CHAPTER FOUR

Purdah/Parliament: Modern Muslim Woman and the Political Oblique

. . . I'll answer slowly, there are no women in the third world.[1]

My last chapter focuses on the autobiographies of two Muslim women from the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century. Autobiographical initiatives in twentieth century India are said to be inextricably linked to the inauguration of "public" lives during the anti-colonial movements. The social reform movements of the nineteenth century and the anti-colonial struggles that began around the time, it has been argued, enabled "women" to emerge from domestic spaces into the public arena, and in doing so, were held to have "resolved" the women's question. In Section 1, I sift through arguments around the thesis of a nationalist resolution of the women's question, mainly through the work of Ayesha Jalal. In Sections 2 and 3, I read the autobiographical narratives of Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul respectively for a postcolonial transition of the political category "Muslim women" and its implications for a contemporary politics of identity.

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"Secularism Nationalism" versus "Religious Communalism"

While women such as Rashsundari Debi in the Calcutta Presidency did write her "autobiography" *Amar Jiban* (in the late 1800s) and Krupabai Sattianadhan in the Bombay Presidency wrote the autobiographical novel *Saguna: A Story of Native*

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[1] Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Christian Life (published serially during 1887-88 in the Madras Christian College Magazine), the conscious crafting of an "autobiography" with a prominent public life as the most crucial aspect of that life appears to be possible only around the turn and later into the twentieth century.

Scholars have argued, particularly with reference to Bengal that the social reform movements of the nineteenth century were a major cultural initiative that fed into the nationalist project. In a major and much quoted work, Partha Chatterjee contends that the colonial framing of oppressed Indian womanhood as a symbol of an inherently oppressive cultural tradition led to a nationalist response that accepted the liberal notion that (i) the West was a rational social order and (ii) "Indian tradition" needed to be criticized and reformed. Indian nationalism thus took up the woman's question as it was already constituted by colonial discourse, and it therefore also became a problem of Indian tradition.[2] To sum up in somewhat reductive terms, this was the central principle, according to Chatterjee's framework, of the nationalist resolution of the women's question. It was precisely the same sort of ideological concern that, Chatterjee argues, operated among Muslims as well, even if at a different chronological time (133).[3]

According to Ayesha Jalal, the Partha Chatterjee dichotomy between a dominated outer material domain and an autonomous inner spiritual domain fails to take into

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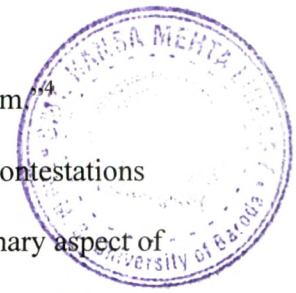
[2] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, rptd. 1995), 119. I use the 1995 edition; the page numbers are hereafter given in parenthesis in the text.

[3] Chatterjee is drawing here on Ghulam Murshid's *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905* (Rajshahi: Rajshahi University Press, 1983).



account binaries of "secular nationalism" and "religious communalism."[4] Chatterjee's argument glosses over, avers Jalal, the many subaltern contestations of an emerging mainstream nationalism and underplays the exclusionary aspect of such nationalisms (263-264). The idiom of religious identities in regional politics, Jalal demonstrates as she excavates political shifts and alliances, could not be accommodated in a frame of equal citizenship of inclusionary nationalisms that worked with a homogenizing narrative.

Jalal identifies the 1909 introduction of separate or "communal" electorates at all levels of representation as significant in bringing the term "communalism" into prominence. Colonial enumeration created notions of "majority" and "minority"; the first-ever census of 1835, when there was a simple head count of "Hindus" and "Muslims" in the north west provinces, cast the die for religious enumeration (40).[5] Religion as social demarcator became intrinsic to the social engineering of a colonial "public" sphere while religion as faith was to be a "private" matter,

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[4] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[5] Sudipta Kaviraj has used the term "enumeration" as part of an apparatus of colonial government. In his words:

> Human beings do of course live in communities, and the language of every group has words or concepts which designate the community to which an individual is supposed to belong. But often such language works on a peculiar presumption of self-evidence designating that "community" by a generic term. This appears to be true of languages in societies which have no consciousness of either the optional or constructed character of communities, or the layered nature of the community in which people live, in which, depending on the context, one can designate the neighbourhood, the region, the nation (if one is available), the religion. . . . They[such societies] are not used to the modern manner of living with clear enumerated identities of community, in a world which is, from the modern point of view, very unsatisfactorily classified. . . . fiction writers used the fuzziness of this idea of a community to give their audience a community which had not existed before, by gradually conceiving a new community called the nation, or selecting the appellation nation for one of these communities. (113)

For more on this, see, Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of the Nationalist Discourse in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); see also, Kaviraj, "Introduction" and "On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony" in Sudipta Kaviraj, ed., *Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-36 and 141-158 respectively.

subject to a community. Jalal examines this colonial construction of "community" out of religious groupings as a tool used back by the colonized for communitarian-based narratives by the late-nineteenth century. Hence, she contends, the "apparent denial of autonomy to the individual [in Indian Islamic enunciations] . . . was a product of tactical and strategic choices rather than an accurate reflection of the realities on the ground" (41).

Probing the narrative inflections of the discourse on communitarian identities among Indians without imposing latter-day teleological constructions would, in Jalal's argument, enable a more nuanced understanding of cultural difference and strategic politics. Jalal argues that in contrast to the post-Anderson focus on the newspaper and the novel in the formation of national identities, the historical and cultural context of colonial north India requires a focus on the press and on poetry, whose oral traditions transcended class and literacy barriers, for early narratives on Muslimness. Investigating the variety of initiatives in the area of vernacular presses in the north-west during the late-nineteenth century demonstrates, Jalal claims, that a communitarian narrative in itself did not occasion the erasure of the Muslim as an individual; scholarly interpretations have failed to "make an analytical distinction between a cultural identity informed by religion and the actual politics of Muslim identity in the subcontinent" (57). Sectarian differences as well as class were major axes of division of a singular Muslim identity; Jalal painstakingly traces journalistic records of various Urdu as well as English language newspapers and other writings to chart the various interests at work immediately following 1857.

Arguing that the idea of India is a latter-day product, Ayesha Jalal contends that literary and cultural texts from the first half of the nineteenth century do not carry tensions between one's city, region, "Hind," and a religiously informed cultural identity (27). She reasons that though religiously informed cultural differences did exist in a pre-colonial eras the colonial state's political purposes had qualitatively different consequences than in earlier times. Sifting individual consciousness from collective narratives of Indian or Muslim nationalism around 1857, Jalal remarks that communitarian terminology or nationalistic explanations alone fails to explain away participation; further, specific local and regional social and political configurations impacted on the colonized peoples as rebels or as collaborators. Delineating the transition from Company to Crown raj that was accompanied by a demarcation of a colonial, secular, political "public" from a "religious" and "culturally" informed "private" sphere, Jalal points out that such a neat demarcation did not rule out overlaps.

Jalal focuses on categories of colonial modernity that confuse the role of religion in the articulation of cultural differences and conflate class interests into a communitarian mode. The spirit of nationalist accommodation during the 1920s when khilafat and non-cooperation came together, as Jalal lays out, was significant in legitimizing the political articulation of religiously informed cultural identities. Instead of stepping out of frameworks of majoritarian and minoritarian narratives derived from colonial enumeration, Jalal points that such alignments skipped the more challenging attempt to work out a charter based on common citizenship to project a vision of equal citizenship irrespective of cultural difference (240).

Jalal holds that a doctrinal approach to Islam would highlight a communitarian aspect of the religion; however, she proposes, analyses of the historical experiences of Muslims in specific geographical contexts would reveal a more complex and nuanced composition. Jalal contends that caught in the internal strictures of a community and an externally imparted identity, the idea of the individual is obscured by an elision of religious difference into an essentialized Indian Muslim community. The categories of colonial modernity confused the role of religion in the articulation of cultural differences and, in the process, obscured the variegated motivations and aspirations underlying the embattled politics of identity and contested sovereignty.

Jalal identifies and meticulously tracks the critical role of language and region in the construction of a political category of "Muslim" by early twentieth century in the context of emerging narratives on the Indian nation, nationality and citizenship. The identity of a "Muslim," she argues, is marked among others, by region and language; these two factors have always cut across religiously defined and ideologically informed national identities in the context of the Indian subcontinent. Urdu, she points out, was mainly the language of the "shurafa" or "respectable" classes concentrated around urban centres in north India, and perhaps Hyderabad in the south. The language of the common people was richly textured by the local environment; the Urdu of the masses, for instance, borrowed heavily from local dialects and idioms. Jalal draws on extensive examples, concentrating on Bengali literary history, apart from Punjabi, Sindhi, Pukhto texts. Such cultural and literary evidences demonstrate, according to Jalal, the relations

of individuals to local and regional collectivities, without being overwhelmed by religious differentiations (16).

