From behind the curtain: a study of girls' madrasa in India
Winkelmann, M.

Citation for published version (APA):
Winkelmann, M. (2005). From behind the curtain: a study of girls' madrasa in India Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
4 Curriculum and learning

'I promise that I shall observe the rules and regulations and that I shall study with great dedication and that I shall stay away from those things that are a waste of time and that I shall never display any immoral behaviour. I promise that I shall dedicate twenty four hours a day to studies in accordance with the timetable of the Jamia and that I shall obey the command of those in charge of the Jamia and accept any punishment if I break any of the rules and regulations.' (Students' pledge; see Appendix I)

The following sections examine the Madrasatul Niswan's curriculum with a view to finding out what ideas, other than the social background of the founders and their informal affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat, have left their mark on the educational model proposed by this institution. As a particular understanding of morality, along with a certain ideal of Islamic womanhood appear to be central for bringing about the madrasa's broader educational mission, the question is raised how disciplining mechanisms of various kinds ensure the reproduction of the above ideals. In order to put my findings into perspective, a 'dual type' madrasa for girls is introduced for comparative purposes.

4.1 Islamic education: the broader context

Regarding the history and background of the madrasa, the following is explained in the Arabic and Urdu 'advertising' brochure:

'Delhi was a place of historical and academic importance before the advent of the British imperialists. There were many madrasas, which played an outstanding role in the field of education and dawah. Their alumni, who were great scholars, served the cause of Islam and made their efforts for the resurgence of Islam. But when the British subjugated India, they forced the madrasas to close down. They also hanged religious leaders and founders of madrasas. The whole city witnessed massacres of ulama. The number of madrasas was in thousands. However, following the tragedy, believers of Islam sacrificed whatever they possessed so that the word of Allah should prevail over other ideologies. They established Islamic madrasas apart from other endeavours. One
cannot imagine the intensity of pains taken by the Islamic reformers at that crucial point of time for the sake of God. The British also started to propagate Christianity through the channel of education. After India was enslaved, they opened colleges and universities for that purpose. They also prepared a curriculum based on falsehood. To achieve their aims, they did not only target boys but girls and women as well. They would think that the cradle is the child's first school. Muslims saw a threat in the expansion of these networks of schools and kindergartens at the hand of the British. So they in turn established a countrywide network of madrasas to combat the threat posed by missionary schools. But these madrasas were not able to counter these challenges. The urgent need for madrasas to educate girls was felt very desperately. So therefore, Muhammad Ilyas Barabankvi founded the first Islamic madrasa for girls, the Madrasatul Niswan, with the cooperation of his well wishers. Not a single madrasa of this kind was found in the vicinity of Delhi. In the beginning, the madrasa neither had its own building, land, or any financial assistance. A kind-hearted woman donated her own house for this noble cause. As a result, a madrasa came into being. From 1 June 1996 onwards admission started and from 6 June 1996 teaching began formally. Since its inception, the madrasa started gaining popularity. A large number of girls from Delhi and its vicinity flocked there. This forced the madrasa’s authorities to think of how to fulfil this growing need. Thus, three more buildings were purchased, which helped to meet all needs. But these new buildings proved insufficient due to the ever-increasing number of students. Even the hostel and other facilities could no longer meet the needs. They were determined to purchase a large plot of land and to build multi-storied hostels so that the students, teachers, and employees may be accommodated. Muslims who want to guide their generation on an Islamic footing should sacrifice their lives and wealth for this cause. This will prove to be of eternal reward for them. In this regard, many hadith are narrated, one of which is the following: 'Abdullah narrates the Holy Prophet (pbuh) saying: 'who among you considers the wealth of heirs dearer to him than his own wealth?' [...] God's Messenger said: 'So his wealth is whatever he spends (for God's cause) during his life (on good deeds) while the wealth of his heirs is whatever he leaves after his death.' (Bukhari) We pray to God to accept our deeds that way and to reward those who cooperate in this great cause and serve religion. We ought to help accomplish the aims and objectives of the madrasa.'
While in the above account the emergence of girls' madrasas is mainly presented as a move to counter British missionary activities directed at young Muslim women, the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan emphasized personal reform along with equality of access to the discipline of Islamic theology as the foremost reasons for establishing the madrasa. With a view to the institution's educational aims not much is said except that the institution stands for the guidance of the students on an 'Islamic footing'. In the Madrasatul Niswan's admission papers (see Appendix I) we find the additional information that 'the aim of the madrasa is the reform (islah) of morality (ikhlaq) and actions (amal). Apart from the Madrasatul Niswan's brochure and admission papers, I looked for materials that would allow for an understanding of the particular educational aims of this girls' madrasa from a broader perspective.

Starting with an Urdu source, the Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Hind's publication *Al-Jamiyat Weekly* summarizes the origin of Islamic education as follows: The first verse of the Quran called *Iqra* is considered the founding stone of the Islamic education system. Here it is written that God gives superiority to man above the angels, because of man's possession of knowledge. The Quran reads: 'Behold thy Lord said to the angels - I will create a vicegerent on earth!' They said: 'Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate thy praises and glorify thy holy name?' He said: 'I know what ye know not.' And he taught Adam the names of all things; then he placed them before the angels and said: 'Tell me the names of these if ye are right.' They said: 'Glory to thee, of knowledge we have none, save what thou hast taught us, in truth it is thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom.' (*Surah Al-Baqarah*, 31-32)

Other sections of the Quran mention those who are learned in a favourable manner too, as being knowledgeable is considered a means of accumulating merit for the Hereafter. 'Is one who worships devoutly during the hours of night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the *Miraj* of his Lord – (like one who does not)? Say: 'Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?' It is those who are imbued with understanding that receive admonition (*Surah Az-Zumar*, 9). As a second example, the following verse is cited: 'Allah will raise up to (suitable) ranks (and degrees) those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge.' (*Surah Al-Mujadala*, 11). My observations during fieldwork pointed in a similar direction as the above argument and quotations, because the young women in the Madrasatul Niswan seemed to hold the idea of accumulating merit for the Hereafter.
through studying and teaching in the madrasa in great regard. Moreover, it appears to be a widely shared view that seeking knowledge represents a ritual obligation and that Islam encourages learning for men and women alike.

With regard to women and learning in particular we read elsewhere that 'she is under a moral and religious obligation to seek knowledge, develop her intellect, broaden her outlook, cultivate her talents and then utilize her potential to the benefit of her soul and of her society' (Jawad 1988:205). Similarly, the Al-Jamiyat Weekly states that God created man to worship Him and the purpose of knowledge and education is to obey Him and His will. Seeking knowledge (ilm) is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman, and according to the Prophet knowledge comprises Quran, hadith, and knowledge sanctioned under Quran and hadith. As a result, knowing and exploring nature as areas of science are not prohibited by Islam, because God is recognized and remembered as the Creator of nature through the above activities. In such an argument science cannot challenge the view that God is omnipotent and omnipresent, as a result of which the same article claims that God's commands are neither directed against human reason nor do they forbid experiments, as a learned person is thought to come closer to the Witnesses of God and his Followers directly or indirectly. In other words, science bears witness to God and His will (Bana 1988:17-20).

Those who advocate equal access to Islamic knowledge for women often cite the example of female teachers of hadith among the women of the Prophet's time, as we saw in the previous chapters. The centrality of teaching hadith is justified as the collections of hadith are considered repositories of Prophetic sunnah (Momin 2001:22). With regard to the most prominent methods of teaching hadith, oral recitation, reading from the written text, and finally dictation are mentioned. Similarly, concerning the contents of teaching the Quran ranks first, followed by the hadith, the biography of the Prophet (sirah). The preferred methodology of instruction includes the following components: sitting quietly, listening with attention and understanding, memorization, acting according to what one has learnt, and finally dissemination. According to Al-Ghazali, the teacher should train students according to their ability, with affection, and understanding. Moreover, the use of illustrations and examples are recommended along with discussion, debate, and 'contemporary methods' (Momin 2001:42-43).

To acquire knowledge, the following four character traits are deemed necessary: determination, patience, humility, and broadmindedness. In addition, tireless efforts and bearing hardships to acquire knowledge rank
among the highest virtues that God encourages and appreciates. Finally, it is noted that no scholar is perfect in knowledge as scholars learn from each other; struggle and sacrifices are necessary to learn; and patience is necessary as the truth is hidden and knowledge is found in past, present, and future. The following hadith illustrates why knowledge should be transmitted: According to the Prophet, three things remain of a person after he passes away, namely eternal charity (sadaqah-e-jariyah); the knowledge another person learned from him; and a righteous son who begs forgiveness for his parents before God. Another hadith claims that one who desires leadership should acquire knowledge first and should continue to do so after becoming a leader, because knowledge is enhanced, strengthened, and secured through continuous study. Since God is considered to be full of knowledge and wisdom, he also represents the primary source of knowledge and transmitter of knowledge to man. However, while God is perfect in knowledge, human beings are not and thus learning is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman (Bana 2002:17-20). In the same issue of the Al-Jamiyat, the Prophet's migration to Medina is presented as the historical founding moment of women's education in Islam, because it was then that education became institutionalized. Once the quadrangular construction called suffa was built above the ground level in the Prophet's Mosque (Masjid-e-Nabi), the Prophet began teaching men and women there. For the women a day of the week was fixed during which the Prophet used to teach them exclusively. Besides, the women's husbands, sons, and the 'Prophet's House' operated schools as well (Rizvi 2002:24-25).

