal feminist interpretation will be helpful for analyzing the actions of Tablighi women beyond the simplistic notions of resistance, it reveals how they respond in creative ways while they locate themselves in a discursive space within the Islamic movement. To some extent, the Tablighi women, the subject of my dissertation and the interlocutors of my ethnographic account, take various actions that do not fit to the dominant ideology of TJ, such as forming new Tablighi groups without male leadership or participants. These women exercise their individual choices and powers created through their religious activism to make decisions. On the contrary, they never consider themselves as equal to men in the Islamic movement. By performing collective religious rituals, they are creating new space and new tradition in the collective religious practices for women, and these actions lead them to a potential situation of exercising some form of religious leadership, but finally they conform to the gender division as prescribed in Islam. This conformity is similar to the notion of a willing submission argued by Mahmood (2005). The agency of pious subjects of TJ, formed within an unequal socio-religious context, is clearly rooted in a context which cannot be interpreted under the dichotomous framework of resistance/subordination. The language of negotiation with a patriarchic order should not discredit their willingness to adopt gender inequality on one hand and their active participation

in Islamization project on the other. This ambivalence can be explained further if considered as a dual context in which women's desires may conform to a subordinate structure and at the same time may resist against certain forms of religious ideologies. This duality has been supported in many other studies (Nagata, 1996; Gole, 1996; Huq, 2006; Macleod, 1991), which entail that pious women are raising question about men's authority in the religious sphere, even though they submit to those structures and attempt to enhance the boundaries of the constrains in which they operate. In this sense, we can conceptualize that the unequal structure may also open some space for the subordinated subjects (here women) to generate some forms of power towards their end such as the desire for active roles in religious sphere.

1.6.2 Power, Subjectivity, and Women's Agency

Judith Butler (1993) departed from the notions of agency as resistance and had raised questions on what she called an emancipatory model of agency. Butler locates the possibility of agency within the structure of power (rather than outside of it), and more importantly, suggests that the reiterative structures of norms serve not only to consolidate a particular regime of discourse/power but also provides the means for its destabilization (Butler, 1993). Mainly two important terms are central in Butler's analyses that are taken from Michel Foucault.

The notion of power, according to Foucault, cannot be understood solely on the model of domination as something possessed and deployed by individuals or sovereign agents over others, with a singular intentionality, structure or location

34

that presides over its rationality and execution. Rather, power is to be understood as a strategic relation to force that permeates life and produces new forms of desires, objects, relations and discourses (Focault, 1978, 1980). Secondly, the subjects, argues Foucault, do not precede power relations, in the form of an individuated consciousness, but is produced through these relations, which form the necessary conditions of its possibility. Central to his notion is what Foucault calls the paradox of *subjectivation*: the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent (Butler, 1993, 1997; Foucault, 1980, 1983). In fact, Foucault's shifts from his earlier concept of individuals as 'docile bodies' to the idea of individuals as agents with some capacity for autonomous actions, and thereby he shifts from an analysis of the technologies to an analysis of technologies of subjectification (McNay, 1996). This gradual shift attracts many feminist scholars to examining agency focusing on the process of subjectification in which the individual subject is not static or determined.

> "…the subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition… In this sense, agency is to be located within the possibility of variation on that repetition" (Butler, 1999, p.198).

Butler argues that if the rules of a governing body not only restrict but enable assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, new possibilities

35

for gender may emerge beyond the rigid codes of hierarchical binaries. Huq (2006), in her study of female Islamist activist's agency formation in Bangladesh, criticizes Butler's model of subject formation. To her, the Butlarian subject is so thoroughly constructed, top to bottom, that it is more of an 'effect' than an entity with any kind of agentic, creative ability (Huq, 2006, p.35). But she was aware of the profound ambivalence that Butler attributed to subject formation, the slipperiness and mutability of the differentiating markers between forms of subjection and empowerment. Butler's theory on construction of gender through a process of repetitive and performative regulations as embedded in social structure and practices is also supportive to the formation of pious subjecthood in Tablighi activities. Through repetitive and performative religious observances and rituals, the women in TJ are being constructed as religiously constituted and embodied subjects. In light with Butler's theory of agency for the religiously constituted subjects comes from whether they can have any varied roles against the performative and repetitive construction of the subjecthoods. For this, we need to consider the dynamics among construction of gender or gender ideology, subjectivity and agency.

In this case, feminist anthropologist Ortner's (1996, 2008) theory is helpful to unpack the complicated relationships among gender, agency and subjectivity. According to Ortner, agency is not the inborn volition, rather it shapes desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity. Subjectivity—the modes of perception, desires, feelings and thoughts—is the inner states of subjects, and these states are socially and culturally constructed. Her theory of

anthropology of subjectivity explores new dimension to understanding complexities of subjectivities beyond the dominant perspective of cultural shaping of subjectivities. Ortner does not deny that the modes of subjectivities (desires, feelings, intention, and consciousness, for example) are culturally constructed, but she raises question about this particular construction of subjectivities. She explores that the culturally and religiously produced subject is defined not only by a particular position in a social, economic and religious matrix but also by a complex subjectivitiy, a complex set of feelings and fears. Following the idea of Gidden's 'knowing subject' (Gidden, 1979, cf. Ortner, 2006, p.110), Ortner, argues that the subject is at least self-aware and reflexive. Subjectivities are complex not just because of cultural and emotional complexities but also of the ongoing work of reflexivity and monitoring relationship of the self to the world. She acknowledges the cultural subject which fully embodies the dominant culture and is being subjected by dominated culture. For the most subjects, there are 'countercurrents of subjectivity'[6] as well as of culture. According to her, it is true that there is no subject that can stand outside of culture but cultural consciousness is at the same time multilayered and reflexive. This complexity and reflexivity constitute the grounds for questioning and criticizing the world in which they live. It means that although culture constructs the subject, subject through its living on

[6] Ortner, borrowed the term 'countercurrent' from Williams (1977) in which he mentions the word to mean alternative cultural formations that coexist with the hegemonic, what he calls the "resudal" or "emergent". Although Ortner does not use the term countercurrent to mean alternative cultural formations rather she does so in a question of complex subjectivities as she mentions there are countercurrents of subjectivity of culture.

the ground, and engagement in various practices, may act on culture. Thus, Ortner's concept of subjectivities embraces both the hegemonic orders in culture as well as potential disordering in cultural structures. Following Raymond Williams concept of 'hegemony' (Williams, 1977, cf. Ortner, 2006, p.6), Ortner argues that although a given ideology or set of practices may be hegemonic but it is not a total, and this incompleteness opens the potentiality of structural and semantic transformations.

Ortner's notion of subjectivities explores the construction of agency in different ways. According to her, all human beings have a capacity for agency but the specific forms it takes vary in different times and places. Agency is shaped differentially and is nourished or stunted under different regimes of power. Agency is always seen as synonymous with the form of power. People in positions of power hold a 'lot of agency', according to Ortner, but the dominated too always have certain capacities and sometimes very significant capacities to exercise the influence over the ways in which events unfold (Ortner, 2006, p. 144). So resistance is another form of power within the structure of agency. The idea of resistance is relevant to know the agency of (unequal) power. The dominated class are disallowed or disrupted by the powerful class that strengthens the power of the dominate class but in this regard, the less powerful people also seek to nourish and protect their interests by creating or protecting sites, literally or metaphorically 'on the margins of power' (Ortner, 2006, p.144). Although she emphasizes resistance it seems she does not recognize the subject or actor as a free agent. She argues that "not only in the sense that they do not have the

freedom to formulate and realize their own goals in a social vacuum but also in the sense that they do not have ability to fully control those relations towards their own ends" (Ortner, 2006, p.152). It means that the social actors work within many webs of relations in society that should be considered to understand their intention, and desires that regulate their actions.

In her study on women's roles in the founding of the first Sherpa nunnery in Khumbu, Ortner (1996) shows the active roles played by the Sherpa women in the founding of the Devuche Nunnery. Ortner illuminates how a Sherpa nun dissolves the various negative qualities attributed to women in Sherpa culture, which in turn encourages women to be confident, competent, and independent actors. Despite gender-egalitarian characteristics of Sherpa culture in which women usually practice various aspects of power, associations of women with certain negative cultural discourses impose social constraints on women. Ortner's analysis entails that the possibility of a transformation of gender is subject to a constant interaction between the gender discourse or ideology in Sherpa culture and the practice of women (such as of the Sherpa nuns), and in this interaction each can push the other and thereby result in some forms of change. Ortner's analysis on gender moves from structuralist to practice-oriented approach in which she attempts to identify the "spaces of potential transformation" (Huq, 2006, p.38). In this dissertation, I depict gender structure/ideology/discourse of TJ on one hand and the practices performed by the Tablighi women on the other. The interaction between these, as we will see, inadvertently pushes the women in a situation where they often create the spaces of their own, and it is somewhat

similar to Ortner's notion of agency that operates in a dynamic interplay of power, discourse, and practice on the ground.

Ortner's conceptualization of agency in the light of human actions is useful; however, ambiguity remains on whether religious subjectivity such as women's desires for religiosity and actions taken in favor of that religiosity can create any potential space for transformation. To put in other words, does the Tablighi women's pious subjectivity produce any form of power or resistance against the gender discourse, ideology, and or practice established in the religious sphere, social space, and or cultural arenas? Ortner's gender theory, largely drawn from Sherpa women of a Buddhist nunnery, put aside the issue of religiosity as her critics claim. For a more fluid conception of agency, the concept of 'generative notion of agency' as argued by feminist philosopher McNay could be useful here. Pointing her critiques to gender theory, she argues that agency is conceptualized in relation to a negative understanding of subject formation, and the core of the negative paradigm of subjectification is the idea that the individual emerges from constraint. The subject is understood in passive terms as an effect of discursive structures and actions, and subject's agency is mainly grasped as resistance or dislocation from dominant norms. According to her, "the negative paradigm of subjectification has been useful for feminist theory", and it is because "it offers a way of analyzing the deeply entrenched aspects of gendered behavior, while eschewing reference to a pre-social sexual difference" (McNay, 2003, p.140; cf. Frisk, 2009, p. 11). She calls for a more precise and varied account of agency, including a more "dialogical understanding of temporal aspects of subject

formation" and emphasizes on "the protensive and future oriented dimension of praxis as the living through of embodied potentialities, as the anticipatory aspects inherent within subjects formation" (McNay, 2003, p. 4-5; cf. Frisk, 2009, p.11). To her, the subject formation process is a "lived relation between embodied potentiality and material relations" (cf. Frisk, 2009, p.16).

McNay's generative logic or theory of agency invites us to look into the creative or productive aspects immanent to agency in order to explain how, when faced with complexity and difference, individuals may respond in unanticipated and innovative ways which may hinder, reinforce or catalyze social change. The religiosity the Tablighi women cultivate and practice generate some unanticipated actions, and through these actions certain forms of power are produced enabling them to respond to the structure that shapes their desires such as religious subjectivity.

1.6.3. Negotiation within Patriarchy: Tablighi Women's Agency and Power

Since the 1990s the liberal feminist notion of agency has been in question partly due to its failure to recognize women's actions in their own life-context, social-cultural, and historical conditions. The revised notions of agency, as discussed above, place women and their actions in their own contexts—a shift from structuralism in which subject and subjectivity are seen as the production of structural constraints to a more practice-oriented theory which rather prefers to locate women's agency as resulting from complex interplay between structure and everyday actions. The new notion of agency puts emphasis on "creativity" of

human activities as contended in Ortner's (2006) and McNay's (2003) studies, for example. While adapting this theoretical underpinning what is distinctively sought in this dissertation is whether pious subjectivity and religiosity constructed through the cultivation and repetitive performances of religious practices, as in the case of Tablighi women, whom I interview, can create and generate power towards the end of a potential transformation of the conventional gender relationship and spatial reconfiguration of men and women in the religious sphere. Mahmood's (2005) critiques of the secular-liberal emancipatory notion of agency are drawn from the Muslim women's mosque movement and heavily emphasize their ethical and political perspectives on feminism, which has significant implications. However, on the question of whether religious subjectivity, as in the case of the Muslim women involved in the mosque movement, can generate power through their pious actions that eventually affect the gender relationship in Islam, is untold in Mahmood's work. Although I subscribe to her notion of the "willed subject" in the case of the Tablighi women, for they embody the gender ideology and division prescribed in religion and TJ movement, I, rather, delineate that religiosity attained through the movement does not just make them self-conscious subjects but also enables them to take certain actions in favor of their religious desirability and their responsibilities of social reform. These actions may eventually lead to a potential condition of transformation of the religious spheres and practices. The notion of Tablighi women's agency, thus, is closely associated to the embodied religiosity and religious consciousness, and desires for cultivating piety that they can utilize in redefining their own subjecthood and actions as active religious agents. On the one hand, Tablighi women's

subjectivities are regulated and constructed by the doctrine of Islam and the ideology of TJ, but on the other hand these pious subjectivities become a means of transforming them from passive religious subjects to active religious agents. In this sense, the power of religion that reinforces women's subordination with the mask of TJ, and thereby ensures their conformity to the gender ideology, values, and norms already entrenched deeply in familial and social lives and religious practices, turns out to be the means by which Tablighi women take or create certain roles within the religion. These roles include religious preaching, organizing Islamic reading circles, and establishing community spaces (such as the *Talim House*) for performing collective rituals only for women, which have not been widely practiced or were, until recently, considered conventional. Therefore, TJ women's agency, if we take into account their own contexts, needs to be understood in relation to their capabilities in spreading the message of Islam, a self-chosen and self-driven action, and in taking extended roles in the religious sphere. If they exercise certain forms of agency by utilizing their religious expertise and involvement in TJ, for example, are they able to resist the male dominated world of religion including the very masculine face of TJ? Resistance, for them, needs to be conceptualized not as an oppositional force to men's world as, according to Ortner (1995, p.191), it can be "more than opposition, [it] can be truly creative and transformative" in the multiplicity of their involvements as social beings and in the ambivalent social context in which they live.

The notion of "generative actions" and "creative conformity", as suggested by McNay (2003), and discussed earlier, can be theorized in relation to

43

Tablighi women's power to resist and act while operating under a submissive gender ideology and patriarchic values. Despite being submissive as "willed subject", the notion of Mahmood's (2005), as discussed earlier, is that the Tablighi women's actions for preaching and teaching Islam can transform their social and religious status in the community. This dissertation inquired into the women's actions and activities in the mainstream TJ movement and of the GFC Tablighi group which is not recognized by the mainstream for its violation of gender rules i.e. operating Tablighi activities without male companions. In both cases, the women practice and cultivate piety-based religious activities following the rules and guidelines instructed by the founders of the movement, the male Islamic scholars. Although women's participation in the TJ movement is subject to the participation of their male partners, such as husband and unmarriageable kin, many women even in the mainstream TJ, who generally abide by the instructed gender norms, work alternatively by their own choices and desires to bring other womenfolk into the fold of TJ and to the spiritual and ascetic path of Islam (discussed in Chapter Five). On the other hand, the formation of GFC itself reflect a form of agency of those women who find it difficult to have their male partners in the Tablighi activities or find it not reasonable to depend on male partners if they want to participate in the movement. For those who wanted to operate Tablighi activities independently without male partners formed GFC as an alternative Tablighi group, often denounced by the male leaders of the mainstream TJ movement.

As analyzed in the case of GFC, the members, mostly housewives, are

44

able to establish new social relationships and to have a wider social exposure compared to their involvement in the TJ movement. These women whose worlds were demarcated mainly within the domestic space, and who need to take care of their families and household chores and kin circles, found the Tablighi mission of GFC as a means of changing their daily life activities. GFC created an opportunity for their involvement in the outside world for preaching Islam and taking part in religious activities, meeting with other female followers etc. Over the course of their involvement in the TJ movement, they are able to establish personal and social relationships, maintain social networks, and take collective initiatives. Often they utilize these relationships and social capital if they face personal and familial crisis. For them, religion becomes a vehicle of social exposure and connection beyond their familial and kinship relations. On the other hand, for Tablighi activities, they are able to extend their conventional boundary of religious practices and performances from home to neighborhood to community to wider society. Of those who have a longer experience in TJ, some began to take leadership roles, though limited within the womenfolk, and with less power and authority as compared to their male counterparts. As is the case, these women are often invited by male Tablighi followers in various communities to preach Islam to women. Earlier, preaching Islam has historically been the responsibility of men, now women have begun to share this responsibility with the male members, and this is an indication of the potentiality of transformation in the longstanding gender and power relationships in the religious sphere. These Tablighi women willingly cultivate the piety promoted through repetitive and disciplinary religious practices in the ideology of TJ movement. For example, veiling is symbolically

considered and promoted as a divinely ordained identity marker as well as a symbol of Islamic modesty for Tablighi women. When a woman joins the Tablighi mission, she starts to maintain the veiling if she had not done so earlier. By accepting veiling as a regular practice in her personal attire, she submits herself to the very notion of Islamic modesty and to the Tablighi gender discourse that aims at perfecting Muslim womanhood. On the other hand, although many Tablighi women are seen to take certain new roles, like those predominantly performed by men, such as leading collective prayers like the *imam* (prayer leader), performing prayers collectively on certain occasions, preaching and teaching Islam etc., they do not deliberately challenge men's position in religion nor their superior religious scholarship and authorship in the society. In this context, the pious subject consciously submits herself to the gender ideology of Islam instead of confronting that ideology. Therefore, translating and conceptualizing Tablighi women's desires for liberation and their actions against the historically and religiously imposed subordinate status of male dominance in Islam and in the Islamic movements would be misleading. For these women, they are more conscious about their responsibilities in Islam as such consciousness is produced through the TJ ideology, than about the aspect of dominance of men in the religious sphere. Therefore, in this dissertation, I do not intend to examine the TJ women's desires, actions, and practices as a means of positioning them on an equal foothold with men in religion. Nor have they expressed a desire to be liberated from the shackles of patriarchy embedded in the religion and social structure. Rather, as I argue in this study, their actions are primarily driven by a pious subjectivity and a conscious responsibility for religion (Please see the figure in annex-2). This stance

enables them to response in multiple ways that lead to a potential context of negotiation with the male dominated religious world. In doing so they are able to extend their roles and spaces of their own actions as religious agents (Please see the figure in annex -3). This is what I intend to examine as a form of negotiation, what I call 'negotiation within patriarchy', that took place through the dynamics interplay of Tablighi women's submission to the patriarchic structure and these women's 'generative actions' that give them some spaces and voices in men's religious world.

1.7 Fieldwork and Methodology

1.7.1 Research Area

This study is based on "multi-sited" fieldwork, conducted in four places: Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Gaibandha, in Bangladesh and New Delhi, in India. A major part of the fieldwork has been conducted in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh where the Headquarters of TJ is located. I have frequently visited and participated in the activities and programs in the TJ Headquarter at the Kakrail Mosque and in two female *Talim* groups in Dhaka. Also, I travelled to Rajshahi, a northern city of the country, in order to conduct fieldwork among a female Tablighi *Talim* groups (refer to figure-1 in annex). This has given me the opportunity to conceptualize the nature of Tablighi activities beyond Dhaka city. For an understanding the activities of *Char Sathir Dal*, Group of Four Companions (GFC), which has emerged as an alternative group of TJ led by female leadership, I conducted fieldwork in Gaibandha district in the northern part of Bangladesh. For collecting historical documents and observing transnational Tablighi activities among

women, I travelled to India and visited the world Headquarters of TJ at Nizamuddin Mosque located in Delhi. There I interviewed several senior Tablighi leaders and observed the female Tablighis, coming from different countries, and their activities inside the mosque. In all the locations, where I conducted fieldwork, I found that women's participation in the TJ movement has already been established and popular, and its presence can be found at the local, national and transnational levels.

Initially, I started to do fieldwork by collecting the historical and textual documents about TJ from its Headquarters at the Kakrail Mosque in Dhaka. Then I continued my focus on Tablighi women of regular *Talim* groups and on the women coming from other cities to the Headquarters for participating in *Dawa*activities. I found that the Tablighi women who have earned experience in Tablighi activities at local level usually come to Kakrail Mosque, mostly with their husbands, and few with their unmarriageable kin, for taking part in *Dawa* tour for seven, 15 and 40 days. There was another reason for choosing Dhaka for fieldwork. It is because Tablighi activities for women had

Photograph-1: Kakrail Mosque, Dhaka, the Headquarter of TJ Bangladesh, Photograph taken Dec 12, 2012

originated in this city during the time of the undivided Pakistan, mostly influenced by Tablighi activities for women in India. Since TJ is extremely informal and volunteer based, a scarcity of recorded historical documents was a major problem

48

I had to face while I tried to understand the journey of TJ in Bangladesh. For this, I had to depend on the narratives and experiences of male and female Tablighi persons who were associated with TJ for decades. Then I move to conduct fieldwork among the women of two specific female *Talim* groups in Mirpur area. But like the female Tablighis, I also moved from one place to other within Dhaka city and often encountered senior Tablighi leaderships both among men and women.

My fieldworks among the two *Talim* groups were based at Kazipara, Mirpur area in Dhaka city. Kazipara *Talim* point is registered under *Halka* (origin, *Halaqah*, circle or gatherings for religious study) Number Five. According to TJ's organizational framework maintained by the leaderships at the Kakrail Mosque, *Halka* represented the smallest area and administrative unit of Tablighi activities. In the big cities like Dhaka, the Tablighi activities are managed by dividing the total area into different *Halkas*. Dhaka city is divided into 30 *Halkas*, and each of them is responsible to conduct Tablighi activities in its area. The members of one *Halka* supervise their Tablighi activities in their own areas and report their progress to the administrative body at the Headquarter at Kakrail Mosque. Each *Halka* is also responsible to communicate with their own area in Dhaka city and with other cities in Bangladesh. For example, the *Halka* number four and five of Kakrail mosque cover some areas of Mirpur, Senpara, Kazipara, and Aminbazar in Dhaka city. These two *Halkas* are also responsible to communicate with the Tablighi groups in Dinajpur District, located in the northern part of the country. In such way, the *Halka* works as a mediated networking unit between national and

local level

I have spent several days for my fieldwork in the Kazipara, Mirpur area, which are supervised by *Halka* number Five. Since one *Halka* supervises several *Talim* groups, so the groups are registered into numerical groups. These two *Talim* groups in Kazipara are known as 311 and 312 *Talim* point. These numbers do not carry any hierarchical meaning based on participation rates or period of activities; rather, it simply addresses the location. I gradually came to know that the entire Dhaka city is covered with 450 *Talim* points in 2012. The *Talim* points are also known as *Talim House*s. Once in a week a *Talim* is held in the house where the women from the adjacent areas gather and take part in learning Tablighi lessons. The *Talim House* 311 is located near the East Kazipara bazaar (small market) and the *Talim House* 312 is in a residential area.

The *Talim House* 311 is headed by a 35 years old woman while the *Talim House* 312 is guided by a 65 years old woman. For organizing *Talim* among womenfolk, age, educational and economic backgrounds are not considered as significance factors; rather, women can form *Talim* based on her period of experience in Tablighi activities. Due to not having a membership system, it is difficult to estimate how many women can gather in a *Talim* session. Since TJ does not follow any membership system and it is largely volunteered, anyone can participate anytime, and he or she can leave it without any notice. Similarly, it is not mandatory for the participants to join every week's *Talim* session. I observed that 30 to 40 people join every week of which 20 to 25 are regular participants and

others are frequent participants. But during the time of the *Bayan* (religious sermon or lecture) usually provided by male Tablighi members to the female participants, the number of participation increased from 60-70. The men's *Bayan* is organized once in two months. Women's participant rates are nearly equal in the *Talim* point 312. Considering women's irregular participation, fieldwork has been conducted among the female members of two *Talim* groups, and it roughly covers 50 female participants in the TJ movement in Dhaka.

In the second phase, fieldwork has been conducted in *Talim* point 19 in Rajshahi city, where there was a total of 30 *Talim* points. The *Talim House* I choose for fieldwork is located in the Mirjapur administrative unit (Thana) of Rajshahi district. Also, it is close to a public university, the University of Rajshahi. I found that most of the participants of this *Talim* group are students of the university. Though the weekly *Talim* is organized in the female dormitory house of the university, the students are free to join at the *Talim* point 19 for learning more about TJ. Other *Talim House*s are not frequently found in Rajshahi like Dhaka. The head of this *Talim House* informed me that it was the only *Talim House* within five kilometers. However, for accommodating the increasing number of female participants, one more *Talim* points started to work from last year, and it is just 2 km away from this house. I also visited the newly established *Talim* point where the women from nearby villages participate. Comparing to the *Talim* point 19, the participants of the new *Talim house* are attended by more aged and less educated women.

Besides doing fieldwork in *Talim* sessions, I participated in a *Dawa* tour with a group in Rajshahi. Five male and female participants formed this Jamaat group from Bagha Thana under the Rajshahi District. However, I could not attend the *Dawa* tour for several days because of some limitations, and I was allowed to participate with them partially. As I already mentioned, TJ maintains a restricted gender norm that is the rule of *mahram* (husband or unmarriageable male partner) for attending a tour in Masturat Jamaat. The male relatives/partners have to have some earlier experiences in attending *Dawa* tour if they want to accompany their female relatives/partners in Mastuart Jamaat. Because of this particular rule, I was not allowed to join with them for the full time but they allowed me to stay with them from dawn to night.

Photograph-2: Nizamuddin Mosque, the global headquarter of TJ, Delhi, India

Photograph taken Jan 5, 2013

The female members of the Jamaat group stayed in a house located in the Shiroil area of Rajshahi. The house belongs to a couple who were involved in Tablighi activities for years. The participants of the Jamaat group came from different villages including Aloknagar, Bishnupur, Khoira, Horifola, and Taherpur under Bagha Thana. The participants of the *Dawa* group did not know each other, since they came from different villages. Their socio-economic and educational backgrounds were also different from each other. The five members were 65, 45, 30, 20 and 18 years old. Among them, two are generally educated and two are

madrasa educated and the 65 years old woman was only primary school educated. Though at the beginning they were unknown to each other, within three days they made a good relation. Since their true desire for participating in *Dawa was* to make them perfect Muslims, they engage to cultivate piety and religious virtue and morality, including the practices of Islamic etiquette, manners and conduct of behavior. All of which bound them as a peer group. I observed that at the end of the tour when they were leaving each other, all were emotional and were crying while saying goodbye.

This *Dawa* tour of three days was a good opportunity for me to understand the uniqueness of the group and how the *Dawa* tour worked to increase social bonding among the women.

The third phase of the fieldwork was done in the Nizamuddin mosque, located in the west district of South Delhi, India. During the fieldwork, I observed that access to the Nizamuddin mosque was open to all compared with the Kakrail mosque in Bangladesh. Even as a Bangladeshi, I would have to get permission from the Tablighi male authorities to enter the Kakrail mosque but in case of Nizamuddin, the local women can easily access it. This may happened due to its long experience of introducing separate compounds for female Tablighi comparing the newly added female Tablighi facility in Kakrail mosque.

In the fourth phase, I did my fieldwork among the GFC group of female Tablighi in Gaibandha. The fieldwork with the GFC in the Gaibandha provided

me the exposure to female Tablighi activities, which facilitated making comparisons with the mainstream form of TJ. It gives me knowledge on how the poor women in rural areas practice the Islamic doctrine in their daily lives. Like the mainstream group of TJ, GFC also has the Islamic teaching class of *Talim*. Since the female Tablighis of this group made their own group from the mainstream TJ, they arrange additional activities.   The women of this group are responsible to expand the scope of their group's activities: they visit different *Talim House*s to provide *Dawa* as well as to take care of the group's activities. I participated with them in various places that enriched this fieldwork by sampling from a larger pool of participants from different backgrounds.

1.7.2 Period of Fieldwork

This study has developed following the fieldwork into three phases. In the first phase, the primary fieldwork was started on December 2011 and continued for one month.   At that time, historical documents and related print materials were collected and the visibility of female Tablighi activities was observed in various places. Based on these observations the research fields were selected in Dhaka and Rajshahi, which then led to the second phase of the fieldwork. During the first phase of the, I hired a male co-researcher to collect information from the male Tablighi as women have a limited access to the male Tablighi leaders. At that time the co-researcher had collected some interviews from the male Tablighi leaders at the world headquarter of TJ in New Delhi.

The second phase of fieldwork began in mid-October 2012 and continued

to mid-January 2013. During this period, the fieldwork has been done in Dhaka, Rajshahi and New Delhi. In third phase, I did fieldwork for one month in December 2013 among the GFC groups in Ganbandha and partially visited the field area in Rajshahi.

1.7.3 Data Gathering Methods and Techniques

This study is based on an ethnographical research to understand the total process of a group of Muslim women's participation and their actions in the Islamic revivalist movement of TJ. Since the primary aim of the study is to explore Tablighi women's activities in a relatively new and restricted religious sphere, so it demands to examine and to analyze their performance in terms of religion specially, in Islam and in the social context. My previous experience about religiously educated women's activities in a new and restricted area such as in madrasa teachings, allowed me to conceptualize that in such cases women's choice of action and response are related to their piety that had been cultivated in a particular religious context. In such cases, it might be misguided to consider these women as 'subjects' according to their own perspective. Hence, it is very important to know them according to their own context that includes their particular type of Islamic learning and training, the practices of Islamic rituals, and the Islamic dress and code of conduct. Moreover, to understand their action one must aim to know the social context where they live. In such cases, the ethnography is the best way to record and to interpret another people's way of life (Rogger M. Keesing & Andrew.J.Strathern, 1976). Hence, by using a qualitative research method, this study tries to understand the whole mechanism of female

Tablighi activities according to their own points of view and to analyze the interconnectedness of their social life.

During the total period of fieldwork, four types of data collection techniques have been followed. *Participant observation*, the most important strategy of authentic data gathering is used here because by using this technique the researcher can take part in the community and try to observe the people and their activities from their own point of view (Spardley, 1980). Additionally, Goffman (1989, p.125) also defined participant observation as research technique as about "getting data by subjecting yourself, your own body and personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation". Considering these ideas, I myself participated in Tablighi groups, visited in weekly *Talim* sessions, and joined in the Jamaat tour with the female Tablighi.

My frequent visits in *Talim* sessions and in Jamaat tours have been helpful for the participants to consider me as a Tablighi member rather than being viewed as an outsider making it easier for them to share information with me. Another aspect is that the female Tablighi has an intention to motivate people to the Tablighi activities and they believe it is their duty to give *Dawa* (call for Islamic activities) to others. From the beginning of the fieldwork, they told me that if you are involved with this work then you could easily know the total activities. I attended two *Talim* sessions of two *Talim* points in Dhaka that are held

in every Wednesday and Saturday. Besides joining in the reading sessions, I frequently visited the *Talim House* to observe the women's daily lifestyle, their relationship with the family members, relatives and friends.

Besides participant observation, the *interview* is another data gathering technique that was followed. Interviews have been taken from the male Tablighi leaders from the Kakrail and Nizamuddin mosques. Interviews have been taken from the women who have a long experience of Tablighi activities. The nature of the interviews was not focused on specific issues but rather was open-ended so that the informant could share the information including his or her opinions and feelings. In the third phase of the data collection, I used the *case study* technique by which I observed four members of TJ who have mostly dedicated their life for the Tablighi works. Four case studies (each focusing on one woman) have been conducted, among them two are from Dhaka, one from Rajshahi and one from Gaibandha. These four women were selected based on their long Tablighi involvement in comparison to other members. They have sacrificed their lives, souls and bodies for the development of TJ.

Besides these three data collection strategies, I have applied another technique of *focus group discussions* to gather information from groups of peoples when they took part in informal discussions. During the fieldwork in Jamaat, I observed that during periods of leisure, the women divided in groups and took part in gossiping. Mostly, they shared their Tablighi experiences and Islamic knowledge since they believe discussing about worldly affairs is a waste of time.

Sometimes I joined with these groups and technically proposed topics such as purdah, women's education, and women's roles at home and in public, and women's leadership roles in Tablighi activities for discussion. I observed that some of groups of women simultaneously shared their views and opinions. I have noticed that some women were not interested to talk with me personally because of felling shy, though they felt free to take part in-group discussions to share their views. During the fieldwork, I have followed the *survey technique* among one hundred women to know their socio-economic status. This survey was conducted by making a mini questionnaire survey.

1.8 Organization and Outline of the Study

In order to understand women's extended gender roles in Islamization, this thesis is based on three interrelated analytical motives. First, coming away from the scholarly tendency of conceptualizing gender roles based on the ideological structure in the Islamic movement, I explore power relations and politics of manifesting gendered roles for women in religious movements that is true for both Hindu and Islamic reformist movements in South Asia. This idea aims to explore women's roles beyond the analysis of gender roles based on ideological and political structures of the Islamic movement. Second, against the early scholarly tendencies of ignoring subjectivities of actors based on the ideological and political structure of Islamic movements, I explore the subjectification process focusing on organizational activities and personal lives of the religious women. Focusing on McGuire's (2010) idea of Islam as a lived religion with daily experiences, I explore the way in which the individual cultivates Islamic piety and

reconstructs self through their own experiences rather than as institutional narratives of the Islamic movement. I explore the individual's true desires for being religious that are also shaped by multidimensional pushes from society that creates some resistance power for the subject persons within the subjective experiences of the pious women. Third, besides the idea of agency as resistance against subordination (Abu-Loughod, 1998) I explore within the lived process of subjectification, a new kind of pious subjectivity develops that acquires resistance power for doing creative and transformative action. By subjecting oneself to God, creativity leads religious woman to be an actor in Islamization.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this thesis serve to provide background information. Chapter Two makes an introduction of TJ movement including its historical origins in India. The thesis then moves from the early analysis showing women in the Islamic movement as included in the project of community building, to exploring that women willingly included themselves in this project to bring reform and to prepare the community for reform: a history that was overlooked. Based on historical documents and spoken materials, I explore that women's sense of self-responsibility brings them in equal status like their menfolk to perform religious roles in Islamization. However, this is still the early stage for Muslim women in India to participate in the Islamic movement and lacks experienced men acting as the guardians to determine how women's Islamic activities should be done.

Chapter Three focuses on the gender ideology of TJ. I will examine the

gender discourse of the TJ movement by discussing the practices of performing different activities for men and women in TJ. I will discuss the essential rules for female Tablighis prescribed by TJ. This study looks for the formation of this particular ideology of gender inequality in the socio-cultural context of India in late 19th to early twentieth century, when TJ emerged as an Islamic reformist movement. This chapter explores the genealogy of the gender discourse and ideology of TJ in relation to the core discourses on "reformed women", a debate evolved through complex political processes including Western colonialism, nationalism, and communal politics since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in colonial India. By analyzing the discourses and ideology of TJ as framed in the movement by its founder and pioneers, this chapter contends that the core gender discourses of TJ such as the renewed and extended roles of Muslim women with restricted mobility beyond the private space was largely fitted to the discourse of "reformed women" promoted by the modern reformist leaders from Muslim and Hindu communities who engaged in nationalistic and communal politics. It is imperative to look beyond the cliché of religious doctrine as how gender ideology is framed in the religious movement through a historical-political context despite its ramifications and legitimization drawn from religious doctrines. The findings of this chapter allow for the examination of women's roles and their status beyond the ideological and political structure of the Islamic movements. Instead, it leads to explore women's roles in Islamization based on the 'women's perspective'. This chapter also provides the scenario of a deeply rooted patriarchic structure in contemporary Indian society, which is almost similar to Bangladesh. The social patriarchic structure functions to shape

the religious women's experiences about gender.

Chapter Four focuses on TJ growing popularity among women in Bangladesh in relation to a changing socio-economic and political context. I argue that TJ became popular among emerging lower middle class women in Bangladesh. Shortly after emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, the country focused on gender development issue and women from both rural and urban areas were included in modern development projects such as in economy, education, and politics. As a result, large number of women from lower middle class and middle class include them in outer world. I seek TJ's popularity in context of this changing socio-economic status of women in Bangladesh. I shall seek the initiatives taken by TJ to accommodating the movement among the female followers in the changing social context of Bangladesh. Moreover, I shall go through the question regarding how the women are inclined to a restricted gender ideology of TJ in the modern social context of Bangladesh. I argue that the state takes various initiatives to reduce gender disparity, however, still gender inequality is severely rooted in society and women are everyday target of various forms of discrimination in everyday lives. I argue that state's weakness favors to restore patriarchic gender norms in society. Within this unequal social context, TJ's gender ideology creates its space among the female follower without making any contradiction with social gender norms. Thus, TJ becomes popular among women across the country.

Chapter Five focuses on the subject formation process of TJ women

61

through TJ's lessons and practices. How the women perceive themselves as religious subjects through religious lessons and practices in the *Talim, Bayan* and *Dawa* tour will be discussed here. Mahmood's (2001) idea of 'cultivating Islamic piety' is useful here for understanding the way in which women's conscious commitment to God and true desires for being religious have developed. Coming out from Mahmood's idea of increasing piety through religious practices, I focus on the life experiences through which women's desires for conversion developed. Based on both material and religious experiences of women, I argue that female Tablighis embody a new kind of pious subjectivity that acquires resistance power against male dominance but hardly raises consciousness about emancipation though instead it grows creativity among them that reveals them as the creative actor with conformity to the will of God.

The idea of creative actors will be enlarged in Chapter Six, focusing on the activities of an alternative group (GFC). I explore that TJ women are resisting the gendered ideology of TJ and they are responding in creative ways by making separate groups. By organizing collective rituals in the 'out of home' the religious women are transforming the meaning of cultural traditions that functions to reconfigure the boundary of women's spaces in the religious sphere. Women's engagements in new roles demonstrate that they are actors in Islamization. I argue that by leading separate religious groups the women emerge as female religious leaders that are historically restricted for women This study argues that in order to endure and to legitimize women's new roles and new spaces; they are always in negotiation with the patriarchal ideology of Islam.

Finally, the Conclusion will summarize the findings of this study and make a relation between the current findings and the existing gender theories. It reports the shortcomings of the current study and recommends clues for further studies.

Chapter Two

Tablighi Jamaat: Origin and Development, Concepts and Principles

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the origin and development of TJ in general and in particular, it emphasizes on the beginning of women's involvement, which was completely ignored in earlier studies. In the formative period of TJ in 1927 in India, it was mainly men centered and women were included in this Tablighi mission until the 1940s (Metcallf, 1998). TJ activities for both men and women have circulated around the world. In spite of worldwide presence of TJ women, little scholarly attention has been paid on it, comparing to male's Tablighi activities. Very little is known about the history of TJ women while growth of male Tablighi activism has been well documented in various studies (Haq, 1972; Sikand, 2002; Gaborieau, 2000). This chapter seeks to find the origin of women's participation in Mewat, south-west of New Delhi, India where TJ originated and later spread around the world.

The earlier studies about TJ have focused on the socio-economic and political condition of Mewat in early twentieth century and have made a connection between socio-economic and political crisis and development of TJ (Siddiqi, 1986, Mayaram, 1991, 1997, 2004). They have noticed agrarian crisis of early twentieth in Mewat, which resulted communal identity crisis. The event of *Suddhi* movement in Mewat, undertaken by Hindu reformist leaders who started to reconvert the poor Muslims into Hinduism, made the religious identity situation among the Meo people worse.

Numerous studies (Mayaram, 1991; Sikand, 2002; Ali, 2006) point out the development of TJ, the event, is a direct religious response of Meo Muslim people to their social oppression. This study examines women's inclusion in TJ based on this particular social context. The Meonis (Meo women), who were given high economic value due to their contribution in agriculture, became equally victims of agrarian crisis, like their menfolk. This study focuses on the invisible history of female's participation in TJ, which was started by women. The pious, educated woman proposed the founder of TJ to include them in Islamization like the men.

The founder of TJ, Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, who considered the Mewat crisis as an example of great tragedy of greater Muslim society caused him to express his concern about the disappearance of Islam in future that provoked him to further his vision for building a single community for Muslim (Mayaram, 2004). Women's inclusion in TJ was seen as potential means to preceding Ilyas's idea of community building project in which, they were seen as repositories of community's glory, like the other movements at that time.

2.1. Origin and Development of TJ

2.1.1 Mewat and the Meo peoples

Mewat, is a territory in the south-west of the Indian capital city of New Delhi, where the Meo people live. Its geographical boundary is not fixed like many other areas, it covers large parts of the districts of Gaurgaon, Alwar and Bharatpur. The Gaurgaon

district is part of Haryana states and Alwar and Bharatpur districts are located in Rajasthan state of India. The Mewat region is largely occupied by its own ethnic people who are popularly known as Meos, although different ethnic minority peoples are also there. The Meos are mostly engaged in agriculture work, the peasant caste dominates the Meo society, although animal husbandry and dairy farming are also present. The Mewati Muslims to whom Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas has reached out with his appeal of Islamic reform were Muslim in name but they practice the religious rituals that were mixed from both Hinduism and Islam. It was possible because the mostly Mewatis claimed their Rajput ancestry and converted to Islam only in name but retained many of their indigenous religious practices and cultural traditions. As far as it is known from early history that the Mewatis converted to Islam when they defeated by the military of imperial army[1] . Not many of the Mewati Muslim who converted to Islam accepted scriptural Islamic traditions and rituals, mostly they followed the local religious and cultural traditions. During this period, various *sufi* orders entered into Mewat region to habituate the *nau Muslim* (new Muslim) into

[1] Various sources confirmed the Muslim invasion in Mewat and as a result of win, Mewatis are converted to Islam. According to the records of Rajputnana Gazetteer, in the eleventh century, the Meos are conquered and converted to Islam by Masud Gazi (cf. Haq 1972:103). Another sources mention, during the period of 1994 when Qutub-u'd-din Aybek was in power,Hiraj,brother of Prithviraj, invaded Mewat but was defeated and slain by Sultan. Sayyid Waji-u'd-din was given the task to invade Mewat by Sultan but he was killed and his nephew, Miran Husayn Jang took the charge and ultimately subdued the Meos. In that time some of Meos converted to Islam while others associated Hindu religious beliefs to pay jizyah. (Haq, 1972, p. 104).

Islamic culture and tried to adopt Islamic rituals and practices among them. Sufi saints such as Hazrat Khaza Mohiddin Chisti and Nizam-u'd din Aulia were highly respected and worshipped by the Meo peoples[2]. Numbers of *ulama* especially *ulama* of the Waliullah tradition engaged in the Islamization process of the Mewati people. In spite of Sufi and *ulama*'s hard efforts for cultivating an Islamic culture, the Meos were nominal Muslim, until the early decades of the twentieth century when TJ emerged in Mewat. As it is reported in historical accounts, the Meo Muslims were nominal and there was little to distinguish the religious beliefs and practices among Hindu and Muslim. Aggarwal stated, "they (Meos) observed most Hindu rituals and continued to use the services of all Hindu castes including the *Brahmins*, long after embracing Islam'' (Aggarwal 1978,p.151). The Meo Muslim developed syncretic religious traditions by practicing rituals both from Hinduism and Islam and it was almost a common feature across the Mewat region. As it was reported at the end of nineteenth century in Alwar Gazetteer of 1878, written by Major Powlett:

[2] When Muslim rulers begun to ruling Mewat, different sufi orders entered in that region. The graves of the Sufi saints became shrines and site of pilgrimage to the Meo Muslim. The Meos used to pay their respect to the shrine of the Sufi saints. Hazrat Madar Shah(1315-1436) in Makhnpur, was a well-respected Sufi saint whose tomb was considered as sacred among the Meos. Other well-known Sufi saints such as Hasrat sheikh Musa and Shah Chokha who engaged in Islamic preaching in Mewat, their tomb were worshipped and *urs* (annual celebration to mark the death of saint) are observed. For details about the practice of Sufi rituals in Mewat see, Haq, 1972.

All the Meos are, now Muslim, but only in name. Their village deities are the same as those of the Hindu landlords, and they celebrate several Hindu festivals. Holy is a season of special rejoicing among the Mewatis and they observe it like their own festivals such as Moharrum……. They have Hindu names, with the exception of the word Ram, and their last name often is "singh' though not as frequently as 'khan'………. The Meos are largely ignorant of their faith, i.e., Islam. Very few of them know the *kalima* (faith) and fewer still observe *namaz* (prayer) regularly. (cf. Nadwi, 2012, p.33)

Similarly in the Gazetteer of Gurgaon of (1910) it is stated that the

Meos were very loose and careless type of Muslim. They shared most of the customs of the neighboring community, especially those which possesses an element of fun and merriment. Their basic rule seems to be to observe the religious celebrations of both communities, and disregard the religious duties of either. Lately some religious teachers have appeared in Mewat and a few Meos have started to keep the fasts of Ramadan (name of Arabic month) and to build mosques in their villages and observe *namaz* (prayer). Their women too have taken to wearing *pyjamas*[3] instead of Hindu *Ghagra*s[4]. All these are the signs of religious awakening'' (cf. Nadwi, 2012, p.33)

[3] Loose trousers, garments for both man and women can wear.

