MUSLIM CHILDHOODS AMIDST DISCOURSES ON NATIONALISM IN INDIA

A CRITICAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

A THESIS TO BE SUBMITTED TO

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BY

SHAIMA AMATULLAH

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

DR. SHALINI DIXIT

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Private University Established in Karnataka by ACT 35 of 2013
Bengaluru- 560064

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this thesis "**Muslim Childhoods amidst Discourses on Nationalism in India: A Critical Social Psychological Approach**" submitted by **Ms. Shaima Amatullah** was carried out under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree or examination at any university. References, help and material obtained from other sources have been duly acknowledged. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

Research Supervisor: Dr. Shalini Dixit

Assistant Professor

School of Social Sciences

National Institute of Advanced Studies

Date:

THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Private University Established in Karnataka by ACT 35 of 2013
Bengaluru- 560064

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

I declare that this thesis entitled "**Muslim Childhoods amidst Discourses on Nationalism in India: A Critical Social Psychological Approach**" submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy to THE UNIVERSITY OF TRANS-DISCIPLINARY HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY, Bengaluru, is my original work, conducted under the supervision of my guide, **Dr. Shalini Dixit**. I also wish to inform that no part of the research has been submitted for a degree or examination at any university. References, help and material obtained from other sources have been duly acknowledged.

I hereby confirm the originality of the work and that there is no plagiarism in any part of the dissertation.

Place: Bengaluru **Signature of the Candidate**
Date:

Name of candidate: Shaima Amatullah

Reg. No.: 20319010101

Date of Reg.: 02 May 2019

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List of Acronyms

CAA – Citizenship Amendment Act

CBSE – Central Board of Secondary Education

CSP – Critical Social Psychology

IB – International Baccalaureate

ICSE – Indian Certificate of Secondary Education

IGCSE – International General Certificate of Secondary Education

KPS – Karnataka Public School

KSEEB – Karnataka Secondary Education Examination Board

MSC – Minority Status Certificate

NCMEI – National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions

NRC – National Register of Citizens

OBC – Other Backward Classes

RTE – Right To Education

SC – Scheduled Caste

SSLC – State Secondary Leaving Certificate

ST – Scheduled Tribe

Synopsis

This thesis presents a critical, socio-psychological analysis of Muslim childhoods in India, a minimally researched area. It examines how the tension between the competing discourses of nationalism, within a larger socio-political context of 'othering', becomes apparent in the lives of children belonging to the Muslim community, a marginalised religious minority group. From the existing literature, it was clear that despite being the most urbanised religious community, the socio-economic conditions of Muslims continue to be poorer than other minorities living in India. Problems of poverty, unemployment, poor access to education, healthcare, housing and being subject to various forms of violence including riots and genocides have been explained by pointing to certain unique aspects of marginalisation, which have not been found among other minorities (Basant, 2012; Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2012; Mander, 2019; Robinson, 2005, 2012). A nationwide study reported that Muslims have been looked at with suspicion in public spaces due to a double burden of being labelled as 'anti-national' and as being 'appeased', they experience hostility and discrimination while trying to access housing, in schools and jobs, they have been perceived as not interested in education, and they also fear being attacked during times of communal tension in any part of the country (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006). Alongside have been popular discourses that make an association of violence with Islam— madrasahs labelled as 'dens of terror', Muslim men stereotyped as aggressive/violent whereas Muslim women as suppressed/disadvantaged, and Mughal rulers marked as Muslim, and portrayed negatively in textbooks.

Within the synthesis of the extant literature, as these various threads were schematically mapped, it became clear that the religious identity of Muslims has become salient due to India's colonial past which culminated in the Partition. Thus, nationalist discourses, religion being an important facet in their articulations, have always had an enduring effect on the Muslims. The two major strands of nationalism — Indian nationalism (termed secularism post-independence) aims at 'inclusion' of religious minorities and Hindu nationalism/Hindutva explicitly excludes them,

especially the Muslims from their imaginations of a 'Hindu' India. In the imagination of the latter, Muslims were cast as 'outsiders' or 'invaders'. In sum, an overarching theme that ties these aspects of lived marginalisation and popular, dominant discourses is the construction of the Muslim as 'the other'—to be included or excluded— within the discourses of nationalism. Therefore, any question posed to understand Indian Muslim childhoods would be essentially linked to questions of how nationalism is (re)produced in the lives of children since all other discourses/stereotypes stem from it or overlap with it.

Thus, this thesis sets out to ask— what kind of socio-political discourses about the community are Muslim children aware of? What are their experiences? More specifically, how do they make sense of the nationalism discourses that often cast them as 'the other'? What are their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses? The study traces the interplay between the personal and the political— and demonstrates how the entanglement between religious and national identity within these discourses influence children's learning about the self and the other, their social goals and their overall identity processes.

Muslim childhood finds its mention in very few studies in India though research studies emphasise that early childhoods in India are often marked by religion. Within the context of schooling, though state schools in India tend to promote values of tolerance towards all religions, 'unity in diversity', they have concomitantly shown to be important sites of teaching a Hinduised idea of being Indian through rituals like pooja (Nambissan, 2010), touching the teachers feet, having pictures of deities, exclusive celebrations of Hindu festivals (Gogoi, 2014; Srivastava, 1998), linking of religious and national identity by repetitive singing of religious songs, embodiments and symbols (Bénéï, 2008; Thapan, 2014), disciplining of the body and mind through Hindu moral values (Deka, 2014) and textbook histories (Thapar, 2014). Barring a few exceptions, studies have shown that in the minds of Hindu children, 'true Indianness' was being equated to being Hindu and Muslims were considered to be 'an undifferentiated mass of people who cannot be trusted or who can turn violent any time' making Muslims a single entity analogous of disgust, threat thereby worthy of being hated and 'othered'. Thus, there is need to

recognise the impact of communalism in the context of education. Indian schools have shown to thus (re)produce nationalism discourses that entail exclusion of religious minorities. Apart from schools, such dominant discourses and stereotypes (of terrorism, also beef-eating and veiling of women) about Muslims propagated through media, movies and textbooks, and impact childhoods (Nathan, 2019). This has important implications for children, as they use these representations as a means to make sense of the world and build their own identities. For children belonging to minorities, the sense of belonging to the nation can be emotionally straining due to the negativity attached to their minority status (Scourfield et al., 2006). Thus, this thesis sets out to explore this interlacing of minority childhoods and nationalism.

To do this, the study makes a unique contribution by taking an interdisciplinary, critical social psychological (CSP) framework and attempts to bridge the disciplinary tensions and fissures between psychology, sociology and childhood studies,. This framework allows enough room for a researcher to navigate between the personal and social without having to take an either-or path. It critiques universalization/normalization of all human experience, recognizes the embeddedness of individuals in their socio-historical, cultural and political contexts imbued with contradictions of power, at the same time conceives human beings as active agents and treats researcher reflexivity as a productive force (Braun et al., 2017; Dreier, 2020; Holzkamp, 1983; Parker, 2007). Childhood studies often blends with other disciplines and has over the years continued to further our understandings of the key concepts related to children— critique of developmental perspectives, social (re)construction of childhood, child rights, agency, children as beings v/s becomings, citizenship and more (James & James, 2004; Qvortrup et al., 2009). Overall childhood studies denies the existence of a singular, essentialised notion of childhood by conceiving childhoods as complex, socially constructed phenomena that are (re)invented within diverse societies, while emphasizing children as social actors with agency. Since CSP approaches have similar underpinnings, they marry well with childhood studies to form a sound theoretical framework to fulfil the objectives of this study.

This study becomes relevant in a time when the world is witnessing an unapologetic normalisation of several isms (like nationalism, racism, fascism, sexism), xenophobia and islamophobia through right-wing political discourses and populism (Psaltis et al., 2017; Wodak, 2021). India is one such example wherein the right-wing ruling party's Hindutva movement has come to an unprecedented great strength. As children become exposed to such potent discourses of nationalism, questions of exclusion become more pertinent since social institutions like the family, school and media form important sites that continually regulate and (re)produce "childhood as part of national projects" (Millei & Imre, 2016, p.11). Among these institutions, schools have been considered central not only because children spend a large chunk of their day at schools but also because the state uses schools to consciously cultivate ideas of nationalism in children through their actual and hidden curriculum (Ahonen, 2001; Bénéï, 2008; Benwell, 2014; Carretero et al., 2012; Collins & Coleman, 2008; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Thus, schools were chosen as the primary site of investigation.

The fieldwork was carried out in two phases; first visiting and understanding the types of educational spaces available to Muslim students in Bangalore. The second phase involved making a systematic classification of these spaces and narrowing down the specific sites for ethnographic fieldwork. To cater to the heterogeneity within the Indian Muslim community, a multi-sited ethnography was carried out, focused on children in the age range of 12-16 years. However, along with schools, as critical educators have now increasingly emphasized extra-educational contexts in the complex and dynamic process of identity building (Spyrou, 2002), children's social interactions outside the schools— family, neighbourhood and social media— have been included as points of enquiry. Within ethnography, the methods of data collection used were— participant observation, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The data was coded, analysed using a blended approach (Graebner et al., 2012) which began with inductive coding and then moved towards deductive coding using a critical psychological conceptual lenses. Looking for themes and moving towards abstraction was done keeping in mind that themes were identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which are often

meaningless when viewed alone (Aronson, 1995). These themes were further refined through a reiterative process of collapsing/merging/separation until final abstract analytical themes emerged.

The findings highlight children's identity negotiations (keeping in mind their multiple intersecting identities), their agency and their cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses to dominant discourses. Through an in-depth analysis, the study shows that children engage with the political as ideas of nationalism are (re)produced in their everyday lives through a number of routine activities, in their schools (and other social spaces) which have often been perceived to be neutral spaces. Whether children identify with religion or not, they have no escape from their religious identity becoming salient— the probability that a given identity will be invoked in a social interaction. These interactions in turn bring about an important realisation, in the minds of children, of the 'self' being constructed as 'the other'. Children recognise that this construction is not a simple religious marginalisation rather it is due an intersection of their religious and national identities, which becomes evident through everyday nationalism and through episodes of hot nationalism (anti-Muslim violence, the CAA, the Babri-Ayodhya dispute and the passing of the Triple Talaq Bill).

Chapter 3 deals with the question of how Muslim children learn about dominant discourses of nationalism and other socio-political discourses that revolve around the community. This chapter particularly draws from Billig's (1995) 'everyday nationalism' to explain how children constantly (re)negotiate these discourses that percolate the spaces of their everyday lives. As children encounter stereotypes that make their religious identities salient, the analysis demonstrates how they become political actors. A range of their responses in different contexts with different social actors are discussed and inferences are drawn on their identity processes. This analysis is extended in Chapter 4, wherein children's responses during periods are discussed when the sense of belongingness to the nation becomes explicit. Using three cases in point of 'hot nationalism' (Billig, 1995; Fox, 2017) that had brought forth the Muslim identity, the contradictory, ambivalent and shifting nature of children's social positions and their ability to critically examine such issues are detailed, and thus childhood has been pointed out as an ambivalent social phenomenon. It becomes

clear in Chapter 3 and 4 that the past continues to bear weight on the present. In other words, the dominant socio-political discourses, deeply rooted in historical constructions of the Muslim identity, are shown to be continually (re)evoked in the lives of children. Therefore, in Chapter 5, the discussion on children's identity processes is deepened by focusing on their consumption of history. This chapter is insightful in providing an understanding of how children appropriate and resolve discrepancies between official narratives that exclude minorities and unofficial community narratives that foster a sense of belongingness to the nation. Through these findings, the outcomes of in/congruence among children's intersecting identities are reflected upon. Finally, in Chapter 6, Muslim children's experiences and agency, which are in a constant dialogue with parental decisions, are shown to be important aspects of the process of choosing a school. Here the manner in which the manifestation of nationalism discourses results in marginalisation has been demonstrated. Differential levels of discrimination/exclusions at a structural/geographic level (lack of Urdu medium high schools, precarious conditions of religiously segregated homes) and at a micro, everyday level (being asked to take part in Hindu religious rituals, not being allowed to wear hijabs, being force fed during Ramadan fasts) within schools result in narrow school choice set. Children are bound to travel long distances, accept a sudden change in the medium of instruction or often switch between schools in order to complete their education.

Through these findings, it becomes clear that is there is an urgent need for Indian schools to recognise that they are key sites for building children's national identities and recalibrate to what extent their actual and hidden curriculum are in opposition or in keeping with the constitutional commitment of a secular national identity that treats all religions as equal. More importantly, exclusion attempts to render, among minority children, a belief that their personal values are inferior, deficient, or substandard. This is compounded by the dominant discourses outside the school. The implications of such a devaluation or disconnect on identity has been illustrated throughout. And thus, there is a need to device mechanisms that would make schools consolidate plurality of other identities (caste, religion, gender, and class) within the same national identity and thereby inculcating a fruitful integration

among children from diverse backgrounds. This could further help children challenge nationalism discourses that are exclusionary. Additionally, schools must become spaces that encourage critical inquiry, and allow students to voice their concerns or confusions and bring up matters of difference without fear.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis, I explore the negotiations of Muslim childhoods in India. More specifically, I focus on how the discourses that conflate their religious and national identities are played out in their daily lives and how children negotiate these identities as they also intersect with gender, class and region. In this chapter, I set out the background, rationale and context for my empirical research. I detail the relevant literature and existing gaps and thus establish the relevance of the study. I finally present the chapter outlines.

1.1 Background and context: Situating the study

Globally, much has been written about the Muslim identity, especially, post the 9/11. Struggles of Muslim youth related to employment, being labelled as 'terrorist' and their open discrimination, especially those who bear visible markers of their religious identity like the beard or headscarf on their bodies, have been discussed in various contexts (Hopkins, 2004; Pennington & Kahn, 2018; Zine, 2006). However, Muslims living in India have been confronted with such challenges at least 50 years before the 9/11. Unlike other countries where the Muslims' identity problems have been compounded by an immigrant minority status, Indian Muslims are unique— they form an 'involuntary minority' (Ogbu, 2008). This was due to their non-migration during the Partition of India that took place in 1947, an unsuccessful attempt to provide a separate state to the Muslims. This marked the Indian Muslims as those who were actually meant to leave the country, thus, placing them outside of the purview of the national identity.

With this background, this thesis sets out to explore Muslim childhoods in India, a minimally researched area. To fathom what would be the questions to ask if one were to understand a complex phenomenon like childhood in a vastly heterogenous, marginalised minority community, certain key considerations were necessary. From the existing literature, it was clear that despite being the most urbanised religious community (Census of India, 2011a), the socio-economic conditions of Muslims continue to be poorer than other minorities living in India (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006, 2014). Problems of poverty, unemployment, poor

access to education, healthcare, housing and being subject to various forms of violence including riots and genocides have been explained by pointing to certain unique aspects of marginalisation, which have not been found among other minorities (Abdelhalim, 2015; Basant, 2012a; Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2012; Maizland, 2022; Mander, 2019; Robinson, 2005, 2012; Singh & Kaur, 2017). In a nationwide study, Muslims reported that they have been looked at with suspicion in public spaces due to a double burden of being labelled as "anti-national" and as being "appeased", they experience hostility and discrimination while trying to access housing, in schools and jobs, they have been perceived as not interested in education and they also fear being attacked during times of communal tension in any part of the country (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006). Alongside have been popular discourses that make an association of violence with Islam— madrasahs labelled as 'dens of terror' (Alam, 2011; Moulton, 2008; Noor et al., 2008), Muslim men stereotyped as aggressive/violent (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012; Rukmini, 2019) whereas Muslim women as suppressed/disadvantaged (Kirmani, 2016; Sanyal, 2011; Vatuk, 2008), and Mughal rulers marked as Muslim and portrayed negatively in textbooks (Mayaram et al., 2005; Thapar, 2014).

In my own synthesis of the extant literature, as I began to schematically map these various threads, I found that the religious identity of Muslims has become salient due to India's colonial past which culminated in the Partition. Thus, nationalist discourses, religion being an important facet in their articulations, have always had an enduring effect on the Muslims. The two major strands of nationalism— Indian nationalism (termed secularism post-independence) aims at 'inclusion' of religious minorities and Hindu nationalism/Hindutva[1] explicitly excludes them, especially the Muslims from their imaginations of a 'Hindu' India (Pandey & Samad, 2007). In the imagination of the latter, Muslims were cast as 'outsiders' or 'invaders' (Thapar, 2014). The core ideology of Hindutva rests on the belief that only those whose '*janmabhoomis*' (places of birth) and '*poonyabhoomis*' (places of worship) were both in India could be considered citizens (Savarkar, 1928). It thereby excludes religious minorities especially the Muslims. It assigns new gendered meanings— represents the

1 Hindutva is a predominant and militant form of Hindu nationalism that points particularly to the Muslims as 'the other'.

Muslim male as hyper-masculine aggressive, and Brahmins as hyper-effeminate (Bacchetta, 2000). It further describes these gendered categories; the slaughtering of the cow has been considered as the Muslim male's aggression on the Hindu female goddess— 'the cow' (Bacchetta, 2000). It constructs the Partition of India as an attempt to cleanse a Hindu land of imposters and redeem the failure of the Hindu male to protect the motherland, *Bharatmata*, a Hindu chaste female, from Muslim invaders (Dubashi, 1992). Post-independence, Indian secularism not only attempted to curb Hindu nationalism but also aimed at the separation of religion from the state since religion was seen as a deterrent to modernisation and development.

Though state apparatus was filled with orthodox leaders favouring Hindu communal ideology, the Nehruvian idea of India as a secular, industrial, scientific 'modern' state was enshrined in the constitution (R. Sen et al., 2014). The two most prominent meanings attributed to secularism in the Indian context are *dharmanirpeksata* (religious neutrality)— all citizens have equal rights irrespective of their religious affiliation and *sarvadharma samabhava* (religious equality)— state acknowledges religious differences and allows citizens to freely practise their own faith (Govinda, 2013). However, this separation of religion from the state was never absolute as the Indian variant retained a complex, moral and "multi-value" laden character (Bhargava, 2007). "This resulted in a mixed social and political transition: secularism thrived, but religious antagonism, which was hastily buried, did not die but remained dormant" (Sen et al., 2014, p.4).

Post Partition, Muslims were linked to communalism and a separatist position (Engineer, 1990) and secular nationalism posed a choice between either becoming secular by diluting into the mainstream or becoming characterised as communal and therefore anti-national (Williams, 2012). This was in contrast to the shared belongingness in the pre-colonial rule (Sikand, 2003; Sobti & Bhalla, 1997; Uberoi, 1999). The Muslim masses, who had actively engaged in India's freedom struggle (Engineer, 2004; Habib, 2017b), in their strong opposition against this geographical demarcation decided to remain in India. Eventually, there came about a perceived foreignness or "otherness" (Sinha-Kerkhoff, 2004; Talbot, 1995) to their identity and they came to be seen as more loyal to Pakistan (Engineer, 2004; Fazalbhoy, 2005). These meanings and socio-historical context continue to bear weight on the

community as the construction of the Muslims as 'the other' has resulted in their marginalisation, large scale genocides, riots, and other forms of violence (as discussed above) since the time of the Partition until the present. The state's discourse of secularism, in its tepid promises to 'include' the Muslims, has been critiqued for its continued tilt towards a 'Hindu bias' (Govinda, 2013) as everyday material practices within the public sphere, and within institutions have retained an unmistakably Hindu flavour (Anand & Lall, 2022; A. Basu, 2012; Kaviraj, 2010; Tarlo, 2003). On the other hand, proponents of Hindutva have continued to mobilise efforts towards the exclusion of Muslims.

In sum, an overarching theme that ties these aspects of lived marginalisation and popular, dominant discourses is the construction of the Muslim as 'the other'—to be included or excluded— within the discourses of nationalism. Therefore, any question posed to understand Indian Muslim childhoods would be essentially linked to questions of how nationalism is (re)produced in the lives of children since all other discourses/stereotypes stem from it or overlap with it.

Through this thesis, I first set out to ask— what kind of discourses about the community are Muslim children aware of? What are their experiences? More specifically, how do they make sense of the discourses on nationalism that often cast them as 'the other'? What are their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses? I trace the interplay between the personal and the political— I demonstrate how the entanglement between religious and national identity within these discourses influence children's learning about the self and the other, their social goals and their overall identity processes.

This study becomes relevant in a time when the world is witnessing an unapologetic normalisation of several 'isms' (like nationalism, racism, fascism, sexism), xenophobia and islamophobia through right-wing political discourses and populism (Psaltis et al., 2017; Wodak, 2021). India is one such example wherein the right-wing ruling party's Hindutva movement has come to an unprecedented great strength. There has been a resurgence of such discourses, an increase in open hate crimes against Muslims and serious attempts to declare India as a 'Hindu' nation (Bhatia, 2019). As children become exposed to such potent discourses of nationalism (Millei, 2019), questions of exclusion become more pertinent since social institutions

like the family, school and media form important sites that continually regulate and (re)produce "childhood as part of national projects" (Millei & Imre, 2016, p.11). Among these institutions, schools have been considered central not only because children spend a large chunk of their day at schools but also because the state uses schools to consciously cultivate ideas of nationalism in children through their actual and hidden curriculum (Ahonen, 2001a; Bénéï, 2008; Benwell, 2014; Carretero et al., 2012; Collins & Coleman, 2008; Gellner, 1983; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Thus, I have chosen schools as my primary site of investigation. To cater to the heterogeneity within the Indian Muslim community, I have carried out a multi-sited ethnography and focused on children in the age range of 12-16 years. However, along with schools, as critical educators have now increasingly emphasised extra-educational contexts in the complex and dynamic process of identity building (Spyrou, 2002), I have included children's social interactions outside the schools— family, neighbourhood, and social media— as points of enquiry.

1.2 Indian Muslim Childhood

Research on Indian childhood continues to grapple with the impressions from the colonial legacy of bringing 'reform' to the Indian child born into 'problems' while considering native meanings of childhood to be peculiar and in need of rescue (Balagopalan, 2011; Nieuwenhuys, 2009; S. Sen, 2005). As a response there is an attempt to "liberate childhoods from the colonial heritage" (Nieuwenhuys, 2009) while acknowledging the presence of "multiple childhoods" (Balagopalan, 2011). In such attempts to challenge the western 'normal childhood', there have been tensions between rights-based frameworks and approaches that lay emphasis on children's resilience and agency within problematised categories like children in the labour force, sex trade, poverty stricken, education deprived, juvenile delinquent etc. Despite post-colonial interpretive frameworks that call for critical attention to child-worlds beyond the colonial gaze, the impact of colonialism on childhood today, including the research on childhood, continues. More importantly, the 'Muslim child' becomes a doubly complex category as independence from the colonial rule was juxtaposed with the creation of a separate state for the Muslims. While being cognisant of these

concerns, this thesis moves away from seeing the Muslim child as a troubled category, that refuses to be sufficiently 'schooled' or in need of rescue. Rather, it views the child as a social actor with agency embedded in a socio-political and historical context and takes on an exploratory stance. It turns the gaze primarily on the school space along with other contexts within which the Muslim child learns and experiences discourses on nationalism.

Muslim childhood finds its mention in very few studies in India. Gupta (2008) emphasises that early childhoods in India are often marked by religion, however, some seminal works have omitted religious minorities completely. For example, Kakar's (1982) work on religious conceptualisations of Indian childhood barely does justice to the multi religious societal fabric of India as it focuses only on Hinduism (C. Basu, 2019). Most other studies that discuss the Muslim child draw upon the prejudices held about the Muslim 'other'. Razzack (1991) in a reflective piece on her own childhood describes her dilemmas in her Indian Muslim identity as it was subject to tags like pro-Pakistani, emotions like fear and threat and insensitive remarks during schooling. Mankekar's (1997) feminist analysis on the case of a young Muslim girl, Ameena, highlights the impact of communal and nationalist discourses on the child. Erum (2017) in her work on Muslim children's bullying experiences shows that they were often name-called as 'terrorist' and bullied because of the stereotypes associated with their religious identity.

Within the context of schooling, among the few school-based ethnographies in India that have looked at childhoods and nationalism, the voices of the religious minorities have not been explored (S. Srivastava, 1998) or have received little attention confined only to minority-based schools (Bénéï, 2008; Matthan et al., 2014; Thapan, 2014). Though state schools in India tend to promote values of tolerance towards all religions, 'unity in diversity', they have concomitantly shown to be important sites of teaching a Hinduised idea of being Indian through rituals like pooja (Nambissan, 2010a), touching the teachers feet, having pictures of deities, exclusive celebrations of Hindu festivals (Gogoi, 2014; S. Srivastava, 1998), linking of religious and national identity by repetitive singing of religious songs, embodiments and symbols (Bénéï, 2008; Thapan, 2014), disciplining of the body and mind through

Hindu moral values (Deka, 2014) and textbook histories[2] (Thapar, 2014). Manjrekar's (2015) work recounts experiences of Muslim children in schools which are spatially segregated in Gujarat and emphasises the need to recognise the impact of communalism in the context of education. Barring a few exceptions (Gogoi, 2014), studies have shown that in the minds of Hindu children, 'true Indianness' was being equated to being Hindu (Deka, 2014; Ellwood-Lowe et al., 2020) and Muslims were considered to be 'an undifferentiated mass of people who cannot be trusted or who can turn violent any time' making Muslims a single entity analogous of disgust, threat thereby worthy of being hated and 'othered' (Gupta, 2008, p. 40). Indian schools have shown to thus (re)produce discourses on nationalism that entail exclusion of religious minorities. Apart from schools, such dominant discourses and stereotypes (of terrorism, also beef-eating and veiling of women) about Muslims propagated through media, movies and textbooks, and impact childhoods (Nathan, 2019). This has important implications for children, as they use these representations as a means to make sense of the world and build their own identities (Phoenix et al., 2017). For children belonging to minorities, the sense of belonging to the nation can be emotionally straining due to the negativity attached to their minority status (Scourfield et al., 2006). Thus, this thesis sets out to explore this interlacing of minority childhoods and nationalism. Since this warrants a detailed understanding on nationalism, I bring focus to the same in the next section. I review the discourses on nationalism in India, particularly in the context of education.

1.3 Discourses on nationalism, Religion and Education

Differing visions of nationalism have positioned the place of religion in education distinctly. To understand the current context, it becomes necessary to lay out the historical background. In pre-colonial times, formal education was imparted through madrasahs, mathas and other religious educational institutions. Madrasahs taught science and subjects such as language, geography, astronomy etc. (in the Persian medium) for all. They also provisioned religious subjects separately for both

2 Controversies around history textbooks illustrate the manner in which these competing discourses are played out. Left-leaning, secular historians have been critical of Hindu nationalists' versions for their strong communalist stance, skewed derogatory representations of Muslims and promotion of communal strife, while censoring parts that convey multi-religious tolerance and diversity (see Delhi Historians Group 2001; Habib, Jaiswal, and Mukherjee 2003).

Muslims and Hindus (Ara, 2004; Engineer, 2001; Law, 1916; Sikand, 2005). The option to choose religious syllabi and their associated languages— Sanskrit and Arabic— allowed Hindus and Muslims to study together in the same madrasa without any qualms (Ara, 2004). These practices continued until Macaulay's Minute of 1835, which declared that religious education (of Islam and Hinduism) was of no use by calling them false religions (Sethi, 2018). This was the watershed moment that made the inclusion of religious education (except for Christianity) within the school highly contested. Alongside this imposition of English knowledge and culture as superior, exemplified by Macaulay's minute, Indian nationalist leaders such as Gandhi opposed western education, and believed English language was irrelevant to Indians (K. Kumar, 2016a). Several native communities (across religious faiths) appealed to the government to stop mission schools fearing proselytisation (Sethi, 2018). Eventually, this constant pressure led to the removal of the Christian religious education from government schools' curriculum leaving it to the private ones (see N. Chatterjee, 2011). Towards independence, Indian leaders gained more autonomy in important affairs of the state. As the control of educational affairs came under their purview, a nationalist vision of education took shape and yet religious education remained a contentious topic.

In the first vision for education through the Wardha scheme (1937), which advocated free and compulsory education for all, formulated by Indian nationalist leaders, Gandhi discarded religious education. He said, 'we are afraid that religions, as they are taught and practised today, lead to conflict rather than unity' (Oesterheld, 2007, p.7). The scheme was opposed by both Hindu and Muslim leaders as both felt the need for religious education in order to purge childhoods from western influences. However, the question of religious instruction in education remained. Conservative congressmen of provincial educational ministries vouched for a model based on Hinduism as they deemed India to be a land of Hindus to be cleansed of Persian influences through the sanskritisation of Hindi and introduction of the Vidya Mandir scheme (1938)[3] to establish hegemony (Oesterheld, 2007). Muslims, in governance and civilians, strongly protested against the Vidya Mandir scheme as it disregarded

3 Wardha scheme advocated free and compulsory education for all and Vidya Mandir scheme was to provide basic education in villages in the mother tongue of the community. Both excluded Urdu language. Other literary traditions include making Hindi language central.

their educational needs and neglected Urdu. While educational schemes were posited as secular, Muslims strongly opposed them as 'a symbol for establishing a religiously coloured communal dominance of a Hindu majority through the medium of education' and an attempt to subsume Muslims and their culture within the Indian-Hindu nation (Oesterheld, 2006) as the lines between Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism blurred. Alongside this, the 1930s witnessed the solidification of the Hindu-Indian identity through the nationalisation of literary traditions in Hindi while excluding Urdu to cleanse 'foreign' Persian influences, especially in the northern states (Orsini, 2009) and mass dissemination of Hindu mythical symbols in the public sphere (Pinney, 2002). The opposition weakened considerably as Muslims became a minority with India's independence accompanied by the Partition. The forces of Hindu nationalism also weakened and Indian nationalism matured into Indian secular nationalism or secularism (Kotin, 2015). However, the tensions around religion in education remained significant.

Post-independence, as previously mentioned, the Constitution in its task of nation-building of 'secular and modern' in contrast to the 'communal backward' (S. Srivastava, 1998), went on to cement the post-colonial secular mindset through Article 28. Yet, the Indian consciousness(es) could not be separated from the felt need for childhoods to purge themselves from western influences and this was to be done by instilling morals through religious education. Several attempts were made to decide on what must be the best way to include religion in the curriculum while sticking to the ideas of secularism. Multiple committees (Radhakrishnan Commission,1963, Sri Prakasha Committee,1960, Kothari Commission, 1966 and SB Chavan Committee,1999), conscious of being secular, proposed religious education through the study of different religions and diversity. Eventually, the idea of universal/natural religion evoking common values drawing from across religious beliefs has come to prevail.[4] However, understandings of common religious values inevitably reference Hindu texts or gurukuls as their role models emphasizing its

4 Post-partition, several contestations remained as different commissions, over the years, debated whether children must study and appreciate others religions to prevent prejudice for the nation to be united (Radhakrishnan Commission, 1963, Sri Prakasha Committee, 1960, Kothari Commission, 1966), whether majority children should be stopped from learning Hindu holy scriptures such as Gita and epics like Ramayana, or if children must study moral values common to all religions (81st Report on Value Based Education/ SB Chavan Committee,1999)

‘universally desirable values’ (Sanatana dharma) (Sethi, 2018). It is important to recognise that the Indian constitution explicitly states ‘no religious instruction shall be provided in any institution wholly maintained out of state funds’ unless the state has sanctioned the institute to provide religious instruction (Article 28, Constitution of India). The Article further states that ‘no person attending any educational institution shall be required to take part in any religious instruction or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution’.

Despite such an explicit constitutional commitment to a secular ethos, in practice, Hindu ritual practices are replete in the everyday routines of schools (Bénéï, 2008; Nambissan, 2010; Srivastava, 1998; Thapan, 2014 and will be further described in this thesis). These very practices, however, are cast as universal or Indian, and thus as in keeping with secular commitments. These contradictions become apparent in the everyday life of public schools and outside of it and are now compounded by the resurgence of Hindu nationalism discourses. Through this study, I show how the tension between the competing discourses of nationalism, within a larger socio-political context of ‘othering’, becomes apparent in the lives of Muslim children. Since this forms the crux of this thesis, I now go on to touch upon the link between childhoods and nationalism.

1.4 Childhoods and nationalism

The largest body of work that discusses childhoods and nationalism comes from the cognitive-developmental branches of psychology (Millei, 2019; Scourfield et al., 2006). However, we still do not have enough contribution from psychologists in this area though such empirical findings can have direct impact on understanding socially excluded groups, citizenship education, designing inclusive curricula, and children’s intergroup relations. Unlike other identities, national identity, essential to the making of the modern self (Gellner, 1983) is consciously inculcated into children through the intervention of the state (Jenkins, 2008). The images of ‘childhood’ or children as future citizens have been deeply intertwined with nationalistic discourses (Millei & Imre, 2016; Stephens, 1995) disseminated through school curriculum (Ahonen, 2001a; Barton & Mccully, 2005; Waldron & Pike, 2006), other practices

within the school/classrooms (Bénéï, 2008; Benwell, 2014; Christou & Spyrou, 2017; Lappalainen, 2006), children's books (Kelen & Sundmark, 2013; A. Taylor, 2013) or through everyday activities or places (Millei & Imre, 2016; Silova, 2019).

Crucial to the building of children's national identity is the understanding of who belongs to the nation and who is considered as an outsider. Children mobilise nationalistic discourses to identify themselves as well as to construct 'the other' (Millei, 2015 and references therein). For minority children, "this identification is potentially a more active process for these children who, by definition, have to work out how to position themselves in relation to dominant discourses that for others are relatively unproblematic because they are taken for granted" (Scourfield et al., 2006, p. 51).This becomes crucial in societies wherein minorities may be construed as 'problematic', 'as a threat' or 'out of place' (Skey, 2011). In such societies, children from majority groups consider themselves superior and do not consider minorities as a part of the nation (Bénéï, 2008; Leonard, 2012) or name-call and stereotype minorities (Zembylas, 2010), whereas children from minority communities develop a fragmented self (Habashi, 2008) or subtly resist nationalist discourses (Bénéï, 2008; J. Hart, 2002). These studies, though few in number, have contributed to the exploration of the relationship between childhoods and nationalism. Further, in doing so, they have emphasised that children display agency as they actively negotiate their identities. Yet most of them have focused on race/ethnic contestations with nationalism, with religion remaining understudied. In this thesis, I show that religion plays a central role in the national construction of modern schooling in India and how religious minority students negotiate nationalist ideologies that impinge on them, particularly when these ideologies exclude them from belonging to the nation.

Through this study, I make a critical contribution by bringing forth minority voices as central by drawing on the ethnographic fieldwork conducted at high schools in Bangalore, India. I foreground Muslim childhoods as they negotiate the double burden of exclusion; one through the material and discursive practices of the schools and other social contexts where secularism is enacted within 'Hindu contextualism' – where Hindu symbols and rituals are cast as universal (S. Srivastava, 1998), and two through the stereotypes and 'othering' discourses about Indian Muslims, which have significantly increased in the public sphere due to the ruling party's imagination of a

Hindu nation. In doing this, I recognise children's agentic capacities in negotiating their Muslim identities within the spatio-temporal confines of schooling with an awareness of the socio-political ramifications of being Muslim. I also contribute to the less explored aspect of socio-cultural diversity of religion within research that have been 'dominated by analyses of class and race/ethnicity' (Holloway et al., 2010).

1.5 Thesis outline

In the following chapters, I first present a detailed description of my methodology and then move onto my empirical chapters. In Chapter 2, I present a detailed description of my methodology. I begin with laying out a conceptual map, "a schematic device for representing a set of concept meanings embedded in a framework of propositions" (Novak & Gowin, 1984, p. 15) that allowed me to visualise and link several concepts/constructs that I aim explore, while keeping them embedded in a social context (Daley, 2004). I then provide a disciplinary grounding to my study, lay out the theoretical framework and provide a rationale for using a CSP approach to answer my research questions. Based on the existing literature and gaps therein, I discuss Bangalore city as an interesting and useful site to carry out the study. I describe the process of making several visits to schools in Bangalore and the manner in which I have narrowed down the specific school sites to cater to the heterogeneity among the Muslim children. I then move on to discuss the methods used which includes reflexivity of my insider-outsider position. I finally describe each of my field sites, the data collected from each site and the stepwise method of analysis until abstract analytical themes had emerged.