Turning to the contemporary situation, the relation between Islamic education and the modern age is examined from an ethical perspective. Islamic education should aim at establishing a civic society based on a firm belief in God and His followers. Underlying Islamic education is the strive to bring about welfare, prosperity, and the salvation of the individual and of society, both in this world and in the Hereafter. In addition, the Islamic education system endeavours to establish justice, the recognition of human rights, and dignity of human life. With a view to the above aims, the Islamic system of education should emphasize the formation of ethical characters, as an exclusively materialistic life fails to provide peace of heart and mind. The primary objective of Islamic education should be to pave the way for righteous conduct in society, both with a view to pleasing God now, and with a view to the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter. In the above argument, education represents a social responsibility, the purpose of which is to nurture the hidden and natural qualities of a child through mechanisms that aid the upbringing and correc-
tion of the child. Islamic education is viewed as a purposeful act, endowed with the power to bring about the reformation of the individual and of society at large. Furthermore, education is seen as a process that can be adapted to meet new challenges and situations. As social development and prosperity depend on the definition of educational goals, one of the primary objects of Islamic education today is to prepare a child to be a responsible citizen, and therefore virtues are taught to bring about a spirit of cooperation and stability in society (Rizvi 2002:24-25). Even though the formulation was different, the educational ideals of the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan tallied with the above ideals to a great extent. As we saw in the previous chapter, both men stated that they wanted to bring about reform in women’s actions with a view to improving society at large and with a view to accumulating merit for the Hereafter. In order to realize this aim, the Madrasatul Niswan prescribes a curriculum that is based on, though not identical with, the standardized madrasa curriculum for boys known as the dars-e-nizami4. The curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan

At first glance the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan seems ambitious for a five-year course (see Appendix II). To begin with, the ‘Preparatory Year’ offers a great variety of subjects. Herein, emphasis is laid on reading and memorizing sections from the Quran, learning the method of Quran recitation called *tajwid*, internalizing requirements related to ritual obligations such as the five daily prayers (namaz), along with mastering Arabic and Urdu5. Apart from continuing the memorization of the Quran and its recitation, the ‘Pre-Senior Secondary Year’ introduces a host of new subjects. Among the new subjects are the Girls’ Islamic Course (see Jeffery 2004), Islamic law (fiqh), and history (tarikh). During the ‘First Year’ dogmatics (aqidah) is added, along with the biography of the Prophet (sirah), and Arabic literature. In the ‘Second Year’, the first collections of traditions of the Prophet (hadith) are studied, together with exegesis (tafsir), and rhetoric. The ‘Third Year’ and ‘Fourth Year’ appear to form a phase of consolidation, as no major new subject areas are added, and the ‘Fifth Year’ focuses almost exclusively on the study of ten voluminous collections of hadith. According to the official curriculum, a minimum of non-Islamic subjects is offered throughout the entire course, which includes English, mathematics, and according to the Founder and Manager also Hindi and computer skills. As a peculiarity of this madrasa, at the end of the list of subjects it is noted that daily readings from the *Fazail-e-Amal* (The Virtues of Everyday Actions) are mandatory for the entire
duration of the course. As we saw before, this tablighi book teaches how to accumulate merit (sawab) for the Hereafter through everyday actions.

A comparison with Malik’s list of books and subjects constituting the contemporary dars-e-nizami (Malik 1997:536-541, see Appendix III) indicates that many books and even entire subjects were omitted in the curriculum of the Madrasatul Niswan. With regard to other subjects something has been added, and in addition my findings suggest that the practice in turn may deviate from the formal curriculum. With a view to the absences it easy to see that many books are missing in the field of Islamic law (fiqh), with a view to the basis of Islamic jurisprudence (usul al-fiqh), and concerning logic, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, and debate. Regarding other subjects a lot has been added, for example Quran recitation (tajwid) and memorization, history, Arabic essay, Urdu, and the cluster of subjects related to ‘personal grooming’ formed by ‘Islamic Upbringing,’ Home Science, ‘Daily Routine,’ and the weekly Thursday Programme. Besides, the entire body of value-oriented adab literature has been added as well, which includes Thanawi’s Bihishti Zewar, the Qirat-ur-rashida, the Ladkion ka Islami Course6, as well as the tablighi oriented Fazail-e-Amal.

Malik notes that owing to its strong emphasis on linguistic subjects, the non-Quranic sciences are ‘disproportionately represented’ in the current dars-e-nizami (Malik 1997:536). While it seems as if the range of subjects is more diverse in the Madrasatul Niswan, there is a strong emphasis on teaching the traditions of the Prophet (ahadith) and on ‘grooming’ the girls in a particular Islamic way of life, in keeping with the community’s ideals regarding Islamic womanhood. As I observed during fieldwork, the official curriculum does not indicate that in many cases the books mentioned are not studied completely. For example, in the case of the Hidaya, which is a bulky work on Islamic law, the chapters to be studied suggest that the selection was made with a particular aim in mind. The strategic reply I received when asking the teachers about the discrepancies between curriculum and practice was that the curriculum had been narrowed down ‘to fit the constraints of a five-year course’ (instead of the original sixteen and later eight years of studies for boys). However, we ought to keep in mind that the Founder and Manager of the Madrasatul Niswan set the curriculum, as we noted in the previous chapter. Apart from struggling to fit all subjects into the shortened course, the two men have a particular ideological background that may influence their decision regarding what they deem important for the girls to know.

Even though the men in charge claimed that the curriculum was based on the dars-e-nizami, apparently the adjustments were made with
a particular agenda in mind. As a consequence, certain books, especially in the field of Islamic law, logic, and philosophy, were either left out entirely or they are only partially studied in practice. For example, with regard to Islamic law only those sections from the prescribed books are studied that are deemed important for girls, such as questions related to marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. As a result, the graduates only know Islamic law as far as questions pertaining to women are concerned by the end of their course. The Founder's and Manager's decision regarding the contents of what is taught appears to be informed by a particular understanding of what a (learned) Muslim woman ought to know. Despite the Founder's wish to provide equal access to Islamic theology for women, the extent to which the young women have access to certain subjects is determined by the men in charge of running the madrasa. Although the men in charge claim that the curriculum is the same as the dars-e-nizami taught in madrasas for boys, we saw that the curriculum is substantially different, and moreover what is taught in practice often differs from the official curriculum.

4.3 Teaching methods and discipline

Contrary to what I heard many interlocutors outside the madrasa claim regarding the madrasas' teaching methods, namely that they would promote learning without understanding, the Madrasatul Niswan's teachers took great care to ensure that the students understood what they taught. After all, in the teachers' opinion their work did not merely represent a profession, because teaching was seen as a mission that ensured religious merit for the Hereafter. The spiritual side of their work seemed to equip the teachers with patience and tranquillity, and the students in turn generally displayed a great zeal for learning. For example, whenever an Arabic text was introduced, the teacher used to read it out loud first, following which she explained the vocabulary. In the meantime, the students who sat in a semi circle on the floor around her took notes. Following the morning classes the students had to learn the vocabulary of all the subjects taught that day by heart, because next day's class usually began with a round of repeating the vocabulary and contents of the previous lesson. During those repetitions the students took turns translating words from Urdu into Arabic and vice versa, and then they took turns reading the same text out loud, thereby demonstrating that they had understood the lesson.

In case someone's reading was not fluent, the student's turn ended and the teacher asked the next student to continue reading. As a disciplinary
measure, the student who failed to perform up to the mark had to stand up and remained in a standing position for the remainder of the class, or until the teacher told her to sit down again. Often more than one student ended up spending the remainder of the class standing up, as the students were under tremendous pressure to master the vocabulary of not just one but up to eight classes in a single afternoon. Continuous poor performance on the students' part tended to give rise to discussions in the staff room during recess, while correcting the students' homework, or while marking their written exam papers. In line with the community's view that learning represents a way of accumulating merit for the Hereafter as well, the teachers' tone was generally marked by worry about the student rather than criticism. Similarly, the students mostly seemed to form support networks rather than being competitive in situations wherein disciplining took place. Whenever students repeatedly failed to perform during the daily repetitions and tests, the Thursday Programme was the occasion when more severe reprimanding and mild scolding took place. Although I saw students break out in tears at such negative feedback, I also observed how warmly others comforted their fellow students by hugging them, holding their hands, or by wiping their tears away.