[4] Garment generally worn by Hindu women, which hangs below the waist and partly covered the body

The above historical accounts show that the Meo Muslim did not pay enough attention to cultivate scriptural Islam in their daily lives except absorbing some particular rituals. The most important Muslim customs, which they strictly observed, were male circumcision, marriage and death. These rituals were also performed with Hindu features (Aggarwal, 1973). For example, the marriage ceremony is performed by the *maulvi* or *Qazi* (Muslim cleric performs the formalities of marriage) but the Hindu Brahmins take part in the formalities to preceding the marriage. Meos used to go to the Brahmin priests to fix the date of marriage. Moreover, Meos introduced the practice of burial instead of burning the dead body but observed the feast culture like the Hindu.

In case of women's clothing, the Meonis used to wear Rajasthani skirt and blouse and heavy silver jewelry but kept them away from using dress like Hindu women. But they did not adopt the Islamic dress of *burqa* or veil. As Aggarwal observes,

> Unlike both the Hindu and Muslim high castes, Meo women do not observe *pardha* (seclusion)… Meo women, however, do avoid certain relatives in their families, especially the male affinels who are older than their husbands. In the presence of these relatives Meo women cover their faces and avoid any kind of contact (Aggarwal, 1973, p. 33 cf. J.A.Ali 2006, p.133)

The syncretic religious traditions of Meos continued hundreds years without facing any threat on their possession of an ambiguous identity. Recent historians (e.g Shams, 1983; Sikand, 2002) argued this practices of syncretic traditions served to secure the Meo Muslim's position in Meo society. Since the almost agriculture sector was belonged to the Meos so the peasants caste dominated (according to the large numbers) the Meo society. In such social circumstances, although, the Meos became Muslim but retaining the local and un-Islamic customs, practices and attitudes towards the lower caste enabled them to claim and continue their dominant status in the local social hierarchy. The non-Muslim, service castes and Brahmins who were depend for their share in agricultural product from Meos carried on serving them without raising any religious question. In consequence, as long as the economic and social life remained undisturbed, the ambiguous religious identities were overlooked and continued in Meo society. As a Meo scholar observes, there was '' no pressing need to bend in either direction (Hindu or Muslim) because their position in Mewat was secure. None of the other caste groups in Mewat questioned the Meo dominance'' (Shams 1983, p. 35 cf. Sikand 2002, p. 114). However, at the beginning of the twentieth century the Meo society went through a rapid social change of economic transformation that fall the Meo Muslim in economic crisis. As a consequent of socio-economical change, religion or religious identity, which was ignored by Meo society, became a crucial question. Within a particular context of socio-political crisis, there was evolved a religious anxiety which might be seen as a suitable environment for organizing and furthering Islamic revivalist movement like TJ.

2.1.2. Socio-economic Crisis and Meos Move for Islamic Identity

Various studies (Agarwal, 1969; Khan, 1988; Siddiqi, 1986) mentioned that the worst economic condition of Meos in early twentieth left the Meos in hopeless and defenseless situation. Although, the Meos held the ownership of almost cultivated land in Mewat, the devastating majority became became small landowners except a few very large landholders living among them. Less productivity of land, lack of modern irrigation facilities and due to natural disasters most of the peasant Meos fell into poverty. One of the main reasons for Meos to become impoverished was the money depending system from the local Hindu *banias* (traders) who charged high rates interest that increasingly made them poor. According to Khan (1986), the Hindu *banias* charged the poor Meos an interest rate of 5 percent per month on their loans that amounted to 60 percent annually, which they were unable to repay. As a result, of incapability of repaying money the Meos' land was handed to the *banias.* This growing trend of land owning system of *banias* from impoverished Meos, according to Sikand (2002), was a direct consequence of British imposed new conception of landownership in which land was seen as commodity and a private property that one could be used for selling or mortgaging. Earlier, the Meos borrowed money from the Moneylenders and repaid their loan by exchanging the same value of crop instead of money but under the new system of land ownership Meos pledged their lands to the *banias* for credit. Through the new process, the Meos very quickly became landless and forced to resulting in becoming poorer than before.

Within this economic transition, the Meos not only became poorer than Hindu High caste but also turned into marginal status in social hierarchy of Meo society. Earlier, the peasant Meo castes who dominated in Meo hierarchy, economic loss replaced them from their local social and political position instead the Hindu *banias* gained high economic status. The Hindu *banias* became the repositories of high caste Hinduism and begun to distinguishing them separate from the Meos. In such a way, shortly after of emerging the Hindu *banias*, religious identity became a powerful symbol in Hindu-Muslim relation that had disappeared earlier. Although, the Meos claimed their ancestry from Rajput status of Hindu but the *banias'* attitude to them was like they were untouchable caste. They refused to take food cooked by the Meos, claiming their religious ritual as polluted. The hostile attitudes of Hindu high castes increasingly spread in all spheres of daily living, therefore, the agrarian crisis turned into a crisis of religious identity among the Meos. Within this particular context of an Islamic identity crisis in the early twentieth, Mawlana Ilyas entered in Mewat with his reformist appeal of promoting religious knowledge and familiarization with the rules and principles of *Sharia*. Despite groups of Meos willing respond to Ilyas's appeal of Islamic reform it was unable to gain mass response to a new ideology and completely external, out of Meo culture. In fact, the mass people's response to Tablighi reform appeal was a consequence of a particular event of the Meo peasant rebellions in the early decades of 1930s, in which the poor Meos realized the identity crisis was very much stronger than before (Mayaram, 1991; Sikand, 2002).

Without taking into the account of Meos' peasant rebellions, the development of TJ might not be understood very well which was introduced in Mewat shortly prior to the riot and spread on large scale immediately after the revolt. The effects of revolts are outlined in various forms, specifically, it had great impact in strengthening a strong sense of Muslimness among the Indian Muslims. Sikand (2002) mentioned that in the early twentieth century a class of educated was emerged among the Meos who could point out the interests of poor peasants. He showed that this combination of emerging educated class and ongoing agrarian crisis provided a fertile ground for the outbreak of series of peasant uprisings in Mewat in 1932-34 through which successful efforts were made to link specifically the Meo economic demands with a pan Indian Muslim agenda. This process made it easy for the Meos to establish their greater identification with Islam. During the period of peasants' riots, the Meos came to the vicinity with several Muslim leaders and organizations from outside Mewat. Meos interaction with Muslim community from neighboring areas who came to help them in crisis established religious ties and grew a strong sense of Muslimness among the Meos. Moreover, during this critical time Meos did not get any support from the Hindu in Mewat rather they found Muslims who came to rescue them during the unrest. This perceived sense of Muslimness later made an easy beginning of Islamic ideology through the missionary efforts of TJ.

The Meos' wider response to TJ will not to be properly understood without taking into the account of state's brutal policy and the *Suddhi* campaign of Arya Samaj movement, led by Hindu reformist leaders, which increased resentment and

raised Meos consciousness of communal identity. Hindu rulers showed hostile attitudes towards Muslim subjects and taking brutal policies against the Meos that furthered the resentment of Meos and prepared them for rebellions, which was clearly addressed in various studies (Haye, 1966; Mehta and Mehta, 1985). Moreover, at this time, the revivalist leaders of *Arya Samaj* extended their missionary activism of *shuddhi* campaign in Mewat to convert the Meos back in Hinduism. The Hindu rulers of Alwer, Bharatpur districts supported the reformist leaders of *Arya Samaj*. The policy of cultivating pro-Hindu image of Alwar administration strongly depressed the poor Meos that finally caused them to rebel on a large scale across the Mewat. This policy, ''however, had the unintended consequence of making the Meos more fiercely conscious of their Muslim identity, which was now being reinforced by the state itself'' (Mayaram, 1997 cf. Sikand 2002, p.123). There are debates about labeling the peasants revolt as an Islamic revolt or not, here it is not my intention to discuss in details but what I want to point out is that the event did cast light on the issue of religious communalism in Mewat which was extended later (Siddiqi, 1986). Therefore, the Meos consciousness for building an Islamic identity was not to be considered as false consciousness rather it might be seen as a factual reaction against their social oppression.

The shocking experiences of social oppression that created woeful experiences to the Meos, the Meonis (Meo women) became equally victims; in some cases, it was more distressing than their menfolk. They were facing oppression from both side of their 'inner' community and at the same time from 'outer' or 'others' the

74

Hindu castes. According to Mayaram (1994) almost all the agriculture works in Mewat were performed by the womenfolk, occasionally their menfolk helped them. Therefore, like the Meos, the Meonis became equally victims of the exploitation from Hindu *banias* moneylenders. The miserable condition of Meonis women in Mewat is addressed by a Meo men in Sikand (1995, p. 7), he told "Meonis are doubly exploited. First, they, along with Meo men suffer at the hands of *banians* and the official. Then, they were exploited by their men themselves. Some are even treated as dumb cattle, though our religion strictly prohibits this''. Agrarian crisis enforced the Meonis only in household works when their menfolk became landless. On the other hand, the Meonis were oppressed by their own people, because of their cultural practices, which were strictly maintained among the Meo community. Although the Meos became Muslim but the institution of family was remained almost untouched and the Meo family structure continued in their own indigenous customs and marriage exogamy, which were in direct contrast to the Islamic law. The rules of exogamy allowed its members to marry the close blood relative such as first cousin (Marwah, 1979). The Meos practice of polygamy allowed polygynous family consisting of a man more than one wife and more children. It was also found in Meo society that the rich Meos took two or more wives because of their prestige (Aggarwal, 1973). In addition, the customary Hindu laws of inheritance were continued and the Meonis were almost not allowed to exercise their inheritance right. Under the patrilocal extended family system of Meo society women were handed over to their husbands by marriage. Women rarely owned any property in the Meo society because their inheritance rule is not based on Islamic law. Women were

excluded from sharing of ancestral property (Marwah, 1979). Therefore, this cultural oppression might encourage them to accept a single religious ideology instead of adopting syncretic religious customs. Since the Meonis were also a part of the Meo community they had miserable experiences of social oppression from Hindu rulers and high castes, thus, they provoked toward focusing on an Islamic identity like their menfolk and started to keep themselves away from ambiguous identities. As it is reported in Sikand (2002), the Meo women gave up the Hindu skirt and blouse for Islamic *shalwer kameeze* (garment for female, loose trouser and long shirt). In such a way, the agrarian crisis of early 1930s had created a context of dividing religious traditions as 'own' (Muslim) and 'other' (Hindu) in the Meo community. Social and cultural oppression created the necessity to bring reforms in syncretic religious traditions for establishing proper Islamic customs instead. As Siddiqi remarked '' the high economic value of Meo women to agrarian life and the practice among the Meos of strict community endogamy necessitated the movement from a culturally heterogeneous mode of existence to a more uniformly patterned way of life'' (Siddiqi;1986,p. 445).

Shortly after the event of Meos peasant rebellion, TJ started its Tablighi activism in full swing in Mewat area. Sikand reports "it was only from late 1933 onwards that the *Muballigin* (Tablighi activists) of the Tablighi Jamaat began roving in the Mewati countryside'' (Sikand, 1995, p.12). At the beginning of TJ, Tablighi activities were performed only in British Mewat and particularly around Nuh. And after the revolt, it started in Alwar and Bharatpur and adjacent areas. Therefore, this

combination, of social oppression, anti-pathy from Hindu high castes and emerging sense of Muslimness, moved the Meos for Islamic identity. This particular setting of Islamic identity building in Mewat might be seen as suitable for developing TJ in Mewat. In the context of growing Tablighi activism in Mewat in 1940s, the female Tablighi activities were introduced to reform the Meonis. The origin of female TJ might be understood in the same context of social oppression and identity crisis that the Meos and Meonis faced in Mewat.

2.1.3 Ilyas and TJ

Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), the founder of TJ born in 1885. By born he was associated with two renowned families of ulama in Jhanjhala and Kandhala, two towns in districts Muzaffar Nagar, UP. Therefore, he had the opportunity to have close association and interaction with the ulama of his parental families who had deep commitment to Islam and of whom many contributed to the Islamic revivalism movement. The background of his family might have profound influence on his devotion and deep commitment to Islam. Later, during his Islamic education career, he came to the vicinity of many reformist *ulama*, in particular the Deoband *ulama*. Ilyas, after his graduation from *Deoband* in 1910, started teaching in *Mazahirul Ulum*, Sharanpur.

Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas started Islamic reform in Mewat following his father and elder brother. Actually it was his father, Mawlana Ismail (d, 1989), Islamic religious educated man and great devotee to Islam, first made contact with

the Meos and engaged him to reform the nominal Muslim Meos. At the beginning, he started to teach the Meo children who were sent to his madrasa that had opened at the mosque at *Basti-Nizamuddin* in New Delhi. After completing their study in madrasa, they would return to Mewat to preach Islam. The Meo students, who were mostly from poor families, were given food, clothes, education and a place of stay free of cost (Khan, 1986). In such a way, Mawlana Ismail's devoutness in Islamic reform and hospitality had made him popular among group of Meos and then along with some close disciples, he started to take short tours in the villages of Mewat. According to Baliyavi (n.d), because of Ismail's efforts, '' nearly five hundred real servants of God, some of whom became *hafiz* (who can memorize Quran), religious scholars and missionaries who strove to spread the name of Allah throughout the world'' (Baliyavi, n.d, p. 46, cf. Sikand 2002, p. 126). After his death in 1898, Ismail's eldest son Mawalana Muhammad who was engaged in teaching in the Madrasa in Basti Nizamuddin, continued his father's works in Mewat. Untill Mawlana Muhammad's death in 1917 he engaged in Islamic preaching and reforming in Mewat and increased Islamic awakening among the Mewatis. Following the path of father and elder brother Mawlana Ilyas started his journey in Islamic reforming in Mewat in request of some close disciples of his predecessors.

As I stated earlier, despite of introducing numerous reforming efforts in Mewat, Meos were passing through syncretic religious culture and it was almost the same when Ilyas entered there. Besides following his elder's method of visiting physically Mewat and teaching the Mewati in New Delhi, he went a step further and

established *maktab* and *madrasas* in that area so that the influence of the faith could spread to a wider area and brought change in people's lives (Nadwi, 2012). Ilyas had established, according to Hasni, a few hundreds *maktabs* (elementary seats of Islamic learning) and *madrasas* (Islamic religious schools in Mewat, where Quran was taught (Hasni, 1989, p. 201). However, he was disappointed and very much shocked to his effort when he found a *hafiz* (a title given to a Muslim person who memorize the entire Quran) completely indistinguishable from the non-Meo Hindu person. To Ilyas, the *hafiz's* personal and behavioral etiquette such as wearing *dhoti* (men's garment, usually known as dress of Hindu men), having no beard made him indifferent from non-Muslim Meos and other Hindu caste's peoples. While seeing the *hafiz*, Ilyas was depressed and felt that his efforts for founding religious schools were a waste of time and money that produce such a type of Islamic learned man (Nadwi, 2012). This rationality of Tablighi mission, therefore, was grounded in making true Muslim who would represent Muslim identity. A Muslim will not be a Muslim by birth, his Muslimness should be appeared in his external appearances, and these visible symbols would identify a Muslim as 'proper Muslim'. This perceived ideology of TJ, Sinha criticized for it introduces the nature of communalism among the Meo peoples (Masud, 2000:98). Similarly, Sikand (2002) points out that tabligh not only wished to bring reform among the nominal Muslims but furthered the project of making a 'pan Indian Muslim community'. Therefore, the goal of the reformist appeal of TJ can be seen as to serve the purpose of making Muslim conscious about their separate identity. Ahmad (1991) elaborates the aim of TJ

The essential thrust of the movements was to purify the borderlines of Muslim from their Hindu accretions and to educate them about their beliefs and rituals so that they would not become an easy prey to the Hindu proselytizers. Its aim was thus to bring about a reawaking of faith and a reaffirmation of the religio-cultural identity of Muslims. The Tablighi Movements, however, did not try to convert non-Muslims to Islam; its exclusive focus remained on making Muslims better Muslims and purer Muslims (Ahmad, 1991, p.511. cf. Jalalzai, 2005, p.75).

In context of *Suddhi* campaign, Ilyas,'s agenda for reforming the nominal Muslim Meos was nothing different from the missionary efforts of his contemporaries or earlier reformist *ulama* who wished to strengthen the Muslim identity by organizing reformist movement[5]. However, his techniques of reforming were not similar with other reformists that made his Tablighi mission different from all other movements. Ilyas did not try to convert non-Muslim into Islam like *Jamaat-*

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[5] At the end of nineteenth centuty to early twentieth century, numerous missionary and reformist movement evolved by the *ulama*. Among them mostly the *Deobandi ulama* were dominating. Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1863-1943), Mawlana Abdul Bari (1878-1926), Khaza Hasan Nizami (1878-1955) engaged in missionary activities and mostly they emphasized on Muslim's separate identity and wished to build a wider Muslim community. For details see Sikand, 2002.

ul-ulama-Hind[6] in India, rather, he emphasized on renewal of faith of individual Muslim by providing proper Islamic teaching. He believed that the only way to bring religious reform and correction of the Mewatis was promotion of religious knowledge and practice of Islamic rules and principles (Nadwi, 2012). He hoped that once the Islamic faith has been strengthened then the Meos would seek for themselves to guide their lives according to Islamic principles.

Since Ilyas, in the initial stage of his mission lost his faith on the method of increasing people's faith through the religious institutions of *maktabs* and *madrasas*, then he started looking for alternative way. Ilyas developed his method of Tablighin three phases, according to Masud (2000), first he applied the method of Islamic teaching through education institutions and failed to earn effective reform then he turned to employing the method of *dhikr* (remembering Allah). This time also he became upset at the un- expected outcome. Finally, he decided to do tabligh by calling people, there was no way to bring religious reform without reaching into the people with Islamic lesson. Ilyas introduced a new idea of *tariqa-i-tabligh* (method of preaching), performing tabligh through travelling of Jamaat tour. Peoples formed in a group and visited one place to another to call on Muslims the correct Islamic

[6] *Jamaat-ul-ulama-Hind* is renowned Islamic reformist movement in British India originated in 1919, governed by a group of *Deoband ulama*. Its missionary activities were organized aimed to convert the non-Muslim to Islam. It was launched in context of the *Suddhi* movement of *Arya Samaj*.

teachings. He believed that ''through physical movement away from one's own place could one leave behind one's esteem for life and its comforts for the cause of God (Nadwi, 1985, p.244). Tablighi activities through travelling of Jamaat groups were started after 1925s (Nadwi, 2012). Mentioning the works of Jamaat group one Meo writer writes "this is when the work of Tabligh actually began'' (Baliyavi, n.d, p. 54). At the beginning of introducing Jamaat, they had been instructed to preach only about the *kalima* (basic faith of Islam), and 'prayers' and 'respect for the *ulama'* and 'knowledge and remembrances of Allah' were added shortly after. And after 1932s when Ilyas came back India observing after his Third Hajj, paid greater attention to his Tablighi mission. Then, two more points were added-'purification of intention' and the importance of every Muslim in order to make Tablighi mission effective (Firozepuri, n.d, p. 40). This is six fundamental principles of TJ, which is enjoined to follow the all Tablighi members. In such a way, through the process of developing Tablighi methods and principles, Ilyas introduced a new idea of doing Tablighis not only the work of educated class of *ulama* only, rather it must be work of all Muslim men as well as women. It was a greater shift in Islamic reformism at this time. Ilyas stated,

> Through, this movement of ours we want that the *ulama* and religious people-
> and the worldly people –should both meet and mix with each other, and their
> differences get removed. We want to bring all sections of Muslims to the
> work of *deen* (Nomani, 2012, p. 110).

This particular strategy of involving peoples from all sections in Islamic preaching was a way to l to familiarize the movement at grass root level of masses of peoples. Ilyas believed that the real remedy of the crisis of Muslim did not lie in individual correction or confining the approach within the educated class. Ilyas believed that only a grass root Islamic movement could enable to keep away the nominal Muslim from their syncretic religious practices. By providing basic knowledge of Islamic faith it would possible to sustain the Meos kept away from the Hindu proselytizer's target. lyas's appeal of reaching his mission to the masses was physically started after 1933, the Jamaat groups of Mewat continued to perform Tablighi activities in Meo countryside moving from village to village. At the same time, Jamaat groups began to visit the religious centers of Western UP, like Khandhala, Raipur, Deoband and Nadwa in order to reach into the urban educated classes in Muslims, which was seen as a second phase in the movement's development (Masud, 2000). Ilyas aimed to enlarge its activities both inside and outside of Mewat. The Jamaat groups from Mewat would visit urban areas and come into close vicinity with the religious educated persons to whom they could acquire Islamic knowledge from. At the same time, it was thought that the Jamaat group's visit to urban people ensure them in practicing Islamic acts. As it was thought that the urban peoples were mostly busy in worldly affairs that made them wholly materialistic and kept them away from Islamic way of life (Nadwi, 2012). TJ enabled to make a link with the educated and semi educated people and people from Meo-countryside and from urban areas. The *ulama* who showed their concern over Ilyas's method of preaching Islam by the semi educated Mewatis, later, they expressed their respect to the Tablighi activists.

Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1864-1943) a renowned Deobandi reformist leaders, referring the Meos activities, told in a congregation '' if you want to see how the (prophet's) companions were look at these peoples'' (Firozpuri, n.d, p.24-28; cf. Sikand, 2002, p.138). This particular success of TJ might be seen a result of Ilyas's major concern for enduring Islamic faith in masses.

Another major shift of TJ was turning out the Meo Muslim's crisis, in a broader context of Indian Muslim society. Ilyas initiated his mission of Islamic preaching to increase faith among the nominal Muslims but gradually he expanded his movement in out of Mewat and introduced it in Delhi and surroundings areas. This particular initiative indicates his greater vision of making TJ popular in broader context of India like other reformist movements of that time. The broader agenda of introducing TJ out of Mewat society might be resulted from Ilyas's concern over Muslim malaises at the advent of Western domination and Muslim's degenerate condition in colonial India. Like the *Deoband* reformist *ulama* Muhammad Ilyas also believed that the degenerate condition of Muslim sultanate and decline of political power in India was resulted because they kept away themselves from religious devotion and focused on worldly affairs. He associated Mewat crisis with his broader concern about Muslim malaises in future due to advent of Western modernity in India. He stated,

> Respected friends; time is still left for work. Two great dangers for *deen* are
> approaching in the near future. The first one will be a missionary movement
> of a propagation of disbelief, just like *shuddhi tehrik*, which will travel among

84

the ignorant masses. The second one will be atheism and apostasy (if feeling no interest in religion and doing religious acts) which is coming hand in hand with the Western government and political system. These two sources of waywardness will rush like the flood. Therefore, do what you can before these appear. (Nomani, 2012, p. 97)

Ilyas's concern over Muslim malaises helped him to decide his philosophy of TJ to make 'Muslim true Muslim'' with embracing the right path of Islam. He believed the real remedy of the Muslim crisis lies in following proper domain of Islam and strict obedience to his messenger Prophet Muhammad. Whilst many modern Islamist of his contemporaries advocated for reinterpretation of Islamic rules, TJ strictly opposed and criticized such type of modern attempt of using reason and science in religious matters. In response to the debates on Muslim community's 'progress', Mawlana Ilyas, clearly explained that model of perfection and progress did not only mean imitating the West. In contrast to the idea of Western superiority, he explained that Muslim concept of perfection was different to the idea of other people. According to his ideology, Prophet Muhammad was the model of perfection and progress that lied in imitating his life (Masud, 2000). He believed that if Muslims faithfully followed the path of Muhammad and devoted themselves to the task of spreading Islam they would always dominate over non-Muslims' and destine to be the masters of everything on this earth (Kandhlawi, 1989, p.8 cf. Sikand, 2002, p.67). This signifies

Ilyas's main goal of TJ beyond the narrow concept of capturing 'the state'[7] rather building a wider 'Muslim community' around the world. The present development of TJ as a transnational movement was rooted in Ilyas's imagination of making a wider Muslim community. In his lifetime of Ilyas, TJ was only spread in India and after his death in 1944, his son Mawlana Yusuf is praised for internationalization of the movement around the world. This particular vision of TJ for making a wider Muslim community might be seen as suitable background for including women in Ilyas's Tablighi mission.

2.1.4 TJ and Women

As I stated that at the initial stage of TJ, Ilyas had no intention to include women in his Tablighi mission. But the Meo women's un-Islamic practices such as worshiping Hindu deities, free mixing with men, and dressing like Hindu women were not out of Ilyas's observation and consideration. He emphasized on women's Islamic dressing while formulating his 'plan of action' in 1934. The plan of action, outlined the purpose and programs of his Tablighi reform movement, was submitted to the village *panchayate* in 1934 at Nuh. In the plan of action 15 points were emphasized: (1)

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[7] TJ maintains apolitical ideology. TJ strictly enjoins its followers not to seeking the capturing of the state for establishing an Islamic state rather it emphasizes on inner reforms of individual. TJ believes if men cannot properly regulate their life according to Islamic *sharia* then capturing state power or establishing an Islamic state is totally absurd. TJ follows a bottom-up ideology rather than top-bottom approach.

article of faith; (2) prayer; (3) acquisition and dissemination of knowledge; (4) adoption of Islamic appearance and dress; (5) adoption of Islamic ceremonies and rejection of non-Islamic ones; (6) seclusion for women, (7) performance of marriage in the Islamic manner; adherence for Muslim dress for women;(8) non-deviation from Islamic beliefs and non-acceptances of any other religion; (9)protection and preservation of mutual rights, (10) participation of responsible persons in every meeting; (11) no secular education for children before they receive basic Islamic education; (12) pledge to strive and endeavor for the preaching of religion; (13) striving for preaching Islam; (14)observances of cleanliness ; (15) pledge to protect the dignity and respect of one another (Haq, 1972, p. 110). Among the 15-points of this plan of action, two addressed the promotion of Islamic dress and veiling for women. It means that Ilyas perceived, in the formative period of the TJ movement, that if Muslim men were properly taught in Islam they would teach their women.

However, it was the woman, who raised the issue of female's involvement in Islamic movement. The woman was the wife of Mawlana Abdus Subhan who lived in Kasabpur, a place adjacent to Delhi. Mawlana Subhan was a Mewati student who came to Nizamuddin mosque for study and after his graduation; he became involved in TJ with Ilyas. His wife became concerned about the Mewati Muslim women's reform. She used to provide Islamic teaching among women at her home, where women joined from neighbouring places. She raised the question that if male could engage in TJ why could not the women? She posed the question to Ilyas that "why

did he not arrange Islamic teaching for women by forming female Jamaat like the male Jamaat?"

When this question was conveyed to Ilyas, he became surprised to know the women's interest in his reformist movement. One day he visited the Kasabpur area where the lady arranged *talim* for the womenfolk. He was happy to see the woman's individual efforts in Islamization. He returned in Nizamuudin and shared the issue of women's inclusion in TJ with his followers. Initially most of the ulama associated with TJ including Ilyas's son Mawlana Yusuf (the second *ameer*, leader, of TJ), Mawlana Inamul Hasan (third *Ameer* of TJ), Qari Daud (spiritual successor of Ilyas) had denied the proposal expressing their apprehension over occurring *fitna* (disorder, chaos). But Mawlana Ilyas was adamant and argued that the women were used to having frequent social visits such as attending to the marriage ceremony, visiting neighbor's and relative's houses if someone died, and even enjoying sightseeing visits in Meheroli and Okhla. Ilyas argued, why they could not participate in female TJ. Finally, Ilyas sought endorsement from Mufti Kifayatullah, a prominent Deobandi scholar at that time, and argued the necessities of women's participation in Jamaat travelling, one of the key activities of TJ, in order to renew the faith of Islam among Muslim womenfolk. He explained the method of women's working conditions and particularly highlighted that they could participate in TJ with their male *mahrem* (unmarriageable kin). It was in 1940, during Ilyas's lifetime, that the first female TJ was formed and sent to Ghaseda village in Gurgaon. These Jamaat consisted of seven pairs of women and men who travelled for 10 days led by a male *Ameer*, Mawlana

88

Daud. During the period of Jamaat tour, the male members were used to staying in a mosque and the female members in a nearby house provided by local Tablighi members. Miyaji Musa, a devoted Tablighi follower, arranged everything for that Jamaat and provided lodging facility for the women at his home. Inclusion of women in TJ and their visit in Mewat was very much welcomed by the villagers. It was reported that the first female Jamaat group was received with celebrations of gunfire by the villagers of Ghaseda[8]. In such a way, the project of reforming Meonis women through TJ was introduced by Ilyas and the menfolk of Mewat who already engaged them in reforming Meo community eagerly accepted the idea of reforming their women.

The Tablighi Jamaat for women began its journey along with the male TJ in the name of Masturat Jamaat or the Jamaat for women. According to a prominent male Tablighi leader[9], the term Masturat is formed in composition with two Arabic words—*Mastura* and *Awrat*. Mastura means something that is hidden or not displayable in public, and *awrat* refers to woman. Masturat Jamaat, thus, literally means the "unrevealed women". He stated,

since our women are not allowed to express themselves in public except in front of *mahrem* male, permitted men according to Islamic law such as,

[8] Interview with Mawlana Salman, Nizamuddin mosque, India.

husbands, brothers, fathers, and others to whom marriage is forbidden. Therefore, the term Masturat derives from the term *awrat* [10]

Although the term, Masturat Jamaat, refers to the group of women that engage in Islamic preaching, it is not exclusively for women. The male leader again mentioned that according to Islam, while women travel *mahrem* members need to accompany them. Therefore, Masturat Jamaat consists of men and women's Jamaat group rather than women alone. The naming of the group denotes the restriction of women's independent participation in Tablighi activities since they always need to depend on male. By attributing a set of conservative rules on Masturat Jamaat, the journey of making pious and ideal Muslim women had started. What role of Masturat Jamaat was suggested by Ilyas? At the beginning of Masturat Jamaat Ilyas states women's roles to support their menfolk at Tablighi *Dawa* activities. He states,

> I say to women to support their menfolk in the work of religion. Let the men go out for the work of religion in peace. Share some of men's household responsibilities so that they can attend to the work of religion with a free mind. If the women do not do this they will be the *hebautus shaytan* (conduits for evil) (Ilyas 1960, p. 104, cf. Masud, 2000, p.102)

[10] Interview with Wasiful Islam, a governing body member of Tablighi Jamaat, Kakrail Mosque.

This above narrative clearly expresses the true intention for women's reform, which is bounded in the project of supporting their menfolk in the work of *Dawa* tour, which is core for activating and spreading the movement on a mass scale. Mawlana Ilyas suggested the Tablighi followers spend their time in Tablighi works as much as they can, specifically, to spend time in travelling with Jamaat tours. It was thought that their stay in Jamaat tours would increase the depth of Islamic faith among the individuals.

Moreover, Ilyas realized, according to Sikand (n.d), his mission of building an Islamic community would be incomplete if he did not include the womenfolk in TJ. As I stated earlier that Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas had decided the key goal of TJ movement was to build a wider Muslim community which will be strengthened as a means of the individual's practice of 'pure' traditional culture. In such a context of making a Muslim community, women's inclusion was felt necessarily to protect and keep the traditional glories of the Islamic culture. At the same time, the women were seen as the boundary marker of Islamic culture. Without taking into account of reforming the Meonis, who were closely associated with 'Hinduistics' customs and rituals in their daily lives, it was absurd to bring change into the Meo society. It was thought that the reformed woman would play a central role to establish an Islamic environment in her family, which is the primary unit of reforming the community or society. Ilyas declared the Tablighi women's roles at home. He sates,

The main work of *masturat* is to perform at home. One *masturat* will conduct *Talim* among her children and will pay attention to set up an Islamic environment at home where all the members of the family engage with daily performing of prayer. The house will be an Islamic seminary that deals with Islamic learning and teaching. A house will be mosque, where an environment of praying can continue. A house will be *khankha,* which provides an environment of addressing Allah. Moreover, the *masturat* will be responsible for sending their husbands, fathers and other *mahrem* male to Tablighi tours (Hossain, 2007, p.44).

Therefore, women were valued for their domestic roles in the early reforming agenda of TJ. The reformed female Tablighi will work as the first madrasa to guide their children, the future generation of Islamic community. Besides educating children, women are enjoined to spread Tablighi message among their female relatives, guests and neighbors who come to their homes, even to the female beggars who knock on the doors (Sikand, 1999). In such a way, the reformed women were seen to perform greater role of making Muslim better Muslim, a repository of the true essence of community. Although, women willingly participated in Tablighi reforming movement, because of lack of experiences in religious activities the men leaders became the guardians to determine how the female activities were to be done.

2.2. **TJ a transnational movement**

TJ has been spread as a transnational movement around the world, though the majority of the numbers are the followers from South-Asia. Like male's Tablighi activism female's activities have also spread across the world including Middle Eastern countries, South-East Asia and south Asia. Growing popularity of male and female's Tablighi activities have also been seen in non-European countries where a large number of Muslims migrated to live. As I discussed earlier that Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas amalgamated the Meos crisis with the Muslim crisis in India because of Imperialism that contributed to the impending future for the Muslims all over the world. So TJ had a transnational focus since its inception. In his lifetime of Ilyas, was able to spread TJ in Indian subcontinent, infact, his son Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf, who was the successor of the movement after father's death, was pioneer to introduce it on the international level (Sikand, 2002). Like his father, Yousuf also conceived the Muslims as a whole *ummah*, which was not only limited in India, and or in Middle East but the entire world. Because of his vision, TJ was first introduced in Britain in 1946, in the United States during 1952 and in France in 1962 (Metcalf, 1996). At present, TJ's presence has appeared across the world in some 165 countries. Likely, TJ women's presence and activities are also seen in across the globe. Various studies notice women's active presence in TJ, for example, in Australia (Ali, 2011), in Gambia (Janson, 2005) and in Indonesia (Amarullah, 2011). During my fieldwork, I met Masturat Jamaat women from different countries such as Malaysia, South Africa, Russia, Saudi Arabia and France in Nizamuddin mosque. Female Tablighi in Bangladesh described that they not only visit in south Asian

countries; even they go out for such distant countries as Fiji, United States and Canada. It is true, that TJ started its journey as a transnational movement from its inception in the 1940s, an event, which received scholarly attention. Different group of audience involvement in Tablighi preaching help it to reach the various networks that function to spread the movement.

However, with the substantial labour, student and professional migrations to Europe and North America, beginning in the 1960s, that a network of support and a core audience for preaching appeared and substantial Tablighi activity began (Metcalf, 1996; cf .Ali, 2006, p.147).

TJ spreads through the migrant Muslim's network in West and European countries, who are mainly minority in diaspora communities. Without establishing any religious center, TJ's face-to-face communication for inviting people in the path of Islam became convenient to reach to the migrant peoples in West. ''It also filled the cultural and social vacuums created by migration. This has benefitted the Muslims in acquiring the understanding of the fundamental principles of Islam and, at the same time, helped the movement and it's preaching networks in these countries'' (Ali, 2006, p. 148). Not only the Muslim migrants or migrants from South Asia are the target people for converting in Tablighi, recent scholar (Gabrieau, 2000) reports that the movement began to addresses non-Muslims and to expand out of South Asia.

The nature of political aloofness functions as means of spreading TJ as a missionary movement without making any contestation with state's ideology. For example in independent Bangladesh, shortly after it emerges when religion based politics was banned at that time TJ as a missionary movement continues its journey. Ahmad (1991) reports the method of *Dawa* tour is a successful means of proliferating Tablighi mission to large number of people. The rules of *Dawa* tour of bearing all cost by individual make that person responsible for reform. One will spend money, time and intelligence to make him/her prepare for the next world, where there is no need for material things. Anyway, TJ spreads as a transnational movement by focusing on a simple message of individual reform through face-to face communication and makes the movement as non-threatening to the peoples.

2.3 Concepts of TJ

The word 'Tabligh' came from the Arabic word *balagha* (*b-l-gh*) that means 'to reach one's destination', 'to achieve one's objective', to come to here or to 'come of age'. The word *balagha* frequently appeared in the Quran (e.g 5:67, 33:39, 7:62,) in association with *risala (*mission of a prophet), meaning the communication of the revelation or message. The word Tabligh, though is not directly used in the Quran but the term *balagh* which is considered synonymous with Tabligh by the Quranic lexicographers contends a significant aspect of Islamic concept. The Quranic verses (5; 99, 105, 13:40, 16:35, 82, 42:48) assert on importance of the Islamic concept of tabligh and emphasize that the vital duty of the preacher is to communicate the message properly (Masud, 2000). Another literally meaning of *tabligh* is 'to convey'

or 'to communicate' a message. The term *tabligh* might be defined as preaching act or act of communication with *risala* or Islamic message. Qadi Sulayman Manuspuri defined Tabligh as 'calling to others towards one's religion' (1928, p.4). On the other hand, the word *Jammat* is translated as 'party' or 'organized community'. So the word 'Tablighi Jamaat' carries the literary meaning of 'preaching party' (Sikand, 2002). Though the founder Muhammad Ilyas Khandhlawi was not interested to name it as Tablighi Jamaat because Tabligh means propagation or proselytization but his aim was not to proselytize the non-Muslims rather to work among Muslims. Ilyas did not like to mention it as Jamaat because, he is reported to have said that he is not founding any Jamaat- that has been already formed by the Prophet Muhammad and after that no one could claim to make Jamaat, better he liked to call it *Tahriq-i-Iman* or the movement of faith (Haq, 1972). Despite Ilyas's claim about referring it as Jamaat, over the time Tablighi Jamaat has closely associated with his movement of *Tahrik-i-Iman.*

Tablighi Jamaat has also been called as *Dini dawat* (call to religious renewal) (Nadwi 1941). *Da'wa* (root-d-'w) literally means to call. The word *Da'wa* has been used in the Quran to mean 'invocation', 'prayer' (2: 186; 13:14), 'claim' (40:43) and 'call' (14:44; 30:25). *Dawa* and its related words mean mission when used with reference to the prophets and other people who are assigned with such mission. (12:108; 14:22; 44; 33:46; 71:5-8) (Masud, 2000). *Da'wa* means inviting the person to whom Tabligh has been given or the message has been delivered to the way of Allah . Tablighi Jamaat defines the mission within the framework of these verses,

according to them *Dawa* means enjoining good and forbidding evil (*amr bil maruf wa nahi amr munkar*). Inclusion of *Dawa* makes the term different from its literary meaning. The literary meaning of Tabligh or balagha that means transmitting the message or conveying the message, if someone just conveys the message to another then he just did Tablighin dictionary sense but it is not Islamic in true sense of the word as preached by the participants of TJ movement. In case of Islamic sense or in the perspective of Tablighi Jamaat movement, Tabligh needs to include *Dawa* (Alam, 1993).

In the modern period, several *Dawa* organizations or *Dawa* movements are working across the world. TJ's *Dawa* activities have made it different from others. Though Tablighi Jamaat is reported as an emerged movement against the thread from the *Shuddhi* movement by Hindu, the aim of the founder, Muhammad Ilyas was not to convert the non-Muslim to Muslim. Rather TJ has emphasized on faith renewal. TJ has focused that faith has become corrupted among the Muslims and needs to be renewed. To do so TJ stresses on providing or teaching Islamic lessons but it has no educational or teaching institute like the traditional Islamic school where the *ulama* teach scriptural lessons. Moreover, TJ's *Dawa* activities never address any political agenda like the modern *Dawa* movements such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or *Jamaat-e-Islami* in Pakistan and Bangladesh. By focusing on personal reform, TJ has kept itself away from affairs of state and has approached an apolitical ideology.

From its origin, TJ movement is working to purify Muslims and the aim is to protect people from religious syncretism and to produce the 'better Muslim' or 'model citizens of the world for the rest of humanity. Facing challenges from modernity and secularism the definition of good Muslim became contestable among the modernist, revivalists, reformists and in consequences several new concept of a good Muslim were claimed. Tablighi Jamaat stresses on faith renewal and sees the reform of Muslim society according to Quran and Hadith that is the ultimate goal of TJ and keeps it apart from other Islamist movements. TJ unlike other Islamist groups has no room for *ijtihad* or the use of independent reasoning in adapting Muslim laws. While the Islamist in some extend, try to extend or to accommodate their ideological view with modern science TJ does not. TJ has strongly followed the path of the *ulama* of the established school of law and kept them away from reinterpretation of *fiqh* (Islamic rule) to make it more adjustable with social change. Though TJ has its roots in the South Asian Deobandi movements owing allegiance to the *Hanafi* School, it permits its *non-hanafi* followers, all of whom are *Sunni*, to follow their own respective school of Jurisprudence (Sikand, 2002).

Ilyas emphasized two main points to form the Tablighi movement at least in its initial stages- strengthening faith, spreading awareness and practice of the basic Islamic ritual obligations. The basic principle behind the Tablighi work was that all Muslim needed first to strictly follow Islam themselves before they could go out to preach to others. If one began to lead his life in accordance with the *Sharia* (divine law) then the others would be so impressed that they would themselves seek to follow

true Islam. In such a case, TJ has no intention to capture state power for establishing an Islamic state rather it has emphasized on personal reform. The apolitical ideology of TJ has kept it apart from other Islamist movements whose main goal is to create an Islamic state. The Tablighi followers are not interested in seeking political power to them that is worldly they are more interested in turning themselves into perfect Muslim, which brings reward in hereafter. TJ believes 'when Muslims cannot regulate even their personal lives in complete conformity with the *Sharia*, aspiring to capture political power or to set up an Islamic state is totally absurd (Palunpuri, n.d., p.18 cited in Sikand, 2002, p.2). Therefore, the 'bottom-up' approach of TJ is strictly contrasts with the 'top-down' approach by other Islamist movements.

2.4. Six Principles of TJ

The main theme of Tablighi reformism has been developed based on six principles that are popularly known as *Chhe Baten* or *Chhe Number* (six points). Both men and women Tablighi activists observe these principles to maintain the activities. These principles are:

1. *Kalima Tayyiba* (the article of faith)- TJ emphasized on the fundamental belief of Islam that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. this point is explained in a way that prepares a Tablighi for his or her total commitment to the Jammat program

2. *Salaat* (ritual prayer)- like other Muslims, Tablighi followers believe that all Muslim should offer their five daily prayers. Tablighis emphasize this practice of

worship very much arguing that five ritual prayers are essential for spiritual elevation, piety and a life free from the afflictions of the material world.

3. *Ilm and Dhikr* (Knowledge and remembrance of Allah)- This principle has two points (a) *Ilm* or knowledge and (b) *dhikr* or remembrance of Allah. Ilm and Dhikr complement each other; *Ilm* makes *dhikr* effective and *dhikr* gives life to rituals and light to faith. Tablighis stress that knowledge and remembrance of Allah is very important for spiritual growth. They regularly conduct sessions in which a congregation listens to the recitation of Quran and preaching by an *amir* (leader), and they perform supererogatory prayers and read *hadith* (prophet's sayings).

4. *Ikram i-Muslim* (respect for every Muslim) –Tablighi followers strictly maintain the rule of respecting its fellow members. This principle is intended to cultivate an attitude of forbearance, toleration, indulgence and good will toward other Muslims. It is very important to build a personal and social relationship among the Muslim community.

5. *Iklas –i-niyat* (emendation of intention and sincerity)-this principle encourage all Muslim specially the Tablighi to perform every action for the sake of Allah. The ultimate goal of doing anything should be to earn pleasure of Allah and Muslim should not do anything that creates displeasure to Him.

6. *Tafrak-i-Waqt* (Sacrifice of spare time)- this principle includes the injunction about sparing time to learn knowledge and impart the knowledge gained to fellow Muslims. Tablighis should spend their spare time in Tablighi activities. And it is instructed that the Tablighis should spend at least 3 days in a month or

one month in a year or three months in each lifetime for attending in *Dawa* tour. By attending *Dawa* tour one relief him/her from this worldly lifestyle that develops and improves their Islamic faith. They learn the virtues of Islam, prophetic traditions and take his (Prophet) message to door-to-door for the sake of Allah. This principle explains the philosophy, methodology, and practice of TJ. Besides these basic six points, there is another principle that the Tablighi followers maintain.

Besides these 'Six points', one additional principle is suggested by TJ for its followers.

7. *Tark-i-yani (*abstention from futile talk) – It includes a preventive measure against wasting time and energy in talking, or doing things that unlikely to bring any reward in the hereafter. Sometimes people waste their time in meaningless talking that could have been used for performing religious actions for getting a reward in the hereafter.

TJ strongly enjoins it's follower to accustom with these principles especially with six principles. It is the routine work of every Tablighi member to consulting these six principles in weekly *Talim* sessions (reading session) and in *Dawa* tour. They think that these six principles will keep them in the right path of Allah.

Conclusion:

TJ has been developed as a missionary movement around the world into focusing on ideology of individual reform. At the beginning of TJ movement, women's reform was suggested through reforming their menfolk, but within a short time, women's strong desire for participation in Islamic movement has brought the issue of female reform as equally important as men's. At the beginning of TJ movement, the founder Mawlana Ilyas emphasized religious duty that is not constrained to *sufi* or *ulama* instead it is the duty of all Muslim men as well as women to do Tabligh. TJ allows women to engage in *Dawa* tour, the core component to increase religiosity among individual. TJ suggests female Tablighi should arrange *Talim* at home, go through the Tablighi books, and memorize six points (main principles of TJ) for increasing Islamic knowledge like men. One may argue that by making women more religiously educated and designing her roles within household that in womenfolk, the founder tried to promote Tablighi message to the wider community of people. Following Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas's vision of 'community building' it might seems true that women are definitely included in the community-building project of TJ. However, TJ women willingly include them in this community project building.