Laying out the dislocations of colonialism that pressurized the compositions of a new identity for Muslims professional classes, Jalal points out that this class bore the brunt of the recasting of the private domain, with women—middle- and upper-class women—as a particularly central component (45). Women were glorified as wives and as mothers under indigenous patriarchies, and set off against "depraved" lower class women contaminated irremediably by exposure to the public sphere. While theological scholars were determined to confine women to the "sacred geography" of the house, Jalal shows that most men agreed upon women's education which had to take place within the home. Given the contemporary debates on pan-Islamic sentiments of Muslims—which, Jalal points out, has to be assessed against the context in which the term was deployed, much like "fundamentalism" in contemporary politics—and on "modernity," women in the redefinition of a Muslim middle- and upper-class identity came to be central as silenced partners rather than active agents (69). Colonial imperatives directed reformist zeal towards women's rights in marriage, divorce, inheritance; in other words, Jalal points out, "Muslim woman as individual was simply not an inhabitant of a civil society" (72).

It is precisely because nationalist discourses failed to resolve the woman's question, attending to it in terms defined by a colonialist paradigm, that the issue was salient in postcolonial debates on citizenship. As Jalal puts it, men who wrote about women since the late nineteenth century did not consider them as

"individuals with sensibilities of their own" (566). Concentrating on reforming women within their class and homes, men ignored the majority of women from the "lower classes" who existed only as a "negative point of reference" against which standards of respectability and so on were defined. Jalal deems it all the more "unfortunate" that upper class educated women, when they made their presence felt in the public arena, did so "as symbols of their community rather than as representative of their gender" (566).

The exclusion of the majority of women, "lower class women," from the grand narratives of nationhood was, according to Jalal, "reflected in the fate of religious minorities." A continued "confusion" over public and private, secular and religious, meant a colonial logic persisted in confining the meaning of the Shariah to personal laws. As Jalal points out,

> Instead of establishing the basis for a civil society on the principles pf equality, solidarity and freedom, Islamic Pakistan quite as much as secular India focused on the personal laws of religious communities, believing them to be a sufficient accommodation of cultural differences. (567)

Thus, while the postcolonial states held out a promise of individual rights of citizenship, they also retained notions of community-defined personal laws. Jalal identifies this dilemma of being an individual in public and a member of a religiously-defined community in private as bearing serious consequences for women. It served to perpetuate the subjugation of women, "particularly those belonging to the lower strata," even as it sought the "individual's loyalty to the community of religion . . . to be superseded by the citizen's unquestioning allegiance to the nation-state" (568).

Jalal follows the threads of shifts from tactical discourses of communitarian difference to that of a national distinctiveness, as well as postcolonial transitions which splintered the imagined political community of Indian Islam into citizens of two, later three, sovereign juridical states. She charts a paradox of inclusionary nationalisms, with a discomfort with difference, that end up as a narrative construction of exclusionary majoritarian identity. Jalal is useful in that she points to the effacement, if not negation, of Muslim women's identity as "public" actors or citizens of their societies. Instead, discourses of communitarian difference as well as national distinctiveness directed the construction of their identities primarily, if not definitively, in religious and not individual terms.

2

Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah: Nostalgia and the Nation

One of the consequences of a post-structuralist problematization of the categories of author, authority, of self, individuality, and personality, of the ways in which texts are constituted, of language and representation, has been it is said, the end of autobiography itself. For example, Sara Suleri speaking about her memoir *Meatless Days* (1989) in an interview (2003), commented that "[t]he personal pronoun is just as academic as if I was to say, 'This Reader believes this about Conrad.' The 'I' is just as much a persona."[6] If the autobiographical text is therefore understood as a discursive formation, if not a consciously crafted text, it would perhaps be more useful to read for a specific local economy of discourse.

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[6] Sara Suleri, Interview with Rachel Aviv. 15 October, 2003. Cited by Rachel Aviv in her "'I' Versus 'They': The Textual and Communal Self in Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*" on <www.postcolonialweb.org/pakistan/literature/suleri/aviv>.

My focus thus is on reading texts by two Muslim women from different locations for specific experiences of being and belonging: Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament* (1963) and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's *From Purdah to Parliament* (2001).

On a quick glance, both texts appear to work very much within a humanist tradition of a unique life, framing an ideal and inviolable self. The narrative strategy in the autobiographies is to discover the subject's evolving consciousness, authorized by the sincerity of the narrator to structure a singular subject who has lived out her life at its several stages, in all its intimate and inconsistent textures of personality and experience. Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (1915-1998) was born in Bengal and migrated to Pakistan in 1947 though Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul (1910-2001) did not migrate from her birthplace in U. P., India.[7] These women come to understand their selves in a colonial/postcolonial context. Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah discusses, albeit in a rather tangential fashion, the fabrication of "Muslim" and "woman" and Qudsia Rasul writes consciously from her minority location in a majoritarian country. They are, in other words, postcolonial subjects who negotiate their identities as women and as Muslims during moments of powerful and passionate debates over definitions of a self in relation to a community and a nation and are deeply involved with the idea of "Muslim" in their critical moments of defining a "self."

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[7] Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, *From Purdah to Parliament* (London: Cresset, 1963; Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998, 2000); Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul, *From Purdah to Parliament* (Delhi: Ajanta Books, 2001).

Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (1915-2000), born in the spiritually, academically, intellectually and politically distinguished Suhrawardy clan of Calcutta, declares herself to be a product of two orders. She details her maternal as well as her paternal lineage, and juxtaposes the different and yet harmonious temperaments of her parents. Her mother[8] belonged to "the age that her father [Shaista's maternal grandfather] had seen vanish" and "looked back" (11) whereas Shaista's father[9] "looked forward" (11), one of those "visionaries who always see ahead of their times" (12). Shaista's mother came from a traditionally-oriented family whereas her father's people had already made a shift towards Western education and professions.

Shaista's early life is a comfortable existence, with minor tensions between her "ultra-Westernized" nuclear home and the "Arabian Nights world" of her maternal relatives that do not really impact upon on the young Shaista's life, for she can "slip easily" between the two (26). Shaista recalls "the nineteenth or the eighteenth century" ambience in her mother's natal home; during their stay in Calcutta, Shaista's mother visited her sister and aunts "frequently" and even an

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[8] Shaherbano was the "favourite" and the "most beautiful" of the seven children of Nawab Syud Muhammad, who rose to the rank of Deputy Magistrate, the highest post open to Indians at that time, and whose essays in the *Oudh Punch* are held to be ironic, accurate and priceless portrayals of the times. Though her grandfather would be "shocked" if he heard a son of his had not paid his debts, writes Shaista, he would be "shocked . . . no less of one if them could not distinguish between various flavours in mangoes" (8). Breach of good taste, thus, in matters of food and dress was as important as breach of good conduct in her mother's natal house.

[9] Sir Hassan Suhrawardy was third of the four sons of Obaidulllah-Al-Obaidi Suhrawardy, a reformist scholar of Arabic and Persian and the first Principal of Dhaka Madrassa. The second Muslim from the subcontinent to take the degree of FRCS, Hassan Suhrawardy later became Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University as well as Honorary Surgeon to the Viceroy. He resigned from government service to join politics. It was during his term as Vice-Chancellor, in 1932, that Bina Das attempted to shoot the Governor; according to Shaista, her father was "able to get to her [Bina Das] and stop her" and was later knighted for his efforts (43). Apart from mentioning this detail, the narrative silence on the implications and further reverberations of the issue—a Muslim Vice-Chancellor preventing a Hindu "patriot" from the political assassination of a representative of the colonial government—is suggestive of the tensions, at various levels, that the text is trying to negotiate.

ordinary call involved a "certain amount of formality" (18). The usual time for such a call was after lunch, when Shaista and her mother would travel in a "doli" (palanquin), even though they had a car, carried right inside a courtyard so that there was "no chance" of any accidental compromise in their purdah. The pleasure of these visits for the child Shaista was, however, not only because of the stark contrast between the "manageable proportions" of their Western home and her aunt's bustling household of dependents, relatives, servants and "noisy activity" (20). Children could forever listen to stories or join in some ongoing "minor domestic crisis" in which everybody was involved.

The narrative details with loving nostalgia the hectic yet laid-back activities of the secluded spaces of the zenana. The maidservants and the women vendors played an important role—there were "character[s]" such as Muna Buwa who had come into the family as a servant girl during the time of Shaista's great-grandfather and who could now "tick off" even Shaista's mother ands sisters, disapproving of the "recently" developed habit of visiting—the doli being "hawked round from door to door"—outside the family circle (20-21). The women vendors brought a "hundred and one attractive little things" but, more importantly, were "news carriers of the women's world" who brought and collected "gossip" (21). As the ladies talked, they supervised the delicate dyeing and crimping of dupattas, the sorting, pounding and preparation of fresh herbs for bases in shampoos, cosmetics and sachets as well as the sewing of fresh quilts. Shaista's text seems to deploy, almost, the language of cinematic composition, with a wide angle view of beautiful women and bubbly children, a landscape rich in colour with muted

musical voices and laughter in the background presented for the reader's visual imaginary.

But the golden hue of all these sepia-tinted memories is pricked by the suggestion that all the "innumerable ceremonies" seemed designed to "while away their [the women's] time" (22). It is as if, with all their literary, social and material resources at their command, the women inside purdah were set pieces that could only move around at the behest of external forces, read male authorities. For the narrative comment on the "highlights" of women lives in purdah, marriages that were "deliberately" spread out into "elaborate affairs," implies long days unfilled with any "meaningful" occupation or activity. Running a house or rearing of children was something that happened as a matter of course, then; the actual challenge, it is implied, of engaging the intellect with problems or issues was missing. This, I will argue, is a patriarchal, if not orientalist, construction of women's lives in the zenana. The marriages were detailed and convoluted just to "provide occupation and amusement for weeks" (23). But the narrative unease with its own complicity in such fabrications can be read in the many comments it lets slip at different occasions.