As an example taken from one of the classes in adab or 'value education', I would like to introduce the translation of an Arabic text from the Qirat-ur-rashida illustrating one of the many moral lessons taught with regard to everyday life. It deserves mention that the book was written by the earlier mentioned Maulana Saiyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi of the Nadwatul Ulama. The Qirat-ur-rashida represents a 'key text' of the adab classes, as therein lessons in social etiquette are taught at the hand of the exemplary lives of the first Caliphs of Islam. The two volumes provide stories on everyday matters, such as eating and drinking the proper way, dressing properly, displaying appropriate behaviour when attending or organizing marriages, and running a household with a view to pleasing God. I chose the following text on the etiquette of eating and drinking, as it addresses an everyday matter, owing to which the students could relate to both the story and the lesson taught, as we shall see.

*Etiquette of eating and drinking* (Nadwi, Part II, n.d.:72-74)

'When Umar bin Abu Salma was a mere child, he would live with his mother Umm-e-Salma, who was married to the Holy Prophet after the demise of her husband Abdul Salma. Thus, Umar bin Abu Salma came under the upbringing of the Holy Prophet. Umar, the child, was an orphan slave. His father had died when he was a small child. But he
ate with the Holy Prophet like a child eating with his father. The Holy Prophet loved him very much and taught him conduct and manners. Once, while eating with the Holy Prophet, he ate from the plate, but from different places, like most children do. The Holy Prophet taught him how to eat and instructed him to read the name of God before having a meal and to start eating from what was in front of him. The teachings of the Holy Prophet are meant for the entire Muslim ummah. Thus they should adopt the entire Islamic etiquette including the etiquette of eating and drinking.

Here are citations of a few sayings and teachings of the Holy Prophet concerning the etiquette of eating and drinking. The Prophet said: I have been sent as a moral guide. Abu Hurairah says: The Prophet never complained about a meal. He ate if he liked the food and left it if he disliked it. The Prophet said: I do not take my meals while leaning. Anas says: The Prophet used to pause and breathed thrice while drinking water. Ibn Abbas narrates that the Prophet said: Neither breathe out into a vessel nor blow into it while drinking. Anas quotes the Prophet saying: Don't drink (water) while standing. Abu Hudaifa quotes the Prophet saying: Don't eat and drink from a silver or gold plate or vessel. For such things are for the disbelievers in this worldly life and for us in the Hereafter.'

During class, the teacher read out the entire Arabic text aloud first, following which she translated it word by word into the more familiar Urdu. Then she began to explain the text in Urdu with special regard to the moral lesson of that day. As a final step, the teacher encouraged the students to find examples from their own lives to illustrate and internalize the contents of their daily lesson in adab. With a view to accomplishing her didactic aim, the teacher asked the students whether they observed the requirements regarding eating and drinking at all times, as mentioned in the text. Hesitating to possibly appear in an unfavourable light, apart from muffled giggles the students remained silent. The teacher then asked whether the students had observed others eat their food. By way of responding to the question the students became more lively. One student pointed out that she had seen someone eat her food from all over her plate the other day, following which her observation was discussed in relation to the above text. Ultimately the teacher succeeded at contextualizing the text for the students and concluded that from now on they should be sure to act in line with the requirements of eating and drinking during every meal.

The English classes formed the exception with regard to the teaching methods, and the teachers were quick to admit that they simply lacked the
training to teach proper 'Spoken English'. Since the teachers generally did not understand the English texts, they mostly taught their classes with the help of Hindi translations of the English textbooks, which often resulted in odd readings and even odder pronunciations. Similar to lessons in other subjects, the students were asked to read the English texts out loud, but as they were unable to make sense of what they read, they did so without much intonation. Besides the teachers' insufficient training, a certain distrust vis-à-vis English and the culture associated with it accounted for the low level of interest the girls took in the contents of their English Readers, which they assumed to be manipulated by the 'government' anyway. Nevertheless, especially the Principal badi appa admitted on many occasions that they were all in need of a decent English teacher, as she thought they should master the language in order to keep up with the world outside and its innovations, such as computers and the internet.

The daily afternoon classes on the hadith collections of Bukhari deserve special mention too, as this was the only subject taught by a male teacher. Consequently, the classes were not held in the main building of the Madrasatul Niswan, but in the house opposite the Principal's and Manager's residence. For this occasion, the final year students used to put on their burqas every afternoon and set out for the short walk to the other building. They always made sure that they arrived prior to the teacher, so that they could enter the building and walk upstairs without being seen. Usually they came in so early that they were able to spend some extra time in the single room on the first floor, where they sat and talked, read, or knitted until the teacher arrived. The teacher from the Tablighi Markaz remained on the ground floor for his class and communicated with the girls upstairs through a microphone. Apart from the above examples of 'special' classes, during which problems related to language and means of communication played a role, teaching was a well established routine. Despite the relative austerity of life in the Madrasatul Niswan, a certain courtesy marked the overall tone of interactions between teachers and students, which is subsumed by the earlier mentioned concept of adab.

4.4 Adab or value education and the ideal Muslim woman

'If superstitions, undue veneration of tombs, pagan customs, extravagance on the occasions of marriages and deaths and the like are still prevalent in our homes, it is largely due to the withering of the real spirit of Islam in the hearts of our women.' (Nadwi 2001:2)
The aim of bringing about a sense of adab in the students was not limited to the formally scheduled didactic activities that took place in the classroom. Even though lessons in adab or ‘value education’ only took up a relatively small portion of the timetable, my findings suggest that adab permeated the everyday actions and overall atmosphere of the Madrasatul Niswan to a great extent. Introducing the students to and grooming them in the rules laid out by the community’s understanding of adab appeared to be pivotal for the madrasa’s primary educational aim of bringing about the ‘reform (islah) of the morality (ikhlaq) and actions (amal)’, as stated in the admission papers (see Appendix I). The same admission papers demand that ‘[...] the students must fully respect the teachers, founders, and ulama behind the Jamia’, and so a related question is how the above aims were achieved and put into practice. The very first lesson the students learned about adab was fourfold; namely that they had to show respect for their teachers, books, their authors, and finally the madrasa. With regard to showing respect for their teachers, we should keep in mind that most of the teachers were barely older than their students, as they were recent madrasa graduates themselves. Nevertheless, instead of using a less formal address like the first name or tum, the students addressed the teachers using the formal app or appa. Considering that some of the teachers graduated from the Madrasatul Niswan just one year earlier and that the girls used to interact with them as fellow students, one could have imagined a less formal tone of address.

As far as the timetable was concerned, eight adab classes were scheduled per week for all students, without finding mention in the official curriculum. The books studied included the two volumes of the earlier mentioned Qirat-ur-rashida, and since the books are not directed at women in particular, the lessons left scope for the teachers’ and students’ creativity when searching for parallel situations and moral lessons in their own lives. While Nadwi’s Qirat-ur-rashida is not mentioned in the curriculum at all, another book used for the adab classes, namely Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi’s Bihishti Zewar (Heavenly Ornaments; see Metcalf 1990), is listed under Islamic law or fiqh. The Bihishti Zewar belongs to the genre of late nineteenth century ‘advice literature’ for Muslim women, as it aims to instruct the young Muslim woman on how to be a good wife, mother, and family member. For example, the author explains how a young woman should write letters and to whom, how to dress properly, how to act during public functions and gatherings, what to read, how to speak, what to cook, what to spend money on, etc. In short, the book covers just about every aspect of everyday life. In the Bihishti
Zewar, as well as in a host of similar ‘advice’ books for women, and during the adab classes, the female Companions of the Prophet tended to be presented as role models for Muslim women today.