Chapter Three

Genealogy of Gender Ideology of Tablighi Jamaat

Introduction

This chapter attempts to examine the genealogy of the gender ideology of TJ movement. The gendered discourse, structure, and ideology framed in the TJ movement, like in other Islamic movements, are often seen as genealogically connected to and derivative from the gender doctrine of Islam. This paper attempts to decipher the genealogy of gender discourse and ideology of TJ in relation to the core discourses on "reformed women", a debate evolved through complex political processes—Western colonialism, nationalistic, and communal politics since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of colonial India. By analyzing the discourses and ideology of TJ as framed in the movement by its founder and pioneers, this chapter contends that the core gender discourses of TJ such as renewed and extended role of Muslim women with restricted mobility beyond private space were largely fitted to the discourse of "reformed women" promoted by the modern reformist leaders from Muslim and Hindu communities and nationalistic and communal politics. It would be imperative to look beyond the cliché of religious doctrine that how gender ideology is framed in religious movement through a historical-political context despite its ramification and legitimization drawn from religious doctrines.

Recently women in Islamic movements in the contemporary Muslim world have been the subject of scholarly attention, and many of such studies interrogate the changing gender roles in the religious sphere (e.g. Moghadam, 1993; Macleod, 1992). Two powerful discourses are dominant in the study of subjectivity of Muslim women: 'passive subject of male authority (e.g. Stivens, 1998; Ong, 1995) and "active agent in Islamic movement" (e.g. El-Guindi, 1981; Macleod 1991). Previous studies which considered Muslim women's lives and their participation in Islamic movements in relation to Islamic doctrine have been critiqued for their historical focus and emphasis on "Islamic determinism" approach (Bernal, 1994). The focus of Islam as a determining factor, which emphasize on Islam as a rigid and unchanged tradition, largely ignores the role of the world system and the intervention of capitalist power (such as colonialism) in shaping gender relations among Muslim subjects (Bernal, 1994.p.59, cf. in Samatar 2005,p.226). This study attempts to interrogate the gender ideology of TJ beyond the Islamic determinism. Instead, it looks into the formation of gender ideology of Tablighi Jamaat, in relation to the processes of socio-cultural construction of gender as articulated in wider public discourses in specific historical-political trajectory in colonial India.

TJ draws a set of rules that must be followed by the followers such as the exemplary etiquette, custom, and practices of Prophet Muhammad's life. For women, the lifestyles of the prophet's wives and female companions are the role models. Amarullah (2011, p.140) referring to the study of Kepel (2004) contends that the rules set in religious movement are not only confined to Islamic movement.

Movements in other religious communities such as Lubavitch in Judaism also practice the role model of religion. In this sense, as Amarullah (2011) suggests, all religious movements have a common trend—reinforcing some common gender norms, customs, and practices from religious doctrine. Rather than looking into the religious doctrine and texts, it would be imperative to explicate how certain gender norms were reinforced by religion and were accommodated into specific social-cultural and historical contexts.

Recent scholarships suggest that Muslim women's subordination, a stereotypical perception, can neither solely be understood by looking into Islamic doctrine, nor be entirely shaped by the global processes of socio-economic transformation (Kandiyoti 1991; Najmabadi 1991). They emphasized that Muslim women's status should be interrogated in relation to the political project of contemporary state formation and to their historical transformation. As the argument follows in the study, it would be futile if the gender status, roles, and relations of Tablighi women are understood solely in terms of Islam as a religion. TJ as well several other Islamic reformist movements were evolved in specific political and historical context in the British colonial India which aimed at facing the challenges to Islam and Muslim community. Women's participation in these movements including TJ was promoted as repositories and key transmitters of religious values and symbols of communal identity. Both in the Hindu and Islamic reformist movements at that time, women were seen as the visible markers of religious and communal identity formations. Due to women's limited knowledge and expertise in religious education

and mobility in public space than it was the men exercised the authority to draw and define the gender roles and status in order to succeed their reformist project (Mohanty et al. 2000; Devji 1991). Therefore, the 'indigenous patriarchal structure' was reshaped or, put in other words, 'homogenous masculinities' was reproduced in the colonial gender discourse that was evolved within the politics of women's reform led by male social reformers in the British ruled India. As I shall argue, the gender ideology structured in the TJ movement was closely linked to the colonial gender discourse.

To understand the genealogy of gender ideology of TJ, first, I shall illuminate the colonial gender discourse of Indian society. In particular, my discussion will concentrate on the very essential politics of women's reform from the early nineteenth to mid twentieth century, the period when various religious revivalist-reformist movements evolved, and when the debates on changing women's social conditions had been a concerning issue for the social reformers. In this politics, not only the Indian reformist leaders, but also the British colonial leaders played vital roles in championing the idea of women's reform. I shall analyze what gender discourses were manifested and articulated within the politics of the British ruler and their Indian subject, and how such discourses were conceptually connected to the gender ideology of TJ.

3.1 Politics of Women's Reform and Colonial Gender Discourse

In the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century, the women's question had been emerging as a social reform issue that was ''directly political ones concerning the politics of nationalism'' (Chatterjee, 1999, p.116). The political and economic losses due to the British rule had induced the Indian social reformist leaders to be nationalist against colonial powers. The Indian leaders who lost their power became fervent to regain their status, authority, and social power. As a way to overcome their powerless position, they focused on reviving their own cultural tradition. As a remedy to the colonial dominance, the Indian leaders emphasized to bring social reform in traditional culture, which was dubbed as 'barbaric and lawless' by the white colonizer. Indian nationalism, against the colonial dominance and rule, captured the women's question as a problem of social reform which had already been defined by the colonizer. In other words, women's question had emerged as a problem from social reform, as seen by the Indian reformist leaders, in response to the colonial critique against Indian women that they were 'backward', 'oppressed', and 'victimized'. The colonial power first identified the 'women's question as a problem of inherited tradition and made it rational to take the initiative of reform (Sarker, 2008; Borthwick, 1984). In most cases, the colonial narrative of Indian culture concerning gender discussed about child marriage, widow immolation, polygamy, and veiling or seclusion of Muslim women. The women were shown as a sufferer of Indian's 'barbaric and lawlessness' culture, and it was advocated for reform through the

'civilizing mission'[1] proposed by the colonial leaders. The entire mechanism of 'civilizing mission' was criticized, for it aimed at legitimizing the British rule in the sub-continent. Put in other words, by making Indian culture different, 'other', and inferior to the West was a logic for establishing the imperial domination that demanded a social distance between the ruler and the ruled (Sarker, 2008,p. 46). Critiques to the 'civilizing' project of the colonizer have been the subject of many scholarly works. For our purpose, it would be useful to illuminate the impact of the colonial representations on the discourses of Indian reformist leaders, both the modern nationalists and traditionalists, on the question of women's reform in the nineteenth century. As Borthwick (1984) argued that the British criticism compelled the Indian *bhadralok* (gentleman) to rethink their attitudes about women. The new gentlemen of Bengal, for example, began urging the need for reform in women issue.

How the Indian nationalist leaders responded to the British criticism against Indian traditional culture (or gendered culture) is also crucial for understanding the gender ideology of reformist movements. The colonized people were forced to recognize the British dominance over certain aspects of their lives; however, the colonized people naturally retained their pride in those areas in which the colonial administration had no direct control. Therefore, making a distinction between public/private, material/spiritual, inner/outer was the key technique of nationalism

[1] For understanding the criticism of Indian culture by British rulers and to know the way of

reformation 'civilizing mission' by British rulers see, Chatterjee (1989), Minult (1998); Sarker (2008)

that Chatterjee (1989) argues in relation to the issues of social reform including women's reform in the nineteenth century's reformist movements. Chatterjee's argument of public/private distinction of Indian society has definite implications to gender issue. The public sphere is equated with masculinity while the private, the domestic realm, is associated with the feminine. This private/public binary was useful to define social roles by gender; women are bound for home while the men are for the world. The home was considered as the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality, and women must take the responsibility for protecting and nurturing the quality. Nationalist leaders adopted several elements from tradition as markers of their native cultural identity, though these traditions were reformed and reconstructed, and women are seen as bearer of those cultural identities.

Women were seen not only as marker of national cultural identity but also of communal religious identity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a British imposed system of classification of the population based on ethnic and religious identities shaped the identity crisis among their subjects in religious, ideological, and communal senses (Mathur, 1983). Because of the emerging politics of separatism between Hindu and Muslim community in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the Indian reformist leaders became assertive in building and rebuilding their own religious community (Sikand, 2002). In this community construction project, the ideology of public/private distinction was used and women were redefined as the symbols of spirituality and protectors and repositories of religious tradition and customs. Since the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century, various religious

revivalist movements evolved both in Hindu and Muslim communities, and the reformist leaders of both communities felt the necessity of reforming women as a strategy to preserve religious identity.

The case of Muslim women's reform was addressed by the emerging *ulama* (Islamic scholars trained in madrasa) class especially the Deobandi[2] *ulama*. To the *ulama*, increasingly known as the guardians of Islam in this period, women's reform was equally essential to men. They believe that if the women were properly reformed, they would be active in Muslim families and consequently be able to contribute to the entire community. The male reformist leaders had made a "custom laden private world'' in which the women were the central target of social reform. Since the public institutions were out of Muslim control, and in some cases, it posed threats to Muslim culture, the ulama had increasingly concerned about the protection of Muslim cultural and religious domains (Metcalf, 1990, p.8). Same issue also addressed by Chatterjee (1989), he showed that the private domain of religion and social reform became a public domain of debate among the reformers before the overtly public domain of politics was open to Indian men. The interrelatedness of sphere and importance of

[2] The religious reformist efforts, taken by *ulama* in late nineteenth century, were institutionally turned into a movement by the establishment of *Darul-ulum*, a seminary set up at the town of Deoband, near Delhi, in 1867. The Deobandi reformist movement gave preference to the reform of individual. It suggested, by gaining proper religious knowledge if the individual can order himself properly then the rest of the community will change.

woman as symbols were, therefore, directly related to the development of the public political lives of men. In favor of this political development, the *ulama* had gained the authority to shape the way of women's life, making them guardian of spiritual morality who would be responsible for protecting, perpetuating, and establishing a Muslim culture in private domain. Robinsion (2007, p.269) marked this development as women's move from their early position to a "private Islamic space". Following the dominance of the non-Muslim in public space, the Muslim reformers had moved the women from their earlier positions to the private space. Within the politics of reform among Muslim leaders, according to Minault (1998,p.6), "the reformist movements involved with the assertion of male authority and value judgments over those areas of women's lives that in pre-colonial era were largely autonomous''. Likely, male authority over women was central to the Hindu reformist project. As Borthwick (1984) points out that the women became the marker of social identity of the emerging *bhadralok* (gentlemen) class in Calcutta. In the name of women's recovery from the inherited oppression of tradition, reformist male leaders had enjoyed the authority to control over women's behaviors, according to orthodox practice that turned to be more and more rigid in Calcutta. A rigid distinction between home and world to determine women's mobility was always central to this reform project.

Within the national and communal identity politics and crisis, the gendered space and gendered roles were redefined by the Indian male reformist leaders. Some scholars (Sarker, 1999; Karleker , 1991; Banerjee, 2004) argued that the entire

process of women's reform became a matter of self-interest of the rising middle class men. The discourses on women's reform as articulated among the middle class men were not against their own interest of increasing their social status and power in their class as well as in the community. As Lata Mani argued ''there had no separate agenda for a woman to develop in terms of any independent image of herself. The Middle class man designed the women's reform programs in such a way that it would not pose a threat to male's hierarchy, but rather, would flourish and be contained within it'' (Mani,1998, cf . Banerjee, 2004, p.9). In the following section, I discuss how Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, an elite Muslim reformist leader, was provoked by the wider politics of women's reform while he formed his Tablighi Jamaat movement, and adapted certain gender ideology in it.

3.2 Politics of TJ

Most of the revivalist and reformist movements emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth century India were led by the elite class people, and Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas was not exceptional from his predecessors that I already discussed in chapter two that he was closely associated with two prominent Ulama family in India.[3] Mawlana Ilyas's appeal to the Muslims for renewal of Islamic faith was initiated in the early twentieth century, when several Islamic and Hindu revivalist and missionary

[3] For details on Mawlana Ilyas's parental families influence on his devotion to Islam, see, Nadwi, S. Abul Hasan Ali (2012, p.1-21), Masud (2000, p.3-6).

movements had already been launched in India in part in response to meet the challenges from the British dominance and in part to separate each community from the other in a divisive communal political context. Although, unity among the Hindu and Muslim political leaderships were seen in the nationalist political struggle (such as in the *Khilafat*[4] movement), communalist politics began to upsurge in both sides of the leaderships. In such context, Mawlana Ilyas had strictly kept himself and his Tablighi mission away from overt and direct political involvement. But it did not mean that he did not have resentment against colonial rules and the rulers. His non-involvement in direct political activities could be seen as a strategic means of instrumentalizing TJ movement as an apolitical movement. As reported in his biography, he took *bayat* (discipleship under Sufi master) for jihad against the British under Mawlana Mahmud-ul-Hasan, a renowned *deobandis*[5] known for his political struggle against the British.

To Ilyas, the British rulers were the opponents of Islam, and he extended resentments everything associated with the British in India (Nadwi, 1960, cf. Haq, 1972). For instance, he had expressed resentment against the British system of Oriental Language Examination, such as *Mawlawi Fazail*, *Munshi Fazail,* etc., which,

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[4] *Khilafat* movement is a protest movement against the British policy of partitioning the Ottoman Empire. It was the first mass political movement in India in which Hindu and Muslims jointly engaged against British.

for him, was a project for production of moderate ulama for the British administration. Despite his resentment, he deliberately intended to be out of direct political involvement, unlike many other reformist ulama at his time, which gave more weight on the spiritual attributes of his personality: ''his passion in life was the service to the cause of religion'' (Haq, 1972 ,p.98).

Most of the Muslim reformist leaders sought some forms of approval and endorsement of their ideas and movements from Mecca and Medina, the holy cities of Islam. Like his predecessors, Mawlana Ilyas wanted his work be recognized by and directed from the holy land of Islam. However, his request was turned down by the Government of Saudi Arabia that shocked him very much. Finally, he decided to continue his mission in India, a country, according to his opinion, ruled by the "principal enemies of Islam" (Haq, 1972). Instead of involving in any political activity against the "enemies", he preferred to call upon his community people for spiritual reform. The failure of several political movement launched and led by the Indian *ulama* could shape Ilyas understand that the emancipation of Muslim community could not be attained through political means.

Moreover, the event of *Khilafat* Movement's failure (1919-1924) against the British Imperial power was an important lesson for Ilyas (Ahmad, 1991). The *Khilafat* movement, according to Masud (2000), had exposed thin line dividing the political and religious views of politics in India and shifted the focus of politics toward religious identity. This focus was defined both in ideological and communal

terms. In socio-political context of communal identity crisis, Mawlana Ilyas's Tablighi efforts might be seen as a part of ongoing project of the construction of 'Pan-Indian Muslim community' that I discussed in earlier chapter.

Ilyas, like his earlier Islamic reformers, wished to strengthen the Muslim identity by organizing reformist movement. However, he did not try to convert non-Muslim into Islam; rather, he emphasized on renewal of faith of individual Muslim by providing proper Islamic lesson. He believed that the main problem of the degenerated condition of Muslim society liay at lack of understanding of proper Islamic knowledge. TJ ideologically designed its purpose of mission to develop individual's 'inner reform' in order to transform the Muslim society as a whole. TJ believes, until Muslim cannot regulate even their own personal lives in complete conformity with *sharia*, aspiring to capture political power or to set up an Islamic state is absurd (Palanpuri, n.d:18; cf. Sikand 2002, p.2). For TJ, political aspects of human life are worldly affairs while spiritual, and mainly ritual (*ibadat*), is the proper domain of *din* (religion) that can make an individual's life perfect for other world. This philosophy of distinction between *din/duniya* (religion/world) rationalizes TJ movement as an apolitical form.

Ilyas's philosophy of '*din/duniya*' dichotomy is essentially equal to the nationalist leaders who followed a distinction of material/spiritual to enrich Indian national culture but at the same time it carried some different nationalist agenda. Whilst many modernists Islamist advocated for reinterpretation of Islamic rules, TJ

strictly opposed and criticized such type of the modern attempt of using reason and science in religious matters. In response to the debates on Muslim community's 'progress', Mawlana Ilyas, like the nationalist leaders, clearly explained that progress did not only mean imitating the West. In contrast to the idea of Western superiority, he explained that the Muslim concept of perfection was different from that idea of other people. According to his ideology, Prophet Muhammad was the model of perfection and progress lied in imitating his model (Masud, 2000). He believed that if Muslims faithfully followed the path of Muhammad and devoted to the task of the spread of Islam, they would always dominate over non-Muslims' and destine to be the masters of everything on this earth (Kandhlawi 1989:8 cf. Sikand 2002, p.67). This signifies Ilyas's main goal of TJ beyond the narrow concept of capturing 'the state': building a wider 'religious community' around the world. The transnational mission of TJ carries its goal for making global Muslim community. Jalalzai (2005,p.78) argues 'the 'nation' that the movement concerns itself with is that of the global Muslim nation or the *ummah*. TJ defines therefore itself as a transnational organization.'' This particular intention of strengthening the community and for building a wider Muslim community TJ promoted the reformist appeals regarding women's reform.

3.4 Core gender discourse of TJ

With essential similarities to the earlier reformist movements, TJ also emphasized on individual religious responsibility, and suggested all Muslim men as well as women to carry out the work of Tabligh. For them, "each Muslim came to be seen as playing

a key role in the preservation of Islam'' (Sikand 2002, p. 64). The Tablighi discourse entails individual religious responsibility as for cultivating an 'ideal human behavior' following the lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad or his closest companions. It is expected that the human beings both men and women will be gentle, behave with other modestly, dedicated to others, generous and kind. According to Metcalf (1998), all the character that needs to cultivate for men are also necessary for women. She argued that TJ revitalizes the old Islamic thought of sharing essential nature between men and women: both have same constitutions, the same responsibilities, and same potentialities. The women cultivate the same qualities and read the same books as men. However, this egalitarianism does not mean TJ promotes equal gender roles and status for women. TJ follow the egalitarian ideology to ensure equal learning system both for men and women by following the holy text that emphasizes over knowledge for all human beings without making any distinction between male and female. At the same time, the TJ articulated Tablighi method in such a way, which suggests women's roles are different from male, which I am going to discuss based on the principles and condition of doing MJ activities (for details refer to annex-4).

Women's dependence to Men: Jamaat tour or travelling for Islamic preaching is a core component of Tablighi activities. Like men, the women are encouraged to attend in Jamaat tours for three days, fifteen days, forty days or longer to preach Islam among Muslim womenfolk. Ideally, the Jamaat should consist of ten women and ten *mahrem* relatives, though the number of participating pairs may vary.

According to the Tablighi rules [6] the married women are preferable to go out for Jamaat tours accompanied by her husband. The Husband is the most preferable male relative for joining in Jamaat tour. In the absence of the husband, women can join with other male such as son, brother, father and grandfather or other *mahrem* men. The unmarried women are allowed to join in Jamaat tour only for three days, and they must have to be accompanied by their mothers. The accompanied male member of a female Tablighi should have prior experience in Tablighi tours. The male *mahrem* should (if possible) be one who has already gathered experience in forty-day Tabilghi tour (known as *chilla*). In addition, he must have beard to testifying his commitment to Islam. By attributing the rules of *mahrem* TJ promoted women's participation in out of home with full dependence to male. The restricted rule of attaching with male relatives defines women's participation in Tablighi activities is as supportive and supplementary to that of men, not independent or equal to them (Masud , 2000).

At the early stage of Masturat Jamaat, since the practice of Muslim women's presence in out of home was strictly restricted then the rule of *mahrem* male might be seen as a means of providing women's physical security that allows female's

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[6] The rules of Masturat Jamaat are listed as '*Masturater Kaj somporke Hedayat*' in paper and in books written by the Tablighi elders (*Masturater kaj*, Hossain, 2007; *Masturater kaj* Mawlana Abdullah 2011; *Masturater kaj ki* Ahmad 2012). The rules are almost same for all Masturat Jamaat working in different parts of the world. All female Tablighi are prescribed for conformity with the rules.

participation in Tablighi travelling. Therefore, women's participation with male relatives physically secured their presence, and, at the same time, fulfills the Tablighi agenda of producing pious Muslim women in Muslim society. This socio-cultural reason of women's presence with a male in out of home has been legalized by Islamic rules. The Tablighi leaders legalized women's participation in TJ with male relatives in light of canonical Islamic texts. In response to the emerging debate over women's participation in the Jamaat tour with men, Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf, son of Ilyas, explains that a woman cannot go outside, according to *Bukhari sharif* and *Muslim sharif* (compendium of hadith book), for more than three days or three night without any attachment of *mahrem*. If it is less than three days or less than 48 miles, woman can go out of her home without being accompanied by *mahrem* male. In light of religious doctrine and narratives, the male Tablighi leaders legitimized women's participation in Islamization project and authorized the notion of going out of the home in order to proselytizing Islam. TJ does not only emphasize on Islamic law; rather, it focuses on *taqwa*[7] (ethics of Islamic piety). The leaders of male TJ had

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[7] Islamic term *taqwa* means God-consciousness and piety. As an ethical base for the Muslim community, *taqwa* plays a significant role in one's relationship to God by reminding His believers of His great power and knowledge. The awareness of God's power makes people want to please him, making *taqwa* a moral and ethical base for their actions. Because of this construct, taqwa is one of the "ideal ethical values" of the religion of Islam. for details see, Rahman, Fazlur (2001). "Some Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur'an." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* (2001), p. 170-85, Nanji, Azim (2000). "*Islamic Ethics*." The Institute of Islamic Studies (2000)

emphasized on piety as for guiding and regulating female in TJ. Seclusion, obedience to male as an expression of modesty, and observing Islamic rules are central to the formation of pious subjects in TJ.

Seclusion from men: Tablighi women are enjoined to strictly maintain *purdah* (veil) in all TJ activities. Women are allowed to join in Jamaat tour but they have to confine them in full cover. During the period of Jamaat tour, when a group is reached to the destination, accommodation for female Tablighi members is arranged in a house of a local Tablighi men's house. The male Tablighi members who accompany the women in MJ tour stay in an adjacent local mosque. *Bayan* or giving religious speech among the Tablighi gathering is another important activity of TJ. Mostly the men are allowed for giving speech in both male and female gatherings. In case of female gathering, the man provides speech behind a curtain to maintain the restricted rules of seclusion for women.

Men's guardianship over women: In Jamaat tour, women are enjoined to obey the decisions taken by men folk accompanying with them. One male member is selected as *ameer* (head) for the whole group of men and women. A woman is never allowed to take the position as *ameer* or lead the group. Even she will not take any decision for the female part of the group. In consultation (*mashwara*) with other male member, the *ameer* usually takes the decisions that how the Jamaat will work and who

will responsible for what activities. Decisions taken by the male members or *ameer* are conveyed to the female group. One female member who represents the female group came to know the decision through his *mahrem*, usually the husband. Besides Jamaat tour, another key activity for female is doing *Talim*, Although *Talim* is arranged only for womenfolk, it is decided by male Tablighi members. According to Mawlana Inamul Hasan, the third *Ameer* of the world TJ headquarter in Nizamuddin mosque, the women should gather other women to perform the *Talim* after consulting with male family members (Masud, 2000). In most cases, married woman is allowed to conduct a *Talim* session at her home. In that case, the husband of the woman who wishes to run a *Talim* session need to propose it to the male Tablighi members of the TJ headquarter. Then the male Tablighi members decide it depending on the woman's modesty, piousness, arrangement for seclusion and, above all, on her experience in TJ or Jamaat tours. Those women who do not have experience of going Jamaat tour because of lacking *mahrem* relatives, they are not allowed to arrange *Talim* at their home, though they are good at Islamic learning and skill. Finally, when a female *Talim* point (the *Talim* house where it is held popularly known as *Talim* point) is decided, then the male Tablighi leaders in local mosques guide whole performances in Talim sessions. Since the Tablighi activities are always mosque based so the female *Talim* activities are also guided by local mosque's leaders. Within Tablighi discourse, the male's authority is structured in designing, planning and prescribing all the activities to be done in female *Talim* groups.

Gendered roles and Gendered space: From the beginning of female TJ, it follows a sharp distinction between men and women's roles in doing Tablighi activities. The table below shows the differences between men and women's Tablighi activism

Table-3.1: Difference between men and female's Tablighi activism

Tablighi activism	Men	Women
Local work	O	×
Jamaat tour (travelling for Tablighi activities)	O	O
Chilla (Jamaat tour of 40 days)	O	O
Ghast (group work of men, to invite people for praying and TJ)	O	×
Taskheel (formation of outgoing Jamaat)	O	O
Bayan (giving religious speech)	O	×
Talim (reading session)	O	O
Mashwara (consultation among the governing body members of TJ)	O	×
Ijtema (Annual gatherings which held in Bangladesh, India And Pakistan)	O	×

[Source: This table is made based on the written documents about principles, rules, and roles of MJ collected from Kakrail Mosque, Dhaka]

122

The above table shows that division of gender roles are strictly followed in TJ. Tablighi women are partially allowed to do religious activities comparing with men Tablighi. Although, TJ allows women to go to Jamaat tour with their male relatives out of home, but they are not permitted to visit door to door to invite people (the *Ghast* activities) like their male counterparts. Since the Tablighi women are expected to conform to seclusion and modesty, she is prescribed to engage in Islamic preaching at home and in a limited space of womenfolk to do *Talim* instead of involving in public. Since men are seen with the activities of outer domain, women are not permitted to do *Mashwara* or consultation for taking decision about Tablighi matters. Men are responsible to lead, to manage all the activities of TJ even women are not allowed to decide any Tablighi matters about on their own. Since men's authority is emphasized in TJ, women are disallowed to provide speech (*Bayan)* among women. Likely, women are not allowed to join in *ijtema*, the annual gathering of TJ concerning the rules of seclusion. These rules are manifested at the beginning of TJ and women's roles were decided confining them at home. In a letter to Mawlana Ubaidullah Bolihavi, (Tablighi follower, close to Ilyas) the founder of TJ had written:

> Regarding the Tabligh among women, they themselves will read the *din-i-ketab* (religious books) or it will be read by other women. They will listen and should abide the Islamic customs in their entirety and guide their relatives to conform to it. They will send their husbands to Tablighi tour so that they can

teach the women what they have learned. Women are not to be given the permission of performing the duty of *Ghast*[8] (Ahmad Sultan 2012, p.10).

The Tablighi ideology of making women religiously learned and confining their space of mobility has raised a debate. Possible objection arose when the Tablighi literatures contain the stories of the companions of early Islam that states women's participation in the battlefield to nursing the wounded with Prophet Muhammad. TJ ideologically follows the path of Prophet why then the movement restricted women's roles at home. In response to this debate, Mawlana Inamul Hasan (The third amir of Nizamuddin mosque, India) explained that all of these stories belonged to the battle of *Uhud*, when the injunction of veiling had not yet been revealed. He further added "the jurists have ruled that gatherings of women are seldom free from disadvantage. A woman who cares for tabligh should gather at her home'' (Rashid, 1997, p. 414-415). To him, a woman cannot be appointed as *ameer*. She is not a full witness, so how she can take the position of judge (Rashid, 1997). In such a way, in line with Islamic rules

[8] *Ghast* is an outgoing Tablighi activity. It means round. *Ghasts* starts by making round in the vicinity of a mosque,inviting people to it. A group of people goes to *Ghast* to perform *Dawa*. This group should not be consisted more than ten peoples and they will be selected by their Tablighi experience, although there is some new fellow who join for taking training. Among the group of people one is selected as speaker for inviting people in mosque. When the speaker will engage to invite others then the other members of the group remain them stop from talking and they will engage to remembering Allah (*dikhr*). For detail about the performance of *Ghast* (see Masud ,2000).

TJ advocates for complete conformity with seclusion and allows women's activities at home asserting on different gender roles for men and women. Mawlana Saad, a Tablighi elder and member of the governing body in world headquarter of TJ, Nizamuddin mosque, narrates

> Men and women both are responsible for preaching Islam. The responsibility of women is not less than men's. Nevertheless, only the difference is *tariqa*-method by which the work will be done. These differences are arranged because Allah has made them women. A woman is responsible to establish Islam at home while the men are made responsible for the world (Hossain, 2002, p. 18).

Nevertheless, TJ extends women's roles from home to a limited space of womenfolk by introducing female reading session. Women gather at weekly reading session, popularly known as *Talim* where some women work as religious master in their own circle. However, the knowledgeable, skilled and pious women are allowed to give *Bayan* or speech among the womenfolk, she must have to pay attention about her feminine modesty. As Sikand noted on the rules of giving *Bayan* if delivered by a woman,

> Extreme care should be taken that a woman does not speak in an authoritative tone as if she is delivering a lecture. The reasons for this, says a Tablighi elder, that this is the age of *fitna* (disorder), of great corruption and degeneration, and

'much evil', he warns, can come out of this. Just as women should 'always keep their bodies completely concealed', he says, so too 'must their voices be kept in complete purdah'. Unlike a man, who can give lecture from pulpit or while sitting on a chair, if a woman is to address her sisters she must, like them, sit on the floor and speak to them. In no case should she stand up to speak to others, as that goes against what are seen as notions of feminine modesty. She must speak as she would in an ordinary conversation and not try to imitate the forceful, emotive style of male Tablighi (Sikand, 1999, p. 44-45).

The above rules prescribed for female Tablighi highlights that women in TJ must conform to such modest behaviors and attitudes that will distinguish them from male Tablighi. However, the perfect Muslim womanhood is attained through the Tablighi discourse central to which is seclusion, obedience to male leadership, conformity to different gender roles and gendered space through devotion to religion and gender discourses of Islam. In the next part, I shall discuss the Tablighi gender discourse that is very common characteristic of colonial gender discourse that was originated within the politics of women's reform between colonialist and Indian leaders. I will focus on two prominent Islamic reformist leader's views from both modernist and Islamist who became pioneer to bring women's reform issue in light in early twentieth century.

3.3 Genealogy of Gender Ideology of TJ

TJ introduced women's new roles in Islamic sphere, which was historically known as men's sphere. While his early predecessors, including Mawlana Thanawi who championed the idea of women's education in separate institutions, Ilyas's initiatives for men and women's joint participation in Jamaat tour was an indication of promoting equal gender roles. Women's inclusion on travelling of Jamaat tour in the outer spaces of the home could increase the spatial boundary of gender in Indian society at that time. Ironically, the gender ideology promoted by TJ such as women's spatial relationship to men did not create any difference with the discourses of early reformist *ulama* who envisioned women's new role in Islam in a limited and restricted boundary of the home. In this sense, the women's reform question as seen in the ideology of Ilyas and the successors of the TJ was reflexive of the early *ulama's* reformist discourses.

As I discussed earlier that at the beginning of early twentieth, the Deobandi *ulama*, first, expressed their concern over women's reform issue essentially by men in order to reform Muslim society. Among them, the Deobandi scholar Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1864-1943) was pioneered in expressing his concern publicly in line with perfect Islamic knowledge. In his voluminous text, *Beshiti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornament) he had introduced the idea that men and women are equally potential in their capacity; if they are properly nurtured, then they could perform like men. He showed the truth that the women are not morally inferior to men and at the same time, they are not superior. Though, he mentioned his books *Beshesti Zewar* is not only

serve the guidelines for women only but also for the men to make them religious pious and modest. But in the last session of his book he specially made some guidelines for women that show that he had already perceived the women are inferior to men. Metcalf (1990) argued that he (Thanawi) did not attempt to enhance the gender difference at the same time, never questions about the different gender roles. He argued men and women are created for performing different social roles. Women are meant to be socially subordinate to men adhere the *shariah* standard of seclusion, when possible, inside the home. Thanawi provided a compendium of useful knowledge for women, but these knowledge, according to Metcalf, (1990,p.13) ''encouraged female competence and self-confidence in a domestic sphere''. As a product of Deoband and close associate with Mawlana Thanawi, the founder of TJ Ilyas might be influenced by his philosophy of producing good Muslim woman who will be the guardian of Islamic virtue at home.

Mawlana Ilyas's gender views are not only similar to *Deobandi* thoughts, but it also goes parallel with the Modernist Islamist views. Modernist view of women's reform hardly differs from Thanawi's concept of reforming Muslim women by providing proper religious education. In fact, the notion of good Muslim woman that the *Deobandi ulama*, who were seen as conservative, promoted, as it has been reflected similarly in the Modernist Islamic revivalist leaders' views. The Western educated elite social reformist leaders, e.g. Mawlana Abu Mawdudi (1903-1972, the founder of *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Islamist political party, originated in India in 1941), had insisted over the importance of equal education for women like their male counterpart.

However, he furthered that ''their (reformed women) tasks would be the ruler of domestic space, sealed off from all those elements of *kufr* (acts against Allah's existence) that polluted the public space'' (Robinson, 2007, p.270). By promoting husband as the authority of a family, Mawdudi as a modernist Muslim reformer, advised women to obey their husband for maintaining a disciplined family life (Mawdudi, 1997). The Islamic revivalist ideology, which was attended by these three prominent figures: Mawlana Thanawi, Mawlana Ilyas and Abu Ala Mawdudi, was sharply different from each other, here it is not my focus to elaborate their views. What is mentioning that in the question of gender ideology, their views closely related to each other and their views keep them in a common platform. It might happen because almost the revivalist leaders showed their concern over women's reform in their revivalist movements in which the reformed women were seen as 'supportive to their menfolk' and 'preservers and protectors' of Islamic culture to strengthen the Islamic community.

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As I stated earlier that Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas had decided the key goal of the TJ movement to build a wider Muslim community, which will be strengthened as a means of the individual's practice of 'pure' traditional culture. Therefore, like the other reformist movements TJ also sees the women as the repositories of Islamic culture and maintaining the dichotomy of home/world is essential to distinguish the male-female's roles and to demarcating their space. At the beginning of TJ Mawlana Ilyas defined women's roles as supportive to men in Islamizing family and

community. The founder puts more burdens on women in household management for men's greater mobility in TJ tour.

Within Tablighi discourse, women are valued as Islamic teacher and working as '*madrasas*' (Islamic schools) for their children's Islamic learning. By promoting women as Islamic teachers, TJ has renewed and extended female's roles in Islamization as Sikand (1999) argued that in such a way, women are provided with a 'new instrumentality' that they have hitherto lacked. Nevertheless, finally, TJ ideologically bound them within the four walls of her home and in a limited space of womenfolk. Since the women have lack of proper Islamic knowledge and academic learning in institutions that gave the opportunity to Tablighi male to enjoy the authority for guiding women's activities. Therefore, the Tablighi discourse of women's reform that is suggested by Ilyas and his successors brought the women in renewed roles of Islamic teaching with certain standards of behavior and limited mobility beyond the private space, not more than that.

In this sense, all such reformist appeals regarding women's reform including TJ might be seen as serving the crucial purpose of reformist men's interest for strengthening their religious community. The reformist leaders did not include any agenda that provides women to exercise their capability for doing actions independently. The men of these generations, according to Minult (1998, p. 62), "whether western-educated Muslim modernist or the conservative *ulama,* they were seeking the ideal woman to meet their own needs and that of their class and

community—women who would be better wives, mothers, and better Muslim''. It is worth noting that not only the Muslim reformist leaders manifested the idea of ideal Muslim womanhood that aimed at confining women at home. The Hindu leaders also did the same in organizing the notion of ideal Hindu womanhood. As Metcalf (1990, p.12) illuminates, "a central premise of Bengali Hindu reform was that women were essentially different from male''. In the Hindu reformist project, women were seen as the center of home and the difference between world and home became the root dichotomy through which the women's reform was planned, designed and legitimized. The Hindu reformist leaders set a standard for new middle class woman with modest dress, distinctive educational attainments, and piousness, which modified her personality with new skills and new moral role—a marker of her distinction from the uneducated and traditional women as well as from the European woman. "She was to be nothing less than a central symbol cherished, but endangered, Bengali culture'' (Metcalf 1990, p.12). Both Islamic and Hindu reformist appeals regarding women's reform are crucially utilized to serve the broader agenda of building and strengthening the religious community. Therefore, the gender ideologies as manifested by the elite reformist leaders in both Hindu and Islamic reformist projects constitute some common character over gender roles and status for women. The genealogy of the restricted gender ideology for women in TJ might be rooted within this common gender ideology manifested in revivalist projects of colonial India in the mid nineteenth to early twentieth century.

3.6 Conclusion

Women's roles and status within TJ that is framed in the name of Islam hardly differs from the colonial gender discourse manifested by the reformist leaders of mid nineteenth to early twentieth century, which represents an ideal womanhood as modest, secluded at home and obedient to male. The Tablighi notions of 'Ideal Islamic femininity' is seen as a repetition of Deobandi understanding of the role of women as wives and mothers (Sikand, 1999). Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas has promoted the appeal of producing good Muslim by observing a similarity with the core gender ideology of the early reform movements. Later, his successors have developed and expanded the scope and boundary of female Tablighi activism around the world. In Ilyas's lifetime, women are allowed to join in local Tablighi travelling in neighboring areas of New Delhi later his successors expanded its geographical space. Female Jamaat is taking part around the world like their male counterparts. However, without making any change in its core gender discourse female TJ expands as transnational movement and accommodate it in varied social context around the world.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss, how TJ accommodates the movement for its female followers in changing social context of contemporary Bangladesh by taking some new initiatives in its gender policy, although the gender discourse remains unchanged.

<center>Chapter Four</center>

<center>**Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh**</center>

Introduction

TJ is 'by far and the largest' but 'probably the least known religious movement in contemporary Bangladesh (Ahmed and Nazneen, 1990, p.799). Within a short period of emerging TJ in India, the movement has been started in Bangladesh in 1944. As I already mentioned that at the beginning of TJ in Bangladesh, it was limited among men. Later women are included in the movement at the decade of 1970. However, within a short period of emerging it has become popular across the country. Various studies (Rozario, 2006; Hussain, 2010) have noticed the *Tablighi* women's visibility in Bangladeshi society. Despite growing visibility very few is known about how and why the female TJ is becoming popular among women. The central aim of this chapter is to examine how the female TJ is growing in Bangladesh.

Female TJ's popularity is interlinked with the development of men's *Tablighi* activities. The female *Tablighi* are thought that they are the wives and daughters of men *Tablighi* (Sikand, 2002). It means that popularity of TJ among men ensures more and more women's involvement in the movement. Various studies have already explored TJ's popularity among the men in contemporary Bangladesh (Sikand, 2002; Uddin, 2002). In order to understand TJ's popularity in mass level, the process of proliferation of the movement has been situated in varied socio- political context in contemporary Bangladesh. However, the earlier studies have ignored female's

<center>133</center>

growing participation in this movement. In this study, for understanding TJ's popularity among mass women, I examine the process of proliferation of the movement in relation with varied socio- economic and political context in contemporary Bangladesh. Female TJ has been increased in last two-three decades, especially since 1990s, the transitional period for women in Bangladesh, when large numbers of women's inclusion are noticed in modern development projects. In order to include women in modernizing project, state as well as local and international non-government organizations have taken various initiatives that has resulted large numbers of female's participation in outer world in last two and half decades. On the other hand, women's visibility in outer world was considered as a challenge to the long-standing cultural and religious tradition, which raised resentment to the Islamist leaders. In response to the modernizing projects of women development taken by state and NGOS, the Islamic leaders are also seen to move strategically for accommodating their religious movements among the female followers. Within the debate between modernists and Islamists, women in Bangladesh have gained a notable scope for mass interaction in outer world. As a result, women's growing participation is noticed in various social development sectors as well as in Islamization projects. In order to understand TJ's popularity among women, the problem needs to be situated within this broader framework of women's changing socio-economic status and mass interaction in outer world. In this chapter, I go through the answer of the question regarding on how does TJ movement ideologically response and take initiatives to accommodate it among the followers in changing socio-economical context of Bangladeshi society. Moreover, in changing social

context, who are representing the female *Tablighi* Jamaat in Bangladesh is important to know. In this study, I shall examine the socio-economic background of the female *Tablighi*s in Bangladesh.

4.1 Changing Socio-Economic Status of Women in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a low-income developing country with a population of 156 million in which female population is approximately 48.6%. The position or status of majority of Bangladeshi women is mainly governed by the way a patriarchal system accommodates them. Women are always seen associating with home while the public participation is seen to the domain of men. The patriarchal society is reluctant to shed its tradition, culture and custom that has always denied women's participation in economy, in politics and social decision-making and has emphasized men's superiority. However, modern development policy creates the possibility to include women in development programs. In last three decades, Bangladesh has witnessed success in gender development. The country has gained progress in gender related index comparing to other country in South Asia. According to the UN gender related index report 2014[1], Bangladesh constitutes the position of 107 as compared to India's position in 132 and Pakistan 145. Comparing to the earlier gender report of 2005, Bangladesh's position was 121 while for India it was 113 and for Pakistan was 125.

[1] For details see the Gender development index report, http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-5-gender-related-development-index-gdi

The figure comprises the growing progress in gender related development index in Bangladesh; changing socio-economic status of women evidences this advancement.

Bangladesh has been emerged, as an independent nation on 1971 through a bloody war and shortly after independence, economic development was become the major focus in country's development policy. It was severely realized by state that remaining half of population in out of economy expected progress in the project of country's development was impossible. As a result, including women in modernization projects has become one of the central focuses in state's development policy shortly after independence. Special focus was paid to create environment for increasing women's development skill and activities. Specific objectives to reduce inequality between the development of men and women are emphasized on country's development plans. A draft Participatory Plan for 2010 formulated by the government in 1995 and it sets the goal of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. In March 1997, a National policy for women's advancement was approved by the Cabinet. The vision of the policy was to guarantee women's equal access to opportunities for realization of the goals and equality and people's participation in development (Khan, 2001). As a result of changing development policy and initiatives taken by state, women in Bangladesh has gained notable success in education, health and labor force. According to the census report of 1974, female literacy rate was 13.7% while men held 29.9% (Islam, 1997). In 2010, the female literacy rate has increased to 54.54% while it has increased in 57.56% for men

(Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, BBS [2] report, 2010).Girl's enrollment has increased in school. State's focus on female education has created a space for women to participate in teaching profession. According to BANBEIS report[3], in year of 1970, female teacher's participation rate in primary education was 2.2% and it has reached to 36.3% in the year of 2005. Not only in education sector, there has been an increase in the levels of female participation in other sectors of national economy also. In 1974, female employment constituted only 4.1% of the total employment in national economy (Hossain and Clem, 2003) and the rate of female labor force has reached in 36.0% in 2010 (BBS report, 2010). Female labor participation in Bangladesh has been mainly driven by the expansion of the low-skilled textiles and readymade garments industries in the urban area and by the spread of micro financing through NGOs (Hossain& Clem, 2003). Another major source of including women in development is local and international NGOs. During the period of late 1970s, many local and international NGOs have taken part to do development in the country and women have become the target groups of those organization. Like government, the NGO organization started to include women in modern development programs such as in education, health and in economy. The recent studies have argued that the status of women in Bangladesh has improved over the last two and a half decades because of participation in labor force and accessibility in education (Hossain &Clem, 2003).

[2] Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic (BBS) Report (2010)

[3] Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information & Statistics (BANBEIS), Women in Bangladesh, publication no, 385. 2008

Notable change of female labor force's participation is observed in professions of physical scientists, healthcare and social and community services. Furthermore, women's participation in different political parties has also been increased. Women are representing in national parliament as well as in local government institutions in rural areas.

Despite growing progress in women's socio-economic status, still getting gender equality in development process is very far in reality. Nevertheless, it needs to analyze the rise of women's socio-economic status in context of the trajectory of time when there was raised a debate between Islamist and secularist about women's participation in modern development projects. Shortly after independence, especially after 1975, state's ideological shift to Islamism and growing strength of Islamist forces in politics and public life have brought the women's development issue in a different way in Bangladesh. The Islamist leaders' have responded in different way against the secularist program of women's development that also works to increase women's socio-economic status.

Women's involvement in modernization projects in outer world was not easily welcome by the traditionalist religious leaders. The NGO's activities for accommodating women in education, family planning and in micro credit were felt as threat among the extremist leaders, *mullah* (traditional village leaders) *ulama*. Various studies have shown the Islamist's reaction and have unfolded the cases of fundamentalist attacks on NGO School and offices even direct attack on female NGO

workers in local society (Naher, 2010; Chowdhury, 2009; Shehabuddin, 1999; Karim, 2004). The recent scholars evaluated different reasons and identified the background; these fundamentalist attacks occurred upon NGOs when Islamic political ideology was raised in state combined with reconstituting the local power structure and emergence of new elites with the advent of NGOs (Hussain, 2010). Whatever the reasons are, the fact is, these violent incidents clearly show a political debate between the secularist/modernist and Islamist/fundamentalist in which the secularists appeal to diminish the presence of Islam in public sphere and Islamists advocate for establishing an Islamic state. As Shehabuddin explains that according to the secularists, because of the backwardness, darkness and ignorance of the rural people, especially women, unscrupulous forces can exploit them in the name of religion (Shehabuddin, 1999, p.218). On the other hand, the *fatwas* (legal decree provided by Islamic religious leaders) are issued on 'immoral' women and 'alien' NGOs and these incidents can be attributed to the gullibility of the rural poor and women who do not know about Islam. The debate between secularist and Islamist became clearer through their response in latter period.