Defending the notions of life in the zenana as restricted or constrained, the narrative turns to a "mistaken notion" of the West that "our women" missed all the "fun" of shopping. But "our women" did not "miss" any of "that great joy of Eve's life" claims the narrative; without having to push, pull, jostle or stand for hours in shops, the ladies "missed nothing" because the "shops came to them" (25). The narrative is establishing the idea that shopping, in a "western" or

"modern" understanding of the term, is not necessarily fun, that these elegant ladies who had access to the wares of jewelers or cloth merchants had access to all the range of the beautiful goods without the pain and hassle of going to shops. Of course, the narrative is working here with the principal idea of "shopping" as a "typically" female activity, if not as a "woman's" fundamental right of existence. So, on the one hand, even as the narrative makes exotic the world of colour and laughter and art-and-craft activities in the zenana, it wryly comments that all these were designed to merely entertain, amuse and while away time. On the other hand, the narrative appears to be under pressure to prove life in the zenana as "free" and fulfilling as a woman's life outside it. This unease with the perceived limits of life in the zenana and the desire to present it as free of all constrictions stems, I would suggest, from a need to make equal different life-worlds which however exist with very different values and logics.

The autobiographical narrative is grappling with the idea of a "backward" life of Muslim women in purdah and a "modern" life of women out of purdah—the desire to identify with a normative notion of "free," for both a purdah life and a non-purdah life, makes the narrative do balancing acts which cannot always be sustained. This becomes apparent at different moments in the text.

The narrative is working hard at the notion of "gender," which is to be female in an upper-class Muslim milieu, though it would be misleading to read an unqualified approval of this female existence also given the choices the narrator herself makes in her life. For, on the one hand, the account of the verandah—as it was turned into the "most attractive of counters" where bundles were opened to

display "gorgeous sarees" in "ruby red, emerald green, peacock blue and saffron yellow," with rich borders and pallus, stiff with embroidery and soft enough to pass through the proverbial ring in a "feast of colour" and "profusion of richness"—evokes wonderfully an archetypal bazaar scene of women laughing, giggling and exclaiming over silks and satins. It is "sad," muses the narrative, that Shaista's children have never seen the "magic" of that "sheer feast" when "one could not keep one's fingers from touching" all the wonders unfolding before one's eyes (25-6).

On the other hand, as a housewife in 1940-47 Delhi, Shaista prefers not to "waste . . . time doling out sugar and tea, or go marketing to check prices and so forth," even if she had to "do without half a dozen sarees" in order to be able to give time to her social and political "work," canvassing votes for the Muslim League (128-129). The ideas on women's activities within domestic spaces and the notion of work in public spaces that the narrative is working with are too explicit to bear further analysis. The women's domain could, it appears, only deal with domestic crises that are by definition "minor"; events in the sphere outside required "work." But these normative identifications of female labour and frivolity and male work are constantly undercut too, as we read on.

Like "everything else" in her life, Shaista's education too followed a "dual pattern" (27). At a very young age, she went to a private school run exclusively for English and Anglo-Indian children where she was the only Indian student and then learnt Arabic and Urdu at home. Thereafter, she followed the "usual pattern" for a girl's education "in my country" wherein formal education stopped after

learning to read the Koran and literacy in Urdu and education on "homecraft" and needlework continued. Though girls did not go in for higher studies "as such," those who had a "literary bent" could acquire a wide knowledge of poetry, literature and history because "their homes possessed such an atmosphere that they learnt by just living in the midst of it" (27). There are several notions being compressed in these quick sentences: first, for a narrative that appears to never problematize the question of being a Muslim in Bengal that was later bifurcated to become part of India and East Pakistan, this use of "my country" is a significant moment in the text.

Throughout the autobiography, the narrative dwells emphatically on a pan-Islamic community: for instance, she recalls a particular instance of a family picnic (around 1946?) at Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, when a discussion on the territory of Pakistan came up. Shaista remembers her husband pointing to the domed and turreted skyline of Delhi, and declaring that city undoubtedly belonged to the Muslims. The partition of Punjab however meant that "we" lost Delhi: the narrative emphatically links this "lost" city to the mosques and minarets of Cordoba and Granada, cities important in Islamic history as emblematic of a lost golden age. So the use of "my country" while writing in 1963, but most significantly, sitting in the young nation-state of Pakistan, for a childhood time of untroubled innocence, gaiety and frivolity in a geographical and cultural location that would later be as much a part of India as of East Pakistan is suggestive of a shared community that was not necessarily premised on religion alone. This is an argument I will return to later in the chapter.

Neither is this slippage a one-time accident of language either. Talking of her domestic arrangements when her children were all young, for instance, Shaista recalls that it was all possible because of the "wonderful servants" in the "background" who made the "life of leisured grace" possible "in our country" (128-129). This is an author who carefully tells us that she was reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest* when her female cousins came to torment her with a photograph of her husband (whom she never met or saw before their marriage) on the eve of her marriage.[10] These are, I suggest, a series of significant "slippages" in a narrative that constantly, and quite successfully, works to erase questions of ethnicity, sect, language, geography or gender tugging at the fabric of her young nation-state and at establishing a homogenous category of modern, Muslim, woman.

Second, the narrative deftly elides questions about class: what kind of "homes" would have the "atmosphere" that simply allowed secluded zenana women to learn literature or history merely by virtue of "living in the midst of it"? Third, given that elaborate wedding rituals were designed to keep presumably brainless women, who chiefly indulged in "gossip," entertained and busy, the narrative is simultaneously insinuating that one only merely had to be so inclined, "bent," that a "self" with a Nietzschean "Will" could branch off into a "higher" realm of literature and learning. The narrative silence on the precise nature of this operation speaks loudly about the issues it is trying to side-step. The making of an

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[10] Shaista's marriage was arranged with Mohammad Ikramullah, an I. C. S. officer from a family originally from U. P. but settled in Nagpur at the time of their marriage. Ikramullah, who lightly pointed to the dilemma of Muslims in minority provinces, such as the Central Provinces where he came from, and quipped to Jinnah on their first meeting that the idea of Pakistan did not "appeal" to him "much" (88), later became the first Foreign Secretary of Pakistan.

"educated" or "civilized" woman in the zenana cannot be quite as simple as the narrative would like to make out; nevertheless, it is significant that this desire arises out of compulsion to collude with, participate in, literacy—knowledge of poetry, literature and history—as a marker of a universal "self" who could also exist in the world of early twentieth century Muslim zenana spaces. These contradictory and difficult moves the narrative tries to pull off, I argue, are attempts to, one, identify with that universal self of modernity's liberal politics and, two, more importantly, to suggest the impossibilities of doing so. The narrative succeeds in its attempts, but not quite. The 'not quite' is the most important part of Shaista's autobiography: it opens up possibilities for critiques of that universal self that the text is also attempting to dovetail into the category of "modern Muslim woman."

To take up another example, the first instance of conflict recorded in the narrative, significantly, is over the issue of Shaista's formal schooling. Her education in English so far had not been regular on account of her father's postings, but when they came to live in Calcutta, around the time Shaista was twelve, her father decides to put her in an "English" school, the convent of Loretta House. Shaista describes the "storm" of criticism that broke out—her mother's relatives came on condolence visits, commiserating on "her [the mother's] misfortune" while her father's relatives tried more actively to dissuade him. Of her own opinion on the matter, Shaista disarmingly grants, that at twelve, "one is not certain of one's values" and therefore when her father left for England shortly thereafter, the family's collective criticism began to "wear me out" (34). The accusations of "unseemly" behaviour on her part, "injurious" and disgraceful, coupled with a

sense of guilt that she had forced her father to send her to school—". . . that it was due to my keenness for studies that father had taken these steps. . ."—induced her to give up going to school. Her father, it was suggested, "would not mind my leaving school."

The elegant prose of the narrative succeeds, almost, in charmingly dismissing any glimpses of domestic or emotional hysteria. It is as if the very same young girl who was "delighted" at the "lovely pile of books" she acquired to go to school does not feel anger. The narrative conceals any sense of even an adolescent fuming at the systematic siege—the criticisms that "continued without a break"—that must have pressurized her to "voluntarily" give up going to school. Her father's prophetic words, that in twenty years' time everyone else would also be sending their daughters to school, did come to pass. But Shaista Akhtar Suhrawardy, as she called herself for her literary career in Urdu, does not dwell in this autobiography on the siege that would have coerced her into throwing away this opportunity to go out into another world.

Instead, the narrative deflects attention from any personal costs to note briefly that women's education in itself was not "disfavour[ed]" in her family. Therefore, it was decided that she would study at home but that too was shelved as tragedy struck the family. Shaista's only sibling, her 18-year-old brother, and the only male among the children of four brothers, contracted tuberculosis and died within a few months (34). The immediate effect, therefore, was that since her father no longer had a son, her relatives had to agree to his "educating me as one" and in an

"outward semblance of normality," Shaista attended school for nearly five years, though not without long absences in between (35).