Parallel types of role models can be found in more contemporary literature as well. In *Islam and the Promotion of Knowledge*, for example, female teachers who issued *fatawa* ‘with the same authority as men’ during the time of the Prophet are mentioned (Momin 2001:18-19). By the same token, another author claims that ‘it is difficult to come across a distinguished savant of this [i.e. early Islamic, M.W.] period who did not sit at the feet of a woman teacher’ (Chaudhry 1953:72). More specifically, ‘Ayesha [sic] represented the scholar and the savant who was a radiating centre of educative influence and at whose feet the savants and the slaves sat to acquire religious knowledge’ (Chaudhry 1953:69). In addition, more recent publications on the female Companions include Nadwi’s books on Aisha (Nadwi 2001; 2000), who appears to feature as the most prominent role model for women.9

With regard to activities Aisha engaged in that distinguished her as a scholar and as a role model for other women, it is noted that she used to organize weekly lectures for women, the Prophet’s Companions used to consult her concerning theological matters, and she challenged the Companion’s views on matters pertaining to women. In other words, ‘in deciding juristic points concerning women, she used to keep their convenience in view and would cite the Qur’an [sic] and Hadith to support her opinion’ (Nadwi 2001:54;94). Moreover, ‘in the tafsir the excellence of Hazrat Aisha was un-paralleled among the male and female companions of the Holy Prophet. Her status as a scholar and commentator of the Holy Qur’an [sic] was at par with the elders among the companions like Hazrat Abdullah Bin Abbas’ (Nadwi 2000:256). By the same token, ‘among the companions whose rulings (fatawa), if collected, could develop into volumes of books, Hazrat Aisha has been included’ (Nadwi 2000:279; see also Nadwi 2001:10; 89). Kandhelwi’s *Shamail Tirmidhi*, which is part of the Madrasatul Niswan’s curriculum (see Appendix II), includes Aisha’s ahadith (Kandhelwi 2001), regarding which the earlier mentioned Chaudhry claims that there is a total of 2,210 (Chaudhry 1953:71).

Explaining why Aisha held such a high position and how the world has changed since, Nadwi continues: ‘During the good days of the companions, the moral standard of the female companions was very high and they could, without let and hindrance, participate in the gatherings of prayers and discussions. But, towards the end of the age of companions, there was a set back in the moral standards and Hazrat Aisha pointed this out without
fear and favour. She said: Had the Holy Prophet found in the women the (moral) degradation (now arrived at), he would have prevented them from attending (congregation in) the mosques as had the women of Bani Israel been prohibited.' (Nadwi 2000:264). The same publication lists the actions, character traits, and elements constituting the social life of the female Companions. These markers deserve mention, since they set the female Companions apart from other women, by virtue of which they are considered worth emulating for women today. Among the praiseworthy actions are the acceptance of Islam, bearing of hardships, keeping ritual obligations, and abstention from music and musical instruments (Nadwi 2000:193-208). The female Companions' character traits include dignity and self respect, sacrifice of personal interests, avoidance of vengeance, endurance in the face of affliction, and honour and chastity (Nadwi 2000:219-226). Finally, among the elements that are thought to constitute a model social life are kindness to kin and relatives, protection and defence of the wealth and property of the husband, and love, service, and seeking pleasure of the husband (Nadwi 2000:228-235).

Tackling the problem of the perceived 'backwardness' of Indian Muslim women, Nadwi concludes that 'the truth is that, if the women folk wish to guard their rights and privileges, they must pay special attention to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an [sic] and the Traditions concerning themselves' (Nadwi 2000:263), as it is only then that 'Muslim women even today can rise to high position of respect in society if they follow the great lives of the women companions' (Nadwi 2000:286). Although the author sets in with a praise of the great scholarly qualities of the female Companions, what he discusses at length are their moral qualities, their extraordinary character traits, and what made them good Muslim women. Ideas of what it means to be a good Muslim woman are (re)read through the lens of a preconceived ideal of womanhood, and the result is the taking shape of a role model based on examples borrowed from the past.

The above argument and examples from the literature reminded me of stories and moral appeals I had heard in the Madrasatul Niswan during the Thursday Programme and adab classes. On the above occasions, the young women were encouraged to bear hardships for the sake of Islam; they were reminded of an ideal past; and they were taught to behave in ways thought to be in accordance with past ideals. Apart from the informally scheduled classes, adab was maybe even more so transmitted, practised, and reproduced through the 'informal' curriculum, which is to say through rules regarding discipline, body control, and behavioural expectations. The subtle and yet all-pervading impact of adab becomes tangible in the fol-
lowing two examples of young girls who came to the Madrasatul Niswan as ‘outsiders’ who were nonetheless affected by the madrasa’s ‘civilizing mission’.

To begin with, there was a girl in her early teens who worked as a cleaner in the Madrasatul Niswan. She stood out in her appearance, as her *salwar kameez* tended to be very colourful, thereby contrasting the otherwise sober colours in the madrasa, and moreover her head was generally uncovered. After some months, a gradual change set in, as she began to linger around the staff room more and more. From that point of time onwards, in between her chores she was taught to read and write Urdu and Arabic properly. As a result, she was often found in a corner of the small staff room, her head covered with a clean white dupatta, reciting texts from her Urdu and Arabic primers. The young woman seemed quite new to the habit of covering her head properly, but she managed to keep it covered most of the time. The girl’s new favourite pastime was to quietly observe and listen to the teachers’ conversations in the staff room, while dedicating herself more or less fully to her self-studies. The former cleaner seemed to take pride in her newly acquired and visibly more demure appearance, as she spoke in a muted voice, tended to lower her eyes when addressing someone, and walked about in a much more feminine manner than before. Even though her age was roughly the same as the students, she did not socialize with them, nor did there seem to be a place for her among them. Nevertheless, the girl’s status in the Madrasatul Niswan had changed, as she gained respectability through her interest in Islamic education, which suggests how upward social mobility can be achieved through the cultivation of a modest self. To the extent that she showed willingness to adjust to the codes of dressing and behaving, the teachers began to pay more attention to her, instead of just ordering for her to fetch them hot milk tea, clean up the floor, or put away dishes they had used for their breakfast.

As a second case, children below the age of enrolment used to come to the madrasa for tutorials in Arabic and/or reading, memorizing, and reciting the Quran on a daily basis. Apart from what they learned, I also observed visible changes in these children. For months at a stretch there were twin girls, around six years of age, who came to the Madrasatul Niswan daily for their first lessons in reading and memorizing the Quran. The girls stood out as they were dressed rather shabbily, with their make-do dupattas barely covering their heads. In addition, their complexion was greyish, as if they hardly got to go outside the house. Over the months their appearance changed, because due to their daily walks to the madrasa the children began to look much healthier. There was a blush on their other-
wise pale cheeks, their hair was neatly brushed and oiled, and the dupattas were carefully tied around their heads. As the twins were below the age of purdah, they were allowed to come to the madrasa by themselves, since they lived in the neighbourhood, just like most of the young children who came to the Madrasatul Niswan for tutorials. While initially the girls carried their Quran copies tied in plain pieces of cloth, after a while they proudly tied the Quran in beautiful green silk covers with matching buttons. Soon after the introduction of the silk Quran covers, the girls were no longer seen with the Quran lying on a cushion or a pile of books in front of them either, as both possessed ornamentally carved wooden Quran stands. Once the lesson was over, they folded up the wooden stands and carried them home together with the wrapped up Quran. Although when they first came to the madrasa the twin girls appeared anxious and scared, they gradually eased into the new environment. While they hardly spoke to anyone, they studied with great dedication and in a strikingly disciplined fashion for girls their age. Except for mastering their first lessons in reading and memorizing the Quran, apparently the girls had also learned something about adab, which came to the fore by means of the visible changes in dress and appearance, as well as in their ways of showing respect for the Quran. Within a short period of time the girls had picked up the moral undertone of conduct and dressing in their first encounter with the Madrasatul Niswan.

The above examples demonstrate how adab serves the madrasa’s broader mission of bringing about reform in the morality and actions of Muslim girls through Islamic education. In addition, some of the young women belonging to the ‘core families’ got married to or hoped to get married to Indian boys studying in Medina and wished to settle there, as we will see in the following chapter. With regard to such future prospects, proper grooming was thought to be crucial for the young girls. The subtlety with which mechanisms of disciplining appear to function in the Madrasatul Niswan suggests that the influence of adab is indeed all-pervading.

4.5 The madrasa as a total institution

After demonstrating the impact of adab on the education provided by the Madrasatul Niswan, I would now like to examine the disciplining mechanisms by drawing upon Foucault’s concept of the ‘total institution’. To begin with, activity took place in accordance with a timetable in the madrasa, which was centrally positioned in the staff room. The students copied the timetable into their notebooks, as there was just a single copy of the official
timetable, which was hand written by the calligraphy teacher, whose task it was to make adjustments if necessary. As we saw earlier, there appeared to be tensions between normalizing measures, such as the timetable, means of surveillance, rules for punishment, and seating, and the ways in which individuality could be expressed in a context wherein there were few diversions.

According to Foucault, for the disciplinary society (Foucault 1995:216) to arise, initially the 'inversion of disciplines' was necessary. What was initially formulated in negative terms, such as the need to control those of unsound mind or as helping people out of their ignorance and poverty, was reformulated in positive terms, like increasing people's utility with a view to the labour market and developing a healthy mind and body. Similarly, originally education was meant to provide a sound upbringing to people who were poor and ignorant, while later on it was justified in utilitarian terms as a way to produce useful individuals and with a view to the labour market (Foucault 1995:210-211). The ensuing 'swarming' of disciplinary mechanisms implies that control over parents was hoped to be achieved through school children. In a parallel move, religious groups may aim at disciplining the population through a 'strive to eradicate places of ill repute' (Foucault 1995:211-212), which reminds of the reformist activism of both the Madrasatul Niswan and the Tablighi Jamaat.

