# CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, I explored the making of a "Muslim" woman's identity through the autobiographies of two politically active, if not publicly prominent, women. Shaista Ikramullah Suhrawardy and Qudsia Aizaz Rasul were both women who participated in public political affairs and negotiated complex socio-political forces as well as structures in their life-worlds. The making of the identity of a "Muslim woman" in their narrative as well as in the shift of history and politics is, I have tried to show through my analyses, not a casual conjunction but rather a moment in an intricate and ongoing dialogue. Their lives offer, I claim, moments of understanding political conjunctures that hold historical significance for contemporary contests over the making of a sovereign, secular identity.[1]

Ayesha Jalal's arguments on the making of an identity and the evidences—social, cultural and political from literary and other texts—she brings to bear on her

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[1] My argument in this thesis has brought into discussion the idea of "sovereignty," implicit in the liberal democratic notion of a "self." The idea of sovereignty, broadly understood as the logic and structure of rule, has been the focus of a long and meticulously argued discussion and debate. It has also been argued that in the era of globalization, the sovereignty of nation-states has declined. In a widely discussed recent work, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term the contemporary logic of sovereignty, "Empire." In an age of Empire, they contend, sovereignty has not declined as such; rather, a new global sovereignty that transcends both national borders and modern imperialism has emerged. They argue about "the impossibility of traditional forms of struggle" and call for strategies for social transformation that take into account "a fundamentally new form of rule."
In a later book, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Hardt and Negri examine the diverse demands for democracy from various corners of the world. They investigate modern political concepts of representation and sovereignty, and explore how an emerging democratic project might usefully remake or resist these concepts.
For more, see, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2000) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

arguments are impressive.[2] However, there remains an unease of the formulation "Muslim woman" that Jalal attributes to language, region and class. It appears glaringly obvious, as my analyses in chapters three and four have demonstrated that the absence of any consideration of "caste" in the critical constitution of identity in the context of the subcontinent could lead to recourse to Enlightenment logic of categories such as secularism-communalism, citizenship, rights, and so on.

Trying to understand the sense of incompleteness of Jalal's thesis, it might be useful to consider the problem from another angle: that here exists a gap on the one hand between the legal-bureaucratic apparatus of the state that has virtually reached its target of its activities, that is, the population and on the other, the domain of civil social institutions—in the sense of associational life tied to a European modernity—that remains restricted to a fairly small number of "citizens."

Or, in the words of Partha Chatterjee, clearer theoretical shapes and instruments around practices, solidarities and institutions have to be examined from "within the nation" for a more satisfactory resolution.[3] Chatterjee draws on the Foucauldian concept of "population" which is—unlike the family in classical political theory—descriptive, classifiable, enumerative and empirical rather than normative and has been more significant for the emergence of modern

[2] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[3] Partha Chatterjee. "Beyond the Nation? Or Within?" In *Economic and Political Weekly* (4 January-11 January 1997): 30-34.

governmental technologies.[4] So, civil society[5] is a concept useful to describe modern associational life in postcolonial countries as institutions set up by nationalist elites in the era of colonial modernity, in a desire to emulate and conform to the virtues of enlightenment and bourgeois freedom of a secularized western Christianity. Chatterjee argues that "the actual 'public'" cannot "match up" to the standards of such civil society institutions that continue on a path of "cultural modernization still to be completed" (32).

Instead, Chatterjee suggests, the mediation between the population and the state takes place on the site of "political society," though there may be spillovers of organizational limits, as was evident by divergences during nationalist political

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[4] Michel Foucault characterizes modern power—as against power in predemocratic regimes that was "substantive," or, embodied and directed uncompromisingly upon a subject—as "governmental"; that is, it is concerned to "structure the field of others" (221) and does so through the enumerative category of "population." In other words, modern power is differently distributed and differently organized in relation to targets, instrumentalities, and forms of knowledge.
In the postcolonial context, it operates through a governmental reorganization of the existing institutional and political spaces in a manner such that the conduct of the colonized is constrained or urged in an improving direction (social reform, for instance). It is then a construction of a distinctive political rationality which works through a subjectivity experienced as a "free will" and rational assumption of agency. Thus, the non-modern, non-liberal and non-democratic forms of a pre-democratic regime of political community can only appear as securely in the past, and needs to enter into a project of perfecting their modernity, which task can only take place within the concepts and institutions through which their social lives have been reshaped by the intrusion of western power.
For more on this, see, Foucault's "Governmentality" in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality; with two lectures by Michel Foucault*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[5] Chatterjee's term has of course a genealogical link to Gramsci's use of the term "civil society," though he gives it a new valency.
Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) argued that capitalist societies in the twentieth century maintained control not just through violence and political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became the "common sense" values of all. Thus a culture of consensus develops in which people of the working-class identify their own good with the good of the bourgeoisie, and thereby help to maintain the *status quo* instead of revolting. In the Gramscian framework, the state is not to be understood in the narrow sense of the government; instead, Gramsci divides it between "political society," which is the arena of political institutions and legal constitutional control, and "civil society," which is held to be the "private" or "non-state" sphere, and includes the economy. The former is the realm of force and the latter of consent. Gramsci stresses, however, that the division is purely conceptual and that the two, in reality, often overlap.
For more on this, see, Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1996).