The social and economic realities, which compelled large number of women to include in workforce and permitted middle class women to take part in education, bound the Islamists to address the way of modernizing women in alternative way. Especially to meet the challenge from the modernizing effort of NGO, the Islamist leaders of religious movements have redefined the concept of modernity that creates new scope for women. For instance, *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the largest political party in

Bangladesh, has accepted some aspects of modernization but not Westernization. The Islamist movement provides a new ideology of Islamic modernity- that criticizes the Western way of life as being polluted by consumerism, materialism, and self-indulgence, and advocates for establishing lifestyles characterized by morality and faith (Hussain, 2010). Under this framework, veil has emerged as a symbol of modern women that ensures female's Muslim identity as well as it has opened the scope for them to involve in social and religious activities. In the case of women's affairs, *Jamaat-e-Islami* has adopted significant changes in its policy and moved from its earlier position on women, which attracts many modern educated women in its Islamization project (Shehabuddin, 2008). I agree with Shehabuddin that the Islamist efforts of including women in modernization are necessarily felt in order to ensure their benefit into the politics of vote. The party has realized that it is difficult to get women's support by remaining them in out of Islamization. Not only *Jamaat-e-Islami,* overall the Islamic reformist movements response parallel to include women in Islamization process against the secularist efforts. I shall argue later how TJ reshuffles its ideology by taking various initiatives for increasing women's participation in the movement.

One important contribution of the Islamist modernizing effort is including women in religious education. Bangladesh has experienced a boom in girls' religious education in last two and half decades. Large numbers of *madrasa* (Islamic Schools) are set up across the country in which girls from middle class and lower middle class are studying. According to the BANBEIS report of 2008, the total number of separate

girls' madrasa was 6.8 % and it has reached in 12.8% in 2008. During this time, girls'

enrollment in madrasa education has increased from 7.7% in the year of 1990 to

51.60 % in 2008. Moreover, since late 1970s there are large numbers of *Qwami*

madrasa (non-recognized madrasa) are set up in Bangladesh in which many girls

student from middle class and lower middle class family study. Growing number of

girls madrasa and increasing enrollment of girls' student have created opportunity for

women to engaging in madrasa teaching profession. While conventionally the Islamic

movements promoted women's roles at home, the modernizing efforts taken by

Islamic leaders brought the educated women in new roles in out of home. Wearing

burqa (Islamic dress for female), the women are engaging in madrasa teaching like

the men teachers.

The Islamist forces not only focus on religious education, they establish

medical college, engineering institutes, private university that attracted women from

elite class and middle class women in urban areas. These institutions are working to

make women skilled in modern technology but they will be religious also showing

their Islamic identity. The religious women are seen to create an Islamic environment

in modern intuitions by wearing Islamic dress and by avoiding free mixing between

male and female. During this period, as observed in Bangladesh, the Islamists have

developed a modern economic stand through their own ideology by establishing

different profitable and non-profitable institutions in various sectors such as bank,

insurance company, health, real estate, media, and NGOs. It offers employment

opportunity for many women. Wearing veil the women are doing job in these fields.

141

Like the secularist NGOs, the Islamist NGOs are built in Bangladesh, which are working among the rural women to provide micro-credit. However, the women in Islamic NGO should obey the strict principle of Islam.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the Islamist movements have gradually shown a parallel response against the secularist attempts of modernizing women. Besides, including women in economic development project, the Islamist forces ensure women's right in Islamic politics. The major Islamic religious parties focus on accommodating their movements among the female followers. *Bangladesh Islami Chatry Sangstha* (the female wing of *Jamaat-e-Islami*), Masturat Jamaat (female wing of *Tablighi* Jamaat) emerged and started to be popular among women in this particular social context. During this period, the way the Islamic movements include women in Islamization process brings them in more active way than before. Recently women are seen to form own religious groups which is a new phenomenon in Bangladeshi social context. As Huq and Sabina (2011) have shown women's *tafsir* (interpretation of Quran) class are led by female from urban middle class who are actively working to increase Islamization among women in the community. In this study, I shall show a female led group of GFC that is emerged as an alternative group against mainstream TJ.

How the women are taking part in Islamic organizations gets scholarly attention. The recent scholars have shown that the women's presence in Islamic organization offers new dimension to understand gender relation in religious sphere.

As Hussain (2007) shown that now in Bangladeshi broadcast media, it is a common picture that women are taking part in talk show and discussions by wearing veil, the new roles have recognized them as religious scholar like the men *ulama*. While previously Islamic interpretations were confined in, the *ulama* or men leaders now the new media opens the scope for any Muslim having knowledge can take part in religious discussion. Therefore, the women are appeared in talk shows that make them popular as *ulama*. However, it does not mean that the women are using their text-based knowledge to raise question against the patriarchal fundamentals of Islam. Instead, the modern educated women promote the idea of women's purity by using Islamic dress. It means that Islamic modernization project have brought women more active way in Islamization process, while it persists the traditional gender norms. In other way, the modernizing efforts of Islamic movements become able to raise the women with individual religious responsibility who works individually or collectively to increase Islamization. TJ's growth among women in mass level needs to examine in these particular context of changing socio-economic status of women and their increasing mobility in outer world as well as in religious sphere.

4.2. Beginning of TJ in Bangladesh

Likely, in India, female's *Tablighi* activities in Bangladesh were started by the women whose men relatives strongly associated with the TJ. The emergence and development of TJ is embedded in proliferation of men's *Tablighi* activities in Bangladesh. According to the female *Tablighi* elders, it is known that women from the family of Haji Mohsin started *Tablighi* activities among women in Bangladesh.

This section deals with the emergence and development of men's *Tablighi* activities in Bangladesh.The available historical documents report two sources of introducing TJ in Bangladesh, among them one is Haji Mohsin Ahmed and another one is Mawlana Abdul Aziz. As far as it is known that TJ has spread in Bangladesh in 1944 when it was part of British colonial India (Hasan, 2000) and it was introduced by the refugees of West Bengal, particularly from Calcutta (Sikand, 2002). According to Sikand (2002), on the background of growing communal consciousness, not just in Bengal but also in India as a whole, the TJ's pan- Islamic appeal attracted many Muslims specially the educated and emerging Middle class Muslim men. This Middle class man of Bengal started to begin *Tablighi* activities here in association with the TJ leaders of India in order to strengthen their Islamic identity against the Hindu *Bhdralok* (men) class. Haji Mohsin was an electrical engineer in profession who born in a Muslim family in Calcutta. When he was in Calcutta came to the vicinity with a *Tablighi* elder and started to begin *Tablighi* activities there. During this time he attended in several *Jamaat* tours to visit Delhi headquarter. Haji Mohsin along with his family migrated in Dhaka (capital city of Bangladesh) and started his career as a lecturer in an engineering college. He along with his younger brother, Abdul Mukit (also a qualified engineer) would visit friends and used to urging them to join in TJ. This, two brothers played leading role to spread TJ in Bangladesh and until their death and they performed as governing body members of TJ in headquarter of Bangladesh.

Another source reports that a Bengali *alim* played a key role to introduce TJ in East Bengal, his name was Mawlana Abdul Aziz born in Khulna. He studied in Calcutta *aliya* madrasa and after his graduation, he engaged in teaching in a madrasa over there. In 1944, he came to the attachment with a *Jamaat* group that visited Calcutta from Delhi. When Abdul Aziz returned to Bangladesh, he engaged him to spreading TJ here (Uddin, 2002). Mawlana Abdul Aziz had started his *Tablighi* activities based on the mosque of the madrasa of Udoypur, located in Mollahat thana under the Southern districts of Khulna and it was the first headquarter of TJ in Bengal area. However, the movement smoothly started its journey in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) following India's participation in 1947. The area of East Bengal became the part of Pakistan and it was known as East Pakistan. At that time, many close disciples of the founder of TJ, Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, visited both part of Pakistan to preach Islamic lessons. In order to spread *Tablighi* activities in Bangladesh three local *Tablighi* headquarters were established in East Pakistan-Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna (Hasani 1989, cf. Sikand, 2002). The *Tablighi* elders including Ilyas's successor, his son Mawlana Yusuf travelled several times in East Pakistan, especially on *Ijtema* (annual gathering of TJ) to motivate large number of peoples. Although, it carries some differences about the primary initiators of TJ in Bengal areas but the truth is both the modernist and *ulama* played key roles to spread TJ among different groups of peoples. However, TJ has proliferated in full swing in independent Bangladesh after 1971. In Bangladesh, complex relationship between state and Islam favors rapid expansion of TJ here. Sikand (2002) states

These developments- the involvements of Islamic political groups in the massacre of freedom fighters, the declaration of Bangladesh as a secular state in which religion and politics would be kept strictly apart, and the banning of *Jamaat-e-Islami* and related groups- seem to have actually worked in favor of TJ (Sikand, 2002, p. 194).

Independent Bangladesh started its journey taking the official policy of secularism that provided a good opportunity to TJ for expanding its activities. Ahmed notices, that TJ as an apolitical Islamic revivalist-reformist movement has grown voluntarily and rapidly in the years after the independent of Bangladesh in 1971 (Ahmad, 1991). Shortly after independence, particularly since 1975, state's ideological inclination toward Islamism makes the social environment more favorable to enlarge the movement. The scholars have outlined two important reasons for expanding TJ; one is growing salience of Islam in Bangladeshi Public life, second, is growing economic frustration among the peoples in the period of after independence. Since 1975 to 1990 Bangladesh was ruled by military governments and during this period, state has directly patronized the Islamic groups and institutions in the country. In 1977 president General Zia-ur –Rahman removed secularism from state's constitution and replaced it with 'Islamic faith'. Later General Ershad declared Islam is as state's religion in 1988 (White, 2010). As a result, politics of Islam has become strengthen. Islam emerged as a social force and started to influence the public lives. During this time, in society, visibility of Islam has been increased rapidly. There are appeared a large number of mosque, religious schools, Islamic media, Islamic bank

and Islamic NGOs across the country. This social environment particularly works to raise people's sentiment to be religious by involving in Islamic religious movement including TJ. As one leading Bangladeshi scholars mentions that the increase salience of Islam in Public life in Bangladesh particularly after 1975 works much to the rapid expansion of TJ in the country in this period (Jahangir, 1990, cf. Sikand, 2002, p.197). On the other hand, economic crisis, political chaos, natural disasters create immense sufferings and uncertainty among people's lives. In such uncertain social context, people look for peace by engaging them in religion. TJ's religious appeal to individual reform for both this world and otherworld attract many men. As Sikand mentioned, Bangladesh now began to flock in large number than ever before to the TJ, finding in it an anchor in the otherwise anarchic and shattered world around them (Sikand, 2002, p.197). Day by day TJ becomes popular across the country and accommodates the movement among the followers from different class educated, semi educated, elite, middle class and poor men. However, the majority of *Tablighi* followers constitute from lower middle class and middle class and still *Tablighi* appeal to very poor class is limited. For the poor, to whom survival of life is main concern, providing enough time for attending *Dawa* tour is often impossible.

TJ's popularity is well understood by the annual gathering of TJ, popularly known as *BiswaIjtema* is one of the core events of *Tablighi* activities. In the Annual gathering of TJ in Bangladesh, which is reported as the world's second largest gathering of Muslim pilgrimage after the *hajj* event held in Mecca, millions of people attend from home and abroad. In the year of 2013, TJ has observed 48th of its annual

gathering in Bangladesh where more than one million of peoples including 30 thousands foreign followers from 103 countries participated (The Daily star, January 11, 2013). From 2010, the ritual of performing *Ijtema* has been organized in two phases because of growing participation rates of pilgrimage in it. At the first phase of *Ijtema*, people from 32 districts out of 64 in Bangladesh attend in it. The foreign guests also attend in first phase of *Ijtema*. In second phase, people from rest of 32 districts attend in *Ijtema*. The final session of *Ijtema,* which is known as *akheri monajat* (supplication) is attended by millions of people.

Those who attend in *Ijtema*, all of them are not the *Tablighi* followers among them many are sympathizers. TJ's popularity connects it with so many sympathizers. The Prime Minister, President, opposition leader, government high official, political leaders and businesspersons participate in *Akheri Munazat* to show solidarity with the *Tablighi* peoples. During the period of *Ijtema,* high security system is arranged in the *Ijtema* field and adjacent places. Government and transport businesmen provide extra transport service to the pilgrimage who travel from various part of the country. The elite businesspersons set up mobile hospital to provide free medical facilities among the pilgrimage. The private TV channels broadcast the live event of *Ijtema* activities that open the accessibility for many people who cannot join physically in the event. The whole environment of *Ijtema* shows TJ's growing popularity in Bangladesh.

Although, TJ does not allow its women follower to take part in *Ijtema* but its popularity makes many female sympathizers too. Women from different poor, middle

148

class and elite class are seen to take part in the last session of *Ijtema (Akheri Munajat)*. Bangladesh is rulling by female Prime Minister since 1990s. Both Prime Minister and opposition leaders are women and they take part in last session of *Ijtema* with other groups of women. Since in *Ijtema* field, there are no arrangements for female followers, many female *Tablighi* are seen to take shelter adjacent houses of *Ijtema* field to attend the speech given by the men *Tablighi* leaders. By taking part in it, the women show their devotion and solidarity with the TJ followers. Over the last few years, *Ijtema's* popularity makes large number of female sympathizers who finally motivate to TJ. During my fieldwork many female *Tablighi* show their devotion to *Ijtema* and mention that they are praying to make the event successful.

4.3. Female TJ

The available information from the oral histories given by the male and female *Tablighi* elders reveals that the urban educated women played key roles to introduce it in Bangladesh. The women from the family of Haji Mohsin Ahmed started TJ activities here. Haji Mohsin Ahmed and his younger brother Abdul Mukit played key roles to invite men in TJ, likely, their wives; Rahat Begum and Rukaya Begum engaged them to invite women in TJ. Both of these two women graduated in modern education in Calcutta and migrated in Bangladesh with their husbands. At the beginning, they engaged to invite women from their family, kin relatives, friends and neighbors. The exact date of lunching female *Tablighi* Jamaat in Bangladesh varies from one source to other. One member of the governing body of TJ in headquarter at

Kakrail Mosque (Dhaka) reported that some form of *Tablighi* activities for women had started before the 1970s[4]. Authenticity of his speech is found in another source. Mawlana Tarik Jamil (a noted *Tablighi* leader of Pakistan) reported in his speech that he visited Bangladesh in 1951 with a group of Masturat Jamaat. He delivered lecture to a group of women at a gathering hosted at the house of Mr Jahir, in Dhaka city where he encouraged the women to prepare their husbands for participating in *Tablighi* Jamaat tour. He added that a group of 8-10 women came in that house at a night to inform him about their eagerness to form a Jamaat group for travelling (Hossain, 2007). It means that women used to take part in *Talim* or religious reading session where the men *Tablighi* leaders used to give speech for women. One elder female Tablighi, Dilara Begum, (lived in Dhaka) reported that she had joined to a group of Masturat Jamaat tour in 1975 but MJ activities were organized before she joined. *Tablighi* male elders at Kakrail Mosque informed that women's association with *Tablighi* activities by organizing women's reading circle might have started before 1970s but formally, their activities through organizing Masturat Jamaat were

[4] Wasiful Islam, is currently working as a governing body member in Kakrail Mosque, the headquarter of TJ in Bangladesh. In order to talk about some forms of TJ activities among women, he mentioned *Talim*, (reading circle) activities among women were started at the early stage of female TJ in Bangladesh.

started in independent Bangladesh[5]. Therefore, formally MJ had started its journey in independent Bangladesh since 1971. Untill 1990s female *Tablighi* activities grows in urban areas then it started its activities in rural areas. The proliferation of female TJ parallel goes with the development of women's participation in modernization. In order to accommodate the movement among the female followers the *Tablighi* leaders take informal strategies and methods that effectively function to attract women from different groups in this movement.

4.4. Recent Developments in TJ

Last few years back, TJ constructed a new building at the headquarter of TJ in Kakrail Mosque to host female *Tablighi*s who attend in Masturat Jamaat from home and abroad. This is a new development in TJ to host female *Tablighi*s at Kakrail Mosque, the event itself, shows the proliferation of female TJ in Bangladesh. From the beginning of TJ, the female *Tablighi*s of *Masturat Jamaat* used to stay in TJ member's house and the male *Tablighi*s used to stay in Kakrail Mosque. Since women's participant rate has increased in *Dawa* tour it creates the essential need to build permanent place to host them. Moreover, now days, women like men are participating in *Masturat Jamaat* for 10 days, 15 days and 40 days- that raises difficulty to arrange any *Tablighi* member's house for hosting them for such a long

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[5] For getting information about female TJ my male co-researcher joined in a focus group discussion among the *Tablighi* male elders at Kakrail Mosque. My male co-researchers joined in this focus group discussion on Feb. 3. 2012)

time. TJ has built new building to host the female *Tablighi* at Kakrail Mosque. Everyday Masturat Jamaat groups are coming in Kakrail Mosque at the same time women are going out for attending *Dawa* tour in different areas across the country. The yearly statistics of Masturat Jamaat in Kakrail Mosque shows that the every year thousands of women take part in *Dawa* tour and stay in the mosque. The statistics given in below show the annual numbers of Masturat Jamaat groups visited in Kakrail Mosque for 10 days.[6]

In 2013 – 8122 groups

In 2012-7910 groups

In 2011-7555 groups

The above numbers shows the number of women's groups who travelled inside the country. Each group holds five to ten pair of men and women. Kakrail Mosques also host the Masturat Jamaat groups from foreign countries, who travel different parts of Bangladesh. The foreign MJ groups first stay in Kakrail Mosque then, they travel different parts of the country. In the same way, the Bangladeshi MJ groups first come in Kakrail Mosque then go out for travelling abroad. According to the report of 2013 at Kakrail Mosque, there are 84 Masturat Jamaat groups who visited Bangladesh from different countries and 14 *Jamaat* groups travelled for *Dawa* tour in abroad. During my fieldwork, it was reported that 57 Masturat Jamaat groups were staying at Kakrail Mosque from different parts of Bangladesh and from foreign countries.

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[6] The statistic is taken from the documents stored in the Kakrail Mosque, Dhaka.

Among them, Masturat Jamaat from different foreign countries such as Sudan, Egypt, Khyrgisthan, Russia were staying at Kakrail Mosque.[7]

The arrangement of making separate building for female *Tablighi*s at Kakrail Mosque is a new development in Bangladesh, which followed the path of the world headquarter of TJ in Nizamuddin mosque. Women's participation in mosque gives the female *Tablighi*s a sense of equal responsibility of doing religious activities like their menfolk at mosque, a space that was historically restricted for them. Many female *Tablighi*s, who stay in Kakrail Mosque report that they are free from household responsibilities, such as, cooking, washing, cleaning etc rather they are getting meal, which were served by the men.[8] Women's stay in mosque is considered as a relief from household activities that gives them opportunity for spending enough time in religious performing to reform them as pious Muslim. Moreover, women's stay in mosque, a men's place, provides a sense of equal responsibility among them like their men counterpart to engage them in the project of Islamization. As I discussed in chapter two, that like any other contemporary Islamic movements, from the beginning TJ also successfully promoted the idea that men and women are equally responsible for the enduring Islam in community. Through providing women's

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[7] Interview with Mawlana Muhammad Habibullah, the volunteer in charge of Masturat Jamaat at Kakrail Mosque. Interview was taken on Feb.4. 2012.

[8] Interview with Female *Tablighi*s at Kakrail Mosque

accessibility in mosque, TJ in Bangladesh has reemphasized the idea and   has brought the female followers with more responsibility of religious activities.

There is another development in TJ that it organizes special speech for women by the men *Tablighi* leaders who provide *Bayan* (religious speech) in the annual gathering of *BiswaIjtema.* The event might be seen as another strategy to make women equally responsible like men in Islamization. Because of seclusion rules, TJ makes restriction about women's participation in *Ijtema*. Instead, it had organized women's separate *Ijtema* at the decade of 1990s and it was continued 3-4 years[9]. There were arisen some unexpected problems to manage the veiled women in *Ijtema* place. TJ authority stopped women's *Ijtema*, instead started to arrange similar speech by the *Ijtema* leaders that are especially for female *Tablighi*s. The world leaders of TJ who used to give speech in *Ijtema* , provide speech separately for women. After the 3-day session of *Ijtema*, the men leaders organized speech for women at different places in Dhaka city where womenfolk from neighboring places joined. Usually, it is held in *Tablighi* men's house where women from neighboring areas join. This new development indicates that TJ perceives men and women's equally important in work of Islamization and women are needed to make equally skilled like men. Moreover, by organizing separate *Bayan* (speech) for women, TJ revitalizes the idea that women

[9] Interview with Dilruba Begum, one elder female *Tablighi* from Dhaka. Interview was taken at her home.

have the right to access in all religious activities like men but it will be held in different way. As one female *Tablighi* told that

Women should not go to *Ijtema* field because they should obey the rules between men and women. Women should pray for making the annual gathering successful and take part in *Bayan* after *Ijtema*. The same lessons what men are learning in *Ijtema* and women are learning at home by the preachers of *Ijtema*.[10]

The above narrative indicates that female *Tablighi*s perceive that their roles in Islamization are not less than their men folk. They are made equally skilled like their men counterparts. However, women should take part in *Tablighi* Islamization process by observing proper Islamic principles. Therefore, by adapting new techniques TJ has made the women individually more responsible in Islamization process. Moreover, to make the movement popular among mass women TJ took various efforts that attract many women.

4.5 Beyond Kin Networks

The recent development of TJ women becomes possible because it comes out from the narrow boundary of kin network and it focuses on the women's network. At the beginning of female TJ in Bangladesh, it was limited among several *Tablighi* families

[10] Interview with Dilara Begum, a female *Tablighi* lives in Dhaka.

who played vital role to introduce the movement here. Female activities were limited among the women of founder's families and their friends and relatives. TJ tries to reach to wider people through womenfolk. At the beginning, TJ suggests its men followers to mobilize their women in female TJ. Later, TJ emphasizes on including women who are thought to influence their men relatives in TJ. One men *Tablighi* leader[11] told that women are suggested to take part in *Talim* at neighboring places. They should arrange *Talim* at home so that their other family members may influence to TJ. However, this study has conducted a survey among hundreds of TJ women. Among 100 respondents, 45 mentioned that at their home there are no other *Tablighi* followers. They are informed about TJ from neighborhood or friends. While rest of 55 women told that menfolk of their family are also involved with TJ. Among 55, mostly inform that they are motivated in TJ by their family members. It means that female TJ has spread beyond the kin network and source of getting information about TJ has enlarged.

This development of women's inclusion in TJ was possible because of increasing numbers of women's *Talim* after 1990s. One female *Tablighi* from Rajshahi mentions that she set up *Talim* for womenfolk at her home before 1990s and at that time, it was very difficult to take the permission. At that time, in order to make new *Talim* place, women have to take permission from the world head quarter of TJ at Nizamuddin mosque in India. Until 1992, TJ in Bangladesh was headed by a

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[11] Interview with men leader, a member of governing body (*sura*) in Kakrail.

single *ameer*, appointed by Nizamuddin authorities. After 1992, the rules were changed and instead of a single *ameer*, a governing body (*sura*) was formed who was responsible to lead TJ in Bangladesh. This development allows the authority of TJ in Bangladesh to take permission about organizing new *Talim*. This change in *Tablighi* management works to expanding female *Talim* and makes it available to the women. As it is noticed that at the beginning of TJ, there was only three female *Talim* in Dhaka and recent development shows the numbers have increased more than 450.[12]

Increasing numbers of *Talim* expands the sources of delivering the message about female TJ in Bangladesh. According to the survey results, it is known that among 100 respondents, 43 informed that they knew about MJ from menfolk at their family while other 57 were informed by neighbors, friends and colleagues. This result denotes that still family is working as important source of spreading MJ. However, majority numbers of women know about female TJ from their neighbors, and friends who have attachment with female *Talim* at neighboring places. This result suggests that women's neighborhood network, peer groups and friends actively work as source of spreading TJ for women.

4.6. TJ among Rural Women

Focusing on rural women was one of central focus of modern development projects since 1990s in Bangladesh. As I discussed that both modernist and Islamist

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[12] Data about female reading sessions collected from the male leaders of Kakail mosque.

emphasized on including rural women in development projects, TJ also started to spread the movement in village areas on late 1980s. TJ emphasized to expand female TJ in rural areas. Organizing two-fold communication flow from urban to rural and rural to urban areas is a new development in TJ in Bangladesh that started late 1980s. The female *Tablighi*s in the village areas claim that travelling of MJ group in village areas is a recent development, mostly this visit was limited in urban areas. At the beginning of women's participation in TJ in Bangladesh, mostly the MJ groups travelled in the capital city of Dhaka and its neighboring areas. One man elder in Kakrail Mosque mentions that there was hardly found any house in village areas, which could meet the proper seclusion for women. He mentions that lack of proper lodging facility was one of the important reasons for non-availability of MJ group in rural areas. According to the rule of TJ that the female *Tablighi* of MJ group stays in a house of a local *Tablighi* and the male members stay in local mosque. The houses, where the female *Tablighi*s stay, have to have indoor toilet and boundary wall in order to secure proper seclusion. There was hardly found such type of house in rural areas.

Recently, many devoted *Tablighi* followers are seen to making house including indoor toilet system in order to host MJ at their home that increases MJ's availability in village areas. As one female *Tablighi*, Bibi Hawa [13]mentions that few

[13] Bibi Hawa, 70 years old woman, lived in a suburb area of Rajshahi district. I met with her in Rajshahi where she came with a Jamaat tour.

years back she made indoor toilet at her home in order to host MJ. Besides the housing facilities, cooking in village areas was also another problem that remained many urban women to travel in rural areas. During the period of stay in *Jamaat* tour, the female *Tablighi* are suggested to cook for the whole team. It is the rule that the female *Tablighi* will stay in a house of a local *Tablighi* but they have to cook their food by themselves. One female *Tablighi* in urban areas of Rajshahi districts shared her experience of a *Jamaat* tour in a village, according to her, "cooking in a home-made burner and using local product of *patkhati* (dry plant used in homemade burner for cooking) was so tiresome that tears came from my eyes''. Poor communication transportation system was also another problem for TJ women to reach into the rural areas. AT the beginning, when MJ started its journey in 1970s then the condition of communication transport system was very poor in Bangladesh. In many places, train was only way to travel from Dhaka city and the condition of train communication was also very poor. Because of poor transportation facility, women's travelling for Jamaat tour in far places was not encouraged by the male *Tablighi* in early days of female TJ. In last two decades, Bangladesh has witnessed infrastructural development and communication from rural to urban and urban to rural areas has become easier than before. In such social context, MJ becomes available in rural areas and urban, educated women provide much effort to involve rural women in *Tablighi* activities. During the visit of *Jamaat* tour, the urban female *Tablighi*s provide lessons about TJ and discuss the Islamic values and practice, reward and punishment of doing religious acts in hereafter. The female *Tablighi*s of MJ group selects some responsible members among the rural women who can organize *Tablighi* activities in their local

159

community. At the beginning, it is emphasized on setting up a *Talim* or regular reading circle to a woman's house where neighborhood can attend. Women are taught Islamic lessons and practices and they are encouraged to join in *Dawa* tour with their menfolk. Their efforts successfully attract many rural women in TJ.

Specially, the housewives from lower middle class in rural areas who are educated or semi-educated are seen to become interested in *Tablighi* activities. During the period of 1990s, women in rural areas started to go through a drastically change, female visibility in out of home has increased. This development gives women an opportunity to enjoy or engage them in outer world. But still women are suffering to engage them properly in outer world concerning concept of women's honor, bad environment in workplace or job crisis. Many educated women confine them at home after marriage. TJ becomes popular among these housewife classes. The housewives in rural areas who observe a routine life in domestic realms, TJ provides them a way to engage them in women's network through doing religious activities. On the other hand, for many housewive women, participation in *Tablighi* activities was a kind of relief from their mundane life, especially the method of *Dawa* tour in TJ works as a means of relief from monotonous life for the rural women who get little opportunity to visit out of home. As Hanifa, one sixty five years old woman mentions that joining in *Dawa* tour in Rajshahi was first visit to an unknown place in her life. She mentions that her full life she spent in domestic works and she wants a relief from that. Taking part in *Dawa* tour in out of home seems to her a break from her tiresome lifestyles in household that finally makes her responsible in Islamization.

TJ gives them the opportunity to expand their mobility among women's network in their local community. In some case, through religious knowledge they influence other women that raise their status among the community people. Women in rural areas are working actively to expand TJ. Hussain (2010) mentions that the recent trend is, TJ is widely spread among rural women by the women preachers. The women's accessibility in Islamic faith and Sharia made them conscious and responsible in such a way that the women themselves start to criticize the local beliefs and practices whose followers are mainly women. It means that *Tablighi* engagement made the women more active in Islamization process that in turn works to expand TJ in mass level.

TJ does not only create the opportunity for rural women to visit urban areas and out of kin networks, it also brings the housewives of rural women in a virtual equal status like urban educated women. According to TJ rules there are no hierarchical status among the Muslim that allows unique and relationship among the *Tablighi* followers. The way in which they take part in *Dawa* tour brings all members, rural or urban, educated or non-educated rich or poor in a similar status among the group's activities. During the *Dawa* tour, they perform similar activities; read same books, invite people in *Jamaat*, do *Talim* and other religious activities. Moreover, they stay in same place where nothing is special arrangement for the rich or urban educated women. Instead, to reduce the disparity TJ follows some particular rules. For example, two or three *Tablighi* followers eat in one plate. They believe that by observing this practices the followers cultivate the Islamic ideology of ideology of

equality among all human beings. Moreover, in *Tablighi* project of Islamization, follower's education background is not well emphasizes as in *Jamat-e-Islam*. For being a member of *Jamat-e Islami*, individual needs to be educated. However, for participating in TJ, individual needs education but not higher education. Thus, TJ attracts many women in rural areas, who do not have higher education. In spite of less academic education background, they can earn Islamic knowledge by going through *Tablighi* texts. By gaining religious knowledge they can take part in *Tablighi* activities with the urban educated women. As I observe in Kakrail Mosque that women who visit from the rural areas often, take part in talking about religious matters with the urban educated women. This makes sense among them that they are equally important in Islamization process like the urban educated women. In such a way, TJ becomes able to make a solidarity among the women between rural and urban, educated and semi- educated. This particular feeling of solidarity and virtual equal status make the rural women active in *Tablighi* Islamization process.

4.7. E**ducated Women**

Although, I discussed earlier that TJ has no requirement about follower's academic background. However, like other contemporary religious movement, (such as *Jamat-e-Islami*), TJ also target the women from modern educated class in changing social context of growing female accessibility in higher education in Bangladesh. TJ strongly realized that it was impossible to reach into mass level remaining the emerging educated class women out of the movement. One female *Tablighi* elder in Rajshahi mentioned that in late 1980s, the male *Tablighi* elders started to provide

speech among the female students of the residential hostels of Rajshahi University, a public university located in northern part of Bangladesh. Female reading sessions are set up in higher education institutions. The women's reading circles, which were limited among housewive's networks, expanded to the networks consisted by female students. *Tablighi* networks among female students are found in almost general universities, medical and engineering universities in Bangladesh. Various studies reveal the female *Tablighi* activities among the students of public universities (Rozario, 2006). My earlier experience[14] in a public university in Rajshahi also witnessed that TJ women are actively working to increase their followers by doing their *Dawa* activities. During my fieldwork in Rajshahi, I found that there are five residential hostels for women in Rajshahi University and female TJ groups are working in each hostel. As I discussed in chapter three that seclusion between men and women is an important provision for participation in TJ and it strictly suggests women to stay at home. In contemporary situation, female *Tablighi*'s presence in modern education institutions and studying in co-education system completely

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[14] Previously I was a student of Rajshahi University. During my study period I was familiar with the female *Tablighi* activities. Although, the female TJ groups in university did not hold any activities in public places, instead they engage to do *Dawa* voluntarily. Mostly their activities are seen in residential hostels where the female students live. There is a prayer room in each residential hostel and female *Tablighi* activities are continued centering on this prayer room. The female *Tablighi*s gather in prayer room once in a week and organize reading session. After the evening prayer they organized in a group and visited room to room to invite people in Islam as well as in TJ.

contradict with the ideology of TJ. In this case, like other reformist religious movements, TJ's efforts might be seen as re-modification of its ideology in context of modernity.

How do the modern educated women do response to the reformist appeal of TJ? Recently, many scholarship emphasized on the relationship between higher education and creeping conservatism (Elickson, 2004) or women's seclusion and proliferation of textual based Islam (Gardener, 1998). Higher education opens the scope for women to direct access in textual Islam that increase women's religiosity. I agree with the earlier scholars because this study also evidences educated women's affiliation with the conservative ideology of TJ. In contemporary social context, the female *Tablighi* are seen to avail the modern opportunity while they also concern about their religious identity. By wearing veil they promote their religious identity. The religious women in Islamic movement are always accused as 'backward' and secluded at home, but the modern educated female *Tablighi*s challenge those secularist's criticize. One female *Tablighi* in Rajshahi University mentions,

> If religious women do not have enough knowledge in science, technology, and literature, how they challenge the modernist's criticism. Modern educated women may become the example for other women in order to observe Islamic principles in daily lives in contemporary world.

It means that in order to meet the challenge from secularists-modernists, some women actively take part in Islamic movement to protect Islamic culture. They believe that the modern educated female *Tablighi*s will be the example for other women in society. The modern educated women represent them as modern by engaging them in co-education system of higher education and at the same time their adherences to Islamic lifestyle show them as religious.

The educated women not only incline to religious movement through their accessibility to textual Islam, many female *Tablighi* are seen to take part in TJ based on their experience about increasing social malaises in contemporary society of Bangladesh. Especially, the event of growing violence against women, encourage many women to be religious. Many religious women believe that observance of Islamic lifestyle such as covering full body by *burqa* (veil) and remaining them from free mixing with men protect them from violence. I shall discuss *Tablighi* women's attachment to veiling in next chapter. However, what I want to mention here that over last two decades, Bangladeshi society has witnessed a large number of women's accessibility in outer world but at the same time it experiences severe violence against women in society (Zaman, 1999; Jahan, 1994, White, 1992). In contemporary Bangladesh, violence against women appears in various forms ranging from domestic violence to rape, dowry, killings, acid throwing, and sexual harassment, eve-teasing. In every year, many suicide events are noticed because of women's sexual harassment. All such events raise social insecurity, frustration among the women that

influence many female *Tablighi* to be religious and they believe TJ is a way to establish peace in society. A female *Tablighi* Ayesa, lived in Gaibandha, mentions

Now days, conflicts, corruption, violence are the everyday events in society. People become selfish and always concern about self-interest. Men try to win at any cost and engage in corruptions. All such social malaises are resulted because people are far from the right path of Islam. If men would think about their final destiny-death, they have fear in God and do not engage them in such conflicts, violence and corruptions.

In the background of social unrest and malaises many women believe on *Tablighi* ideology of individual reform, if every man and woman focus on their own reform then society as a whole will be transformed. If they follow the *Tablighi* rule properly, they will be safe in this world and also in other world.

Moreover, in the local context of Bangladesh, social structurally the women experience myriad forms of discrimination, inequality in their everyday life from home to everywhere. As is recognized in different studies (Alam, 1998; Zaman, 1999, Naher, 1010), men and women of all classes hold that patriarchal values are deeply rooted in the society of Bangladesh. For women in Bangladesh, it is a common feature of their daily lives to face gender inequality. As Zaman notices, ''the existing social, economic and political structures, such as property rights, state laws, policies, and discriminatory treatment along gender lines are exploitative in nature and

ultimately deny women their socio-economic autonomy at every stage of their lives''(Zaman,1999:37). Although, state's take various initiatives to reduce gender disparity, nevertheless, still women in Bangladesh are facing various forms of gender discrimination in everyday lives. As Kabeer (2005) mentions, gender equality and women's empowerment are important for the state's Millennium Development Goal (MDG), and various development projects for women are being undertaken, but their implementation is disappointing. In such cases, she mentions state is playing a dual roles in implementing gender policy. For reducing gender disparity state has offered women in modern development projects like men, however, still women's skill and competence are suggested in the realms of social and welfare issues. In such dualistic position of state the religious reformist movements easily continues with their unequal gender ideology. To many female *Tablighi*s, whom I meet during my fieldwork, TJ's gender ideology of inequality does not make anything exceptional or unusual rather it seems to them real social and cultural gender norms. In such unequal gender structure, while TJ's promotes the idea that men and women are equally important for Islamization but the method of activities are different between sexes, the concept is easily accepted by many modern women in Bangladesh. Thus, TJ's gender ideology is being popular among modern women in Bangladesh without making any contestation with the dominant social and cultural norms in society.

4.8. Working Class Women

Still TJ is very less popularizes among the working class women. Working class women's participation in *Masturat Jamaat* might be seen as an emerging source of

developing the movement. As I discussed earlier that TJ emphasize on women's duty at home but it does not make any restriction about women's work in outside. As one *Tablighi* elder[15] in Kakrail Mosque mentions,

> Islam does not give women the responsibility for earning like the men, however, they can do it. It is obligatory for a man if he gets marry; he needs to bear the costs of his wife and children. Women are not given earning responsibility so that they rear the future generations properly which is bigger responsibility than going outside and working or doing any business. However, there is no problem if someone works following the rules of Islam for women such as *purdah*.

Men *Tablighi* leader's changing attitude opens the possibility for working class women to engage in religious activities. According to survey result, five women out of hundred engage in employment in public. Many higher educated women who are participating in TJ wish to engage them in outside wok in future. This is a new trend in TJ, which is observed not only in Bangladesh but also in other parts of the world. Feo (2009) noticed working class women's presence in TJ in Southeast Asia. He mentions that *Tablighi* women are much more involved in outside activities than other Muslim women obeying their traditional domestic roles are (Feo, 2009). The

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[15] Md. Islam, a leading member of the governing body in Kakrail Mosque Dhaka, interview is taken on February 4th on 2012 in Kakrail Mosque.

trend of working class women's participation in TJ is also spreading in other countries. During my fieldwork in Nizamuddin mosque, the world headquarter of TJ, located in New Delhi India, I met with Saleha who attended in a Jamaat tour from her home country , South Africa. She has graduated from Deoband Madrasa of India and after returning to her country, she engaged her in teaching in a Madrasa. She informs that female *Tablighi* member's engagement in teaching and medical profession in South Africa is increasing. Likely, *Tablighi* followers are seen to take part in teaching and medical profession in Bangladesh also. This trend in TJ is resulted in recent social context of contemporary Bangladesh where teaching and medical profession are increasingly popularized among the Bangladeshi women in recent time. Safia khatun, one female *Tablighi* lived in Dhaka mentions that her daughter becomes a doctor who is female *Tablighi* follower also. She mentions that women should come to this profession (doctor) otherwise, the female patients have to go to the men doctors that is uncomfortable for many women. Therefore, many women feel responsibility to include them in modern profession as well as to be religious. Although, mostly the religious women feel comfortable to remain at home, nevertheless, working class women's presence in TJ creates new source of spreading the movement among the peer groups and women's network.

4.9 Alternative Group of Female TJ

This study observes a new dimension in female TJ that many female *Tablighi* are organizing in different way against the mainstream form of TJ. TJ's rigid gender ideology, which I discussed in chapter three, does not allow woman alone to take part

in MJ. Those women who do not have male relatives are not allowed to join in MJ. In such complex context, the religious women who do not have male relatives organize different way by creating new group. This study has explored alternative form of TJ, the Group of Four Companion (GFC), which is ideologically same as TJ but led by female *Tablighi*s (I shall discuss the group in detail in chapter six). Although, this group is not recognized by mainstream TJ but it is working different parts of Bangladesh.

4.10. Female *Tablighi*

In order to know the socio-economic status of the female followers of TJ, this study conducts a mini survey among one hundred women. This survey has been done urban areas of the capital city of Dhaka. Survey has also been conducted among the women from a metropolitan city of Rajshahi and from a small district town of Gaibandha. This multi sided survey denotes that female *Tablighi* are from various backgrounds. The following table shows *Tablighi* women's position in different age categories.

Table-4.1: Introducing female *Tablighi* by age category

Age	Population
20-30	31
31-40	26
40+	43
Total	100

Source: Field survey data, 2012

Age is an important factor to becoming religious. It is common idea that mostly the aged people become inclined to be religious and emphasize on doing religious performing in order to prepare them for next world. In case of TJ, it is not different from the common perception that is reflected in survey result. 43% female out of hundred *Tablighi*s are above 40 aged. In contrast, 31 % young women rests of 26% middle-aged women are seen to take part in female TJ in Bangladesh. This table shows that majority of female *Tablighi* are women from young and middle –aged. It means that in changing socio-economical context young and middle aged women's participation is increased in different institutions such as in education, politics, and economy. Likely, many young and middle-aged women's participation has increased in *Tablighi* religious activism. Next, I show the education ratio among the female *Tablighi*.

Table-4.2: Introducing the female *Tablighi* through education level.

Education	Population
Home educated	2
Illiterate-Primary	29
SSC-HSC	53
Graduation	16
Total	100

Source: Field survey, 2012

The education charts depicts that mostly 53% female *Tablighi* are semi educated who earned 10-12 grade of education. A few numbers of women (16%)

171

have completed their graduation. Among them, some engage for further studying. Out of hundred women, 29% women studied below grade 5. Although, I thought that the female *Tablighi* are religious educated but this survey shows only two women out of hundred have no formal institutional education, they have learned basic Islamic knowledge and Quran. Although these two women (mother and daughter) have no institutional education background but they went through popular Islamic books, compendium of hadith books at home.

Besides educational background, this survey examines the economical condition of these female *Tablighi*. In order to know the economic condition of female *Tablighi*, this survey focused on the head of the household's income. The table in below shows the Economic condition of female *Tablighi* members,

Table-4. 3: Introducing female *Tablighi* based on economic status

Occupation	population	Monthly income
Day labors,	29	5000-10000
Service holders	51	10000-45000
Small business	16	20000-35000
Big business	4	50000+
Total	100	

Source: Field survey, 2012

The above table depicts that most of the female *Tablighi* (51%) are from service holders whose income 10 thousand to 45 thousand taka (Bangladeshi currency equivalent to 126-576). Comparing to this group, 29% and 16% belong to the group whose income is respectively five thousand to ten thousand (64-128) and twenty thousand to thirty five thousand (256-448). Rest of 4% belong to the group whose income is over fifty thousand (641$).It means that the female *Tablighi*s are mostly from the lower middle class and middle class. TJ hardly gets accessibility among the poor class who are concern about their daily survival and hardly gets free time to spend for joining in *Dawa* tour.

Therefore, the female TJ in Bangladesh is constituted mostly by the women from young and middle aged who are semi-educated and from lower middle class across the country. As shown earlier that since 1990s, state's modernizing effort created various development projects for women in which mostly the women from lower middle class participated. Women's participation rate has increased in education. Women who received education, they are interested to adapt them in outer world. As a result, women's accessibility has increased in various institutions. In this social context, semi-educated and educated women who are mostly housewives from lower middle class choose to take part in TJ through which they establish accessibility in outer world by making women's religious network.

The female *Tablighi*s in Bangladesh mostly are the women from housewive class in both rural and urban areas. This study has conducted a survey among 100

173

female *Tablighi*s. According to the survey result, 95 female *Tablighi*s are housewives out of 100. During last two and half decades, despite large number of women's participation in economic sectors still significant numbers of women are housewives. They confine them at home concerning physical security or environment of workplace. Still in Bangladeshi society, many women in middle class family are remained at home by their family members to preserve the cultural norm of women's honor. Moreover, the social reality of employment crisis in job market does not encourage many women to compete for entering into jobs. Still, a significant number of women are housewives and fully confine them at home in Bangladeshi society. Even, many higher educated women are seen to be comfortable in domestic realms. This study observes that female *Tablighi* activities have proliferated mainly by the housewive women to whom it serves the opportunity to enjoy some new relationships, status by engaging in women's network. Obviously, it is relief from their monotonous life in domestic realms.