Apart from such explicit ways of disciplining society, my observations in the madrasa indicated that disciplining did not primarily take place through the teaching methods employed, since more subtle forms of disciplining appeared to be at work, as we saw in the above examples of outsiders to the madrasa. In addition, the body comes to the fore as a central locus for disciplining. According to Foucault 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault 1995:136). By the same token, the main aim of the disciplining processes is to 'increase [...] the mastery of each individual over his own body' (Foucault 1995:137). This statement hints at the ambivalence between subordination and agency, because the process of disciplining increases the potential for agency, while simultaneously training the body to be docile. In other words, certain forms of disciplining may increase the students' agency, because they learn about life and their bodies, while at the same time a particular ideal of Islamic womanhood is internalized.

One expression of the latter is modest dress. During teaching hours, the students used to wear the typical white uniform consisting of lose trousers (salwar), a loose cut blouse reaching below the knees (kameez), and a
broad scarf (dupatta) for covering the head, shoulders, and chest. Following classes, the girls were allowed to change into the more colourful suits they had brought from home. Each girl kept her belongings in a suitcase on the steel shelves that lined the classrooms, kept out of sight with the help of thick curtains. By contrast, the teachers wore whatever colours and materials they wished to don, at times accompanied by jewelleries or other small signs of extravagance in the otherwise sober environment. But when venturing outside the madrasa, all of them wore the same black manteaus (burqa) and veils (hijab) that rendered them unrecognizable to the outsider.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the teachers and students were proud of the extra pieces of clothing they used for what they considered proper modest dress, namely knee-length socks and black gloves reaching over the elbow. The young women even used to wear the socks and gloves in the midst of summer, when in Delhi temperatures easily reach forty five degrees centigrade.

Foucault notes that rather than allowing for more freedom once a certain level of discipline has been accomplished, quite the opposite holds true, as increased aptitude goes hand in hand with increased self regulation. In other words, the better the mastery, the more the body is subjected to additional constraints (Foucault 1995:138). Similarly, I observed that while some students appeared to attend the madrasa to receive some form of formal education and not much else, others seemed to compete at the level of discipline and piety. The more they knew, the more eager they were to appear more dedicated than the others, for example by continuously swaying their upper bodies while studying, by keeping the daily prayers and supplications, by using Arabized Urdu with its formulaic expressions of faith, and by following their interpretation of the sunnah of the Prophet. For example, some of the young women claimed that the Prophet's favourite colours were green and white, which dictated the choice of colours for their suits. In addition, some of the teachers and students also seemed to be stricter about veiling than others, even inside the madrasa. Most teachers and students wore their long rectangular scarves (dupattas) wrapped rather loosely around their heads, and as long as they were surrounded by fellow teachers or students, they even allowed for their scarves to slip off their heads at times. By contrast, there were others who used a bigger type of veil, which they tied around the face closely, so as to cover the ears, along with every strain of hair, and the entire upper body. My findings did not suggest that the stricter style of veiling was necessarily associated with the girls from the 'core families', as sometimes students and teachers from
rural areas and from less 'pious' families adopted the stricter style of veiling as well. Owing to the randomness of the practice it is likely that other factors were at play, such as the hope for upward social mobility by cultivating a visibly pious self, which is a point that will be discussed in the following chapter.

The discipline required to observe the above-mentioned strictures was taught and practised during classes and outside the classroom, as both the formal and the informal curriculum appeared to be based on discipline of various kinds. First of all, the curriculum was so extensive that dedication was necessary on the part of the students. Such dedication was not merely hoped for, because it was explicitly formulated as a rule and pledge in the admission papers (see Appendix I). Second, the spatial constraints of the small building also called for discipline, because opportunities to enjoy privacy were limited. Although using the same space for studying, sleeping, and eating may not be that exceptional, under circumstances other than these such a limited space would hardly be shared by over one hundred and eighty people. As a result of the spatial limitations, every movement had to be well calculated when groups of students moved from one section of the building to another, as the ceilings were low, the staircases open and steep. Acts of discipline also define how 'one may have a hold over others' bodies'; and it is herein that the political anatomy comes to bear. For example, the teachers' control over the students' bodies showed whenever they began to recite a text during class, as without any further ado the students ceased their activities, adjusted their posture, fidgeted with the scarves covering their heads, and started moving their upper bodies along with the rhythm of the teachers' voice.

With beliefs and embodied discipline on the one hand, encounters with everyday life on the other hand may confront the believer with contrasting ideals. Although watching television, along with Bollywood and Hollywood movies, and listening to popular music were considered forbidden or haram by this community, there were occasions indicating that the young women could not avoid the influence of popular culture entirely. One day we sat in the staff room and badi appa's infant son displayed signs of discomfort, as he suffered from an itchy rash. The Hindi word for itch is *kujli* and the teachers present asked me for the English translation of the word. As soon as I said 'itch', the teacher who had asked me for the translation started to laugh and said: 'Oh, so *Itch Guard'* means *kujli* guard. The other teachers also began to laugh, while the Principal badi appa and another teacher immediately quieted down and tried to assume a disapproving look in the
direction of the teacher who had passed the initial remark. They said: 'Oh, so
you watched TV', but since they also knew the advertisement, they did not
have a strong point reprimanding the other teacher, because they had obvi-
ously watched the same commercial. On another occasion I took my camera
with me, as one of the students had asked me to take a photograph of her.
When I mentioned my camera in the staff room, thinking that the teachers
too might enjoy using it, my offer met with strong disapproval. The teach-
ers were quick to say that the Prophet had 'stopped this custom' of produc-
ing images of human beings. Nevertheless, despite the strong opposition
towards photographs, even badi appa admitted that she kept a number of
passport size photographs of her children as infants. The above examples
show strategies of negotiating 'outside' influences that are considered for-
bidden by this community's interpretation of Islam, so as to create small
niches of defiance.

Besides reflections on the female body, dreams occurred in our con-
versations as a means for emotional expression. How the young women
expressed themselves through dreams and what they expressed by bring-
ing them out in the open can be discerned at the hand of the following
examples. One day, badi appa approached me in the staff room showing
me a small pile of hand-written notes. She explained that these were recent
dreams of students, which she had written down and collected over the past
weeks. Those dreams, she added, were either dreams the girls had at night
or dreams induced by fever, as those were the two conditions under which
dreams were thought to be of revelatory content. For her it was a regular
activity to read the notes and then select those dreams she deemed impor-
tant enough to show to her father and to her husband. Then she read out
the dreams she had selected this time. It struck me that the Prophet was the
central figure in all of them, and he invariably conveyed a message to the
respective student. For example, in one dream the Prophet ordered the girl
to criticize the Founder of the madrasa for not providing sufficient space
and time to perform prayers (namaz) properly. Another girl had a dream
during a bout of fever in which she saw the Prophet standing in the cor-
ner of the room 'with a serene face and a beard', owing to which 'her chest'
got well immediately. The third dream conveyed the Prophet's praise for the
good work of the madrasa, along with the promise that it would flourish. On
another occasion badi appa told me that she had recently dreamed about
me. When I asked her what her dream had been about, she said that she had
seen me on the Hajj. She then asked the other teachers to confirm the verac-
ity of that dream, as she had told everyone about it the next morning.
In his book on *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*, Moosa (2005) points out that dreams may be used to attest to one's piety and spiritual achievements, as they contain coded information and enforce the authority of the person portrayed (oneiric communication). According to early Muslim philosophy and mystics, there are ties between dreams, poetry, and revelation. In other words, dreams are thought to convey knowledge of a higher reality. Even though dreams are not per se authoritative, their meaning is often compelling to those sharing the same habitus, as in Moosa's words dreams are 'part of a continuum of prophetic inspiration' (Moosa 2005). For the same reason there appears to be a common acceptance of dreams as a means for emotional expression in the otherwise sober environment of the Madrasatul Niswan. On the one hand, badi appa's regular practice of writing down the students' dreams for her father and husband to read reminds of mechanisms of surveillance. On the other hand, it may be only through such 'dreams' that the girls were allowed to voice criticism vis-à-vis those in charge of running the madrasa. After all, it is striking that the students' dreams brought in the Prophet to make a certain point, as his authority cannot be denied.

Apart from the contents of our discussions held in the staff room, the staff room itself, along with similar 'enclosures', represents a site wherein disciplining took place. In Foucault's words for such a link between disciplining and space to emerge, it takes 'a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself', a 'protected place of disciplinary monotony' (Foucault 1995:141). In the case of the Madrasatul Niswan, the building was clearly demarcated from its immediate surroundings through a fence, thick curtains that were always drawn, and closed doors. Like many other girls' madrasas I visited, the Madrasatul Niswan was hard to find, because the building itself appeared to be in purdah or 'veiled', owing to which what went on inside remained protected from the outsiders' gaze. A closer look revealed that the building was also divided internally, whereby functional sites were set apart, such as the staff room and the main hall wherein the weekly Thursday Programme was held.