mobilizations. Chatterjee's contention is that "the practices that activate the forms and methods of mobilization and participation in political society are not always consistent with the principles of organization in civil society" (32).

The principles that govern postcolonial political societies—that try to order and channelize popular demands on development—can be termed, according to Chatterjee, under the rubric of "democracy." However, Chatterjee maintains that the institutional forms of this emergent political society are still unclear and continue to be worked out through struggles to find "new democratic forms . . . not thought out by the post-enlightenment social consensus of the secularized Christian world" (33).

Chatterjee posits three theses in this new movement of political society and the desire for democracy: one, transformations during the colonial period took place most significantly on the site of civil society and during the postcolonial period are on the site of political society; debates during the colonial period are framed by modernity and during the postcolonial period, the framing question is democracy; the contemporary globalization of capital may witness an emerging opposition between modernity and democracy (33).

The last thesis is related by Chatterjee to a contemporary desire for the nation-state, on the one hand, to mediate between globality and modernity and, on the other, between globality and democracy. Chatterjee identifies a universalist notion of rights grounded in a global modernity as generating charges of failure against the nation-state. On the other hand, the grounds of a new cultural modernity show

up glaring inadequacies of the old forms of democratic representation and in fact, pronounce "modernity itself as inappropriate and deeply flawed" (34). It is in fact, contends Chatterjee, a separation of civil society-modernity and political society-democracy that will enable a working out of "new forms of democratic institutions and practices" (34).

Let me juxtapose this call for "new forms" with a recent autobiography of a Muslim man. Ziauddin Sardar's autobiography[6] is the story of his journey, in progress even as the book concludes, of his "search" for paradise in late twentieth/early twenty-first century.[7] The act of extensive travel, Sardar points out, is intimately linked to a quest for knowledge in classical Islam. And knowledge is the key to the gates of paradise; hence, travel is the search for the entryway to paradise. After the eleventh-century theologian and philosopher Al-Ghazali's distinction between professionally undertaken outward travel—*rihla*—

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[6] Ziauddin Sardar, *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* (London: Granta, 2004). Professor Ziauddin Sardar (1951 - ), born in Dipalpur, Northern Pakistan, migrated to London when he was barely ten years old with his family. A writer, broadcaster and critic, he is a prominent writer on the future of Islam and has published widely on science and technology. A Visiting Professor of Postcolonial Studies, Department of Arts Policy and Management at City University, London, he has published over forty books on various aspects of Islam, science policy, cultural studies and related subjects. He often writes columns in *The Observer*, a British Sunday newspaper, and the *New Statesman*, a weekly magazine. Professor Sardar is the editor of *Futures*, the monthly journal of policy, planning and futures studies and co-editor of *Third Text*, a critical journal of visual art and culture.

[7] The idea of travel, or a journey, is one that has rich and complex philosophical, religious and political roots. After all, entire disciplines of thought and knowledge, history and anthropology as we know them today, to name only two, take the idea of travel as a fulcrum for their existence. The high Renaissance idea of a linear progress was tied in the European imaginary to the notion of travel over space and time. The "discovery" of continents and peoples in Africa and Asia fed into the understanding of a "superior" Europe; in short, journey as a trope for discovery and growth, collective or personal is a primeval one. The act of remembering, the choice of possible or available meanings, heavily influence the counters and contours of that journey. Thus, at the "end" of it all, as the assessment and summing up is brought in for an analysis, the journey of life may appear a fruitless chase or a meaningful intervention, a self-fulfilling struggle to actualize specific values. A journey within one's self, as for instance in the act of writing an autobiography too, can also be an attempt to understand, to confront oneself.
Ashis Nandy has argued that while for the Victorians a journey might have been a frame, primarily, to view others, for South Asians it has mainly been a frame to confront the self. See, for more, Nandy, *An Ambiguous Journey to the City: The Village and Other Odd Ruins of the Self in the Indian Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

and a journey that combined physical exertion with inner transformation, liberation and attainment—*safar*—Sardar consciously undertakes the latter form. Within this too, he opts for that version of *safar* which is said to enable a transformation within the traveler and lead him (sic) to paradise.