The housewive women whose networks mainly limited among the family and kinship network, *Tablighi* activities provides them social exposure beyond this narrow boundary. Specially, in rural areas the housewives who hardly get chance to go out of home or visit out of kin or relatives. *Tablighi* activities create opportunity for the women to engage in women's network. They weekly take part in *Talim*, which provides the opportunity to meet the neighboring women. The *Tablighi* activity of *Dawa* tour expands this network in wider context from neighborhood women's network. As I shall discuss later (in chapter five) the participants of MJ groups do not

know each other but I observe that during their three day stay in *Dawa* tour they make a relationship that looks like they are the family members. During their stay in *Dawa* tour, they not only take part in religious talking but also share their private experiences. In such a way, taking part in *Tablighi* activities provides opportunity for women to create new social relationship out of their family and kin networks. Many female *Tablighi*s mention that they continue this relation. As Mina, 23 years old, one female *Tablighi* in Rajshahi mentions that she join in a MJ group who came from Philippine and after *Dawa* tour the women have returned to their home country but still they have communication with them. Although, the female *Tablighi* activities are limited among the women's networks but women are seen to discuss religious matters with the men leaders. Thus, through *Tablighi* activities, women engage in new social relationships that associate them more actively with religious activities.

Involvement in *Tablighi* activities expands women's network as well as raise their status among other women's network. Involvement in religious activities creates opportunity for women to teach and preach Islam to other women. During my fieldwork I observe that the women who conduct *Talim* at their home, they are enjoying a status of religious master among the women's network. Neighborhood women frequently visit her to discuss religious matters. Not only religious matters, they discuss various women's affairs. The housewive women whose influences are only limited among the family members, involvement in religious activities expands it womenfolk. As Asma one female *Tablighi*, lived in Rajshahi mentions that before participating in TJ, she is not known to the women in community. It is *Tablighi*

activity that makes her known among the women in community. Now she organizes a *Talim* at her home where women from neighborhood attend. She mentioned that although she is a home educated woman but many educated women frequently visit her to discuss religious matters. She mentions that it becomes possible because Allah has brought her in the right path (to her right path is TJ). Like Asma, for many housewives, TJ provides the way to include them in women's network in out of home.

Conclusion

Like other Islamic reformist-revivalist movement, Female TJ's proliferation is a religious response against modernity in contemporary Bangladesh. Although TJ poses a hostile attitude to modernist Muslim attempts to reinterpret Islamic jurisprudence for accommodating it with contemporary context, especially in the matter of women's affairs (Sikand, 2002). Nevertheless, in changing socio-econimic context, TJ is also seen to re-modify its gender ideology. TJ recognizes that men and women both are equally important for spreading Islamization, thus women should make skilled and trained like men. TJ is seen to adapt new techniques in order to accommodate it among the female followers. By introducing women's accessibility in mosque or arranging separate *Bayan* (by *Ijtema* leaders) only for women, TJ has brought the female *Tablighi*s in Islamization projects with more responsibility. In changing social context, large numbers of rural women are included in modern development projects, TJ is also seen to accommodate the movements among the female followers in rural areas. As a result of modernizing efforts, in last two-and half decades large number of women form lower middle class include them in modern development projects by

engaging them in education, employment and in other social and religious groups. Female TJ proliferates based on these emerging middle class women. Mostly the educated and semi-educated housewives women from lower middle class background are actively working to proliferate TJ through women's network. In the context of contemporary social unrest and malaise, women from the emerging lower middle class embody, practice and preach religion for peace for their own and others in the society. For them spirituality and asceticism and morality guided by TJ in particular, and religion in general, bring peace in society.

Chapter-Five

Reconstructing Self: TJ Lessons and Practices

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Tablighi reformist activities such as *Talim, Bayan* and *Dawa* tour, which are the necessary sources of providing Islamic lessons and practices for an individual's reform in TJ. By participating in Tablighi activities, TJ followers acquire mastery in Islamic knowledge and engage in religious practices such as prayer, *zikr* (chanting Allah), Quran reading, and others, and embody religious virtue for being a pious Muslim in general. But, for women in addition, they have to go through traditional practices such as; veiling, and conformity to the rules of seclusion from male and men's authority over women, which are the obligatory rules for female Tablighis to attain perfection in piousness. In this chapter, I focus on the disciplinary process of TJ for increasing piety among the female Tablighis. I examine the importance and meaning so as to educate the women in traditional religious practices of veiling. Through the whole process, my main aim is to understand how the female Tablighis recognize them as pious or true Muslim.

By providing Islamic lessons and guidance of correctness in religious practices in *Talim, Bayan* and *Dawa*, TJ may function as a 'total institutions', to discipline the 'docile bodies' with religious virtue, morality and spirituality. Again consideration of TJ as a total institution and the idea of female Tablighis as docile

178

bodies makes a statement to explain or interpret not only within the institutional narratives but as evidence of this study shows TJ women are consciously using them in Islamization. They are actively working as individual agents to bring personal reform as well as community reform and the way in which they are doing so shows women's participation in various forms of religious practice. For example, TJ suggests women obey the rules of the veil and seclusion to preserve their Islamic identity by performing their roles as good mothers and wives but in reality, female Tablighis are seen to work as religious masters at home and in womenfolk. Through the women's network, they are reaching to the wider society for increasing Islamization. Many TJ women are seen to work in out of the home for economic and educational purposes where their veil represents their Islamic identity. Some other women are also seen to be seeking to do creative actions within the gendered structure of the TJ movement. These diversified nature of practices by women create the essentials that need to be examined beyond the ideological narratives of TJ movement instead seeks to examine how TJ women embody religious belief and practices in their own perspective relating it to the world in which they live.

Recently, the anthropological works about Islam brought this issue to light as to how people make sense of their world- the 'stories' out of which they live. Mostly the researchers focused on lived religion as it related to people's lives, how it constituted their practices in their everyday lives. It carries a material relation between religious beliefs and bodily practices. McGuire (2007) in her study suggests to understand this process, not merely based on packages of religious narratives

supplied by institutions but the myriad individual ways by which ordinary people remember, share, enact, adapt ,create and combine the 'stories' out of which they live. She argues that material existence-especially the human body is the very stuff of these meaningful practices that she calls 'embodied practices'. The anthropological contribution of 'lived religion' or 'everyday religion' expands the literary attention of conceptualizing people's spirituality based on institutional religion toward understanding it in social and cultural aspects. Various scholars showed the process by which Islamic ideas and practices have taken on locally specific social and cultural meanings (Bowen, 1993, p.6, cf, Frisk, 2009, p.100). In point of fact, this process is developed through a combination of ideas and practices given in Islamic doctrine and the social and cultural context in which people live (Eickelman, 1982).

The TJ women increase their religiosity based on Islamic knowledge and practices provided by TJ. They go through concentrated learning of Islamic lessons in *Talim* and *bayan* and conform to the fundamental belief of Islam. In order to attain to Allah they go through the rules of discipline prescribed by TJ. They use them in obligatory religious practices such as praying, Quran learning, using *burqa* to increase religiosity. This study argues that TJ women embody the obligatory religious practices associating with their social and cultural experiences. The way in which a woman realized herself as a pious Muslim creates her choice in how to demonstrate this: "individual choice is understood not be the expression of one's will but something one exercises in following the prescribed path to becoming a better Muslim'' (Mahmood, 2005, p.85). I examine the women's bodily practices of

veiling. This study argues that women's better understanding of Islam and conformity to veiling are reinforcing the gender norms of men-and women's separation while the veiled woman also curve out some space for individual authority to control her mind/body and thought/actions according to her own choice. TJ woman goes through a new kind of pious subjectivity in which individual becomes conscious to increase religiosity and holds some power to control her body and mind for transforming to a pious self.

Based on McNay's (2000) idea of a generative approach of self-formation this study also examines pious subjectivity acquires some capability as to how the women's sense of piety encourages them to be active in the Islamization project. The pious women engage them in *Dawa* activities at home and among womenfolk. The pious subjectivity holds some power and capability through which the woman becomes a religious master for her husband and children at home. Moreover, through *Dawa* works the female Tablighi reach out to the larger part of society beyond their confinement to domestic arenas that give them more influence in religious sphere.

This chapter is divided into two sections: Section one includes the ethnographic description of TJ activities of *Talim, bayan* and *Dawa* Tour. It also includes TJ women's stories of using *burqa*. It describes how the TJ women playing *Dawa* activities at home and outside. The second part provides discussion and analysis.

Section one: TJ's Reformist Activities

5.1 *Talim*

Talim, a core component in TJ, deals with providing Islamic knowledge. The fundamental aim of TJ is individual's reform, which is impossible until one goes through true Islamic knowledge. Thus for an individual's reform, TJ has concentrated on the event of *Talim*. TJ enjoins its followers to engage in *Talim* as much as they can get time in their daily lives. Men and women all are enjoined to perform *Talim* at home every day with their family members. Besides Men's *Talim* at the mosque, women do it only with their fellow women. Both men and women are all encouraged to do *Talim* during their stay in *Dawa* tour. There are two types of *Talim* in TJ:

1 *Infradi Talim* where one should memorize the sayings of Prophet

2 *Ijtami Talim* that is done by a group of peoples at mosque or at home.

For men *Ijtemi Talim* is arranged at a mosque and for women it is arranged once a week, in the home of a local Tablighi. Women's *Talim* is popularly known as weekly *Talim*. During my fieldwork, I attended four *Talim* sessions in different areas, in which women from neighborhood areas join. Women's religious practices in *Talim*, is the focus of my observation. Women's weekly *Talim* is divided in three parts:

1. Reading Tablighi books

2. Memorizing Six Points of TJ

3. Doing *Tashkheel*

Talim starts by reading the Tablighi books. The compendium of *Fazail-i- Amaal*, written by Mawlana Muhammad Zakaria, is the most popular book in TJ, which belongs to all female Tablighi members' have to hand. The female Tablighi tells me that at least one Hadith from this book should be read daily. This book consists six sections: *Virtues of Tablighi, Virtues of Salaat, Virtues of Holy Quran, Virtues of Zikr and knowledge, Virtues of Ramadan and Hikauthus Sahaba*. Each section of *Fazail – i-Amaal* deals with selected Hadith that are inspirational for motivating people toward observing Islamic principles in daily lives. According to the female Tablighi, these Hadiths clearly denote the merits of performing the rituals in the hereafter. The *Virtues of Quran, Virtues of Salaat, Virtues of Zikr and Virtues of Ramadan* explain merits of performing these particular rituals, punishment ignoring obligatory rituals in the hereafter and the principle code of performing the rituals perfectly. For example, take some examples of hadith from the first part of *Fazail-i-Amal*, virtues of *Salaat* that state the importance of five time prayers for Muslim, "*Salaat* (prayer) is the only line of demarcation between *Kufr* (disbelief in Allah) and Islam'' (Kaandhlawi,2000,p.85). Not only *Salaat* is emphasized to identify the Muslim but also it is the key of all forms of worship for establishing Islam. According to one Hadith, noted in *Fazail-i-Amaal*, says,

A person who is observant of *salaat*, in fact, establishes *deen* and one who neglects it demolishes (so to say the structure of) *deen* (Kaandhlawi, 2000, p.428).

Furthermore, it holds the rewards and punishment for doing *salaat* that is explained in *Fazail e-Amal,*

> It is said in a hadith, Allah bestows five favours on a person who is mindful of his *salaat*. Viz: His daily bread is made easy for him; he is saved from the punishments in the grave; he shall receive his record in his right hand, on the Day of Judgment, he shall cross the *Siraat*, with the speed of lighting……. As for him who neglects his *salaat,* he shall be given five times of punishment in this world, three at the time of death, three in the grave, three after resurrection…… Those at the time of death: he dies disgracefully; he dies hungry; he dies in thirst….. those after the resurrection are: His reckoning will be a hard one…. He will be thrown into the fire. (Kaandhalawi, cf. Zakariya, 2000, p. 422-423).

Fazail-i-Amaal contains various hadith like above, which is motivational for the Tablighi members. Besides the *Fazail–I-Amaal*, other popular books: *Munthakhab Hadith* written by Mawlana Muhammad Yusuf Khandalawi, *Fazail-e-Sadaqaat* wtitten by Mawlana Muhammad Zakaria Kaandhalawi is read in *Talim*. Through all Tablighi texts TJ provides the message that the present day Muslim is in crisis in the world and the only remedy from this catastrophe is embedded in being true Muslim and leading life in accordance with Islam. As one Tablighi books states,

The first generation of Muslims attained high position in life because of the purity and strength of their life and the excellence of their character. Conversely, the deplorable condition of the present day Muslims is the result of weakness in their faith and character, the opposite of what their fore fathers possessed. (Kaandhalawi, n. d, p. 8)

To the female Tablighi who associate them in TJ, the messages that the books provide are said to be very potent. Tablighi followers believe that degenerate condition of Muslim and the Muslim community has come about because the Muslims ignored the true path of Islam and only way to remedy serious deviation is to resume once more the righteous actions expected by Allah. The devoted persons easily grasp the messages from the Tablighi texts and rationalize their fear for Allah, Day of Judgment, hell and Paradise. Considering Allah as the supreme authority, they become rational in how to become perfect to please Him. The female Tablighis, become concerned about remaking their lives according to the principles of Islam and find the solution in the path of prophet. TJ suggests following Prophet Muhammad and his companions for individual reformism. The Tablighi books contain the stories and biographies of the male and female companions of Prophet Muhammad, focusing on their strong moral characters. These stories explain the characteristic of the Prophet's companions: their sacrifice for Islam, their valor and heroism, zeal for knowledge, piety and scrupulousness. They are described as role models for Muslim. Particularly, the stories of women and children that are narrated in these books are very inspirational for the female Tablighi. The women of early Islam especially

prophet's wives and daughters are perceived as the role models among the female Tablighi.

The second point of *Talim* is discussing the six points of TJ, which is the fundamental agenda of the movement. After reading the Tablighi books, the six points are discussed by one female Tablighi ; (*iman*) faith to Allah, (*saalat*) prayer, (*Ilm and zikr*) knowledge and chanting Allah, *ikram-i-Muslimin* (respect to other people), *ikhlas –i-niyat* (perfect intention) and *tafriq-i-waqt* (spending time for doing Tabligh). The woman states the importance of the six points, which is inspirational for participants to bring Islam into everyday lives through daily practices. In conclusion of discussion of the six points, one female Tablighi[1] told a story. She states,

> Once a king announced that, if anyone desires to take anything in his palace, he/she will receive the same chose. Following king's announcement, the employees of his palace chose the most valuable things they wanted. But a *kalobady* (black maid servant) kept her hand on the king's head. Everybody burst into laughing to see her. Then the king explains her wisdom that you want wealthy things that fulfill your temporary needs but she wants me and as a result, she will be the owner of everything that is mine. The tale means that if anybody desires Allah and properly submit her to call on Allah and obeys his rules obediently they will be benefitted in the afterlife, which does not

[1] Female Tablighi, Naher, lived in Mirpur Dhaka.

pass away but which is a permanent world. For submitting to Allah, this woman has chosen righteous by her actions of prayer, *zikr,* and other obligatory duties. She spends her time, wealth and knowledge in the path of Tabligh and in return, she expects reward in *akherat*. At the same time if she obeys the rules of Allah, lives a simple life; has no greed to material success, wealth or the status that ultimately that will keep her away from doing corruption or bad actions. She will be relieved from the distraction of this world.

The female Tablighi believes that if anyone correctly adheres to the obligatory and moral guidance of Islam they will be rewarded both in this world and in after world.

The third point of *Talim* is *Tashkeel. Tashkeel* means inviting the participants of *Talim* to attend in *Dawa* tour. The female Tablighi believe that, like the women in early Islam, they should take part in missionary tour for increasing Islamic piety among themselves as well as to teach Islamic lessons to other women. The women who wish to attend in Jamaat tour, writes their male relative's name on a paper. This paper is sent to the local mosque and the male Tablighi leaders inform to the men to form group for a *Dawa* tour. In such a way, the female Tablighis work to expand Tablighi Islamizing project by doing *Talim* and making new *Dawa* tour group.

Talim is valued significantly among the female Tablighi and how to embody the Islamic learning in perfect way in their mind is their concern. One female Tablighi[2] explains the importance of learning Islamic lessons in *Talim.* She states,

> '*Ilm* (knowledge) looks like the sea, you can see the waves of sea which always flows but things inside the sea are valuable. If you want it, you have to enter the sea into the depth of the sea. Likely, for learning *Ilm* you have to enter into the depth. Anyone can read the Tablighi books or Islamic texts but for gaining *Ilm* you need pure intention and the correct way you will get perfection.

For learning Islamic lessons, purity of intention is important. Moreover, attention has to be paid to the correct way of practicing the Islamic manners and etiquettes for learning Islam in *Talim*. The female Tablighi take part in *Talim* by observing ablution (*odhu*), which they believe, is good way of the reading the Islamic books and submerge their body and mind into the texts. Although, *Talim* is practiced among the womenfolk, they must covered their heads and bodies appropriately. The women sit on the floor very close to each other because they believe that if there is some empty place, the *shaitan* (evil) will enter to make disturbance into the religious gathering. The female Tablighi believe that the women, to whom Allah gives His attention more than 70 times, participate in the gathering of *Talim*. So this gathering is valued highly among the female Tablighis. When I was participating in *Talim,* the

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[2] Interview with Dilruba Begum, female Tablighi, lived in Dhaka.

female Tablighi told me that Allah gave His attention to me because I was there. They inspired me to practice TJ. Women in *Talim,* believe that *Allah's rahmat* (Allah's favor) is covering them and angels are surrounding of the people of places. The etiquettes of doing *Talim* such as, sit with full attention, sit with intention of doing *amaal* (acts), sit very near to each other, listening about *akherat* (final judgment day) feel be happy, and listening about *Jahannam* (hale) feel be fearful of Allah. Women are enjoined not to leave the place for minor needs like drinking. All such manners and etiquettes are practiced by the female Tablighis to conform to certain kinds of modesty to make them perfect to embody Islamic knowledge.

Talim is also disciplining the female Tablighi with the notion of men's authority over women. Women's duties in *Talim* such as reading Tablighi books, consulting six points and doing *Tashkheel* are guided by male leaders of TJ. The male leaders of local mosque do consultation (*mashwara*) and decide the duty of female Tablighi. They write the names on a list and deliver it to the man, head of the household. He delivers the list to his wife. The women perform the duties according to the list. The female Tablighis devoutly follow it, to obey the Tablighi ideology of male's guidance over female activities. Many female Tablighis say that they should work following the male's *mashwara* rather than following their own decision. It is not like that they don't have confidence to their own capability to arrange *Talim* but they think it as scriptural rule that women should work under male's guidance. There is some exceptional view also among the female Tablighis that I will discuss in other chapters.

5.2 *Bayan*

Bayan means religious speech, an essential part of TJ to teach Islamic learning. Bayan is an important source of learning Islamic lessons in TJ. Tablighi men and women both are enjoined to take part in *Bayan* for a better understanding of Islam. According to Tablighi rules, the learned, experienced male Tablighi leaders provide Bayan among the menfolk and also womenfolk. Women may provide speech among the womenfolk only. During my fieldwork, I attended several *Bayan* in Kakrail Mosque, in weekly *Talim* at Dhaka and at Rajshahi and in *Dawa* tour. Often, *Bayan* starts after the afternoon prayer and it continues one or one and half -hours. Before the evening prayer Bayan ends so that the female Tablighi go back home safely. Like other activities of TJ, in *Bayan* also, seclusion is the prime importance. The men and women attend in *Bayan* from separate rooms. *Bayan* is delivered to women's gathering by using a microphone.

This particular style of male and female separation in *Bayan*, reinforces the gender segregation in society. But among the female Tablighi it is considered as a style of Prophet. One female Tablighi of weekly *Talim* in Dhaka says,

> In the early days of Islam, prophet used to teach Islamic lessons to the women from behind a curtain. Who is giving the speech is not important to us but what he is saying is important.

Bayan holds special meaning among the female Tablighis. I observed that not only the regular members join in *Bayan* rather the women from far away participate in it, which they think it is a rare chance to learn Islamic lesson from the experienced Tablighi Persons. I observed that the participant's rates have increased in Bayan rather than in the regular *Talim*. In weekly *Talim* session, usually 20-30 women participate from neighborhood areas but in *Bayan*, often 60-70 women participate. The head of weekly *Talim* gives the date of *Bayan* in regular reading sessions. She informs the message to her kin and religious network who are not the regular members of her reading session. Therefore, the participant rate has increased in *Bayan*. Here, increasing participant rate is not the aim of female Tablighi, they believe that through their

Photograph-3:Tablighi man preaching bayan to women followers who gather in a separate room, Photo taken Nov 10, 2012 at Kakrail Mosque

participation in *Bayan* their Islamic faith will strengthen and they will be more conscious about their religious practices. The female Tablighis always take take note of *Bayan s*o that they recall it later. One of the core content of Bayan is the Six Points of TJ. The speakers discuss the Six Points in the light of Quranic verses and Hadith, and explain the merit and demerits of obligatory religious practices and the value of

doing Tabligh. The stories of the Prophet and his companions provide guidance on how to achieve a close relationship with Allah.

A *Bayan* provided by a male Tablighi leader is given in below:

Respected sisters,

Today we gather here only to please Allah. The great creator, Allah has created us human beings as the most important creation amongst all His creatures. He has given us intelligence to examine everything in the world. As His best creation, human being should express their full belief in Allah. We need to improve our faith to Allah and his prophet Muhammad. The fundamental objective of faith is to bring faith about *Akherat* , conviction of the hereafter. In order to obtain success in *Akherat*, the basic goal is that of doing righteous action to please Allah. We have to ponder the question of how we can best please Allah. The only way to come Allah is to follow the path of Prophet Muhammad. If the believers follow the Prophet Muhammad exactly they will become rewarded in this world and in other world.

Dear sisters,

Allah is the owner of our lives and wealth. Allah blesses us for spending money to establish *deen*(religion)*,* for doing hajj and for doing *Sadakah*,(religious endowment) for helping the poor and widows and for the family. If we spend money in the path of Allah, it will accumulate reward for future in *akherat*. We should spend our live, wealth and time in the path of *deen* to please Allah. We should remember that Allah selected us for sacrificing ourselves to the path of Islam. Prophet Muhammad and his companions sacrificed their lives for Islam. In the same way, we should sacrifice ourselves for Islam. In return for the sacrifice of our lives, Allah will reward us in the Day of Judgment.

Dear sisters,

We forget the stories about prophet and his family regarding their sufferings and hard works for establishing Islam. The prophet and his family members who will be king and queen in Paradise but they suffered a lot in the path of establishing Islam. Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, was hungry for three days and she was so tired she could not even walk. At that moment, the Prophet out to her and told her ''be patient, Paradise is waiting for you''. He had nothing to say more than that. They lived a terrible life. One day. Fatima made a piece of bread and gave it to her father. The Prophet asked, what was that. Fatima replied that she made bread but she could not eat it without giving some to her father. Prophet told her that he was eating the piece of bread after three days. It was in this kind of way that the Prophet and his family members suffered day after day for *deen* (Islam)

Respected sisters,

Think what we are doing now. We are concerned for earning material success in this world, which is temporary and has no value in *akherat.* We spend our lives, wealth, time and intelligence for the passing pleasures of this world and ignore the real and permanent world of Allah. But, in the Day of Judgment, Allah will ask all people three questions: how did you earn money and how did you spend it? How did you live your lives, what *ilm did* you learn, and how did you apply it?

Dear sisters,

Allah has created men and women for doing different tasks in the world. Both men and women both are enjoined to perform the Tablighi works for increasing Islamic faith among the people. Already women are doing works and Masturat Jamaat is coming from different countries. Sisters, who are present in this *mahfil* (gathering),

Alhamdulliah, make it your intention to sacrifice yourselves to the precepts of Tablighi works. Prepare your family and encourage them to become fully active in Tablighi missionary activities.

Respected sisters

We do promise to take part in Tablighi works. We do the *Tashkheel* and prepare our male relatives for going out a Jamaat tour. When the *mahrem* man returns home then woman should join with man for going out Masturat Jamaat tour. In such a way, Tablighi activities will spread. Men and women will perform obligatory rituals of prayer at home and will do *dua* (supplication), for the whole world, as much as we can. (This *Bayan* is provided by a male Tablighi in a *Talim* of *Dawa* tour in Rajshahi on December, 27.2012)

After the *Bayan*, the male leader started to do *munazat* (supplicatory prayer). He called on all participants to attend in this event. All women raise their hands as offering them to Allah. The male leader continues the *dua* for 4-5 minutes and then women start to shake hand with one-another. According to one female Tablighi, it is Tablighi custom to do handshakes, which means solidarity among the Tablighi participants. Then one female Tablighi of Masturat Jamaat started to do *Tashkheel* (invite people to give their name for going to *Dawa* tour) among the womenfolk, who participated in the gathering from the neighbourhood. She politely invited them to give their names for joining in missionary tour of TJ. She told of her earlier experiences and said that at the beginning of their journey in *Dawa* tour they used to pledge to Allah for making a new group and truthfully speaking Allah has made their

intention successful. They had become able to make a new group in their earlier tours. Some women from the gathering gave their names and wished to join in Masturat Jamaat in the future. Therefore, *Bayan* works as a source of increasing Islamic knowledge as well as inspiring the female Tablighi. Women are indoctrinated in traditional gender norms of seclusion between men and women.

5.3. Missionary Tour and Kakrail Mosque Activities

As mentioned earlier, TJ arranges different *Dawa* tours for 3 days, 10 days, 15 days, 40 days and for one year. The women's Jamaat, which is known as Masturat Jamaat, formed by male and females visit the local and neighbouring places for 3 days.

Photograph-4: Visiting Room for male partner at Kakrail Mosque, Photograph taken Nov 10, 2012

The Jamaat for 10/15 days or for 40 days visit the Kakrail Mosque, the headquarter of TJ in Bangladesh. The female Jamaat that come from foreign countries to Bangladesh stay in the Kakrail Mosque (the headquarter of TJ in Bangladesh) and then go out on a *Dawa* tour in the local areas. In following part, I will discuss the religious practices of female Tablighi in Kakrail Mosque and on a local *Dawa* tour.

195

TJ arranges a separate section for women in the mosque. Like men, the women Tablighi stay in Kakrail Mosque and take part in performing activities. At the beginning of my study, I visited Kakrail Mosque. It is divided into two separate buildings, one is used for hosting men and other for women. Seclusion between men and women is an important part for MJ. Female Tablighis cover their full body and face in a black *burqa* even their hand and feet are also covered by black gloves. When the Masturat Jamaat groups arrive in Kakrail Mosque, the men and women become separated. Men stay in the male's section and women stay in the female's section. In front of the women's building, there are some rooms covered by black curtains that are used as visiting rooms. The visiting rooms are numbered 1, 2, 3 such as. The female traveler uses these rooms to meet their male visitors. When a male guest come to visit his female member, his name and room number are announced by microphone. According to the announcement of the room number, the female comes into specific place to meet her male relative. So that they do not face any trouble, they stay inside and keep themselves busy performing religious rituals.

When I entered into the women's part in Kakrail Mosque, I observed that more than hundred one women were staying inside one room and most of them were practicing religious duties. The room like a large hall, I saw that some women were performing *Talim*, or praying, or doing *Zikr*. Some are moving around to look after the participants. Some women are seen to be preparing them for prayer. The women are talking with each other very slowly so that other's attentions to prayers, etc. are not disturbed. Since the women come into the mosque with a group of

Masturat Jamaat, they maintain their activities among the member of their own group. Inside the hall room, one group belongs to one particular place where they stay at night. Several groups of women from different places stay in the same room. The total scenarios reveal the Tablighi women's primary attention in *Dawa* tour is to engage them fully in religious practices. Minah, one female Tablighi informs me, unless you participate in Masturat Jamaat you cannot understand the learning obtained in the Kakrail Mosque.'' Another woman said, "we are free in *Dawa* tour, and completely submerge in religious performing which are not possible at home.'' The women who do not get enough time at home for religious purpose, *Dawa* tour give them proper opportunity to use full attention only for religion.

The total environment of Kakrail Mosque provides an Islamic environment to the female Tablighis which embraces a simple lifestyle for Muslims. There is no arrangement of a cot; women usually make their own bed on the floor by using whatever they have brought with them. Usually everybody brings their necessary stuffs; such as a bed, pillow, plate, glass etc. and normal daily living materials. They do not disturb anybody. Most of the women are engaged in religious actions. Food is provided from the male's section. Although, women sometimes start to gossip but it is mostly about the religious matters, which are the main subject of conversation. There are some female Tablighi, known as *khadimah,* who are responsible for taking care and guiding the participants in the room. The caretaker women serve meal and clean the room. The caretaker women's (who stay in female's part), male relatives are responsible for taking care the Tablighi members in male's part of the Kakrail

197

Mosque. Communication between men and women's part are done through these caretaker men and women in both sections. For example, at the time of providing *Bayan* from male's part, one caretaker man would send a message by phone to his wife who is a caretaker in women's section. During my visit in the Kakrail, I talked with some caretaker women who expressed their pleasure at performing this service. They voluntarily serve in the Kakrail Mosque and they are not paid. They believe in taking care of Tablighi people and spending their time and efforts as in TJ will secure God's reward for them in hereafter. One devoted woman said, "I came here for one month and I am very happy to do this work''. It shows that there is a pure intention among the devoted Tablighis to please Allah through serving for other people.

Women in the Kakrail Mosque take part in *Bayan* (Islamic preaching) which is given by experienced and learned male preachers. The male *ulama* provide *Bayan* from the men's section of the mosque, which is conveyed, to the womenfolk by using a microphone. After the evening prayer, *Bayan* is provided by the male leaders and it was continued until the night prayer. Women are seen to listening the speech very carefully and there was no noise, although more than one hundred women are in attendance. Most of the women were busy to taking notes of the sermon. The focus of the sermon was how one can earn reward and punishment for his/her good/ bad deeds, pointing out the examples of good deeds and sacrifices of the Prophet and his companions for Islam. I observed that the women showed their emotions when hearing about the sufferings of the Prophet and his companions for preaching Islam during the early period of Islam, even some women were crying when they heard this.

The preacher talked about the ignorance of people in the ways of Allah and the probable punishment in the afterworld and the women expressed their guilty of having wrong actions which showed a fear of God. Such particular feelings may increase their faith and may influence to decide their proper path for increasing religiosity. Anyway, after finishing the speech they get few time to talk each- other because it was the time for night prayer. After night prayer, food is served. After night prayer, it was suggested them to sleep early so that they could wake up right time for observing the midnight prayer (*Tahajjud prayer*).

Every day after the Morning Prayer, *hedeyah Bayan* (essential rules and etiquettes for making *Dawa* tour successful) is provided for the participants of the outgoing Jamaat. In this speech, the participants of Jamaat groups are given lessons about the rules and guidance for making a *Dawa* tour successful. The experienced and old male Tablighi persons are used to provide this speech. After providing the *hedayah bayan*, the women go out for travelling in *Dawa* tour.

5.4 Local *Dawa* tour

As mentioned earlier that I attended a *Dawa* tour group of Masturat Jamaat from early morning untill night prayer, because of the limitation of *mahrem* male relatives in joining the tour. Women join in *Dawa* tour accompanied with male relatives. The female Tablighi suggested me to inform and prepare my male relatives for *Dawa* tour so that I can join in Masturat Jamaat in the future. One female Tablighi said that the *Dawa* activities should be done correctly because they believe that in order to set up

Islam if Islamic rule is violated, the true Islam cannot be established. TJ women believe that they should be the role model of Muslim women to the rest of the society. Therefore, observing Tablighi principles are considered by them as the best way of being a true Muslim. The rule of *mahrem* does not mean as male dependence to the female Tablighi but a principle of Islam that should be observed by every woman. However, Tablighi women are accustomed with the Tablighi rule of *mahrem* male for showing their respect to TJ rule.

Anyway, I joined a Masturat Jamaat group in Rajshahi and it was an opportunity for me to observe the day- long activities of the female Tablighi. The groups were consisted by five pairs among them five were women and five were men. They visited in Rajshahi from the neighborhood Thana[3], in Baghmara. This Masturat Jamaat group was formed in Baghmara and then it was sent to Rajshahi. When the Jamaat group reached in its destination, men and women were separated. The men stayed in nearby mosque, while the women stayed in a house of a local Tablighi. There are special arrangements to host Masturat Jamaat in this house. The women of house explain that she hosts local and foreign Jamaat in her house and there is one room with inside toilet in this house that is specially arranged to host Masturat Jamaat. As, it is the rule of TJ, that the house will be will be arranged in such a way that it assures complete seclusion for the women from the men. Therefore, all men must leave the house. The house owner (man) left his house for three days and stayed at

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[3] Thana is the smallest administrative unit of Bangladesh. One district is consisted by several thana. Baghmara thana is 36 km far from Rajshahi district.

mosque with the male members of Jamaat group. Among the five women, one is 55 years old woman and other three are 40, 36, 23 and 21 years old. All are married and take part in Jamaat with their husbands. Among the five women, the eldest woman has a primary educated, two have had a higher secondary education and other two are studying in college. Among them, two have the previous experience of joining in Masturat Jamaat and other three were new in MJ. Masturat Jamaat is formed by old and new members so that the old can guide the new.

Their daily religious activities were started by observing an additional prayer. It is a rule of TJ that Tablighis will perform *nafl* prayer of two *rakah* (two unit of prayer) when they reach their destination. When the women arrived at the house, it was 11.am, the time for preparing lunch. The group divided in two parts; two women helped the host in cooking. Another three women engaged them to doing *Talim*. It was the Tablighi rule that the participants will bear all the cost of tours themselves, they may accept an invitation from the host but it is better to make all arrangements about the food themselves. According to Tablighi beliefs, personal faith will be enriched through TJ, when the individual will spend his time, wealth and physical effort in Tablighi *Dawa*. One female Tablighi told the Jamaat tour that it is the best way for practical training and for making a person perfect. It teaches people how he/she can spend less time in worldly affairs and can give more time for performing religious duties. They followed a daily routine (refer to table-5.1)[4], which is provided

[4] According to Tablighi rule, during the Jamaat tour, all decision will be taken by *mashwara* and women should obey it. One *ameer* is selected in the group, who is responsible to take- care the

201

by the male group. Always the women of Masturat Jamaat are seen to follow the general routine and obeying the *ameer's* decision. To the female Tablighi, the idea of obeying *ameer* is mandatory for all the members of the group. One female Tablighi mentions that in the early days of Islam while the Prophet Muhammad used to do *Hizrat* (going out for Islamic preaching) he was the leader of a whole group of male and female members. The female members of the Prophet's group strictly obeyed his decisions. Therefore, to the female Tablighi, theTJ rule of obeying the man *ameer* of Masturat Jamaat group means following the righteous action, observed in the Prophet's life.

5.5. **Practices of Islamic Etiquettes in *Dawa* Tour**

In addition to observing commanded religious practices, TJ ideology for individual reform of a man and woman involves them in acting out in their lives the religious requirements preached by the Prophet Muhammad. The standards for righteous actions and the correct way of living has been shown by strict adherence to the way

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whole group including women's one. Women's daily routine works are decided in male *mashwara* and are listed in a paper. Later the list is provided to the women's group. Women are enjoined to follow the list. A list of this Jamaat group including their routine works is enclosed in next page. This list is produced in Rahmatbagh jame mosque. Since Dawa tour is coordinated by local mosque so the Dawa tour what I describe here is led by the mosque.

the Prophet himself lived even to such simple acts of eating and sleeping and others

daily matters.

Table 5.1. The list of daily activities of female Tablighis in *Dawa* tour

Serial No.	Activities	Name	Time From	Till
1	Helper:	Wife of Abdul Kayum and wife of Md. Jamirul	dawn	night
2	*Talim:* Morning (purpose of Talim, etiquette, reward)	Wife of Abdur Rahman	11:10	11:30
3	Remembering Six points	Wife of Abdul Kayum	11:30	12:00
4	Preparation for noon prayer	All members		
5	Lunch	All members		
6	Estekbal (inviting people)	Mrs.Yunus and Mrs. Md Jamirul		
7	Noon *Talim* (Reading Muntakhab Hadith)	Mrs.Aabdur Rahman	2:30	3:00
8	*Bayan* done by man		3:00	4:00
9	*Taskheel*	All	3:50	4:10
10	Afternoon prayer	All		
11	Invite the local people	All	4:30	5:25
12	Sunrise prayer	All	5:25	5:40
13	Learning Islamic etiquettes, patience, remembering zikr, discussion about the performing of women in early Islam	Mrs Abdur Rahman	5:40	6:45
14	Night prayer	All	6:45	7:10
15	Remembering six points and reading the dawa performance of the Prophet and his companions	By turn everyone will tell	7:10	8:00
16	Dinner	All	8:00	9:00
17	Mid night prayer	All	4:45	
18	Morning prayer	All	5:00	5:30
19	Remembering six points	All	6:00	6:30
20	Prayer		6:30	7:00
21	Reciting Quranic verses		7:30	10:00
22	At the last day house cleaning			

Source: Written materials of Masturat Jamaat, collected from the visiting Jamaat at the of Mosque: Rahmatbag -Jame Mosque, Rajshahi, three day Jamaat tour, the tour continues from 1st December, 2012 to 3rd December, 2012.

Muslima, one female Tablighi says, 'it is impractical to be praying all day long, but we can keep in touch with Allah by following some simple tips. For example, if we start any work by saying *Bismillah* (start in the name of Allah) then Allah will be with us until the work is continued.'' Learning Islamic manners and etiquettes are important for the female Tablighi to develop their Islamic virtue. It is the regular practice in *Dawa* tour that one woman will read the etiquettes of eating a meal whilst we are actually doing so, that helps us to practice and memorize the instructions. These rules are explained in a Tablighi book written by the Tablighi leader, Mawlana Ashiq Elahi Bulandshahari (2000). This is where we find the rule that the woman has just read out to us.

> 'Wash your hands before and after having the meal, begin your meals by saying 'Bismillah *wa 'alaa bara Katillah*, take meals with your right hands,….do not eat from the center, take your food with three fingers of the right hand,… do not object to the quality of the food… all of you should take food in a group and not separately…… (Bulanshahari, 2000, p. 931).

Through practicing Islamic manners and etiquettes, TJ women live Islam as a way of life. Obligatory and additional religious practices ensure women perform Islamic rituals in their daylong activities. Moreover during their stay in *Dawa* tour, I observe that two or three female Tablighi ate from the same plate. They believe that the practice of eating from the same plate makes a close relationship amongst Muslims. It removes their inner pride so they will embrace the Islamic principle that

all human being are equal before God. This practice might be seen as a way of increasing morality and sisterhood among the Muslim women.

Therefore, *Dawa* tour works as a training center for the female Tablighi to teach how to pass their daily lives completely in an Islamic way. In *Dawa* tour, repetition of certain actions such as daily prayers, *zikr*, Quran teaching and reading Tablighi books, additional prayers (*nafl* prayer) and *dua* (supplicatory prayer) create virtues among the female Tablighi. Tablighi informal lessons regarding how to eat or sleep in a correct way, how to behave with others, all are disciplining the female body and mind to do actions and behaving in Islamic way. Conduct of good behaviours shows modesty as well as women's piousness. Moreover, the practice of veiling and seclusion embody pious selfhood by controlling the female body and movement. Thus, the entire mechanism of piety formation process of *Dawa* tour embodies religious virtue of a piety, while it also reinforces traditional gender norms among the female Tablighi.

5.6 Piety and Stories of Veiling

To the female Tablighi to whom I did my fieldwork with, piety entails the practice of veiling and seclusion from the male as a primary requirement of Islam. To the female Tablighi, veiling practice is perceived as a righteous action for preventing them from religious disorder (*fitna*). They believe that veiling is not only a means of covering a woman's body but also a way of putting a distance between men and women. As one female Tablighi says, according to the Quranic lessons, when one man and woman

meet in a place, *shaitan* (evil) becomes active to influence doing into wrong acts so they should wear veil to stop this from taking place. One female Tablighi says, '' in Islam women are told to use veil so as to make them separate from the male and at the same time men are encouraged to accept this rule so as to protect their eyes from observing unknown women''. So the female Tablighi understand both men and women should respect on rules of veiling.

Modification of religious beliefs and modification of behaviors go hand in hand. All of the female Tablighi whom I met during the fieldwork of this study, used *burqa*, they think it is equally important as other obligatory practices such as prayer. Most of the women said that they realized the significance of using the burqa by their further knowledge of TJ although previously some had only used a veil. However, their sense of using veil developed overtime. Aliya, a female Tablighi says, 'I started to use a long scarf on my head but shortly after I realized it was useless without covering face. I started to wear a *burqa*.'' To the female Tablighi, decision of wearing a veil comes gradually. They found that wearing Islamic styles clothes was big change in their lives. At first they felt shy to wear veil. Another female Tablighi said "I was a teacher and I had to go to outside and work with my colleagues, so I hesitated to start to wearing *burqa*. But also without covering my body, I felt uncomfortable and guilty. One day, I wore burqa and went to school. My colleagues laughed at me when they saw me but I felt relieved because I was wearing the appropriate form of dress, which showed me to be a Muslim. Now, I never think to go out without wearing *burqa*.'' My inner struggles are completely satisfied, knowing

206

that it is a requirement of Islam, so I am not bothered about other people's views on the subject.

But not only inner struggles, in some cases, there are other women having conflict with their family members about whether or not one should wear veil. Many Tablighi women are seen to reject their husband's wishes and instead implement their desire to please Allah. By wearing a *burqa* they resist the authoritative voice of the chief family members. As Naher, one female Tablighi said,

My husband did not like the style of Islamic clothing that I used to cover myself. My husband used to take me to friend's house, party, and also to the market. But when I began to understand the Islamic faith, I started to feel uncomfortable in front of unknown males. I realized that as a Muslim woman I should cover my body in correct way. One day, I took the brave decision to attend in a wedding party by covering myself with a *burqa*.

While many women told wearing a veil is entirely their own choice for pleasing Allah but I found many women who joined in TJ used the veil to please their male relatives in the family. Tamanna, a female Tablighi told me, " I started to use *burqa* after my marriage to a Tablighi man.'' In this sense, adopting veil was pressure for them, which was also a good way to please husband. However, apart from that what I have just said the knowledge gained in becoming a Tablighi encourages them in their daily lives that their main intention is to always please Allah.

Tamanna told me later '' Now, I feel naked if I am not wearing a *burqa* ''. The pressure to and knowledge of veiling gradually becomes a sense of religious devotion.

Social demonstrations particularly against violence to women are seen as being supportive of female Tablighis to encourage them in their decision to wear the *burqa* as a righteous action in today's world and world thereafter. The female Tablighi who finds herself in ambiguous position about wearing *burqa* soon finds out that it is the correct way of being supportive of Islam and therefore it requires the use of Islamic style clothing which is only logical. Hena told me, I did not like wearing a *burqa*, although my family insisted me several times that I do so because they were worried about my physical security. Later, I realized that there was no example of a covered woman becoming a victim of violence.'' To women wearing the *burqa* gives them security against violence. They criticized the men's brutality and at the same time, expressed apprehension about the social system in Bangladesh. She told me that when a woman becomes a victim of physical violence, she cannot get any social justice, the system tends to blame the victim of physical violence. When a woman becomes a victim of physical violence, her whole family members suffer with her. Victim woman hardly get fair justice in Bangladeshi society. Women's attitudes therefore to all this violence against them influence their thinking and convinces them that the best way to become safe is to adhere to the customs of Islam so as to guide them in their daily lives. Daily experiences of social insecurity convince them that TJ's doctrine of seclusion is the best method to protect them and it also embodies piety which is not only for this world but also in the next.

When the women adopt the custom of veiling, they limit their movement in public. Most of the female Tablighis believe that home is the proper place for them. They never go outside without their male relatives. Many are very selective to express them in front of male. Many female Tablighis inform that they never meet with an unknown male. One female Tablighi told me, "after starting to wear *burqa*, I did not go outside without male relative because veiling does not only mean to cover my body, I have to concern over my voice. If any man hear my voice it is my sin." Most of the female Tablighi believe that they have to be secluded properly from the male. Tablighi lessons make sense to a woman about her body and its purity through using the veil. Not wearing a veil is constituted to be a sin. In order to prevent women from committing a sin the women must always be consciously aware to keep themselves away from unrelated man. A sense of piety engenders a restoration of conservative attitudes, giving the mind true intention for disciplining the body so as to keep it in line with the teaching of Islam. However, in practice, most the women Tablighis say it is very hard to observe the rules properly even though they try to follow as much as they can. Many Tablighis are seen to say that they cannot properly practice the rules of veiling like the women of the early Islam who are thought of as being 'ideal Muslim women'. This practice of wearing veil shows the commitment by a female Tablighi and shows her awareness of being a true Muslim.

As I have already said the Tablighi women's decision are reinforced by their experiences in society. However, there are differences for them in performing their traditional religious practices compared to other women. The Tablighi women

become concerned about their obligatory duties about veiling, while they cannot avoid them from their materialistic lives. As we observed that social insecurity strengthens the idea of veiling and at the same time, allows the modern women's ability to become more mobile in a local context. Wearing the veil ensures them the convenience of being able to socialize and does not confine them to seclusion of the home. Therefore, women use religious knowledge to reinterpret Islamic rules of veiling and seclusion in their daily lives according to their needs and experiences. One female Tablighi Rahima told,

> From childhood I was acquainted with TJ activities. I joined in *Talim* with my mother when I was 13 years old and afterward married; I joined in several *Dawa* tours with my husband. I know the rules of veiling but I have to go out to carry my livelihood. I am the only earning member of my family. I teach the children the Arabic language. When I go outside I use a *burqa*. I believe, Allah will pardon me for going outside as it is necessary to earn my livelihood.