And clues about the loss she felt on giving up school are aplenty in the text. For example, Shaista clearly remembers, when she did go to school, she enjoyed her studies as well as the "daily companionship of girls of my own age" (35). She also enjoyed the "gossip" at school—over film stars, cinema, the Royal Family—and talked with other girls "in the same way as they did." This admission is immediately undercut by the declaration that these were nonetheless "completely remote from . . . personal experience and knowledge" (36). The narrative simultaneously looks back at Shaista's childhood and is sad over the contemporary erosion of familial and parental authority, "today" (36).

In a rather curious twist, the same logic—of her brother's death—is also the one used for her marriage when she was not yet eighteen and a bare three days after the conclusion of her exams. Shaista's father agreed since "it was the one thing that would give my mother some happiness and bring some interest back into her life." Why the question of her continuing her education to follow in the path her brother might have followed never arose is one that the narrative chooses to keep out of the text. It is also, perhaps, Shaista's sense of duty, of family tradition, that compels her to frame her life's turns thus. The death of her brother—"not just an only son but an only son among four brothers"—meant that for Shaista herself,

the "burdens of family traditions" now had to be "shouldered by me alone in future years" (35).[11]

But Shaista the autobiographer does recall the condition the twelve-year-old put before her "poor mother" to give up on school—that she should be allowed to study at home. The narrative uses this event to quickly sketch in a strict yet indulgent mother: her mother agrees readily because, according to Shaista, she realized it meant "a great deal" to her daughter and was prepared to "humour" her, even it was in something "as unconventional as studying" (34). It is interesting that the only relatives whom Shaista documents as having had the temerity to speak to her father personally are a female relative—his eldest cousin—and a younger male relative—the "very pompous" son-in-law of his youngest sister—from his side. It is thus not clear whether the older men of the clan—such as Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy and Sir Zahid Suhrawardy, her father's eldest cousin, the patriarch whose word "was final in any matter of family dispute"—had any opinion about educating girls. Shaista does not speak either of her female cousins who went to school, if there were any at all.

The absence of any influence of her paternal aunt Khujista Akhtar Bano Begum, the wife of Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy (they were cousins), directly or indirectly as an example for the other family members, makes the narrative's silence on the matter even more curious. Khujista Akhtar Bano Begum is regarded a pioneer of women's education in India, was awarded an honorary degree by the Calcutta

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[11] Strangely though, she also says, talking of her wedding arrangements, that she was "the only girl among four brothers" and therefore the wishes of all her aunts and uncles had to be acceded to (50).

University and was an examiner in Persian for M. A. in the same University (13). Her sweetness of disposition and character and her concern for her brothers' welfare is noted by Shaista. In turn, Shaista's father and his two brothers "absolutely adored" her and she was the "most important person" in their lives even after her death and Khujista Akhtar Bano Begum's name is the second name of all the girls in the family as a mark of respect to her memory. Given this, one can only read a heavy dose of irony in Shaista's words on her aunt: she was "sort of a guardian angel of the family whose conduct and behaviour had established the standards for the family for all time" (14).

This absence of any intervention by the more authoritative relatives on the issue—for or against—becomes interesting more so because of another issue when they do intervene. When Shaista is nine years old and not yet "put in purdah," her mother appeals to the family patriarch, Chacha Jan, to speak to her husband. After his visit to the house, Shaista's father sends for Shaista to inform her that it was time she started observing purdah. Similarly, when her uncle Abdullah Suhrawardy accidentally sees her in "English clothes"—presumably a skirt—he expresses "disapproval"; that is "sufficient" for her father to order Shaista to discontinue wearing skirts (36).

It would be useful to take a jump forward in time, and in the text, to when Shaista did come out of purdah formally. The occasion is the garden party of one of the executive counselors in Delhi, in 1937. The rigidity of her purdah had relaxed somewhat after her marriage and with life as the wife of an I. C. S. officer in Delhi. But her debut is nonetheless marred by the presence at the party of her

uncle, and her incessant efforts to avoid her as "he very strongly disapproved of my coming out of purdah" (70-71). A further comment on purdah reveals her opinion of both mixed society as well as the women's quarters:

> My subsequent sallies into mixed society I found no more interesting than the first one. I had imagined that mixed society would be composed of intelligent people, who would talk of more interesting things than were talked of in the women's world to which I had so far been confined, but to my disappointment I found that this was not so, and all that they talked was a meaningless sort of official jargon. (71)

These narrative comments could be read as efforts to show that the author is aware of, comprehends, the limits and boundaries of a life-world outside purdah. It is as if to suggest that a young, naïve Shaista may have had misgivings about the "backwardness" of a purdah world. But, the suggestive tone continues, life outside purdah can be equally monotonous and dull. That is to say, life inside the walls of the zenana can be full of meaningless chatter or one may will one's way to a life of knowledge and culture and civilization. Equally, life outside the zenana can be made of pointless official jargon or one must find one's way to some intelligent conversations and work. The narrative moves are directed towards making commensurate the two worlds—purdah and non-purdah—and to align both worlds along a universal norm of binaries of "meaningless chatter" and "intelligent conversation."

The desire and intention of such authorial moves are unmistakable. At one level, the narrative works to set up an equality of life-worlds. At another level, the narrative undercuts all its efforts at setting up this equality by tugging at the

threads that suture over the unequal. A case in point is the musing over the pastness of a purdah-life:

> In the dust and strife of life in Parliament I often longed for the peace and leisure of the days in purdah. But there could be no turning back, no return to the secluded and sheltered existence of the past. I had to continue on this new road on which women of my country had set out, in which one could taste the joys of achievement as well as the bitterness of failure, to know both hope and fear, disillusionment and attainment. And who can deny that this is a richer, fuller and more rewarding way of life? (168)

The strain of life in the public world, the world of work and achievement, the world of a citizen, is contrasted to the more leisurely pace and peace of life in the private world, the world of women and idle gossip, the world of a subject. The path to that world is no more open: the will that could have "bent" itself to partake of the poetry, literature and history that seeped through the zenana now has to "continue" on this "new road." The authorial brush-strokes that sketch out a new journey for a brave, lonely soul open up vistas of possibilities for her sisters, the women of her country. Yet, the narrative cautions, this is a journey fraught with the perils of failure and the promises of success. The joys of achievement and attainment, the mere possibility of such success, are undeniably a richer, fuller way of life. The autobiographical narrative undoubtedly orchestrates the author's life as a journey that paves the way for generations of modern Muslim women, a stepping-stone that others may follow for a rewarding way of life.

However, the nostalgia for the peace and leisure of purdah days is not mere nostalgia: I would suggest that in that glance back, the look that has to return back

to the future, lies a puzzlement over "true" life in purdah. While it is probable that there is some fuzziness in an author's memories, I will argue that the narrative seems to suggest why it is no longer possible to find shelter in that secluded world: life in purdah was not actually free of dust and strife nor was it that oasis of harmonious tranquility it appears to be in memory. These are the narrative moments where I read for critiques of both the "secluded" world of Muslim zenanas and the "free" spaces of public life, for a collapse of the conceptual spaces of "purdah" and of "Parliament."

The narrative claims that a strict stepping into purdah at the age of nine had made little material difference to Shaista's life, for

> I did not go out of the house anyway, so that all it meant was that I did not appear before the menservants and did not got to that part of the house where my father received his friends and that I now watched the functions held there through *chiks*. . . ." (37)

But earlier, it is the same Shaista who had listened "avid[ly]" to the discussions in her father's rooms with his male friends, where she heard the names of Gandhi, Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, even though her mother "strongly disapproved" of it all. The narrative tells us that Shaista "liked" talking to these "strange men" who expressed "gratifying sentiments" about her father. She mulls that when she "held forth . . . at length" on the subject of Swaraj, they "put up" with her, but her mother would send for her "just as I was in the midst of a very heated discussion" and "scold" her (41-42).

When Shaista had first stepped out of the world of mixed society, at the ripe age of nine, she could no longer interact with her fathers' friends and can only observe from behind the bamboo curtains—the *chik*—which had to be opened at the right angle to see without being seen. But Shaista "never got the knack" of doing so; her mother told her it was her late introduction to the rigors and necessities of purdah that impeded her success in this "art" (37). Her first foray as an adult into mixed society must have been eager indeed—the narrative bite is unmistakable as it points out that she had hoped to come across "intelligent people" who would talk of "more interesting things than were talked of in the women's world." It is a calculated authorial move to make commensurable the "meaningless sort of official jargon" and the chatter of the zenana, though whether either sets of conversations were inconsequential "gossip" is, I would suggest, open to interpretations.

But when the narrative is talking of purdah days specifically, it is a lot more cautious. The "dust and strife" of public life and political worries make Shaista long for the "peace and leisure" of the purdah. In a conclusion that foreshadows Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's, she is stoic: there can be "no turning back" to the "secluded and sheltered existence of the past." The "new road" of achievement and disillusionment are more difficult, but ". . . who can deny that this is a richer, fuller and more rewarding way of life?" (168)

Shaista's dim awareness—that purdah was also a space of seeing without being seen—does not quite comprehend the "art" of that life and world. It is a "fact," she can grant, that life behind purdah is an "art" which "consists of many things

besides knowing how to look without being seen yourself" (37). But she deftly aligns her "self"—a self that has tasted of the "freedom" of the "new road" on which the "*women of my country* had set out" (emphasis added)—with a larger body, a greater sisterhood, in the public spaces of gendered "work." Torn between a desire to watch her children grow and make her home a space where her family and friends would "like to be," Shaista in later life feels that "all eyes were on me" (168). They watched to see a woman combine a home and a career outside, and if she "failed," it would adversely impact "other women's chances" to try to do the same; therefore, she says, she "tried very hard not to fail" (168). Quite clearly, the narrative is setting up its subject's life as an eponymous heroine fro the women of her new, young country.