Subsequently, over the years of his travel and work across the globe, from North Africa, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China to Malaysia, apart from Europe and the U. S. A., Sardar's primary preoccupation continues to be an individual and collective becoming and belonging (183). Sardar demarcates "paradise" carefully, precise in his delineation of its many linguistic and conceptual complexities.[8] However, he notes sadly that paradise has come to mean an accumulation of credits—Islamic deeds, including outmoded concepts and ideas about Shariah, art, literature, culture—and in turn has also come to mean an end in itself. On the other hand, Sardar's discovery has been that the Muslim paradise was "not a place of arrival." More likely, he thinks, that it is "a way of traveling," "a continual kind of becoming" (339). The journey may fail, but the thinking and questioning of each day of each journey is paradise itself; the "route map" is continually amended and adjusted but the quest continues.

Sardar's sense of identity is firmly placed in the framework of a composite identity: on the one hand, it is neither alone nor singular but "simultaneously part

[8] Sardar's early education in theology by his mother, at home, instructed him on paradise as a parable; the fact that the word for "garden" occurs a hundred and thirty times in its description in the English text (1930) of the Quran was but a metaphor. Paradise, Sardar notes, was not merely an idea of a landscaped garden in the imagination of the first translator of the Quran into English, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), filled with all kinds of imaginable and unimaginable riches. Rather, he considers it as a protected space that veils or protects from the scorching, searing heat of hell (335). The word itself is meant to be a "springboard" for the "imagination" (335), and it is Islam as an open system, full of diverse flowers so to speak, that is the "earthly paradise" that Sardar has sought to "discover" all his life (338).

of the multiple and diverse body of the whole Muslim community" (183). On the other hand, Sardar elsewhere recalls that as a child, he had to negotiate day-to-day domestic transactions for his mother and parley market, bureaucratic and cultural contacts in an alien environment. It was also his task to seek out "nooks and crannies" for a "continuity" and a "belonging" (22)—whether unearthing "proto-" corner shops selling groceries and spices from the subcontinent to escorting his mum and her friends to shows of classic Hindi movies across town. Further, the "Paki-bashing" also in vogue in town meant, Sardar notes, that the worlds he grew up in "barely recognized," indeed, knew "precious little" about each other. So, his "innermost" self, his private self, his identity in the terms of my argument, is experienced as an "embodiment" of personal faith that is not simply a matter of "aggregate[s]" but organically linked.

Sardar's praxis is that of an activist search for immediate solutions while retaining a vision and a questioning of the frameworks of thought. So, his vision of an Islamic science is of a "knowledge-based" tool to solve local problems: recurring diseases such as diarrhea and dysentery in Pakistan, flood control in Bangladesh, bilharzia in Egypt and the Sudan, or the materials and mechanisms for cheap temporary housing, clean drinking water, basic healthcare, etc. Sardar states that he is not in favour of a mere "Islamization"; rather, "modern knowledge" has to be made relevant to the values of Islam (198). He notes that modern forms of knowledges are the result of specific historical and political needs; for instance, anthropology was developed to know, manage and control the "Other" of western civilization (200). Similarly, newer forms of disciplines are required that are based on their "own" cultural context, geared to solving "their own problems" (200).

Thus, research on "traditional" medicine, agriculture, water management would be "built upon and improved" in a "collaboration" that would simultaneously force philosophical inquiries about "modern science"—its assumptions and premises about nature, time, logic, human beings, ethics, values, the universe (328).