In some extent, a better understanding of religious knowledge teaches the female Tablighi how to overcome a situation when women's boundary in Islam is about to be compromised with the daily events of their material lives. She has said '' if I stay at home and use a veil, who will feed me? Although I believe Allah is almighty and arranges food for us (*rigiker malik Allah)*. Nevertheless*,* I have to try by myself. Then He will provide it for me'. She believes that Allah has no favorites either male or female until they try to earn themselves a living. Women's better

understanding of Islamic knowledge brings the practice of piety into the domain of common sense, according to their daily needs. Like, Rahima, many young female Tablighis who study in university use the rule of seclusion according to their needs. Mila, a female Tablighi, student of a public University, told that general education did not provide Islamic lessons correctly and for getting a good understanding of Islam she had joined in regular *Talim*. She never used *burqa* before she joined in *Talim* but now wears regular style as worn by all Muslim women. But she cannot follow the rules of seclusion from male, prescribed by TJ doctrine. Mila says, "I regularly wear *burqa* when I go to class, market or any other places. I am concerned about covering my body; I consider it to be my duty. So I believe that veiled women can do any kind of work in out of home. After my graduation, I want to join in a profession in which I can wear *burqa* constantly.'' Although, Mila wished to develop her career in public service, most of the female Tablighi want to engage them in domestic sphere as well as in religious sphere. Many of them talked about the competition in the job markets. They also noticed the 'bad environment' at working place and in the path of going to workplace. In such a situation, the female Tablighi want to remain pious, staying at home and wearing the veil in seclusion. So the Tablighi women's response to veiling and seclusion is to accept it as part of training of piousness which leads to moral understanding in how to behave in society and the local culture as laid out in the Islamic lessons of TJ.

5.4 Remaking Self: Three Case Studies

Case-1: Beli

Beli is a 55 years old woman. She lives in Dhaka with her family. She worked as a teacher in a high school and her husband was a government employee. Recently, both of them fully engaged in TJ. Beli became involved with TJ when she was 36 years old and her husband joined in TJ 5 years ago. Since she was the first member of her family to join in TJ, she had to struggle hard to remake herself into a more pious woman against her husband's choice. I was interested to know how she became motivated to join in TJ. Beli recalled the story of her attachment in TJ,

> One of my neighbors often invited me to join at weekly *Talim* for womenfolk, but it was very difficult for me to arrange time. It was not that I had less interest in religious meeting, but the busy schedule of my daily life did not allow me time to participate. Anyway, one day I did take part with her in *Talim*. Ayesa apa (a woman Tablighi who arranged *Talim* at her home) gave speech to the female members gathered together in her home. She told us that people in the world spend most of time trying to make money, to increase their wealth, to build their personal careers so as to give themselves peace and happiness in the world. But just think, does this kind of mentality really make people happy? The answer is no because people are always wanting more. We want to be in a better position than we are right now; this is why people never feel happy. But think about death cannot be avoided by anyone, after which you will be buried in grave. Nothing such as your money, wealth and

positions will go with you in grave. Only the good deeds that you did will remain in Allah's sight. If you intend to please Allah, it will prevent you from doing any wrong deeds in the world. The belief in God will prevent you from telling lies and limit your greediness and protect you to doing actions that create uncertainty and instability in your lives. Therefore, faith in God reduces uncertainly and protects your personal and social lives otherwise a person is lead into unhappiness despair and depression. Thus, the only way to ensure reward both in this world and in the hereafter is embedded in increasing Islamic faith. We should follow the easy way and prepare us for this world and the next world.

The talk enabled Beli to have a better understanding of life and she determined to put into practice what she had learned in her own personal life. I observed that the appeal of TJ was that it was a distinctive ideology of a religion that encompassed this world and the next. TJ shows that the material world is very short for human life. Her feelings of depression due to this mundane world encouraged her to pursue a religion that gave hope, a hope of peace and enjoyment only obtained by submitting in everything to Allah. There is a significance connection between her feelings of depression in worldly affairs and motivation to TJ. By practicing TJ she was able to share her feelings with Allah which gave her some comfort. She shared her feelings,

I had to bear a terrible life both at home and in the workplace. I had to carry out family responsibilities as well as my official works, which I found to be very difficult. My husband became very angry as I had to prepare everything for our daily use and meal always had to be ready on time. I had to take care of two children at home as well. Because of my home responsibilities, I could not give enough attention to my workplace. Sometimes I could not compete with my male colleagues at my workplace and I became ashamed. The whole situation caused me to have feelings of depression. There was a situation one day when our six years old daughter became lost. Although we found her the event raised difficulties in our family life. Despite giving as much time as possible to family life my husband blamed me but I was unable to quit my job because I feared that the economic crisis might even affect our family problem more. It was the only way for me to submit myself properly to Allah. I began to call on Allah in prayer. Going to *Talim* give me relief from all worldly anxieties. My husband strictly forbade me to take part in *Talim* but I could not obey his order.

Therefore, the appeal of TJ to a woman is because it motivates them to a religious life and enhances their experiences of living their daily lives providing them with spiritual guidance. This woman then became a regular participant in *Talim* to increase religious knowledge. Although at the beginning she mentioned that she had very few leisure time in her daily lives but she stated that later she managed to find

time especially for *Talim*, which was more important for her than doing any daily work.

Beli's participation in *Talim* started a new journey in her life, which was full of inward struggle and outward struggle. As we see that TJ prescribes women to join in TJ by covering her full body in black colored *burqa*. Since Beli worked in public service, she felt ashamed at having to wear a *burqa* but eventually she became accustomed to do so as this was the dress code for women in Islam. Besides inner struggle, she had to observe outer struggle at her home. Her relatives, even her mother did not like her conformity to veiling. Her husband was also against her wish to use the *burqa*. But, she had a firm belief and great faith that helped her using own choice as to whether to wear the *burqa* or not irreguardless of her husband's wishes. Therefore, conversion to the state of becoming a religious or being female Tablighi created within her a strong desire to practice the Islamic rituals as a guide to good conduct and behavior according to the laws of Islam, the correct way to make her a pious Muslim. As Beli states "I cannot even think to go out without a *burqa* even, when I am at home I cover my body and head with big *orna* (female dress) because Allah observes me all the time.'' Through covering her body, Beli is maintaining a continuous relationship with God.

Beli's conversion does not only encourage her to remake herself rather it promotes her concern for other people, who are, according to her, are still far away from the Islamic practice. First, of all she intends to influence her husband, and close

family relatives. She believes that inviting people to increase Islamic faith and providing message of Islam is her duty. However, she realizes she cannot force anyone to comply, until a man or woman has a religious experience within herself before they commit themselves to the practices of Islam. Beli also knows that she must teach Islam in such a way, so that it does not irritate the prospective believer to do so would create another sin in the eyes of Allah. The *dayee* (responsible for providing *Dawa*) will provide Islamic lessons according to listener's comprehension; modes, context and environment. For example, she mentions that when her family members express unhappiness in their daily lives she tries to console them through religious lessons. She is extremely happy to say that now all her family members are followers of TJ.

Her mastery in Islamic knowledge gives her the position as a religious master among her family and kin. She also intends to influence women in her neighborhood. But, here there are problem with TJ's structural rules. For instance, seeing that Beli's husband is a new member in TJ, still now she has not yet received permission to arrange *Talim* for women at her home. But true intention encourages her to arrange *Talim* alternatively. She arranges a *Talim* at a neighbor's house where women from the local neighborhood join in. Although, those taking part amounts no more than ten she feels happy that at least she has become capable to influence ten more members. By her own methods and arrangement, she has motivated these ten women to become regular member of *Talim*. As we have seen, TJ prescribes the female Tablighi to carry out any single action by following the male *mashwara* (TJ's men leader's

consultation). Beli's effort is a violation of the official rule of TJ. Belis realizes this quite well and is worried about male Tablighi becoming informed about it. Despite of feeling anxiety, she has confidence that she is not doing any wrong. Her true intention is to bring the women into the ways of Islam.

Case 2: Naher

Naher, is a 56 years old woman lived in Mirpur, Dhaka. She has had a general education and is a housewife. Her husband worked as a company employer but now is retired person. They lived in their own house in Dhaka. Naher and her husband kept themselves busy in Tablighi works, which is the true path for being close to Allah. Although, all of her family members are now active in TJ, at the beginning, Naher had to work hard to motivate her family members. Naher explains her story on joining in TJ.

> I was passing through a very terrible situation in my life. My youngest daughter started to circum to a severe brain disease and we took her too many specialist hospitals but doctors told that the situation was not good and she was in a critical condition. We were all in a state of shock. At that time, one of my neighbours who were a member of TJ came to my house. She cheered me up by her knowledge of Islam, spoke in such a way as to remove our fear, and told us to put our faith in the Almighty. She told me that praying about the situation to Allah was the best, as He knows everything. Before she left my house, she had invited me to join in *Talim*. Her advice was nothing new to me,

217

for I had already submitted myself to Allah and was now calling upon Him. I would think in such a situation, all the mothers in the world would have done the same thing when there is no hope only God can help. It was an absolute miracle to me that Allah intervened and saved my daughter. I experienced a new awakening in my life that Allah is the Almighty; He has the power to arrange everything in our lives. I became greatly inspired to know more about Allah and to know the best ways to make myself more subject to his will. I became a regular member of *Talim*.

Naher's story shows that she was well informed with good advice about TJ and *Talim* from her neighbors. She discovered through a social experience that God's power is completely beyond men's medical knowledge and capabilities. Men's capabilities are limited. Not so with God. Faith in God pleases Him and He will respond accordingly. This experience caused Naher to want to come closer to Allah and gain peace of mind. Having now strong religious beliefs about the way to approach Allah about the condition of her soul and body in her daily life she now kept herself busy in the performing of her daily prayers, reading the Quran and Tablighi books, *zikr, nafl* prayer, fasting and other religious matters. Naher kept herself away from unnecessary mobility in outside. She became concerned about her appearance to male visitors. She restricted herself to only accepting visitors of selective male relatives.

Like, Beli, conversion to being religious encourages her to motivate other members of her family. Naher's continuous efforts converted her husband to become a member of TJ. Naher states,

> After joining TJ, I always prayed to Allah to change my husband. I believed that if he could become converted then our daughters might change also. When they are at home, most of the time they are busy watching TV and listening music so I can hardly find a place to say my prayers attentively. Nevertheless, I have continuously tried to motivate them in the true path of Islam. One evening, I met with the *Imam* of our local mosque. I requested him to meet my husband and to give him religious advice.

Her continuous efforts of making a religious environment in the home have had some success. Her husband and daughters all became Tablighi members. It gives her great pleasure as she works as a religious master in her home. She found the capability to influence her husband. Now she joins regularly in Tablighi *Dawa* tours with her husband. She performed *Hajj* a few years ago. She established an Islamic environment in the home. She lives a very simple life. There are very few staffs, which are very much needed for living, are in her house. She arranges a weekly *Talim* at her home. She hosts the Masturat Jamaat group at her home.

Naher also felt some concern about the rural women of her hometown where female Tablighi activities have not yet been introduced and she tried to started *Talim* by her own efforts. Once in a month she visits her hometown and arranges a *Talim*

219

for the womenfolk. First, she tries to motivate some local women who will be responsible to conduct *Talim* regularly and once a month she gives speech among the womenfolk. The same think happens in the case of Beli, she also visits her hometown and arranges *Talim*. Beli, and Naher believe that if anyone visits any place but does not provide *Dawa*, the visit has been a waste of time. To them, both group meetings and talking are important places to provide *Dawa*. It is not guaranteed that everyone will follow your message but anyone among the gathering may be influenced by you. If nobody listens to you, go back again in the future and try again. It shows that the female Tablighi, Beli Naher have confidence and a true desire for promoting Islam among the womenfolk of the community.

Case 3: Asma

Asma is 49 years old woman. She lived in Rajshahi with her family. She born into a conservative religious family in which women's outside activities were restricted. She had to learn her basic education from her brothers and father. She learnt Arabic and the Urdu language. From childhood, she was familiar with Tablighi activities. Her father was an active Tablighi member. Now her brothers are the Tablighi leaders in Rajshahi. Asma married with a Tablighi man. While Naher and Beli motivated and joined TJ through women's neighbourhood networks, Asma joined TJ by family networks. Compared to Naher and Beli, she does not seem to have hard struggle for remaking herself pious female Tablighi. Her familial affiliation with TJ worked smoothly to reach into the womenfolk with *Dawa.* Her long experience in TJ activities increases her wish to become more active in Masturat Jamaat. She recalled

her attachment to Masturat Jamaat in 1982 when female Tablighi activities first began in Rajshahi. From the beginning, she worked with TJ members and travelled with *Dawa* tours in local areas. She also travelled many foreign countries with Masturat Jamaat groups.

Although Asma is a home-educated woman but she has excellent religious knowledge, which makes her a master among the womenfolk. She arranges weekly *Talim* at her home where almost all the participants are graduate in general education. Mostly modern university graduate women are the participants of her *Talim*. Asma's *Talim* session was one of my field areas of this study. During my fieldwork, I noticed that most of the time there were some female Tablighis at her house. The female Tablighi visited her to consult on several religious matters. Her religious expertise makes her master among the womenfolk of her neighborhood. Not only does she provide Tablighi *Dawa* among the female Tablighi, sometime she hosts their children when they are on a *Dawa* tour. She informs that she looks after the children of female Tablighis so that their mothers can take part in Jamaat tour.

From childhood, Asma more or less was confined to being at home but working with Tablighi women has given her a greater understanding of the outside world. Now her perceived responsibility is to do *Dawa* engaged outside of home. According to her,

> Providing *Dawa* to others is our obligatory duty, which has been given to us
> by the Prophet, and everyone should obey it. She used to visit the residential

hostels of Rajshahi University and provided speech among the female students.

Although, TJ does not allow women to do *Ghast* which is performed by a group of men and used in visiting door to door to invite people in true path of Islam as well as in TJ. Asma's idea of inviting people is similar to doing *Ghast* like her male counterparts in TJ. She is doing it alone in her own particular way but the purpose is exactly same which is to invite and introduce Islamic practice among womenfolk. She also believes that *Dawa* activities are not limited to woman and she can do it any place any time. She states,

 anyone can provide *Dawa* it at any time. If one beggar comes to your house, you can instruct her in *Dawa*. Usually in daily lives, we meet with relatives, friends and neighbours to whom we can invite. A few years ago, I was waiting in a room of the embassy of the Saudi Arabia in Dhaka where I had to wait for obtaining visa. I talked with a woman, who sat beside me. She lived in Saudi Arab. We talked with each other for around one and half-hours, I invited her to TJ. I collected her mobile number and communicated with her in Saudi Arab. She joined TJ during our stay in Saudi Arab and she became a host of Masturat Jamaat at her home.

Asma believes that through women's network they can reach to their male relatives so that women will motivate their men. In such a way, female's Tablighi are making efforts to increase Islamization in society. Although, Asma's religious

awareness drives her to be active in Islamization but she believes that women should do Tablighi activities under direction from a male and in consultation with men. She states,

> Men and women must do *Dawa* works according to principles of TJ. A woman should try to motivate her husband to join in TJ. Without being accompanied by a male, a woman should not venture outside even in *Dawa*. It could create unrest in the family.

In fact, Asma's conservative attitude concerning men having authority over women come from past stories which she has heard about women in early Islam and of present day in society. Asma, says the story of Ayesa (Prophet Muhammad's wife) to explain the importance of the rules for *mahrem* male in women's participation in *Dawa* tour. She says,

> In the early days of Islam, Ayesa usually accompanied with the Prophet, when he travelled for Islamic preaching. On one of his journey, some trouble occurred that caused discomfort between the Prophet and his wife. The prophet would travel with a group of followers, which continued for several days. Men used to travel on foot but for prophet's wife carrying cart was used. In one of their journeys, the group stopped in a place for rest. Ayesa was sitting in the cart, which was carried by some men. The men let the cart down and went a short distance for a break. Ayesa got out of the cart and was late to return in the cart. Unfortunately, the men who carried Ayesa, continued the

journey with the cart but it was empty. When Ayesa returned to the place, where the group had rested saw that everyone had left. In the group, there was one man who was responsible to see everything was in order and that nothing was left behind. He was the last man at the end of the group. When he found Ayesa alone in such a situation, he became worried. Anyway, he guided her carefully so that she could catch up with the Prophet. This event caused a storm of rumors that showed the Prophet in a bad light. Although He was a man of religion but this event created some ambiguities to him about his wife. Later, Allah solved this problem by providing Quranic verses for further instruction.

Her belief on past stories limits her movements of being alone, even in *Dawa* work. Moreover, the everyday experiences of violence against women in present society show examples to her that a female is in danger without a male's company. In case of Asma, though, her physical mobility is limited but virtually she reaches too many women. During my fieldwork, I observed that tele-communication is now being used to inform people about Tablighi activities. Asma mentioned that Laila, a woman who studied in Rajshahi University, was a regular member of her *Talim*. After her graduation, Liala left Rajshahi and went back to her home town. Female Tablighi activities had not been started in Laila's hometown, so Asma continuously guided her to start *Talim* and motivate women. Asma mentions that in such a way, she introduces *Talim* in various places across the country.

As mentioned earlier that Asma was involved in TJ through family networks and her brothers are leaders of TJ in Rajshahi. Family assistance helps her to be more active in TJ. She motivates women and invites them to join in her *Talim.* After getting some experience, Asma pushes them even more to make a new *Talim* in the local areas and when this happens, she sometime mediates with the local male leaders of TJ through her brothers. I talked with Jubaida, who is joining in Asma's *Talim* for three years and she is trying to make a new *Talim* at her home so as to spread female Tablighi activities in her local areas. In such way, Asma is working to spread female Tablighi activities through women's network.

Section 2: Discussion and Analysis

5.8 TJ and Cultivation of Piety

One of the central objectives of this chapter is to understand the question regarding how does TJ women's sense of being religious develope and how do they cultivate Islamic piety among themselves through disciplining process of reform activities of Tablighi movement. Through, the ethnographic description of Tablighi women's practices in *Talim, Bayan* and *Dawa,* I focus on how they respond to Tablighi reform ideology and methods by which TJ suggests individual's reform and makes a sense of conversion as being the best way to make a Tablighi woman pious.

The center of TJ's reformist ideology holds on personal reform, although it emphasizes on to convey message (*Dawa*) to others and calls Muslim to the path of Allah. But the primary focus of TJ is to reform one's own self. Every man and

woman will be accountable to Allah for his/ her own deeds. TJ emphasizes to strengthen one's own faith to reform one's actions. If a person becomes perfect Muslim, he or she will do every single action in the world according to Islamic laws. Thus, the core of TJ ideology is self-purification and self-improvement instead of transforming social institutions, social orders and society as a whole.

What techniques of self- formation are suggested in the reformist project of TJ? The key concept of TJ self-reform ideology is making a relationship between Allah and faithful. As we see the first principle of the six points of TJ holds the *Kalima* (faith) which requires people's complete submission to the will and command of Allah. TJ commands its followers to join in TJ to learn how to establish this unique relationship between Allah and faithful by following the Islamic rituals in their daily lives in the world. For understanding this unique relation, sociologist, Turner's (1974) analysis of between supernatural or invisible power and people is useful here. According to his sociological analysis, actor's personal world needs to embody the actor's understanding of his or her understanding of social world-external world. Based on actor's personal understanding of external or social world, the actor, he or she does their actions through which the relationship with the invisible power is expressed. It means that the relations between supernatural power and the faithful are socially related. This concept will be helpful for understanding the mechanism of TJ for making the relationship with God and the Tablighi followers. One of the main strategy of TJ's reformism is observing a distinction between *din and duniya* (this world/other world). According to TJ, *duniya* is conceptualized as an embodiment of

material things, which are consumed and enjoyed that are only temporary in their existence, but it does not mean that TJ denounce this world. Like, other religious movements, TJ also suggests this world is temporary and functions as a waiting room before our lives go on to an eternal journey. The world after death in the hereafter is eternal for which people must prepare. In this material world, in which we live, life is considered as a capital for investment for the reward and benefit to be enjoyed in the next world. Individual will be benefitted in next world by how much they have invested for Islam in this world. According to TJ perspective, individual should concentrate less on worldly pursuits and pay greater attention to the cause of Islam. It not only ensures better life in this world but also in other world. Thus, for the TJ followers, TJ portrays *duniya* (the world) as a place where people prepare them for the next world and they will engage to do righteous actions to please Allah and obtain a reward in the Day of Judgment.

By considering this world as temporary and remembering the universal truth, that everyone has to face death in any time, TJ makes a direct appeal to its follower's mind. Moreover, by admitting this world is in a degenerate condition in which human life is in a continuous problem, TJ provides an escape route for the believers showing them to get out of this unstable and dangerous world. As we have heard from the speech given by the preachers in *Talim* and *Bayan* they depict that the modern world is full of corruptions, violations, conflicts, which are considered as severe ill in society. It was happened because people kept them away from the right path of Islam. TJ has expressed great concern that the modern world situation is fast deteriorating

and the future looks darken still. TJ vows the way to remedy from the disease lies only in process of being individual faithful. In fact, this particular ideology of TJ was constructed at the beginning of movement in early 19th century based on the degenerate condition of Muslim in India against the emergence of colonial power and advent of modernity that I discussed in chapter three. However, TJ's appeal of being faithful still makes rational appeal to its follower's mind in the ongoing deterioration of the modern world.

As Beli's case shows that there is evidence that the economic crisis has become a burden to her family. In order to bring economic solvency, modern educated woman, like Beli, engaged in teaching profession but she was under continuous pressure of Patriarchic structure at home and in the workplace. The whole situation plunged her life into depression. When she feels uncertain and troubled in her daily life she turns to God to obtain peace and confidence. Also Naher's faith on the great supernatural power is strengthened by the wonderful kindness and personal experience she has had from Allah, who saved her daughter from deadly condition. It shows women's conversion to TJ is relational with their understanding social environment in which they live.

The way TJ guides women for being pious is also related with the understanding of social environment. As discussed, assertions to wearing veil and the idea of covering body develop to the female Tablighi through their personal understanding of social environment that seems vulnerable for them. To many female

Tabligis veil is perceived protection from violence in society. Moreover, TJ's appeal of using a veil and covering the full body is also related with the socio-cultural norm of modesty. TJ women's practice of religious modesty might be explained as their practice of feminine modesty in society like the ordinary women practice in everyday lives. By using cover, the practice of sexual segregation between men and women and female modesty carry a long history in Bengali Muslim society that works as everyday experience to the TJ women. According to Rozario (2006), women's practice of *burqa* is a new development in Bangladesh but the tradition embedded in socio-cultural structure of Bengali society where covering female body is related with the concept of expressing female modesty. Most women in Bangladesh from all classes used *Sari* (female dress) to cover their head. It is very common practices among the married women to cover their head by using *Sari*, especially when they leave their home. They cover their head by *Sari*, when they appear in front of their senior men relatives or unknown men. For the unmarried women, who use *Salwar-kamiz* (female dress) instead of *Sari,* usually cover their private parts of body by using *orna* (long sheet of cloths for women's use) and many girls are seen to cover their head by *orna*. This practice is not only appeared among the Muslim but also in Hindu, Christian and Buddhist women in Bangladesh, so as to conform to the unofficial socio-cultural practice of feminine modesty. In this sense, TJ women's practice of covering full body with *burqa* is a new form of their earlier generation's practices of covering head and body by *Sari* or *Orna.* As it is evidenced in Asma's case that TJ's command of wearing veil was nothing new to her while she was using *burqa* that used to separate herself from men from her childhood. She mentions,

It is our family custom that the female members never go out of home alone, even in school. My grandmother, my mother, my sisters- have all followed the same customs. When we went outside, we used to cover our body in such a way that no men could see us.

TJ's appeal of using veil for being religious is explained by the female Tablighis through their understanding of feminine modesty practiced in society of Bangladesh. In such a way, TJ women's conformity to religious value makes real sense through their experience in society.

Besides, the social experience, the religious knowledge about the female body as being pure and modest encourages the TJ women to obey the rule of veiling. Through their everyday bodily practices veiling makes real sense for being pious. During my fieldwork I observed, that they not only covered their body when they appeared in front of men or outside the home, instead they used to cover their full body and head when they stayed at home. During the period of *Talim*, they used to cover their full body, a modest way to sit in *Allah'r maglish* (a place through which individual meet with Allah). When they read the Quran, or did *Zikr* (chanting Allah) even, when they started to eat or went for toilet they used to cover their head and body. To the TJ women, covering the full body is a correct way to submit them to God with modesty that protects them from doing any sin. They believe that the uncovered body is easily attacked by *shaitan* (evil). Even, when they sleep they used to cover their head. Asma mentions, "by staying in the condition of having a clean

body and covering body with clean apparel expresses individual's mind that he/she is prepared for the universal truth of death that can happens at any moment.'' Thus, bodily practice of using the veil in everyday life brings the female Tablighi in continuous attachment with the creator. The existence of God is discovered in individual's self through 'lived experiences'[5] (Troeltsch, 1930, cf .Ali, 2006), or 'lived religion' (McGuire, 2007). McGuire shows a myriad of way by which individual comes to understand the world, which is unseen. She indicates different individual ways by which ordinary people remember, share, enact and create the stories out of which they live. The practice of using the veil, therefore, is a way through which individual creates and maintains a relation with God.

Let me offer another obligatory practice of prayer by which the female Tablighi discovers God's authority over them. The female Tablighis say that they used to perform prayer but conversion to becoming religious was made rational and distinct meaning of prayer to them. As we saw in Naher and Beli's case that both submitted themselves to God and started to call on Allah when they were in trouble. Prayer carries the distinct meaning to make contact with supernatural power. They imagine the existence of the physical form of an invisible God through their performing of ritual prayer. They believe that prayer will solve every material problem (*namaz sokol mushkil asan kore*). Although, it does not mean that their

[5] Lived experiences in terms of religion mean Allah's existence in all human actions in everyday lives. Scholars used this term of lived experiences to understand the experiences of individualistic asceticism for discovering God (Troeltsch, 1930).

expectations are always fulfilled through prayer, nevertheless, they do not feel depressed instead, it strengthens their faith. They believe on the Quranic injunction, ''Allah says, whosoever fears Allah (that is fulfill all His commandments avoids all that is forbidden), He will make a way out (of every difficulty). And He will provide him from where (sources) he could never imagine (*Al-Talaq*, 65: 2-3)''. Naher several time reminded me that it is our primary duty to do prayer on just time because no one knows when he/or she will die. If one dies without performing prayer he/she has to be accountable to Allah for it.

Like the bodily practices of veiling, Naher's strong belief in Almighty God has developed through the experiences of her bodily movements associated with prayer, which is closely related with cultural associations dealing with prostrated body. The way in which she everyday prostrates her body or submits herself to God in the prayer, serves to create a sense of humility among her. In such a way through this living experience of humbling herself in the prayer every day, she essentially observes the sacred authority of God over her. The actions of prayer are embodied as living realities of submission to Almighty Allah is not just performed like a robot but has the comforting feeling of having been in God's presence.

Therefore, TJ woman's religious faith is concentrated in the individual's self as a satisfactory living experience, which she enjoys in everyday observance of praying five times whilst covering the full body. In this particular case, individual's religious beliefs, religious practices and embodiment have a strong relation that deals

with the relation among body, mind and spirit. At this point, social anthropologist, Asad's (2003) analysis of the individual's conscious intentionality for increasing faith and actions are useful. According to Asad "enunciation of intention is an integral part of the rite, a form of conscious commitment initiating acts of worship that must itself be cultivated as an aspects of one's continuous faith'' (Asad, 2003; cf. Frisk, 2009, p. 136). The point here is that a conscious faith in God does not elicit outwards forms of conduct. It is rather the sequence of practices and actions that a person is engaged in that determines the person's desires and emotions. Action it can therefore be said does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them (Mahmood, 2001). The body then should thus be understood as the 'developable means' (Asad, 1993, p.76) through which forms of being and actions are realized.

Based on these ideas, we can see that the way in which TJ women are creating and observing strong relationship through lived experiences that holds their conscious commitment for being religious. Therefore, for increasing religiosity their engagement in everyday religious practices, disciplining their body and conformity to repetitive per formative actions provoke their true desires for being pious that contends a sense of conversion in which one needs to change herself from her previous condition (here change means being religious and conformity to Islamic practices). The woman actively seeks to reform personal life suggested by Islam. The Individual's consciousness and true desires encourage her to embody a set of moral dispositions aimed to transform to a pious self. In next part, I discuss TJ women's capability to exercise their choice for remaking themselves to become pious selves.

233

5.9 Reconstructing Self and Veiling

As I discussed that wearing veil is compulsory rule of TJ, nevertheless, many women are seen to take the decision gradually through an end of inner struggles and outer struggles in family. Finally, they take the decision of using veil to make a relation between their religious soul and Allah, which denotes that they are exercising power to control their body and mind. Naher and Beli's case reveals that they started to use veil against their husband's wishes. In this point, there are two contradictory aspects that the TJ women hold- one is development of the sense of individual responsibility for self-purification and other is a form of resistance to traditional hierarchical relations at home. Naher and Beli, both tried hard to control their own bodies which is their personal responsibility for proper submission to God. On the other hand, both of them resisted against husband's refusal to apply their individual choice of using veil for increasing their religiosity. This conservative attitudes and actions of controlling mobility by using veil, might be criticized by secularists who consider veil as women's seclusion and segregation from public (Papanek,1971). But, in this matter, woman's personal commitment to individual responsibility to God and relationship with God overrides everything else and it cannot be ignored. Their religious awareness does not only create a sense of sin for ignoring Islamic rules but also raises a sense of individual responsibility to do actions what they think as righteous to obtain reward in hereafter.

Thus, TJ women embody a certain form of consciousness that the individual alone is accountable for her own deeds in this world and in hereafter; the necessary

234

thought fosters her to choose the righteous action as laid down on the divine law. It creates some space for woman to establish a new authority for controlling her own body. TJ women consider them as individual in sense of holding equal capability for men and women to self-creation but it does not mean they are similar to the 'individual' in the Western concept which involves equal gender rights and freedom. In this point, Brenner's (1996, p. 684), study is a good example to understand the particular notion of TJ women's individualism. He argued that the certain awareness of individual responsibility to God is not similar to the bourgeois 'individualism' in Western modernity instead it associates conformity to the divine laws of Quran. This conformity is understood, as a choice that an individual makes of her own will but in keeping with the dictates of a higher authority. In fact, the female Tablighis, way in which they perceive themselves as 'individual' through the technologies of subject formation, itself holds some ambiguities over the notion of equal rights for men and women that cannot be ignored. TJ woman's sense of 'individual' brings her in a ground of equal gender rights, she emphasizes on man and woman's performances of equal responsibility for getting equal rewards. But the way in which TJ woman embody the knowledge about men and women's identical gender roles and men's authority over women creates ambiguities to perceive them as 'individual' like in Western approach. Thus, the pious subject discovers that she is in an ambiguous condition, in such context, she has to follow God's will first and perform her religious responsibility second the will of men's authority. In this complex discourse, Frisk (2009) outlines there are three positions-men, women and God. Men and women are equal in terms of their duties towards God. This gave them a way out of what they

would say was a Western way of approaching gender relation- but women's movement and its claims on equality of men and women in terms of identical rights. This gave them indisputable arguments towards their husband. By bringing God into an argument, the injustice was done towards Him, only directly towards wife. Therefore, this conflict was grounded not so much in the relations between men and women, as in the relation between God and women. This argument is useful to examine TJ women's religious awareness of individual responsibility to God beyond the Western notion of individualism aims for acquiring freedom or equal rights. By ignoring the idea of equal rights, TJ women restore the dominant social values of gender inequality, while their consciousness to individual responsibility for remaking them as pious provide them a new sense of mastery over her to disciplining own body and lifestyle. Therefore, a TJ woman's new kind of pious subjectivity acquire certain kind of power to exercise a form of authority over her and to resistance power to oppose the hierarchical relation at home in some extent. This power of resistance may not apply against the practice of gender injustice but it provides capability to practice Islamic rules in different way in their everyday lives. They resist the structural boundary of piety in Islamic movement of TJ that I am going to discuss in next part.

5.10 Contested Notion of Islamic Piety

Woman's awareness for remaking herself pious has brought a contestation among the popular concept of female piety in the Islamic movement. Many Tablighi women are seen in out of home with compulsory veil. Women are seen to decide which practices of piety they will perform according to their own understanding of Islam, and daily

236

needs that makes a contradiction with the prescribed notion of piety in TJ. Among the female Tablighi the case of Rahima and Mila are making some exceptional. After wearing the *burqa*, most of the female Tablighis become selective and wish to confine them at home, Rahima and Mila believe *burqa* does not limit women in domestic sphere only. Rahima goes out for daily livelihood, uses public transports with male. Like, Rahima, Mila also attends class with male friends and teachers in a co-education system at the University. Rahima and Mila's practices show their resistance against the official boundary of women's piety in TJ.

Women's mastery in Islamic knowledge increases their confidence and capability to modify the religious practice of *burqa* in a convenient way in their daily lives according to their personal understanding of Islam. They are going outside for daily purposes by covering their body with veil. Like, Naher, Rahima also believe that using veil is her personal responsibility to bring her close to Allah but at the same time, she is responsible for bringing economic security into the home. She explained her position according to sacred texts. Likely, Mila argues that learning knowledge is obligatory for all Muslim that allows women's participation in TJ and it permits them to take part in general education or public services in out of home. As I discussed in chapter four that many women in contemporary Bangladesh are taking part in Islamic movement while they are also taking part in different development activities such as in education, employment etc. These women are concerned for being modern while they also seek for protecting their religious identity. The female Tablighi, Rahima and

Mila are good examples of modern woman in TJ who engage in outer world by wearing the veil, which is the essential marker of Islamic identity.

Therefore, the perceived notion of material and religious responsibility provides TJ women some power to resist the authorized model of Islamic piety of TJ movement in which female's complete seclusion is fundamental theme. Although, Rahima and Mila do not represent the common figures of female Tablighi followers in Bangladesh, most TJ women try to exercise piety by keeping them away from unknown men in public. Nevertheless, Tablighi women's story of veiling denotes their engagement in different practices rather than prescribed form of seclusion in TJ. I shall discuss the contested notion of piety and resistance to the structure of TJ in details in next chapter.

5.11 Refashioning Community/ Society

Islamist women's piety is always seen as inner worldly focus in which the central objective is transformation of self (Ali, 2006; Mahmood, 2005). Material in this study shows that within the process of self-transformation, the pious women become conscious to bring change or transform the community as a whole. Piety creates a sense of responsibility for reconstructing the community through engaging her in *Dawa* activities. One female Tablighi says ''we are not only the wives of Tablighi men, but also their co-worker for doing Dawa''. (*amra shudu sohodhormini na shokormini).* It means that the female Tablighi expresses concern over their religious roles like men beyond their roles as homemaker in domestic sphere.

The immediate arena of performing *Dawa* is family, close relatives and friends. Three of the women (Naher, Beli and Asma) interviewed are actively seen to perform their *Dawa* activities at home and in womenfolk. Among the three women, Naher and Beli had to do hard struggle in their family to make Islamic environment at home. The newly found agency for the women allowed them to become religious master of their husband at home. In case of Naher and Beli, they became successful in converting their family members in TJ. The women are working as religious guides both to their husband and to relatives. The women are working to establish Islamic environment at home.

Although TJ women's primary focus is to bring reform in family, evidence of this study shows that TJ women's domestic roles exclusively work to reach out to the wider society. The idea that the 'family is the microcosm of the society' works as a catalyst to provide the women with the sense of accomplishment of influencing the society at large (Huq and Rashid, 2008). The female Tabighi works to Islamic environment at home and works to produce their children as good Muslim for Islamic community. The women's work at womenfolk, although it is limited among the women but it is effort to reach to wider community. Asma says that they provide Islamic lessons to the women so that they can change their other family members. In this way, through the women's networks they wish to transform the community as a whole. Three of the women interviewed are seen to reach in womenfolk with their *Dawa* works. Naher and Asma became successful to arrange *Talim* for womenfolk in which the neighbourhood women participate for Islamic learning.

Because of their individual responsibility in Islamization, the women are found to be organizing creative activities to reach to the wider peoples. Asma's case shows that the TJ women are doing *Dawa* and *Ghast* in their own way. Likely, Beli's case denotes that TJ women are contributing to the Islamization process of TJ in community beyond their structural boundary. Beli is doing *Talim in* a creative way, which she is doing only to fulfill her desire for reforming other women by providing and guiding them religious lessons. Moreover, the case of Beli and Naher denote that they regularly give speech among the womenfolk in their hometown. The performs have brought them in new roles as Islamic preachers, the roles which were traditionally for men. Usually the men leaders provide speech among the womenfolk but Naher and Beli introduce women's speech that increases their accessibility among many women.

Therefore, it is *Dawa*, through which the woman get some ability to influence her husband and exercise some power to take decision in familial matters. Woman's mastery in religious knowledge raises her position to husband and in family. On the other hand, woman's *Dawa* activities among the womenfolk make them capable to reach into the larger society beyond their families and kin networks in which they exercise the ability to influence the society people through Islamic knowledge and divine guidance. In this way, Tablighi women become the agents of transforming society to the precepts of Islam.

5.12 Conclusion:

As discussed, through living experiences of material and religious performing, the woman consciously begin a process of converting her to become a believer that cultivate her true desire for being pious. Religious women's desire for conversion to Islamic lifestyle creates a self-responsibility to reconstruct her according to the principles of Islam. The women become active agent in the project of self-improvement. Women's sense of self-responsibility holds some power to control their body for example, exercise of obligatory practice of veiling.

This study finds that Conscious desire for being pious does not only raise religious responsibility for reconstructing self but also for reforming society. Religious women's sense of self-responsibility associates them with various religious activities at home and in womenfolk. They have emerged as religious masters, preachers both at home and in womenfolk in the community. They work as religious masters for their family members and kin groups as well as for other women in neighborhood community. Within the structural limitation in TJ, the ways in which the Tablighi women creatively engage religious activities demonstrate them as actors in Islamization. Through women's network the pious women try to reach to the wider community for increasing Islamization.

In spite of women's active involvement in religious roles at home and in womenfolk, the pious women hardly show concern for challenging the gendered structure of TJ. They become concerned about their religious roles and organized

Ghast and *Talim* in innovative way. However, it does not mean that they struggle for establishing gender equality in conventional structure of TJ. To the pious women, the western concept of equal gender rights are perceived as worldly matters, which do not carry any significant meaning to them rather performing religious duty is their main concern. Moreover, to them challenging gendered discourse seems ignoring God order. However, mastery in religious knowledge has increased women's status among the womenfolk in community. Through women's network the women are increasing their voice at home and also in community. I shall elaborate this issue in details in next chapter by exploring TJ women's activities in an alternative form of TJ in Bangladesh.

Reconfiguring Gender Boundary and Female Religious Leadership

in Religious Sphere: An Alternative Group of Tablighi Jamaat

Introduction

In the contemporary social and religious dynamics, the Muslim women are seen to be playing an active role in Islamic activities, and in some cases, they tend to resist the gendered ideology of the Islamic movement by founding and leading new forms of religious groups for women. This new trend opens the possibility for women to be religious leaders and organizers, though not with the same authority and power men usually enjoy, of various Islamic activities within womenfolk in the religious sphere. Based on this changing dynamic of gender roles in contemporary Islamic movements ,this study examines Muslim women's activities and roles in TJ movement by taking into account an alternative form of Tablighi group of women— *Char Sathir Dal* (the Group of Four Companions; hereafter GFC) in a community in Bangladesh. The female Tablighis of GFC are working as Islamic preachers, teachers. A Group of women's collective agency creates the possibility of emerging female leadership among the religious women. The members of GFC are creating their own space of women's mosque by their personal understanding of Islam and transforming the traditional rituals. This study focuses on the changing dynamics in gender roles and shift in boundary for understanding the gender relations in the religious sphere. Boundaries between sexes in their respective spatial, social and psychological

243

dimensions delineate the structure of gender relations at a given time and place (Gerson and Kathy, 1985). In changing socio-cultural context, shifts in the boundary are also closely intertwined to the transformation of gender relation in religious sphere.

As I mentioned in chapter three that 19th century's Islamic religious movements, including TJ maintains a separate gender roles and social spaces between the sexes. The early scholars have shown that the division of space confines women at home and world for men, which was manifested based on the root dichotomy of inner/outer or the spiritual/material domain[1] of activities (Metcalf, 1990; Chatterjee, 1989). I illustrate that the way in which the women of GFC engage in everyday religious activities that involve them both in 'inner' and 'outer' domain of activities. The female Tablighi are seen to engage in the activities of 'inner' domain, such as obeying religious tradition (e.g. veiling) and cultural identity (femaleness) and domesticity that associate women with home and spirituality. I argue that despite

[1] The dichotomy of outer and inner world was helpful to understand the nationalist ideology and struggle against the colonial power in Indian subcontinent, as argued by Chatterjee (1989). According to the nationalist discourse, the 'inner', spiritual domain was the core of Indian cultural identity in contrast the West was considered as the superior in 'outer' material domain of economy, statecraft, etc. The distinction between inner and outer world can be understood in relation to the distinction of separate space between home (*ghar*) and *bahir* (world); women represent home, the spiritual domain and men represent the world, the material domain (Chatterjee,1989,p. 624)

women's association with 'inner' domain or spirituality, they exercise their power to resist the gendered ideology of TJ in order to engage them in the wider community to bring social reform by guiding other women that is the activity of outer domain or material. Religion or spiritualism is always seen free from material concern, however, it offers a powerful space of resistance to injustice and provides the avenues for critical contestation and political engagement. (George, 2001 cf. Zine, 2004). I argue that the GFC followers' religious commitment and devotion to Islam encourage them to raise questions about women's limited roles in Islamic movement and limited space. The women collectively response to extend their roles in religious sphere that shows they are accommodating for their self-interest. The religious women struggle for connecting them with wider religious sphere, the 'outer' domain, and create new meaning of their roles and relations with men's religious worlds. In one hand, GFC women's concern about men–women separation, as represented in veiling practice and men's authority over women, reconfirms their statuses as bearers of cultural and religious identities and tradition. Concurrently, by wearing a veil and by being submissive to men's interpretation that tends to reemphasize women's home-based seclusion discourse, they are able to organize religious activities outside of home, and this gives them the opportunity to move from home to the world. It opens the opportunity for them to engage in female leadership roles in the religious sphere.

The ethnographic account discusses the activities of the GFC in *Talim ghar*, a place where the female Tablighi followers perform various Islamic rituals.

Traditionally, men used to perform these rituals in the outer world, whereas women performing the rituals outside of their home were not common phenomena. I analyzed *Talim ghar* not just as a place for preaching Tablighi lesson, but also as a mosque-like institution and community space for women and by women. In this out-of-home space, the female Tablighi followers, as I contend, engage with Islam as well as with other families and social matters that affect their lives. The out-of-home involvement with Tablighi movement or, more broadly, with religion inadvertently leads to the evolement of new forms of female leadership, not just based on Islamic scholarly authority but also of how women become capable with engaging religion in out-of-home. This capability increases their religious as well as social status among both womenfolk and community people. The female followers of the GFC Tablighi group's collective religious reformist activities denote their resistance to men's dominance in religious institutions. On the other hand, they are concerned about 'femaleness' such as women's subordination to men or veiling practice for articulating gender division. In this dynamic, as I argue their involvements both in 'inner' and 'outer' domain of activities indicate a shift from their defined boundary at home in the Islamic movement, in Tablighi Jamaat movement, in particular. My discussion also illuminates that despite being in a submissive status of existing gender structure woman may redefine their rights to and roles in the Islamic movement. As I argue, women look forward to cross the boundaries and enter into the public arena of Islamic movement without subverting their conventional roles in the boundary of home (women's space in Islamic movement).

The GFC claims that it is a wing of TJ and is following the same reformist ideology and method of TJ and the only difference is the leadership of guiding Tablighi activities. While TJ women's wing works under the guidance of its male TJ leaders, the GFC is completely led by female leaders. Leading female Tablighi activities without male guidance is considered a violation of the principles of TJ; thus, Tablighi male leaders of the mainstream movement do not recognize the new female group as a branch of TJ, and TJ views this group's activities as *bidat* (from *bida'h*, reprehensible innovation that is not permitted according to established Islamic norms and practices). Despite mainstream TJ's critiques, the GFC's origin carries significance in Islamic studies—in particular, the visibility of Muslim women in the outer world invites us to reexamine the practice of gendered space of the Islamic movement, which confined women to the home with a limited ability to engage in religious activities under men's authority.