From Chapter 3 to Chapter 6, I present my empirical findings. All through these chapters, after reviewing literature on childhoods and nationalism, relevant to the chapter themes, I highlight children's identity negotiations (keeping in mind their multiple intersecting identities), their agency and their cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses to dominant discourses. Through these findings I provide insights into children's identity processes— their understanding of the 'self' and 'the other'— and how this influences their social goals like choice of education and future employment. Chapter 3 deals with the question of how Muslim children learn about

dominant discourses of nationalism and other socio-political discourses that revolve around the community. In this chapter, I particularly draw from Billig's (1995) 'everyday nationalism' to explain how children constantly (re)negotiate these discourses that percolate the spaces of their everyday lives. As children encounter stereotypes that make their religious identities salient, I demonstrate how they become political actors. I discuss a range of their responses in different contexts with different social actors and draw inferences on their identity processes. I extend this analysis in Chapter 4, wherein I discuss children's responses during periods when the sense of belongingness to the nation becomes explicit. Using three cases in point of 'hot nationalism' (Billig, 1995; Fox, 2017) that had brought forth the Muslim identity, I detail the contradictory, ambivalent and shifting nature of children's social positions and their ability to critically examine such issues and thus point to childhood as an ambivalent social phenomenon (Jans, 2004). It becomes clear in Chapter 3 and 4 that the past continues to bear weight on the present. In other words, the dominant socio-political discourses, deeply rooted in historical constructions of the Muslim identity, are continually (re)evoked in the lives of children. Therefore, in Chapter 5, I deepen the discussion on children's identity processes by focusing on their consumption of history. This chapter is insightful in providing an understanding of how children appropriate and resolve discrepancies between official narratives that exclude minorities and unofficial community narratives that foster a sense of belongingness to the nation. Through these findings, I reflect upon the outcomes of in/congruence among children's intersecting identities. Finally, in Chapter 6, I demonstrate how Muslim children's experiences and agency, which are in a constant dialogue with parental decisions, are important aspects of the process of choosing a school. I demonstrate how the manifestation of the discourses on nationalism results in marginalisation— differential levels of discrimination/exclusions at a structural/geographic level (lack of Urdu medium high schools, precarious conditions of religiously segregated homes) and at a micro, everyday level (being asked to take part in Hindu religious rituals, not being allowed to wear hijabs, being force fed during Ramadan fasts) within schools result in narrow school choice set. Children are bound to travel long distances, accept a sudden change in the medium of instruction or often switch between schools in order to complete their education. In my final

concluding Chapter, I summarise all my findings, synthesise the arguments and provide directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter, based on the aim of the study I lay out the research objectives. I further depict the research problem using a Conceptual Map. I then discuss the theoretical framework suitable to the study and systematically discuss the conceptual lenses used in this thesis. Following this paradigm, I further contextualise my fieldwork in the city of Bangalore. The fieldwork was carried out in two phases; first visiting and understanding the types of educational spaces available to Muslim students in Bangalore. The second phase involved making a systematic classification of these spaces and narrowing down the specific sites for ethnographic fieldwork. I then present details about choosing ethnography as a methodology and my insider-outsider position as a part of researcher reflexivity. I detail the methods of data collection used— participant observation, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews and summarise the details of each method. I finally discuss my method of analysis— steps I followed to arrive at analytical themes from empirical data.

2.1 Research Objectives and Questions

Based on research gaps and review of literature, the research objectives are as follows.

Objective 1: To delineate the awareness of the dominant socio-political discourses among Indian Muslim children about their community

Objective 2: To understand how dominant socio-political discourses about Muslims in India, intrinsically linked to discourses on nationalism, impact Indian Muslim childhoods

Objective 3: To critically examine Objective 2 in the context of schools and other social contexts wherein children negotiate their identities

Objective 4: To capture the interplay between the ‘psychological’ and the ‘political’ by focusing on children’s identity processes and agency

To fulfil these objectives, I ask the following research questions. Without assuming that children would be necessarily familiar with all or any of the socio-political discourses, I first begin by asking if children are aware of these discourses.

And if so, I move to exploring the impact of the discourses pointed out by children themselves.

Question 1. Are Muslim children aware of the dominant socio-political discourses about Muslims in India?

Question 2. Are Muslim children aware of the dominant discourses of nationalism? What are the sources of their understanding?

Question 3. How do Muslim children learn and perceive the dominant socio-political discourses about Muslims in India, intrinsically linked to discourses on nationalism?

Question 4. How do they make-meaning and respond to these dominant discourses cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally and thus negotiate their identities? What are the counter discourses produced?

Question 5. How do various identities of class, gender, region intersect with religious and national identities to bring about varied responses?

Question 6. How does the educational space of the child (re)produce dominant discourses and thus influence their identity negotiations?

Question 7. How do other social contexts like the family, media, and neighbourhood of the child (re)produce dominant discourses and thus influence their identity negotiations?

Question 8. How do children characterise themselves and others in terms of group membership and build an understand of the self and others?

Question 9. How do these characterisations and intersections influence social goals like choice of school and future employment?

2.2 Conceptual Map

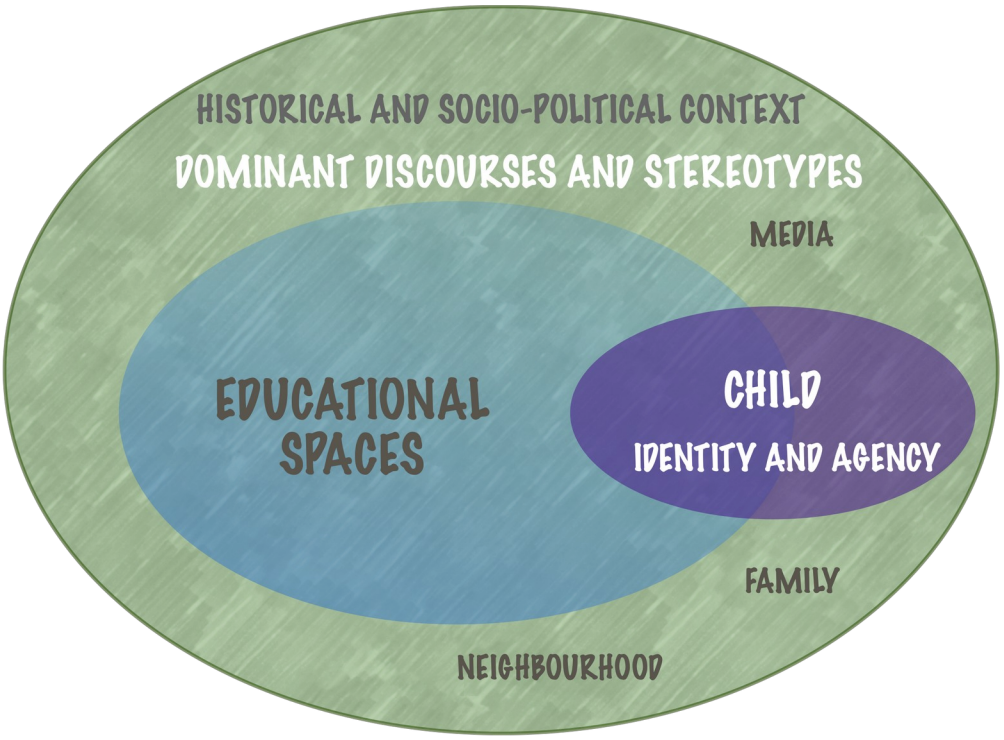

Figure 1. Conceptual Map

The conceptual map depicts the overall understanding of the thesis based on the research objectives. Children are embedded in a larger socio-political context. They learn about dominant discourses from the school, home, neighbourhood, and media (print and online). In this thesis, I mainly focus on how children negotiate their identities as they respond to these dominant discourses that are (re)produced within formal educational spaces while also accounting for other social contexts (like family, neighbourhood and use of media) that influence these processes.

2.3 Interdisciplinary approach and theoretical framework

I this thesis I use a critical social psychological (CSP) approach to understand Muslim childhoods. Thus, I broadly locate this work in the disciplines of sociology, psychology and childhood studies. Childhood studies often blends with other disciplines (anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, geography, to name a few) and has over the years continued to further our understandings of the key concepts related to children— critique of developmental perspectives, social (re)construction of childhood, child rights, agency, children as beings v/s becomings, citizenship and more (A. James & James, 2004; Qvortrup et al., 2009; Tesar, 2016), especially post the work of Prout & James (1997). Overall childhood studies denies the existence of a singular, essentialised notion of childhood by conceiving childhoods as complex, socially constructed phenomena that are (re)invented within diverse societies, while emphasizing children as social actors with agency (Tesar, 2016). Since CSP approaches have similar underpinnings, they marry well with childhood studies to form a sound theoretical framework to fulfil the objectives of this study.

At their core, critical psychological approaches are built on tenets (like childhood studies) that critique mainstream psychology for its reductionist or essentialist way of looking at an individual, often bereft of his/her context. Mainstream psychology claims to uncover 'true', neutral and objective knowledge of psychological processes (Prilleltensky, 2001; Stainton Rogers, 2011) by reducing human beings to a set of variables that can be experimentally manipulated by a 'neutral/objective' researcher to arrive at universal laws or generalised explanations (Hook, 2014a; Mkhize, 2014). It maintains that there is a standard or normal against which others can be pitted. This normal within most psychological studies has been defined by choosing participants who are WEIRD—Westernised educated people from industrialised, rich democracies (Henrich et al., 2010) and in turn pathologises all those who diverge from these so-called norms, especially racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual and other minority groups. In a movement away from such a position, there have been other approaches that have made important contributions by acknowledging the socio-cultural and historical dimensions along with the psychological (Gauvain & Perez, 2015; Rogoff & Morelli, 2001; Shweder, 2003;

Wertsch, 1997; Yasnitsky et al., 2014). However, critical psychological approaches take on a more explicit and declarative stance. Critical psychological approaches acknowledge the messiness of social reality and embeddedness of individuals in their socio-historical, cultural and political contexts (Holzkamp, 1983; Teo, 2015) and attempts to put back the social into psychology (Parker, 2007). It takes into account the researcher's own positionality—their own history, power relations with those whom they study, their limitations (Parker, 2015) and treats researcher reflexivity as a productive force (Braun et al., 2017). Thus, critical psychological approaches emphasise the situatedness of human beings within their contexts and challenge the universalisation/normalisation of all human experience (Parker, 2005, 2020). "Critical psychology is always already necessarily social and that as a form of critical cultural-historical psychology, it is always already necessarily political" (Parker, 2020; p. 27). Critical psychologists acknowledge that "there is no one critical psychology" (Hook, 2014; pp. 11), instead there are multiple forms or approaches that tend to be diverse as they reflect the socio-cultural and political contexts in which they emerge (Parker, 2020). However, they converge in their critique of mainstream psychology and in their foundational conceptualisations.

Critical approaches conceive human beings as active agents who live in a societal nexus of complex social structures imbued with contradictions of power (Dreier, 2020). Their actions are dependent on two aspects, first is the individual access or lack of access to resources in their immediate environment, mediated by the overall social structure and second is on how they subjectively (cognitively and emotionally) capture their conditions, their needs and interests (Dreier, 2020). As a result, human beings may experience mixed states, wherein they may be able to expand their possibilities at times in certain contexts whereas they may become restricted in others (Holzkamp, 2015). Using such a lens, critical psychological approaches cut across various sub-disciplines in psychology as they reformulate concepts like motivation, cognition, emotions, perceptions etc. When they particularly reformulate social psychological concepts like prejudice, identity, group relations, they turn into a Critical Social Psychology (Gough, 2017; Gough et al., 2013; Tuffin, 2005). However, these strands continue to overlap with each other without forming a rigid boundary and also openly borrow from other disciplines whenever needed. Since

a CSP approach is cognizant of how power— that is inextricably linked with discourse and representation— is used to pathologise, marginalise or subordinate certain groups and individuals in society impacting their social and personal identities, it thoroughly fits the objectives of this study.

Though I use the word discourse in my thesis, and since discourse analytic research has been most widely studied among the critical approaches to social psychology like the seminal works —Potter & Wetherell's (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology* and Burman & Parker's (1993) *Discourse Analytic research* and many subsequent works which primarily concern themselves with the use of language in building everyday categories and concepts for meaning-making, it becomes important to clarify that I do not use language as a unit of analysis in my CSP framework. Rather my focus remains on how children make sense of dominant othering discourses and thus negotiate their multiple identities. I draw particularly from Fanon's work on 'psychopolitics' (as described by Lebeau, 1998) which analyses the "interchange between personal psychology, on the one hand, and social-political forces of influence, on the other" (Hook, 2014b, pp. 90) without thinking of them as two different poles. In other words, it is to capture the blurring of boundaries between the internal and the external in other words, the psychological and political. In his work on the lived experience as a Black person, Fanon moves between several axes— socio-historical and political factors that construct a marginalised racial identity which an individual cannot escape, psychosocial processes like alienation, cultural dissonance and intrapsychic processes like ego-defences, inferiority complex and the understanding of the self (Fanon, 1986, 1990). Such a Fanonion conceptualisation allows me to engage with my research questions, which are essentially aimed at understanding how Muslim children respond to and negotiate their marginalised religious identities within a socio-historical context. However, unlike Fanon's focus on a single marginalised identity, I begin with Muslim children's religious identities, which are intrinsically linked to their national identities as a starting point only and further look at the multiple axes of identities (like class, gender, region, language) and capture how these intersections are played out.

Intersectionality allies with CSP approaches as it challenges mainstream social psychology's narrow view that an individual's social identities are fixed, linear and

independent of each other (Bowleg, 2017). “A central tenet of intersectionality is how multiple interlocking social identities at the individual level of experience intersect with social inequalities at the macro structural level” (Bowleg, 2017, pp. 516). This forms the crux of my thesis— to reach a higher level of abstraction in my analysis, I not only consider the various identities within children but also locate their experiences in a broader socio-political context and the institutional frameworks within which dominant discourses are (re)produced (Anthias, 2013). “Intersectional perspectives recognise the heterogeneity of different social groups and examine how particular individuals and groups are both systematically marginalised in different spaces, places and times but also use their positions at the intersections of certain categories as resources for activism and resistance” (Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017, p.1). I thus contribute to “an underutilised but essential theoretical framework for social psychology” (Bowleg, 2017, pp. 507) and in childhood research (Alanen, 2016). Next, I systematically discuss the conceptual lenses used in this thesis.

2.3.1 Framework to understand “discourse”

The traditional understanding of ‘discourse’ simply as text and talk, often dissected at a fundamental, structural or sentence level, has evolved over the past several decades to a “complex, multimodal object, as a form of social interaction and as a communicative event in its sociocultural context, managed by socially shared underlying cognitive strategies and representation” (Djik, 2012, p.1001). This definition highlights that the dynamic, reciprocal interaction between societal structures and discourses is mediated by cognitions. In other words, individuals use cognitive processes in social interactions to continuously (re)produce and (re)interpret discourse (Djik, 2014; Segall, 2013). Moscovici (1988) terms these cognitions, often shared by a group of people, as social representations. In his social representations theory (SRT), he lays emphasis on the prescriptive nature of social structures while accounting for individual responses and agency and the trade-off that exists between the two. According to him, social representations are as much part of our world that surrounds us as much as they are in our everyday cognitions. They have a dual function — first, they allow individuals to classify and categorise people or events, thus orient and master their social world and second, they serve as a common code to

enable communication for social exchange among members and also locate themselves in history. Thus, on one hand they serve as 'common sense' collective knowledge of the society that determines intergroup relations and on the other hand they act as frameworks at a cognitive level to communicate among members of one group (Breakwell, 1993). Representations can exist on different levels, they can be hegemonic (shared by a nation or most members of a society), emancipated (shared by members of smaller groups or communities with a degree of autonomy) or polemic (related to conflicts between groups in a society) (Moscovici, 1988).These dynamically interact with each other and thus it is also possible for incommensurable or divergent representations to coexist within groups or within the same individual, often referred to as cognitive polyphasia (Sammut et al., 2015). While SRT discusses individual processes at great length, it has neglected questions about how social representations are a part of institutions or the social world organised around individuals (Flick et al., 2015). It has now evolved from its inception to "include a conceptualisation of the structural forms of social representations, of how these intermingle in diversified public spheres" (Sammut et al., 2015, p. 81). However, it still remains short on how power relations are infused with social representations and thus maintaining systems of discrimination and exclusion (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005).

Critical discourse studies offer a framework that includes the socio-political context of discourses, mainly concerning their association with power. "It explains that and how the symbolic elites of politics and the mass media are able to control public discourse and attitudes and thus may contribute to the reproduction of racism and xenophobia in the country" (Djik, 2020, p.16). Through repetition, such discourses become abstracted to form a generalised notion about an event or a group (Djik, 2012) which can often be exclusionary in nature. Raiter (1999) refers to these as dominant discourses, i.e., some discourses may become dominant over others gaining a more established form due to repetition and especially when endorsed by those in power (Hodges & Nilep, 2007). Of particular interest to this thesis, are the discourses on nationalism. Skey (2011) theorises that when nationalism discourses are institutionalised across socio-political and economic spheres, they become dominant

or ‘sedimented’ and thus exclude alternative narratives. Discourses then dictate who belongs to the nation and who does not. Its manifestation often brings about struggles between dominant groups that claim a greater national belonging and minority groups that are ascribed to a foreign status. Therefore, the role of individuals who (re)enact these discourses regularly is equally important. It is in these discourses that identity emerges through everyday practices as a socio-cultural phenomenon (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), constantly undergoing negotiation and change (Howarth, 2002; Reicher, 2004). To capture this dialectic relationship between discourses and individuals, Skey advocates researchers to consider dominant discourses that become part of the routine, taken for granted everyday life i.e., everyday nationalism (Billig, 1995) (see Chapter 3) and those that come to the forefront during the times of ruptures or breaches i.e., hot nationalism (see Chapter 4). Thus, in this thesis, I use the lenses of both social representations theory and critical discourse studies to understand dominant discourses and their interplay with children’s identity.

2.3.2 Understanding Childhood: Developmental and sociological frameworks and intersectionality

Psychological or developmental perspectives understand children based on stage-wise development in accordance with their biological age and often fail to account for contextual factors. On the other hand, sociological frameworks attempt to understand children in their social and cultural environments, however, they often undermine individual factors. Several researchers have, however, discussed the demerits of the lack of communication between the two disciplines (Chancer & Andrews, 2014; S. Clarke, 2006; Howard, 2000; Scourfield et al., 2006) and advocated the use interdisciplinary methods as most fruitful to understand childhood (Illeris, 2018; Marvakis, 2020; Prout, 2011; Walkerdine, 2004). Sociologists have shunned developmental methods whereas psychologists have been more open to include social dimensions (Scourfield et al., 2006). This is evidenced by the contributions of psychologists like Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Michael Cole, and others that have led to the subsequent growth of sub fields like cultural psychology (Chaudhary, 2018; Ratner, 2012; Shweder, 1991; Wertsch, 1997) and the pioneering works of Erica Burman, Ian Parker that have led to the development of critical

psychology (Burman, 2008; Gough, 2017). Sociologists, on the other hand, within the turn towards a new sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997), have moved towards questions of children's rights, children's agency— they have argued that childhood cannot be seen solely as a social construct in which children are viewed as future adults, rather children must be seen as social actors or beings with agency.

Drawing largely from these concepts, this turn eventually led to the genesis of childhood studies, a multidisciplinary field that encompasses a wide range of disciplines from the social sciences and humanities (anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, literature, philosophy etc) (A. James & James, 2012). Engaging in cross-disciplinary debates within childhood studies has not only helped to theorise and (re)construct childhood in useful ways but also led to rethinking of the methods while carrying out research with children (A. James & James, 2012; Punch, 2002; Qvortrup et al., 2009; Spyrou, 2018). This has challenged assumptions of a universal childhood, dualisms of structure/agency, child/adult, children as beings/becomings (Prout, 2011) or an outright rejection of developmental perspectives. In fact, the initial emphasis in childhood studies on considering children as social actors with agency just like adults is now being recalibrated to an in-between positioning. Researchers have approached childhood with an understanding that children are 'beings' and 'becomings' at the same time (Uprichard, 2008; Warming, 2013), differently placed from adults (Lee, 1998; Punch, 2002; Wyness, 2013) and that their agency must be located in their individual psychological abilities as well as their social experiences (Scourfield et al., 2006). Childhood studies has thus "shown a renewed interest in the concept of development, accepting that younger children cannot be expected to demonstrate the same capabilities or agency as older children, due to their lack of social experience if not biological development" (Hemming, 2016, p. 59). In an attempt to bridge these disciplinary tensions and fissures between psychology, sociology and childhood studies, this study makes a unique contribution by taking an interdisciplinary, critical social psychological (CSP) framework (elaborated in Chapter 2). Through this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that a CSP approach is compelling to capture the fuzziness of children's everyday lives (just like adults), their identity negotiations and meaning-making processes, which are essentially immersed in the social and the political.

2.3.3 Identity in children

Though some developmental psychologists like Freud, Piaget contributed significantly to the understanding of self and identity, their view of identity as largely independent of others and located within oneself (Bamberg et al., 2011) has been critiqued as it overlooks the larger societal context that the individual is a part of. In a movement away from the essentialist view, other developmental psychologists like Erickson, Vygotsky have spoken of a social and cultural understanding of self. In continuation, the works of Bruner (1986), Butler (1990), Mead (1934), and others further contributed to this area. Recent developments in studying identity indicate a growing shift towards an interactionist and social constructionist paradigm (Bamberg et al., 2011; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Howarth, 2002). The identity of the individual is never autonomous rather a dialogic, relational phenomenon which brings about social meaning when in interaction with other actors and their identity positions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Social interaction is a dominant site not only for negotiation of identities but also carries representations of groups, discourses, ideologies and power structures (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Therefore, the construction of identity is heavily context dependent (S. Taylor, 2015). More so, in the current times of greater mobility and blending of diversities, the notion of stable and fixed identities has been well replaced by multiple, dynamic, and fragmented identities (Wetherell, 2009).

Barrett (2005, 2013) through his intensive psychological work provides insights on age-related development of children's national identities. However, he argues that since existing social psychological theories (cognitive-developmental theory, social identity theory, self-categorisation theory, and social identity development theory) have been insufficient to explain certain empirical findings, it calls for a more comprehensive framework that includes components like media, education, family etc. Within sociological research, which considers children as agentic beings, the manner in which children absorb and (re)construct the nation to build their identities has indicated a dynamic, bidirectional relationship between childhood and nation (Silova, 2019; Waldron & Pike, 2006).

2.3.4 Agency in children

To engage in the question of agency is central to any research on childhoods. Agency was first discussed in the new sociology of childhood by James & Prout (1990; 1997) as a critique to paradigms that regarded children as becoming future adult instead of beings (Qvortrup et al., 2009) or a greater focus on familial processes than on children (Esser et al., 2016) across disciplines of sociology, psychology and educational studies. They advocated for the need to move beyond such limiting frames that consider children as passive subjects— "Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes" (James & Prout, 1990, p. 8). Since then, there has been a growing interest in the complexity of agency within childhood studies (Esser et al., 2016) rather than assuming a simplified, romanticised existence of agency (Durham, 2008; Hanson et al., 2018).

Robson et al. (2007) highlight diverse theoretical approaches to understand agency in research— structural and material perspectives understand agency in relation to material and economic realities; cultural, post-structural and feminist perspectives draw from more abstract, social lenses often conscious of power imbalances/discourses and some combine the two to avoid dualisms. They outline four important elements that affect and shape children's agency— social contexts (child's position within the family or in general relation to adults), cultural discourses (about youth, gender etc.), personal biography (demographics like age, family history) and spatial relations (being included or excluded from physical places). Children are neither completely free nor completely bound as their in/ability to act varies with their internal state of mind like willingness or perceived ability to act and the constraints or opportunities in their environments like presence of adults etc (Robson et al., 2007). Such a conceptualisation is partially substantiated in research by a failure to apply a Western concept of agency to non-Western contexts and has challenged assumptions of a global childhood (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Jensen, 2014; Klocker, 2007; Muftee, 2015). However, we understand that though this model of agency acknowledges changing contexts, it still does not account for axes of inequalities on the macro level that may be a significant part of the everyday lives of children. Little

has been discussed about the agency of children who grow up in marginalizing contexts.

Understanding the agency of such marginalised children requires a deeper engagement with how oppressive structures interact with socio-political realities without assuming that they are purely victims. Few studies have shown that they have tactic agency (Honwana, 2005), thin or thick agency (Klocker, 2007), ambiguous agency (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012), or relative agency (White & Choudhury, 2010). Keeping these factors in mind, my thesis attempts to understand Muslim children as social actors in their own right. However, I remain cognisant of the fact they are not fully empowered (Wyness, 2013) nor do they completely lose their ability to act in oppressive conditions, thus, closely accounting for restraints/opportunities at the micro and macro level. Therefore, this study adds to lack of literature on the agency of marginalised children especially in South Asia (H. Sen, 2016).

2.4 Field site selection

2.4.1 Phase 1: Understanding the field- Bangalore city

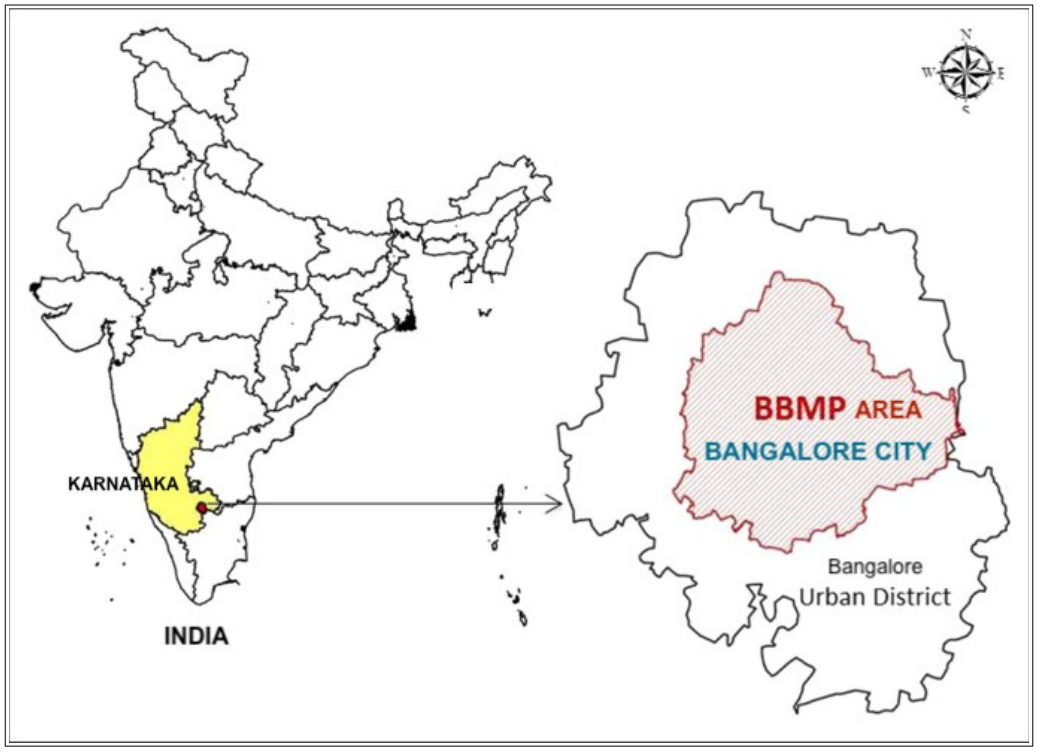

Figure 2. Map showing Bangalore city in urban Bangalore district[5]*, Karnataka, India, as the field site. Source: Downloaded from Raj et al., 2021 and edited.*

The current study is located in urban Bangalore, capital city of Karnataka, which has an estimated population of 8 million (Census of India, 2011b) and an area of 741 square kilometres. The city has Hindus (79%), and the people from minority religions including Muslims (14%), Christians (6%) and other religions (1%) (Census of India, 2011b). It has been projected to be the fastest growing city in the world in the coming 15 years (Koshi, 2020) and has been in the global spotlight over the last few decades as the Information Technology hub. Bangalore was chosen as the field site primarily because southern states in India have received very little attention in academia despite the fact that they house a sizeable population of Muslims. Also,

5 Bangalore district was divided into urban Bangalore district and rural Bangalore district in 1986. Within urban Bangalore, the field site is demarcated as Bangalore city (also known as BBMP area).

though Bangalore has been considered relatively less riot prone (Varshney, 2002), it is found to be strongly segregated in its religious demography (Susewind, 2017) making it an interesting site to observe. Apart from this, my previous research experience on understanding minority identity negotiations in urban contexts along with my personal experiences of growing up as a Kannada speaking Muslim woman in Bangalore, often negotiating my Muslim identity marked by the hijab has also shaped my interest.

Bangalore is a major contributor to the country's economic growth and owing to its rapid urbanisation, about half of its population comprises people from other states ("Bengaluru's Migrants Cross 50% of the City's Population," 2019; Puttalingaiah et al., 2020). Alongside it has witnessed multiple problems of reduced green cover, depletion of water resources, poor air quality, traffic management (M. Hussain, 2019). There are sharp economic inequalities between the "local" and "corporate" resulting in a divided city (Benjamin, 2000) which in turn marginalises the working classes and those living in poverty. Similar divides can be seen in the education system wherein the city caters to elite, diasporic populations through international schools while the most marginalised attend fee-free government schools (see Tukdeo & Mali, 2021). Apart from marginalisation due to economic inequalities, there are several groups that become marginalised by virtue of their non-native status and religious minority status (Engineer, 1994; Nair, 1996). Since this study deals with Muslim minorities and discourses on nationalism, in the following paragraphs I trace certain local regional discourses that are linked to ideas of nationalism. I then discuss the educational details of the Muslim community in Bangalore.

2.4.1.1 Regional Nationalism and communal tensions. The 1956 reorganisation of states, based on common regional language, did not count Urdu as a language though it was spoken by many Indians who were not necessarily Muslim, leaving it without any geographical space (Nair, 1994). Kannada is the common language spoken across religions in Karnataka. Unlike regional nationalism of other states, in Karnataka, the attempts have been scattered. Especially in Bangalore, Kannada nationalism could not make its desired impact because of multiple reasons. Historically dominated by non-Kannada speakers, Bangalore's cultural nationalism was largely taken over 'economic nationalism', never breaking the hegemony of English (Nair, 1994, 1996). According to census 2011, the city has 46% people who

speak Kannada, 13.99% speak Tamil, 13.89% speak Telugu, 12% speak Urdu, and the remaining speak other languages. One of the earliest waves of Kannada nationalism was witnessed in Bangalore in 1994 when a ten-minute slot was provided for telecasting news in Urdu in the prime time. Protest processions and slogan shouting, well supported by ABVP and RSS, were held at Muslim dominated areas in the city and riots had broken out (majority injured were Muslims), thus, converting the linguistic agitation to communal (Engineer, 1994). This escalation inked the association of Kannada and Hinduism reinstating Alur Venkat Rao's (1917) historical construction of Kannada nation (Karnatakadevi) as a Hindu nation whose glory ended due to the conquest of Islam. There have been three other occasions when just communal unrests were sparked in the years 1986, 2007 and 2020 lasting for 2-3 days. The anti-CAA protests, spanned over months from December 2019 to March 2020, were the longest witnessed in the city.

Apart from this, Kannada nationalism was witnessed, in 2017, during the "Namma metro, Hindi beda" campaign in which the state decided to remove all the signs written in Hindi language at the city's metro stations in response to the threats, protests, and unlawful blackening of signs by pro-Kannada activists (Ram, 2017). Ideas of nationalism came to the forefront when the ruling BJP (since 2019 in Karnataka) had decided to make changes to the school history textbooks. This was done by the removal of a chapter on Tipu Sultan, a Muslim historical figure from Mysore revered until recently, but now constructed as anti-Hindu in the Hindu nationalist discourse. The school textbook revisions have continued to take a more rigorous form of saffronisation through several modifications of Indian history, and plans of introducing 'sanatana dharma', Bhagavad Gita for moral education along with a justification from the education minister that it would suit majority of the students (Prasanna, 2022). Additionally, the government has also proposed the Kannada Language Comprehensive Developmental Bill as means to create employment reservations for Kannadigas in government and private sectors by emphasising on the use of Kannada as a medium of instruction in schools, and higher educational institutes[6] (Express News Service, 2022).

6 The state has previously passed the Kannada Language Learning Act, 2015, according to which teaching Kannada as a first or second language would be mandated upon all schools irrespective of their board of affiliation. This created a stir from parents, especially those belonging to other states and

Educational spaces also witnessed the hijab controversy in 2022 wherein few colleges in Karnataka began to deny entry to hijab-clad Muslim students. While the students demanded that this was a denial of their fundamental constitutional right, several Hindu students wore saffron scarfs to colleges protesting against Muslim girls wearing the hijab in the Udupi district (Sabarwal, 2022). The controversy spiralled into several protests (on both sides) across different regions in Karnataka, students filing petitions and eventually leading to communal tensions and violence (Shantha, 2022). It was concluded with the Karnataka High Court order that declared a ban on hijab in educational institutions stating that it was not an essential practice within Islam and thus cannot be protected by the Article 25 of the constitution[7]. As different states in India vary in the manner in which nationalism discourses are propagated, it becomes necessary to locate such instances in their regional context for a better understanding of the field.

2.4.1.2 Muslim Community in Bangalore and their educational status. According to Census (2011), 13.9% of Bangalore's total population follows Islam. Similar to the rest of its counterparts throughout the country, the Muslim community is largely heterogeneous in terms of their linguistic and sectarian preferences. The diversity is mainly reflected in their class composition and ideological affiliations (Barelwis, Tablighi Jamat, Jama'at-e-Islami Hind, Ahle-Hadith and so on) and less in terms of caste divisions (Mohammed-Arif, 2012). A report indicated that Muslims living in Bangalore had the largest share of households living below the poverty line and lowest share income (per annum) above ten thousand rupees (Khan, 1995). Specific district-wise literacy rates for Muslims are not available as the 2011 census data clubs Muslims under Other Backward Categories (OBC). The 2001 census showed that the literacy rate of Muslims in Bangalore is 79.3% which is lowest among all religious groups in the city but was higher than the Muslim national average of 59.1%. However, those educated till class 7 were 43.2% and those above class 7 were only 12.8% (Khan, 1995). There have been certain initiatives within the state and city to improve the educational status of minorities. The Al-Ameen

CBSE & ICSE schools

7 Article 25 of the Indian constitution allows citizens to freely practice, propagate and profess their religion.

movement of 1966 by Dr. Mumtaz Ahmed Khan was the first attempt to provide educational facilities to the Muslim Community in Bangalore, which continues to privately run a range of institutes under the Al-Ameen Educational Society. Karnataka is also the first state to have set up a Ministry for Minority Welfare in the year 1999 with a mandate to promote socio-economic development of minorities. One of its major focuses has been to increase participation of minorities in education through several schemes. However, compared to other minorities, Muslims were not found to benefit as much from these schemes (Arif, 2012).

According to a nationwide assessment report by National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, for the year 2016-17, there are 1403 state and 3426 privately run schools and 17 madrasas in Bangalore. The report also mentions that the enrolment rate of Muslim students is 16.4% up to class 8. Beyond this, there is no available literature or city-specific survey data on educational status of Muslim children or what kind of schools they attend. More recently, the School Education in Karnataka Report (2018-19) interestingly indicates that their school enrolment pattern has also been different from other marginalised groups. While a vast majority of students from all other marginalised groups are enrolled in government or government aided schools, only 50% (approximately) Muslim students have opted for the same while the remaining half are enrolled in private, fee-paying schools (School Education in Karnataka Report, 2018-19)[8].

8 State enrolment patterns here are discussed since specific district data for Bangalore has not been recorded

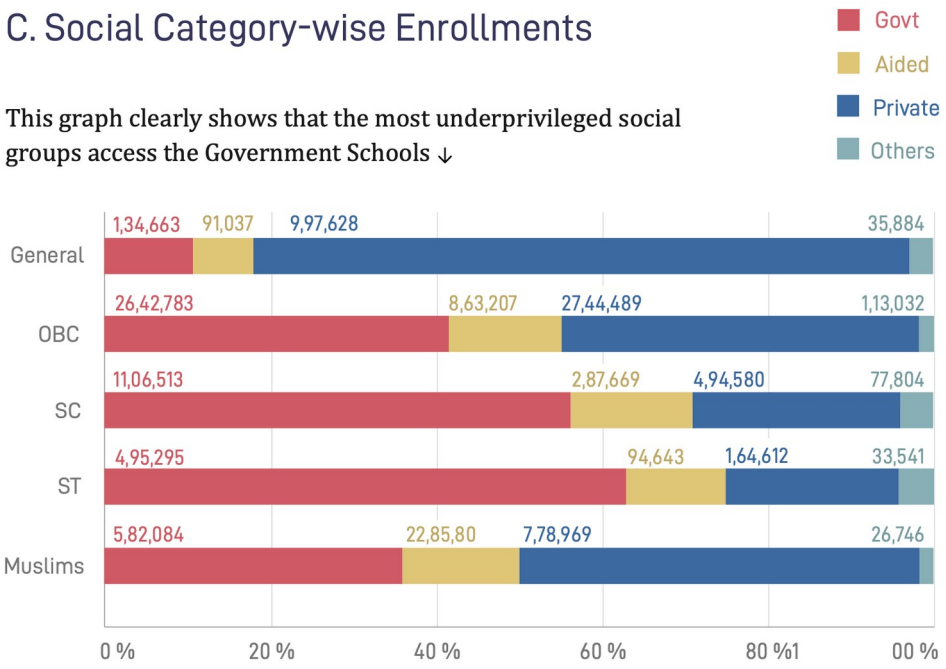

Figure 3: Social Category-wise enrolments in Karnataka

Source: School Education in Karnataka Report, 2018-19, a report by Department of Primary and Secondary Education, Government of Karnataka

This is an atypical pattern of school choice considering their economic and employment conditions. On similar lines, it has also been noted that though Muslim community is the most urbanised religious community (Census of India, 2011b), their socio-economic conditions continue to be poorer than other minorities living in India. These patterns must be understood by looking beyond their numerical minority status or simply based on their socio-economic conditions. Thus, researchers have pointed to the need to understand the community from within as the existing statistics do not explain why they have not attained their expected improvement (Basant, 2012b) despite policy efforts.