Sardar's philosophical framework is a deeply moving as well as a highly nuanced one: its very attempt to include a dialogue between the local and the global renders the many individual as well as communitarian locals equal; the universal global also becomes an equal speaker/participant in each of these global/local exchanges; such a move simultaneously erases the political power and the economic clout of the "global" during such dialogic encounters in order to strategically and emphatically announce the voice of the marginal, the excess, that which can be ignored by the mainstream genres only at their own peril. And the demands that such identities pose, travelling identities as it were, are clear: a global push from above that is blind to historical, economical and political contexts in which vast numbers of contestants exist and exercise their options will do so at risk to itself, and will have to negotiate with various impositions from below. The "transition" towards a "world of cultural diversity" and a "dynamic tolerant pluralism" (341) crucially requires due attention to the historical, economical and political contexts in which individual lives exist and exercise their options.

Let me elaborate a little by taking examples from the issue of law and Muslim women: a Handbook prepared by an international solidarity network, the "Women Living Under Muslim Laws" (WLUML), documents the legal, customary and

other laws based on religion as used in the context of Muslim women.[9] The organization worked to identify commonalities as well as shatter the myth of one homogenous Muslim world by "identifying diversities across Muslim countries and communities" (*KOR*, 16). It was found that though all countries under the study claimed Islam as the justification for their laws and practices, for instance, polygyny is customarily mandated in some sections of the community in Nigeria, permitted without restrictions (other than the number of wives) in India, permitted only with court oversight in Malaysia, and prohibited in countries such as Tunisia and Turkey (*KOR*, 204-7). The Handbook also discusses in some detail not just the existence of codified laws, but also the space available for women, legal interpretations, and community practices.

It is obvious from the details of the WLUML research that the religious sanction for personal laws (regarding, primarily, marriage, children and inheritance), though claiming to originate from that section of the Quran termed the Shariah is but a convenient tool that has been very very difficult to negotiate and prise open for affirmative action in the interests of women. Nonetheless, the variety of existing laws point to the dictates of political structures under different, specific, socio-economic contexts that have determined and restricted options.

The history of codification of laws regarding women, irrespective of community, caste or religion has been well documented as far as India is concerned and I will

[9] International Solidarity Network, *Knowing Our Rights: Women, family, laws and customs in the Muslim World* (Delhi: Zubaan, 2003; London, 2003). Hereafter, abbreviated as *KOR*. The WLUML, founded in 1984, has researched laws in 20 Muslim countries and communities; their primary focus has been women who not only identify themselves as Muslims and women living in "Muslim" states but also women from immigrant Muslim populations in Europe, women who have chosen other markers of identity but to whom Muslim laws are applied either through their marriages, nationality or birth identity.

not go into those details here.[10] Suffice it to say that scholars have pointed out, on the one hand, how the issue of minority laws, in a given political and socio-cultural as well as economic context, may become a handy tool for leverage by political fronts of varied hues, leading to a withdrawal and closure of ranks of a community. On the other hand, it can also pressurize civil and political spaces to do a re-think on such concepts.

In other words, though the construction of institutional and conceptual spaces cannot be read as an episode in the progressive emergence of "freedom"; neither can such a move be read reductively as a recourse to a ". . . construction of a distinctive *political rationality* in which power seeks to work *through* the construction of the space of 'free' social exchange, and *through* the construction of a subjectivity experienced as a 'free will' and rational assumption of agency."[11] On the contrary, Sardar's praxis suggests that it be read as an agentive move that negotiates, even as it engages, with the existing categories of its world. To put it another way, the WLUML documentation affirms the possibility of struggling with and successfully contesting the identity of "Muslim" and "woman."

Sardar is aware of the quagmire of circular problems: an "unbridled passion" for Shariah, he regrets, has transformed the community into "passive receivers" rather than "active seekers" of truth (240-241). Nonetheless, he recognizes that such

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[10] See, for instance, *Manushi* (1984), *The Lawyers* (1988), Vimochana Document (1988), Vasudha Dhagamwar (1989), Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1989), V. C. Mishra (1991), Tanika Sarkar (1993, 2001), Madhu Kishwar (1994), Zoya Hasan (1994, 1999), Flavia Agnes (1994, 1995, 2001), AIDWA Draft (1995), Forum Against Oppression of Women Document (1995), Ratna Kapur and Brenda Cossman (1995), S. Chandra (1996), Anveshi Law Committee (1997).

[11] David Scott, "The Aftermaths of Sovereignty" in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 131-157.

conundrums have not paralyzed efforts by Muslim "individuals and communities" to reinterpret their religious texts according to their own time and context (246-248).