Studies on women in the Tablighi movement overlook the distinctive features of GFC from TJ. In recent years, those who focused on women in TJ movement did not pay attention to what made GFC distinct from the mainstream TJ movement. For instance, White (2010) and Ashraf and Camelia (2008) investigate women's empowerment and Islam by analyzing some cases of female Tablighi leaders (known as *amma huzur*, a title for showing reverence for their religious knowledge); however, they did not clearly distinguish whether their cases are taken from GFC or mainstream TJ. Their discussion about *amma huzur* and her activities in *Talim ghar* (house for religious lessons and prayers) suggest that

247

they have taken their cases from GFC since mainstream TJ does not allow a foundation of *Talim ghar* as a separate place for performing religious activities by women and for women in the community. Instead, the mainstream TJ prefers to organize religious lessons at a follower's house where the neighborhood can attend.

I delineate that the evolvement of GFC is itself a form of resistance to the gendered ideology of the mainstream TJ in which women's participation is always subject to their unmarriageable male companionship. I put GFC's evolvement in wider social context in modern Bangladesh, where women's visibility in outside the boundary of home has been increased significantly in the recent decades. The women in Bangladesh are visible in various social contexts, and the emergence of GFC and its activities in outside of the home is interlinked to the overall women's visibility in wider Bangladeshi society. Considering the restricted gender norms in the established Tablighi movement for women, this study inquires how the GFC maintains the same ideology and method of TJ.

This chapter divided into two sections; first part discusses the GFC group's origin, compares the similarities and difference of the activities between TJ and GFC and trash out the new activities of GFC. The second sections analyzes how GFC group is working to legitimize and establish it as an alternative group in the religious sphere and develops the space for women to emerge as a religious leader.

6.1. Changing Dynamics of Boundary in Religious Sphere

TJ's ideology of separate social spaces between the sexes can be traced back to the colonial gender discourse in Indian society: women's association with domestic realms and men with the outer world of the society. Researchers explicate that the anti-colonial politics and nationalism in Indian society, reinforced the idea of home/world (*ghar/bahir*). This inner/outer distinction (Chatterjee, 1989) successfully redefined Muslim women's role as "mistress of private space" (Robinson, 2007) and ensured men's authority over women (Metcalf, 1990). However, Robinson (2007) argues that the way in which the Islamic movement invites women to take part in Islamization provides a sense of individual religious responsibility and mastery in religious knowledge, and this leads to the emergence of female religious authorities with their own rights. In recent years, women's increasing participation in Islamic movement and accessibilities in those areas in which men used to play dominant and leading roles require a closer examination on the reconfiguration of conventional gender boundary and gender relations in contemporary Islamic movement and religious sphere.

The recent scholarship indicates that the Islamic movement creates a new source of mobility for women in the religious sphere (Sikand, 1999). Metcalf (1998) argues that the ideology of TJ articulates shared gender roles between men and women. By participating in TJ movement, men are doing some activities such as cooking, washing, cleaning that are conventionally known as women's work. On the other hand, women are invited in Islamization projects, which had been so far led by

men and restricted to women. By examining shared gender roles, Metcalf argues that TJ encourages a more egalitarian relationship between men and women. Although Metcalf did not discuss enough on the gendered boundaries as defined by the ideology of TJ and practiced in the movement, her explanation suggests that divisions in boundaries according to gender line are overlapping. Thereby, the idea of separate spaces in Islamic movement, according to gender and its changing dynamic remains vague and unclear in academic scholarships.

The clear gender-based demarcation lines of boundaries, spaces, and actions in religious practice and movement is increasingly being blurred due to Muslim women's new roles in Islamization projects and other forms of religious movements in many societies. Vatuk (2007) observes growing numbers of Muslim women's groups in India working actively with the wider public. These women, according to Vatuk, demand some form of gender equity rationalizing their equal responsibility in religion. As argued by Huq & Sabina (2012), by arranging female led *tafsir* (Quran interpretation) class, the female religious activists are moving for their extended roles in Islamization. Such new forms of actions and activities performed by women suggest that the women redefined their roles beyond the domestic realms in contemporary society.

In this study, I shall conceptualize transformation of women's boundary from home to a world based on the difference between inner and outer domain of activities or material and spiritual concern. Actors at home are always associated with tradition,

cultural identity, spirituality and domesticity. On the other hand, the actors in the outer world are always interlinked with some power or authority to influence other people or groups of people. The peoples in the world are concerned about self-interest. In this study, the female Tablighi to whom I did fieldwork, they do not exercise the power to do religious activities like the men Tablighi does, nevertheless; these women's mastery of religious knowledge allows them to influence other women in their community. As I argue later that by organizing collective religious rituals in *Talim ghar,* which works as female mosque, the GFC women express their concern to extend women's roles in Islamization in the community. Despite their concern for bringing progressive change, the female Tablighi are also worried about their cultural identity and tradition. For example, they strongly preserved the tradition of veiling. As I show later that they redefined the concept of seclusion and veiling and accommodate it in their struggle of extending their roles in out of home. This study shows that GFC women are in the process of transforming the boundary through redefining the practices at home as well as exercise the practices of the world.

6.2. Conceptualizing Female Religious Leadership

Conventionally, religious leadership is conceived in relation to religious authority. Examples of religious leadership that hold some form of authority include Sufi master, *alim* (Islamic scholar), *caliph,* prayer leaders of mosque, legal scholars etc.[2] All the authoritative leadership positions have largely been held by male. In

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[2] On female leadership and religious authority, see Kalmbach (2008).

the modern period, leadership and authority in Islam tend to move from conventional forms and functions. "More and more groups and individuals are claiming the right to speak on Islam, and in the name of Islam" (Kramer and Schmidtke, 2006, p. 12). Expansion of mass education and Islamic knowledge and the emergence of 'free market of religious thought' create opportunity for individual Muslims for their independent engagement with religion (Esposito and Mogahed, 2007, p. 55). This changing dynamics in religion, in particular, in the modern period are marked by increasing participation of Muslim women in those religious spaces, forums, institutions, and movements where they have long been near-invisible. Recently, in many parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East, the female leaders are speaking publicly for Islam and they are working as Islamic preachers, teachers, interpreters of Islamic text, the jobs that were specialized for men. In this changing context, scholars recognize religion as an ''institution in this man's world where women can exercise some control and autonomy and can gain some recognition for their efforts" (Williams and Vashi, 2007, p. 272), and this contention somewhat poses question against the critiques of secular feminists who view Islamization as a project that ramifies Muslim women's oppression in the name of religion.

In this study, I conceptualize female religious leadership in an extended sense. Religious leadership as interlinked with authority is often seen in relation to scholarly abilities to perform certain religious activities such as preaching, teaching, interpreting religious texts, leading worship, and providing guidance on

religious matters (Kalmbach 2012). The female Tablighi followers to whom I conduct fieldwork involve with all these kinds of religious activities despite their limited scholarly authority in Islam. The leadership, as I illustrated later, is also formed or, at least, seems to be formed, through the abilities of creating and managing religious space for the womenfolk in the community. The pious Tablighi women not only conscious to reconstruct themselves, but foster to construct Muslim community through inviting other women who are thought still apart from the true path of Islam. The notion of self-responsibility encourages women to be active by their own efforts and without men's leadership and guidance. As argued later, the women are leading religious rituals not like male leaders, but according to their personal understanding of Islam, which is figured out as 'women's Islam' (Ahmed, 1999). Ahmed (1999) argued that when the women figured out religious issues, they would raise questions, and this has resulted in a type of Islam that is essentially women's Islam (as opposed to an official, textual Islam or men's Islam). The GFC women question the male's interpretation about women's affairs and solve it according to their personal understanding of Islam. In the absence of men, through their participation in religious gatherings and leading religious rituals the women are constructing the ideas of faith in ways that sustain and dignify their actions and allow a sense of well-being and agency (Torab, 1996).

Section 1: Ethnographic Description of GFC Activities

6.3. Background of the Emerging GFC Group

This group claims that it has been named the 'Group of Four *Sathi* (Companions)' because in the early days of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad took part in Islamic preaching with his four spiritual Companions, who were popularly known as caliphates. Following the path of the prophet, the women created the Group of Four Companions and introduced women's collective activities by engaging as a group. The GFC group has been established in Bangladesh in the 1980s. Like TJ activities for women, the GFC also started its journey from the capital city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, and spread across the country through women's networks. The GFC group in Gaibandha, where I did my fieldwork, emerged through its network in Bogra, another district in Bangladesh. According to the head of the group, Ayesa, (a 45-year-old woman living in Gaibandha who teaches at a college) started her journey of forming a separate Islamic religious group in her hometown in Gaibandha in the 1990s. Before starting it in Gaibandha, she followed the GFC in Bogra, where she lived and worked in public service. During her stay in Bogra, she realized the scarcity of Islamic knowledge among the women of her hometown and started to visit Gaibandha once a week in order to preach Islamic lessons to women. Finally, she decided to quit her job in Bogra and started to introduce the GFC activities with more efforts in Gaibandha.

At the initial stage of fieldwork, I focus on two aspects. The first aspect concerns why the GFC claims it is ideologically similar to Masturat Jamaat but is

an alternative form. Second, I focus on the very essential factual context of organizing a separate group composed of only women. Following the two questions, I try to understand the background of the emerging GFC in Bangladesh. In response to the question of defining the difference between the GFC and female TJ, the head of the group, Ayesa, outlines the distinction in the following way:

> GFC is not an opponent of *Masturat Jamaat*. Its purpose and goal of increasing Islamic religiosity and 'making ideal women' is similar to Masturat Jamaat, only the method of doing activities is different. Masturat Jamaat works by attaching them with male *mahrem*[3], while our Tablighi followers perform their duties without any male partner. Truly speaking, this group emerged in the context of the limitations of the restricted rule of *mahrem* male.

This narrative indicates that the group's vision of Islamization is neither entirely identical to nor different from *Masturat Jamaat*; as mentioned earlier, individual reform is the central theme of Tablighi revivalism, and the GFC poses the same ideology. Making Muslim women pious and returning them to daily ritual practices are the main agenda of the GFC; it is completely apolitical and has

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[3] *Mahrem* male refers to permitted and unmarriageable male relatives according to Islamic rule. For example, father, brother, maternal grandfather, maternal uncle are known as *mahrem* relatives for women.

no secular agenda. Ideologically, these two groups have no difference. Thus, that the group claims itself as an alternative group of Masturat Jamaat is a nominal distinction.

As a transnational movement, according to recent studies, TJ is 'by far and the largest' but 'probably the least known' religious movement in contemporary Bangladesh (Ahmed and Naznin; 1999, Siddqi 2000, Hasan Ashraf & Suborna 2008). The annual gathering of TJ, known as *Biswaijtema*, depicts the growing popularity of this transnational movement in Bangladesh. The *ijtema* in Bangladesh is reported to be the second largest gathering of Muslims anywhere in the world, after Hajj (Sikand, 2012). The growing popularity of TJ encourages members of the GFC to follow this particular Islamic reformist movement and the agenda of TJ was recognized as suitable for them to return to the true path of Islam. The head of the group, Ayesa states,

> I was a graduate student at a modern university when I first encountered a *Masturat Jamaat,* which visited in Rajshahi (a district located in the northern part of Bangladesh) from a foreign country, Canada. A Tablighi man of this *Jamaat* gave his religious speech at a women's gathering. I was so impressed that, for the first time in my life, I recognized I should be a true Muslim. As a Muslim, I should engage myself in Islamic preaching.

This early experience of following TJ and affection to the Tablighi ideology of creating a perfect Muslim life attracted Ayesa to join in the revivalist movement. How does TJ suggest women become involved in this faith renewal movement? According to the Tablighi ideology, as its founder Muhammad Ilyas states, doing Tablighis not only the duty of the *ulama* and Sufis*;* rather, it is the duty of all Muslims—men as well as women—to engage in Islamic preaching (Sikand, 2002). This narrative may create a sense of individual responsibility among the pious women that is observed among the followers of the GFC, who simultaneously express their wish to engage in Tablighi. Merina (a regular member of the GFC and 45 year-old, a housewife who lives in Gaibandha) explains her wish of performing Islamic reformism in the following way:

> We, as the followers of last prophet Muhammad, it is our duty to disseminate his messages to all Muslims. Here, he never made any category between men and women. If we refrain from obeying his order, just think, how we will respond to Allah hereafter?

Then, she continues the discussion with respect to her modesty:

> I do not have vast religious knowledge, but what I believe is that I should provide my knowledge to others who have a need for it. Now, I feel happy that I reach so many women who are Muslim in name even if they do not know the *kalima* (faith of Islam) well.

Finally, she confidently said,

> "The structure of TJ allows women's participation, only when their male
> relatives are with them; thus, there is no scope for us because our male
> relatives still are not ready for the Tablighi works. So, should we limit
> ourselves to the home until our male relatives' engage in TJ? Will the men
> respond to Allah on our behalf?"

The narrative clearly addresses the pious woman's sense of self-responsibility to attend Islamic preaching and the desire for resisting the core principle of the *mahrem* male in TJ. Therefore, TJ is playing a twofold role for women. It encourages women to join in Tablighi activities like their male counterparts, but they are only allowed with the attachment of their male relatives. In such ideological complexity, the pious women, who have no *mahrem* male relatives to accompany them in this movement, organize in a different way. The GFC's origin has been understood in this complex context of male dependence of TJ. According to the head of the group in Gaibandha, the GFC has been spreading its network across the country. This study observes that the group has expanded across the Gaibandha districts, and even in rural areas, the women of this group are very active.

TJ's ideology and popularity are important factors to organize women in GFC and motivate them to join in religious activities in the absence of *mahrem* male. However, I shall examine this new phenomenon in the broader context of

changing dynamics of gender relation among the middle class women in Bangladesh. GFC has been emerging among the middle and lower middle class women who are educated and semi-educated. They did not find such kind of Islamic religious group among the women in their earlier generation. They outlined this difference in terms of gender- historically religious groups are organized and led by man's authority who had religious knowledge and very few women associating with religious knowledge engaged in Islamic activities under men's guidance. Thus, mastery of religious knowledge is a vital factor to organize and leading religious group. Recent development of GFC connects it with the growth of women's education in Bangladesh. GFC has been emerged and developed in last three decades and during this period Bangladesh has gained great success in women's education that I discussed in detail in chapter four. Higher rate of girls' education in Bangladesh is an important factor for increasing women's involvement in contemporary Islamic movements. The women of new generation understand Islam not by depending on the interpretations of the traditional Islamic scholars, but by direct access to the Islamic texts, that provides diversified meaning of Islam. Eickelman in his study shows a relation between mass higher education and increasing religiosity. He argued that accessibility in mass education fosters direct access to Islamic texts, a phenomenon that is responsible for "fragmentation of authority" in Islam (Eickelman, 1992). The women of a new generation understand Islam not by depending on the interpretations of the traditional Islamic scholars, but by direct access to the Islamic texts and books. For understanding Islam, they go through various textual sources such as the Quran,

Prophetic tradition, and popular Islamic books, and this gives the opportunity to find the meaning of Islam according to their own life context. They utilize the knowledge they learnt through this process while engaging with various types of Islamic activism. In the last two decades, Bangladesh has witnessed a boom in development of print media that opens women's easy accessibility in various textual sources for religious knowledge. GFC women are seen to justify individual participation in Islamic activities according to Islamic texts rather than following the men's interpretation. As GFC leader states,

> ''I have faith in the basic principles of Islam; it is the duty of all Muslims, men and women, to worship Allah- allows us to organize and lead religious group. Our intention is to please Allah. ''

The narratives indicate that their direct accessibility in Islamic texts provides the way that women have the right to involve in religious activities like men. In such cases, when they face complexity to join in TJ without men's attachment, they organize and participate in a new group of GFC.

Not only growing rate of women's accessibility in education, but also the overall growth of female visibility in out of home has encouraged women to take part in GFC. As one GFC member claims,

> Women are currently going everywhere individually; for education, employment, politics, entertainment but nobody raises questions. Only,

when women go for Islamic activities in the absence of male relatives, they become victims of *ulama*'s (Islamic scholars, cleric) criticism.

As I discussed in chapter four that women's visibility in out of home has increased several times in last three decades comparing to earlier in Bangladesh. Women are increasingly taking part in education, economic sectors, politics and various secular fronts. Similarly, groups of women have become interested to join in Islamic movements to increase Islamization. GFC's emergence has to be considered in this particular background of middle class women's increasing accessibility in out of home.

6.4 Similarities and Difference between GFC and TJ

In association with female Tablighi activities, the GFC designs its *dawa* activities. I shall discuss the activities of the two groups. Here, I have no intention to compare the activities between these two groups; rather, I want to mention that the GFC, as a woman-led group is doing the same activities as TJ. At the same time, since the decision-making power is in the hands of women, some change occurs in structure, space and leadership in the GFC. Moreover, in order to gain public recognition as well as to reach large groups of people, the GFC introduces some new activities that bring women into new roles in religious movements.

Talim: Both of these two groups arrange a weekly *Talim* or reading circle, which the women from the neighborhood join. The number of participants in the regular *Talim* of both groups is almost same—approximately 20-30 women join

regularly. The same reading material in listed Tablighi books is read in both *Talim* sessions. Members of both groups even observe the same etiquettes and manners of *Talim* such as, sitting in proper dress, closely sitting with each other (*gaye gaye lege bosa*) and all members sit in a same ground. The only difference is the place of performing *Talim* and the decision of forming a reading circle. In the case of female TJ, *Talim* is arranged inside the home of a female Tablighi, while the GFC group uses a separate *Talim ghar* (Talim house). The members of the GFC contribute money to build a *Talim ghar*, which is used for multiple purposes, such as *Talim,* meetings, hosting the Jamaat tour and prayer. In case of the GFC, the *sura* (governing body made by regular female members) decides and regulates the *Talim*, while in case of female TJ, it is totally guided by male Tablighi members from the local mosque. In addition to reading Tablighi books, the GFC emphasizes regular practice of Quran reading. In the last part of *Talim*, one woman invites others to take part in the Quran reading. Reading of the Quranic verses is divided among the women. The women read it by themselves at home, and the following week, they meet again in *Talim* and report their progress. It is called *Khatam- e- Quran* (reading the whole Quran). In such a way, once a week, the whole Quran is recited by a group of women. According to a regular member of this group, "the weekly reading event increases women's Quran reading habit. Many women who do not regularly read it are also interested in this group reading". This group reading might be seen as a way to bring the believers in through a common interest. When one woman reads the Quran, she does it to receive her personal blessing. However, group reading serves to earn blessings for the

Muslim *ummah* (community). Moreover, the collective participation in Quran reading makes the woman a regular participant in *Talim*.

In the case of TJ, the female Tablighi are committed to their neighborhood *Talim*. They are not allowed to visit another *Talim* to give a speech. The GFC followers visit several *Talim* and give speeches to encourage women in their reformist mission. In contrast, TJ requires women to stay at home and practice their knowledge to create an Islamic environment at home and in a limited space. The GFC members believe that if the women do not reach out to other women with *Dawa*, then expecting women's reform in masses is absurd. Like the male Tablighi, the GFC followers visit different *Talim*, where they give speeches among the gatherings to encourage others to engage in Tablighi reformism.

Jamaat tour: One of the core components of TJ activities is participation in the Jamaat tour. Five to ten pairs of men and women join in the Jamaat tour. When the Jamaat team reaches a destination, the male Tablighi stays at the mosque, while the female Tablighi stays in a house of a local Tablighi. One male is selected as *ameer* for the whole group and women are enjoined to obey the male leader's decision. Like TJ, the GFC also arranges a Jamaat tour and visit neighboring places. The Jamaat is formed only by the female members. The female Tablighi bear the all costs of travelling and food. During the period of the Jamaat tour, they stay in *Talim ghar*, or in some cases where *Talim ghar* is not yet built, women stay in a local Tablighi follower's house. According to the head of the group, mostly during the

period of Ramadan, they arrange a Jamaat tour where more than 20-30 women join, and it continues for 3 days, 7 days or 10 days. The *sura* members of the GFS are responsible for taking care of the whole Jamaat group. The participants of the Jamaat groups are given a token as a gift, which is arranged by the GFC fund.

Mashwara: *Mashwara* means consulting or meeting. Because TJ has no constitution, it is regulated by regular *mashwara*. All Tablighi members are enjoined to take part in *mashwara*, held in a mosque. TJ does not allow women's participation in *mashwara*. If a TJ woman has any query, then she informs her male relative of it and the man relays the message to the male elders in *mashwara*. Female Tablighi women are enjoined to do work according to the male *mashwara* and they are strictly prohibited from doing Tablighi works according to their own initiative. In contrast, the GFC members attend *mashwara* in *Talim ghar* weekly. The followers are encouraged to join in the regular meeting. However, not all members join regularly in this meeting, but the *sura* members must participate. The GFC has a *sura* that consists of ten regular members who are assigned for conducting the activities in different areas and are encouraged to report in the meeting. All members may express their arguments in meetings. Compared with TJ, the GFC group does not believe in a hierarchy of status—all members are considered equal. However, *amir* is considered an authority in TJ and all must obey him (Hasani, 1988). In the case of the GFC, there is no *amir*; however, the head of the group, Ayesa, is recognized as the leader of the GFC. Without her participation, no decision is made in the GFS.

Therefore, performances of similar activities between TJ and the GFC summarize that female-led organizations have the ability to organize and lead an Islamic religious group separately beyond male guidance. It creates a new opportunity for the GFC followers to engage in new roles, which were normally reserved for males. However, when the women take part in the males' jobs, which is challenging for them, they consciously become responsible to perform them well. They become active in legitimizing their activities among the community. Thus, this encourages the GFC followers not to limit their activities to the narrow scope of FTJ; rather, they expand their activities, which I will discuss in the next part.

6.5. Building *Talim* house as a Women's Mosque in Community

As mentioned earlier, TJ upholds home-based Islamic preaching and teaching activities by women and for women. GFC also maintains this rule by limiting their activities within womenfolk. In addition to the common activities (discussed above), the GFC has expanded its activities through establishing a permanent place, which is named *Talim ghar* (Talim house); the efforts might be seen a way to reach out and gain acceptance among women in the community. The strategy of making a permanent *Talim ghar* is a technique to bring similarity between TJ and the GFC, but at the same time, it might be seen as a means of recognizing the new group in the community. As the TJ movement is based in the mosque and has no formal organization, Tablighi activities are regulated from the mosque. TJ activities are regulated and decided in the mosque by the male Tablighi. Similarly, based on the Tablighi idea of regulating religious movement based in the mosque, the GFC has

essentially felt the need to create a permanent place that will serve as their center of regulating Islamic activism. Because the idea of a women's mosque remains unpopular in Bangladesh, the GFC has established the concept of building a permanent *Talim ghar*, which will be served as a female mosque, a center for engaging in the ritual of prayer and housing the group's activities. The GFC concept of *Talim ghar* identifies it as a female mosque, where women can gather for individual and collective praying as well as for performing GFC activities. Like the male members of TJ, the GFC group uses *Talim ghar* for the same purposes—praying, hosting the Jamaat group and doing *mashwara.* In such a way, the GFC, as an emerging female-led group, introduces the idea of creating women's own space through which they will regulate the Islamic movement. This group has made several *Talim* houses in neighboring areas of the Gaibandha district, and those houses serve as local mosques to them.

How does the *Talim* house serve as a mosque to the community if it is not like a real mosque? Its structural shape is not like the mosque; it looks like a single house. There is no system of announcement for calling on women at collective prayers (*Athan*). The Talim house does not arrange any collective prayers or even Friday prayer (known as *Jumah* prayer), except for the occasional collective prayers during the period of *Eid*, *Sab-e Barat* and *Sab-e- Qadr* (known as holy night for Muslims). Usually, a mosque means there is an *Imam* (leader of prayer), but the *Talim house* has no female *Imam*. Actually, this Talim house, as a women's mosque, will be well understood by the term 'women's mosque just like home', as used by Jaschok (2012,

p. 44). In her detailed ethnography of Muslim women's mosques in China, she showed that the historical concept of *bidah*, as it applied to women's space, defined the religious and material traditions of women's mosques as similar to those of the home. However, the recent development of emerging women's mosques in Middle Eastern countries, which has been well attended by the recent work of anthropologists (Mahmood, 2005; Frisk, 2009), shows that female mosques are, in most cases, part of male mosques. Males lead the collective prayers, while women are recommended to attend from behind a curtain or wall. Mostly, women's mosques are used for preaching, listening, and Quran learning rather than taking daily prayers. Despite the growing development of women's accessibility in mosques, still the '*masjid* (mosque) is considered as the male's domain' (Lehmann, 2012, p.505). This means that the concept of the women's separate mosque is still seen as contesting with the dominant and traditional idea of the men's mosque.

The same thing is happening in Bangladesh, where the concept of the separate women's mosque is still prohibited. Women take part in male mosque and perform rituals of praying under male leadership. Still, it is an urban-based practice hardly seen in rural areas. In the global and local context of Bangladesh, the GFC's *Talim* house might be considered as a praying place for women, which is 'just like home'. Although its structure is similar to that of a home, the performing of rituals inside the *Talim* house has given it recognition it as a female mosque among the community women.

6.6. Performances of Rituals in the *Talim* House

The *Talim* house seems like a sanctified place among the pious women. As they view it as a sacred place, the women clean themselves by performing ablution (performing of *odhu*) before entering the house. They enter the room leaving their shoes outside. They cover their body properly, talk slowly and engage in religious performance. The women refrain from unnecessary talking and instead engage in *zikr* (chanting Allah) or reading the Quran or other religious books. Performing rituals denotes that the *Talim* house is a holy place for them. As they believe the *Talim* house is their mosque, they link it with the traditional thought of using the mosque as a place for Islamic teaching for women. Historically, it is a common nature of the mosque to hold a Quran teaching class. The *Talim* house is no different from that. It also has a regular Quran teaching class where the female Tablighi engages in teaching. The children and women participate in this class. During my fieldwork, I observed that approximately 25 children and middle-aged women took part in this Quran teaching class, which is held every day in the early morning. Three female Tablighi engage in teaching the students, a service that is provided at no cost. The female teachers believe that they will be rewarded in the hereafter for their roles in Islamic teaching. In the *Talim* house, women emerge as Islamic teachers, while previously, in the mosque, the male *hujur* (Islamic teacher) performed this role. In general, the children were the students of this class. Because female teachers teach at the *Talim* house, many middle-aged women also take part in this class.

One important implication of the *Talim* house among the community women is arranging collective prayers during the time of Ramadan. At this time, the ritual of *Terawi* (special prayer arranged at night with the night prayer of *Isha*) is arranged for the women from the neighborhood. Moreover, collective prayers for celebrating two main festivals of *Eid* (*Eid-ul-Azha* and *Eid-ul-Fitr*) are also arranged at the *Talim* house. According to the female Tablighi, more than a hundred women participate in these special prayers. She claims that the new tradition of women's *Eid* prayer was introduced in the local community for the first time by the GFC. In the early years, the participant rate was very poor in these collective prayers, and although the GFC followers only joined in last 3-4 years, the participant rate has increased. This means that the *Talim* house as a women's mosque is getting acceptance in the local community. While, male participation in *Eid* prayer in and out of home is seen as obligatory and women are recommended to pray alone at home, the new practice of women's collective *Eid* prayer at the *Talim* house is said to bring a change in cultural tradition. In the early morning of *Eid* day, it was common for the men to don a traditional Islamic dress and go out of the home to pray. However, in the *Talim* house recently, women are also seen going out of their home to perform the *Eid* prayer. After prayer, they exchange the *Eid* greeting among themselves. In such a way, the *Talim* house, as a symbol of a mosque, is changing the meaning of traditional Islamic cultural values and norms. The ritual of women's prayer, which was thought to be a performance of seclusion, performed alone at home, became a ritual performed at women's gatherings out of the home.

During my fieldwork, many female Tablighis mentioned that it is their mosque. This is clearly understood when the *Talim* house is used by the devoted women for performing the ritual of *itikaf* (devotional seclusion). Over the years, performing of the ritual of *itikaf* was limited only to men, as they could stay at the mosque, but in the *Talim* house, the women are able to engage in this ritual too. The ritual of *itikaf* means individual engagement in religious performance at the mosque for a certain period, remaining in a state of seclusion. Usually, the ritual is performed for the last 10 days of *Ramadan,* when *Sab-e-Qadr* (night of power) is sought. During the period of performing the rituals of *itikaf,* men/women strictly abstain from going outside the mosque. Mostly, he/she engages in performing rituals, such as optional prayers (*nafl* prayer), Quran reading, *zikr* and performance of long *dua* (supplication). Therefore, the performing of religious rituals itself makes the *Talim* house a women's mosque among the local community.

6.7. *Talim* House a Community Property

As the *Talim* house is valued as a sacred place to the devoted women, collective responsibility is observed in taking care of it. During my fieldwork, I observed that the GFC women made hard physical and financial efforts to construct the *Talim* house. At the beginning of the GFC in Gaibandha, it started its journey in a *Talim* house, which was made by traditional material of wood and tin and lasted for 20 years. Following the development of the GFC activities, the members decided to construct a four-storied building. A devoted member of this group (Ayesa's mother) donated a piece of land to build this house, and the followers are now collecting

donations to construct the house. The construction work has started, but it requires huge costs, and followers are seen collecting money. Collecting money and providing donations for this purpose are thought as both sacred and beneficial for the hereafter. Merina, one GFC member, explained: "I collected 50 thousand *taka* (Bangladeshi currency) from my own areas for building this house. It will be an *Allah'r ghar* (room for Allah) where women can attend prayers"[4]. How the poor followers donate money for constructing a *Talim* house is remarkable and reflects their deep religious motivation for the GFC. During my fieldwork in Boali, (a village under the Gaibandha district), I observed that the followers, most of whom are very poor, donated their collection of *mustir chal* (handful of rice) for constructing the *Talim* house. Through the hard efforts given by the devoted GFC followers, the *Talim* house is constructed as a community property. It is open to all Muslim women, who recognize it as their own. Although this house is not yet completed because of a lack of adequate money, it brings religious satisfaction among the women. One pious woman expressed her emotion in the following way: "when I come to this house I feel peace, it is our place, and it is women's mosque"[5].

[4] Interview of Merina, a 45-year-old woman and housewife who lives in Gaibandha. She is a regular member of the GFS. I took her interview in the Talim house.

[5] Mona, a 40-year-old woman and housewife who lives in Gaibandha. She is a regular member of the GFS. She shared her feelings with me when we spent some time in a constructed building serving as a Talim house.

As the *Talim* house is viewed as a community property, it is built in an open place rather being relegated to the inside of one's house. Another reason of building the *Talim* house in an open place is to make it easily accessible for Tablighi women. If it is built inside one's house, then some women may feel hesitate to enter into the *Talim* house when the male members of the house are present at the house. Therefore, the *Talim* house, although it is not like a real mosque, is recognized as a female space in the religious sphere, built by collective efforts and serving as a place for the performance of religious activities, particularly the rituals of prayer.

Therefore, the *Talim* house, to some extent, might be considered as a development of women's space in the Islamic sphere. How does it work to transform gendered roles in Islamic movement? Does the *Talim* house create female leadership in the Islamic sphere? Do the female leaders struggle to resist the unequal gender status for women in the Islamic sphere? All these questions are necessary to understand how the women are performing their roles in order to secure and develop their space. These questions are analyzed in the next section.

Section 2: Discussion and Analysis

6.8. GFC Women in Home and World

GFC's religious performances in *Talim ghar* are said to provide an opportunity for the women to transform the traditional boundary in the Islamic movement. However, it raises the question does it really extend women's boundary from home since their activities are still limited among womenfolk only. To analyze the GFC's religious

space of the *Talim* house, there is a good example of 'Living Room Meetings', which is discussed by Vanderwaeran (2012). In her detailed ethnographic work of the 'Living Room Meetings' held by women, she argues that the women do not allow men in their meeting, which is considered a meeting 'for women and by women'. Through their participation in the home-based 'Living Room Meeting', the women raise questions about patriarchy practices in the Islamic movement and try to resist it, emphasizing gender equity and equality in Islamic texts, which have been neglected in the past. The author argues that raising such questions indicates that the women are in the process of a true search for understanding women's rights rather than the mere passive adoption of religion. The women are searching for their own space in which to practice their religion based on their personal understanding of Islam. The whole process embodies the women's movement towards religious pluralism.

In spite of the different social, cultural and religious backgrounds between Flanders and Bangladesh, there is a similarity between the 'living room meetings' and 'religious meetings of *Talim ghar*'. The way GFC emerges as an alternative religious group for women, by resisting the gendered role of men's dependence for attaching in TJ, it denotes that the pious women consciously provide their effort to make new groups for increasing their boundary of home based religious role. The case of GFC shows that religiosity or spirituality does not only encourage women to increase personal piety rather their piousness enforce them to make other women religious in the community. The pious women of GFC perceive individual religious responsibility to engage them in reforming other women in society who

are still far from practicing Islamic rituals perfectly. In such situation, by accommodating both material and spiritual domain of activities the pious women creatively organize religious groups for reforming other women in the community. The emergence of *Talim ghar*, itself, denotes that the GFC has been built according to the members' personal understanding of Islam rather than following the men's interpretation about women's roles in Islamization. Women struggle to extend their religious roles like men. The women raise the question over the male's interpretation of Islam. Ayesa the head of the group of GFC states, "as the *ummat* (followers) of the last prophet, everybody is responsible for preaching Muhammad's lesson. Here, men and women are not separate."

They not only raise questions about limited roles, but also about women's less accessibility in collective religious rituals. By making new religious group the GFC women, do not only increase their religious activities at out of home, they establishes women's right to access in collective religious rituals. Collective religious rituals, for example, *terawi* prayer (additional night prayer offered only in the month of Ramadan), *Eid* payer (collective prayers for celebrating two annual festivals for Muslims *Eid-ul-Azha* and *Eid-ul-Fitr*), *Du*a (supplication) which are traditionally women performed individually at home, GFC introduces these rituals for its followers to perform collectively in *Talim ghar*. *Talim* house is arranging collective prayers for community women during the month of *Ramadan*. The women from the neighborhood attend *terawi* prayer at the *Talim* house. Conventionally, the Muslim women in Bangladeshi society offer prayers at home. The *Talim* house gives them

the opportunity to offer prayers with other community women out of their homes. On the occasion of religious festivals, Muslim men usually wearing a new dress used to offer prayer in an open space or in the premise of a mosque. This type of collective gathering for performing certain religious observances is widely practiced among Muslim men, and the Muslim women usually have very limited opportunity to offer prayers beyond the boundaries of their homes. The *Talim* house of the GFC allows them to take part in collective religious offerings outside of the home. According to a female Tablighi member, more than a hundred women participate in these special prayers during festivals. For the first time, according to her, the GFC introduced the new tradition of women's collective *Eid* prayer in the community. In the beginning years, the participants were very poor in these collective prayers. Gradually, it has been increased, and it indicates that the new tradition is being accepted by the community people. Besides collective prayers, women also offer *zikr* (also *dhikr*, remembering God by chanting his name rhythmically) and *dua* (supplementary prayer for receiving God's favor). They arrange these *dua* for seeking remedy for illness and other material problems in daily lives. The collective rituals the women performed in the *Talim* house are important to understand the changing nature of the conventional boundary of religious practices for women. Usually, Muslim men observe and perform such religious practices and observances in a mosque, and in the most cases, the community people for their efforts to attain some form of spirituality revere the religious clerics and those who are regular in observing such practices. By observing and performing the similar religious practices, the female Tablighi members of the GFC could raise their status in the community, and many

others recognize and support their efforts for attaining spirituality. As observed during the fieldwork, a woman from the community donated 10,000 Taka (Bangladesh currency) to the *Talim* house for seeking God's blessing, through GFC members' *dua*, for her deceased father. Since the GFC member attain some form of spirituality, according to the donor's belief, it is possible that God may respond to them if they seek some favour for her deceased father. This is how the GFC member is being recognized by the community for their spiritual practices. Through religious practices, the GFC women influence other women in the community. In such a way, the *Talim* house provides a new space for them to connect with wider community people, though mostly women.

Moreover, GFC's concern for community reform through guiding other women in womenfolk secure their presence in outer world with the broader agenda of socializing. Although, Betteridge (2001), in her experience with Iranian modern women, shows that the Islamic framework does not provide significant meaning to them in terms of socializing. In contrast, it may work as an important means of socializing with women who are housewives and who rarely get the opportunity to meet with women beyond their relatives and neighbors. In this case, Frisk's (2009) study is a good example. In her study of Malay women's *Dakwah* movement, she mentions that for many women, the religious gatherings are highly valued as social events. This is true not only for housewives but also for modern women who already experience public engagement. Even in some cases, modern women leave their careers to spend more time for religious purpose. The GFC women to whom I

encountered in my fieldwork are mostly housewives who spend most of their time with the GFC, which they consider an obligatory religious and social duty. They believe that by increasing piety among the women, they will be personally benefitted in the hereafter. On the other hand, they believe that religious ignorance is one of the main reasons for dispute in the local community, and this influences them to be active in the project of increasing Islamic piety among the women. Mona,[6] one regular member of the group reveals that every day she is busy in religious activities from morning to evening. She conducts the Quran teaching class in the *Talim* house every day in the early morning. She joins once a week in the *Talim* session and once a week in *Mashwara*, and twice a week, she visits her own areas to look after the progress of the GFC activities and to provide a speech at the *Talim* sessions. The GFC engagement makes them responsible for spending as much time as they can for increasing piety among the women in the community.

The Islamic rule of seclusion is one major factor that constrains women at home. The GFC women raise question about the rules of veiling practiced in TJ and redefined it according to their personal understanding of Islam. According to the rule of TJ the male Tablighi followers, companions of the female followers, are allowed to make a door-to-door visit in the community to call the menfolk in the path of Islam. Female members' group tour in the community is not permitted due to the restricted gender norm of seclusion in TJ. The head of the GFC, Ayesa, interprets it as in the following.

10. Mona, a 45-years-old woman lives in Gaibandha. She is a regular member of the GFS. I met several times with her in the *Talim* house. She shared her feelings about various matters with me.

The male Tablighi leaders do not allow their wives to visit neighboring places to perform *Dawa* (group visit of TJ followers to preach Islam for renewal of faith) among the women for fear of violating seclusion rules; rather, they suggest that neighborhood women come to them (in a house). Do you think the neighborhood women's seclusion is less important than the wives of male Tablighi leaders?

This narrative clearly addresses Ayesa's resistance to the notion of female Tablighi followers' confinement and home-based Tablighi activities. The GFC members with Islamic attire (veil) are visiting far places for *dawa* activities without companionship of male partners. They often draw examples from the early Islam in order to justify their activities. Referring to the prophet's wives, Ayesa explains that the female companions of the Prophet Muhammad attached him on many occasions and even they joined him in the battlefield. Ayesa draws several prophetic traditions and narratives in order to legitimize her opinion that women can have equal contribution to religion and society.

GFC promotes the idea that women with proper Islamic attire can go anywhere to perform *Dawa*—a notion that is viewed as a violation of the mainstream TJ's gender rules and norms. Ideologically, GFC believes that women's involvement in *Dawa* activities outside is better than staying at home for fear of violation of gender norm and seclusion rule. Their *dawa* activities without male companionship are also against the longstanding gender norm of the society. Traditionally, social and

cultural norms, in rural areas, in particular, do not allow women to go outside or to visit long distance area alone. The GFC members are seen to take part in religious activities by making group of three or four women, especially in the village area. Women's group tour, according to a GFC member, is a strategy to avoid the rumor and gossips about those women travelling outside the community. In such a way, the GFC does encourage women not only in outside religious activities but also in outside employment opportunities. Ayesa, as the leader of the group, engages in job in addition to her Tablighi activities, and this encourages many women to follow her—engage in livelihood works and religious activities, which are not possible if someone would like to follow the home-based gender norm and seclusion rule only. In such cases, they redefined the rules of veiling that connect them both home and world. Nevertheless, GFC women reinforce the practice of veiling, which is always criticized by the secularist as restoring men and women's difference and separation (Papanek, 1971) For the GFC women, veiling or any form of Islamic attire is expression of their agency over their own body, and by utilizing it they can pursue for their own choices. In such a way, through redefining the meaning of a religious and cultural tradition of seclusion, the female Tablighis further for practicing new roles in the world.

6.9. Female Religious Leadership is in Negotiation with Patriarchy

Muslim women are creating their own autonomous and independent associations and groups in Middle Eastern countries as well as in Western countries, which has been well attended by anthropologists. When the women take the role of leading revivalist

groups or leading collective religious rituals, it seems like the development of female religious leadership. The recent development of women emerging as Islamic preachers and Islamic teachers—as religious leaders—and entering into the core religious spaces such as mosques and leading religious institutions and groups, which might be seen as a potential subversion of male domination of religious leadership. In spite of the growing development, anthropologists have shown that the religious authority of these women is often limited. Discussing the Dutch Muslim women's separate group, Dessing (2012), argued that even though Muslim women in the Netherlands organize in many ways and are more active than before, their scope of obtaining and exercising religious authority is limited. In her detailed ethnographic study, she mentions that the majority of female leaders in the mosque-based group in the Netherlands exercise authority based on their traditional training, knowledge and expertise. These women are respected in their community at large, but their authority remains limited only to women. Scholars have examined the reasons for limiting female religious leadership and argue that the performance of religious leadership depends not only on obtaining religious knowledge, but also on particular social and religious norms and values, which influence to legitimize religious authority. As Kalmbach, mentions that female religious leadership is not only dependent on their activities and the roles they play; rather, female religious authority is often limited due to the gendered restrictions or longstanding traditions of society (Kalmbach, 2012). This study analyzes the scope and nature of female religious leadership of the GFC group from a social perspective of where the women live.

Ayesa, the head of the GFC, represents herself as a female religious leader because of her outstanding performance in leading the group. The presence of *Talim ghar* and performances in the space help her to be a leader among the women of the community. She holds the same characteristics as a man for becoming a religious leader. An analysis of the factors shaping Ayesa's strong bond with her followers suggests that the success of gaining loyalty requires multiple qualities, such as religious knowledge, expression of Islamic piety, communication skills, modesty, and sound managerial expertise. All such qualities are observed in Ayesa. She is 45 years old, married and comes from a middle class family. She is engaged in a public profession of teaching in a general education institute. Her academic background is modern education, and she does not have any formal degree from Islamic institutions like the ulama. Nevertheless, she has substantial knowledge about the Quran and Hadith and knowledge of popular Islamic texts. During my fieldwork in different *Talim* houses, I observed that when she delivers her speech to the women gathered, she frequently uses the Quranic verses to make her speech authentic. Her religious speech is desired in the women's gathering. Not only she is a good speaker but she is also known as a good woman due to her modesty and generous attitudes. The audience members of women's gatherings mention that she has no pride and respects women from all classes. Moreover, her personal signs of piety encourage many women to be modern as well as Islamic. For urban neighborhood women, as revealed by Rausch's work in Morocco (Rausch, 2012) and Bano's work in Pakistan (2012), Ayesa's act might be seen as a model of personal piety in modern times. She is in Islamic dress constantly, and her presence in public attracts many urban women who

are engaged in public. It does not mean that she is ignoring the Islamic values of women's seclusion or rules of covering. In such cases, her stand is strategic—she never forces anyone into complete conformity with the rules of seclusion, but in her speech, she mentions the reward of seclusion in the hereafter. Finally, her communication skills and behavior with the people of all classes establishes her as a common member of her group. Despite her social hierarchical status as a higher-educated woman and employee, she used to take food in the same plate as her fellows, which is the practice of TJ. Her ignorance to social hierarchy, modesty, and good behaviors impresses the common people. Ayesa is addressed as the mother of the group, which expresses her recognition as a leader of the whole group.

However, despite Ayesa's popularity and leadership roles in the GFC, she still does not claim to be a female religious leader like her male counterpart. She strongly believes that women cannot be *Imam* or *ameer* (leader) like men. According to her, the role of *Imam* is particularly assigned for men; thus, women should not struggle to obtain the status. Despite leading the collective prayers of *Eid*, she refrains from performing as an Imam, which might be seen as an expression of obeying the Islamic doctrine of religious authority against the backdrop of some practical reasons.

A multiplicity of related factors, such as different approaches to textual sources, traditions, and culture, as well as internalization of specific gender roles, impact the gender-sensitive issues such as the right of female religious leaders to

work to shape female religious leadership. Moreover, the experience of performing religious authority, which was always a male domain, works to guide the female leadership. Additionally, the concept of gender equality and feminism are criticized and are portrayed as foreign, hegemonic, and therefore inauthentic, intrusions into local culture contribute to shaping the notion of female religious leadership (Kalmbach, 2012).

Although Ayesa has deep knowledge of the Quran, hadith, and popular Islamic texts, she still feels lacking in Islamic knowledge. It may be her secular education background that prevents her from subverting the dominant model of Islamic authority, although she partly resists men's interpretation of Islam. During her interview with me, she politely mentions,

> I lead the GFC activities according to my poor knowledge of Islam and I don't know much like the *ulama*. But I believe the basic principles of Islam; it is the duty of all Muslims, men and women, to worship Allah. All Muslims, men and women, have the right to practice all Islamic rituals in which men and women are not separated.