2.4.2 Phase 2: Selecting specific sites

Due to paucity of data, I began my fieldwork by first inspecting the educational spaces available to Muslim students in Bangalore from January 2019 to March 2019. Since Bangalore is strongly segregated in its religious demography (Susewind, 2017), and the selection of a school strongly depends on its proximity

(Ohara 2012; Woodhead, Frost, and James 2013; Srivastava 2008), I used this as an anchor to visit several schools (both privately run and state run) where I could expect a sizeable population of Muslim students. However, I did not restrict myself completely to such a criterion. I also gathered information through community centres, known acquaintances who were teachers or were associated with schools in any way. One obvious stand out was that I was often directed to several minority-based educational spaces. These included Urdu-medium schools, madrasahs and privately run faith-based schools. Based on these preliminary understandings of the field, I visited several schools across Bangalore. For some schools, I made a prior appointment whereas for others I did not require to do so. During my visits, I mostly interacted with principals or head masters/mistresses or with teachers. An authorised letter from my institute stating that I am a researcher had been helpful to initiate the conversation. Sometimes they voluntarily discussed their school's pass percentages, fee reduction initiatives based on the class composition of students. Through multiple visits, I learnt about their syllabus, board of affiliation, student strength and I made my own brief observations of the schools.

I then classified these educational spaces (that a Muslim student may go to) based on their funding, board of affiliation and syllabus. This resulted in four types of spaces: government schools, madrasahs, faith-based Islamic schools and other schools. Based on this classification, I selected one school in each category. Overall, I aimed at greater heterogeneity in terms of social class and sub-groups within the community, I began ruling out the sites which were similar, or which would not help fulfil my objectives. I describe the selection process and the detailed description of each field site.

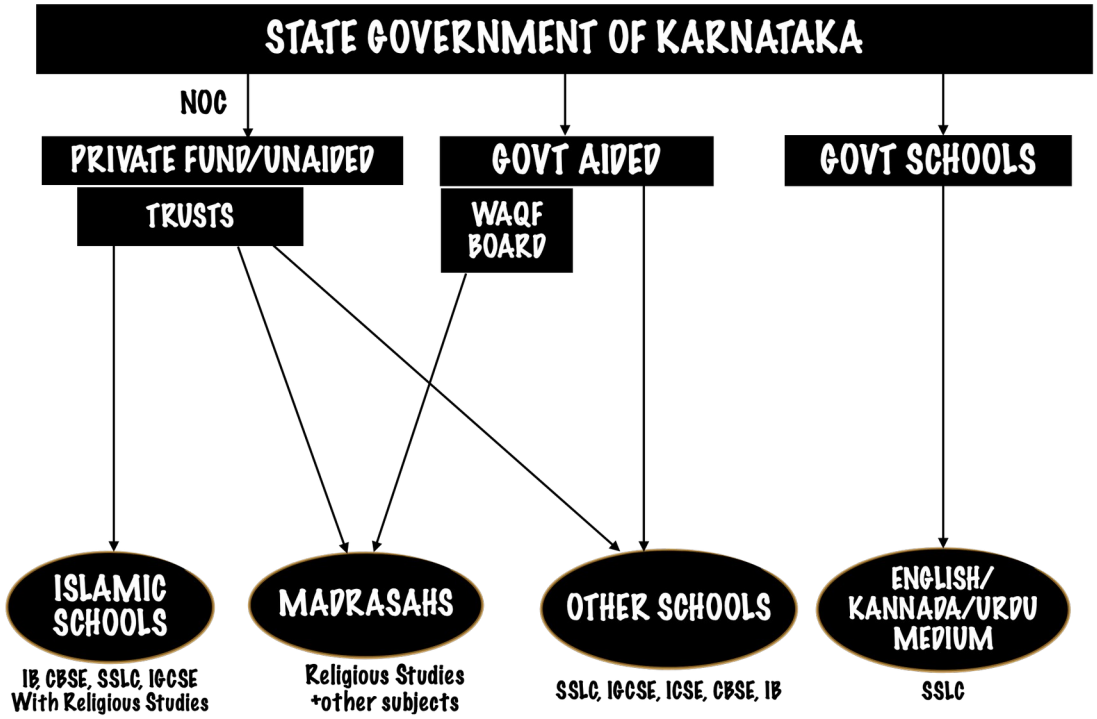

Figure 4. School structure and Syllabi in Bangalore, Karnataka (based on author's fieldwork)

In the 1st category, are government schools, directly funded by the state. They are affiliated to Karnataka Secondary Education Examination Board (KSEEB) and follow the state/SSLC Syllabus, in mediums (of instruction) English, Kannada or Urdu. As per the Right To Education Act (RTE), 2009, the government provides free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age. The government also provides textbooks, uniforms, and mid-day meals free-of-cost.

Under this category of government schools, I did not select Urdu medium schools for two reasons. First, since there are only 8 Urdu medium high schools in Bangalore and most of the students dropped out of them to join Kannada or English medium government schools or dropped out altogether (Ahmed, 2013; Vaijayanti, 2011). Second, it would be more useful to select a school with heterogeneity in religious composition, which was not possible in the other categories. I chose a government school which had a mixed religious composition and I could infer about the religious composition of a school only through direct observations of students during my visits to the schools in phase 1. I selected Vidyabhav government high

school (VGHS)[9], a state-run school compliant with RTE provisions as mentioned above. It was also one among the 276 Karnataka Public Schools (KPS) in the state[10]. There were 161 students between 12 to 15 years of age, 60% identified as Hindus, 38% Muslim, and 2% Christian. Students mentioned that free education was the main reason to choose this school. All of them belonged to families from lower socio-economic groups wherein their parents worked as daily wage workers at construction sites, as auto-drivers or as house-helps (with an income between 1 to 3 lakhs per annum). A majority of the Muslim students came from four Muslim segregated localities which were at least 15-20 kilometres away from the school. This was because of poor quality infrastructure and education in government schools in their localities and lack of high schools in their neighbourhoods (I discuss these aspects in detail in Chapter 6).

In the 2nd category, are madrasahs, run by either Private funds/Charitable trusts or from the funds from Waqf board. The syllabus is mainly religious studies. Madrasahs enrol students with a minimum age criterion of 10-12 years, with or without any prior education. Some of the students may have not had any formal schooling or dropped out of primary education in a regular school or have attended maktabs (centres which provide basic religious studies for children below the age of 10, usually attached to a mosque). Madrasahs are gender segregated and some of them also have residential facilities. A course of 5-8 years is offered at the residential madrasas at the end of which the student receives an alim/alima (religious scholar) certificate and further can specialise in certain subjects. Unlike some states which provide an equivalent BA degree, madrasahs in Bangalore have no such provision. Madrasahs also have provisions to run extra classes for other subjects (English, Mathematics, Science etc) and arrange for their students to write exams through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). However, very few madrasahs are able to provide such add ons due to financial constraints.

9 All names of institutions and people in the paper are pseudonyms, introduced to protect confidentiality of research participants

10 KPS schools provide Kannada and English as mediums of instruction from classes 1 to 12 in the same premises whereas other government schools may have separate premises for primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. KPS are said to have smart classrooms, sufficient classroom space and a desirable student-teacher ratio.

Under the madrasahs category, there were not many variations. Since they are gender segregated, I approached girls' residential madrasahs first. I then approached boys' madrasahs, however, I learnt that they could allow me only for very brief visits. So, I opted for the girls' madrasah. I selected 2 madrasahs, Dar-ul-Bayaan (DUB) and Jamia Ma'arifa (JM), privately run, residential girls' madrasahs offering religious education at a moderate cost (roughly 20,000 to 30,000 rupees per annum with food and accommodation). They often made fee concessions for those in need. The student class composition at both madrasahs was mixed. There were 210 and 102 girls between 12-19 years of age respectively, all identified as Muslims. The girls had been previously enrolled in regular schools since the minimum age criteria for enrolment was 11-12 years. Their syllabus contained only religious subjects like Life stories of the Prophets, Hadiths (Prophetic statements or actions), Interpretations of Quranic verses (Tafsir), Supplications (Dua), Arabic Language (Nahw and Sarf) and matters of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). They also had a separate batch of students exclusively for memorisation of the Quran (Hifz). Since these two madrasahs belonged to different ideologies/schools of thought, they differed in their pedagogies. For instance, there were no male teachers at DUB in order to maintain pardah (segregation of sexes) whereas in JM most of the teachers were male and veiling (including face veil) was maintained. Also, at JM, history was taught as a separate subject (covering Islamic world history and Indian history), there were additional weekly classes for vocational training in tailoring, learning basic skills in computers and Kannada language. These were not present at DUB. Since these two madrasahs belonged to different ideologies/schools of thought within Islam their syllabi and pedagogies were slightly different.

In the 3rd category are Islamic Schools, faith-based schools run on private funding. They are mostly affiliated to international boards like IB or IGCSE or central board (CBSE) or state board (SSLC). Along with regular curriculum, they offer religious education with subjects like Quran, Hadith etc. (similar to that taught in a madrasah but on a lower scale). They maintain Islamic dress code for students and teachers. Since these are fee-paying schools, they cater to a range of students belonging to higher and middle socio-economic sections. The ethos of the school is set to imbibe students with an Islamic atmosphere through an overall moral code of

conduct, dress code and giving importance to religious education along with regular schooling.

Under the Islamic school category, there were fewer schools to choose from. Their variations were mainly in terms of student class composition and syllabus. I chose an Islamic school with a state board curriculum. I selected Magnum Opus Islamic School (MOIS), a privately run, faith-based school. The school's fee was about 50,000 rupees per annum. Students mostly belonged to families from middle socio-economic groups[11]. Since MOIS was 9-years into its inception, the high school comprised only class 8 and 9. There were 35 students between 12 to 15 years of age, all identified as Muslims. The principal of the school who was actively involved in community-related work mentioned that she had met several middle-income Muslim families who were concerned about the lack of Islamic values or knowledge about Islam in their children's education. Such private faith-based Islamic schools in Bangalore have only been a recent phenomenon. These schools were founded with the purpose of providing Islamic religious education alongside a regular curriculum. MOIS adhered to state board syllabus for regular curriculum, and for religious education, the books were sourced from a private publisher. They allocated 120 minutes/week for religious education. Additionally, there was an emphasis in incorporating Islamic values like facilities for daily prayers, Islamic dress code for teachers and students.

In the 4th category, Other Schools, all schools other than those stated above are included. This is a fuzzy category, with a mix of schools with high-fee to low-fee and diverse groups of students. These schools are either government aided or private. They are affiliated to state or central or international boards and accordingly they use syllabi like SSLC, CBSE, ICSE, IB and IGSCE. Some of these schools attract a sizeable population of Muslim students depending on their geographical location or due to their Muslim administration. Among these, some of the schools have registered with the minority status certificate (MSC) issued by National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) to minority-administered institutions established to promote education of minorities.

11 This study acknowledges middle-income as a vastly heterogenous group (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Fernandes, 2006) (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Fernandes, 2006) in India with a range economic, social, symbolic, and cultural capitals (see Nambissan, 2010).

Under the Other school category, I chose not to select convents though I found a fair number of Muslim students in many of these schools. Since they are Christian faith-based schools, this would add additional layers of complexity which would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Among the remaining schools, I found that the religious composition of many schools was largely homogenous. This meant that there were schools either with a large number of Muslim students or with only 1-2 or no Muslim students. Thus, I chose the former. I selected Luminous High School (LHS), a minority based, state-aided school, particularly for Muslim students, which provided education at a minimal cost (10,000 to 15,000 rupees per annum) for classes between lower kindergarten to 12. Along with aided sections, it also had low-fee unaided sections. LHS followed the state board curriculum and also had moral or religious education as one subject (40 minutes/week). There were 176 students between 12 to 15 years of age, all of them identified as Muslims. Along with religious education, the school maintained an Islamic dress code. Also, boys were taken to the mosque on Fridays and girls had special religious gatherings on Thursdays. Students mentioned that low fee structure, Urdu as a language option and accommodation of Islamic values (facilities for daily prayer facilities, uniform with hijab for girls, religious education as a subject) were important factors in opting for this school. All the children belonged to working-class families—their parents worked as daily wage workers at construction sites, as auto-drivers or as house-helps.

The summary of the schools selected is as shown below.

No	**Type of School**	**Funding**	**Board of Affiliation**	**Syllabus**
1	VGHS, Government School	state funded	KSEEB	KSEEB syllabus for SSLC
2	DUB and JM, Madrasahs	privately run	None	Religious education only
3	MOIS, Faith-based Islamic School	privately run	KSEEB	KSEEB syllabus for SSLC+ additional curriculum with

				multiple subjects for religious education (120 minutes per week)
4	LHS, Government aided minority school	partly state funded	KSEEB	KSEEB syllabus for SSLC+ additionally 1 subject for religious education (40 minutes per week)

Table 1. Specific educational sites selected for field work

2.5 Methods

2.5.1 Choosing Ethnography

Ethnography as a methodology has undergone tremendous change since its inception in multiple ways. From researchers going to study a community and write about the 'other' to now researchers studying their own communities (Clifford & Marcus, 2010; Lecompte, 2002), from studying a single geographically demarcated field site to multiple and more fluid field sites (Falzon, 2009), from being 'neutral' observers to produce an 'objective' reality (Hammersley, 2000) to participant observation and getting involved in subjectivities of self and participants (G. L. Anderson, 1989; Savage, 2010), from having a predetermined plan to carry out the research to being open to let the field guide the research process (Mills et al., 2013), from a free narrative style of writing to a more theory driven style and very often finding middle paths between these polarities. Hence, it becomes essential to lucidly present one's own methodological stance and locate oneself as an ethnographic researcher (Clifford & Marcus, 2010).

In this thesis, I have utilised the broad of lens of the social constructionist paradigm, and the specific lens of a critical social psychological approach as described in section 2.2. Based on this, in my ethnographic work, I have remained cognisant of these lenses— that human beings are born into a context and culture, and they constantly make sense of the world and negotiate these meanings based on their socio-historical context (Crotty, 1998). I have, thus, accounted for the subjective meanings of the participants, multiplicity and complexity of views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), while acknowledging that their embeddedness in larger social structures influences their development and identity processes (Cole, 1986). The process has been largely inductive, and context driven. I have taken on the approach of a multi-sited ethnography which gave me the advantage of access to greater heterogeneity among participants across different educational spaces. Here multisitedness refers to "not just sites but spatialized cultural difference" (Falzon, 2009, pp 13) as one can expect that each school itself would be driven by its own ethos and at the same time it would typically attract students from a relatively similar

social class or neighbourhood. Having multiple sites allowed me to understand how differently children are socialised as these educational spaces (re)produce the same dominant discourses in a variety of ways. Spaces in which the majority of the students were Muslim, the school itself acted as a 'safe space' that allowed self-expression (Robson et al., 2007).

Within each educational space, I had been a participant observer wherein I acknowledged that my presence affected the space, and my involvement was more than simply observation. My ethnographic gaze had been particularly on the emergence of dominant socio-political discourses, particularly on the discourses on nationalism, and the responses to them inside the classrooms, outside the classrooms, in the staff room and during celebrations or events. I was particularly interested in attending social science classes, mainly history classes and religious education classes (if the school was providing them) as I expected a greater probability of these discourses or counter discourses to emerge. However, I spent my entire day at the schools, attending other subject classes as well, to become familiar with the children and observe them in their social interactions. My focus had been on high school children— in the age range of 12-16 years. At the madrasahs, there were students up to the age of 19 years. As I sat with the students on their benches during their classes, I became familiar and established rapport with them during the breaks. I also deliberated by involving the students in focus group discussions and interviews by asking questions that were specific to my topic. As the heads of institutes were aware that my disciplinary background was psychology and that I had practiced as a psychologist, I also took few classes and workshops for the children during free hours (on topics like dealing with exam stress, career guidance), took up supervision for one of the school counsellors and in few cases I held brief counselling sessions.

2.5.2 Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus group discussions are a useful qualitative method that allow the researcher to focus on specific issues with a group of homogeneous participants by engaging them in an interactive discussion (Neuman, 2014). I could explore my specific research questions by using a discussion guide for the FGDs. Using the funnelling technique, I prepared the guide to move from broad to specific questions

(Hennink et al., 2011). The initial questions were more general (e.g., "What is your typical day like?", "Tell me a little bit about your family", "What are your activities outside of the school?", "What is your neighbourhood like?", "What games do you play with your friends?", "Do you use social media?", "What festivals do you celebrate?"). These questions opened up conversations about children's social interactions and daily experiences. For example, they spoke about friendships in the school, attending madrasahs and tuitions after school, their neighbourhoods being religiously segregated, or children talking about their interfaith friendships while celebrating festivals, or playing cricket and their teams being divided based on religion and other experiences. Surprisingly, I found that in these experiences their religious identity was unusually conspicuous. Additionally, questions related to social media and news, particularly, opened up conversations about events and public sphere discourses which were linked to nationalism. These leads easily allowed me to take up questions from the discussion guide (e.g. Based on these experiences, "Do you often get asked questions about your religion?", "How do you respond to them?", "Then do you think there is the popular understanding about Islam/Muslims? What would that be?", "What kind of conversations take place within your family about such events/discourses?").

I followed up the FGDs with in-depth interviews (IDI) by randomly choosing 1-2 children from each group. In IDIs the conversations were more exploratory and less structured making children tell their stories freely (Hennink et al., 2011). Sometimes I picked on the classroom observations related to current affairs or from the information they had shared during the FGDs during the detailed interviews as a dialectic between my field notes' reflections and gathering more insights (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I facilitated children (through active listening and using non-verbal communication) to openly express their views, at the same time I was aware that my presence also influenced these processes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I maintained my reflexive journal notes to account for the same.

2.5.3 Reflexivity- Insider-Outsider position

Next, I recognise facets of my own identity that may have impacted this research; my religious identity as a member of the Muslim community which was visibly marked by my wearing of a hijab, my adult identity when speaking to children, my linguistic, and cultural identity. My presence as a researcher in the field has resulted in a bidirectional exchange—the participants making sense of my identities and me making sense of their identities. Along with these aspects, though I began with an open-ended mode of enquiry, I am aware that by asking further questions based on children's responses, I have taken part in the process of co-creating knowledge. I would consider myself in a 'double hermeneutic' wherein the researcher's own position is pivotal in making sense of children's making sense of their worlds (J. Smith et al., 2022). As an interlocutor, I had maintained a similar format of questioning across the school sites, however, there were points where it was required for me to remain silent or intervene further. I have also remained reflexive throughout the process with the help of my daily reflections and discussions with peers who were particularly attuned to the concept of reflexive research work. I provide an initial glimpse of this in the following paragraphs and continue to do so in the remaining empirical chapters.

Accessing the field entailed multiple negotiations, including for permissions from the state educational department, but mainly my own identity as a Muslim and as a researcher led to both ease and challenges across sites (which I will describe in following paragraphs). The most common question asked across sites was "*will you be evaluating teachers?".* Assuring that I was particularly interested in students eased my entry into the schools. I further describe each of the sites in detail. When it came to VGHS, there was a long bureaucratic process of going back and forth between the school and offices of the educational department of the state to obtain permission. During my initial visits, the principal asked me about what I would do in the school and after I explained she said, "*It's hard for us to allow researchers, especially when you come dressed like this*." [12] After a couple of visits, in consultation with other teachers she granted me permission. On my second day at the school, she requested me to leave as she said that few of the teachers were uncomfortable with my presence. I understood this discomfort in relation to teacher-fears of being evaluated. She called

12 She pointed to my hijab

another teacher into her room to decide if I would be allowed to stay and emphasized on her neutral stance. I requested the principal to only allow me in classes where teachers were comfortable having me around, and she agreed. I later found out that the principal was coincidentally also Muslim. She perhaps wanted to retain her 'secular' image and was wary of coming across as someone who would extend support to me because of our common religious identity. In a very subtle, verbal and non-verbal communication, I saw her need to underplaying her religious identity in the school context, despite being in a position of power. Thereafter, I was cautious of my identity as a Muslim, my presence within the school space and more cautious of bringing up the topic of religion during any discussion.

Similarly, gaining access to the madrasahs was particularly challenging. I could gain entry into the madrasahs only through community networks. Such a reference point was necessary for the madrasah heads to allow a researcher inside as they were sceptical about letting an unknown person into their premises. Despite this, on my 2nd day at DUB, I was particularly looked at with suspicion. Eventually the teachers and the madrasah head expressed their discomfort about my presence and questioned me if I was a government spy. She called the woman who had given the referral to enquire about me. I was then required to provide several clarifications through a series of meetings with the head and eventually I was allowed to stay. Through this experience and my visits to other madrasahs during phase 1, I could gauge the strong perception of threat/fear of intrusion among the madrasah educators about the state's attempts to modernise madrasah education by integrating into the mainstream[13]. The manifestation of this fear became clear when a known point of referral and my religious identity did not suffice to build trust. However, this was not the case at the remaining two sites.

It was relatively easy for me to get permission at LHS and MOIS particularly because of my religious identity. Since both these schools were at the juncture of upholding both regular and religious education, they perhaps looked at me in a similar fashion. On several occasions, students and teachers expressed that they were inspired

13 There have been several debates about the need to reform madrasahs to integrate Indian Muslims into the 'national mainstream' by providing 'modern' education. Such attempts from the state have been met with mixed responses from the community members with a fear that the state may eventually take complete control of the madrasahs (for details see Sikand, 2005)

about my level of education. Initially, I was asked questions about my topic and where I was doing my PhD. The teachers often asked, "*Oh how come they let you take a topic on Muslims*?" "*Who is your supervisor, is s(he) Muslim?*". Such questions made me think that my participants were somewhat echoing my research questions to me. They wondered how I was able to negotiate my space as a Muslim researcher in academia amidst dominant socio-political discourses while I wondered how students were doing the same.

Being a part of the same geographic location, cultural context, religious faith and knowing the local language (both Kannada and Urdu), I recognise, may have made the students think of me as an 'insider'. As I question the extent of being an "authentic insider" (Aguilar, 1981; Messerschmidt, 1981), I move away from the polarised positions of 'insider' or 'outsider' and recognise my identity as multiplex (Narayan, 1993) which partially resonates with those of my participants. At times, I was aware of being apart from their socio-economic class realities and my power position as an adult whom the students may have seen as aligned with their school teachers. So, I attempted to deliberately sit along with the students on their benches during class hours or speak with them casually during breaks. The partial insider position not only gave me access to such shared realities of the Muslim students but also turned the silences during FGDs, especially at VGHS, into a sense of comfort and openness that students displayed during personal interviews (as also indicated by other Muslim researchers like Abbas, 2010; Islam, 2020). Along with this, I owe a great deal to my training in Psychology that attuned my reflective abilities and four years of work experience as a therapist that has taught me much about the intricacies of being in a subjective-objective space. Recognizing that my own presence and others' understanding of it shapes the field, I account for my own positionality throughout my work. I continue to remain reflexive and write myself throughout this thesis as this played out differently at different sites.

2.5.4 Details of data collected

Between April 2019 to March 2020, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork across the four sites. I maintained field notes during this time which included detailed observations and my own reflections. I also used methods such as Focus Group

Discussions (FGD) with students and In-depth interviews (IDI) with students, parents and teachers. The details of which are shown below.

Site/ Method	VGHS (Government school)	DUB & JM (Madrasah)	MOIS (Islamic school)	LHS (Government-aided minority school)	Total (method wise)	Total no. of participants
FGD with students[1]	5	3	5	8	21	67 boys 123 girls
IDI with students	27	8	11	10	56	25 boys 31 girls
IDI with Parents	0	0	0	3	3	3
IDI with teachers/heads[2]	3	4	3	4	14	14
Total (site wise)	35	15	19	25		

Table 2. Site-wise and method-wise details of the data collected

[1] Number of students in the FGDs varied from 6-12

[2] Interviews with teachers were more informal throughout the field

At all the sites except at LHS, I was unable to interview parents due to space constraints at the schools. Also, most of the parents I had contacted were working and refused to come to the school during working hours. I noted their phone numbers to carry out telephonic interviews towards the end of my fieldwork. However, due to the abrupt disruption caused by the pandemic which had resulted in serious changes to people's life situations, telephonic interviews were no longer feasible.

2.5.5 Data Analysis

The analysis had been an ongoing process from the time of formulating the research questions, during the field site selection and during the ethnographic fieldwork which took a more formal shape once fieldwork was completed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). I transcribed all the recorded interviews and compiled all my field notes. After reading and re-reading the data, re-listening to the audios to become more familiar (Braun & Clarke, 2006) I added thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), and merged my reflections/field notes along with the transcripts. I marked the data that is unexpected or remarkable by referring to field notes.

In the next phase of organizing and re organizing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I divided the large data set into manageable chunks and added short summaries (site wise) using Microsoft Excel. I was then able to now read the data read across sites to roughly capture the broad emerging themes. Thus, by regrouping and identifying preliminary categories, I transformed the site wise data into theme wise through a summary document.

Following this, I returned to the site wise data and began open coding using QDA Miner Lite software. In the next step, using the summary document as a guide, I grouped the basic codes together to form broad categories. I used a blended approach (Graebner et al., 2012) which began with inductive coding and then moved towards deductive coding using the critical psychological approaches and the framework of 'psychopolitics' (as described previously). Looking for themes and moving towards abstraction was done keeping in mind that themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which are often meaningless when viewed alone (Aronson, 1995). Also, "a theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000; pp. 362). These themes were further refined through a reiterative process of collapsing/merging/separation until final abstract analytical themes emerged.

Chapter 3: Thinking through 'us' and 'them'- Everyday Nationalism in Understanding The Other

"There is no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." —Arundhati Roy

In this chapter, I will discuss various social contexts through which children learn about dominant discourses on nationalism. My focus will be on understanding how these public sphere discourses trickle into their interpersonal experiences as they interact with their peers (both inside and outside school), teachers and family members and thus bring about an understanding of the 'self' as 'the other'. As mentioned in my theoretical framework, I use Fanon's lens of 'psychopolitics' to capture the interlacing of the political and personal in children's lives while keeping in mind their multiple intersecting identities.

Several researchers have studied schools as important sites of 'everyday nationalism' which refers to an ongoing (re)production of nationalism in the everyday lives of people through a number of routine activities (Billig, 1995). Schools form primary sites where children 'encounter and negotiate different ideas and practices of nationalism' (Millei, 2019, p. 83) through actual and hidden curricula wherein children learn who is included or excluded based on several markers of identity (Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Christou & Spyrou, 2017; Leonard, 2012; Millei, 2015, 2021; Moser, 2016; Zembylas, 2010). Everyday nationalism within the hidden curriculum entails 'daily schedules, priorities laid on certain values, or embodied practices of eating, dressing, celebrations, and in language use' (Millei, 2019). When these routine practices mirror the practices of the majoritarian group, they exclude minorities, thus creating 'the other'. This becomes crucial in societies wherein minorities may be construed as 'problematic', 'as a threat' or 'out of place' (Skey, 2011). In such societies, children from majority groups consider themselves superior and do not consider minorities as a part of the nation (Bénéï, 2008; Leonard, 2012) or name-call and stereotype minorities (Zembylas, 2010), whereas children from

minority communities develop a fragmented self (Habashi, 2008) or subtly resist nationalist discourses (Bénéï, 2008; Hart, 2002). In addition to this, there is also recognition of that schools cannot be looked at in isolation from the larger historical and socio-political nexus that they are a part of (Cook & Hemming, 2011), thereby broadening the scope to simultaneously understand social institutions like the family, school and media as important sites that continually regulate and (re)produce "childhood as part of national projects" (Millei & Imre, 2016). In a similar vein, I demonstrate that though children spend a considerable amount of time at school, their experiences inside the school and outside the school are in a continuous dialogue with each other, thus forming an ongoing dynamic process of learning. Thus, in this chapter I address the question of how dominant discourses of nationalism come alive in children's social interactions across several social contexts and I capture how they respond to such discourses. I began by asking children basic open-ended questions like, "What is your typical day like?", "Tell me a little bit about your family", "What are your activities outside of the school?", "What is your neighbourhood like?", "What games do you play with your friends?", "Do you use social media?", "What festivals do you celebrate?", which opened up conversations into their social interactions. This led to discussions on friendships in the school, attending madrasahs and tuitions after school, their neighbourhoods being religiously segregated, or children talking about their interfaith friendships while celebrating festivals, or playing cricket and their teams being divided based on religion and other experiences. As I explored these interactions further, the theme of religious differences had recurrently emerged. Children became exposed to the stereotypes associated with their religious and national identities and therefore understood difference. My central argument in this chapter is that Muslim children have no escape from nationalism discourses in which they are casted as 'the other' and that they are constantly made aware of this in their daily lives.

Apart from religion, nationalism discourses are known to intersect with language (Leonard, 2012), gender (Silova, 2019; Silova et al., 2018) and race/ethnicity (Christou & Spyrou, 2017; Lappalainen, 2006; Zembylas, 2010) in daily lives of children. However, very few studies have examined these categories together. In this chapter I discuss how children encounter such intersections of

national and religious identities with gender identities that produce certain stereotypes of ‘oppressed Muslim female’ and ‘violent Muslim male’ and with linguistic identity that again create ‘the other’ through regional nationalism. Given this, I show how children (re)attempt to deconstruct an essentialised notion of ‘the Muslim other’ by entering into conversations/explanations with their non-Muslim peers, they strategically conform or remain silent with their non-Muslim teachers and at other times they internalise being ‘the other’.

In the first section, I highlight the ways through which children learn about dominant discourses through media, movies, through adults in the family while in the remaining sections I present detailed descriptions of their social interactions, their agency and meaning-making processes. In the second section, I present their interactions with non-Muslim peers and how they experience ‘everyday nationalism’ and make sense of categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’. I detail their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses when faced with questions about various Islamic religious practices, the most prominent of them concerning veiling and beef consumption. In the third section, I discuss schools as spaces wherein ideas of nationalism are (re)produced and how children are vigilant of being stereotyped or bracketed as communal, thus resulting in negotiations through conformity especially with their non-Muslim teachers. In the fourth section, I discuss the intersection of linguistic, national and religious identities within discourses of regional nationalism that exclude the Muslim child as ‘the other’.

3.1 Learning about dominant discourses

Children learnt about the nationalism discourses and other dominant socio-political discourses about Muslims/Islam through TV/newspaper, social media (most commonly WhatsApp and YouTube), movies, talking to parents, neighbours or teachers and interacting with peers. Adult experiences of discrimination at educational spaces or workplaces became a source of secondary intergenerational learning. Children also overheard conversations of their parents, or sometimes asked teachers about these discourses as schools often discussed current affairs. Students, across schools, were well aware of the nationalism discourses that cast religious minorities as ‘the other’. They were aware this was applicable to all minorities, however, they

felt there was a specific singling out of the Muslim identity. They explained this by stating their own interpersonal experiences, stereotypical portrayal in movies, and socio-political events like the episodes of violence incited against Muslims— deaths due to mob lynching by cow vigilante groups, Kathua rape case, Triple talaq bill, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Babri mosque-Ayodhya dispute, new rules on cow slaughter ban and Uniform Civil Code (all of these are discussed in detail in Chapter 4).

3.1.1 Making sense of Media dissemination

In my study, children strongly felt that the media was responsible for magnifying isolated events by individuals and attributing it to the entire community which led to assumptions about Muslims. Nabeela (19 years, JM) expressed her frustration— "if one or two people do something they will brand everyone as terrorists...they have made a completely wrong meaning out of jihad...it is not about taking a sword and killing, even controlling your desires is a big jihad...but people who interpret this they take jihad only as violence." Some children argued that though the media gets both sides of the information, the negative aspects are publicised and the positive aspects are buried. Due to these reasons, children pointed out that media was an important catalyst and a medium to disseminate negative stereotypes.

Some students believed that certain Indian media houses were controlled by political parties through which they spread hate against Muslims. Children sensed that political parties were deliberately attempting to create communal rifts. Like Hasan (13 years, MOIS) pointed out "it's not about Hindu or Muslim, it's about political things, they don't want us to be peaceful." Similarly, while discussing the cow slaughter ban, Nadir (13 years, MOIS) argued, "it is just another way to separate Hindus and Muslims." Qudrah (13 years, MOIS) supported this, "this has been there since years... that we cut beef... but suddenly they will start talking about these things...they want to divert our minds...then they bring other topics also...earlier it was beef now it is CAA." Thus, children could discern the role of media and political agendas in creating categories of 'us' and 'them' (Elkassem et al., 2018) which shows sophisticated cognitive abilities. They critically examined media discourses by placing them in the socio-political context rather than simply absorb them. Portrayal

of Muslims in Indian cinema was another reason identified for such stereotypes in the minds of their peers. In several groups, children discussed Bollywood movies at length (quoting several examples of movies) and questioned the repeated stereotypical projections of Muslims as terrorists or criminals or anti-national. While expressing such thoughts, children felt frustrated and angry about these widely circulated discourses, thus showing how the political has a direct influence on the psychological. Overall, they felt that the public sphere was saturated with such discourses.

However, this was not restricted to their local contexts as children also encountered hate comments while using social media (for example, while watching any Islamic content on YouTube). On analyzing these narratives closely, I found that children seamlessly tended to switch between global Islamophobic discourses and local 'othering' discourses since both of these are based on an essentialised understanding of Muslims as more loyal to their religion than to their nations. Alongside were overlapping discursive constructions of the Muslim male as violent/terrorist and the Muslim female as suppressed (often due to her wearing of the hijab) (Patton, 2017). Research has shown that the media representations of conflicts and their awareness among students influences religious minority identities (Hopkins, 2004; Illeris, 2007; Peek, 2005). Globally, this has been particularly understood with respect to the Muslim identity post 9/11. Very limited work discusses children's minority religious identities in this regard, and it remains in the realm of a minority status due to migration (Elkassem et al., 2018; Kabir, 2021; Patton, 2017; Scourfield et al., 2006). Though Indian Muslim children are different from their global counterparts, i.e., they are not migrants, my analysis shows certain parallels between how media effects their lives as the global loops into the local (Gobo, 2011; Habashi, 2011).

Taking this further, the discourses disseminated through media made them concerned about how others perceive Muslims (for similar concerns among Muslim children in other countries see Elkassem et al., 2018; Kabir, 2021). Shama (16 years, JM) said, "the thing is they [non-Muslims] don't know internally how it [Islam] works... they look at it from outside and make judgements... but they don't know or don't want to know about the real details" and Farina (14 years, MOIS) was worried that "if a kid is being influenced by that type of movies from the start, then that is

problem...first all it will make them insecure and if the kid has no exposure to Muslim community, then that will for sure effect." Nabeela (19 years, JM) echoed similar feelings, "if you keep drilling something into someone's head then mentally, he will absorb this... and there are few incidents where there was violence but then they keep targeting based on these instances." Children were concerned about the ubiquitousness of these discourses in the local as well as in the global realm. They were also aware that they would have to face repercussions since they would be negatively judged based on such stereotypical representations (these experiences will be detailed in section 3.2). Further, since they could not circumvent the same, it had resulted in feelings of helplessness. For some it turned into anger, like Sidrah, "there are people being properly brainwashed by the media...they shouldn't get only one-sided information... they can't just decide based on one-sided views but that's what is currently happening now." These emotions of anger, frustration and helplessness were intense since being constantly cast as the 'other' had trickled into their own lives (as I will further discuss in 3.2) and brought about anticipations that they would face discrimination similar to that experienced by the adults in their lives.

3.1.2 Learning from adults and extrapolation

Children learnt about how these othering discourses disseminated through media were continually being (re)produced in daily lives of Muslims through the experiences of close relatives or friends. In a group discussion with MOIS class 9 girls, Sidrah said "My cousin took her child to school, and she was wearing dupatta and burqa and they din't even look at her... purposely ignored her." Others in the group quickly began to echo similar sentiments and experiences.

> Marina: Ya even my cousin wanted to take up a job and she went for an interview but they din't take her and they said they don't allow hijab... and she said I can't remove...
>
> Farina: in my brother's college there was a notice that they are not allowed to keep a beard... and that they will rusticate them if they do so...