Shaista's active involvement with the Muslim League, claims the narrative, grew in the 1940s, especially also since her cousin, Shaheed Suhrawardy who was the general secretary of the League's Bengal branch came to Delhi a great deal to discuss policy matters with Jinnah and stayed at her house. Her home became a "sort of" League committee room (103). Prominent leaders dropped in and there were usually ten or twenty people staying on at meal-times. Press conferences, statements, interviews and other kinds of political activities were conducted from her home, and Shaista "even tried" to "take a hand" in the "inside workings of great events" (104). Thus, she said, she too tried to persuade a prominent Bengal politician of the time, a leader with a grassroots following unlike Jinnah, to "come back to the Muslim League." She not only went to see the politician at the Dargah Nizamuddin Aulia, the "citadel of conservatism" but was accompanied on this "errand" by another "very old-fashioned person" from the north-west frontier

provinces, another geographical location associated with orthodoxy and conservatism. Shaista was not censored for being thus "bold and unseemly"; women after all could visit a dargah to beseech a saint's intervention, or even seek shelter in the guest-house there. But her efforts as a woman to intervene in public matters were regarded as "creditable," for they were directed at helping the "community"; this, the narrative claims, was due to a "changed attitude" that had "fired [the] imagination" of the times (104).

The earnest prose and skilful language of Shaista's narrative smoothens most of its contradictions and gaps; the contours of being female, for instance, are taken for granted as idly gossiping away the hours or indulging in elaborate events designed (by whom?) to entertain women. The desirable acts of "work" in a public space, understood as that which is in operation outside of the women's spaces, are on the one hand wryly mocked as being no more interesting, meaningless official jargon substituting for an earlier gossip, and on the other, a "vision" and a "goal" intensely worth striving for (174). The author continues strategically to contain the narrative, I will argue, in an unquestioned binary of male and female roles: a case in point is her description of her tenure as Ambassador of her country to Morocco, she says the she was given the "courtesy due to a woman" and at the same time allowed the "seriousness due to a man" (220). It is a narrative, as illustrated in the above textual analyses, starkly and strikingly aware of its readership, written as it first was in the early 1960s.

As a self-consciously written life-story by a "pubic figure," the narrative is aware of its audience. The narrative remembers a childhood when she thrilled to the

names of Gandhi and Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, of the 1920s "idyll" of Hindu-Muslim "harmony" (83); on the other hand, she writes of the 800-year-old history of "Muslim" rule that "came to an end" in 1857 (158). While these rulers married and settled down in their new country, they never did "become one with the people of the country." Instead, post-1857, the "Muslims" felt threatened by the British as well as the "numerical superiority" of the "Hindus." The early twentieth century "type of nationalism," when the two communities came together for the first time for India's independence, had "no mass appeal" because the very "language of parliamentary democracy" was "unfamiliar." Religion, according to the narrative, made different people of them and "every little thing" that made the cultures different was "tenaciously" held on to (158-160). Yet, even while deploying the phrase "Nationalist Muslims" (101) that was widely in use for Muslims who believed and worked with the Indian National Congress, as against the Muslims who saw through the impending "Hindu imperialism" and worked with the Muslim League, the narrative passionately defends her "continued friendship" with people such as Sarojini Naidu or Asaf Ali of the Congress. Quite clearly, a singular axis of being Muslim—to be either for or against, without any in-between positions that would include continuing friendships with "Hindus" or "nationalist Muslims"—is being robustly contested and denied by the narrative.

Similarly, the narrative analysis of the history and politics of the subcontinent is interestingly dismantled at several points. While making statements about a pan-Islamism deliberated carefully for their impact, for instance, the narrative also talks unproblematically of "my country." The phrase is suggestive of a (un)conscious narrative awareness about not only shared geographical spaces but

also social and cultural norms. The definitions of a "way of life" that is similar at some points and dissimilar at others, that allows for slippages between "Hindu" and "Muslim" on the one hand and an evocative "my country" on the other hand are crucially indicative of the difficult terrain the narrative is trying to bridge over. The obscurity and opacity of parliamentary democracy that the narrative contends for the "common people" is curiously at odds with Shaista's defense of the "tenets of democracy" and right of "freedom of speech" during the debates in Pakistan's Constituent Assembly as the members drafted the new country's Constitution. These are tensions, I contend, of the different frames of an identity—of being modern, Muslim, woman, subject and citizen—that the narrative of a remarkable woman is trying to stitch together.[12]

3

Qudsia Aizaz Rasul: "Secular, Indian, Islamic"

I will now turn to Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's autobiography. Born in the first decade of the twentieth century, Qudsia's career in public life spanned almost the entire twentieth century. A member of the 1937 U. P. Legislative Council, re-elected several times and Deputy President of the U. P. Upper House in her very first term, Qudsia was an active participant of discussions on Bills on social legislations, "Chairman" of Committees and Sub-Committees for various Bills, and also presided over joint sittings of the two houses of the U. P. Assembly. In 1947, apart from being Leader of Opposition of the U. P. Legislative Council, she

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[12] For more details of her life, see also, Nicholas Barker, "Obituary: Begum Shaista Ikramullah" in *The Independent* (London: 29 March 2001).

was also member of the first Constituent Assembly and Legislative Assembly (Central) from December 1946 to November 1949, before its adjournment on January 24, 1950, when the Constitution of India was formally signed. Jawaharlal Nehru nominated her as member of the first Rajya Sabha or Upper House of the Parliament and she continued her remarkable political career over the next forty odd years, a prominent actor at the State as well as Central government levels.

To begin at the beginning, Qudsia's travel and work with her father,[13] as his secretary, brought her into contact early on with prominent national and colonial figures, intellectuals and politicians, of the 1920s. She terms her father a great nationalist at heart who often voted with the Swaraj Party, but was unable to join the party on account of his connections with an Indian state and the fear of his properties being confiscated, thereby "depriving his children of their inheritance" (3). Qudsia writes at some length about her mother,[14] as well as her maternal grandmother, though she does not name them. Her education began at home with an English governess who taught her and her two brothers English; her maternal grandmother gave them their first lessons in Persian, Arabic, the Koran and religious tenets. A distinct lack of unease or defensiveness about her childhood

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[13] Qudsia's father, Nawab Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan, from a ruling family that traced its ancestry to Afghanistan, the Muslim state of Maler Kotla in present-day Punjab, was Prime Minister of Patiala state during the minority of its Maharaja. He was nominated Member, Imperial Legislative Assembly and of the Council of States, later elected to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1926 under the Minto-Morley Reforms, and in 1928, was one of the two Muslim politicians appointed member of the Central Committee of the Simon Commission, the other being Abdullah Suhrawardy of Bengal, Shaista's uncle. He was also the leader of the Indian delegation to the League of Nations in 1930. Discarding the "palace intrigues" of his native state, he shifted to Lahore where his salon for literary gatherings boasted the presence, among others, of Muhammad Iqbal.

[14] Qudsia's mother was from the ruling family of Loharu in present-day Haryana that traced its ancestry to the Barlas tribe of Mongol-Mughals. She observed purdah but made exceptions in certain cases. She took the 18-year-old Qudsia with her to visit Gandhi, in Simla, in 1927. She was also friends with Sardar Umrao Singh Sher Gil, Amrita Sher Gil's father, as well as with Muhammad Iqbal.

life-world marks the narrative here: her father's political compulsions deterred him from taking a public stand on Swaraj, for instance, and the choice made within a specific historical context is neither dismissed nor rushed past. The narrative tone maintains a rather matter-of-fact appraisal of the social and political compulsions of the time—for instance, the autobiography notes that Qudsia did not go to school until the age of 11, because she says, though a Western education and "enlightened outlook" had freed her father from the "shackles" of "outdated ideas and customs," he retained "basic values of family norms and values."

That he did send Qudsia to school was also, moreover, at "the insistence" of two English ladies who were in charge of Queen Mary's College, Lahore. Nonetheless, the idea of a girl from their "royal" family going to school caused a "flurry" of messages from relatives, conveying "horror" and "condemnation." Qudsia was however "very happy" informs the narrative and made many friends at the very select school she went to with girls from various royal families—Baroda, Indore, Mandi, Kalsia, among others—and most of them continued to correspond with each other "till long afterwards." Apart from the regular teaching, we are told that Qudsia participated in plays and annual functions—the costumes were great fun, she remembers, "especially the men's clothes"—and played tennis, badminton, rounders, volleyball, basketball. While Qudsia went to the Queen Mary's college at Lahore for half the year, her father arranged for her to be day-scholar at the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Simla for the other half of the year. In the convent, the emphasis was more on the arts, piano, painting, embroidery, including "pen-painting." All in all, she says, her school days were "very happy" (7-10).