Still, except for the above sites the internal division of space was not clear in the Madrasatul Niswan, mainly because space was scarce to begin with. As a result, a constant hustle and bustle of movement and voices characterized everyday life in the madrasa. In addition, the lack of functional furniture allowed for flexible behavioural patterns, as the girls studied, ate, and slept on the floor wherever there was space available at any given moment. With the aid of 'props' such as mats, rugs, or cotton stuffed mattresses, the
same space was designated for a new purpose. Although space itself did not seem to be a decisive disciplining factor, circumstances allowed for disciplining techniques of a different kind. Rather than structural factors, it was the authority of the teachers and senior students that ensured the smooth running of everyday activities inside the cramped space of the Madrasatul Niswan.

Prior to the Thursday Programme, senior students were assigned the task of supervising the seating arrangements of those attending the weekly event. The other students used to sit down on the floor of the main hall and on the open gallery in rows according to the year they studied in. The senior students appeared to take their task seriously, as they tended to be very strict when it came to correcting rows of students that were not absolutely straight. Even at the risk of causing a major disturbance during the Thursday Programme, they seemed eager to ensure that the lines were sharply drawn, backs were straight, and dupattas adjusted so as to cover the smallest strain of hair. The women from the neighbourhood joined in the back of the hall, adjacent to the front room, where the Manager and his male guests were listening. The men also took care of the technical equipment, such as the amplifier and the microphone, which were handed to the girls from underneath the door that divided the front room and the main hall. Due to the proximity of the men in the front room and the girls assembled in the main hall, the men could hear every word of what went on inside during the Thursday Programme. This deserves mention, because those inclined toward a certain conservatism would see it as objectionable for the men to listen to the young women's voices. Nevertheless, in the Madrasatul Niswan the men listened with genuine interest, possibly also to convey the impression that they were able to survey what went on inside the space otherwise forbidden to them. Despite the awareness that they were under constant surveillance, the men's frequent inability to ensure the smooth working of the microphone also gave rise to jokes and muffled giggles on the part of the students. As the teachers and students were aware of being within earshot of the men in charge at all times, there was a flow of indirect communication through shouting between the front room and inside. At times, the communication was facilitated by messengers, such as the Principal's children who were free to commute between the two sections of the building.

Finally, another question related to exercising 'total' control was what made for permissible pastimes. We noted before that this community considered the depiction of people, photographs, movies, and non-religious music
haram or forbidden. Even though those in charge seemed to aim at creating a milieu that does not allow for many pastimes or 'things that are a waste' (see student's pledge, Appendix I), regular visits home and the two annual vacations were occasions when beliefs and embodied discipline could be put to the test. Once badi appa complained that the stay with her in-laws in Barabanki during the vacation following *Eid-ul-Fitr* had been extremely boring. As much as she dutifully emphasized liking her in-laws, she took up the occasion to relate in detail how boring village life was, adding that she could not wait for her husband (who was 'travelling in the path of God' at the time) to come and take her back to Delhi. When I asked a group of fourth year students what they had done during the same vacation, they answered in chorus that they had rested and read. When I continued to ask them what they had read, they mentioned the *Fazail-e-Amal* (*The Virtues of Everyday Actions*), the Quran, and collections of hadith. The latter implied that the girls had access to copies of various books they studied in the madrasa at home. This in turn presupposes a certain intellectual milieu, along with a certain level of wealth, considered that some of the girls' parents could afford to buy such specialized theological books for them. Even if the presence of the Quran and the *Fazail-e-Amal* could be taken for granted in the case of this community, possessing collections of hadith presupposes a deeper theological interest. Besides, the students' reply sounded too neat for adolescent girls who had expressed their eagerness to go home and enjoy their free time outside the cramped madrasa many a time. As there was no teacher around to check on the girls during recess, there was no immediate reason for them to come up with such a uniform answer. Hoping to find out more, I told them that my mother had come to visit and that we had spent the coldest evenings of the year watching films. A sharp sound of disapproval went through the small room, and the girls said that films and music – except for religious music such as naat and taranas – were completely haram. Now that I knew, I should stop watching them. The students' reaction indicated the extent to which they had internalized the worldview of the founder's community with regard to popular culture and activities associated with leisure. The discipline of the 'total institution' appeared to permeate the young women's free time, their time at home, which was often far away from Delhi, and their time with others who did not necessarily share their opinion regarding things forbidden.

My observations also included moments of disruption. For example, once another group of fourth year students browsed through my photographs, which included pictures taken on the Hindu festival of light or
As they immediately seemed to recognize the context of the photographs, I asked them whether they liked this festival. Interestingly enough, while some students immediately discarded the idea of Diwali altogether as a non-Islamic festival, others enthusiastically replied that they liked it very much. In fact, the girls who were favourably inclined toward the festival literally out-argued those who were not, in this group of students. In addition, one of the students who knew and liked Diwali added that she liked another festival called Rakshabandhana even better.

To conclude, apart from the formally scheduled classes in adab that aimed at instilling a sense of moral duty in the girls, there was range of related practices, such as veiling, embodied ideals of Islamic womanhood, the use of a particular language code, and the mastery of rituals (ibadat) with their minutely prescribed postures and purification techniques, whereby the individual was thought to contribute to the greater good of the community. The extent to which this idea was valorized became evident when students and teachers told me that they considered the act of studying or teaching in a madrasa an act of merit for their families and for society at large, as we will see in the next chapter.

4.6 Alternative views of self and ‘Other’

Whenever the young women put forward their views regarding what they considered markers of being a good Muslim woman, they engaged in a discourse with the absent or imaginary ‘Other’, such as their non-Muslim surroundings or influences associated with Westernization. The affirmation of their identities and the markers thereof implied the denunciation of the opposites and the absent ‘Other’, which remained unsaid at times, while on other occasions the judgment passed was made explicit. The ‘Other’ was generally identified as the non-Muslim majority in India and ‘abroad’ in the widest sense. Such perceptions of the ‘Other’ also appeared during teaching hours.

For example, the teachers in charge of the English classes made it a habit to ask me for vocabulary and Urdu translations of the English texts in the staff room. The teachers used a series of textbooks issued by the National Council for Educational Research and Training for the English classes, which meant that the same books were prescribed by the state curriculum for use in non-Islamic schools. For the teachers and students in the madrasa, these textbooks epitomized the ‘saffron scare’ in some sense, as in the young women’s perception these textbooks were part of the ongoing ‘Hinduiza-
tion’ project of state curricula all over India. Their perception was rooted in the given that the overwhelming majority of names, historic figures, and cultural events such as family parties and outings in the English Readers were based on the non-Muslim majority culture. The occasional mention of a (Muslim) student called ‘Ali,’ who was bound to make his appearance in any conversation in praise of Indian plurality, formed the exception. As the texts were rather meaningless for the girls in the madrasa, apart from trying to acquire a basic understanding of the vocabulary and grammar, the teachers and students did not engage in any further activities in relation to the texts. By contrast, as we saw in the above section, during classes in Islamic subjects, great care was usually taken to contextualize the lesson for the students. For example, during a lesson on prayer or namaz, the teacher reminded the students that social visits and functions, such as their last trip to the new madrasa in Okhla, or the attendance of weddings, should not interfere with one’s ritual obligations, which made more sense to the students than a story about Mrs Verma’s ‘kitty party’.

While the texts in the above example were written from the perspective of the non-Muslim majority, some of the textbooks used for Islamic subjects tended to define the ‘Other’ as the non-Muslim in lieu. For example, during tafsir classes it struck me more than once that much of the Urdu commentaries on the Quran explained the text in relation to the unbelievers (kafirun) and the ‘foreigner.’ In other words, these texts were written with the absent non-believer in mind, who was typically used as the absolutely negative example of how society and morality decayed in a non-Islamic environment. The presence of one such foreign non-Muslim appeared to make the students more aware of the contents of such lessons, because whenever either the unbelievers or the ‘foreigner’ were mentioned, everyone tended to look at me. On such occasions the young women seemed partly apologetic, because in our discussions some of the teachers and students had begun to realize that ‘Western culture’ was not necessarily all that bad either, and partly curious as to how I would react.