> Zanjabeel: in my brother's college also, they won't allow to perform salah [prayer]... so, he has to miss some lectures and go out and perform salah

I found similar accounts by students in other schools. Nabeela (19 years, JM) said "my brother has done aviation, he got many good offers for cabin crew because he had a very nice personality, but during interviews he was rejected due to his beard only." Rukhsana quickly added by saying, "my brother was not allowed to wear a jubbah[14] and beard...he went for interviews at least to 4 to 5 places...everything was fine and, in some places, they asked him to join from the very next day but they said that you can't dress like this...so he had opted out.". In some cases, discrimination was not related to attire. For example, Shadab (13 years, LHS) said, "my [Muslim] neighbour was working in an office, and he was doing good work, but they used to not give salary proper but for others they never did that." Such an intergenerational learning from adults became a crucial point of reference for children to visualise their future lives (Wyness, 2013). Intergenerational learning, which was previously considered as a unidirectional process wherein adults in the family educate children, has now expanded to include extrafamilial adults, emphasizing on a reciprocal exchange between adults and children (Alanen, 2009; Mannion, 2017). Since children are agentic actors in their own right, they (re)invent their communities or social settings by taking part in social processes along with their peers and adults (Hart, 2009).

Students anticipated such discrimination to happen to them in the future. Shadab had already decided, "I will go to Dubai, it is an Islamic country, because Muslims will be ruling there, they will not discriminate against us." Farina said, "when we go out and work in non-Muslim places, then dressing style will be a problem, they won't allow us to wear the hijab." When Samaira (14 years, LHS) said "they won't take Muslims in government jobs", her classmate Salwa was slightly hopeful as she said, "some people who have humanity will be impartial, but others will select only Hindus". Children thus extrapolate about their own futures, based on their learning of these instances of everyday nationalism from adults. It is also

14 A long, knee or ankle length, outer garment usually worn my Muslim men

important to note that since these experiences were present across class and gender, they delineate the importance of religious identity among a heterogeneous group of Muslims. Thus, children assumed that it was highly likely that they would face such issues especially because they were already grappling with ongoing 'othering' discourses. Very few exceptions like Shadab were quick to make decisions about their futures, whereas most of them expressed a sense of helplessness and despair.

3.2 From being stereotyped to building close friendships

3.2.1 Understanding differences through observable practices and interactions

Children's experiences in their interactions with peers (outside and inside school) from different faiths had been largely mixed. While there were instances of close friendships, there were also instances of hatred or disgust. Some students pointed to similarities with other faiths like fasting. Christians were often thought of as closer in terms of faith. Others pointed to differences in religious practices like "we do namaz and they do pooja" and "we bury and they burn the dead bodies". Some students also went on to criticise Muslims that they imitate practices of Hindus (especially with respect to grave worshipping). Few exceptions said that there was "no question of religion" in their interactions while few others said there were clear cut groups based on religion when they went out to play in the neighbourhood. This was also evident at VGHS— while relationships were cordial among the different religious groups at school, children mostly demonstrated strong in-group preferences with respect to close friendships. Instances of inter-religion friendships were also observed. Across schools, in cases of close friendships, children mentioned playing together, sharing food, celebrating festivals like Diwali and Holi together. Some of them said they enjoyed bursting crackers or playing with colours whereas many of them said they used to do it when they were younger. Kalam (LHS, 14 years) explained this by saying "now we don't do...that time we didn't have so much sense...now we know" showing a change in their understanding of social differences. What seems to be earlier seen simply as a part of play had now matured into an understanding of a religious ritual to be carried out by someone belonging to that religion. This was clearly demonstrated in another FGD at LHS with class 8 girls,

Me: What all festivals you celebrate?

All: Eid, Bakrid, 26th, Shabaan, Muharram, Shabbe-Berat, Shabbe-meraj

Rubia: ma'am patakhey (crackers)...

Me: Oh, you celebrate Diwali?

All others: No ma'am, no ma'am, we don't... Hindu Hindu Hindu... (in chorus, jokingly pointing to Rubia)

Rubia: it's only crackers ma'am, I like it a lot... (annoyed)

Zohra: exactly, that's what Diwali is the same thing... crackers (dismissing Rubia)

Salmah: Hindus celebrate that

Rubia: (bit angrily) nothing like that ya... do you know anything?

Me: Who taught you this? That only Hindus should celebrate?

Rubia: Ma'am it is Hindu festival, so only Hindus celebrate it...and they all (pointing to her classmates) think if we celebrate, we will become Hindu (dismissing the rest)

Others: Laugh together

Rubia had taken offence when her friends began to tease her for celebrating Diwali though she knew that they were deliberately making fun of her. However, in her response, she retaliated, by saying that their reaction is immature and childish to call her a Hindu just because she bursts crackers, which made everyone laugh and lightened the mood. These examples show that children learn about the existence of social in-groups and out-groups through festivals, food habits and rituals at a younger age (Nesbitt, 2004). However, what may have been understood as play at the time, had now solidified to represent religious categories as Kalam stated, "now we know" or Rubia said "only Hindus celebrate it." Further, Rubia and her friends recognised that a mere celebration of a festival would not be enough to indicate one's religious identity. Through this, children show how their understanding of social differences and categories has developed. As children grow, they "display a wide variety of faith positions and ways of expressing their religiosity, both across and within faith groups." (Madge et al., 2014; p. 208).

While comparing religious practices, Afzal (14 years, LHS) disapprovingly said, "Muslims will go to darga [shrines], they will put cloth and flowers

there...Hindus will think they also do the same... put cloth and flowers in the temple or put coconuts...then what is the difference between us and them?" Two analytical threads emerged from this statement— one, children also reflected on the factions within the Muslim community while thinking about differences and two, they asserted that, despite the heterogeneity/existence of sub-groups, people from other faiths view them as a monolith. With regard to the first point, children complained that due to these factions, there is no unity amongst Muslims and this, according to them, was a major reason for absence of collective action or any progress in the community. For example, in several groups, visiting shrines was condemned. Some children felt prostrating at the shrine was wrong, whereas some of them said that Muslims who visited dargas did not have faith in Allah and others like Afzal had thought such an obvious imitation was ridiculous and un-Islamic. They often named the sub-groups and their opposing views on certain religious practices. However, in all those groups in which this topic was discussed, children emphasised that it was required for Muslims to unite and rise above these differences, especially due to the socio-political circumstances that are increasingly marginalising Muslims (elaborated in Chapter 4). Moving to the second point, I responded by asking Afzal if all Muslims visit shrines. He replied, "Yes, we all don't go, but they think that we go." Others in the group joined to make me understand how others consider Muslims to be a singular unit.

However, this understanding of difference was not limited to the singular axis of religion. As two students from class 9 at MOIS discussed about their interfaith friendships outside school— Haider said, "we do talk about religion... even about other religions... currently what's happening...all that we talk." Zubair added, "we are like brothers." Haider continued "but some parents will object to them, their parents tell them why are you talking to Muslims but they won't listen, they will still be friends." Children tended to discuss differences of religion amongst each other. They not only learnt about the existence of social in-groups and out-groups through festivals, food habits and rituals but also picked up on the political connotations attached to these groups by adults. Muslim children recognised that since they had been cast as 'the other', some of their peers had to transcend parental boundaries to maintain interfaith friendships. Knowing the difference between 'us' and 'them' here was not simply part of religious socialisation, rather children were aware of the

conflation of religious and national identities. In most of the FGD's, whenever students discussed their interfaith friendships, this awareness was often indicated by an additional emphasis that there was "no problem." This shows that both Muslim and non-Muslim children "have the ability to re-negotiate absolute and totalizing nationalistic ideologies" (Christou & Spyrou, 2017; p.10). However, such examples were very few.

Many of them were of the opinion that when it comes to other religions, "some of them like us but some of them dislike us." In another FGD at LHS, Kamilah, said "in our village in Benaras, if Hindu touches a Muslim, they will go take bath in Ganga" to which her classmate Tahseen added "they don't like us at all... [chidte hain humse]... there are all types of people in this world, only some people like Muslims a lot." Similarly, Laiba said, "even if we try to be good to them, they avoid us or get irritated... they think that we are of a different category" and Shanifa said, "my neighbours they just turn away as soon as they see us, they cover their houses with a cloth so that they don't see our faces."

Overall, through their social interactions, all students learnt that there were several stereotypes about Muslims that non-Muslims held which makes them strongly dislike Muslims—

> "they think we are liars, they say don't trust us because they say our God cannot be seen" (Fazly, LHS)
>
> "they have many misunderstandings [galat fahmiyan] in their minds about us" (Safeer, MOIS)
>
> "they think we are terrorists" (mentioned most often by multiple students)
>
> "they think why did we bring this Islam, all this is not valid...they find the azan [call for prayer] disturbing and they want it to be banned" (Raqeeb, LHS)
>
> "they don't like us because we cut cow" (multiple students)
>
> "they say that Muslims have migrated from some other place and they have settled in Hindustan, Hindi and Kannada are old languages while Urdu is originated newly with a new religion" (Raisha, MOIS)
>
> "they think we are lazy, we are dirty" (Hasan, MOIS)
>
> "they think Muslim children are naughty" (Jamshed, MOIS)
>
> "they think Islam is a qattar [too strict] religion" (multiple students)

The findings in my study are supported by other researchers in India. Latika Gupta in her work shows such an essentialisation— in the minds of Hindu girls, Muslims were considered to be "an undifferentiated mass of people who cannot be trusted or who can turn violent any time" making Muslims a single entity analogous of disgust, threat thereby worthy of being hated and othered (Gupta, 2008, p. 40). Erum's (2017) work also shows how Muslim children have been bullied by being name-called as 'terrorist', or 'Pakistani' (Nathan, 2019). Other school-based studies have shown that students equated 'true Indianness' to being Hindu (Deka, 2014; Ellwood-Lowe et al., 2020).

In the range of children's experiences, social categories are played out in a variety of ways through which they build an understanding of the 'self' as 'the other'. This happens both when boundaries are permeable (as in cordial friendships) or impermeable (when met with dislike). In both cases, children comprehend that their 'self' is being identified by others mainly through their conflated national and religious identities to cast them as 'the other'. This 'othering' becomes obvious when met with hate/stereotypes. However, even in case of close interfaith friendships, children are able to recognise that there is an effort made by their peers to de-essentialise their identities. Though the 'self' is thus constantly understood as undesirable or incommensurable with the majority/higher group (Herriot, 2007) as a result of belonging to a religious community, Muslim children resist dominant discourses and make attempts to respond to them when presented with an opportunity to do so. I illustrate this in the next theme.

3.2.2 Interactions on hijab and other religious practices

It was a quite common experience for most of the children to be asked questions about their faith by their peers. Most asked questions were— "why can't your God be seen?", "where is your God?","why do you fast?","why do you pray?" Almost all the girls had been asked questions about veiling— "why do you wear hijab?", "aren't you suffocated?", "you should be free", "this is too much", "this is a form of oppression", "you are so caged." Stereotypical projections through popular discourse often reinforced by the media make way into children's social interactions, especially for girls (who wore the hijab) as they could be quickly identified as Muslim

(Elkassem et al., 2018; Zine, 2006). To these questions children responded in a variety of ways. A common response to the questions on hijab was the banana example. Abeer (14 years, LHS) explained, “When a lady asked my mother about why you wear hijab, my mother got two bananas and she put one open and the other one closed. She then asked her which one do you prefer? By this she was trying to teach her the meaning of burqa...So this is common sense that nobody likes to eat a banana which is already peeled...so similarly wearing hijab or burqa is like that...when we are wearing pardah that time everybody respects us.” Similarly, Hamnah (16 years, DUB) who had been to the doctor with her mother was asked about her hijab, however, her mother in turn questioned asking her why she was wearing a bindi? When the doctor replied saying it was a sacred rule, and we follow it, Hamnah’s mother then said hijab was their sacred rule so they follow it. Some girls went on to say that since burqa has been misused by other people to commit crimes, this could be a probable reason for others to have a problem with Muslim women wearing it. Other girls’ responses were — “we feel it’s nice”, “it’s protective”, “we like it”, “it is part of our religious practice”, “we don't think it is oppression”, “you think we are suffering but we are not”.

Similar to Zine’s (2006) study in Canada, none of the Muslim girls, I had interacted with, were forced to wear the hijab. Rather they asserted their agency in choosing it as they ascribed meanings of piety, feminity, and safety to it. Shireen (14 years, VGHS), who did not wear the burqa, said “I have been asking my mother to buy me one burqa, but she says wait till marriage.” Her classmate, Afza (who also did not wear) said, “I told my mom to buy me a niqab (face veil) but she is not listening.” On exploring further and challenging their responses, I learnt that wearing a burqa was desirable rather than undesirable, as the girls attributed adjectives such as, “simple and elegant” and “looks beautiful” to the garment. In light of these discussions, the girls also brought up the topic of the state’s intention to ban the burqa through uniform civil code. When I asked Afza about what she thinks of the ban she responded, “Why should they ban the burqa, what if we ask Hindu girls to stop wearing bindi..do you think they will do that? Similarly, we should be allowed to wear what we want as per our religion.” To the same question, Zoya (14 years,

VGHS) said “I think that, why should I not wear it? We are Muslims, we like to wear it and how does it matter to them?”

These responses challenge the normative understanding of religion in childhood, that children passively accept messages about faith (Scourfield et. al 2013). It also challenges a simple reading that Indian Muslim girls who wore the burqa were being controlled through attire. From femininity to religious assertion, paying attention to young girls’ articulations shows how a range of meanings were attached to the burqa. It was required for females to “navigate between these reductionist and essentialised paradigms to claim their own representation over the discursive practices that determine the way their bodies are narrated, defined, and regulated” (Zine, 2006; p. 244). Globally, much has been debated and discussed about the veiling of Muslim women/girls especially post 9/11 and the banning of hijab in public schools in France (Hamdan, 2007; Poynting, 2009). Researchers have challenged the fixated discourse of veiling as an oppressive religious practice to understand the agency of Muslim women (Mahmood, 2001) and their negotiations with multiple intersecting discourses of Islamophobia, racism, ethnicism along with their conspicuous veiling practices (L. Clarke, 2003; Hamdan, 2007; Mernissi, 1992; Poynting, 2009; Ruitenberg, 2008; Shain, 2003; Zine, 2006). In India, Muslim women have been considered as a minority within a minority (Lateef, 1998), a ‘problem group’, which is backward and denied of their rights due to the Islamic law, therefore, to be reformed (Fazalbhoy, 2005; Kirmani, 2016). Due such hegemonic discourses and the construction of the Muslim woman as “the quintessential ‘other’ to the idealised upper-caste Hindu women – invisible in the nationalist history but hyper-visible around the Muslim question (Hussain, 2019, p. 93) and the sparse literature on their own articulations and lived experiences (S. Hussain, 2019), Muslim girls in my study were often judged and questioned.

During an FGD with class 9 girls at MOIS, Zanjabeel shared an interesting experience. She said that “once girl asked me about hijab... that don't you feel something because of this?... as we spoke more, she said she wants to experience it one time...” As she said this, others in group almost jumped out of their seats in surprise and asked, “she really told?” And one of them added “then we can tie (for her)”. The girls were in disbelief to learn that a non-Muslim was open to trying out a

much disdained Islamic practice. This again points to children's (across faiths) ability to engage in conversations that can allow for deconstruction of hegemonic discourses. As the discussion continued, Farina said "once my neighbours came to my house while I was reading Quran and they saw me reading and they asked me translate it and I did...they said it looks peaceful and nice... before they had very negative views and I feel I just corrected something of their mindset." Children were willing to enter into a dialogue about their religion with their peers as they felt they could provide explanations that challenged an essentialised view of the Muslim identity. However, many of these interactions were not pleasant or smooth.

Nada (14 years, MOIS) had a hostile experience when she met Sunita at tuitions; Sunita asked her many questions like "is your holy book made up?, what is there in it?, why do cover yourself?, how can you breathe in that?" Nada said, "everyday she used to ask me something and I used to try to explain to her". I observed that while narrating this, Nada was rather calm, neither angry nor irritated like many of the other students. When I asked Nada how she felt about it, she said, "if they think negative, we will get angry but if they ask, we are ready to explain". Others agreed with Nada as they felt that there was a sense of hope that others *may* understand them when they answered these questions. Despite this, for some the attempts to give explanations were not always easy or taken well. Like, Safeer (13 years, MOIS) was asked "why do you people walk on hot coal?" He said, "I try to explain to them that it is not a correct practice [in Islam] but they won't listen, they say you tell its wrong then why you people only do." Unlike Nada, Safeer was frustrated that he was not able to convince his peers through his explanation. Also, the reply from his peers again indicates their view of the Muslim community as a monolith, which Safeer did not know how to counter.

Overall, "children, no less than adults, exercise power with one another, drawing on dominant discourses of normality and 'otherness' in their inclusionary/exclusionary practices" (Devine & Kelly, 2006, p. 136). Whenever Muslim children were asked questions about their faith, they were able to discern that some of these questions came from the point of curiosity whereas others were presumptuous or derogatory. In these conversations, there are often projections of adult stereotypes onto children leading to an adultification (R. Epstein et al., 2017;

Goff et al., 2014). Children found questions, even if alienating, as an opportunity to correct stereotypical assumptions that cast them as 'the other'. However, this meant that they knew they would be required to provide explanations and they naturally felt responsible to be able to do so. I extend this concept of adultification further to explain that children were thus required to be ready with adult like answers and explanations when asked any question about their religion.

3.2.3 Beef consumption and the 'violent other'

A vast majority of the students across schools said that one of the reasons for hatred or crimes against Muslims is due to their consumption of beef/slaughtering of cows. Hasan (13 years, MOIS) pointed out that the cow was a sacred goddess for the Hindus— "cow is their mother, how can we harm their mother and then won't they be angry with us". Within the Hindutva discourse, cow slaughter is constructed as "Muslim male self- assertion through the violation of the sacred Hindu female body (as cow- mother -goddess)" (Bacchetta, 2000, p. 264) and 'vegetarian politics' has been widely used as one of the ways to establish anti-Muslim sentiments (J. Fischer, 2019). Constructions of Hindus and Muslims using dichotomies of ahimsak (non-violent) versus violent through food habits, slaughter, and religious sacrifice of animals (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012) have intensified in the public domain due to the recent visible political campaigns on cow slaughter ban and multiple deaths of Muslims by cow vigilante groups backed by Hindutva organisations (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2016).

Students discerned that it was only Muslims were being unfairly targeted for this though they have seen Hindus in the meat stalls or even consume beef. Some students were confused about this as one student said "though they pray to it they also ate beef" while other students recognised that not all Hindus eat beef[15]. Some even said that not all Muslims eat beef recognizing that both these groups are not uniform categories. Samaira (LHS, 14 years) further condemned this targetting as the state's hypocrisy— "they will tell that we should not eat beef, but they will pack the same thing and export it to other countries, because they will get money if they export."

15 Beef eating practices among Hindus are non-homogenous. Current research shows that beef eating has been under-reported by Hindus due to cultural-political pressures (Khara et al., 2020) and beef eating was found to be 96% more than actually reported (Natrajan & Jacob, 2018).

Thus, students clearly concluded that the targeting is due to religion than the actual eating of beef or cow slaughter. Students engaged in the process of countering dominant discourses by taking a more nuanced understanding of the situation. Students challenged the stereotyping of Muslims with respect to beef consumption/slaughter by describing that people from other religious faiths also consume beef, they also argued that none of these religious groups can be considered as monoliths. This is further nuanced by bringing out the country's economic gain through beef export. Quite a few children further reflected that they process of slaughter itself must be handled more responsibly, as one of them said "in the masjid they told us that after cutting, don't put the blood like that... other religion people will be there, they won't feel good...we should not hurt others' sentiments and we should handle this cutting more carefully so that it does not hurt others sentiments." This also shows that children did not simply take sides, rather demonstrated that they were able to take into account more nuanced views.

Discursively, food habits and personal characteristics have been wedded together, for example, in a recent election campaign in Karnataka, where Prime Minister Modi made the particular association of the beef trade (mostly carried out by Muslims) to terrorism (Rukmini 2019) furthering the beef-eating stereotype and linking it to the 'violent other'. This stereotype was reproduced at VGHS on many occasions with respect to the boys. The principal said to me "It is the Muslim children (referring to the boys) who do all the mischief, they don't want to study." Shankar (14 years, Hindu boy) felt that Muslim boys (except a few) made too much noise and made it difficult for everyone to study. When I asked him why he doesn't complain to the teachers, he replied "If I complain, they [Muslims] will hit me outside the school." He denied having any such experience— "No they have never hit me, but I heard from seniors and others that they will hit." I asked if he knew anyone who had been hit. He admitted not knowing anyone personally but believed that Muslim boys could be violent towards him. His understanding that the Muslim child was 'violent' points to an extrapolation of the stereotypes about male Muslim adults to boys, thus conflating gender, religion and national identities.

Another interesting example of such an extrapolation was discussed by Faizan. Faizan shared his experiences of negotiating his friendship with a Hindu boy, Nishant,

with whom he had cultivated a friendship since Class 1 (6 years). This friendship was put to test when Kaushik, another Hindu boy, objected to this friendship in Class 7 since Faizan consumed beef. Faizan explained that Kaushik made several attempts to break his friendship with Nishant, going to the extent of almost beating him. This also led Nishant to temporarily withdraw his friendship with Faizan which was only restored once Kaushik left the school. Faizan not only had resisted Kaushik's warnings but asserted himself by stating that there is nothing wrong with consuming beef. While food preferences had not been a bone of contention for the two boys earlier, even though children even as young as six years have been noted to understand food habits as markers of religious difference (Becher, 2008; Nesbitt, 2004), the two children had even shared their lunch, Kaushik's narrative of identifying beef as 'cow meat' and as the meat of Hindu God appeared to be influential. Interestingly, he did not object to Nishant's friendship with other non-Muslim students who also consumed beef. In raising objection to this specific friendship, Kaushik appeared to be echoing the heightened public discourse around beef consumption—the political identification and targeting of Muslim populations for consuming beef under the Hindutva agenda of the ruling government, whereas Faizan and Nishant had absorbed the nationalism narratives of 'unity in diversity'. Faizan added, "For me, religion is important, it's the right path, but the BJP government doesn't like Muslims, they don't want us to be united, there are many crimes against Muslims nowadays... but I am not scared because I trust Allah. Also, my teachers have taught us that we should not differentiate between Hindu-Muslim and fight so in the school I make friends with all religions."

In another discussion I had with VGHS students about food habits, the atmosphere had become communally charged. All the Hindu children began to cheer for Somesh (a Hindu boy) as he said, "we pray to the cow and 'they' slaughter it and this should be stopped." Abid (a Muslim boy) retaliated "Then why do you eat chicken by slaughtering it?' and Shireen angrily responded, "more than us, they (Hindus) eat, they are found more in number in the meat stalls selling beef but why do they target us then?" I sensed how the discussion itself was beginning to polarise the group, dissolved the discussion immediately and urged students to acknowledge the diversity in the class without getting into categories of 'us' and 'them'. I feared the

possibility of a fight, and how its escalation to the teachers could easily mark me out as communal. My own fears at that moment made me realise how Muslim children and perhaps the staff had to navigate conversations around religion. Children's resistance and assertions were seen more clearly with peers, as Faizan and Nishant resisted cutting off friendships, and Shireen openly contested the idea that only Muslims consumed beef however, most Muslim children chose to remain quiet during such discussions (either due to my presence as an adult or due to conformity with their peer group).

3.3 Negotiating through conformity: 'Don't appear too religious'

As seen in the previous themes, Muslim students were well aware of the dominant socio-political discourses which brought about several kinds of negotiations with their peers. In this theme I discuss how children negotiate the school space through conformity. Conformity was more pronounced in the presence of non-Muslim teachers than peers. During my fieldwork at MOIS, anti and pro-CAA protests were going on. I learnt from Ms. Muzna (a Muslim teacher) that the non-Muslim teachers were supporting the CAA. In a very disappointed tone she said, "it is so unfortunate that our non-Muslim colleagues in the school are actually for CAA... they work with us so closely they know about us still they are not supporting us...grade 9 children were very upset since they are very close to all the teachers." Following this conversation, I had engaged in a group discussion with grade 9 students. When I asked students if they followed the news, they immediately began to discuss about NRC/CAA and its unfairness. The discussion was interrupted when Ms. Suman, a non-Muslim teacher, entered the room to take some of her books. Suddenly the outcrying group fell silent. As she was picking her books, I attempted to continue the discussion but one of the students indicated to me with his eye movement that she is present in the room. Some students began to fill up the silence by talking about a completely different topic, almost in a broken manner, in an attempt not to make it obvious that her presence had become the reason for silence in the room. After she left, they resumed the conversation in a normal fashion (as if they did not need to explain what just happened and as if I had understood it). Towards the end of this discussion, I asked them if they had any other thoughts they wanted to share (while I

recalled Ms. Muzna's earlier comment), the students did not say anything about the silence when Ms. Suman was in the room. Instead, they began to complain about the art teacher, who also happened to be a non-Muslim. They said he was not teaching anything, and he would often make irrelevant comments. When I asked them if they had thought of giving a written complaint to the principal, one of them said "now this becomes related to NRC CAA...this is the time to win people's hearts and giving complaints against them will affect our unity." This shows the intensity with which periods of heightened nationalism impact the daily lives of children. Children did not see the school space as neutral, nor did they education or learning as the sole outcome of being in the school. In these examples, they viewed the school as a space to build positive interfaith relations, which they considered to be more important than their learning outcomes. Also, a simple teacher-student relationship (usually read as adult-child) was being looked at through a lens of 'us' and 'them'. I argue that their silence cannot be understood as passivity (an outcome of usual disciplining), rather they used their agency strategically in actively deciding not to display any sort of resistance or get into conflict with their non-Muslim teachers even if they did not agree with them.

Similarly in another group discussion at MOIS, Raisha discussed about how her classmates (grade 8) had scolded her for asking Ms. Suman about ongoing political events— "I asked once about CAA and my friend started shouting at me when she (Suman) went out of the class, they were like don't ask. I first asked her about Kashmir [abrogation of Article 370] and then she gave me that example that Kashmir people were not able to marry people from outside and now they can and the rape cases were legal that time but now it is illegal after coming under government and then I asked her about Babri verdict (laughs as if she shouldn't have)...and she was like…I forgot…she said something... and then I asked about CAA, she said Indian Muslims and Hindus are brothers and sisters and the people who are coming from outside are developing some clash between them, because of them Hindus and Muslims are having a fight and that's why Modi is making this rule to send these immigrants out." As soon as Raisha finished, Nada responded to her, "they just have Muslims on their list, thats not right... but she (Suman) takes all these situations positively." Raisha's classmates who warned her not to ask such questions seemed to already have an awareness of Ms. Suman's stance on these matters. Though

classrooms have been considered the most restraining (of all spaces within the school) for children's agency, it still offers the possibility for children to exchange talks among themselves and their teachers (Spyrou, 2000). Raisha brought up the then ongoing political issues with Ms. Suman which was not part of the topic she was teaching. However, this led to the entire class learning about the views of a non-Muslim teacher on the questions of national identity of Muslims and other minorities. Children made sense of her response by not taking it at face value, however, instead of questioning it further, they modified their behaviour to silence. Once the girls were clear about Ms. Suman's stance on the CAA and were not convinced of her explanations regarding the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir and other matters, they did not object to it and chose to remain quiet or not bring up such topics with Ms. Suman. In contrast, I found that students were freely arguing with Ms. Adeela (a Muslim teacher) regarding the unfairness of the Babri verdict and the teacher dismissed them by saying "there is no need to be so emotional about it". Yet, in this interaction, students continued to persist on their stance and openly expressed their disagreement with Ms. Adeela. I found these instances to be striking as they demonstrated how discourses of nationalism entered the school space. Children do not passively accept teacher's (both Ms. Suman and Ms. Adeela) messages. As their personal experiences and knowledge interact with what the authoritarian teacher figure tries to convey, they continue to make new meanings (Spyrou, 2000) of the times of heightened nationalism (discussed further in Chapter 4) through these processes, however, the manner in which they express this varies. Children use their agency to respond differently with different actors. Though students had described the school to be a 'safe space' wherein they could freely ask questions about political events to the Muslim teachers, their conformity with the non-Muslim teachers was indicative of their awareness that a minority community must not jeopardise their position by getting into conflicts with the majority group.

Such a conformity was far more pronounced at VGHS. Several practices at VGHS were ostensibly secular, but truly religious. For the daily school prayer children joined their hands neatly as in Hindu ritual worship and the prayer song celebrated the land of Karnataka as having witnessed reincarnations of certain Hindu deities and being home to several Hindu, philosophers, rulers, poets and saints. The

school functions during Teacher's Day, Independence Day and so on involved poojas (Hindu ritual worship) and bhajans (devotional songs that praise Hindu deities). The school's calendar also revealed its temporal alignment with Hindu festivals by closing for three days during Ganesh Chaturthi, one day for Eid and one day for Christmas and a long break for Dussehra and Diwali. Similarly, within the curriculum, the state's official music syllabus (a compulsory subject) was not neutral. It comprised of various bhajans taught by the music teacher, trained in Carnatic music. During one of the music classes, I observed that while Muslim children did sing, their disinterest was apparent given that they tended to talk amongst themselves more when compared to Hindu children who sang enthusiastically. No Muslim child questioned why the music syllabus only had songs praising Hindu deities. Scourfield et al. (2013) explain the limited agency of minority Muslim children at a state-run school in Cardiff, United Kingdom where they only lip-synced Christian hymns instead of singing. If they were caught in such an act, the teachers scolded them and forced them to sing. Elsewhere, Muslim parents, in Finland, did not actually let their children participate in the school's religious celebrations though they verbally agreed to do so (due to the class-teacher's persuasion) mainly to avoid being termed as 'difficult clients' or Islam being labelled as an extremely strict religion (Lappalainen, 2006).

On questioning several Muslim children at VGHS about their faith, the common thread that emerged across all narratives was a deep commitment to their religious faith outside the school— they took on to religious education from the age of four or five years and continued attending madrasahs before or after school, and followed religious practices like daily prayers, fasting and wearing the hijab (for girls). Children also expressed their negotiations when it came to their daily prayers. During an interview with Rihana, as we discussed her life outside of school, she mentioned that after school she attended a madrasah and did her daily prayers apart from helping her mother. On asking her about the afternoon prayer, she said, "Yes, I know we have to pray but the school won't allow it, so I go home and complete it." Her classmate Zeenat said, "Since I live far, by the time I reach home, it will be late so I miss the afternoon prayer...I can't help it...in case I am at home or reach early I do... But I fast during Ramadan." Other studies in the UK have shown how the Muslim communities' negotiations with the school to allow for prayer have been

chequered; in some cases, Muslim parents have been able to negotiate with the school to allow for prayer during school (Scourfield et al. 2013), whereas in others, devout Muslim children have prayed even in the toilets (Hemming 2011). Muslim students at VGHS recognised that their prayer was obligatory; however, they skipped the afternoon prayer on school days.

There were also certain gendered negotiations. Hindu girls often wore bindis, kumkum (vermillion applied to the forehead) and sacred threads to school and this was considered a desirable way to dress whereas hijabs were not allowed. In fact, a teacher said to Wajida (a Muslim girl) "Why don't you at least wear a bindi or something on your neck?" pointing to symbolic interpretations of Indian femininity as Hindu womanhood. Wajida however did not respond and stood there quietly until she let her go. Most of the Muslim girls entered the school veiled in a hijab, abaya/burqa, face veil over their uniforms and removed it as soon as they joined the morning assembly. While some spoke of being accustomed to removing the burqa at school, others found it discomforting. Ruqya said "Only in the school I remove it, otherwise I wear it whenever I go out, it makes me feel good" whereas Rumana said in a regretful tone, "We have to follow the school rules, so we will remove it." As I sat in some of the classes, a few of the Muslim girls attempted to wear back the hijab, but were reprimanded by teachers who asked them to remove it stating that the uniform did not allow this. Though many of the girls spoke about veiling as a desirable part of their religious practice, they conformed to the school's uniform.

Children were also aware that they must not appear 'too religious' in school. I noticed that Muslim students were silent during the FGDs when other students voiced their support for the ruling party; however, during the interviews, they criticised the ongoing othering. Ubed provided details of this conformity— "Other people think Muslims fight more, that's why Muslims should never get into fights, this will only give them (Hindus) another reason to stereotype us and say why are these Muslims behaving like this." Ubed recognised that Muslim students were expected to conform to the school's religious rituals and if there was any form of resistance, it appears that he feared they would be stereotyped or be seen as communal rather than indisciplined. Also, these responses indicate knowledge of stereotypes. Children recognise that they carry the burden of being constantly watched to be 'well-behaved' and the

accountability is not just for oneself but is also for being a representative of the community (Elkassem et al., 2018). Thus, Muslim children's conformity cannot be explained as a result of typical disciplining as it entails responses to social representations associated with their religious identity.

3.4 Linguistic nationalism and internalizing 'the other'

In this theme I demonstrate how linguistic/regional identities became enmeshed with nationalism discourses linked to religion. This was particularly observable at VGHS. Marking out students and teachers of the Muslim community through language took two forms – first, by associating Kannada or being 'Kannadiga' (which is a linguistic identity derived from belonging to the state of Karnataka) only to Hindu children, and second by using language in a way that signalled the Muslim as the undifferentiated other.

With regards to the first point, the association of Kannada and Hinduism has been previously inked in Aluru Venkata Rao's (1917) historical construction of the Kannada nation (Karnatakadevi) as a Hindu nation whose glory ended due to the conquest of Islam (for a similar construction of India as 'Bharatmata', see Bacchetta, 2000). In Bangalore, Kannada nationalism could not make its desired impact because it has been historically dominated by non-Kannada speakers. Bangalore's cultural nationalism was largely taken over 'economic nationalism', never breaking the hegemony of English (Nair, 1996). Yet, at VGHS, for Muslim students and teachers (Urdu being the mother tongue) their spoken and literal fluency in Kannada did not lead to their easy assimilation into the regional identity. As I conversed with Shankar (a Hindu boy) in Kannada, he positioned me outside of our shared linguistic identity. Since he had just joined the school, I asked him how was this school different from his previous school, and he replied, "the main difference is that there are many Muslim students here as compared to my previous school which had only Kannada boys, and your boys (nimm hudugaru) make a lot of noise in the class, they don't let us study." The manner in which he may have perceived me, as he said 'your boys' without any hesitation, showed that he not only considered the Muslim identity antithetical to the linguistic identity but asserted that only Hindus could be

Kannadigas. He had also made my religious identity salient over my adult or researcher identity.

On another occasion, a teacher told me "Our Kannada teacher is a Muslim, how great is she that despite being Muslim she is a Kannada teacher". Adult attitudes and perceptions about the nation are transmitted to children, thus influential in continually reproducing 'us' and 'them' (Bennett et al., 2004). Exclusion faced by minorities at school due to language has been documented in several Indian states like Orissa, Rajasthan, Assam etc. All the studies indicate that the medium of instruction at school was not understood by the minorities because it was completely different from their mother tongue or was a different local dialect (see Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013). In global contexts, like Cyprus, minority Turkish-Cypriot children who spoke Greek (the language of the majority) experienced greater assimilation (Zembylas, 2010) whereas, in Ireland, children were ambivalent and at times challenged the association of the Irish language to national identity (Moffatt, 2011; Waldron & Pike, 2006). My findings point to the atypical exclusion faced by Muslim students. A sense of othering is experienced in the regional identity despite being born, brought up, and being fluent in the language of the state.

With regards to the second point, on several occasions, teachers referred to students in ways that foregrounded their religious identities; "Where is that student, I don't know her name, she is Muslim" or (I was told) "You can talk to that student, she is from your community (nimmauru)". There is an obviously spoken categorisation by use of words like 'they' (auru) and 'our people' (nammauru) or simply by pointing to the students by identifying them as Muslim. This may not necessarily be derogatory but points to a clear demarcation of students along religious lines. Thus, language became an important means to express who belongs to the nation and who does not. This was also internalised by some Muslim students leading to confusion when questioned further about their identities. During an assignment where a Kannada wedding invite was needed, Shireen (a Muslim girl) proudly said, "It should be easier for Kannada people ('Kannadawale') to get this assignment done, but I did it first". She did not consider herself as a Kannadiga as she felt she had excelled in something that was not meant to be her domain. When I asked her about it, she felt it was obvious that Kannada was not her language. I asked, "But then you said you were

born here, and you study in a Kannada medium school and speak Kannada so fluently, right?" She felt confused not knowing how she had come to this conclusion about herself. However, I argue that she perpetuates the idea of being 'the other' 'since one's conception of national belonging is always intimately bound up with how one perceives, and how others perceive, the place in which one lives' (Scourfield et al., 2006, p. 13).

3.5 Conclusion

Through my findings, I have shown that children are exposed to dominant discourses of nationalism at multiple levels. Children questioned local discourses that particularly construct Muslims as anti-national disseminated through media houses and Bollywood movies. When it came to media discourses, children felt overwhelmed as they confronted the overlapping of global Islamophobic discourses with the local othering discourses. They believed that these led to an incorrect stereotypical image of Muslims in the minds of their non-Muslim peers and adults (teachers, employers etc.). Such an understanding was further strengthened through an intergenerational learning wherein adults in their families had been discriminated against at colleges or workplaces due to their religious identity.