Elsewhere, Sardar has pointed that liberal humanism as a grand narrative of western modernity has created a "gulf": it does not, he contends, "know how to handle difference and how to provide the space for difference to exist as difference."[12] Therefore, the demands raised by a "self" as a particular identity, and strategic mobilizations around a singular axis, with a view on certain socio-economic or political goals have to be read for the multiple strands constitutive of that identity. In other words, "identity" is a sort of unstable ensemble of subject-positions constructed through and within specific discursive formations; it follows that identity can only be constituted through acts of identification and institution.

I have argued in my thesis that auto/biographical narratives which begin with the burden of an identity marked particularly by gender or caste or religion inaugurate a writing that calls into question the universal category of a "self." I have examined in the "Introduction" the possible connection between an increasing popularity of the genre, "identity politics," and the phenomenon of widespread political movements during the twentieth century. I have also surveyed theoretical perspectives that have led to a conclusion that it is no longer possible to visualize individual "subjects" as masters (sic) of the only true realm of meaning and value; instead, it has been demonstrated that subjects are culturally and discursively structured, that their agency is created through their cultural meanings and

[12] Ziauddin Sardar, "Interview" with Hasan Suroor, *The Hindu* 13 February 2006, 11.

practices and that they are material beings, entrenched in the practices and structures of their society. In the context of India, I have investigated contemporary feminist scholarship and its shift towards a layered understanding of gender and identity, not only in terms of a third world location or a class-based analysis but more sharply through the lenses of caste and religion. In chapter one, "Autobiographics: Structures, Sutures, Subjectivities," I have tracked a history of the genre, the history of the writing and theory of women's autobiographical narratives and laid the ground for the ways in which autobiographical initiatives can be understood as drawing on the personal to tug at, to "mess up," the social, the layering of concepts of "self" and "identity," of "language" and "writing," of "personal" and "public."

In chapter two, "Questioning Woman: Leila Ahmed and Nawal El Saadawi's Takes on Race and Religion," I have examined the critiques set up by Black feminists of a deployment of "woman" as a category for analysis and read the autobiographies of two non-Indian Muslim women—Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage: from Cairo to America, A Woman's Journey* and Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*[13] to tease out the implications of "Muslim" in very different discursive formations of economic, social and power relations within a particular society. In chapter three, "Contra-dictions: Nationalist Conundrums and Caste/Gender Narratives," I have reviewed gender and caste as relational categories, analyzed the autobiographical narratives of two Dalit men, Sharankumar Limbale and Vasant Moon, and two women,

[13] Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: from Cairo to America, A Woman's Journey* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Nawal El Saadawi, *A Daughter of Isis: The Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London and New York: Zed, 1999).

Bama, and C. K. Janu, a Tamil Dalit and a tribal from Kerala. [14] I have explored each of these texts for the composition of a lived material reality of contemporary ideologies of caste and showed how the texts dispute notions of freedom, choice, development, and progress as defined under prevailing hegemonic liberal democratic regimes of a benign nation. In chapter four, "Purdah/Parliament: Modern Muslim Woman and the Political Oblique," I have focused on the autobiographies of two Muslim women from the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century, by Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah and Begum Qudsia Aizaz, titled in both cases *From Purdah to Parliament.*[15]

I have argued that autobiographical texts have to be read for what a "self" becomes, how it has been represented, and how that bears on how it represents itself. I have drawn together the implications of experiential questions of identity raised by those living them for normative genres such as autobiography, or public, or secular or citizen. It is, as borne out by the analyses of this thesis, more pertinent to closely examine the historical contours of a "self" in order to enrich our understanding and negotiations of contemporary identities—imposing as in overwhelmingly impressive—inflicted or imposed by social constructs. My argument is not for recourse to a politics of authenticity or a "premodern" form of organizing our collective lives. Rather, my argument is that such a genealogical, nuanced enterprise will enable us to have a better handle on the meaning and

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[14] Sharankumar Limbale, *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*, trans. by Santosh Bhoomkar with an Introduction by G. N. Devy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Vasant Moon, *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* (Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2002); Bama, *Karukku*, trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom (Chennai: Macmillan, 2000); C. K. Janu, *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu*, as told to and written by Bhaskaran, trans. N. Ravi Shankar (Delhi: Kali for Women and Women Unlimited, 2004).

[15] 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).

consequences of contemporary contests over identities and to argue for the validity of a variety of forms of political reasoning and open out possibilities for alliances in the search for more fruitful, newer, forms of equitable institutions and practices.