Against Shaista's hesitant detailing of her school days and then going on a back-foot from her memories of fun, the aristocratic Qudsia has no qualms about her convention-defying entry into school. A tiny yet significant detail, I would suggest, is the readers the authors have in mind, and therefore the slant to the logic of the text: Shaista is trying to establish her "modern" profile in "Muslim Pakistan" and yet distancing her "self" from her past in "Hindu India." On the other hand, a Muslim in India, Qudsia is staking claim to be of a modern-yet-traditional citizen of a "secular" India. That is to say, the narrative efforts are to suggest that she is proud of her aristocratic Muslim lineage but is as "with it"—in education, sports or in music—as her "Hindu" contemporaries.

Qudsia talks at some length of the intellectual atmosphere in her parental home: discussions on Urdu and Persian literature as well as contemporary politics and history were a regular feature. Her mother attended many ladies functions—parties, "at homes" and lunches—which were all purdah events, since most ladies, "Hindus and Muslims, observed purdah"; Qudsia recalls being asked to be an "usher" at the purdah parties Lady Linlithgow, the then Viceroy's wife, gave every season (11). Qudsia's mother herself hosted many such lunches and parties, and it was an "interesting" life. When European women asked them whether they were "happy" being in purdah, not participating in mixed gatherings, Qudsia says she and her mother were "surprised"—they "really" felt, she protests, that not meeting men did not make "much difference" to them.

The narrative takes pains, at pain of life in purdah being regarded as "pre-modern," to reiterate that there were pleasures and stimulations even when "confined to the four walls" of the zenana (8). The women attended concerts, theatres, musical as well as social gatherings. Qudsia recalls an interview by a well-known English writer who asked about the "limitations" and "lack" of a purdah life. The absence of mixed society meant, she points out rather tartly, that she "could not visualize the lack of it" (15). Moreover, women enjoyed, socially and intellectually, "equality in status" (15) to men. Her mother could hold her own in any discussion about Persian and Urdu literature as well as Islamic history. Her mother's "newly acquired" knowledge of English allowed her to not only converse with the European ladies, but also to translate English books, including Shakespeare's plays, into Urdu which were published in magazines (15).

Though her marriage in 1929 to Nawab Aizaz Rasul, a taluqdar from the United Provinces, and her subsequent life at his ancestral home in Sandila meant a very strict adherence to purdah, it "did not irk" Qudsia, claims the narrative, since she was "used" to it (21). The bewilderment or "confusion" came, instead, from "outdated customs and norms." Qudsia cites an instance when her mother-in-law came to visit them and Qudsia walked into the room to greet her: the mother-in-law "jumped up and ran" into another room. It was customary, Qudsia later found out, that the wife should not face her husband when any other person was around; so, if Qudsia was visiting her mother-in-law, a curtain would be "immediately" hung in front of her, to enable her husband to sit next to his mother (22).

But Qudsia's husband, the narrative adds, had decided before their marriage with "great foresight" that Qudsia should live separately, in a smaller house outside town, while his mother lived in the sprawling haveli in town, always bursting with relatives, retainers and servants. All this is in sharp contrast to the "sophistication" and "enlightened company" of her natal home. The narrative moves are two-fold here: one, it is established that her natal home, where she was brought up, was a "modern Muslim" household, even when the women observed purdah, as when compared to outdated customs of "other Muslims." Second, her marital set-up with her husband was distinct from his mother's house, and therefore modern ways were set in place from its very inception and therefore a "modern Muslim" family came into existence.

Purdah, then, was a way of life in those "different times"; what was accepted, even possible, as a "way of life" is "not possible today" (15). It was an age when men were considered superior beings; Qudsia's grandmother, for instance recalls the narrative in a tone of wry amusement, instructed her that even eight-year-old boys had to be respected (16). She died after Qudsia herself became a grandmother, and her word was law "upto the last." However, once having "come out," Qudsia could "never bear the idea of going back."

Although she had come out of purdah after her marriage, to host a party for her father at Simla for which he had sought the permission of her husband, Qudsia formally came out of purdah only during the elections to the U. P. Legislative Council. Adroitly bridging the distance between Muslim households with outdated customs and her own natal as well as marital home, the narrative

recounts one of the odd constraints Qudsia juggled when she traveled from Lucknow, where she lived with her husband and children, to Sandila by train. She would walk up the platform at Lucknow; at Sandila, her mother-in-law sent a curtained palanquin, to be placed next to the compartment from which she had to alight. It caused much "amusement" to her fellow-travelers in the train, she notes deprecatingly, and the media also called her the "two-faced Begam" (22).

The narrative also remembers observing purdah from the "dancing and singing girls" of Sandila, including singers such as Gauhar Jan and Akhtari Bai (the internationally renowned and feted singer later known as Begam Akhtar) whose singing was of a distinct "superior class" and "high order" (27), as well as the *mushaira* and *qawwali* sessions held in the hall near their house. Although "special arrangements" would be made for Qudsia to see and hear the singers from the house, "there was no question of even going near the place" (25). Qudsia resigned herself to the state of affairs, she says dryly, taking it all "very philosophically" and with a "sense of tolerance" (70). It is through these small yet crucial narrative acts that the identity of a "self" in tune with the values of her nation-to-be, the liberal modern secular sense of toleration which became the official policy of independent India, is brought into being.

Qudsia undoubtedly views her life, implied clearly in her title *From Purdah to Parliament*, as having "progressed" with the times, as having become more "modern." In fact, her changing attitude to an earlier "way of life" makes her decide, once she herself is out of purdah and she along with her husband are dubbed as "professional party goers" to turn down invitations from families "who

kept their ladies in purdah" (67). Qudsia, quickly regarded a "breath of fresh air" on the party circuit, explains that the taluqdars, "both Hindus and Muslims," did not "bring out their wives." However, given the state of affairs in the 1940s she says, when the British, League as well as Congress members mixed with each other, it was not possible to stand by her resolution—it would have appeared "churlish" to refuse invitations from people who had also known her father (67).

Qudsia's "political baptism," as she terms it in the title of her third chapter, took place when "some friends" "persuaded" her to stand for the 1936 Provincial Assembly elections. Her friends felt she was "eminently suited" because, having worked as her father's secretary, she had a "good idea" of the prevailing political conditions. She herself, declares the narrative, was motivated by a "burning desire" to do "something to ameliorate the condition of Indian women." Their lives, steeped in domestic "drudgery" sapped women of all "desire or ambition" to "look beyond" their houses; Qudsia wanted to persuade these women dulled by "ignorance and superstition," to send their daughters to school as "there did not seem to be much hope for them" (32).

Contesting the Legislative Council seat, the U. P. upper house, Qudsia notes that her electorate comprised of educated government servants, income tax and revenue-paying people, though there were hardly any women among them. However, she would visit the ladies during the campaigning too, and won by a "good majority." Her husband contested and won an Assembly seat. Interestingly, she records that the ulema proclaimed in a fatwa that it was un-Islamic to vote for a non-purdah Muslim woman (33). In her very first term, she

was elected Deputy President of the Council, defeating Madan Mohan Malviya, and was an active participant of discussions on Bills on social legislations, and a member of the Tenancy Reforms Committee constituted to look into abolition of the zamindari system. When Congress ministries resigned in 1939, Qudsia remained a member of the Upper House, which was indissoluble.

Qudsia's husband was the general secretary of the U. P. League branch, though she herself was not a member and she had accompanied him to the April 1941 Madras session of the League. She was introduced to Jinnah, as well as important Muslim leaders from all over India. Though there were pressures on her to join the League, she was "holding out," and Jinnah, she writes, was aware of it (57). That summer, in Simla, she narrates, she received a phone call from Jinnah asking her to meet him. Their meeting began with his inquiry over why she did not join the League, "when people in thousands were flocking to join" (58). Qudsia's main concern, she says, was what would happen to Muslims in minority provinces such as her own; the idea of Pakistan did not convince her. Besides, she remembers asking, was Pakistan "viable financially"?

Jinnah spent over three hours with her, the narrative tells us, arguing that Muslims needed to educationally, socially and economically "stand on their own feet," to "reassert" and "reshape" their destinies. As she left, Jinnah beseeched her that women with her brains, "a gift from God," should use them for the "good of . . . [their] community" (58). Her impression, notes Qudsia, was that Jinnah himself was not sure of the whole concept of Pakistan, but had put his demand "high" as a "bargaining factor" (58). Undecided over joining the League, Qudsia was

nonetheless convinced that Jinnah was a "very sincere" man; people believed that he could no be "bought over" (58). She did join the League a while later, in a "low profile affair" and when a women's sub-committee was formed, she was elected Secretary. Thereafter, the young and enthusiastic Qudsia traveled all over India, organizing women, holding meetings, addressing students and other gatherings (59).

While the narrative reminiscences work to dispel the myth of Jinnah as a determined and visionary leader of millions of Muslims, at the same time, the author quickly establishes her own relationship and perspective of Jinnah too. Jinnah the "detached" and "cold as ice" figure of meetings was a totally different creature at dinner-time, claims the narrative. She recalls a trip to attend a meeting in Narainganj, a small town in the interior from Dacca. The whole train was reserved for them, and their being no appropriate accommodation, they stayed in the train. On the first day, at dinner at a local host's house, they saw an earthenware vessel—handia—filled with curds; during the long wait, they all were "restive" for they know Jinnah was punctual and particular about his meals. When puris and curry were served, the gathering knew this was not the food Jinnah would "favour": predictably, Jinnah "chang[ed] colour" and inquired in a "sarcastic" tone whether he was expected to eat it. He walked out of the room, leaving the room "completely shaken." Fortunately, says Qudsia, she remembered the sandwiches and cakes in the compartment one of them was carrying and urged the boxes to be brought for Jinnah. They persuaded their nervous host to carry it in to Jinnah, and placated by the "offering" he accepted it. Qudsia ruefully remarks that he "must have been hungry"; in any case, the rest of

them could then eat with a "light heart." The episode was not forgotten easily, the narrative states firmly, and a similar "fiasco" was "never allowed to happen again" (66). The man who was Quaid-e Azam or Supreme Leader to millions of admirers was, we are invited to share by the narrative, a man susceptible to his gastronomic compulsions.