Apart from textbook images of the ‘Other,’ there were also actual encounters with young women whose views challenged the worldview of the teachers and students in the Madrasatul Niswan. Just like the Founder and the Manager, the teachers maintained occasional contacts with women outside the madrasa. One day a teacher’s friend, who worked for a charitable foundation at the Inayat Khan Dargah, directly opposite the Madrasatul Niswan, came to visit. The young woman was responsible for organizing various ‘empowering’ women’s projects, as she put it, such as machine knitting,
sowing, and other educational programmes. As far as her family history was concerned, she came from a Gujarati family, and the first person she talked about was her grandfather, who had been an actor as well as a Sufi dervish. Her father, who was a dervish too and a teacher (guru) of the lute (vina), in turn initiated the move from Gujarat to Delhi over forty years ago. The young woman saw it as the result of the confluence of all the above factors that her childhood had been deeply influenced by the presence of dervishes and her father's students in their home. In addition to cultivating the family's spiritual heritage, she pursued her studies and obtained a degree in public administration. In the light of her current work, she found it surprising how she had eventually come to combine her father's spiritual outlook with her wish to work for worldly affairs.

When I asked her how she had come to know about the madrasa, she said that one of the teachers had come to attend one of the women's projects at the dargah, where she started to learn machine knitting. After some time, the teacher had invited her to come and visit the madrasa, and on that particular day she had decided to take her up on the invitation to come and see her friend in her workplace. The dervish's daughter confidently described herself as a deeply spiritual person and for that reason she was impressed with the interactions she observed in the madrasa. But with a glance at the long black manteaus hanging on the wardrobe, she commented in a carefree manner that she would never wear a burqa. Then, with a broad smile she took out a photograph from her bag that showed her in 'proper purdah'; as she said, adding that this was a rare sight. For this young woman, being in 'proper purdah' simply meant that she wore a scarf (dupatta) loosely wrapped around her head, which she left uncovered otherwise.

Along with the views of the dervish's daughter, I also intended to find out about the Madrasatul Niswan's 'official' stance regarding Sufism. After all, basti Nizamuddin is strongly coloured by the Sufi shrines and their activities, such as the annual celebrations on the saints' birthdays (urs), the weekly spiritual vocal concerts (Qawalis), and the continuous flow of pilgrims, ill, and poor who come to seek relief. Moreover, links between madrasas and the Sufi orders (khanqahs) were a rule rather than the exception throughout history. Even the list of beliefs (aqidah) of Deoband recognizes Sufism as a valid form of seeking knowledge about God, and hence it was hard to imagine Sufism not figuring at all in the Madrasatul Niswan. When I asked badi appa what she thought of tasawwuf practices, which I did with the help of a book on Sufism, tariqah, and shariah, she said that Sufism did not play a role in this madrasa. She explained that according
to their community's beliefs Sufism was only for big people (bade log), because it was others who followed Sufi practices in their orders outside the madrasa, although personally she was not averse to the idea of Sufism altogether either. Another teacher added that even if they wanted to go to a dargah to pray, which would not be wrong per se, provided one had the right intentions for the prayer, it would still be impossible for the young women to go. In her words, they observed such a strict form of purdah that they would not be allowed to even walk with bare feet inside the shrine, where men would be able to see their ankles or hands exposed. Wondering what would be the use of wanting something that one could not have anyway, the young teacher concluded that she did not even want to go to a dargah anyway.

Keeping in mind that the madrasa represents a relatively closed community with a strong emphasis on orthodoxy and orthopraxy, I was surprised that badi appa's attitude toward Sufism was that favourable. Moreover, the vocational centre wherein many of the madrasa's teachers learned machine knitting, embroidery, and sewing, was directly affiliated with one of the two major shrines in the area, as we saw before. The above observations and examples indicate that the Madrasatul Niswan coexists comfortably with its Sufi neighbours, as there seems to be a 'division of labour'. It seems that while the Islamic learning imparted in the madrasa is meant for everyone willing to adjust to the requirements of discipline and ethical practice, Sufism is thought to be more complicated than that, probably because the practices are less accessible to the 'ordinary' believer.

4.7 A 'dual type' girls' madrasa

Following the above encounters with the 'Other' in the Madrasatul Niswan, I would now like to introduce a different type of girls' madrasa for comparative purposes. In this 'dual type' madrasa, Islamic subjects are taught alongside the state curriculum for secondary education. A comparison between the two madrasas allows for an understanding of what makes the Madrasatul Niswan different, while simultaneously identifying common issues, such as the strive for recognition by the state. The Jamiatul Zehra\(^{18}\) public school/girls' madrasa\(^{19}\) in Okhla was founded under the patronage of the Ahl-e-hadith movement (see Chapter 2, n. 11). In the brief history of the madrasa's inception we read that Maulana Abdul Hamid Rahmani established the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre in 1980. According to the Maulana the Salafi movement, which is equated with the Ahl-e-hadith,
used to thrive in Delhi prior to Partition. The reformist traditions of Shah Waliullah, Shah Ismail Shahid, and Shaikh Nazeer Husain Muhaddith were mainly kept alive through the Madrasa Rahimia\textsuperscript{20}, which represents one of the largest Ahl-al-hadith madrasas in Delhi. During the 1980s, the ‘Salafi youth’ revived the Ahl-al-hadith traditions and the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre in turn stood behind the foundation of the Jamiatul Zehra in 1985.\textsuperscript{21}

Although initially the principal of the Jamiatul Zehra was reluctant to see me, I met her sister by chance. Following this introduction to the family, I also obtained permission to come and visit the school/madrasa. The principal’s sister appeared to regret the fact that her sister worked in a madrasa and was quick to add that at least all the ‘modern’ subjects were taught as well in this madrasa. But she made it clear that she felt uneasy about the Islamic component of the curriculum and that she did not understand why her sister continued to work there. In order to show me why this was so, the principal’s sister briefly sketched the educational history of the women in her family. To begin with, she proudly mentioned that her mother had been the first young woman to attend a public boarding school for girls in Lucknow. She and her sister in turn had both received ‘modern’ English medium education, and she seemed to take pride in her family’s progressive attitude. In her opinion, the family’s progressive views with regard to educating their girls made it even more embarrassing that her sister had decided to become the principal of a girls’ madrasa.

The family’s educational history also gave rise to the question why she thought parents chose to send their daughters to a madrasa. My host suggested that girls from rural areas and economically (relatively) deprived backgrounds who attend a madrasa are often the first women in their families to receive formal education. She explained that since in many cases the girls’ parents are illiterate, they would not be able to distinguish between a school and a madrasa. In addition, she pointed out that in her opinion especially the ‘dual type’ madrasas that offer English medium education alongside Islamic subjects tended to lure parents into sending their children to a madrasa. Although I heard similar arguments on other occasions, one could counter that such an argument downplays the importance of the madrasas as institutions of Islamic learning and fails to do right to the parents’ agency. Even though it may hold that the decision to send a daughter to a madrasa is made by mistake in some cases, this is likely to be the exception rather than the rule, because if such mistakes were the rule, the madrasas would be empty instead of mushrooming. What appears to be a more plausible expla-
nation is that many girls from rural and economically (relatively) deprived backgrounds come from large families with many children to feed. Since the madrasas provide education in return for nominal fees, offer boarding facilities, feed the students three meals a day, and often also ensure adequate medical care, sending one daughter or more to a madrasa may be a desirable option. In addition, the decision to send a daughter to a madrasa is often thought to be of religious merit for the entire family, as we will see in the following chapter.

Similar to the Madrasatul Niswan, the Jamiatul Zehra too offers education for those who are economically less well off. On the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre's list of priorities women's education ranks high. In the Introduction of the organization's brochure we read that 'Steps have been taken to get the school recognized by the CBSE [Central Board for Secondary Education, M.W.], so as to enable the students passing the 'secondary exams' to pursue their higher studies in a regular way. The school shall ultimately be elevated to a degree college for women, Insha Allah'. A few pages further, in the section titled 'Plans and Programmes for Future', number two on the list is the establishment of a Jamiatul Zehra Girls College. The 'school has been proposed to be developed into a girls college where the main emphasis would be on Islamic theology. The plan carries more value and weight because of the fact that our female community is a neglected lot particularly in the field of education. We intend to provide secular education as well as advanced theology courses so that our women could face the challenges of the modern age. We would like to give priority to this plan'.

The principal of the Jamiatul Zehra was aware of the above plans, as during my visits to the madrasa in late 2002 she was busy with the administrative side of her personal strive to seek recognition from the Central Board for Secondary Education. As the school was not recognized as yet, the principal was proud to relate that so far many of 'her' graduates had appeared as private candidates for the Secondary Board Exams at the Jamia Millia Islamia University. With regard to the school's curriculum that prepared the students for such exams, the Jamiatul Zehra's brochure states that the syllabus is based on the Central Board for Secondary Education subjects along with Urdu, classes on Islam (Diniat), Holy Quran (from the Nursery Class onwards), Arabic (from class VI), and computer education (from class III onwards). Although all subjects are taught in English, 'the subject is explained in Urdu as well. Hindi and Urdu are also taught along with English as compulsory subjects at all levels'.