When it comes to social interactions with peers, I have shown that children are not passive recipients of nationalistic discourses; rather their personal experiences and social interactions are fertile grounds wherein these discourses come alive (Spyrou, 2011) and contribute to the processes of identity (re)formation. In case of close interfaith friendships, or through engaging in conversations with Muslim children, some non-Muslim children, reportedly, are able to deconstruct dominant nationalistic discourses linked to religion. They recognise that their peers are beyond just their religious identities and at times transcend parental boundaries to maintain these friendships. Whereas in case of hate/disgust or derogatory questions, non-Muslim children tend to absorb dominant discourses to build an essentialised understanding of what it means to be Muslim (as also shown by Bénéï, 2008; Ellwood-Lowe et al., 2020; Erum, 2017; Gupta, 2008) and consequentially they are unable to recognise that identities are intersectional.

Christou & Spyrou (2017) illustrate Greek-Cypriot children's diminished ability to identify intersectional identities of minorities— Greek children used additional markers of gender and religion to denote Turkish-Cypriots as the racialised 'other'. This was due to a powerful national narrative compounded by their lack of interactions with the Turkish-Cypriot minorities. However, in case of Indian Muslim children, despite having close interactions, as I have shown in VGHS, the construction of 'the other' remains strong. The school's imagination of the child being predominantly Hindu became apparent in its curricular and non-curricular activities/events such as celebrations of national festivals, school prayer and holiday calendar. In fact, one of the most unique findings in this chapter is the atypical exclusion of Muslim students based on linguistic identity, despite studying in the state's Kannada medium school and being fluent in the language. This has so far not been found in any context to my knowledge, within India and globally, as exclusion has always been found to be a result of not knowing the language.

Thus, I have shown that children are political actors as they continually (re)produce nationalistic discourses and negotiate their identities in the different social spaces that they inhabit.

Chapter 4: Three Cases in Point for "hot nationalism"- Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Babri mosque-Ayodhya dispute and Triple Talaq bill

"In our age, it seems as if an aura attends the very idea of nationhood. The rape of a motherland is far worse than the rape of actual mothers; the death of a nation is the ultimate tragedy, beyond the death of flesh and blood." — Michael Billig

In this chapter, I will extend the discussion of how the categories of 'us' and 'them' discussed in Chapter 3 as banal forms of nationalism become heightened during periods of 'hot nationalism', i.e., when the sense of belongingness to the nation becomes explicit (Billig, 1995). Such periods are often "'hot' transformational movements produced by a sense of crisis" (Hutchinson, 2006, p. 295) wherein the nation becomes sacrosanct with an intensification of social boundaries of insider/outsider (Hutchinson, 2006). It may include extensive periods like warfare, economic dislocations or natural disaster/diseases (Hutchinson, 2006) or momentary ruptures or episodic breaches in which dormant national sensibilities are evoked (Fox, 2017).

Fox (2017) elaborates on using breaches at the spatial, temporal and political edges of the nation as important junctures that are "capable of showing us knowledge in action, the nation as practice...in the contexts where it matters" (Fox, 2017, p. 36). He further argues that these breaches provide an opportunity to access the otherwise taken for granted, unselfconscious (often difficult to articulate) understanding of how individuals make sense of belonging to the nation. This becomes pertinent while researching childhoods. Silova (2019) extends Fox's understanding of breaching to explore children's multiple, often contradictory meanings and experiences of how the nation is felt. Researchers have, thus, built on breaches as a conception to examine children's construction of their national identities and thus have provided insights on how they experience a sense of 'otherness' or belongingness to their nations (Habashi, 2008; J. Hart, 2002; Leonard, 2012; Silova, 2019). Few others have argued for an all-encompassing, complex exploration of both banal and hot variants of nationalisms

rather than prioritizing one over the other (Benwell, 2014; Jones & Merriman, 2009). While acknowledging that the relationship between banal and hot forms of nationalism is non-linear and oscillating (Fox, 2017), and in an effort not to overlook the blatant forms of nationalism in search for the banal (Benwell, 2014), in this chapter my focus will be on how children experience and respond to the episodes of 'hot nationalism' in which the Muslim identity was particularly foregrounded.

With the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) coming to power in 2014, the rising of Hindutva's far-right nationalism (foundational and ideological aspects discussed in Chapter 1), which aims to build a Hindu nation, the 'othering' of Muslims has currently taken a vigorous, tangible form (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020). Since then, multiple deaths of Muslims have been recorded due mob-lynchings and violent attacks by vigilante groups that receive support by BJP's affiliate organisations (Jaffrelot, 2021). These deaths have been deemed as justified or appropriate by several party members (see Jaffrelot, 2021). The year 2019 had been significant with the state making this attempt of building a Hindu nation further concretised. For instance, longstanding agendas on the BJP manifesto like dissolution of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, resolution of the Babri mosque-Ayodhya dispute by building a Ram temple at the site, recalibration of Muslim personal law in conjunction with a demand for a uniform civil law, prevention of 'Muslim infiltrators' and protection of 'Hindu refugees' in Assam (see Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020) were put to a finality. This was done through the abrogation of article 370 in the case of Jammu and Kashmir, Supreme court's declaration of the final verdict, on the Babri-Ayodhya dispute, that ordered the building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, passing of the Triple Talaq bill to form the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 and enforcing Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019 respectively. I will further elaborate on these in the data sections.

In this chapter, I began with simple questions like "Do you read the news?" and this quickly brought forth discussions on hate crimes or other instances like CAA, Babri-Ayodhya dispute since some of these events were ongoing at the time of my fieldwork. In most of the groups, whenever a single instance of anti-Muslim sentiment/violence had been discussed, students themselves spiralled into further discussions on the same lines as if they began to connect the dots. Thus, episodes of

'hot nationalism' were brought forth by children themselves with an ease I had not expected. It made me recognise that children active engage with their political realities and at times they are bound to do so (a recurring theme throughout this chapter). Additionally, I also picked on the classroom observations related to current affairs during the detailed interviews as a dialectic between my field notes' reflections and gathering more insights (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how anti-Muslim violence and crimes against Muslims impact Muslim children's behaviour, cognitions and emotions. I particularly highlight their restricted sense of agency as they try to navigate their social worlds with an awareness of being vulnerable. In the second section, I discuss the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and how children go back and forth in a fearful anticipation of becoming stateless. I also demonstrate how the anti-CAA protest sites became important informal sites wherein children reclaimed their national identity through their participation in these protests. In the third and fourth sections, I discuss the Babri-Ayodhya dispute and the Triple Talaq bill, both of which had brought the intersection of religious and national identities to the forefront. Through these sections I highlight the shifting and contested nature of children's social positions and their ability to critically examine such issues. This reiterates the fact that children are "not simply recipients of political communications, but actively debate and internalise such discourse, and use it to contribute to the construction of their own political and social identities" (Ross, 2016, p. 166).

4.1 Understanding violence against Muslims

The gang rape and murder of Asifa, an 8-year-old Muslim girl, in a Hindu temple in 2018 and the death of Tabrez Ansari, a 24-year-old Muslim man who was tied to a tree and lynched while he was forced to chant Hindu religious slogans in 2019, have been two of the most well-known crimes among the series of recent anti-Muslim violence in India (Jaffrelot, 2021)[16]. The nationwide protests held in

16 In the Asifa case, according to the police chargesheet, the crime had a dual motive-first was personal revenge, and the second was to intimidate the Muslim community living in the area. The main accused was the temple priest and others included his son, his nephew, and four policemen. Several protests were held condemning the crime. At the same time, right-wing groups, including ministers held protests demanding the release of the accused.

opposition to these hate crimes and 'othering' in turn have led to attacks on students and riots in certain parts of the country. Similarly, in the global context, especially post 9/11, Muslim children have been subjected to micro-aggressions and Islamophobic crimes (Elkassem et al., 2018; Farooqui & Kaushik, 2020) based on a similar essentialisation of Muslims as more loyal to their religion than to their nations.

In my fieldwork across schools, students referred to the popular example of Tabrez Ansari and identified deaths due to mob lynchings as specific crimes that come under the mission of the Hindu nation. While they considered these crimes as steps towards a gradual ethnic cleansing of Muslims, they thought of the Asifa rape case as a means to instil fear. Some students connected such events and discourses that occurred at the national level to the local incidents wherein they had witnessed Muslims being unjustly targeted and punished by the police. Sami (14 years, LHS) narrated, "last year I saw that a Muslim man was hit by Hindu police because he peed in front of a college gate, he was mentally unsound...so the police beat him up...and after Friday prayer we all went to police station to ask for justice and then that video was leaked...he din't do anything simply he was mentally unstable so they hit him but that college was a Hindu college." While Zayan (13 years, LHS) compared, "Police will catch Muslims if they do wheelie, but they won't catch Hindus." On listening to this, his classmate Raqeeb quickly added that, "there was a boy in our school earlier, he did wheelie and police caught him and beat him up so badly...he was in custody for 2 days but in case of Hindu boys, even if they catch them, they will leave them with just one warning." In all of these instances, boys understood the discriminatory attitude of the state apparatus by using the majority community as reference point. On the same lines, Nabeela (19 years, JM) described, "the place that I live in there is a strong hold of RSS and Hindutva and there if anything happens it will be directed to Muslims only... recently there was a girl she committed suicide...she was Hindu...it became a big issue, it went up to the Supreme Court... and here there was nothing to do with Muslims in this... But what they did, they said she did it because of a Muslim guy and they simply targeted him...they hit him... and the whole village was shocked with this...they simply want to be violent towards Muslims, they want to threaten, target and suppress Muslims." Witnessing such local instances of injustice or violence

in their direct experience had made it easy for children to understand that these hate crimes were part of the larger agenda of 'othering' Muslims. The congruence between what they read on news or social media and what they experienced directly had intensified the impact on how children felt emotionally (fear/anger/helplessness) while making sense of being 'othered'.

In their conversations/interviews, children often tended to switch between examples of religiously motivated crimes globally and locally, including the deaths of Muslims in Syria, Palestine, and during Christchurch Mosque shootings. As children were embedded in such social realities, they had been active participants in certain protests, usually along with their parents. Many of them voiced their emotions of fear, anger, and helplessness. They were found to be oscillating between making sense of these emotions and the "need to do something" or "speak up against injustices" just like Muslim youth, popular on TikTok, had made videos asking for justice in the Ansari case (Poonam, 2019). However, during such discussions, a recurrent emerging theme was children's restricted sense of agency. Safeer (13 years, MOIS) felt restricted due to parental authority as he complained, "We are children so our parents have given some limits, even if we want to do something they will say, no you are a child." Thus, the agency of children who grow up in distressing environments hinges upon the support of adults, situated in the same context, to be able to exercise it (White & Choudhury, 2010). However, little has been discussed about the agency of children who grow up in such marginalising contexts, especially in South Asia (H. Sen, 2016) though there is a growing interest in the complexity of agency within childhood studies (Esser et al., 2016) post the work of Prout & James (1997). Understanding the agency of such marginalised children requires a deeper engagement with how oppressive structures interact with socio-political realities rather than assuming a simplified, romanticised existence of agency (Durham, 2008; Hanson et al., 2018).

Agency became "thinner" (Klocker, 2007) for girls as parents posed restrictions on their mobility due to an overlap between crimes against women and crimes against Muslims. Sidrah, a 14-year- old girl, expressed extreme frustration,

saying, “It freaks us out...after the Asifa, Nirbhaya, and Priyanka rape cases[17] it has become really difficult to get out of the house, the Government knows everything but they don't take action...in the Nirbhaya case the rapists are being given so many chances for a mercy plea, even in the Asifa case nothing happened even after so many protests.” Similarly, Iram (14 years, LHS) mentioned, “one of my aunt lives in Mysore and she was wearing a burqa and she was chased and asked to pay fine...they have put on many posters that Muslims should not wear the next day she was very scared to go out because they told her not to wear the burqa...they are also saying that we should decrease the population of Muslims” and Umaiza (13 years, LHS) switched between the local and global context as she said, “we heard that if we wear burqa or headscarf they will kill us...there was an incident in New Zealand where Muslims were killed.” Girls’ vulnerability was intensified as they could be easily identified as Muslim through obviously visible markers like the hijab (headscarf) or niqab (face veil).

For both boys and girls, a limited sense of agency was also extended to their future lives. Many said that they would not be able to choose a job of their choice as they expect to be discriminated against if they seek employment in India or while procuring visas if they wish to travel to western countries (as discussed in 3.1.2). Some had decided to live in an Islamic country to protect themselves. At the same time, this restricted agency motivated children to take up professions to help the community. Some were already engaged in community-related social work during the weekends wherein they helped adults. Haider (14 years, MOIS) said, “I want to become a lawyer because of the injustices happening so that I can help others, Muslims are not there in good positions.” Important decisions about their future work identities have been shaped by their current oppressive circumstances and learning from adults who have faced similar difficulties (discussed in section 3.1.2). Their awareness of being marginalised either made them sure of emigrating or made them take up community work right away in their limited capacities which they thought

17 Nirbhaya rape case refers to the gang rape, brutal torture and murder of a 22-year-old woman in Delhi in 2012. The incident resulted in nationwide protests demanding justice and drew international attention. Similarly, in 2019, the gang rape and murder of Priyanka Reddy, a 26- year-old doctor, near Hyderabad evoked public outrage and protests. Both these women were not Muslim.

would become more fully-fledged later on. Thus, I bring forward an understanding that children also understood agency as age-bound— they hoped their agency within a marginalizing context would expand when they become adults.

Overall, for children, violence against Muslims in the Indian context of building a Hindu nation was juxtaposed with global Islamophobic crimes. Within their daily experiences of 'everyday nationalism' (as discussed in Chapter 3), the anti-Muslim violence in the country or directly witnessing local crimes/injustices had simultaneously contributed the meaning-making process of 'othering' and thus entrenched how the self is understood as 'the other'. Thus, "broad patterns of everyday nationalism inform specific inflations of national sentiment and more dramatic action" (Calhoun, 2017, p. 21). Despite intense emotions of fear, anger, helplessness, and a need to "do something" children were unable to respond directly to such hate due to a restricted sense of agency. Due to their exposure to such potent discourses of nationalism and one of its manifestations in the form of anti-Muslim violence, children had spent considerable amount of time thinking through them such that it had influenced their future employment goals.

4.2 The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019

In my study, ideas of citizenship and belonging to the nation had come to forefront during one of the periods of 'hot nationalism' when the Citizenship Amendment Bill was being passed into an Act. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in 2019, used religion as a criterion for citizenship for the first time under Indian law (Jaffrelot, 2021). It drew international criticism and resulted in large-scale nationwide protests as it was regarded discriminatory based on religion and ethnicity—while Tamils were also excluded under the provisions of the act, the exclusion of Muslims was a major concern. The act aims to provide Indian citizenship to undocumented migrants of all religions other than Islam, i.e., Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsi and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan (Poddar, 2018; Sharma, 2019). It also instilled fear that Indian Muslims would be required to prove their citizenship, in the absence of which they would become stateless and would be put into detention camps (Jaffrelot, 2021).

All the children I had interacted with were of the opinion that CAA was a means to build a Hindu nation. They felt that Muslims were specifically targeted to deprive them of citizenship even though it could possibly impact other minority communities as well. Most of them had an understanding of the CAA as similar to that described by Safeer (MOIS, 13 years)— "it is actually a stepwise plan, first they will make NRC (National Register of Citizens), everyone will have to be in line, but for non-Muslims, government will give them citizenship and remove them from the line because of which Muslims will have to prove citizenship…their mission is to make Hindu rashtra...that is what they are working for." There was no iota of doubt among children that CAA was a grand, systematic step taken by the Government to question the citizenship of Muslims. Unlike other instances of hot nationalism like hate-crimes or anti-Muslim violence (section 4.1) or Babri-Ayodhya dispute and the Triple Talaq bill (to be discussed in sections 4.3 and 4.4), which directly impacted only a fraction of Indian Muslims and indirectly impacted the remaining, the CAA had blatantly raised questions on all Muslims living in India. Children also had shared mixed emotions of fear and hope while discussing this. Safeer had added, "but I don't think so... that it can happen…there are many laws to prevent it". At the same time, he also supported other students who feared that Muslims would lose citizenship, following which they would be sent to detention centres. Safeer's ambivalence (as was the case with other students) in understanding how the CAA would actually impact Muslims was indicated by their changing positions between hope that things would not escalate or that the constitution would protect them and fear of its real possibility. This strengthens our understanding that children can be as "sophisticated, complex and inconsistent in their political beliefs and expressions as adults can be" (Skelton, 2010, p. 148).

The discussions on the possible impact of CAA also stirred conversations about interfaith relations. Some students felt that non-Muslims who have been close to Muslims were supporting Muslims. Haider (14 years, MOIS) was confident, "90% want us to be united but only 10% are for CAA and separation." whereas Zubair's confidence was dwindling, "Some Hindus support CAA, since they support Modi...but some Hindus, though they may support any political party, they are

supporting us since we are friends...but the remaining ones? So far, they were also good with us but after this NRC/CAA, they can think negative... those who think that it [CAA] is good, they will think negative about us and since we are fighting against it, there can be fights, they can hit us also." Zubair not just delineated between a range of positions between various religious groups, but he also feared/anticipated the CAA's possible impact in his own life. He was concerned about how a political climate saturated with anti-Muslim discourses can influence substantial number of people especially those who were otherwise neutral and thus, increase animosity among religious groups. His meaning-making of this larger socio-political reality had translated to a fear in his everyday life when he expressed that "*they can hit us also"*. The above stated narratives point to a nuanced view of how children experience their political selves at the interstices of official Politics (institutional/macro) with that of unofficial politics (personal/micro) (Skelton, 2010). Even for those for whom these identities would have been otherwise latent, CAA had explicitly brought forth the conflation between their religious and national identities. As children had become increasingly exposed to several such discourses (through media inputs, parental conversations, discussions with peers), they had become bound to draw multiple in/consistent conclusions. On one hand children were concerned that they would be rendered stateless and on the other hand, they were anticipating CAA's effect on their daily interactions with their fellow citizens. Thus, children tended to situate themselves across different formal and informal social contexts/structures and accordingly gauge how their lives would be impacted.

Schools also became important sites where these discourses were (re)lived. In politically sensitive societies, Leonard (2007) observes that teachers ward of such controversial topics though these are important and the unsaid may lead to further reification. In my study, this depended on the type of school. Teachers at VGHS tended to emphasise on 'unity in diversity' and brush away topics related to religious divides. However, minority-based educational spaces were largely unrestrictive. I found that there were constant informal discussions at MOIS and JM (during breaks among students, among Muslim teachers and students) about the discriminatory nature of this act and a need to reclaim their national identity as Muslims. An

exception to this has been discussed in section 3.3, wherein I have detailed the manner in which MOIS students had recalibrated their relationship with their non-Muslim teachers. They had actively chosen to avoid any conflict or display any sort of resistance to preserve interfaith bonds. Apart from this, for students at MOIS/DUB/JM, schools became important social spaces to discuss ideas of nationalism. In addition to this, their participation in the anti-CAA protests, provided them a continued experience to the spaces outside the school, i.e., protest sites. At times, they met their teachers at these sites which also gave them a sense of ease to speak about it at school. Overall, children felt proud of going to the protest sites along with their parents or teachers. In an FGD at JM,

Me: have you been to any of the protests?

All [multiple voices]: yes

Me: you went from the madrasah itself?

All: yes

Me: where had you been?

All: Bilal Bagh, Town Hall, Frazer town…

Me: when?

All: after class hours or Sundays

Me: how was your experience?

All: it was good

Me: what was going on?

Rukhsana: there was a different *josh* [spirit] there... going there we feel that there are more people with us and we are not alone... and we feel a kind of brotherhood

Shama: we get more *himmat* [courage] to fight...

Nabeela: I get the “Indian” wali feeling... [laughs...]

Protest sites formed important informal spaces, beyond the school, for them to learn about nationhood (Benwell, 2014) and assert their belongingness to the nation. In various narratives, going to the protest sites was seen as an important awakening in the otherwise absent activism among Muslim community in India (Amatullah, 2020). Since people from all faiths had participated in the protests, it had restored a renewed sense of solidarity for the Muslims as the children described it— Rukhsana felt the brotherhood with her fellow citizens and Nabeela worded this as 'feeling Indian'. The repeated sloganeering, calling out for a unified nation, demanding for freedom from oppression (examples being, "azadi azadi", "inquilab zindabad") and ubiquitous presence of flags were the 'cultural artefacts' (B. R. O. Anderson, 2006) of nationalism that had contributed to the feelings of 'himmat', 'josh', 'brotherhood' and 'feeling Indian'. At the same time children were aware of the negative repercussions that other protestors had faced. They had criticised the police brutality towards protesting college students in Northern parts of the country (M. Basu, 2021). In several groups children discussed the atrocities at Jamia Milia Islamia[18]. However, they claimed this did not deter their spirits. There was a sense of anger about the state harming its own citizens who they believed had a right to protest and the about the act itself.

In discussing this, some students were angry about the open unfairness of the state which found expression when they stated, 'how can they do this to us? while others were in shock, like Hasan (13 years, MOIS), "before NRC and CAA, I used to see the pics [sic] of Syria and Palestine and I thought this will not happen in our country, now it is happening." This way the marking out of the Muslim identity in other global contexts and the resulting enmeshment of different geographical scales (global/local) (Benwell, 2014; Habashi, 2008) also became a point of reference for children to make sense of their own political context. This was also seen in the case of anti-Muslim violence discussed in previous section 4.1. The superimposition of the global on the local was important in furthering their understanding of being 'Muslim'. "Children's worlds of meaning are at one and the same time global and local, made

18 Police forcefully entered two Muslim universities, Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University and attacked and assaulted the students protesting against CAA using batons and tear gas. At Jamia, they also attacked students studying in the library (who were not protesting) and vandalised the college property. About 200 people were injured and hospitalised.

through ‘local’ cultures which are in part shaped by their interconnections with the wider world” (Holloway & Valentine, 2000b, p.769). Thus, Indian Muslim childhoods are not only impacted by their local ‘othering’ contexts but also by the global discourses on ‘othering’, Islamophobia, and stereotypes of terrorism.

In this section, through a period of breach, I have brought forth children’s understanding of citizenship at the scales of macro/micro and global/local. While discussing children and citizenship, existing literature has mostly taken a rights-based parlance. Researchers have critiqued the intergenerational power imbalances which marginalise children from fully participating as active citizens (Percy-Smith, 2016; Wood, 2016), the schools’ prescriptive environment that restrict possibilities of active citizenship (A. James et al., 2008) or lack of collaborative engagement between adults and children to include their voices (Percy-Smith, 2016) and an overemphasis on good citizenship without encouraging dissent or simply considering youth dissent as problematic (Hörschelmann, 2016). These researchers have looked into possibilities or ways that can ensure effective political participation of children as active citizens, while others have critiqued how citizenship education, even as it claims to uphold inclusivity, often reifies differences (Lappalainen, 2006; Leonard, 2007; Staeheli & Hammett, 2010). Though such concerns become important with respect to children since the state and other non-state bodies often (re)produce dominant citizenship discourses for socio-political ends (Pykett, 2010), there remain gaps on how children make sense of such broader political realities. The push for political participation would be deficient without an understanding of how it impacts their personal identities.

In an attempt to fill these gaps, I have detailed how they make meaning of citizenship by highlighting their thought processes (assertion, ambivalence, questions), their range of emotions (fear, hope, anger, pride, belongingness), and behaviours (protesting, remaining silent, conforming). I have shown that “the issue of belonging is particularly pertinent for minority religious groups in a multi-faith context and is often influenced by religious citizenship and interfaith relations” (Hemming, 2016, p. 63). Children were aware of negotiating their citizenship and political rights with the state based on their religious group membership, i.e., religious

citizenship (Hemming, 2015) as well as possibilities of fractures in their relationships with other religious groups. Children, as political agents, while weaving in the global and the local, were actively thinking through such situations (Kallio, 2009) as they constructed their national identities.

4.3 Babri-Ayodhya dispute

The Babri mosque, built in 1528, like many religious structures in India (temples or mosques), was said to have been built over the ruins of a pre-existing temple which marked the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram (for a detailed history of the conflict see Bacchetta, 2000). While some scholars have strongly refuted such a claim (Gopal et al., 1990; Kausar, 2006; Udayakumar, 1997) others have detailed the syncretic practices of Hindus and Muslims at the holy site (Bacchetta, 2000; Nandy et al., 1998), and explained how the issue was given a spin of religious nationalism by Hindu nationalist groups[19] (Bacchetta, 2000; Veer, 1994). Within their larger agenda of building a Hindu nation, the primary slogan of the Hindu nationalist groups was to liberate the Hindu holy site from the Muslim 'other' (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020; Contractor, 2017; Nandy et al., 1998). Within the Hindutva discourse, the construction of the mosque symbolised Muslim invasion of the Indian land— Bharatmata, a Hindu chaste female (Bacchetta, 2000). In 1949, several young Hindu activists (karsevaks) had entered the mosque and surreptitiously placed idols under one of the mosque's domes, which had led to communal tensions across different states in India, thus marking it as a disputed site (Veer, 1994). In the following years, Hindu nationalist groups had continued to persist in their attempts to liberate the site that would be realised with the construction of a temple through campaigns and large-scale processions evoking the Hindu religious sentiments, which finally gained serious momentum during the 1980's. In 1992, they had eventually attacked and demolished the mosque, following which riots had broken out in many major Indian cities (Udayakumar, 1997). Multiple lawsuits filed by both Hindus and Muslims had been undergoing hearings in Indian courts, finally bringing it under the purview of the

19 Sangh parivar or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) family, comprising of mainly the RSS itself, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) (religious organisation), the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) (student union body), Bajrang Dal (religious militant organisation), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (electoral political party)

Supreme Court. The final hearing was held between August to October 2019, during my fieldwork.

In this theme, I demonstrate three important psychopolitical aspects of children's identities. First, it becomes clear that in the understanding of the self, there is a constant negotiation to be treated like an equal citizen who has equal rights over the land of the country, and thus brings to light how concepts of space and place are connected to belongingness. Second, I show how marginalisation is internalised and thus results in a fragmented experience of the self. Third, I show that in these negotiations, there are varying levels of abstraction in the manner in which children absorb and interpret the narratives from media and the public sphere.

With respect to the first point, due to the media and newspaper coverage regarding the hearing and verdict, the narratives about the dispute had resurfaced within school spaces. Some of the students felt that since the mosque was built over the ruins of temple, the mosque was demolished so that the temple could be rebuilt. Samaira (14 years, LHS) explained this, "So they [Hindus] say that [deity] Ram was born there so we must make a temple there...others [Muslims] tell that Allah is everywhere so can you make a mosque everywhere? So that is the debate." whereas Kamilah (13 years, LHS) said, "Hindus say that their *bhagwan* [God] will come there so why did you make your mosque over there...?" Mubeen (19 years, JM) was angrily said, "they cannot just keep an idol there and say that it is theirs...can we do the same thing? Go and keep something in a temple and say this ours now...but one thing is that due to the Babri there is a huge awakening among the Muslims...they were sleeping till then...by doing this Babri dispute they [Government] warned the Muslims to be prepared from now itself about what can happen in the future...may be this was in our fate as a wakeup call...it can be like that also." The Babri-Ayodhya dispute had clearly brought about conversations that spoke to the position of religious group identities in the task of nation-building. Unlike the usual symbols (flags, museums, monuments) (Billig, 1995), with the demolition of a religious place of worship, the nation had become tangible. And this evoked, in children, questions about their place-identities[20]

20 the affective and cognitive component of one's self concept in relation to a physical environment based on their conscious and unconscious experiences, feelings, values and based on the representations of that environment circulated through discourses around them

that are tightly bound to their sense of belongingness to the nation (Scourfield et al., 2006). Since the temple/mosque had become a part of the nation-defining images, children began to attach their identities to the superimposition of an actual place (the mosque) on an abstract space (the nation). They questioned the implicit injustice or inequality by asking if the same injustice would be acceptable if positions between the minority and majority group were switched. The negotiations here do not remain subtle as seen in Chapter 3, wherein children were willing to provide explanations or conform, rather, such instances of hot nationalism fuel the fear of increased othering since this was also interpreted as an important milestone in the larger context of building a Hindu nation. As they experienced a potential threat to their religious identities, children felt it demanded the Muslim community to 'wake up' to the possibility of such threats increasing in the future. As collective group identities became salient, marking 'us' and 'them', during such times, looking inwards into the community also became consequentially important.

This brings me to discuss the second point. A widely circulated narrative among the students across schools was that the demolition of the Babri mosque was a result of Muslims not praying in the mosque regularly or praying only on Fridays. A large majority of them strongly agreed that this would have not happened if Muslims would have prayed there every day and thus Muslims themselves were responsible for such a catastrophe. Safeer (MOIS, 14 years) presented an analogy "if there is a house and it is abandoned, then people think it is of no use, if someone is living there then nobody has the right to go and smash it." In another FGD at MOIS,

> Zanjabeel: Muslims were not praying there... it's our fault... so, if we are not praying there then how can we say that it is our place...
>
> Farina: that's the question they asked... if you are not going to pray there then why do you even want that land...
>
> Zanjabeel: they are giving a bigger place to build the mosque...
>
> Sidrah: holy place... we can't simply allow them to take away our mosque from us...
>
> Farina: if we don't pray then obviously, they will take it away
>
> Me: it was demolished right...?

Farina: it was demolished so that they can scare that side Muslims and put fear of Hindus in Muslims...Muslim should be scared of Hindus

Me: so, some of you feel it's our fault...some don't

Farina: it's actually our fault from the start... we did not pray there

Sidrah: if we had offered salah [daily prayer] and prayed there then this wouldn't have happened

Marina: ya…

The dominant narrative that the demolition of the mosque was justified since Muslims did not offer regular prayers was internalised by both children and adults I had interacted with. The repeated mention of "we" or "our" here is interesting. Children did not blame the Muslims living in Ayodhya, though they knew that it was only physically possible for them to pray there. Rather than differentiating themselves as not deserving of the blame, they remained oblivious to a regional identity, and instead considered themselves to be equally responsible and deserving of the unpleasant consequences due to their religious identity. David (2014) explains how such dominant othering narratives can be internalised by members of an oppressed group at an individual and group level to an extent that it becomes unconscious and involuntary. On a group level it can lead to rejection of one's own culture or devaluation of one's own group members (David & Okazaki, 2006) leading to self-blame as children pointed out that 'it's our fault', the demolition would not have occurred if Muslims would have prayed in the mosque. On an individual level, it can lead to a fragmented experience of self in relation to the world (David, 2014) like Sidrah's responses show that initially she felt that the demolition of the mosque was unfair, however, eventually she agrees that the Muslims were to be blamed. Psychologically, this results in a double damage due to oppressive conditions, wherein children not only take on negative stereotypes and prejudices to understand the 'Muslim other' but also use these values to understand themselves (Fanon, 1986), thus 'forging the instruments of their own oppression' (McCulloch, 1983, p.70). Marginalisation then stems from both the outside (socio-political) and the inside (internalised). However, as critiques of false consciousness theories have argued, it is important to note that taking this as a singular explanation has limited the way we understand the sense of self among marginalised groups (see Mahmood, 2005).

Though children may internalise oppressive discourses, it does not limit other possibilities. In fact, the same process also allows them to become aware of the need to (re)negotiate these realities, thus, aiding in a conception of the self as having multiple, contradictory elements.

The third point also demonstrates this fragmented notion of self. Despite this strong narrative of self-blame, children had not felt that the final verdict was just. When it came to the verdict, on 9th November, 2019, day it was to be finally delivered, the law enforcement had been strengthened countrywide and a public holiday had been declared for schools in many states fearing eruptions of communal violence. The Supreme Court, in its judgement, handed over the site to a trust who would be responsible for building a Ram temple and declared that Muslims would be given 5 acres of land elsewhere to rebuild the mosque. Though there was no eruption of violence post the announcement of the verdict, an anticipation of being subjected to violence in the minds of Muslims (especially if the verdict was in favour of Muslims) was evident during my fieldwork. Abdelhalim (2015) recorded a similar anticipation in 2013 when the verdict was previously expected to be declared. In my discussions, barring one or two students who felt Muslims got more land (5 acres as compared to the original 2.77 acres), most of them felt it was 'obviously unfair' as the verdict favoured one group over the other. The former displayed a concrete cognitive comprehension wherein granting of a larger area was understood as fair or these students may have completely internalised the self-blame narrative whereas the latter questioned the state's neutrality towards different religious groups. Many grade 8 girls at MOIS agreed with Nafisah when she said, "they should have divided it equally." and Faseena who elaborated, "it was obvious that it was in favour of Hindus...we didn't want that they give us [land] somewhere else...in one place at least they would have divided it." As an exception, Qudrah disagreed and took on a neutral stance saying, "they should not have given to either Muslims or Hindus, they should have made some university or school or hospital" while Raisha questioned the basis of the verdict— "India has many many ancient civilisations and you can't just give a decision based on old ancient ruins of some civilisation like that...there was a very good article that mentioned about the Hindu places which had Islamic archaeological ruins below them...so do you just say that there was an Islamic monument there?" She

added in consolation that "the good news is also that the person who first struck the Babri masjid has converted to Islam."[21] Nabeela (19 years, JM) also questioned the rationale of the verdict, "first of all in the media it was told that temple was there and then the mosque was made and it was demolished like that...and they said they will not make the decision based on religion and soon after we get the news that since it was a birthplace of Ram it was given to Hindus, this was actually based on religion only...that was wrong." From these narratives, it can be seen that children demonstrate varying levels of abstraction as they interpret these events. At the same time, it also reinforces the idea that children's notion of belonging to the nation is intimately bound with ideas of space and place (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Kallio, 2014; Scourfield et al., 2006). Among the children who had internalised the narrative of self-blame, for a few of the children who thought more concretely (in terms of size of land), the verdict appeared as fair whereas for the remaining majority, the verdict seemed unfair. Some of them had reasoned that it should have been equally divided whereas others felt it should have not been given to either of the religious groups. Some children show greater sophistication in their thinking process as they critique the reasons cited while announcing the verdict which shows their ability to "provide 'well-rounded, analytically rigorous and critically minded understandings'" (Skelton, 2010, p. 147). Altogether, their claim to the national identity or to be treated as equal citizens becomes apparent as they think through the nation, simultaneously, as a space and place. Also, the polyphasic nature of social positions taken by the students is noteworthy in the manner they switched between blaming their own community, at the same time not agreeing that the verdict was fair. The shifting and contested nature of social positions, thus, throws light on how "one person may occupy different positions as an interaction progresses and in different interactions, but experience themselves as the same" (Davies and Harré, 1990 as cited in Phoenix and Howarth, 2016). This also shows that children's incongruent identity processes are outside of their awareness, the self constitutes both internalised oppressive and emancipatory narratives at the same time. Thus, the Babri-Ayodhya dispute as an instance of hot nationalism provided another opportunity to understand negotiations of religious

21 Balbir Singh, one of the first karsevaks to climb over the mosque's dome and strike it, converted to Islam in 1993. For details, see https://twocircles.net/2019dec05/433533.html

citizenship, capture children's understanding of belonging to the nation through space-place dynamics and gain insights on their sense of self.

4.4 Triple Talaq bill to Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019

Triple Talaq is considered as a form of Islamic divorce wherein a man who proclaims 'talaq' thrice consecutively must legally separate from his wife. However, several Islamic scholars have debated and presented their varied opinions on its validity (Munir, 2013). In India, this has been widely discussed when Muslim women have demanded justice from Indian courts against triple talaq. Several of these judgements deemed triple talaq to be invalid/illegal since it was unconstitutional and/or unIslamic and "came under criticism from conservative Muslim bodies for interfering with the Shariat, and from secular commentators for judicial overreach and for using gender justice as the pretext for pursuing a communal agenda" (Mandal, 2018, p. 4). Thus, the framing of this issue has been about the state's authority to intervene into personal laws especially when these laws are found to be at odds with the constitution's fundamental rights (Mandal, 2016). The issue has often received excessive media attention despite the fact that the rate of divorce among the Hindu community is much higher than that of Muslim community (Agnes, 2019). It has also been used by right-wing groups to project the Muslim community as regressive and oppressive towards women and under the pretext of showing concern for Muslim women (Agnes, 2019; Jaffrelot, 2021) The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017 was passed into an Act in 2019. The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 criminalised triple talaq by declaring it as void and illegal and announcing a non-bailable imprisonment of 3 years to the Muslim man who proclaims divorce in this manner.