However, let me focus here on Qudsia's interventions as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly (comprising the Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee and the Minorities Sub-Committee) around the period 1947-1949. While the bare historical and political facts surrounding the framing of the Constitution of India are known to all of us, and are far too complex to be dealt with in their many facets here, I will attempt to give a quick sketch of the background when Qudsia writes about this particular episode in her life.[15] The Advisory Committee, with Vallabhbhai Patel as Chairman, debated, among various other issues, over the political rights of minorities in a secular state, including the issue of separate electorates and of reservations for minorities. It was in the constitutional reforms of 1909 that political safeguards for minorities, in the form of separate electorates for Muslims, were first implemented by the colonial government; it was in 1925 that reservations for Muslims in government appointments were first recognized. The Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 extended the former provision to Sikhs, Indian Christians, and other communal and functional groups and the latter provision under the 1935 Act.

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[15] I draw largely here on Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of A Nation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1966]); Rochana Bajpai, "Constituent Assembly Debate and Minority Rights, *Economic and Political Weekly* 35.20-21 (May 27-June 2, 2000): 1837-1845; and, Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950," *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 27, 2002).

These came up for discussion during the Constituent Assembly debates, beginning on 9 December 1946, for the colonial government held that a satisfactory resolution of such policies was essential in the move towards self-government. In the first draft of the Constitution, published in February 1948, Muslims, Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes and Indian Christian were ensured reserved seats in parliament and state legislatures for 10 years; reservation in the ministries and government services was given up. There was no provision for separate electorates. By the time of the final draft, political safeguards came to be restricted mainly to the "scheduled castes" and the "scheduled tribes," excluding religious minorities.

A member of the Advisory Committee, Qudsia discussed the issues of separate electorates and reservations for Muslims with her Muslim League colleagues of the U. P. Assembly and Council as well as with Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly (125-126). Armed with their consensus, the narrative relates that Qudsia spoke during the Advisory Committee deliberations of December 1948 against separate electorates and against reservations for religious minorities. In her words, "in a secular state separate electorates have no place" (126). Apprehensive of feelings of "separatism," she feels that it is "not going to be harmful" if the minorities "try to merge themselves into the majority community" and participate in building a "truly secular state" (127).[16]

Besides, once the principle of joint electorates is accepted, reservations become "an act of charity" (128). Instead, by putting the onus on the majority community,

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[16] See, Shefali Jha, cited above, for more on the debates over the use of "secular."

"on its honour, it will be up to it [the majority community] to retain its prestige and honour and return members of the minority community" (127). This will also build "goodwill and friendship," for "trust begets trust" (128); this "sacred trust" will do away with the "spirit of separatism and communalism" (127). It was better, observes the narrative, to "sacrifice" a few seats in order to "gain" goodwill, for India, with its declared objectives of a "secular democratic state," would not be able to "afford" any complaints against it on those grounds (130).

During her conclusion, the autobiography also raises the issue of loyalty to the country: religion and loyalty do not go together, she points out; rather, the Muslims who have "decided"[17] to live in India have the interests of their country "foremost" (129). In her account, it is now the responsibility of the majority community to "infuse" confidence and goodwill, because it is "not the asking for it that makes for it [loyalty]"; rather it is the "condition of peoples' minds that create[s] loyalty" (130).

Qudsia's autobiography elides over some pertinent facts of political alignment here: the Muslim League had boycotted the early sessions, beginning December 1946, of the Constituent Assembly.[18] League representatives began participating in its proceedings from the fourth session, in July 1947 with Chaudhary Khaliquzzaman as Leader and Qudsia as Secretary of the League; their numerical

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[17] She and her husband had decided in 1947 "not [to] leave our [their] home" (122).
[18] Qudsia's husband, Nawab Aizaz Rasul, was appointed the General Secretary of the U. P. Muslim League in 1940 (41) while Qudsia Rasul formally joined the League around 1941 in what she terms a "low profile affair" (58). She and her husband later joined the Congress. Qudsia contested and won a seat in the first Rajya Sabha (from the U. P. Assembly) while her husband contested and won the Assembly elections. Interestingly, we are also told that Nehru took a personal interest in their campaigns (134).

strength, after 1947, was 31 out of a total 235 provincial seats.[19] The Minorities Sub-Committee, based on a short questionnaire prepared by K. M. Munshi and a draft of suggested safeguards by B. R. Ambedkar, had deliberated over political safeguards for minorities in the Constitution.[20] It began with proposals to establish, for religious minorities and for scheduled castes and tribes, separate electorates and reservation in legislative bodies, ministries, and the civil, military and judicial services of government as well as a Minorities Commission. When discussions took place in July 1947, after the League members had joined, the demand for separate electorates and for reservation in ministries and government services were dropped. When the Draft Constitution was published in February 1948, Articles 292 and 294 reserved seats in parliament and legislatures for Muslims, Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes and Indian Christian for ten years.[21] This is the context, in terms of numerical strength, the "sad history" of the recent past, and the whittled away political safeguards for religious minorities, when Qudsia Rasul speaks in December 1948.

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[19] The Muslim League and the previously united Muslim group of the Constituent Assembly broke up around February-March 1948, with most prominent members migrating to Pakistan and some splinter groups refusing to disband. Qudsia refers to this in passing, noting that after the "defection" of Chaudhary Khaliquzzaman to Pakistan from India, an "unfortunate" act that "embarrassed" them as not "a gentleman's act" (121), Patel nominated her to the Advisory Committee (125). Further, the League members in U. P. "dissolved" the Muslim League in U. P. and later, the "Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly" decided "to wind up" the party at the Centre (126).

[20] Ambedkar's draft had a section on "provisions for the protection of minorities," stating that social discrimination constituted the real test for determining whether a social group is or is not a minority. Thus scheduled castes and certain religious groups were both minorities in India, "since the administration in India is completely in the hands of the Hindus, and under Swaraj the legislature and executive will also be in the hands of the Hindus." According to him, Indian nationalism had developed a doctrine of "the divine right of the majority to rule the minorities according to the wishes of the majority. Any claim for sharing of power by the minority is called communalism while the monopolizing of the whole power by the majority is called nationalism." Cited in Shefali Jha; for more details, see, B. Shiva Rao, *The Framing of India's Constitution: Select Documents—Vol. II* (Nasik: Government of India Press, 1968).

[21] The Report of the Advisory Committee, signed by Patel, claimed that the committee's decisions "where they were not unanimous, were taken by very large majorities composed substantially of members belonging to minority communities themselves." Cited in Granville Austin, 151.

Therefore, when Qudsia recounts her speech of December 1948, about separate electorates having no place in a secular democratic state, the text does not mention a fait accompli, that *separate electorates have already been done away with.* Moreover, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs have already given up reservation, and the position of Muslims is delicate.[22] The narrative is clearly and consciously choosing the details of its plot/story, for very interestingly, while the narrative does address the sensitive issue of separatism, she refers to it as "a feeling of separatism prevalent *amongst the communities in India today*" (127; italics added). Thus, while she may passionately and repeatedly exhort Muslims to "throw themselves entirely upon the goodwill" of the majority community (127), trust that their shared notions of "prestige and honour" would constrain the "majority community" to "realize its responsibility" (128), her speech also acknowledges "changed conditions" (129) that demand a shift in the "attitude" of the Muslim electorate. The "new page" in history requires a strategic abandonment of separate electorates or reservations, post-1947, for the Muslims in India. As someone who had to deal with a "perpetual complaint" from amongst her League colleagues about her family's "Hindu friends," and forced to make "clear" that "our personal life was our own," Qudsia has to assert in the Constituent Assembly that she is a "greater loyalist" of India than "many Hindus." She, with all her desire for "strengthening" a "secular democratic" India has to state publicly that she has the interests of her country foremost at heart, whereas

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[22] Granville Austin quotes Patel's stated view that the abolishment of reservation should not be forced on any minority; Austin notes, "Patel, however, was too considerate of minority fears—and too much the strategist—to force the issue, preferring to wait until time and other persons had achieved his ends for him" (152). However, "[t]here can be little doubt that Patel . . . quietly and privately put a great deal of pressure on the minorities to relinquish special privileges" (151). See, Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of A Nation* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1966]).

they are indulging in "subversive activities" which are "against the interests of the state" (129).