90
The Jamiatul Zehra's 'Aims and Objectives' mention that the school also welcomes non-Muslim students, 'without discriminating them on the basis of religion, community, caste or creed so that they may also feel the cool breeze of Islamic culture and society'. Although I did not meet any non-Muslim students during my frequent visits, I found it typical of the madrasa's broader outlook that the role of Islam was downplayed in the above statement, because on the surface the impact of Islam appeared to be limited to the spheres of culture and society. As for the ensuing question how seriously the Islamic component was taken, the paragraph on passing 'Examinations and Promotions' mentions that the students have to ensure they pass with at least eighty out of hundred marks 'in each of the subjects of the Holy Qur'an [sic], Deeniat [sic], English, Maths, and Science'. The ranking of subjects too indicates that religious education is deemed important, because apart from failing to pass an exam, a student can even be expelled on account of failing one of the religious subjects twice.

As opposed to the Madrasatul Niswan, this 'dual type' madrasa made 'Games and Sports' compulsory for all students. Among the sports offered are volleyball, badminton, and indoor games. Apart from physical education, the teachers also organize regular 'Educational Tours and Picnics' 'whenever possible' to 'a historical place, a specialized institution, an unusual site, a museum or a zoo'. The ideology behind the educational model promoted by the Jamiatul Zehra could be summarized as nationalist with special regard for the Muslim community. The 'Aims and Objectives' section formulates the madrasa's educational aim in the following way: 'The institution aims at moulding the thoughts and beliefs, the hearts and minds and the bodies and souls of the students in the true Islamic frame work. To inculcate all these characteristics to the children which would make them a law-abiding, conscientious and sincere citizen. To imbue a sense of national and (Milli) concern so that they may become good citizens of our nation and Millat'.

Aiming to provide a structural framework that allows equal space for Indian cultural and Islamic elements, the celebrations of Independence Day, Gandhi Jayanti (Gandhi's birthday), along with Eid-ul-Fitr, Republic Day, Eid-ul-Adha, and Holi (Hindu spring festival) are included in the List of Holidays and Vacation. Such a combination or masala of shared festivities would have been unthinkable in the Madrasatul Niswan, as those in charge seemed eager to pay as little attention as possible to the wider non-Islamic social context. A similar masala can be found in the Jamiatul Zehra's 'List of Extra Curricular Activities', which includes Debates and Quiz competitions, On the spot essay competitions, Baitbazi competitions, On the spot paint-
ing competitions, Holy Quran Recitation competitions, Elocution (Hamd and Naat etc.), and Games and Sports competitions. In line with the above observations, the spirit of a ‘local Islam’ and the acceptance of its couleur locale pervaded the layout of the Jamiatul Zehra’s school building too, as it was plastered with citations of Gandhi, the Quran, the ahadith, alongside drawings of pluralist India under its unifying flag.

A brief comparison of the two girls’ madrasas points to important differences in the scope and definition of learning. To begin with, in the Jamiatul Zehra disciplining was mostly linked with classroom activities, owing to which everyday life resembled the routine observed in many other schools that start in the morning and end by noon. Such part-time school attendance is quite unlike the ‘total institution’ represented by the Madrasatul Niswan, where learning was not restricted to teaching hours and where for most of the students there was hardly any space for life outside the madrasa. In addition, the Jamiatul Zehra appeared to allot a different place to religion altogether, as Islam was explicitly limited to the ethical, ‘cultural’, and social spheres. As a result, the educational aims differed as well, because in the case of the Jamiatul Zehra those in charge argue that building the students’ personality with a view to functioning within society is the primary educational aim. Such civic concern aims to ensure that the students of the Jamiatul Zehra may find it easier to embrace the plurality of the Indian environment than their peers in the Madrasatul Niswan. Finally, the students of the Jamiatul Zehra also have different future prospects in many ways, as their education prepares them to appear as private candidates for the ‘secondary exams’ that allow them to continue their studies in colleges.
1. As the madrasa's brochure is written in Arabic and Arabized Urdu, apart from those belonging to the 'core families' and those with a similar educational background, many parents may not be able to understand the text.

2. See for example Tirmidhi's (d.892) Kitab ul-Shamail, which is included in the Madrasatul Niswan's curriculum (see Appendix II).

3. Here, the author mentions the Prophet's wife Aisha in particular as a learned scholar of hadith, jurisprudence, poetry, and literature, as we will see later on in this chapter.

4. For the history of the dars-e-nizami, see Malik 1997, 522-541. During fieldwork I observed that it was common for even the smallest neighbourhood Islamic school to claim that they taught the dars-e-nizami, because such claims provided even modest institutions with authoritative credentials, which in turn ensured a steady flow of new students and incoming funds.

5. It deserves mention that mastery of Urdu is not to be taken for granted among Muslim youths in India today. For example, in girls' madrasas in Hyderabad the first year is often dedicated entirely to teaching the girls 'proper' Urdu. Principals and teachers often complained that the girls did not know Urdu anymore, as their primary education takes place in Hindi. Furthermore, it seems that many parents no longer cultivate Urdu in a predominantly Hindi and English speaking environment. Similarly, even though in the case of the Madrasatul Niswan the girls are expected to know Urdu prior to starting the course, my observations indicate that especially girls who come from rural areas are often in need of basic language training in Urdu.

6. For a discussion of the Bihishti Zewar see Metcalf 1990. The Lives of the First Four Caliphs, i.e. the Qirat-ur-rashida, will be discussed at a later stage in this chapter, and finally Patricia Jeffery notes the influence of the Ladkion ka Islami Course, a popular Islamic primer for girls in five parts, on rural (Islamic) education in Bijnor in Jeffery 2004.

7. Similarly, although Maududi was in favour of education for men and women alike, he qualified the latter noting that for women the curriculum should be restricted to what she needs to learn in order to become a good mother and housewife (Maududi 1973:199).

8. With regard to this assumption we should keep in mind that so-called 'textbook conflicts' have led to riots in the past and to an increased sensitivity regarding the contents of non-Islamic textbooks on the part of the Muslim communities. In the opinion of many the contents of such textbooks have been manipulated with a view to minimizing or even eradicating the influence of Muslim culture on the subcontinent.

9. For the publication of this book, the author received the help of the Begum of Bhopal, whom he met in 1914 and whose decisive role for the struggle for Muslim women's education in India has been described in Gail Minault 1998.
10. Regarding the last point, the author goes to great lengths stating that: 'Even an obedient and loving wife will not care for her husband if he breaks his conjugal relations with her even temporarily. A male companion did this but his wife continued to serve him assiduously.' (Nadwi 2000:237).

11. Patricia Jeffery talked about the madrasa's 'civilizing mission' in Bijnor during a conference on values of education (Neemrana, April 2003).

12. Itch Guard is an ointment advertised for in a rather comic and hence catchy fashion on national television.

13. Diwali, the festival of light, is celebrated annually to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The festival also marks the beginning of the auspicious wedding season, and moreover it is widely held that new ventures are best started after the Diwali celebrations to ensure good fortune.

14. Rakshabandhana is a Hindu festival on the occasion of which sisters tie colourful threads or bracelets around their brothers' wrists after praying on their behalf and in 'exchange' for gifts, thus ensuring the sister's good will for the next year.

15. A 'kitty party' is a gathering of married and typically middle aged women, either organized at home or at a restaurant during day-time, when their husbands are at work. Such parties are notorious for being great occasions for gossip, display of wealth, and extravagant tastes.

16. The vina (lute) is a classical instrument exclusively played by men. The young woman mentioned the belief that those who play the vina cannot have children, adding with a smile that her father had proven this to be wrong, as she has four sisters and four brothers.

17. I am indebted to Dietrich Reetz for pointing out this link.

18. As in the case of the Madrasatul Niswan the name of this 'dual type' madrasa has been changed too, though it is a real name.

19. Interestingly enough, while the Jamiatul Zehra's advertising brochure labels the school as 'Public School', i.e. a private school, the Principal, as well as the teachers and students refer to it as a madrasa. Hence the double labelling, which might be the result of the ongoing strive for recognition by the state.

20. In 2002, the Madrasa Rahima was the only madrasa in Delhi registered with the Waqf Board.

21. The overview is based on the brochure of the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre New Delhi. Apart from the Jamiatul Zehra, the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre also runs The Institute of Islamic Education, the Shariah College Sanabil, and a Vocational Centre. Interestingly enough, the Abul Kalam Azad Islamic Awakening Centre not only has its branches within India, as the Shariah College also maintains ties with the Islamic University of Madinah, the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University of Riyadh, and with the Ummul Qur University Makkah. Apart from ensuring funding through these channels, students who qualify at the Shariah College are 'eligible to get admission' in the aforesaid institutions abroad.