In my fieldwork, interestingly none of the boys discussed the act, whereas the girls brought it up in most of the discussions across schools. It was mostly brought up by the girls in the context of Muslims being unnecessarily targetted and as a part of the agenda of building a Hindu nation. It was an Indian-Muslim-woman issue, thus, bringing attention to the intersection of gender, religious and national identities. Some

girls had felt that the government's new rule on banning triple talaq was good for Muslim women because a non-bailable jail term of three years would act as a deterrent and instil fear among men. Zafiah (14 years, LHS) said, "I think it is good, according to me when he will go to jail for 5 years he will realise that he should have not done it and they may improve in their relationship." Her classmates strongly opposed her. Samaira responded, "but the husband will go to jail for 5 years, and when he comes back, they should stay together only but it is different from our Islamic rules... I think whatever is there in the shariah law it is correct, the Government is incorrect." Tuba supported Samaira, "we want to follow what our religion says". As Zafiah understood the new law to be beneficial to Muslim women, she thought of her gender identity as most salient whereas for her classmates who saw it as an interference into shariah laws and matters of the Muslim community, their religious identity took precedence. The girls who defended the shariah law did not go into a detailed reasoning, rather, their conversation indicated an emotional response to a perceived threat to their religious identities (Fischer et al., 2010). The group's divided opinions on the matter also appear to be a reflection of the adults/several stakeholders within the community who either support the invalidation of the triple talaq or others who see it as an interference by a communal government heading towards their agenda of Uniform Civil Code (Punwani, 2016).

I found more detailed explanations at MOIS and JM. At MOIS, Suhana said, "first of all there is nothing like triple talaq in Islam, if we go in detail...and the way they have presented it is different... just to divert us from the real topic...that's what is their mindset and they have been successful in diverting us and getting us on the trap of triple talaq while they were doing the Babri masjid issue on the other side and that was their plan." To this Raisha added, "recently a minister said in his speech that banning triple talaq was good for the Muslim women and they were giving them right it seems. It was from his perspective, and they were literally trying to give a very lame excuse for the thing [sic]...how can they just say that banning triple talaq ruling they are giving justice for the women (questioningly...and a bit angrily)." Here the girls subsumed the act of sympathizing towards Muslim women into the Hindu nation building project. At JM, Nabeela took on a logical argument in a matter-of-fact tone.

She questioned the claimed benefit for Muslim women through this law, “they should have common sense that when the man is in jail then how will he take care of the family, they never thought about all this, and they made this law.” Many other girls supported this logic that the woman would continue to remain abandoned despite this ban and it had not served its stated purpose. Nigar further critiqued the Muslim women who supported this ban through protests, “they did not understand what is shariah, what is Islam at all...this is why it is important to study religion...women wanted freedom and they went ahead because of that...they did not understand the real purpose of this.” In support of such arguments, few girls, both at MOIS and JM, had detailed the stepwise method and rulings related to divorce in Islam and mentioned that triple talaq in itself has always been considered illegal or disapproved in the shariah law. Based on their knowledge of Islamic laws/jurisprudence, they were able to assert with greater ease that the act was gimmicky in nature. Children’s critique and analysis of the criminalisation of triple talaq has been similarly analysed using multiple angles by Mandal (2018) who concludes that the criminal law is an ineffective/excessive response and “is outweighed by its potential unintended consequences, given the corruption and anti-Muslim bias afflicting the Indian criminal legal system.” (Mandal, 2018, p.18). In fact, the criminalisation only increases the precarity of the Muslim women (Agnes, 2019) as pointed out by Nabeela and others in my study. Students like Suhana and Nigar not only defended the Islamic law but also contextualised this issue to the political climate and viewed this as one of the state’s steps towards building a Hindu nation inline with the argument made by (Agnes, 2019) in her work.

The group discussion at JM continued as they defended shariah laws based on their religious education at the madrasah:

> Nabeela: they (non-Muslims) think Islam suppresses women
>
> Mubeen: but there are many instances where women have been provided many benefits... for example in other religions when the women gets her period she will be singled out but that’s not the case in Islam...there are many practices in other religions like burning the widow alive, divorce rights are not there...or they won’t give her rightful place... they think she is nothing...

in fact in Islam her rank is very high...it is even said that Jannat (paradise) is under her feet once she is a mother... also if she doesn't like the husband she can go to a *qazi*, put her case and get separated from him...but in India they (government) took this as a form of suppression and they wanted to remove it (triple talaq)

Rukhsana: both men and women have the right to divorce

Nigar: many Muslim women don't know this

Rukhsana: if they only knew then they wouldn't have done it... (protested against divorce laws)

Zubeida: nobody gives the correct information... always wrong information is spread...

Rukhsana: only because we came here, and studied here we know the truth and we can tell others... we should do this... we should educate others.

Despite several court judgements that invalidated triple talaq in favour of Muslim women even before its criminalisation in 2019, media has continued to project the image of the Muslim woman as a victim of personal laws while neglecting the fact that Muslim women form a subset of Indian women who suffer from problems like domestic violence etc due to patriarchal structures (Agnes, 2016). The madrasah education regarding Islamic laws and principles had enabled students at JM to examine such issues of jurisprudence in detail and take a stance on it whereas others, for example some girls at LHS, who did not analyse the issue in detail felt confused about this law and the other students were skeptical of the BJP's sympathy towards Muslim women amidst several anti-Muslim agendas like the beef ban, cow vigilantism, episodes of mob lynching (Agnes, 2019). Mubeen extended the argument by comparing the status and rights of Muslim women within Islamic law against the practices in other religions like Sati or notions of menstrual impurity associated with women. The girls who were aware of the Islamic law or had even gathered knowledge about general matters of the religion felt a sense of empowerment through their education. They also felt disappointed as they recognised that the lack of the same had led to confusions among other members of the community. Like in the case of the

Babri verdict, children again demonstrated sophisticated and critical understanding of issues in their social realm (Skelton, 2010). An important difference is that, in the Babri case, children had stuck on to the position of "we" and had blamed themselves for not praying at the mosque (here subsuming local regional identities into their religious identity as Indian Muslims), however, in case of triple talaq the girls had blamed other Muslim women who took part in the protests (demanding freedom against triple talaq) for not having awareness about the shariah law or even basic knowledge of women's rights in the religion. They considered themselves to be of a higher stature due to their education/knowledge on this matter and thus, differentiated themselves from other Indian Muslim women. It follows that at times, the marginalised religious identity becomes most salient to establish a unified collective identity such that other identities become oblivious, whereas at other times, it becomes an important aspect to differentiate oneself from the collective. A plausible explanation for this could be that the triple talaq, though considered a part of the Hindu nation-building, had not explicitly raised questions of belongingness to the nation like in the case of Babri dispute. The latter's clear discourse of religious nationalism had strongly evoked collective religious identities evidenced by feelings of threat and possibilities of violence during the time of the verdict. By juxtaposing these two instances of hot nationalism, I demonstrate again that though children may internalise oppressive narratives wherein they blame their own community, it can still result in very contrasting identity dynamics within the self— of convergence or divergence from the group.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how periods of hot nationalism bring about vastly different processes of meaning-making in children. In chapter 3, children were actively negotiating the conflation of the national and religious identities through multiple ways— by responding to questions asked by their peers, attempting to correct stereotypes or through conformity, which also showed how they used their agentic abilities. In extension of these arguments, in this chapter, I have shown how the agency is experienced by children is not absolute but is restricted, especially when

they are attempting to understand and respond to anti-Muslim violence in the current movement towards building a Hindu nation. On one hand they felt vulnerable to hate crimes and on the other hand, this made their parents more protective of them. Due to this conundrum, children's ability to exercise their agency gets limited especially in a context wherein nationalistic discourses are powerful and exposure to hate crimes is high. Factors like gender, present or absent adults further result in spaces of greater or lesser perceived safety that impinge upon their agency. At times, this becomes juxtaposed with the perception of a 'temporal' agency which implies that their ability to act could increase as they transition into adulthood.

A similar conundrum of 'autonomous individuals' versus 'objects of protection' exists while considering children as active citizens (Jans, 2004). However, a broadened conceptualisation of citizenship which includes child participation and involvement (Jans, 2004), allows an understanding how Muslim children negotiate their citizenship and reclaim their national identity during the time of CAA. Childhoods are thus not distant from such macro political changes. In fact, CAA had brought about several ambivalent thoughts and emotions. Strong feelings of vulnerability and anger about the state's injustice were juxtaposed with a hope that the constitution would protect them. Concerns that an essentialised notion of the Muslim being the 'unwanted other' who does not belong to the nation would cause serious damages to their interfaith friendships were accompanied by feelings of solidarity from their fellow citizens (from different religious groups) especially at the anti-CAA protest sites. Thus, for Indian Muslim children, their negotiation of citizenship is rather a negotiation of religious citizenship (Hemming, 2015) wherein their concerns of belonging to the nation cannot be isolated from their religious minority status. While the CAA had become a national issue taken on by citizens of all faith groups, in case of other instances of hot nationalism like the Babri-Ayodhya dispute or the Triple Talaq bill, these had remained 'Muslim issues'. Though collective group identities were evoked again in the latter, children also tended to look inwards— at their own community. However, their ambivalence had remained as children critically examined these instances by themselves.

While some girls believed (few among them albeit skeptical) that the state had helped Muslim women by making a law against the Triple Talaq, others blamed the Muslim women who protested against Triple Talaq for not knowing that the Islamic law already prohibits such a divorce. For those girls who had detailed knowledge about the Islamic jurisprudence, it had enabled them to strongly critique the state's alleged claim of protecting Muslim women through this law. However, many challenged the criminalisation of Triple Talaq through a logical argument that it continued to result in Muslim women being vulnerable and abandoned. Instances of 'hot nationalism' did not make children take one-sided or narrow views despite evoking strong emotions. Children, rather, continued to critically analyse these situations from multiple viewpoints. This was also evident in the Babri-Ayodhya dispute wherein children hold onto the powerful narrative of blaming the community members for not praying at the Babri mosque regularly, while, at the same time, they consider the verdict to be unjust and inline with the agenda of Hindu nation building. However, these multiple viewpoints also had resulted in an ambivalence. Children's multiple social positions were often incongruent which indicates the tension between looking at the situation in a very direct, cause-and-effect manner (Muslim women obviously were helped due to criminalisation of Triple Talaq or it was obvious that the mosque was demolished since nobody was praying there) and looking at it in the light of right-wing Hindu nation building project (criminalizing Triple Talaq was only a gimmick whereas this law is already Islamically invalid or destroying a Muslim place of worship to rebuild a mosque was a deliberate effort to 'other' the Muslims). Therefore, two important inferences can be drawn from the above-mentioned ways in which children negotiate their national identities and citizenship. One, these broadly point to childhood as an ambivalent social phenomenon (Jans, 2004) in which children's transitioning and paradoxical emotional and cognitive processes are seen. Two, due to such an ambivalence/incongruence their identity processes are fragmented or incongruent especially with respect to those identities that are subject to marginalisation.

Through this chapter, I have been able to weave in the micro political nature of children's negotiations (Thomas, 2009) by throwing light on their agency and

ambivalence in their thoughts and emotions while accounting for the larger political context (Alderson, 2010).

Chapter 5: Identity Outcomes of Appropriating Official and Unofficial Accounts of History

"Shahadat hai matloob-o-maqsood-e-momin
[A Muslim's quest is matyrdom]
Na maal-e-ghanimat na kishwar kushayi
[Not the booty of the war nor the coronation]"

— Chief guest at Independence Day celebrations, 2019, LHS

Following from the previous two chapters which detail children's negotiations with everyday nationalism interspersed with periods of hot nationalism, in this chapter I move to situate these in a context of historical narratives. I aim to delve into the 'temporal dimension' of national discourse since the "construction of national history generally reflects present concerns and beliefs about the past" (Özkırımlı, 2005, p. 183). Learning about the past also plays a vital role in the formation of individual and collective identities. In understanding the established link between the past and the present i.e., how the past weighs on the present, both historians and psychologists have used several approaches. There is a broad scholarly consensus that nation's historical narrative has important implications on the construction of a national identity and belongingness to the nation or group identity (Anderson, 2006; Billig, 1995; Dixit, 2021; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; van Alphen & Carretero, 2015; Wertsch, 2012). It also becomes a resource for building solidarity and cohesion between groups (Jovchelovitch, 2012) or for maintaining certain selective narratives as intended by the politicians/leaders (Ahonen, 2001a; Liu & Hilton, 2005). Nevertheless, a nation's historical narratives have been studied to understand two sides. One, the production side— how the narrative itself came about (A. D. Smith, 1991), the structure and content of these narratives, why certain narratives have been retained while others forgotten, and how the state controls, changes and disseminates them through textbooks, commemorations, public holidays etc (Carretero, 2011; Hein & Selden, 2000; Wertsch, 2002) and two, the consumption

side— how people learn and appropriate this information in their own lives. It is also important to note that people are often exposed to narratives of the nation other than the state's narrative, thus, making a differentiation between official and unofficial histories (Wertsch & Rozin, 1998). Since official histories are those endorsed by state, they are carefully selected representations of the past, claiming to be the only absolute true history. For the members of the nation, they serve as a cognitive lens to envisage the nation, provide a sense of group identity, and evoke a loyalty that can be mobilised for political action (Wertsch & Rozin, 1998). On the other hand, unofficial histories have alternate means of production like communities, religious institutions, or folklores. These may be often transmitted orally within families and communities. Thus, I use the terms 'unofficial histories' and 'oral community narratives' interchangeably. They may have lesser resources to research their accounts, however, unofficial histories also claim to be a true representation of the past. In sum, neither can be thought of as more 'authentic' than the other since there ought to be multiple competing narratives about a nation's past (Özkırımlı, 2005) among which official histories are constantly being (re)written reflecting the view of the present (Billig, 1995).

Generally, the consumption side of both official and unofficial histories has received scant attention in research (Barton & Mccully, 2005; Dixit, 2021; T. Epstein, 2006). Concerning children this has been studied by looking at the consumption of history textbooks and curriculum since it "provides a great deal of information regarding identity formation in contemporary societies" (Carretero et al., 2012, p.3). By the turn of the 20th century, teaching official history became significant due to its potential use towards nation-building (Ahonen, 2001a; Carretero, 2011) and thus different countries have had different agendas while disseminating official history to their students through education. Countries such as Mexico, Peru and Argentina transformed their textbooks, during the 20th century, to create a unifying and homogenous national identity (vom Hau, 2010), USA history textbooks had transitioning themes of "worthy Americans" during the late 19th century to "Americanise immigrants" during the early 20th century (Tyack, 2000) whereas the Soviet Union had gone at lengths to control what had to be remembered/forgotten by changing several versions of history and this was further imprinted via mandatory

passing of history exams at school, college graduate levels (Wertsch, 2002; Wertsch & Rozin, 1998). The construction of a national identity continues to remain the most salient objective of teaching history world over even to this day (Foster, 2012; Lopez & Carretero, 2012). While official history attempts to have a homogenising effect on all members of the nations, unofficial accounts provide alternative explanations of the past. "Different factions, classes, religions, regions, genders or ethnicities always struggle for the power to speak for the nation, and to present their particular voice as the voice of the whole nation, defining the history of other subsections accordingly" (Özkırımlı, 2005, p.184). These community narratives have important functions. They help individuals locate themselves in the larger socio-temporal context as members of a community and then as members of a nation, and build a connectedness between the past, present and future. They attempt to foster a positive connection to the nation and thus, assert a sense of belongingness to the nation. In cases of conflict or political violence, community narratives help individuals locate their circumstances historically, gives them a foundation to make sense of their experiences, restores their psychological health and thus enables them to overcome adversities (Barber, 2009). Thus, unofficial histories or oral community narratives mediate psychological aspects such as self-esteem, resilience, and well-being and serve as an overall, stable repertoire that individuals utilize in building an understanding of their self (Hales, 2018; Wexler, 2009). Overall, the combination of learning official histories along with children's exposure to unofficial histories is vital in understanding its consumption and thus its impact on identity (T. Epstein, 2006).

This becomes evident among groups or communities that have been largely excluded or represented in an unfair manner in the official narratives. For example, Ahonen (2001) found that as a result of exclusion from official histories, Estonians in the Soviet Union and West Germans in Germany rejected their official history and formed their own new narrative leading to a 'double consciousness' which had further increased exclusion. In other words, double consciousness is akin to telling a group that though they are citizens, they are not important for the nation's future because of their membership to a particular community or religion. Among other examples, minority groups like the Adivasi children in India disregarded their community history by expressing confusion and disbelief in their own past— they felt that their

community history must be incorrect since such a history is not mentioned in the textbooks (Dixit, 2021). Wertsch (1997) observes that members of minority communities when coerced to internalise dominant narratives that are unacceptable or unreasonable to them, tend to 'master' (internalise) it without 'appropriation' (making it their own or believing in it). This dissonance decelerates the process of learning due to a disconnect between their community meanings/experiences and what is being taught in the classroom. It further brings about varied responses like resistance, expression of disagreement, developing alternative narratives often in a self-serving, biased manner and ways of distancing themselves (Wertsch, 1997, 2012). It also pushes them to socially position themselves as inferior and depreciate their own communities. These responses have significant identity relevant outcomes (Mukherjee et al., 2018) and also determine how communities (re)interpret the past, their intra- and inter-group behaviour and individual behaviour (Jovchelovitch, 2012).

In this chapter, I discuss how Muslim children's consumption of official histories varies with their exposure to unofficial histories and impacts their identities. India has had its own unique trajectory of how the state has attempted to carry out its nationalistic visions through official historical narratives. History textbooks have reflected the two major trends in Indian historiography— communalist or Hindu nationalist historiography and secular historiography (Guichard, 2010). The first set of textbooks were introduced with the state's vision to make education accessible to the masses. They reflected the Nehruvian idea (Indian National Congress, INC) of independent India as a modern scientific state that had attempted to push back religious divides and fostered secular nationalism through 'unity in diversity'. These were written by left-leaning historians, during the 1960's, who supported the state's secular ideals and were also influenced by Marxist historiography. They also critiqued Hindu nationalist historiography (an extension of colonial historiography) for interpreting India's history using religion as the sole and decisive lens, thus, propagating communalist representations of the past (Guichard, 2010). Going forward, changes in the electoral government had direct impact on school textbooks. The first set of textbooks were asked to be proscribed during the 1970's by factions of right-wing members in the then government formed by an amalgamation of political

parties[22], claiming that they were anti-national (Thapar, 2009). However, after several contestations, and the return of INC to power, these were eventually retained till the late 90's. Towards the end of the 20th century, with the electoral victory of BJP, textbooks were revised to a Hindu nationalist version which claimed a Hindu glorious past destroyed by the 'Muslim' invasion. The revision drew critical reactions from historians and educationists for several errors and ideological distortions in reporting historical facts (Guichard, 2010; Habib et al., 2003) as well as for imposing a Hindu identity on all Indians. Leftist historians rebuked Hindu nationalists for "saffronising" the textbooks through their strong communalist stance— associating Indianness to the Hindu religion and glorifying it while 'othering' the Muslims who were represented as invaders, violent, and barbaric, promoting communal strife, and censoring parts that covey multi-religious tolerance and diversity (Habib et al., 2003; Khan Banerjee & Stöber, 2014; Mukherji & Mukherji, 2002; Thapar, 2014). Pointing to these inconsistencies and a change of regime, the textbooks underwent another revision and returned to their initial secular ideals after 2004. However, the current regime has been pursuing the rewriting of history on a serious level. The Hindu nationalist versions gaining momentum as the 'real truth' in the current socio-political scenario (K. Kumar, 2016b) have serious implications for the future generations of children (their thinking, stereotypes and identity formation).

Through this chapter, my aim is to bring the focus from the production side to the consumption side, which is a minimally researched area. I explored this by initiating general conversations about the number of subjects they study and their curriculum. I then shifted focus to history as a subject and asked questions like, "Have you learnt about India's freedom struggle?", "What is your understanding? Can you share some details", "Who were the leaders? What did they do?". In some discussions, I asked children if they celebrated Independence Day at school and when they replied in the affirmative, I proceeded to ask about its significance and probed

22 During 1975, the Congress government declared emergency and was voted out of power in 1977. The Janata Party, an amalgamation of several Indian political parties came to power. The factions that supported the Hindu nationalist ideology, objected to the mention of beef-eating practices among Hindus, mention of caste-struggles, and absence of a depiction of Muslim rulers as tyrants and the lack of ascribing Aryans as indigenous to India (Thapar, 2009).

further. Based on their responses, I analyse Muslim minority children's consumption of history and make inferences on their identity processes.

In my study, all students had an exposure to the same official history textbook curriculum set by the state government. There was a slight variation among the madrasah students— since they had opted out of regular schools at different ages, the volume of school textbook history they had covered varied accordingly. Across sites, children felt that the Indian history given in the textbooks has a negative bias towards Muslims i.e, though Muslim freedom fighters have made important contributions during India's freedom struggle. Children felt that their names have been deliberately removed or made insignificant in the official curriculum. There were multiple ways in which they had come to this conclusion which I detail throughout this chapter. In line with other researchers (Barton & Mccully, 2005; T. Epstein, 2006), my findings indicate that children's thought processes varied significantly based on the type of school which was also invariably linked to their social class. Children at LHS, DUB and JM had greater exposure to local oral community narratives, especially about the contribution of Tipu Sultan (I will return to this point in section 5.1). At DUB, oral community narratives about the freedom struggle were circulated through informal discussions with teachers and events like Independence Day celebrations. At JM, a separate history subject was taught which covered Islamic history in the world and in India. At LHS, children had learnt oral narratives during religious education classes or Urdu subject lessons from teachers who themselves were madrasah graduates, and during Independence Day celebrations. In addition to this, since many of the students lived in joint families or joint community spaces, they also learnt from peers, neighbours, family members. At MOIS, children had little exposure to oral community narratives in the school or at home since most of them lived in nuclear families. Their religious education curriculum was slightly different, while it covered Islamic world history there was an absence of local or regional accounts. They had no such discussions outside the school space and learnt Indian history only through their textbooks. Similarly, at VGHS, children directly absorbed history from their textbooks barring one or two exceptions who had inputs of oral accounts from parents. Through my analysis, I will demonstrate that, within the same geographical region, the

variation in the exposure to history had brought about different meaning-making processes among children.

5.1 Oral narratives and patriotism as a religious virtue

In this theme, I first discuss some of the unofficial narratives that provide information about how nationalism is construed within the community. Among the students at DUB, JM and LHS (who had exposure to oral community narratives), one of the most popular narratives was the mention of struggle of the scholars of Darul Uloom Deoband and other Islamic seminaries against the British during the early 1800's— "from Lucknow to Delhi, each tree lined on that road had the chopped-off heads of several ulema [scholars] hanging from it." During the Independence Day celebrations at LHS, the chief guest narrated another such example, "I will narrate a story to you, children...in front of a British magistrate three ulema [scholars] were presented, Maulana Yahya Ali, Maulana Jafar Ali Thanesari, Maulana Shafi Ahmed Lahori. He asked them, "Are you the one who gave fatwa for jihad [struggle] against the British and do you advocate this?" So, they assertively said that they have given it and told him that "fighting against you is part of our emaan [faith], this is our deen [religion]". So, the magistrate announced that they would be stripped off all their wealth, hung to death and their bodies would not be given to their family members but would be put in a jungle for the animals to eat. When this decision was announced, you all [children] would be surprised to know that all the three of them began to smile and eventually began to laugh. The confused magistrate was wondering what kind of men these were, they should have been horrified with what he announced as their punishment. Despite telling them that they would be getting a death penalty they are still smiling and laughing, what could the reason be? So, he asked them what the reason was. They replied in a poem (sher), "shahadat hai matloob-o-maqsood-e-momin (A Muslim's quest is matyrdom), Na maal-e-ghanimat na kishwar kushayi (Not the booty of the war nor the coronation)." The main aim of a Muslim is to gain martyrdom, so that he seeks the reward of paradise from Allah. They said that they hoped that Allah accepts their sacrifice for their nation, their sacrifice is not for the money/booty or to secure kingdom in the nation, not to attain a place of honour or

wealth in this world. The death penalty was announced for all of them, and they were hung accordingly. These were the kinds of sacrifices."

In this narrative and its explanation, certain values were being imparted to children. An element of honour/pride had been associated with a person who sacrifices himself for his nation. This was in turn linked to the Islamic meaning of salvation in God, i.e., one's entrance into Paradise (the ultimate aim of a believing Muslim) was directly linked to martyrdom. Thus, being a true patriot was considered akin to being a devout Muslim.

Oral narratives such as these and others capture the freedom struggle of India from the Battle of Plassey in 1757 initiated by Siraj-ud-Daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, later followed by the Battle of Buxar (1764) and the Wars of Mysore fought by Tipu Sultan. The hundred-year period between 1757 to 1857 is said to be first phase of rebellion against the British across India, in which the Muslims had been key contributors. While discussing these narratives, it had often been often pointed out, by the participants in my study (adults and children), that the first phase has been eliminated or diluted from the official records or has not been considered as a part of the struggle for independence. Upon verification with the history textbooks, I found that though the books have a mention of the above-listed battles, the first war of Indian independence is marked in 1857[23,24]. In contrast, the unofficial narratives provide accounts of the phase between 1757 to 1857, while emphasising how Muslim rulers had fiercely fought to free their country from British oppression. Children thus felt that there were gaps in the official curriculum and a lack of acknowledgment of their community history (elaborated in section 5.2).

A popular example of this was the contribution of Tipu Sultan. The official curriculum mentions his contribution briefly, whereas the community narratives were detailed. From the community perspective, I found that there is a general view of Tipu Sultan as more than just a king or ruler, he has been also revered as a spiritual leader

23 In the social science textbook for class 10, under the History section, Chapter 6 is titled as "The First War of Independence, 1857". This book is revised based on NCERT syllabus and published by Karnataka Textbook Society (under the Government of Karnataka) and made effective in schools since the year 2017-18.

24 This title is a highly contested topic among Indian historians. Most leftist historians terms this as the 1857 revolt whereas the coinage of the term "First War of Independence" is attributed to V D Savarkar and thus the right-wing historians. For details see (Pati, 2007)

or a wali (one who is very close to God). The word rahmatullahi alahi or rahemullah [may God have mercy on him] is usually attached to his name. He has been designated as shaheed-e-martaba (rank of martyr) and such a rank is said to be among the highest in the religion of Islam. Children at LHS discussed his high rank due to his bravery— they said he was given the title, 'Tiger of Mysore' since he had fought with a tiger (also mentioned in the school textbooks) and that he was the first to invent rocket artillery. They also felt proud that he had lost his life in fighting for the country and had hence died as a martyr. Children often argued with each other about the way he was martyred. Some of them said that he was killed by deceit, while he was in prayer, as one of his soldiers sold him out to the British whereas others said that he was martyred in the battlefield. Few students and teachers pointed out that his photo in the textbooks is fake since the man in the picture does not have a beard. Nevertheless, Tipu Sultan has been held in high regard as a freedom fighter as well as a religious leader.

A common thread across the oral narratives is that, for the Muslims, patriotism is not antithetical to their religious identity rather it is a religious virtue. Children imbibed these values and expressed that sacrificing their lives for their country was a means to pleasing God and therefore attain a high rank in the afterlife. In line with this, few narratives stated that due to such an understanding, British could not buy out Muslim rulers to capture their territories. The narratives also condemned those rulers who were sold out to the British or did not take patriotism and religion seriously. Mr. Yunus (teacher, LHS) narrated, "Tipu Sultan and Siraj-ud-Daulah in Bengal these two were the main tigers, Tiger of Mysore and Tiger of Bengal...they fought four wars and in all the four the British were defeated...they [British] realised that they cannot fight with these armies...so they bought Mir Jafar and Mir Sadiq, who were the army majors of Siraj-ud-Daulah and they closed down the cellars of the arms and ammunitions...so how long could the Muslims fight without weapons? Later the British only killed these two majors considering that they were not loyal to their own masters." Mr. Yunus strongly condemned the army majors for their deceit and thus deserving of such a death. He would narrate such instances of the freedom struggle during classes whenever there was a relevant topic. For example, the class 9 Urdu textbook had a poem called Habb-e-vatan which emphasises the love for one's nation.

During this class, he brought out such stories marking the Muslim contribution. In this manner, oral narratives had instilled, in children, an understanding of nationalism—that loyalty to their nation is an essential element of the religious faith of a Muslim.

5.2 Making sense of official textbook history and negative bias

Children, across sites, had a sense of a negative bias towards inclusion of Muslim names in history. However, the manner in which they arrived at this varied based on their exposure to unofficial history, the type of school and the manner in which socio-political discourses were (re)produced in the school space. In other words, the responses of children at LHS, DUB and JM who had exposure to community narratives were different from that of children at VGHS and MOIS. Since the former had exposure to both official and unofficial narratives, they had a clearer picture of the differences between the two. However, the latter deciphered the negative bias with the state's attempts to meddle with official history. In both cases, a sense of being wronged was apparent in most of their responses as detailed below. I demonstrate this using Tipu's history as a case in point.

Janaki Nair (2020) discusses two broad historiographical trends concerning Tipu Sultan. First, that mostly overlaps with official school history, celebrating Tipu's valour, his anti-colonial nationalism, his economic reforms, use of warfare technology, and religious tolerance witnessed by donations to rebuild temples/mathas. Second, that mainly in opposition, label him as anti-Kannada, a bigot responsible for forced conversions to Islam. Nair further demonstrates that the latter trend is focused at creating an effect of 'historical wrongs' of Tipu largely based on colonial writings while ignoring the breadth of other nuanced historical records and thus it fails to engage with the rationality of professional historians. Nevertheless, Tipu Sultan has been an iconic figure of the southern Indian region. In almost all of the discussions with students across the field sites in my study, his name and contributions were recalled (as also discussed in the previous theme). Students at MOIS and VGHS were not particularly familiar with oral community narratives as mentioned in 5.1, however, in 2019, the state's step to ban Tipu Jayanti (yearly celebration of his birth) had stirred conversations about his contributions. Following this, the BJP government

in their agenda of building a Hindu nation and pushing for their communalist historiography, had decided to erase his chapter from the history textbook alleging that he had been glorified unnecessarily and that he was responsible for forced conversions to Islam. These discourses made their way into school spaces. In a discussion at VGHS while discussing Tipu Sultan,

Akshay: [angrily and dismissively] Tipu did nothing

Dameer: [gets angry on hearing Akshay] What?

Haatim: [defensively] he struggled for freedom

Hemalatha: he freed Mysore

Rama: he fought for freedom

Me: then why is Akshay saying he did nothing?

Dameer: [quickly] yes, he is saying that he doesn't know

Me: did you read it in your textbook?

Adil: it was there in 7th

While his classmates agreed with the textbook history, Akshay had rejected it. Akshay's angry reaction echoes an agreement with the then-ongoing discourses that discredited Tipu as a freedom fighter and reduced him only to his Muslim identity. A further exploration of his learning of history outside the school would aid in understanding why he differed from other students. Also, I observed that non-Muslim students stated the textbook history as a matter of fact, however, Muslim students became emotional on this subject. Their defensive reaction again points to an awareness of a communally charged discourse around this topic. In another discussion at VGHS, children said that Tipu Jayanti was stopped since it would cause Hindus and Muslims to fight. Such dynamics among children— Akshay's assertion, and the responses of Muslim students— reflect how the changing nature of the state's political climate percolates the school space though the official textbook history had not been modified yet. Due to a singling out of Tipu's religious identity within the Hindutva discourse, for Muslim children at VGHS, it evoked a sense of commonness between themselves and him even though that they had minimal or no exposure to oral community narratives. It could then be extrapolated that if the official history is modified based on a Hindu communalist historiography that excludes Muslims or

labels them as anti-national, children of different faiths would also view their Muslim peers differently as the past projects itself onto the present and the future. The glimpses of this are seen in the FGD above.

At MOIS, Inarah (13 years) said, “I heard from my aunt that from next year onwards they will remove everything about Tipu from the textbook.” Her classmates agreed and said that they have heard about this as well. In another discussion at MOIS,

> Farina: right now, we have Tipu’s history in the books but my cousins who study in other schools they don’t have in their books
>
> Me: why?
>
> Farina: they removed it currently
>
> Me: which syllabus...?
>
> Farina: not sure, currently they removed it when they upgraded it...which books we are using those are last year’s books
>
> Sidrah: so, we still have Tipu Sultan and other Muslim fighters in our books
>
> Farina: they are removing it, they are decreasing the content and making it very subtle
>
> Me: why is that?
>
> Sidrah: they don’t want others to know that there were Muslim fighters in this country who fought for freedom...they want to brainwash.
>
> Me: by doing this what will they get?
>
> Marina: Hindu rashtra
>
> Farina: the thing is if a kid doesn't know about a certain person, he won’t even care about going and learning about him or seeing the good values...they just cut off from the start...and they don't go and discover later what has happened in that religion.

Children understand that this meddling is one of the state’s ways of disseminating ideas of nationalism. Farina had taken this further to point to the link between the past and the present. By modifying history, she feared that the othering and stereotyping of Muslims living in the present day will take on a more serious form since non-Muslim children would readily develop an essentialised view of Muslims when backed by a negative history.

In addition to this, MOIS students' understanding of the community being wronged through history or removal of Muslim names followed another unique reasoning. Since they studied global Islamic history, they had learnt that significant scientific contributions of Muslim scientists, especially during the Golden Age, had been erased from history or their names had been changed. For example, they mentioned that Ibn Sina was renamed Avicenna, and Feesa goras was renamed Pythagoras. Haider (14 years, MOIS) said, "they are purposely not letting any Muslims come in that...like before history was like so many achievements of Muslims like planes, vaccinations, and other scientific contributions...but they are not letting this come out." Most of the students said that Muslims had contributed to a variety of fields, however, before World War 2, many Muslim names were changed to Christian names since they did not want Muslims to gain a powerful position. Such an understanding was extrapolated to the local context. Though children did not have exposure to community narratives, based on the hate crimes and stereotyping of Muslims, they assumed that the contributions of Muslim freedom fighters were minimised or removed from textbooks. And they felt that 'they' (Government) did not want the zeal and bravery of the Muslims to be highlighted and credited. Children, thus, do not necessarily construe their identities only in terms of the national (Grever et al., 2011), rather the exposure to transnational history aids in making sense of the local, especially because both the global and local discourses make their religious identity salient.

Students at VGHS and MOIS were aware of the state's plan to modify official history and made conclusions about the growing bias against Muslims. They thought this would soon reflect in their books and in turn, seriously impact their present reality. However, they had remained silent about the existing curriculum. In comparison, students at LHS, JM and DUB, due to their exposure to community narratives, had serious objections to their existing official textbook histories. Since community narratives provided detailed accounts of Muslim freedom fighters (as discussed in 5.1), children compared this with their school textbooks. Their responses were as detailed below.

> "We made all the sacrifices, but they erased our names from history completely...we only hear Gandhi's name." (Hamnah, 14 years, LHS) [echoed by many others]
>
> "Moulana Azad and Tipu Sultan are there but most of the names will be of Hindus only, among Muslims only these two names are there." (Zafiah, 14 years, LHS)
>
> "If you ask anyone about the freedom struggle, no child will take the name of a Muslim person... their [Hindu] names will be highlighted everywhere." (Nigar, 16 years, JM)

Some of them attributed this to the fact that since the control of publishing textbooks is with the Government, they would obviously not like to highlight Muslim names whereas others said that this was a deliberate attempt towards building a Hindu nation. Aliza (14 years, LHS) mentioned "Our teacher told us that Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad wrote a book that detailed all the Muslim names and their contributions during the fight, but it is banned now from publication." Her classmate Aafiya added to this by saying "They decide the information given to students, books publishing is all in their control...so about Tipu Sultan, Hyder Ali, Ghori...they give short paragraph, they want their leaders to become more visible, so they publish mostly on Bhagat Singh, Gandhi." Children felt that their community history had been largely excluded from the official history except for a brief mention in a few places.

The absorption of unofficial history had also intensified their emotions. Students expressed that their sentiments were hurt when the state had proposed to eliminate Tipu's name altogether in the recent revision of the textbooks. In the minds of children, this had affirmed the negative bias against Muslims in the official records. A teacher at LHS had also recounted an incident wherein a non-Muslim professor from Calcutta had repeatedly objected to the maligning of Tipu in one of the history books taught at the University of Mysore. He mentioned that though the book had been finally recalled since the author could not authenticate his stance, such a meddling with history was not uncommon. Children were also upset that Tipu's birth anniversary was no longer allowed to be celebrated. In an FGD with class 9 girls,

> Urwa: he [Tipu] also was one of the freedom fighters but now they are not allowing us to celebrate his birthday

Laiba: yes... no holiday for us (sounding very upset)

Urwa: he also sacrificed his life for us but now that is not being counted

Basma: when Hindu freedom fighter's birthday comes, they give holiday, but for us they are not willing to give a holiday

Abeer: they purposely don't want to give

Iram: from two years this is happening

Zameena: yes from 2 years

Me: And why do they not want to give this holiday? Do you learn about him in the textbooks?

All: not much, very little

Iram: there is very little given in the textbook about him, we sometimes get the information through the internet…

Abeer: we also hear from others in the surrounding in the form of stories

Zameena: ya then we discuss...

Urwa: they should allow us to celebrate his birthday

Sobia: he also has made sacrifices

Me: why do you say that his name is not there in the textbooks?