Ayesa's narrative clearly states her respect for Islamic scholars and, at the same time, her resistance to men's interpretation of women's right to embrace religious roles. Ayesa believes women's rights are fully ordained in Islam, but that they are deprived. She believes that Ayesha (prophet's wife) is the role model of her

life. During her speech, she frequently mentions the example of the prophet's wife Ayesha (*RA*), who is recognized as a religious authority in Islam. Referring the Islamic text of Hadith, she mentions that there are many hadiths, which are collected from Ayesha, and the Prophet's companions frequently visited her after the death of Pprophet when they faced any complexity.

Ayesha's story is used as an example to the GFC women, who struggle to reestablish women's greater right in the religious sphere. Ayesa's struggles for expanding wider religious rights for women must be understood within the Islamic framework rather than the secular idea of gender equality. Her views are similar to the new Islamic feminists who are struggling to establish greater religious roles for women according to the holy text. The recent feminist scholars such as Aisha Abd al-Rahman, Nimmat Siddqi in Egypt promote an ideology of women's Islamic movement that is 'truly Islamic' and 'truly feminist'. They argue that neither immodest dress, nor identical roles of the sexes in the name of modernity, nor sexual segregation and seclusion of women should be mandated in the name of Islam. The right is the one that combines modesty, responsibility and integration into public life with the Quranic and naturally enjoined injunctions between the sexes. (Moghadam, 1993, p. 157). Ayesa never demands that she be recognized as a feminist leader and strongly criticizes the secular agenda of gender equality. She enjoins her followers not to expose themselves in public without any reason and stresses the importance Islamic dress. Although her statements seem to reflect conservative attitudes of women's seclusion, alternatively, it can be viewed as an expression of her spiritual

284

piousness. Likely, Ayesa's attitude of refraining from observing the role of *Imam* is an expression of her piousness, which is developed within an Islamic framework.

Ayesa's desired religious leadership based on Islamic doctrine is also strengthened by the tradition and culture of local society. Ayesa's particular desire will be well understood by the process of social and cultural construction of desire. Mahmood (2001), in her detailed ethnography of women's mosques in Egypt, discusses that the female's desires are always socially constructed and different types of desires emerge in different social contexts. Ayesa's particular desire develops in her local, social and cultural context. As I already mentioned that GFC activities are not recognized by mainstream TJ, the male elders strictly criticize the group's activities as *Bidat*. According to a male Tablighi elder,

> Travelling in *Jamaat* without *mahrem* is totally *bedeeni* (un-Islamic). Proper *deen* (Islam) will never come in the un-Islamic way. The aim of travelling in the *Jamaat* tour is not simply to increase the movement, but rather to establish the practice of *Sunnah*[7] (Hossain, 2007, p. 19).

Because of central non-recognition of the GFC, Ayesa faces a continuous threat from the local leaders of TJ in Gaibandha. She mentioned that at the beginning

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[7] Mawlana Saad, a *Sura* (governing body of TJ) member of the world Headquarter of TJ, New Delhi. For details of his speech, see Hossain, 2007 ,p.19.

of the GFC, the male *ulama* of the local community pressured her to stop the group's activities. Even the male clerics of the local mosque announce her name and mention her group as illegal. She is also under pressure from her community members. Some of the well-educated women in the local community, who have no affiliation with TJ, criticize the GFC activities as a violation of Islamic rule, especially the performance of religious rituals such as praying, *zikr*, *dua* (supplication) at the *Talim* house. A local woman Minara,[8] who lives near the *Talim* house of Ayesa in Gaibandha mentions,

> Allah clearly outlines women's performance of rituals at home with seclusion and strictly prohibits women from being an Imam. Recently, different religious groups are emerging, which are trying to interpret Islam, according to their personal understanding, which is a complete violation of Islamic rules.

This narrative indicates that Ayesa is constantly facing threats from her opponent group TJ as well as from some community people. This continuous

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[8] Minara is a 45-years-old woman living in Gaibandha. She is a general educated woman and engages in a public job. She is relative of Ayesa. Minara views GFC's activities as bogus.

feeling of anxiety may compel the GFC leader to emulate the authorized models of religious leadership rather than subvert it.

Moreover, in the local context of Bangladesh, the GFC activities led by females are seen not only as a violation of the Islamic rules of gender, but also as a resistance to the long-standing tradition and cultural practices of gender. In Bangladeshi society, as I discussed in chapter four, the patriarchal norms are continuously cultivated through the practice of unequal gender norms, and the male is recognized as the guardian of women in both the private and public spheres. Most of the women whom I encountered in my fieldwork have shared how they continuously face domestic violence from members of the opposite sex in their family. Although Ayesa leads a women's group, she mentions that she always informs her husband before going outside to engage in Tablighi activities. She mentions that her husband knows about the places she usually visits. This reflects the cultural practice of women's obedience to their husbands and reveals the dominant tradition of male guardianship over females in the family. The practices show the embedded social system of gender inequality in society, which is faced by all women, including Tablighi, in their daily lives. Although the recent situation of women in Bangladeshi society has been changing and various development projects have been undertaken to reduce gender inequality, it is still deeply embedded in society. In this social context, although the female leader of the GFC forms separate group and leads religious activities independent of male control, she does not intend to struggle for obtaining equal rights.

In the complexity of an unequal social context in many Muslim countries, the authority of female religious leaders is seen as linked to the subordinate role of women and dependence on male authority (Jeffery, et. al, 2012, Dessing, 2012). Ayesa's leadership, which is isolated from male dependence, does not directly make her subordinate to and dependent on male leadership; rather, her position on gender ideology reflects that she is in the process of developing leadership through the negotiation with the patriarchal tradition in Islam. Ayesa decides her stand, which is strategically instrumental; she arranges the collective prayers of *Eid* at her *Talim* house. To some extent, she instructs the prayer, but it is not like the performance of a male *Imam*. While the male *Imam*, standing in a certain place, leads the prayer for the group of men who stand behind him, Ayesa leads the prayer standing in the same row with the other women. She shows that women can instruct religious rituals like men but in different ways, which will not be contradictory to the authorized model of male leadership of praying. Ayesa's position of female leadership is strategically similar to Halima Krausen. German Muslim leader Halima Krausen has consciously chosen to avoid the leadership of prayers so that she can instead expand her influence, impact and authority within communities that reject female leadership of prayers (Spielhaus, 2012).

Although Ayesa's strategic stand may not represent her female religious authority as similar to a male, it has significant social value nevertheless. It increases her social status among the women. Because of her religious knowledge, she enjoys

the position of Islamic teacher, which increases her status among other women in her community. Engagement in the religious movement increases women's social status. The GFC women, to some extent, are known as perfect among the community. The ordinary women like to call on them to perform the essential ritual of washing the dead body of a woman in the community. When a woman dies, her relatives contact with them and request that they perform the sacred ritual.

Furthermore, the most important aspect of Ayesa's leadership is her increased status among the men's circle. Ayesa, as a preacher, is invited by local males to provide religious speeches, although the audience is limited to women. During my fieldwork, I observed that a local elite man, who is a member of TJ (although TJ does not allow the GFC), invites Ayesa and other members of her group to give a speech to the women of his local community. The man arranged a place at his house where women from the neighboring areas could gather and attend the speech given by Ayesa. The man provides transportation and offers food to the GFC followers. According to the male Tablighi follower[9],

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[9] Md Faruk Hossain, 56 years old man, lived in Gaibandha. He is a businessman. He is a devoted follower of mainstream TJ. Although he has association with mainstream TJ but he thinks that the GFC group is not doing wrong. GFC is doing to make women religious. So he believes that he should help the GFC group. On behalf of the influential man GFC gets easy entrance in the local community. During interview with me, Faruq Hossain shared his feelings that he had invited the GFC women to make his community women religious. He expressed that GFC's talim activities

The women of GFC are working for making the community women to be more pious. They are guiding women according to Islam, so why should men prevent them from such good doing.

This narrative suggests men's changing attitudes towards women's contribution to Islamization. In such a way, religious engagement in the GFC and collective performances in *Talim ghar* have increased Ayesa's and other women's status among both the women and the men of the local community. Therefore, recognition of Ayesa's leadership does not stem from her involvement in leading, performing, and guiding certain religious activities among the womenfolk. Rather, the meaning of her leadership is shaped through the social recognition she receives for her efforts to making other women conscious about their self-responsibility in religion.

Some might argue that the specificity of Ayesa's case has less implication in generalizing the trend of female religious leadership in Bangladesh. Obviously, the strength of GFC is lesser than the mainstream TJ. Nevertheless, more and more women in various localities of the country are attending under the platform of GFC, for it provides a self-choice to engage with religion, especially for those women who do not have or find their male kin available for accompany them in TJ movement.

made a good environment in his community. According to him 'good' means women became more religious.

Moreover, it also provides mobility in out-of-home space not just for religious engagement, but also for social interaction that help lessen their troubled life experience they face in a deeply patriarchic social structure, familial and cultural contexts. A Similar trend of female leadership, as reported in some other studies, is also noticed in other areas of the country. For example, White (2010) reported a woman, known as *Amma Huzur*, a title conferred for her Tablighi leadership, of another locality who establishes a *Talim* house where women can pray and meet for religious lessons. *Amma Huzur* has extensive network and is invited by others to preach women in neighboring localities. Even she plans to extend her *Talim* house by establishing an Islamic religious school (madrasa). Similar cases are also reported by Asraf and Camellia (2008). Although these studies are unaware of the difference between TJ women and GFC, their cases mostly likely represent the female Tablighi leaders of the GFC.

6.10. Women's Resistance and Negotiation at home

In addition to increasing piety, in the religious gatherings of the *Talim* house, the women talk about women's affairs, central of this discussion is domestic violence. During my fieldwork, Masuda, a devoted follower of the GFC, shared her personal life experience. She is a 45 years old housewife and lives in Gaibandha. Bitter experiences at family life encourage Masuda to join in GFC. She states,

> My husband used to beat me regularly. Once I decided to commit suicide, but
> fortunately I met Ayesa at that time. She suggested that I kept patience, as

Islam also prescribes so. Following her suggestion, I joined the GFC and found peace in my life. Now I am very busy in GFC.

During religious gatherings, the women discuss and share their daily life experiences with other members. Through this social interaction, they learn to adapt different strategies in their family lives. Masuda found that the Tablighi activities, religious gatherings, meetings, and social interactions with other members gave her some sort of socio-psychological support from her monotonous family life in which she had to face domestic violence. In the beginning of her Tablighi involvement, family members did not accept her mobility outside home and involvement in the GFC activities, and she needed to spend time for such activities often by reducing her domestic works. If some problem arose, she had to face physical torture by her husband. However, her devotion to religion encouraged her to continue despite the problems she faced in her family. Gradually, she became familiar with the women's circle, and her skill in providing *dawa* increased her status among the members. When Masuda's husband lost his job, she discussed it with other members of the group. One day, she requested Asma, a GFC member whose husband is the owner of an apparel factory in Gaibandha to find a job for her husband. Because of Asma's favor, Masuda was able to manage a job for her husband. This event increased Masuda's status to her husband who realized the benefit of his wife's network outside the home. Moreover, he began to believe that losing job was a punishment from God because he did not let his wife to attend GFC activities. Finally, he also changed and became a pious Muslim. Masuda states that now her husband regularly attends prayer

and does not oppose her to attend religious activities. Masuda status in the family, the relationship with her husband, in particular, has been changed due to her devotion to GFC's activities and the social network and capital she could utilize centering on these activities.

Masuda's case reveals that the GFC's Tablighi mission, to some extent, breaks the social taboo on talking about domestic violence. Domestic violence is not an uncommon phenomenon for many women who live in a patriarchal society in which men enjoy higher social status and prestige than women. In addition to Islamic activism, the social relationships and interactions among the GFC members make women more conscious about their life experiences such as violence and other forms of oppressive behavior towards them. While remembering her past family life, Masuda realized that if she were clever, like what she is now, she would not have had to face domestic violence in her family life. She felt that now she is cleverer than before because of her association with GFC, social relationships, and networks with the other women.

Although discussion on domestic violence in *Talim* house has very little impact on reducing the trend of violence against women, it makes conscious about various aspects of oppressive behavior against women in their families and often equip them with certain strategy to face the difficulty in their own life contexts. Most of the GFC women mention that their husbands did not welcome their involvements in religious activities out of the home. However, they could defend and resist

husbands' opposition by rationalizing that they are in the path of spirituality. They try to manage their household activities with more sincerity and punctuality in order to avoid any clash between the work in the family and in the Tablighi activities. Moreover, women's involvement in out of kin networks in the community has increased their status, which in turn affects their positions in their families. Since they are often being invited to other religious ceremony and Tablighi programs, they gradually get recognition on their mastery in religious knowledge from their family members. This helps them reshape their relationships with their male partners, and they found that their voices are often being heard in family decision-making process. For instance, Masuda informs that her husband does not want to continue her daughter's education anymore. But she believes girl needs proper and higher education. Masuda resists her husband's view and allows her daughter to continue her study. Her husband does not bear the cost of education for his daughter. Masuda arranges a part-time job for her by which she manages to continue her study. Education may reduce the sufferings of women both in the family and outside world, according to Masuda. Therefore, it can fairly be said that Tablighi activities of the GFC does not just affect the boundary of religious practices for women but also the gender relationship of the women in their families.

6.9 Conclusion:

This study proceeds to understanding two emerging notions of transforming women's boundary and developing female religious leadership through their involvement in Islamization. The case of GFC exemplifies that the female Tablighi followers are in

the process of transforming defined boundary of religious practices and the Islamization process for women. As I discussed earlier, that the *Talim* house as a community place provides space for women to teach and preach Islam and discuss about their own life experiences. For them, *Talim* house works as a place both for enriching spirituality as well as for being socialized. Although *Talim* house also represents a homelike environment for women, it is the place where they can connect themselves with wider community people, can have social interactions, and build new social relationships. The for-women-and-by–women environment in the *Talim* house allows the members of the GFC to establish equal accessibility like men in certain religious practices and observances collectively. Popularity of these religious practices and observance shows the GFC women's influence among the other women that connects their activities in the community. On the other hand, GFC's broader agenda for community reform are carried by their womenfolk. If the women become perfect in religious knowledge, they will guide other family members. Thus, GFC also reinforces women's greater roles in domestic realms, which are the core activities of inner domain. In this sense, the GFC women have been performing the bridging roles in Islamization project that connect them with home and in the outer world. Moreover, they redefine the notion of seclusion or veiling as a bridging strategy to connect their spiritual and material world. Wearing veil the women's involvement in community reform through guiding other women connect them both at home and world.

This study shows the GFS leadership has been observed according to the women's personal understanding of Islam that they embody through their open accessibility in different source of Islam rather than merely depends on the religious interpretation of male authority in TJ. Their Islamic understandings create consciousness and they recognize men and women are equal before God, same as the women of mainstream TJ that I discussed in chapter 5. They believe men and women have equal rights to perform all religious rituals to gather God's reward. Such understandings encourage them to form a separate religious group and to lead collective religious rituals in different way that I showed earlier. However, this particular feminine consciousness is not synonymous with secular notions of gender equality. Within an unequal social and cultural structure, the female leader may not intend to be equal like men rather GFC female leadership works accepting the ''innate difference between men and women which represents a Muslim view different from that of feminists'' (Dafter-I Mutaliat va Tahqiqat-I Zanan, 2006, p.11; cf . Sakurai, 2011, p.50). Nevertheless, this new female leadership creates a voice in the religious sphere. Harder (2006) argues that Islamic revival has brought about the democratization of religious knowledge and authority in religious sphere. This argument allows the women to be an expert practitioner of Islam and ensures that their use of religious arguments can provide them public credibility at a time of pious revival. The local community women increasingly follow the GFC leaders. To some extend, expertise in religious knowledge raise their status to men of the community.

Despite positive progress in women's religious activities, it is difficult to say that the GFC is challenging the traditional gender norms in the Islamic movement and in broader context of society. Rather, the female religious activists exercise their agency by negotiating not just the restricted gender norms of Islamic movement, but also with the patriarchal social structure and cultural context. As we have seen, the women's religious gatherings unveil the private matters (such as domestic violence) in *Talim* house. Through group discussion and sharing personal experiences, the women reconfigure the gender relation in the family, often by transforming male partners' attitudes towards them and their activities. Religious knowledge reinforces women to obey men. On the other hand, their accessibility in out of kin network or other women's networks make them aware that they are not only the victim of men at home, thus allows them to resist against their partner's view. As shown earlier those by engaging in negotiation and resistance process, the GFC women raise their voice in the family. Therefore, women's involvement in religious networks has increased their status at home and in the community while men's dominance in the social and religious hierarchy, in general, continues to persist. Despite being in the subordinated religious and cultural conditions, women's roles contribute to reconfigure and reshape the gendered boundary and relations of religious practices and movement.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I try to illuminate the potential spaces and driving forces that may redefine the structural organization of religious practices through women's participation in the Islamic movement, specifically within the TJ in Bangladeshi society. In this traditional relationship, the power of manhood has historically been located in the outer world against the women's inner world (home), and where men are conventionally seen as active agents for their authorships, scholarships, and leaderships in the religious sphere. From a secular-liberal emancipatory gender perspective, the Islamic movement including TJ is a challenging force that reinforces gender disparity through ideological and political maneuvering in Muslim societies, most of which have been encountering relentless tensions and conflict between modernity and Islam, particularly at a time when Islam is used as the ideological and cultural means of resistance against empowerment needed for the women in the Muslim world. In this wider political and cultural context, Muslim women are important subjects both for Islamization and secular-liberal emancipatory projects. For the former, the women are repositories of culture and tradition and hence can have significant contributions to the ongoing Islamization project whilst for the latter they need to be taken out from the shackles of religion that limit their freedom, autonomy, and liberty.

The findings of this study, which attempts to explicate women's involvement in Islamization process by taking into account the case of TJ, the largest Islamic faith-renewal and piety movement, would have significant

contributions to the wider debate and the contending issues on gender and Islam in contemporary Muslim societies. Against the secular-liberal thesis on religion as antithesis to change, the study reveals that women in Islamic movements can transform their social and religious positions as "passive subject", which is conditioned by religious or patriarchic structure, to "active agent" which are capable to take actions in favor of their religious desires and subjectivities, though in a limited form, without challenging the core gender division, norms, and values articulated in the gender ideology of Islam and in other forms of social and cultural interactions.

The objective of the study, as framed in a series of interconnected sets of inquiries, was to understand the changing gender relationship, if there any, in the TJ movement and in religion if broadly understood. First, I tried to illuminate the genealogy of the gender discourse and ideology of TJ in its formative period in colonial India. As discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, I contend that the question of "women's reform", a core discourse on gender emerged in a complex interplay of historical-political forces—colonial power, nationalistic aspiration, and communal division in the Indian subcontinent, had largely influenced the gender ideology of the Tablighi reformist movement as framed by its founders, the elite Islamic scholars, in British colonial India. By analyzing the discourses of both Muslim modernist and traditional Islamic scholars on why and how Muslim women, the cultural repositories of Islam, are subjected and critiqued under the "civilizing mission" of colonial modernity, should be reformed. The chapter revealed that the egalitarian notion of gender targeted women to have more active roles in the construction of Islamic identity and Muslim community in

a divisive communal context. In this reform project, Muslim women were relegated in a new patriarchic context in which the women were expected to have a more active role but in a separate domain of worlds—the inner world (home) for women and the outer world for men. The gender ideology of TJ as devised and framed in the movement by its founding Islamic scholars fitted to the discourse on seclusion ideology, and yet paradoxically, on extended and renewed roles of women in the wider Muslim community in colonial India. The ideology of the 'ideal Islamic femininity' rooted in the Tablighi structure and rules, therefore, permitted Muslim women to take responsibilities in the Islamizing project like their male counterparts but under a separate domain of worlds—Tablighi activities for women in the inner world (home) with the women-only environment and the outer world with male companions and guidance. Though these gender division and ideology are largely maintained and authorized in TJ movement, many women who opt not to just cultivate Islamic piety but also to take responsibility for the religion in reforming the other women's selves and society. These women felt they are capable of taking actions for their own choices and desires that affect the structuralized gender ideology of the movement, as I revealed in the previous Chapters.

In Chapter Four, I questioned why the reformist appeal of TJ emerged in a particular historical-political context in colonial India, finding that it widened spaces among the Muslim women of various classes in contemporary Bangladeshi society. As I contend, women's visibility in various arenas in Bangladeshi society has significantly increased resulting from multiple state and non-state (including NGOs) development programs and policies. The traditional power structure

threatened by contemporary social changes attempts to maintain the status quo of the conventional social structure by dint of which they could exercise their powers and domination over women. On the other hand, contemporary social changes also compounded the social environment and put the women in an ambivalent social situation. Despite progress in women's empowerment, the Bangladeshi social structure is deeply patriarchic in nature, and in this patriarchic society unequal gender norms are widely practiced (Murshid, n.d; Kabeer, 1999). The women face not just the challenge of a power structure such as with the local elites and Islamic clerics (Karim, 2004), but also a very hostile and uncongenial social environment in which they often experience sexual assault, domestic violence and various other forms of discrimination and exploitation. In this context, being a pious subject means maintaining a faith as well as abiding by the gender norms of the social structure. It also gives many women, as I illustrated with several cases of Tablighi women, a kind of social security for them. For instance, veiled women, as Tablighi women expressed, are not the target of sexual assault or victims of violations. Therefore, religiosity among women, despite their overall progress, can be seen in an increasing trend among Muslim women including the educated class, such as with university students (Rozario, 2006). I argued that the state promotes emancipatory and liberating programs for women on one hand and accommodates Islam as a political and cultural discourse on the other. In this paradoxical political context, the Islamists and the traditional Islamic scholars find their spaces in promoting Islam both as a political and cultural force, which also affects the increasing trend of women's participation in TJ. Also, the TJ's leaderships responded to the social changes in order to accommodate the women followers in the movement. For many years, the movement was limitedly

operating in various houses of Tablighi followers, and there is no space for Tablighi women in the Kakrail Mosque, the Headquarters of TJ in Bangladesh, nor at the center of managing and operating TJ movements for men coming from other countries and various parts of Bangladesh. Muslim women's accessibility to the mosque as a public religious space is conventionally restricted and widely unpracticed. However, gradually the TJ leadership constructed an additional building for Tablighi women at the Kakrail Mosque in which the followers can come and stay overnight (with their male partners, mostly husbands). This is an ideological shift of the TJ, for it gives women a religious space beyond their homes, partly due to growing number of followers and partly to wider visibility and mobility of women in the society. Similarly, the annual congregational gathering—*Biswa Ijtema*—is exclusively for men, which articulates the seclusion and separation ideology of women from men; however, in recent years, the TJ leadership authorizes women to conduct Tablighi activities after the congregation, so that they can have similar, though not equal, opportunities like men. Despite significant progress in reducing the gender disparity in Bangladeshi society, the reformist appeal of TJ became popular among the middle and lower classes, educated, partially educated, and uneducated women of different ages because of interplay among prevailing gender norms, social structures, hostile social environments towards women, the political context, and the institutionalization of the movement in Bangladeshi society.

One of the central targets of TJ is to reform the Muslim selfhood through certain religious practices, observances, and disciplinary rules. In the process of formation of the pious subjecthood and subjectivity, the women in the TJ

movement are being subjected under the technologies of the power of religion, and it is somewhat closed to the idea of the 'docile body' which is "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" and "can only be achieved through strict regiment of disciplinary power" (Foucault, 1979, p.136).

In Chapter Five, my ethnographic account on Tablighi lessons, religious preaching, missionary tours, and other religious practices delineated the subject formation process of the women. As my discussion revealed, the subjectivation process through the Tablighi religious practices and lessons do not secure only the subject's i.e. the Tablighi women's subordination to the gender ideology of TJ and to Islam but also generate the subject's consciousness as an agent, an argument that closely reflects the theoretical discussion on women's power, subjectivity and agency I made in the Introduction of this dissertation. As analyzed in Chapter Five, women interpret, link, and connect the Tablighi practices, lessons, and discourses in relation to their own life experiences, and their submission to the reformist appeal of TJ and desire for cultivating and embodying religiosity, modesty, and the womanhood Islam prescribed are developed through their experiences with the "lived religion" (McGuire, 2010).

TJ as a 'total institution' indoctrinates woman for how she can construct her ideal Muslim womanhood through certain religious and moral lessons, ritual performances, and observances. But the Islamic piety is not unconsciously grasped by the female Tablighi followers. Instead, the Tablighi narratives about this and the other world are interpreted and grasped by them through their lived experience in social settings and family contexts. By analyzing two religious

practices as obligatory, such as veiling and prayer, I argue that the notion of controlling the body is central to the process of pious subjecthood that generates consciousness by which the women willingly control their bodies. The lived experiences and practice of controlling the body is intricately correlated to the way the individual woman embodies a conscious commitment to God, s desire for religiosity and a set of moral dispositions and a disciplining life-style according to Islamic guidance. These aspects are central to the transformation of one's self, in a similar fashion to what Winchester (2008) depicts as the embodiment of faith. The entire process produced a new kind of pious subjectivity. Also, I explicate that a Tablighi woman as a religious agent being transformed through Tablighi practices becomes equipped with a sense of self-responsibility by dint of which she feels that she is alone accountable and responsible for reward or punishment from God for her deeds.

The perceived notion of individual responsibility brings her in an equal right and status in front of God. Nevertheless, this individual instrumentalist perspective leads woman to take some actions, which generate some forms of power and authority to religiously conscious individual woman to control her own body, choices, and desires. For example, some women break the restricted rules of veiling and seclusion that TJ promotes for cultivating piety. Rather, they adapt veiling in a convenient way that meets their daily needs. The flexibility in veiling practice derives from theirs own engagements with a lived religion, social context, and understandings about Islam. Moreover, personal reform and the individual's sense of self-responsibility push them to take responsibilities in reforming their community, particularly in targeting other womenfolk. As a part of community,

304

they aim to reform their family and other kin members. Mastery in religious knowledge, over the course of her involvement in TJ, often transforms their status in the family, and as revealed in several cases, some women play roles as religious masters to guide their husbands in religious matters. Also, they can gain certain forms of status through their Tablighi activities among other women in the community. Therefore, pious subjectivity generated through Tablighi disciplinary regulatory process to which the women submit themselves willingly seems to enable the women to work for religion not just in the inner domain, such as with family members and close kin circles but also beyond that, which indicates a new form of women's engagement beyond the conventional religious structure.

The case of GFC, as analyzed in Chapter Six, reveals women's self-conscious involvement in resisting the restricted gender norms of the mainstream TJ, and it also indicates how women can create alternative platforms of Islamic activism and movements without a dependency on men.

The gender rules as adopted in the mainstream TJ movement permits women to join the movement if they are being accompanied by their husband or any other unmarriageable kin. GFC is formed by women and for women who do not have any male interested in TJ activities or who cannot convince their male partners to join them but would like to involve in the Tablighi mission. The Tablighi women in GFC, as seen violating the principle gender norms of the mainstream TJ, often pose questions about the men's interpretation about women's roles in religion and about their discourses that define them in a confined spatial boundary for cultivating their pious subjectivities. By forming

305

new Tablighi groups like the GFC and introducing women's accessibility to collective religious rituals beyond their inner world/home, they are able to create a new space for religious practices and Tablighi activities—these efforts suggest the changes of the conventional spatial organization in which women have historically been associated with the domestic space for practicing religion, maintaining cultural tradition and identity.

The annual congregational prayer for the *Eid* festival is exemplary here, for it has been the subject of men's religious practices outside of the home, while the same religious practice for women has been performed so far at home. But the GFC introduces this practice for women outside the home at the *Talim* house, a mosque-like religious institution they construct for regular Tablighi activities and other religious observances and performances. In one sense, the agency they exercise through their involvement in religious activities enables them to create a space in the community for their own choices and desires for religious practices. The way in which the women organize other womenfolk, lead the collective religious practices, and create space for women in outside of the home are some of the examples of the evolving roles of female leadership in Islam, which has historically been restricted. Their alternative and creative actions in favor of their pious subjectivities and religiosity indicate a form of resistance against the notion of conventional structure in which women are always associated with their inner world whilst men in the outer or material world, and this form of resistance also seems to redefine the ideology of seclusion between men and women in favor of their own interests and desires and eventually allow them to extend their rights and roles in the religious sphere. On the contrary, the members of GFC are also

306

concerned about their Muslim identity and roles in the inner world. Their actions generate results in reconfiguring their religious boundary on the one hand and accepting the culturally and socially assigned roles in the conventional boundary on the other. Therefore, changes in the religious sphere are the production of an ongoing interplay between structure and actions.

Anthropological Perspective on Gender and Islam

Earlier studies cast light on the question –does women's participation in Islamic activism lead to the evolvement of Islamic feminism in Bangladesh (Rozario, 2006)? Women's piety is seen in relation to the violation of equal gender rights. Indeed, the framework of women's piety that the Islamic movement draws is hardly emancipatory for them. What is distinctive, as I argued, is that the pious women consciously oppose or resist to the Western notion of women's freedom and gender equality. For the pious women who are involved in Islamic movements like TJ, raising question about equal gender rights would put them against God's will, for Islam provides a separate gender roles. However, by bringing God into an argument, the pious subjects consciously obey the rules of identical gender roles. I have argued that understanding the process of piety formation based on women's perspective produces a new kind of pious subjectivity, which acquires different motivations, consciousness and desires. These religious subjects respond in different ways in the Islamization process to bring transformation to their roles and status in the religious sphere. The idea of subject formation through a lived relation based on embodied potentialities and material relations is not new, and it offers to conceptualize agency as a creative or imaginative substrate to action (McNay, 2000). According to McNay's

307

suggestions, I have argued that the pious women become creative subjects within the creative process of religious subjectification.

I argue that the ambivalence among the religious subjects shows their agency as 'creative conformity' that moves away from the idea of religious women's 'agency based on resistance power for freedom from men' (e.g. Abu-Loughod, 1998, Boddy, 1998). The feminist scholar Bucar (2010) argues that, for doing creative actions, it is not necessary to be an autonomous subject nor does it mean that creativity originates in some space of pure freedom. Instead, creativity occurs within the tradition itself through conformity to religious beliefs. Women's of this thesis are seen to exercise their religious knowledge to bring reform in personal, familial, and community lives. When women face complexities in the existing structure of the Islamic movement, they resist men's dominance by making new groups. These new roles demonstrate pious women as actors that challenge the earlier conceptualization of 'religious women as victims of Islamism' (Ong, 1995, Esfandiari, 1997; Hammai, 1997). This thesis argues that the creative subjects resist the gendered relations at home and gendered structure in the religious sphere, while simultaneously they conform to the other forms of gendered norms. Their self-representation still sees them existing with other representations and as operating within those lines. Pious women's conformity to the gendered structure can be interlinked to Mahmood's (2001) idea of a religious subject as 'willed submission to discursive traditions'. Therefore, agency serves to advance creative actions in the religious sphere for bringing progressive change to conscious actors and to extend their roles in social space, while it also restores traditional gender norms and practices.

Considering agency in relation to the notion of creative conformity suggests that we rethink the secular conceptualization of Islam and women in which women are portrayed as "mistress of private Islamic space" (Robinson 2007) in a binary framework of home/world space (Chatterjee, 1989). Rather, Butler (1997, cf. Mahmood, 2001) argues that gender is an effect of power secured through a repeated performance of norms. This idea allows rethinking pious women's roles as dynamic instead of portraying it as static. Women's new roles as religious masters and religious leaders (although it is limited among womenfolk) empower them to reach to the wider community through women's social networks. Their active involvement in collective actions moves them from home to community where they become concerned about community reform through increasing piety-based activities and performances among a large number of women. It provides the women an opportunity to redefine their roles and spaces in the religious sphere.

Glossary

Akherat   next world

Akheri Munajat   final prayer of the annual gathering of TJ

*Bay*an   speech

Bidah   against the law

Burqa   veil

Dawa   call on/ to invite people

Deen   Islam

Din   religion, Islam

Duniya   this World

Dua   supplication

Eid   main Festival of Muslim

Fitna   disbelief/disorder

Ghast   patrol, door to door visit to invite people in Islam

Hajj   Islamic Pilgrimage

Hadith   traditions of Prophet Muhammad

Halka   small administrative unit of TJ

Hafiz   one who can memorize the whole Quran

Hijab   cover, Screening between non-*Mahrem* men and women

Ijtema   congregation

Imam   leader

Ilm   knowledge

Jamaat   group of peoples

Jahiliya   ignorance

Kalima   faith

Masturat   women in cover
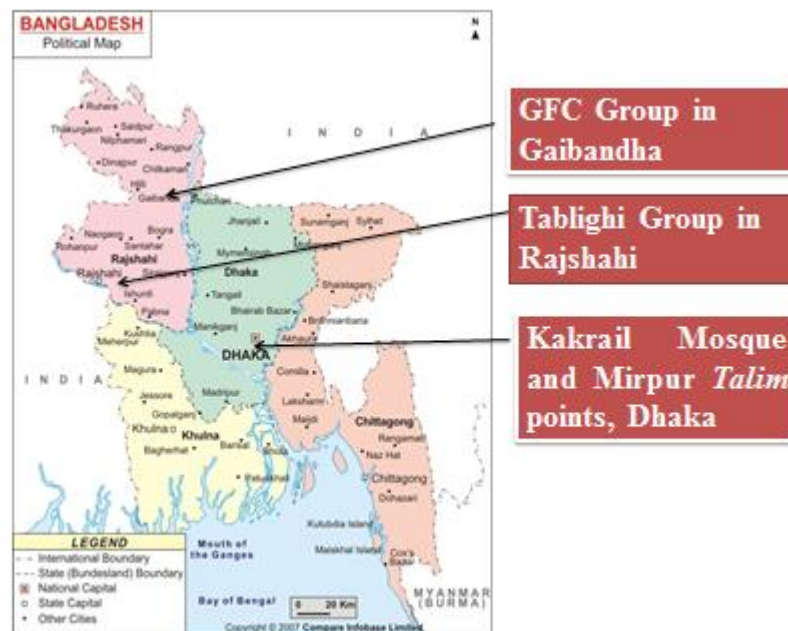
Munazat   prayer

Markaj   headquarter

Masjid	mosque
Mashwara	consultation
Mustir Chal	hand full of rice
Nafl namaj	additional prayer
Orna	female's garment to cover upper part of body
Purdah	veil
Quran	holy book
Sunnah	usual Practice / Muhammad's Sunnah
Shalwer-kameez	female dress/ long shirt, loose trouser
Sura	consultative committee
Tabligh	to Communicate; Islamic Missionary work
Talim	education, religious lesson, reading circle
Talim ghar	house where reading circle is organized
Tashkheel	Invite people to Jamaat
Tariqa	Method
Taqwa	conduct/ behaviors
Thana	small administrative unit of Bangladesh
Taka	the name currency of Bangladesh
Ummah	worldwide body of Muslim believers
Ulama	plural of *alim*
Zikr	chanting Allah
Zimmader	responsible person
Wudu	ablution

Fig-1: Location of the Research Areas in South Asia
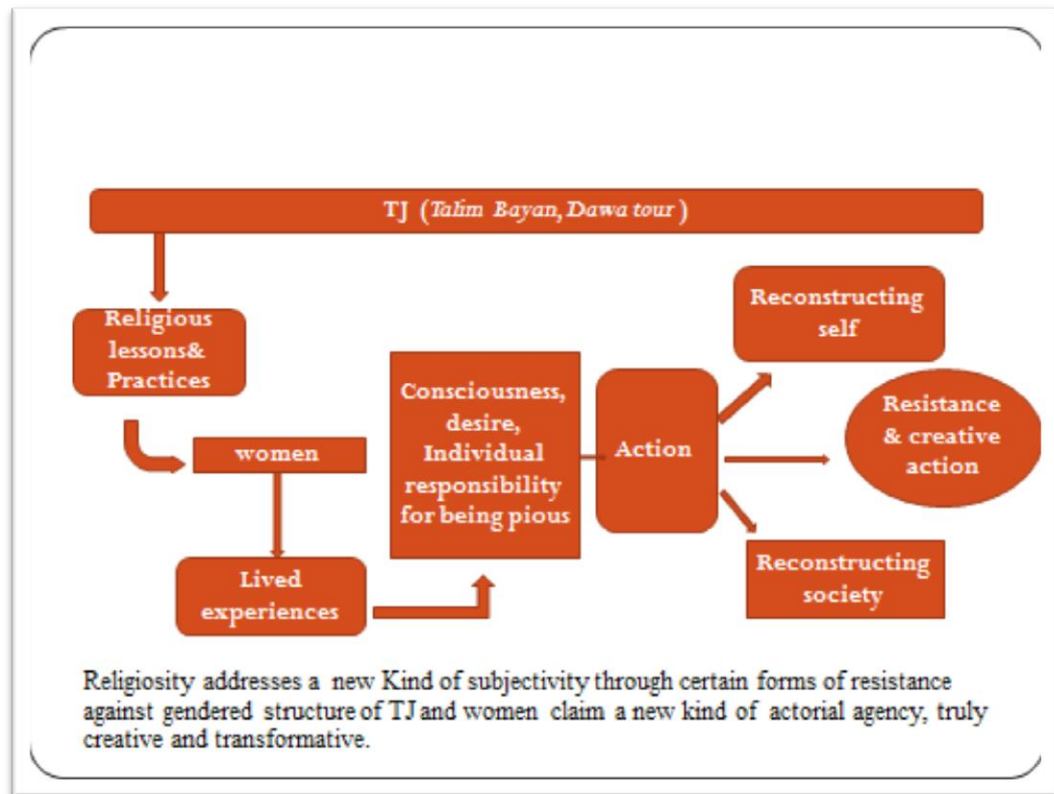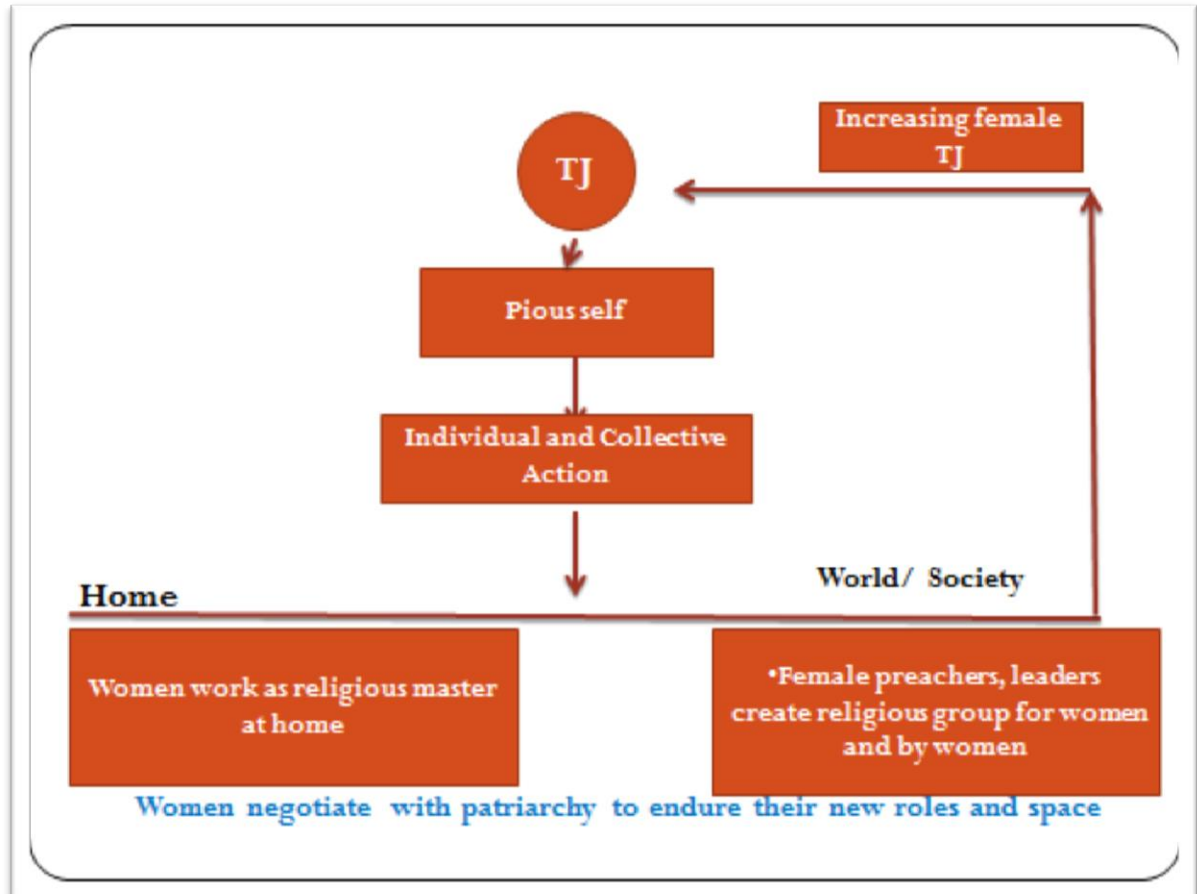

Fig-2: Location of the Research Areas in Bangladesh

Annex -2

Fig-3: Subject Formation Process and Agency

Religiosity addresses a new Kind of subjectivity through certain forms of resistance against gendered structure of TJ and women claim a new kind of actorial agency, truly creative and transformative.

Fig-4: Tablighi Jamaat Women's Extended Roles

Annex 4

Masturater kaj somporke Hedeyet[1]

Masturat consists a big part of Muslim *Umaah*. So women's religious activities carry important significance same as men in Islamization. The significance of doing religious activities among women is important but it also carries potentiality of occurring *fitna* (disorder). Thus, observing the principles and rules of TJ is very important for doing women's activities.

<u>Women's work</u>

1. Men and women with their children will perform *Talim* (reading session) at home. At home every person will perform *Dawa* (invite in Islamic practice) to other family members. Everybody follow the simple lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad in daily performing even in dressing, in eating and in observing behaviors and conducts. Women will establish an Islamic environment at home and send the male members in Tablighi *Dawa* tour.

2. If there is weekly *Talim* arrangement at neighboring places Masturat are suggested to attend in it. Otherwise, the women experienced in the work of Masturat Jamaat, who has experience of joining in *Dawa* tour for ten, fifteen, and twenty days they can arrange weekly *Talim* at home. But the condition is the man of the household will be experienced in *Dawa* tour and the *Talim* will be attached with adjacent mosque. At the weekly *Talim* who are responsible for doing activities such as *Talim, estekbal* (inviting people at the

[1] Translated and extracted from the document about *Masturater kaj somporke hedeyet* (Principles and conditions of activities of Masturat Jamaat) collected from Kakrail Mosque.

315

Talim room), and *Tashkheel* (inviting women for making new *Dawa* tour group) will be directed by the men leaders of adjacent mosque. Without men's consultation, women cannot take decision to make new *Talim* session. Once in month or once within two month, *Bayan* (speech) will be provided by men Tablighis at women's weekly *Talim.*

3. Women should not give speech like men.

4. Women should attend at *Talim* or *Dawa* tour in simple dress. They should avoid to using jewelry.

5. The women should keep them away to do the performance of *Talim and Tashkheel* when they are in standing mode. When the *Talim* will be finished, the Masturat will immediately leave the *Talim* house for going to their home.

The principles of attending Jamaat tour

1. One man will be selected as *ameer (leader)* to lead the full Jamaat group. Woman will not be selected as *ameer* even for leading women's group. Women will be informed through their *mahram* male relatives. Woman can give their opinion through their man relatives. The Man will inform it in men's discussion. Women are not allowed to do anything without men's consultation.

2. Women are allowed to join in Jamaat tour with attachment of their *mahram* men relatives (men relatives to whom marriage is restricted for example; father, brother, grandfather, maternal uncle, and son). Mostly Masturat is suggested to attend in Jamaat tour with their husband. It is better if the *mahram* men relatives are elder. They should be in bearded. Masturat attend in Jamaat tour with the men relatives who are married.

316

3. During the period of stay Jamaat tour, women are responsible to cook for the whole group. Women of Masturat Jamaat will stay at a local Tablighi man's house while the men will stay in neighboring mosque.

4. For 10, 15 or 20 days tour, Jamaat will be formed not less than five pair of men and women and will not exceeded more than eight pairs of men and women.

5. Unmarried women are not allowed for 10, 15 or 20 days tours rather they can join with their father and mother in three days tour at local areas. Children are not allowed in *Dawa* tour.

6. For attending forty days tour or doing *Chilla* tour, Masturat can attend with their men *mahram* who have experiences of joining at 40 days *Dawa* tour for three times.

<u>Religious performing from dawn to night during women's stay at Jamaat tour</u>

1. If the women of Jamaat are new members, they will be in groups and teach the six points. If the six points are known to them, they will practice it among them.

2. They will read the Quranic verses. Masturat will teach the Six points to the local women at *Talim*.

3. After lunch, the men leaders provide speech in women's Talim where the local women join. After providing men's speech, the women of Masturat Jamaat tour group perform *Dawa* activities among the local women. Masturat will invite them to form new Jamaat group.

4. During their stay in *Dawa* tour, women are suggested to learn the proper manner *(adab)* to do religious performing. For example, the manner of inviting people in Islamic practices, to perform *dua* (supplication) etc.

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