A careful reading of Qudsia's autobiography reveals the contradictions that the narrative has to carry and attempt to conceal in the identity of this "self." For instance, Qudsia is painfully aware that "even a broken knife" found in "those times" in a Muslim house could send a family to jail (132). She takes exception to the "unfair and unjust" judgments passed by the post-Independence generations on "our actions," because, more than a few seats in the legislatures, the "goodwill" of the "majority" was "essential" (130). The difficult complexities of the situation Qudsia would have found herself in are hinted at by Granville Austin, when he notes that Begam Aizaz Rasul, Qudsia, "found herself thrust forward as spokesman for the Muslim community" (154). Elsewhere, she expresses a "firm belief" that if the Congress had "adhered to the unwritten agreement" of a coalition government in U. P. after the 1937 elections, "there would have been a confederation of India instead of the division of India" (30). She also quotes Maulana Abul Kalam Azad—popularly labeled a "nationalist Muslim"—extensively from his autobiography, *India Wins Freedom*,[23] to show that he too agreed with this interpretation, because, according to her, "inspite of being a staunch Congressman," he too saw the "justification" of the stand she and her colleagues had taken (98). Years later (April 1999), invited to a convention organized in Delhi to discuss the condition of Muslims and to demand reservations in services and legislatures, an ailing Qudsia sends a message. She quotes in her autobiography from her message: as communal feelings have grown

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[23] Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Madras: Orient Longman, 1988).

and the concept of Hindutva has gained "popularity," it is "time now" to think anew of how to improve the educational and socio-economic conditions of Muslims.

The self being moulded and modulated for our appreciation—a modern, secular, citizen of her nation who, incidentally yet importantly, is also a Muslim woman—is representative of the political compositions that the text is grappling with. Qudsia talks at some length of the intellectual atmosphere in her parental home: her mother was friends with Sardar Umrao Singh Sher Gil, the father of renowned artist Amrita Sher Gil, while Muhammad Iqbal was a frequent visitor to her father's study; discussions on Urdu and Persian literature as well as contemporary politics and history took place and the women enjoyed, socially and intellectually, an "equality in status" (15) to men. Purdah, was a way of life in those "different times" (15); Qudsia undoubtedly views her life, implied clearly in her title *From Purdah to Parliament*, as having "progressed" with the times, as having become "modern." It is ironic that while Qudsia was "confined" within purdah, she had access to varied literary and cultural pursuits, and she sees herself as having had the best of "leisurely times" (10) . And yet, when she was a "representative" in legislative bodies, she was "nominated" to express opinions which seem to vary from her own![24]

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[24] Qudsia finds no mention in many of the books that deal with U. P. politics in the twentieth century or with the formation of India and Pakistan. Some of the books I searched through for information about her include, Mushirul Hasan ed., *India"s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994 [Cambridge, 1985]); Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1923* (Delhi: Oxford, University Press, 1993).

To take an even more provocative line—did the change in status, as a Muslim, the move from purdah to parliament, include as many social and political advantages as the narrative would like to set up? Qudsia is unambiguous that their home atmosphere, when she was growing up as a child, was "secular, Indian and Islamic" (15); nor does the narrative seem to have any doubts about the conjunction of those concepts. It is possible to argue that the promise of a secular India and its much debated "failure" yank my attention to this concurrence in Qudsia's text; in which case, one might be propelled by nostalgia for that loss, as a pledge and a desire which is still longed for.

Yet, I would suggest that the problem lies not in a methodological "failure" but rather in an inherently internal contradiction of these terms which make the fulfillment of the conjunction "secular, Indian, Islamic" impossible. What the autobiographical text suggests, in my reading, is the need for an analysis of the genealogy of the concepts of secularism and nationalism in western modernity and of the question of religion in the rational order of the modern nation-state—an unavoidable factor in secular-modernity. The political domain can no longer be read as separate from socio-cultural domains; one manipulates, and is manipulated by, the others. Religion, as has been demonstrated, cannot be understood as a transhistorical or transcultural phenomenon, for it is a conjunction of beliefs and practices, of forces and representations, themselves the products of discursive processes.[25]

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[25] See, for instance, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993); S. N. Balagangadhara, *"The Heathen in His Blindness . . .": Asia, The West and the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's first-hand account of crucial public events and decisions, her guarded statements and position, have to be read not only for her "identity," the loss-of-self-gain-of-self crafting in autobiographical terms, but for the fine lines she treads, and the critiques enabled because of her status as a minority on more than one plane. And that could be the reason why Qudsia's narrative has a rather jagged prose construction; neither is the arrangement of her memories into "progressive" chapters is as neat as a linear argument of development about an evolving public life would require.

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My aim in this chapter has been to read the autobiographical narratives of Shaista Ikramullah Suhrawardy and Qudsia Aizaz Rasul for the modes in which these contemporaries—acquaintances and colleagues-in-passing if not friends—frame the unfolding of their lives and delineate the identity of a "self." I have argued that, despite the dissimilarities, both selves work primarily at addressing and dealing with their identities as "modern Muslim women" although in very different life-worlds. Or, to put it another way, both texts are negotiating their identity at the disjuncture of, the excess spilling over and into, the private/ purdah domain of "Muslim women" and the domain of the "secular citizens" in public/Parliament.

In many ways, the elegant prose and "finished" quality of Shaista Ikramullah Suhrawardy's autobiographical narrative is in sharp contrast to the uneven narrative structure and inconsistent quality of the prose of Qudsia Aizaz Rasul.

This contrast is further reinforced by the quality of the two publications: the former was first published by a London publisher in 1963 and a revised edition by a major academic publishing house in 1998. The latter has been published by a local publisher, and as late as in 2001, with a decidedly inferior quality of paper and printing.

However, more significant differences are perhaps in their Muslimness, for both texts deal with that facet of their identities as an integral though not exclusive part of their identity as woman that in turn is shot through geographical and class orientations. While they do share certain features of "class"—Shaista talks of the "wonderful servants" in "our country" (128) and Qudsia laments the disappearance of "that breed of retainers" who served the family for generations (18)—the two also come from crucially dissimilar backgrounds. Most critical however is the fact that they are addressing very different kinds of readers, and therefore there are very different requirements of their narratives.

Shaista's family is a member of a urban, western-educated, service-oriented elite; the Suhrawardys live in Calcutta but do not speak Bengali.[26] They speak Urdu and several of them are eminent littérateurs with notable careers in Urdu. And yet, the people they wish to serve in their political lives, the vast majority of rural Bengali Muslims, are far removed from their religious as well as literary landscape.[27] On the other hand, Qudsia's natal Punjabi family is just as educated

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[26] Shaista's doctoral dissertation from the University of London, later published as a book, was on the development of the Urdu novel and short story.

[27] For more on this, see, for instance, Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996 [First edition 1981; second edition 1988]) and Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947* (Delhi: Imperial, 1976).

in Persian and Arabic; her life after marriage continues to function in the world of Urdu/Hindustani. There is little evidence of Qudsia's familiarity with local dialects and though there may be a similar remove between their urban and rural existences, Qudsia's narrative, significantly, conveys a sense of shared cultural ethos with the Muslims, as well as the Hindus, she seeks to represent and work with.

Crucially pertinent to the purely political angle here is that both women seek to narrativize an autobiographical identity that forges links based on a religious homogeneity, real or otherwise, quite apart from the fact that the duplication of their titles— *From Purdah to Parliament*—is clearly meant to reflect a shared concept of expanded possibilities in their journey of life. Yet, these autobiographies have to serve somewhat dissimilar functions amongst their readers. Shaista's autobiography works hard to create a "self" whose identity is measured only in terms of its religion, presuming on the one hand, a function as an example for a readership of "modern Muslim women" in her country and on the other hand, orchestrating the story of how this "example" of a successful public life for a modern Muslim woman is possible. But at the same time, the narrative ordering demonstrates, as my analyses have shown, critiques of hegemonic nationalist demands made on the figure of a modern, Muslim woman. That identity is being subtly yet unmistakably dismantled, offering an idea of the contests on "marginal" locations that raise imposing claims of their own.

Qudsia's narrative does not want to wish away the social, cultural and economic dimensions of her identity and indeed works hard towards an identity that is a

"modern" Muslim, critically aware of the problems besetting her community and yet wisely reflexive about the dissonances in the nation's polity. Nonetheless, this critical awareness and wise reflexivity is undercut by the narrative performance that simultaneously contests such conceptions. In the very act of invoking the name of Abul Kalam Azad who carries the label of a "nationalist Muslim" in mainstream History, for example, and in poking fun at Jinnah's gastronomic constraints, the narrative alignments also offer scope for reading a woman's perspective on male pronouncements and positions. As I have demonstrated in my analyses, though the narrative is acutely aware that the Muslim part of her identity in contemporary India has acquired a critical urgency which it cannot afford to ignore, her sculpting of her identity reveals the compelling illusions of such an identity.

So, while it may be possible to make strategic uses of the identity "Muslim woman," it would be self-defeating to consider it in essentialist terms. As the analyses of the two texts above illustrate, an undifferentiated categorization and reading of "Muslim" would take recourse to an enlightenment space of arrival, that of an unmarked "self." But a more deliberate and nuanced understanding would enable us to look for a richer composition, to search for more rigourous tools that allow a radical interrogation of such an imposing identity. Interestingly, both Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul have written in English, a sign of "modernity."[28] That is to say, while the authors obviously wish to reach at an audience that shares the class and caste requirements of

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[28] Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah's autobiography was translated into Urdu after the English version appeared.

English language in the subcontinent, the texts also set up critiques of hegemonic genres and claims towards new definitions of identity, in a language that is also assertively their own.