Abeer: I think that because he was a Muslim, they don't want to put his name in the textbook (many of them agree)

Children, across sites, could gauge that the official history was not free of bias and was linked to political agendas. This became intensified with the state's proposal to remove the chapter on Tipu Sultan. Here the official history does not just remain silent about a minority group, rather it explicitly attempts to exclude and devalue a group by singling out their religious identity and labelling it as anti-national. Even in the absence of exposure to community narratives (in case of VGHS and MOIS students), historical construction of a ruler like Tipu as anti-Kannada and anti-Hindu particularly due to his Muslim identity makes students link history to their own sense of identity. Such impressions have also been found among black and minority ethnic students; the link between history and identity for them was found to be more pronounced as compared to their white peers (Hawkey, 2015). For students at LHS, JM and DUB community narratives evoke a sense of belonging to a collective identity and this becomes stronger when children understand that this identity has been

discredited in the official narratives. This can explain not only the cognitive aspects but also the emotional commitment towards these accounts, which is often not discussed within research (Wertsch, 2012). Apart from this, children fear that the marginalisation of the Muslim community would take a far more serious form when official history will obliterate Muslim contributions. I build this understanding further in the next theme by detailing the psychological consequences of appropriating official and unofficial histories.

5.3 Resolving discrepancy between official textbook history and community narratives

In highlighting the difference between community narratives and official historical narratives managed by the state Wertsch (2012) points out that though separation between the two is blur, community narratives have often been accused of being subjective and self-serving whereas official history has been thought of as objective, while in fact they are equally committed to the tell the truth about the past. However, few researchers have also critiqued the mending of official history as a means to meet political goals of the state (Evans, 2003; Liu & Hilton, 2005) by elaborating on its changing content as per the regime in countries like Germany and Japan (Conrad, 2003), Syria (Muhammad, 2016), Sweden (Ahonen, 2001b), and India (Guichard, 2010). Wertsch further elaborates that community narratives are powerful cultural tools that shape people's thinking and remembering in a non-conscious way.

On asking children how they make sense of such discrepancy between what they learnt in textbooks and what they orally learnt outside of schools, there were a variety of responses. Many students had more trust in the community narratives. My analysis shows varying levels of appropriation even among them. At JM, students mentioned that since their books at the madrasah and community narratives included the contributions of Hindu freedom fighters, they did not appear to be one-sided. In contrast, they argued that school textbooks had omitted a large part of the Muslim contribution or had only briefly mentioned it in some places, 'as if Muslims had done nothing'. Therefore, children reasoned that their trust in the community narratives was mainly because they appeared balanced. For other students, the understanding of

patriotism as a religious virtue (as detailed in 5.1) had resulted in this trust. Faham (16 years, DUB) said, “Many people were reluctant to fight during the freedom struggle, but Muslims put up a great brave face. Love for your country is an important part of our religion. We have done our bit.” Since students at JM and DUB had left their schools, they had higher levels of appropriation of the unofficial community narratives. Unlike the madrasah students, students at LHS were still required to master the official textbook narratives as part of their academics. Some students complained that their books were filled with names of Hindu freedom fighters, and they were made to learn this to an extent that they have almost forgotten their own community history. Children like Samaira (14 years, LHS) were still able to reject the popular negative discourses by saying, “Lot of work was done by Muslims but in the books only Hindus names will come...about Tipu Sultan they have written incorrectly that he oppressed Hindus.” Such children demonstrate ‘mastery without appropriation’ i.e., cognitive mastery of textbook material did not guarantee appropriation or the use of the text as an identity resource (Wertsch, 2002). These students again had a higher level of appropriation of the community narratives though they mastered the official history. But for others there was confusion, and thus their appropriation was context based (Wertsch, 2002). In some groups at LHS, when asked which version they think is true or which version they believe, some children said they believed both. They would believe either version based on where they were situated. These children showed a context-based appropriation— they had appropriated the school narrative while at school and the community narrative outside of school. This is also similar to individuals developing a ‘double consciousness of history’ (Ahonen, 2001a) wherein they switch between official narratives in public spaces and community narratives in private spaces. The present situational context then becomes a dynamic force that determines how they recall the past (Wertsch, 2002).

Children at VGHS and MOIS had minimal or no exposure to community narratives. They only learnt their textbook histories and thus, had different appropriations. In case of MOIS students, the socio-political ‘othering’ of Muslims in the present and an understanding that official history of Muslims is being meddled with brought about a mistrust in the state’s version. These children also demonstrate

‘mastery without appropriation’. Though there was a disconnect from local community narratives, their exposure to a global Islamic history acted as a proxy to establish a positive connection with the past. However, VGHS students who mastered and appropriated the official narratives continued to experience exclusion due a lack of connection with their past. Their consumption of history must be contextualised to their marginalised socio-economic position in the society juxtaposed with the Hinduisation of schools and other public spaces leading to exclusion. An understanding that historical representations are important for identity positioning of groups i.e, how they perceive their place in the society (Liu & Hilton, 2005) was evident among students of VGHS. They had accepted their marginalised position with the society due to their belongingness to a religious community and had taken on the responsibility to alleviate themselves from it via the means of education. I elaborate on this point in Chapter 7 wherein I discuss the lack of schooling options in their vicinity and willingness to commute a long distance to secure good education. Few exceptions among VGHS students did not appropriate the state narratives due to an awareness of the state’s agenda and debates that had resurfaced about Tipu Sultan. However, their confidence in rejecting textbook histories was weak. Due to an absence of a connection with the community’s past, they did not have the confidence to challenge the official narratives as compared to students at other field sites. Thus, minority communities are greatly disadvantaged when official narratives not only aim at their assimilation in the name of national integration through a homogenizing curriculum but also excludes/devalues their community identity (Dixit, 2021, 2022).

In sum, though students’ understanding of history can be seen as bound up with current socio-political climate of an anti-Muslim consciousness, all children do not demonstrate a simplistic rejection or acceptance of official narratives. They demonstrate varying levels of appropriation, of both official histories and community histories, and based on the context. For some, this appropriation was ‘thin’ to the extent that it varied even with the immediate context in which they were located; home or school. For others, there was confusion. Those with higher levels of appropriation of the community narratives drew from a range of reasons before deciding on which version to trust more. In rejecting the official histories, they compared the one-sidedness of the narratives (based on religion) in the official and

unofficial versions, considered patriotism as a religious virtue or extrapolated from a learning of transnational history. Children, in their consumption of history, "demonstrate a range of complex understandings" (Barton & Mccully, 2005, p.111).

5.4 Resisting Othering

In this theme I discuss the development of children's national identity based on their levels of appropriation of history. Those children who had appropriated community narratives built a sense of belonging to the nation and this had enabled them to resist the 'othering'. Those who had minimal or no exposure to unofficial narratives and had mostly appropriated official textbook histories, had accepted their marginalisation. Children with higher levels of appropriation of community histories were able to think critically and evaluate their current identity as a member belonging to a religious group. They raised questions about why members of the Muslim community have been excluded and marginalised when their contribution to the nation had been historically significant. A group of boys in LHS became very sentimental about this in the context of the Partition. They feared a similar agenda is being pursued currently to drive out Muslims from the country.

All [multiple voices]: that [excluding Muslims] should not happen

Rizwan: as if it is a country only of one religion

Sami: both Hindus and Muslims should be friendly

Kalam: there should be friendship no matter how they are

Afzal: that is not possible...to send off Muslims... so many Muslims are here... how can they send us there [Pakistan]...it's not so easy.

The boys claimed their national identity as equal citizens of the country and asserted that several Muslims had fought during the freedom struggle. Sidrah (14 years, MOIS) presented a different take on loyalty to the nation as she said that during the Partition, "they [Muslims] actually wanted to stay in the place they were born...where they actually belong to...when the Muslims in India were asked that India should be a completely Hindu rashtra they were given the chance but the Muslims did not agree to that...so when we rejected this proposal then you [Hindus] also should take our side and reject this NRC and CAA and take our side." A positive connection to their own past had contributed to building their national identity and

thus a sense of belonging to the nation. The nation was also felt as a shared space wherein different religious groups co-existed.

In the Independence Day speech, the chief guest evoked these sensibilities by drawing from history, "All of you think about reading this history and read it very deeply. Until you understand their sacrifices, the sentiment of sacrifice will not be ignited in your heart; it cannot be done through my words alone. Just by hearing it won't happen, you have to repeat it again and again. Only then you would be able to... in today's conditions of the country do you think that the freedom that we got is still there? So, in this climate of hatred we should spread love and uphold our good character. Hatred cannot be fought with more hatred. If this happens then only hatred will grow. From the legacy of our Prophet, sallallahu alaihi wasallam and his companions and our elders we know that hatred is also replied to with love. This way we have to sacrifice our emotions so that if someone is showing hatred towards us, we must reply with love as taught by Islam. And if this love prevails, then we are seeing that there is a big section that is standing neutral, neither they hate nor they love. If you don't win them over with your love, then those who are spreading hatred will take them away with them and make them against you all. This is why we must make a firm resolve that in this country we will take on the ways of love. This is my message to you all, we were free, we are free, and we will remain free. And today we refresh the memories of the sacrifices of our elders which have been forgotten." For a marginalised group, (re)interpretation of history has been used as means to challenge the legitimacy of the existing social order, especially when historical events become pertinent to the current national identity (Liu & Hilton, 2005). The speech points to the need to confront the current climate of hate by evoking a historical legacy of sacrifices for the nation and spreading love.

Children with higher levels of appropriation of community histories experienced the nation as a continuation from the past to the present. A congruence in their religious, national and historical identities had enabled them to resist othering discourses and the felt need to be united with their fellow citizens. Thus, community narratives not only instilled a belongingness to the nation by upholding the values like patriotism and love for fellow citizens but also formed an important bridge for the development of congruent identity processes. In contrast, children with lower levels

of appropriation, in their struggle with which version to believe or forgetting community narratives due to learning textbook material, experienced more fluidity in their sense of belongingness to the nation. Others who had no exposure to such unofficial narratives were further alienated and experienced tensions in their intersecting identities. VGHS students were well aware of the popular othering discourses that stereotyped and labelled Muslims as anti-national but did not have exposure to community narratives and thus had either internalised being 'the other' (as described in section 3.4) or had tried to hide their 'Muslimness' in the school (section 3.3). Similarly, MOIS students, who also did not have exposure to community narratives, had felt the need to appear less religious to become more united with their fellow citizens during the anti-CAA protests (section 3.3). These behaviours reinforce the arguments presented in Chapter 4 about how marginalisation is internalised by children resulting in a fragmented experience of self. The lack of a positive connection with the past establishes this further, and results in a devaluation of their own community. And due to their belongingness to a religious community (that has been negatively constructed within the discourses of the past and present), they construe their religious identity as something to be hidden in particular contexts. These experiences of alienation, and a disconnect between the school and home environments also deter the process of learning for minority students.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that children's consumption of history forms a crucial component in understanding their identity processes. School curriculum has drawn special attention with respect to children since history education in schools has been used for building national identities. For Indian Muslim children this is particularly important since their marginalisation entails discourses that question their belongingness to the nation. Children had affirmed the negative bias against Muslims in the official history either by comparing it with the community narratives or by an understanding that meddling with official history is a part of the Hindu nation building project. Though Ahonen, (2001a) suggests that "a curriculum in the service of direct identity-politics will be inevitably questioned, and even discredited, by groups who see themselves outside its narrative" (p. 192), through a closer analysis I

have shown that this process is not as simplistic. First, to understand the consumption of history, researchers must take into account exposure to both official and unofficial accounts of history that children may be exposed to. Second, the local context must be taken into consideration while remaining aware of the regional, national and global spatial scales (Benwell, 2014).

By using both above stated points, I have demonstrated that children have varying exposure to official histories and unofficial community narratives depending on the type of school they attended. Discrepancies between these two accounts had led to varying levels of appropriation of these histories. The current socio-political climate of building a Hindu nation and more specifically the debates around erasing the history chapter on Tipu Sultan had also influenced the manner in which children interpreted history. For some children this was compounded by the knowledge of manipulations in Islamic history within the global context. Children who were aware of the state's agenda of disseminating Hindu nationalism, through history (by the distortion of key historical Muslim figures from textbooks), feared that the future generations would be devoid of any information about the Muslim contribution during the freedom struggle. They anticipated that this would allow for the stereotyping or othering of Muslims to take on a more serious form. This shows that these children developed historical consciousness (Seixas, 2004) as they drew future expectations based on their meaning-making of the past.

There was a greater resistance to 'othering' among children with higher levels of appropriation of community narratives. This was because these narratives conveyed nationalism as an essential part of the religion by inculcating values like patriotism and brotherhood and looking down upon disloyalty. Some children trusted these narratives more than the official narratives since they found them to be balanced with respect to giving credit to freedom fighters from all religions. Nevertheless, community narratives fostered a strong sense of belonging to the nation and had further brought about an emotional commitment to these narratives. Those who were unable to completely resolve the discrepancy between official and unofficial narratives, demonstrated a context-based appropriation or confusion. Among those who did not have any exposure to community narratives, could not reject official state

narratives, though they expressed unease with removal or distortion of Muslim figures from history and some even mastered textbook histories. Thus, my analysis shows that all children, even in the same school, do not show the exact same consumption of history, they differ in their levels of appropriation. However, there are broad similarities based on the type of school due to a similar learning of both official and unofficial narratives. To understand the consumption side of history, I have shown that the framework of critical psychology that embeds individuals in their context and construes them as active agents at the juncture of complex and power-ridden social structures (Dreier, 2020) brings about a greater refinement in the analysis. This is important because the production side of history invariably involves dynamics between power and knowledge through the state and educational systems (both formal and informal).

Lastly, I have drawn inferences on their identity processes. When community narratives, used as cultural tools (Wertsch, 1997) allow for a positive connection to be established with the past, a congruence between intersecting identities could be seen — in this case national and religious identities were found to be harmonious. Such children asserted their belongingness to the nation simultaneously with their belongingness to their religion. They construed the nation as a shared space— the love for one's country and fellow citizens were an essential part of one's faith. This finding challenges the popular discourses that label madrasas as 'dens of terror' accusing them of harbouring a curriculum which is anti-Hindu and anti-national (Alam, 2011; Moulton, 2008; Noor et al., 2008). In fact, madrasah students had the strongest sense of belongingness and loyalty to the nation due to higher appropriation of community narratives. This was in contrast to the students from the government school. Due to the absence of such cultural tools, children's intersecting identities were experienced as incongruent. As shown in Chapter 3, section 3.3, VGHS students displayed 'cognitive polyphasia' (Jovchelovitch, 2012) as they conformed to the school's religious practices not to appear 'too religious' in the school despite the commitment to practise their faith outside the school. As they experience tensions in their intersecting identities, internalise their marginalisation, and devalue their community, they construe their religious identity as something that must be hidden.

Therefore, the consumption of history forms an important as aspect of identity development especially for children from excluded or marginalised groups.

Chapter 6: Manifestation of Dominant Discourses within School Choices

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school." — Albert Einstein

In continuation with the previous chapters, wherein I have demonstrated that children are active and agentic participants as they continually engage in and negotiate their socio-political realities, in this chapter, I focus on how dominant discourses of nationalism and other socio-political discourses influence social goals of Muslim children like school choices. So far research on school choice sets (decision about choosing a school from an available set of schools) has primarily regarded parents as key actors. I lay emphasis on the fact that children are important actors as they inform parental decisions to co-produce certain choice sets. This chapter foregrounds how school-going Muslim children's experiences as discussed in Chapters 3 to 5, interact with their families to produce school choices across public and private schools in Bangalore, India (my broad field site), while accounting for their marginalisation at the intersections of religion, class and gender. Through my findings, I demonstrate that factors (intrinsically linked to the dominant discourses) like heterogeneities in social class, differential levels of religious discrimination/exclusion in schools, a need to protect their faith through education and a complex overlap between these have been crucial in shaping choices.

School choice has been most often discussed in relation to providing greater educational opportunities to all, especially socially marginalised groups globally (Ball et al., 2013; Berends, 2015) and in India (Mehendale et al., 2015). The first of such attempts were made through market-based models. Advocates of market-based models (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1955) claim that it would cause de-bureaucratisation and thereby encourage marginalised groups (low-income and other minorities) participate more freely by expressing their demands (see Berends & Zottola, 2009; Lareau & Goyette, 2014). However, in a developing country like India, the responsibility for providing educational opportunities to all factions of the society

has been with the welfare state (I shall return to this point). Nevertheless, these approaches focus on increasing the educational opportunities to allow greater participation. Market based approaches have been critiqued for their implicit assumption that school choice markets are fair and free of bias (Bell 2009a) and for an oversimplification about considering all parents as a uniform category of "rational consumers" (Buckley & Schneider, 2003). Social theorists instead argue that choice sets are situated in a subjective space within a stratified social context (Bell 2009a). For marginalised groups, factors like racial composition (Bell, 2007; 2008; Bunar, 2010; Goyette, 2008), socio-economic status (DeJarnatt, 2008; Hastings, 2009) and social capital— information that flows through class-bound social networks (Holme 2002; Bell 2009a) are important factors in making choices. Bell (2009a, 2009b) emphasises on the socio-historical nature of choice. She found that parental choice sets are restrained by existing social inequalities within which educational opportunities are unevenly distributed. In a similar vein, low-income, racial minority parents not only identified financial constraints as an important factor (Ndimande, 2016) but also faced barriers when they attempted to enrol their children into schools (Cooper, 2007). There has also been an interest in examining the school's structures and internal processes (Dreeben, 1994; Gamoran et al., 2000; Schneider, 2003). In other words, "what goes on inside the black box of schools and how school and schooling factors contribute to both social inequality and productivity" (Berends and Zottola, 2009, p. 45) helps in gaining insights about student experiences, student-teacher relationships, which in turn shapes choices sets. Given this understanding, there are some parallels and important differences to note within the Indian context.

In India, the quest for universalisation of education is witnessed by long standing attempts (that predate independence) to provide free and compulsory education to all (see Mehendale, 2021). From early educational policies like NEP, 1968 to the Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2009[25], the focus has been on providing free public education and a percentage of free seats in private education to prevent segregation of social classes within schools. This has been paralleled by the substantial increase in the number of schools (both private and government) and in

25 RTE provides free and compulsory education (up to class 10) in government schools but also allocates 25% seats to economically weaker sections (EWS) or disadvantaged groups in private unaided schools.

school enrollments (see Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010)[26]. Nevertheless, questions about equity and inclusion within education have remained. In the last two decades, an exponential increase in the number of private schools (many targeting socio-economically disadvantaged groups) and shifting patterns of enrollments from government to private have been observed (Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay, and Namala, 2015; Srivastava, 2007; Mousumi and Kusakabe, 2017; Kingdon, 2020; Kumar and Choudhury 2021)[27]. As of 2015-16, 54.93% of students were enrolled in government schools and 45.06% in private schools (NIEPA, 2016). Increased choice for economically disadvantaged groups is said to come from "an increase in private provision" (Srivastava, 2007, p. 7) as many of these schools are unrecognised, low-fee private schools (Kumar and Choudhury, 2021).

In line with these developments, the research on school choice in India, like many other developed and (more recently) developing nations, have been centered around parental choices of public v/s private. Studies have shown that, despite RTE's non-discriminatory clauses, its implementation has been restricted by structural/procedural and hidden barriers (see Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). Most studies have focused on economic disadvantages as central in understanding school choices (Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2017; P. Srivastava, 2007; Tooley & Dixon, 2007), and few have widened this lens to show that inequalities of class, caste and gender are deeply entrenched and thus, reflected in school choices (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). In fact, an expanded school market has shown to further reproduce and fortify social disadvantages of class, caste and gender (Hill et al., 2011; Juneja, 2021; Ramachandran, 2004). However, these studies have examined disadvantaged caste groups like SC, ST, their low-income and gendered concerns (Duraisamy, 2004; Velaskar, 2005) while religion has not received attention except for an understanding that Muslims have the lowest enrollment share or are most disadvantaged (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006). Overall, an increase in educational opportunities has not necessarily translated into empowered choices. Thus, it becomes necessary to acknowledge that school choice is far more complex than the private-public

26 For instance, the number of students enrolled in primary education increased from 19.2 million in 1950 to 132 million in 2005

27 While the share of private schools increased from 19.49% (in 2007–08) to 25.24% (in 2016–17), their share in the total enrolment from 19.30% to 45%

dichotomy (Jain, 2018; Z. James & Woodhead, 2014; Sarangapani & Winch, 2010) in a heavily stratified (class, caste, religion and gender) society like India. In a careful analysis, I demonstrate again the usefulness of an intersectional lens to understand the choice-making process (Goswami, 2015; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Thus, I attempt to understand choices across my field sites, a range of schools from public to private, whilst retaining an intersectional focus which includes the minimally explored category of religion.

As also pointed out previously (Chapter 2), Muslims students in Bangalore show an atypical pattern of school choice considering their economic and employment conditions. Their school enrolment pattern in 2018-19 has also been different from other marginalised groups. While a vast majority of students from all other marginalised groups are enrolled in government or government aided schools, only 50% (approximately) Muslim students have opted for the same while the remaining half are enrolled in private, fee-paying schools (School Education in Karnataka Report, 2018-19)[28]. An important consideration, unique to this group, is that their marginalisation is not simply due to the numeric minority status. Few studies have drawn attention to the fact that religious bullying has been found in Bangalore wherein Muslim children have been thought of as *'Pakistani'* or asked, *'to go to Pakistan'* (Erum, 2017; Nathan, 2019). In a similar vein, I have discussed in the Chapters 3 to 5 the manner in which the dominant discourses impact children. In this chapter, I detail how such experiences often become hidden barriers in the choice-making process. This chapter continues to build from the understanding of the previous chapters to understand the influence of discourses on social goals like school choices. However, I also recognise that children cannot be thought of as isolated decision-makers in this process and thereby I have considered parents and teachers as valuable informants. I present the data site wise to capture the situatedness of school-choice.

28 State enrolment patterns here are discussed since specific district data for Bangalore has not been recorded

6.1 Site 1: Government school- Vidyavhav government high school (VGHS)

Recalling from chapter 2, VGHS was a state-run school offering free education along with mid-day-meals. It was also one among the 276 Karnataka Public Schools (KPS) in the state which meant that it provided Kannada and English as mediums of instruction from classes 1 to 12. All the children belonged to working-class families. VGHS had 60% Hindu students, 38% Muslim students and 2% Christian students. This was an unusually high percentage of Muslim students in the school, though the proximity of a school has been found to be one of the strongest factors in its selection (Ohara, 2012; P. Srivastava, 2008; Woodhead et al., 2013). The school authorities informed that the neighbourhood was not inhabited by a proportionate number of Muslim families. In fact, most of the Muslim children in VGHS travelled 15-20 kms to the school from four different segregated Muslim neighbourhoods. Most of the children had joined the school in class 8 because they did not have any state high school in their locality. Their families were unable to afford the available low-fee private schools, thus making the actual choice set much narrower than the estimated count of schools in the vicinity (Wilson, 2017). In choosing a school outside their localities, I found that parent's choice-making process partly relied on children's feedback from their previous schools and partly relied on informal networks which became the source of 'hot knowledge' (informal) (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Mazhar (14 years) said, "my father's friend's son studies here... so, I got to know about this school." Students often spoke of how VGHS was different from the state schools in their localities which they attended before coming here. They described their previous schools to be lax about discipline and not 'serious' about teaching and even 'allowed copying during exams'. Shireen (14 years) said, "When my mother found out that they were making us copy in exams, she started looking for another school...my neighbour suggested that this school is very good and then my mother put my sister and myself into this school." Though not explicitly stated, such 'hot knowledge' perhaps provided information about the religious composition of the school as social mix has been an important factor in schooling choices among marginalised groups (Reay & Ball, 1997; Waitoller & Lubienski, 2019).

Though choosing VGHS ensured 'good' education with a suitable social mix, it required students to make adjustments that weighed heavily on them. The first concern was related to travel and safety. The commute to VGHS was tedious and involved traversing multiple transit points. For example, Azeem (14 years) said, "I change 3 buses. I leave home at 7:30am and reach school by 8:30am, the roads are empty, so it doesn't take much time". Similarly, when I asked his classmate Zoya if this school was far, she replied, "no...it is only 12 stops by bus." The ease with which children like Zoya mentioned about their long journey to school was baffling[29]. They seemed to endure the commute to get a 'good' education free of cost which was linked to their future aspirations (we will return to this point). Commuting also posed safety concerns, especially for girls. Sakina (15 years) was often reprimanded by the teachers due to her frequent absenteeism. She confided that she could come to school only when her cousin Mahi (studying in another class) also would come to school. Whenever Mahi was absent (due to sickness or to do housework), Sakina's parents felt it would be unsafe to travel alone. I found that most other Muslim girls had to travel with their siblings or close friends. Perhaps ensuring company for their girls could be a reason for parents to choose the same school for all their children unlike other studies that show parental preference of private schooling for boys (due to assumptions of better quality) and state schooling for girls (Hill et al., 2011; Z. James & Woodhead, 2014). Additionally, unlike other studies where gendered conceptions of safety have shown to result in geographically restricted nature of school-choices for girls (Gurney, 2018; Mehendale et al., 2015; Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2017), I found that safety concerns are addressed by traversing the geographical distance in the company of siblings and peers.

The second concern was that the school had asked some children who were considered 'bright' to switch their language of instruction from Kannada to English and those considered 'weak' were not allowed to continue in English medium[30]. The school's perception that placed English at a higher level of difficulty was evident. For

29 All children studying in Government or state-run primary schools (up to class 7, sometimes includes class 8) in Karnataka are required to choose another secondary school (for classes 8-10), however, such a long commute to access a school was not found among students belonging to other religious groups.

30 Kannada medium state schools had English as an additional subject whereas Kannada was the medium of instruction for all the other subjects.

the child, a change in medium implies that (s)he would be abruptly learning all the subjects via a language of least proficiency from class 8 onwards. For example, Kafeel, considered to be 'weak' student, had previously studied in English medium, however he said, *'*but they did not take me here in English medium, so I had to shift to Kannada medium'. Whereas the ones considered 'bright' had faced the opposite. Two girls in class 9; Razia and Zoya (both 14 years) and their brothers Rafee (13 years) and Noor (15 years) had previously studied in a Kannada medium state school. When they joined VGHS, Rafee and Noor were asked to switch to English medium whereas Razia who had made requests to the school authorities to switch was not allowed to do so. Similarly, Rafee's classmate Jafar was also asked to switch from Kannada to English medium. When I discussed with him in this regard, he was struggling with this switch and said, "I am trying to learn somehow, my sister teaches me." Yet, parents did not "voice" such concerns, rather asked their children to comply with school demands. Thus, there were choices within choices in which the school was at times able to make decisions on behalf of the children without taking their consent or parental consent. The school, concerned about its pass percentages, appeared to take on such an authoritarian role since the administrators could gauge that disadvantaged groups were not only serious about education but also had limited schooling options.

The seriousness about education and adjustments made to continue schooling at VGHS were linked to the perception of 'good' education as an essential means to upward mobility. However, the link between education and employment had gendered implications. Some families encouraged girls to study whereas others asked them to stop after class 10. For example, Tabina's (13 years) parents had recommended her to do a diploma after class 10 and she mentioned, "they say that our kids should not suffer the way we have." Similarly, Shireen said. "I want to do something in life, and I want to take care of my parents... since a very young age she used to work in other people's houses, in fact my mother used to work at her own uncle's place and he used to refuse to give her food if she did not work, she suffered a lot. She wants me and my sister to study and do well.*"* Whereas Rabab said, "I want to study but my mother is saying 10th is enough...they will encourage boys (to study further) ... I wanted to become a police officer, but I have to listen to my mom, they won't allow me to

work.*"* Like Rabab, Ghazal, who had just completed class 10 with distinction was frustrated since she was keen on pursuing further studies, however her father did not permit her. Her mother expressed (in an interview) her helplessness as she failed to convince Ghazal's father to allow their daughter to study. He had remained firm in his position that he did not see a point in educating her further since he felt he had already risked her safety by sending her to school and in the future Ghazal would not be allowed to work anyway.

When it came to boys, many of them were expected to join work to provide financial support to their families. Noor had already started working part-time as a door-to-door newspaper distributor before coming to school. Such an expectation was common for boys and they expressed their dilemmas between choosing further education and employment. Faizan (13 years) said, "My grandmother insists that I take up a job but I want to study" whereas Mazhar (14 years) said, "My father wants me to study further but I want to work so that my mother doesn't have to work in the batti factory... I have already thought of joining one of my brothers at his workplace." Gendered negotiations were not uniform within families, while some retained role expectations of male-bread-winner and female-caregiver, for others these were overridden by the drive to move away from their class realities through education.

Social class emerged as the most prominent factor for the students choosing VGHS as government schools have the only option for the marginalised and 'voiceless' (Mehendale & Raha, 2020). It is also important to note that here social class dovetails with geographical marginalisation due to religion. As Bangalore is strongly segregated in its religious demography (Susewind, 2017), social class further determined the geographical location of these families within the city and the segregated, marginalised homes therein. This was directly linked to the availability of state schools in their localities which provided education free of cost. State schools that were available up to class 7 were also described to be lacking quality education. Beyond this, Muslim children and their parents had to exit the state's primary schooling like every child does, however, the lack of access to secondary state schooling (geographically marginalised due to overlap of religion and class) and inability to access private schooling (economically marginalised) made their choices

heavily constrained to an extent that the existence of choice becomes questionable (Z. James & Woodhead, 2014). Yet, there was a need for continuing education since it was perceived to be a crucial means towards upward mobility (as also shown by Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2004). A 'good' school like VGHS was chosen (through 'hot knowledge') though it required several negotiations of long commute, concerns of safety and a changed medium of instruction for some.

6.2 Site 2: Government aided minority school- Luminous High School (LHS)

LHS was a minority based, state-aided English medium school, particularly for Muslim students, which provided education at a minimal cost for classes between lower kinder garden to 12. Along with aided sections, it also had low-fee unaided sections. LHS followed the state board curriculum and had moral or religious education as one subject (40 minutes/week). Like VGHS, all the children belonged to working-class families. Their commute to school was between 2-6 kms. As my fieldwork coincided with the re-opening of the school for that academic year, I noticed that there was an influx of students in class 8. Some of them had the same reason as students of VGHS that they did not have government high schools in their localities. A large chunk came from Urdu medium state schools[31]. Since there are only 8 Urdu medium high schools in Bangalore, it has been found that and most of the students switched their medium of instruction to join Kannada or English medium government schools or dropped out altogether (Ahmed, 2013; Vaijayanti, 2011)[32]. In other studies, parents and students have marked the state's neglect towards education of Muslims as an obvious part of religious marginalisation (Ahmed, 2013; S. Hussain, 2010). I observed the same at LHS, where students switched their medium from Urdu to English in class 8 as they were indirectly forced to "exit" the system. When I asked them about the switch, students said that since LHS was a minority-based school that housed Muslim teachers, they had hoped that the teachers would explain the lesson in Urdu in case they were unable to understand. Additionally, there was a provision to

31 Schools with vernacular languages as their medium of instruction are associated with their region or geographical location in India, however Urdu medium schools have become synonymous with religious identity, since only Muslim students opt for these schools. For a detailed discussion of politicisation of Hindi-Urdu see Orsini (2009)

32 For 180 Urdu medium primary schools only 8 secondary schools are available, it has been found that few students who wanted to continue their education in Urdu travelled 15-20 kms to reach the nearest available secondary school.

choose Urdu as one of the language subjects which was not provided in an overwhelming majority of the state and private schools. LHS also provided a bridge course for students who were changing medium. Thus, students strongly relied on the social capital at the school for academic success (Goddard, 2003). Apart from these academically supportive norms, LHS also provided other forms of social and emotional support (Bryk et al., 1993).

Mr. Mahib, a senior teacher, responsible for taking student-parent interviews during the admission processes at LHS for many years, said that Muslim students from other schools experienced subtle forms of discrimination- "And you know in today's time they (parents) want to select a Muslim institution because there will be some indirect harassment in other schools. I've come to know from two parents that Muslim students had been looked at in a different way. Some partiality and some harassment is there and sometimes they directly tell the students that when you have your own institutions why do you come here. Why don't you go there? So, this creeps into the minds of the parents and students and then they leave." Discrimination and prejudices (based on caste, class etc) form invisible social barriers which are often overlooked within school choices (Hill et al., 2011; Ramachandran, 2004). These examples show that marginalisation due to religion can impact school choices at a structural level (as in the case of Urdu medium schools) or "'softer' social or hidden normative barriers that may be informally inserted into formal and informal schooling interactions, resulting in exclusion" (Srivastava and Noronha, 2016, p. 564). In all these cases Muslim families prefer to "exit" rather than to "voice" their concerns, while choosing LHS for its social capital.

Even in absence of discrimination, there were concerns regarding moral upbringing and the dress code especially for girls. Children pointed out that choosing to study in a minority-based institution had obvious advantages of an 'Islamic' atmosphere. This meant that their school would be in-line with the religious values at home. The moral education classes and having an option to pray in the school were examples of this. For the girls, wearing a hijab as part of the uniform was comforting. Zameena (14 years) described her family to be religious and since she shifted her residence, her parents were keen on a school which would allow hijab though there were very few options available. When I asked her if she felt her parents were being

very strict, she said. “no, I don’t think so, I agree with them, it’s not like I want to go another way. My parents don’t say that only religion is important, they emphasise on school education. Even in my previous school only one subject was there for religious education.” A very similar need (for modern education in an Islamic environment) was echoed by working-class Muslim parents in Delhi while choosing schools (Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2017) and was also found on the supply side in Hyderabad (Sarangapani, 2021). In addition to this, Zameena mentioned that all her cousins were forcing her to join the school in which they were studying but she refused since she preferred LHS. Similarly, her classmates mentioned that their previous schools (both private and government) did not allow headscarves and they also did not like wearing skirts, which was a reason to changeover to LHS. These conversations helped me understand that parental choice was not simply imposed on the children, rather there was a back and forth between feedback from children and suggestions from parents before a school was chosen. When I interviewed Madiha, a parent whose 3 daughters were studying in LHS, she said that while searching schools she found that most schools did not have any religious education, prayer facility and hijab in their uniforms, and among those which had, very few were affordable. Since LHS had both these factors, she said it was an attractive choice. Like Zameena’s parents, she also stressed that the importance is not only on religion, both religious and school education are important. She did not want her daughters to become homemakers like her, rather she was keen on them having good careers in the future, yet not having to leave hijab for education. Thus, marginalised groups may feel alienated due to exclusion of their socio-cultural or religious symbols within schools (Amatullah & Dixit, 2022) and may gravitate towards choosing schools that acknowledge that the child is at an intersection between the home and school worlds, thus making learning more flexible and leading to positive development (Kumar, 1989; Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993).

The intersection of religion, social class and gender became evident in making LHS as a school choice. LHS’s reputation for being a minority-based institution made it an attractive choice for many working-class Muslim families who could bear a minimal expenditure for education. Some Muslim students and their parents who faced religious discrimination and restrictions on hijab in other schools chose LHS,

while other students from Urdu-medium primary schools chose LHS assuming the possibility of at least verbally receiving their lessons in vernacular. The latter had no other option but to either change their medium of instruction to continue education or exit completely. Many students and parents considered the continuation of religious values to be important while regular education had still been the focal point. LHS fulfilled both these aspects, more importantly, at an affordable fee. Having an 'Islamic atmosphere' meant that children would be taught basic Islamic morals, they could offer daily prayers and wear hijabs (for girls). Thus, LHS enabled several forms of support to minority children— academic support for those who joined from Urdu medium schools, protection from religious discrimination and a continuation of religious values from their homes to the school.

6.3 Site 3: Private faith-based school- Magnum Opus Islamic School (MOIS)

MOIS was a private faith-based Islamic school, 9-years into its inception. Most of the students belonged to middle-income families. The school was founded with the purpose of providing Islamic religious education alongside a regular curriculum. MOIS adhered to state board syllabus for regular curriculum, and for religious education, the books were sourced from a private publisher. The number of hours allocated (120 minutes/week) and the overall curriculum for religious education was more rigorous compared to LHS.

The analysis of the choices showed that MOIS at the nexus of four major benefits- regular education, religious education/values (Islamic history, understanding Quran, moral values, code of conduct, wearing hijab, daily prayers), protection from exclusion and the assurance of a 'right' social mix. There was a great variation in how students and their families weighed in these factors together. These factors were often complexly intertwined with each other.

First, the combination of having religious and regular education, was the most commonly cited reason to choose MOIS. As one student concisely put it "Islamic values and academics both are done" whereas others detailed their religious education curriculum and its benefits. Few teachers said that learning and practice of religion within the school was essential for children as it was a means to protect their faith. Such a phenomenon has been studied by Cohen-Zada (2006) among Christians and

Shah (2012) among Muslims, wherein minority religious groups actively choose schools to preserve religious identity through religious education. For Indian Muslim students and families seeking religious education (as also seen for some students at LHS), preserving religious identity is not only due to their minority status. Given the historical context and the current rising of the right in India, it can be considered as an oppositional or counter response that is often seen in individuals who perceive threat to their social identity[33,34] (P. Fischer et al., 2010; Ysseldyk et al., 2011). In other parts of the world, it has been found that religiosity among Muslims deepened as the hostility in their environments increased (Connor, 2010) and this has resulted in increased inclination to learn religion, practice religion and assert religious identity (Peek, 2005). Likewise in India, the commitment to religious education has been more intense due to marginalisation of Muslims on several socio-economic fronts (Metcalf, 2007). However, the need to receive mainstream education has remained attractive for the socio-economic prospects it provides. Thus, faith-based schools like MOIS catered to this specific need without any compromise on regular schooling. Since these were private, fee-paying schools, they became a part of the school choice set only for those who could afford them.

At MOIS, a closer analysis of this combination revealed that it was not just having the two types of education together, rather the balance between regular and religious education was crucial during the choice making process. One student said she had left an Islamic school because she did not like the fact that the school emphasised on religious values/education more than regular education. Such a need for balance became more evident when I learnt that MOIS had witnessed noticeable student attrition 2 years ago when the management decided to move from central board syllabus to state board syllabus due to some difficulties in accreditation. Interviews with teachers revealed that families perceived central board syllabus to be superior to state board in terms of the quality and level of difficulty. From children's perspective, Maisha (14 years) explained that she was also planning to leave MOIS

33 For a historical understanding of feelings of threat and Muslims' commitment to preserve their faith (see Metfalf, 2007)

34 Historically, the first idea of establishing schools with modern and religious education dates back to 1944 by Sayyed Abdul Ala Maududi when a threat to the Muslim identity was experienced in years leading up to the Partition in 1947 (Sikand, 2009)

because her parents wanted her to gain better quality education (central board syllabus) even if religious education or values were absent. All her cousins went to convent schools with central board syllabus, and education was taken very seriously in her family. Maisha's mother also wanted her to study the whole book to gain knowledge, not just for the sake of exams. She was also unhappy that some chapters were altogether omitted from teaching at MOIS. When I asked about her views, Maisha said that she agreed with her mother and was willing to change her school in the coming year. Such a serious commitment towards mainstream education has been found to be a quintessential element among the middle-classes, despite their heterogeneities (Ball, 2003; Reay et al., 2011). Ball et al. (2013) discusses a similar prioritisation of 'quality' education over the possibility of being subject to racism among black-middle-class families in England. For many other children who continued at MOIS, they mentioned that change of board was disappointing, yet it did not result in a different school choice due to their stronger preference for religious education and values. The change of board made clear that MOIS had been previously perceived as 'best of both worlds' as it had catered to a larger middle-income group when it adhered to a central board syllabus. It had been viable for those who considered regular education as primary and religious education as secondary, yet important and vice versa.

Second, choosing a faith-based school prevented against any religion-based exclusion at schools and in-turn ensured the 'right' social (religious) mix. For instance, while discussing their experiences in their previous schools, Safeer (13 years) said that his father chose MOIS for him when he was only 5-years-old though the commute was about an hour long. He mentioned that in his previous (private) school he was expected to take part in *pooja* every day, and when his father came across a brochure of MOIS he was quick to change over. Safeer's father had not actively looked for a faith-based school, however, he was definitely discomforted by the school's mandate for all children to engage in Hindu religious worship. Other school-based research in India has also shown the observance of majoritarian religious practices in regular (private or government) schools (Bénéï, 2008; Nambissan, 2010a; Thapan, 2014). However, its impact on school choices has not been discussed so far. Safeer's classmate Faria joined MOIS when she was 9-years-

old. Initially she said she left her previous (private) school due to corporal punishment. She said, "they used to beat us with a stick…my mother did not like that and also there were other problems... Like it was a Hindu school (lowering her voice a lot) because of hijab restriction."[35] Faria described that though her mother was not very religious, she wanted Faria to go to 'at least a Muslim school' so that she could also learn Islamic values. In both the examples of Safeer and Faria, the exclusion (by virtue of religion) in their former school spaces became an important guiding factor in making a faith-based school as their next choice. This shows how class capital trumped by religion-based exclusion impacts school-choices. A simple change over to any other private school could possibly result in the same kind of exclusion. These examples also show that very young children may not be involved in the initial parental choice-making process, however, their schooling experiences/feedback can be pivotal for parents to take alternative options.

Third, seeking the right social mix was at the intersection of religion, social class and gender. In the previous section, due to exclusion in other schools, the right religious mix became most important. However, I found that quite a few children had migrated to MOIS though they had the right kind of religious mix in their previous schools. Their previous schools were either Islamic schools or non-faith-based schools with a large number of Muslim students. The concerns in these schools were mostly discussed by boys. They were troubled by smoking habits and the use of foul language among peers. While discussing this aspect, Haider (14 years) and a few other boys, associated 'bad influence' with Muslim children who belonged to working-classes and how their parents wanted to avoid such a mix. By changing over to MOIS, such parents who had earlier given importance only to religious mix, refined their choices further by ensuring a suitable class mix, especially for boys in the context of their non-academic social learning. Within marginalised groups, there are a variety of subject positions when categories like race, class and gender intersect (Moore 2008) and there can be a distancing from 'other' members of the same group which plays out in the choice-making process (Ball et al., 2013).

35 Her reference to Hindu school did not mean it was a faith-based school, rather she referred to a regular private school as a 'Hindu school' to indicate that the practices, majority of the students and the management were Hindu

The choice patterns at MOIS were layered and complex as compared to VGHS and LHS as the social class position of these families, mainly the ability to afford private school fees resulted in a relatively expanded choice set. MOIS's emphasis on religious education along with regular education (a foundational tenet) was the most prominent reason for choosing this school— often considered a means to protect their faith. However, MOIS's change of board (for regular education) from central to state was revealing the need for balance between the two. For the ones who left after this change, regular education outweighed religious education whereas for the ones who stayed, despite being discontent with the change, religious education still weighed higher. A faith-based school also automatically ensured the 'right' religious mix and it attracted those who faced exclusion (based on religion) in other schools. Yet there was a class angle to seeking the right mix. MOIS became a choice for those middle-income Muslim families, who were concerned about their boys mingling with 'other' Muslim boys who belonged to the working-classes. For such parents, MOIS ensured a suitable class mix along with a religious mix. Thus, MOIS was chosen after sifting through other faith-based or non-faith based private schools at the intersections of religion, gender, and class. This complexity in the choice-making process can be fully understood by considering class as a multidimensional concept which intersects with other forms of cultural capital (Seghers et al., 2019) or socially disadvantaged positions due to race/religion.

6.4 Site 4: Madrasah (school for religious education)- Dar-ul-Bayaan (DUB) and Jamia Ma'arifa (JM)

DUB and JM were two privately run, residential girls' madrasahs offering religious education at a moderate cost (roughly 2000-3000 per month with food and accommodation). They often made fee concessions for those in need. There were 210 and 102 girls between 12-19 years of age respectively, all identified as Muslims, belonging to different states across India. Their syllabus contained only religious subjects, spread across a period of 5 years. At JM, there were additional weekly classes for vocational training in tailoring, learning basic skills in computers and Kannada language. I found that before joining these madrasahs, the girls had been previously enrolled in regular schools since the minimum age criteria for enrolment

was 11-12 years. The class composition among the students at both madrasahs was mixed. This was different from the popular notion that only the most marginalised students attend madrasahs due to lack of any other schooling option in their localities (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006). Since the madrasahs in this study charged a moderate fee, and they housed children from different states and social classes, the discussion on religious school choice can be broadened. Also, in order for me to retain the focus on school-choice, I do not engage with the wide range of global and Indian literature on modernisation of madrasah education, which has largely been in the context of the war on terror.

Despite scholarly agreement regarding the paucity of data available to understand enrolments in madrasahs post-independence (see Iyer, 2018), there are several assumptions about Indian Muslims making madrasahs as their school choice. Two of the most commonly cited ones are— one, the issues of availability and accessibility of schools in Muslim localities (as stated earlier) and two, that Muslim parents are opposed to modern schooling. The first one, though may be true for certain regions in the country, overlooks the heterogeneity of madrasah education (Iyer 2018; Alam 2011). Similarly, the second assumption was negated through a nationwide report that estimated that only 3% of the Indian Muslim students are enrolled in madrasahs (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006). My analysis has revealed two clear reasons for choosing madrasahs. One, children were keen on acquiring religious education, in some cases despite parental discouragement. Two, madrasahs formed absolute safe-spaces for those who faced discrimination in other schools.

With respect to the first point, some girls said they opted for the madrasahs since their parents encouraged them to take up religious studies. Several studies have shown parental religiosity to be an important factor in selecting religious education for their children (Asadullah et al., 2012; Cohen-Zada, 2006). At both the madrasahs in this study, the girls had mentioned that they willingly took up madrasah education (recall that the girls were previously enrolled in regular schools at least up to class 6 or higher). Interestingly, for some of them this was not the case as their parents wanted them to continue regular school education. These girls had opposed their parents to opt out of regular schools. In an FGD, Mahira (13 years, 3rd year student, DUB) said, “I had come here for a brief course during the summer break and from

then I wanted to study in a madrasah... I kept telling my parents I don't want to go to school but my parents would not allow me to leave and join here...so I ran away from the house and stayed in my neighbour's house for 3 days and finally my parents understood that I won't agree to go to school and they were convinced to send me here...now it's alright." Her classmate Wabisa similarly said, "I fought at home because I wanted to come here and study." I also met Hashmat (15 years), a summer course student at DUB who was at crossroads in making a choice between regular education and madrasah education. She had completed her class 10 exams in a regular school where she was one among the few high scorers. When I asked her what she would be doing in the future, she said, "I wanted to become a doctor… But I had come here 3 years back and stayed for 44 days and since then had not wanted to go back to school. I was so interested in pursuing religious studies. Now I feel like coming here again, but my parents are asking me to pursue 11th. I am yet to decide." These findings especially highlight the role of children in the choice-making process. Moreover, in religious school-choice children's views have rarely been discussed though we know that children are not passive recipients of parental or societal religious messages (see Hemming & Madge, 2012). These narratives point to an intrinsic value of religious education in the minds of children. As I discussed further with them, all the girls affirmed they were keen and interested in pursuing these subjects as one of them put it "we get the most beneficial knowledge here... we learn what is most important for our life and we can also teach it to others." Shah (2006; 2012) discusses this knowledge from an Islamic perspective. She explains that seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim and here religious knowledge is encompassing of social (familial, economic and political) and personal (development of psychological, moral and spiritual self) aspects. It is in accordance to these principles which a Muslim conducts his/her life for the sake of God. Therefore, madrasah or Islamic education is said to look beyond imparting knowledge or ensuring employability, and more importantly promote values that develop individuals and thus, societies (Shah, 2012).

Moving to the second point, the girls discussed the reasons for leaving their former schools due to discrimination or due to not being allowed to wear hijab. Rukhsana (19 years, JM) left regular schooling due to covert forms of discrimination.

She said, “In Ramadan, they won’t allow Muslims to fast in the school... in my school PT sir force fed many boys and girls... or they would make sports as a reason... means they would keep sports and dance (during this month) which would tire the students totally and then they would give water... and then we tried to quit these activities (like dance) but they said it is compulsory… it went on for 10 days and then we told our parents and they finally came and spoke to them.”

This experience had made Rukhsana bitter and then she had opted for a madrasah as it assured complete protection from such discrimination and also allowed her to freely practice essential elements of her faith. It is also a breach of the psychosocial safety guidelines for children at schools (as set by the Ministry of Human Resource Development 2014). In some cases, parents displayed caution in choosing other schools and thus opted for a madrasah. Zubeida’s (16 years, JM) family was one such example. She said, “because outside situation is not so good... (mahaul kharaab hai), they are targeting Muslims more so that’s why my parents suggested that madrasah is a better option.” Detrimental effects (both academic and psychological) of discrimination/Islamophobia in schools towards Muslim students due to their religious identities has been well documented in many parts of the world (Abbas, 2004; Aroian, 2012; Elkassem et al., 2018; Farooqui & Kaushik, 2020). In understanding its effects on school-choice, it has been found that— in the US, Muslim families form the largest chunk among those who opt for home-schooling (Ajuwon & Bradshaw, 2009; Jackson, 2021), in the UK and other European countries there is growing demand for Islamic faith-based schools (McCreery et al., 2007; Nyman, 2005; Shah, 2012; Shakeel, 2018; Short, 2002). Thus, experiences of religious discrimination weigh heavily on school choices among Muslim families.

Further, there were gendered concerns of veiling in my study. Like the girls at LHS, most of them were not comfortable wearing skirts to school especially in co-educational spaces. As Dania (14 years, DUB) elaborated, “I left the school because pardah cannot be maintained there...we have to wear skirts so my father said it’s better to leave...and then there was an option to join a girls’ school or madrasah... I felt the best option was to join madrasah.” Nabeela (19 years, JM) had completed her 12th standard and was training to become a pilot— “I was doing a course for pilot training in Chennai... since it was Muslim place, I could manage for some time...but later on a

trainer came and he said why are you wearing this hijab you can't go forward with this in this line... you have to cut your hair... and when I had to go to US, at that time also because of my identity it was very hard during the interview... even if had gone forward then it would have been hard for me so I left it." Once she quit the course, had gone back and forth between joining an under-graduation course and the madrasah until she finally decided on the latter. Her parents had asked her to make the decision. As previously discussed in the case of LHS, a discontinuity of values between home and school had made madrasah a viable choice.

Since the age-criteria to join madrasahs was 11-12 years, most of the girls had previously studied in regular schools. As captured at LHS and MOIS, religious discrimination/exclusion or dress code restrictions were important reasons for students choosing DUB or JM. While some parents had encouraged them to switch to madrasah education, in other cases girls had faced resistance from their families when they wanted to switch. In both cases, the choice of studying at a full-time madrasah revealed more details about the intrinsic value of religious education.

6.5 Conclusion

Through this chapter, I have demonstrated that Muslim children's experiences, their negotiations with dominant discourses and their agency are important aspects of the choice-making process, which are in a constant dialogue with parental decisions. Future research must acknowledge and take this account rather than being limited to a singular, parental stance. By using a critical approach with an intersectional lens, I was able to capture a variety of subject positions, at the juncture of religion, class and gender, that result in school choices and its changing dynamics. My findings challenge the hegemonic discourses within Indian education that label marginalised or disadvantaged groups as disinterested in schooling (P. Srivastava, 2007), particularly Muslim families labelled as opposed to 'western' education thus preferring religious education (Ministry of Minority Affairs, 2006). Rather, Muslim children and parents in my study maintained a serious commitment about acquiring regular school education. Though children did not have state secondary high school in their area, children at VGHS, including girls, travelled a long distance to seek 'good' education. This was different from previous studies (except Mousumi and Kusakabe, 2017) that

suggest that Muslim girls were not sent to school altogether due to lack of schools in the neighbourhood (MacArthur foundation study as cited in Chanana, 2021). Instead, I found that gendered safety concerns were mitigated by traveling with peers. The commitment towards education was present across social classes, however the breadth of choice set for different income groups and thus their negotiations varied accordingly. Students (working-class), at both LHS and VGHS children with a narrow choice set, accepted a change in the medium of instruction, despite its high level of difficulty, in order to complete their schooling. Whereas students (middle-income) at MOIS were able to choose from a variety of private schools which fulfilled additional prerequisites apart from regular education. However, it must be noted that this flexibility due to higher affordability did not always hold true, especially in the face of religious discrimination.

When it came to switching between schools, an important factor that resulted in an exit were the differential levels of discrimination/exclusions in schools. These varied from being subtle to more serious forms— from being asked to take part in Hindu religious rituals to not being allowed to wear hijabs to being force fed during Ramadan fasts. In such instances, Muslim children and parents sought schools which were accommodative of their religious values/practices. For middle-income families this meant that despite their class capital, the choice set had been narrowed. Existing research has only demonstrated that class inequalities and the resulting variation in social capital results in different choice sets and often maintains class segregation in school selection (Majumdar, 2021). An intersectional lens provides greater nuances to such a simplistic understanding. Further, I found that even in absence of exclusion, a preference for an Islamic environment and religious education was present. This could be attributed either to the socio-political threat with respect to their religion or to the intrinsic value of religious education itself. In understanding school choices among marginalised groups, researchers must take into account the various dimensions of marginality; for example, race, poverty and geographical boundaries are strongly linked (Reichard, 2014). At the same time certain factors that alleviate marginality may result in relatively expanded choice sets. Only when these are contextualised and qualitatively analysed can a complete picture be painted.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

"In literature and in life we ultimately pursue, not conclusions, but beginnings." — Sam Tanenhaus

I began this thesis with the intent to answer questions about the psychosocial realities of children belonging to the Muslim community, a marginalised religious minority group in India. As discussed in the beginning, my aim was to first delineate the awareness of the dominant socio-political discourses about the Indian Muslims among children belonging to this community. Further to understand, how are these discourses (re)produced in the lives of children, particularly at the school, as well as in the other social contexts that they inhabit. How do they make sense of these discourses and respond to them cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally and thus negotiate their identities? I draw important conclusions that inform us about marginalised childhoods— their identity negotiations, their agency, and thus, their understanding of self and others. In that, I draw upon schools as important sites for childhoods. Since religious minorities have been minimally discussed within the literature concerning childhoods and nationalism, I make a critical contribution through my findings.

The extant literature in Chapter 1 shows that it becomes imperative to locate Indian Muslim childhood in the larger socio-historical context of the colonial past of India; an era which ended with a geographical transformation of its land marked by religion. Colonial concerns about Indian childhood have oscillated between a 'rescued modern childhood' imparted through modern education and the importance of 'saving' the indigenous/vernacular (C. Basu, 2019; Nieuwenhuys, 2009). As a consequence of historical framings, the post-colonial Indian child continues to be framed as the 'native abnormal' (C. Basu, 2019; S. Sen, 2005). Within such a construction, the Muslim child is further framed as abnormal given dominant discourses of terrorism globally and being the 'violent other' locally. By using the school as an important site for childhoods, I have shown several ways in which such

discourses are (re)produced, through curricular and non-curricular activities and events and in some cases operationalized within a 'Hindu contextualism' (S. Srivastava, 1998).

What does this mean for the Muslim children? Children are often thought of as apolitical actors, though the 20 years of research work in this area has attempted to reconstruct what childhood is (Thomas, 2009). My findings show that children engage with the political as ideas of nationalism are (re)produced in their everyday lives through a number of routine activities, in their schools (and other social spaces) which have often been perceived to be neutral spaces. It is important to note that whether Muslim children identify with religion or not, they have no escape from their religious identity becoming salient— the probability that a given identity will be invoked in a social interaction (Stryker, 2003). These interactions in turn bring about an important realisation, in the minds of children, of the 'self' being constructed as 'the other'.

By examining instances of 'hot nationalism' in detail, I also contribute to the analysis of children's voices in politically sensitive societies (Leonard, 2007) who are often excluded from such research if they themselves are not necessarily activists or involved in conflict (Kallio & Häkli, 2011). My study adds to Kallio's (2014) theorisation that children must be situated in their local contexts while trying to understand how they become political and continue to (re)produce these realities in their fluctuating and dynamic social world. This brings out the importance of studying place-identities whenever national identities are discussed as proposed by Scourfield et al. (2006), "since one's conception of national belonging is always intimately bound up with how one perceives, and how others perceive, the place in which one lives" (p.13). Thus, for those researching the Global South there is a need to be mindful that in their everyday lives, children's agency, thoughts, behaviours and emotions, revolve around and overlap with several axes of social differences or inequalities that are micro (due to age, gender, class, race, religion and caste) and macro (conflict/war, political unrest, economic crises, displacement/migration, climate change). Yet, a nuanced attention to these aspects allows childhood researchers to capture the complexity of how children find ways to resist oppressive structures as they create their own lifeworlds and futures within diverse local

contexts. To elaborate on this, I discuss my empirical findings with respect to key concepts that would inform future research on childhoods.

7.1 Considerations in method: Critical Social Psychology and Intersectionality

I hope to have demonstrated the usefulness of a CSP approach and the need to account for intersectionality while studying research questions concerning marginalised childhoods. As more researchers acknowledge the benefit of interdisciplinary methods to prevent a singular focus that looks at reality either from the lens of the individual or from the lens of the social structures (Illeris, 2018; Marvakis, 2020; Prout, 2011; Walkerdine, 2004), I have shown that this framework has equipped me to reconcile between disciplinary divides and present the messiness that results from the embeddedness of individual in the social. I have been able to capture and analyse children's lives in depth of the psychological and in breadth of the social, thus making a unique contribution to a minimally explored research area.

I have shown that children recognise that the construction of self as 'the other' is not a simple religious marginalisation rather it is due an intersection of their religious and national identities, which becomes evident through everyday nationalism and through episodes of hot nationalism (anti-Muslim violence, the CAA, the Babri-Ayodhya dispute and the passing of the Triple Talaq Bill). I have demonstrated in my empirical chapters, how this intersects further with other identities and at multiple scales. First, at a local, regional scale, it has been bolstered with regional discourses on Kannada nationalism which excludes Muslims, resulting in an atypical exclusion faced by Muslim students— othering is experienced in the regional identity despite being born, brought up, and being fluent in the language of the state. Such an exclusion has not been found within India and globally, as exclusion has always been found to be a result of not knowing the language. Second, when religious and national identities conflate with gender, they construct the male child as 'the violent other' and the female child as 'the oppressed other'. For children, these constructions become apparent as they witness hate-crimes against Muslims (lynching, rape, police brutality, targetting due to beef consumption, and veiling) personally or through media. And this becomes further intensified as children become aware (again through social media) of similar constructions at a global scale, and

related Islamophobic crimes, based on a similar essentialisation of Muslims as more loyal to their religion than to their nations. Third, when national and religious identities intersect with class identity, one of the ways it becomes most clearly manifested is in their geographical marginalisation and thereby, directly impacts their access to resources. I have discussed this with respect to access to school education. Fourth, intersectional identities may play out very differently during different circumstances— for example, I show that during the CAA, children's (and adults, across religious groups) national identities become most salient, during the Babri-Ayodhya issue the intersection of national and religious identities become most salient and finally in the case of triple talaq the intersections of gender, religion and national identities come to the forefront. In my study, caste did not emerge as a category among Muslims as discussed by other researchers in northern parts of India , however, there were sub-groups due to ideological differences with respect to religious practices. Through a close analysis of how dominant socio-political discourses are (re)produced in the lives of children using an intersectional lens, I have shown how 'the other' became further essentialized in the minds of children as nationalism discourses were able to powerfully conflate multiple identities. Also, children from the majority group were unable to recognize the intersectional identities of minority children despite their close interactions, unlike previous findings demonstrated by Christou & Spyrou (2017).

Thus, a CSP approach along with intersectionality must receive more attention in future research as it can provide rich insights into the complex dynamics that occur as a result of the constant dialogic relationship between children's inner and outer worlds. It elucidates the nuances in their identity negotiations, (re)constructions of self and the other, and their agency as they traverse several social spaces.

7.1 Identity (re)development and adult-like finesse

In their social interactions with people of other faiths, children experience being essentialised due to their religious identities as adult stereotypes are commonly projected onto them leading to their 'adultification' (R. Epstein et al., 2017; Goff et

al., 2014). In both cases, of cordial interfaith friendships[36] and of disparaging remarks/questions, children learn about being casted as 'the other'. Since identity is (re)produced in relation to others, this becomes more prominent for a minority group as their identity construction always entails a response to the views and stereotypes of the majority (Wagner et al., 2012). I extend the concept of adultification to explain that children carry the burden of having to give adult-like answers when they encounter questions about their faith in their social interactions failing which they experience alienation. However, children also see these interactions as hopeful opportunities wherein they attempt to deconstruct or challenge essentialised stereotypes by providing alternate explanations or clarifications. They reflect, learn, and use their agency in displaying a range of responses like resistance, assertion, emotions of hope, assertion, surprise, disappointment, frustration and some sense of an opportunity to engage with the dominant discourses to be able to correct/redefine them thus thinking through the boundaries of 'us' and 'them'. Thus, they "actively contribute to the social realities that they live in" (van Ommering, 2011) and attempt to renegotiate nationalistic discourses (Christou & Spyrou, 2017). By this, I argue that these breaches/ruptures that are often considered 'hot nationalism' are a part of the everyday of Muslim children's lives. Thus, nationalism must be understood in terms of scale— what may count as hot nationalism or the everyday may vary based on the actor who experiences it. From children's perspective, instances of local crimes can be seen as breaches or ruptures since the discriminatory treatment of the police based on religion had in turn confronted them with questions related to their national identities— of how the state differentiates its citizens based on their religious identities.

Here, I also add to the critique of social categorisation theory, which suggests simplistic understanding of in-groups and out-groups (Reicher, 2004), i.e., people develop their individual and collective group identities and also make conclusions about others based on social categories like gender, ethnicity, or race. It also suggests that, due to such an identification, individuals respond to others not as individuals but as members of social groups, along with the perception that out-groups are more

36 Children often emphasised that there was 'no problem' in their interfaith friendships or that peers of other faith have been friends with them despite parental warnings

homogenous than they actually are (Tajfel, 1978, 1984). However, I have demonstrated that children in my study show a greater sophistication and depth in their understanding. Many of them also discern between politically motivated agendas that result in these categories and question the singling out or targeting of the Muslim identity especially in the example of beef consumption. Thus, they recognise the role of media and political parties in creating these divides rather than just making simplistic conclusions about others as an out-group. Their own experiences with people from different faiths aid in this understanding. When asked questions about their faith, they discern between questions of curiosity and hostility. Though they experience strong emotions, they are forthcoming to answer these questions rather than retaliating/showing hostility towards their peers/adults of other faiths. Some children are also able to recognise that none of the groups (in-group and out-group) are homogenous nor do they discount the possibility of problems within their religious community. "Children and young people draw on a wide range of sources to make sense of religious issues and concerns, including their own faith, other religions, science, the media, and their own experiences" (Hemming, 2016, p. 59).

7.2 Schools as key sites of learning and identity (re)development

Within the school spaces, especially in VGHS, the state's imagination of the child being predominantly Hindu becomes apparent in its curricular and non-curricular activities/events such as celebrations of national festivals, school prayer and holiday calendar. Thus, my study also adds to the existing critique of secularism and multiculturalism in schools (Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Hemming, 2011; Hjerm, 2001; Lappalainen, 2006) as they naturalise practices of the dominant groups and reify the 'other'. I add to this critique by showing that the burden of demonstrating inclusivity lies on the minority children as they were expected to perform/conform to the majoritarian practices. This burden, increased by a powerful national narrative disseminated in the public sphere that casts the non-Hindu as 'the other', more specifically the Muslim as the 'violent other', has crucial implications on the Muslim children's identity development. Such loaded projections onto childhoods that disallow them to have a child-centred experience growing up at school can be applied in global (Islamophobic) contexts. Therefore, there is an urgent need for Indian

schools to recognise that they are key sites for building children's national identities and recalibrate to what extent their actual and hidden curriculum are in opposition or in keeping with the constitutional commitment of a secular national identity that treats all religions as equal. And there is a need to devise mechanisms that would make schools consolidate plurality of other identities (caste, religion, gender, and class) within the same national identity and thereby inculcating a fruitful integration among children from diverse backgrounds (Faas, 2013, 2020). This could further help children challenge nationalism discourses that are exclusionary.

Though all children encounter competing and often contradictory narratives, it is for the minority children to figure out how they must position themselves in relation to dominant discourses which become naturalised (Scourfield et al., 2006). It must be emphasised that children's positioning also varies based on social actors. As I have illustrated, Muslim children at VGHS largely performed the school ethos with an awareness of downplaying their religious identity, especially in presence of teachers, whereas at MOIS they strategically avoided confrontation or arguments with their non-Muslim teachers. I have shown that children were cautious of not appearing too religious in the school fearing that they would be stereotyped or bracketed as communal. However, in both schools, children openly challenged and resisted being cast as 'the other' with their peers or Muslim teachers and displayed a mix of silence (FGDs in VGHS) and openness (interviews) when they interacted with me. This shows how minority children use their agentic abilities as they navigate the school space while they construct their own national identities. Thus, when it comes to exploring nationalism in children's daily institutional lives, my findings suggest that we can think of the school site more broadly— not only as a pedagogic site where children learn who does or does not belong to the nation, but also a site where children enact nationalism discourses absorbed from media and the socio-political sphere. I hope to have demonstrated that both of these aspects are crucial.

7.3 Beyond schools: Learning and (re)development as (dis)continuous

Building further on this understanding, I highlight that, I have demonstrated that though children spend a considerable amount of time at school, their experiences inside the school and outside the school are in a continuous dialogue with each other,

thus forming an ongoing dynamic process of learning. As children traverse between schools and other social spaces, their learning across these spaces has crucial implications for developing congruence in the self and their multiple identities. Minority-based schools and madrasahs provide an inclusive environment by accommodating hijabs in their uniforms, prayer facilities and a continuation of similar values between the school and home/community. This also became evident in the traversal between protest sites and schools, during the anti-CAA protests, as children experienced schools as 'safe-spaces' to discuss the prevalent, alarming nationalistic discourses, which were suggesting the possible removal of citizenship rights of Muslims. However, other schools (state and privately-run) were either unaccommodating or explicitly discriminatory (children being force-fed during Ramadan, being directly asked to leave, being forced to perform poojas, sing bhajans etc). Children are acutely aware that these were manifestations of the larger 'othering' discourse. They responded in a variety of ways— by conforming to the school's practices, exiting the school, or simple behaviours like wearing back the hijab during class hours, and being uninterested in singing bhajans. While the connect between school and home allows for better learning outcomes, a disconnect or experience of exclusion inculcates a fear or apprehension which disengages children from the process of learning (K. Kumar & Oesterheld, 2007). More importantly, such an exclusion attempts to render, among minority children, a belief that their personal values are inferior, deficient, or substandard. This is compounded by the dominant discourses outside the school. I have illustrated the implications of such a devaluation or disconnect on identity.

First, I have shown that when it comes to the history curriculum, children learn differing accounts about nation's past, (especially the freedom struggle) in their school textbooks and through orally circulated community narratives. Both of these speak to their national identity or belongingness to the nation. Children argue that the official textbooks omit a large part of the Muslim contribution or mention it briefly and also cement this by discussing the state's deliberate attempts to erase existing chapters on Muslim rulers. Community narratives detail these contributions and further convey that patriotism is an important part of religious values, thus, assimilating religious and national identities. Children attempt to resolve this

discrepancy between official textbook histories and unofficial community narratives which leads to varying levels of appropriation— confusion, appropriating one version over the other or appropriating both based on context— thus, brings about in/congruence in identity. Minority-based spaces, due to their inclusiveness of community narratives and their openness to let children discuss/clarify inconsistencies, allow for children to develop congruence in their intersecting identities. However, there are individual differences as expected. On the other hand, children develop cognitive polyphasia (Jovchelovitch, 2012) due to an incongruence in their identities, especially in school spaces that inculcate a curriculum (actual and hidden) which aligns with the majority group and thereby excludes minorities. Therefore, my study adds to the existing body of literature which suggests that minority communities' histories should be acknowledged rather than silenced or avoided while teaching official history in ethnically or racially diverse societies (Epstein, 2006; Levstik, 2000; Mukherjee et al., 2018). Additionally, schools must become spaces that encourage critical inquiry, and allow students to voice their concerns or confusions and bring up matters of difference without fear (Souto-Manning, 2013).

Internalisation of oppressive discourses

Second, I have discussed another important identity process in the understanding of marginalised childhoods, which is the internalisation of oppressive discourses. Schools form an important site wherein this occurs in two ways as I have argued previously— through the school ethos and as larger socio-political discourses trickle into the school space. Here, I extend Fanon's (1986) insights on the singular identity of race to the intersectional identities of religion and nation, by demonstrating the manner in which marginalisation is internalised by Indian Muslim children, wherein they tend to use their oppressive realities to understand themselves. In certain instances, marking oneself as 'the other' could be completely unconscious, i.e., outside of their awareness (as in the analysis of linguistic nationalism), and in other instances it may be partial. However, I argue that this does not necessarily prevent them from developing emancipatory capabilities. In fact, the same process builds an awareness for them to negotiate their marginal position, resulting in dynamic, complex intrapsychic identity processes that vary based on the interpretation of

circumstances. I demonstrate that though children may internalise oppressive narratives wherein they blame their own community, it can still result in very contrasting identity dynamics within the self— the self may converge with the group in case the group identity is being threatened (in case of blaming Muslims for not praying at the Babri mosque) or may diverge from the group in absence of such a threat (in case of blaming women for protesting against Triple Talaq Bill, or for lack the unity due to intra-group factions/ideological differences). Such nuances deepen the understanding of the complexity of self and identity among children belonging to marginalised groups as they different traverse social spaces.

7.4 Conceptualising Agency

From all of the above stated range of responses, I contribute to the literature on children's agency. I add to the critique of applying a Western model of agency to non-Western contexts. I have shown that to comprehend marginalised children's agency, researchers would need to account for a wide range of contexts that children inhabit and different social actors that they interact with, while locating these in the larger socio-political context. Children engage in a variety of agentic responses— from serious forms of resistance like taking part in protests or fiercely arguing with their peers, to making decisions to work outside the country, to confrontational replies when stereotyped, to detailed explanations when questioned, to feeling restricted when they could not adequately respond to the anti-Muslim violence, to subtle acts of attempting to re-wear the hijab, to remaining silent or conforming to the school's practices, to deliberating in their behaviour with non-Muslim teachers to avoid conflict. By this, I argue that the model of agency proposed by Robson et al., (2007) must be extended to include axes of inequalities on the macro level that may be a significant part of the everyday lives of marginalised children. Weaving in the micro with the macro, thus, becomes essential to understand how children deploy their agency to respond to restrictions or opportunities in their environment. I also broaden our conceptualisation of agency to include responses of conformity and other subtle behaviours, rather than limiting agency only to responses of opposition or resistance (Mahmood, 2005). Additionally, my analysis shows that children who grow up in

marginalising contexts experience agency as 'temporal', i.e., they conceive that their ability to act may expand when they become adults.

7.5 Limitations, Implications and Future Scope

Due to the limited time frame and feasibility, I could carry out the study in four types of schools in urban Bangalore while including other social spaces as points of enquiry. As I have illustrated the importance of social contexts in understanding childhood, there is a need to explore a greater variety of schools, even within an urban context, and the resulting dynamics therein. A further extension of this to semi-urban or rural contexts and other geographical locations in India would not only expand the scope but also allow to unearth certain commonalities experienced by children irrespective of contexts as I have demonstrated that Muslim children have common experiences across contexts or social class. These would help in designing interventions at different scales— broad to specific/local/regional.

It would add valuable insights if the same children could be observed and spoken to in their neighbourhood or community spaces. As an extension, interactions with adults in the same spaces would build this understanding. As I have succinctly shown in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 3, section 3.1.2, a further deliberation on familial perspectives would aid in understanding children. This would help to cover a greater breadth while exploring research questions such as mine. Another important consideration that could be made is to track the lives of children as they move out of schools and transition to higher education. This would deepen the existing insights about their identity processes— their identity negotiations, their agency, and thus, their understanding of self and others as they grow and increase in experiences.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how national identity or 'Indianness' is constructed and disseminated within schools through their actual curriculum (music, history) and hidden curriculum (school prayer, celebration of festivals, holiday calendar, student-teacher communication). My overall findings could be further substantiated by a detailed examination of state's educational policy documents and the school curriculum. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise schools as key pedagogic sites for building children's national identities through their curriculum and concomitantly as spaces where children enact nationalism discourses absorbed from

media and the socio-political sphere. Therefore, there is a need to device mechanisms that would make schools consolidate plurality of other identities (caste, religion, gender, and class) within the same national identity and thereby inculcating a fruitful integration among children from diverse backgrounds. This is especially critical given the current trends within Indian nationalism.

In a similar vein, several developed and developing countries have been directing efforts towards designing inclusive curriculums to improve learning outcomes (Kluth et al., 2003; Levstik, 2000; Mawhinney, 2007). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that promoting and protecting the rights of minority groups is essential since they contribute to the political and social stability of their countries. Ensuring minority rights acknowledges the dignity and equality of all individuals and furthers participatory development. This in turn contributes to the lessening of tensions among groups and individuals and these factors are major determinants for stability and peace. So, it becomes imperative that we question how and where the country's resources are being spent? Are these leading to more progress and peace or are they building a hostile environment for the youth?

To conclude, as Millei & Imre (2021) point out that since institutional spaces in many countries are now frequented with right-wing political discourses that influence affective and pedagogic dimensions, there is a significant need to explore childhoods. India is one such example wherein anti-minority sentiments and violence, which includes children, have gained serious momentum (more after this fieldwork) and have often been justified as legitimate (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Pandey, 2021). This calls for greater attention to how institutional spaces and children (re)interpret and (re)produce these discourses in their daily lives.

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