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Promoting women's rights in Islam: the role of female madrasah teachers in the economic and social empowerment of Indian Muslim girls

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Promoting Women's Rights in Islam: The Role of Female Madrasah Teachers in the Economic and Social Empowerment of Indian Muslim Girls

by

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A research report submitted to Critical Diversity Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Critical Diversity Studies.

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April 2022

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Bismillah Hir Rahman Nir Raheem (In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful)

Dedication

For my beloved late mother,

Shamim Begum Kader

(20/01/1963–13/08/2021),

who was, is, and will always be my pillar of strength.

I love you, and I miss you- until we meet again, insha'Allah.

My mother, my mother, my mother

The warmth of my soul

The home of memories

With her kind and loving hold

The coolness of our eyes

A forever comfort zone

With the world on her back

And paradise at her feet

God himself honoured her

To the power of three

Your mother, your mother, your mother

To be loved before all

There when I rise

There when I fall

Her every prayer for others

How could one ask for more

My mother, my mother, my mother

A gift from up above

The softest heart I ever knew

Yet the strongest with her love

-Mobeen Hakeem

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Abstract

Madrasah education in South Africa is predominantly based on the Deobandi system which is underpinned by patriarchal ideologies that promote the grooming of Muslim women and girls primarily in the role of homemakers. The aim of this research was to investigate if female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers within such a patriarchal education system are able to teach girls in ways that empower them to pursue further education and business which are aligned with the educational and economic rights that Islam grants women. A qualitative research framework was utilised, within which the instrument of semi-structured interviews was employed. The five participants who were engaged in one-hour, semi-structured interviews had satisfied the selection criteria of being female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers from different madrasahs in various provinces across South Africa, including having a minimum of three years teaching experience. The data was analysed using a thematic content analysis method and it was found that Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers promote women's rights in Islam through various pedagogies such as the use of religious texts, the modelling of important women in Islam, the use of class debates, and implementation of authentic learning. In addition, it was determined that the female Indian Muslim teachers encouraged students to pursue further education that could be either religious or secular, as long as neither type of education transgressed the boundaries of sharia (Islamic law). Moreover, the curriculum taught at these madrasahs by the female Indian Muslim teachers ranged from an exclusively religious education curriculum to one that had a focus on both religious and secular education. Lastly, a sentiment that was expressed by all five participants was that Islam and its religious texts do not need to be reinterpreted from a feminist perspective as Islam already holds men and women in equal status. The implications of these findings are that although these teachers work within patriarchal Deobandi institutions, they are finding ways to empower their learners by providing Indian Muslim girls with an education that challenges the subjugation of Muslim women within Islamic society, and that raises consciousness about women's rights in Islam.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

Western feminism has gained traction in the past few decades and is predicated upon the doctrine of equality for all women. Its emergence was in response to patriarchal systems that subordinate women and exclude them from both public and private life. Religion within a feminist lens is considered to be a product of patriarchy that seeks to exert the very same control and subordination on women that patriarchy exerts (Mir-Hosseini 2011). A religion that western feminism sees as proof of this is Islam, of which the veil has been used as the ultimate illustration of patriarchal religious female oppression. However, Islam refutes this claim with its foundation being based on the equality of women and men, as Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) had said: "All people are equal, as the teeth of a comb. There is no claim of merit of…male over a female" (Adeel 2010, p. 103-104). In the current social climate, however, Islam is believed to have been contorted by patriarchal religious male interpreters into a culture that aims to domesticate Muslim women in a bid to control and subjugate them. This has led to the creation and promotion of Islamic feminism by Muslim women across the globe (e.g. Zainah Anwar, Saba Mahmood) who work to dispel these distortions and highlight Muslim women's rights by deploying an Islamic feminist interpretation of the original Qu'ranic script and the hadiths[1], with the Musawah movement being instrumental in doing so (Kynsihleto 2008).

The framework of Islamic feminism is the reinterpretation of the original Qu'ranic scripts and hadiths to foreground the gender equality intrinsic to Islam and promote women's rights such as the right to an education and the right to work, ridding the practice of Islam of its patriarchal perspective: "The basic argument of Islamic feminists is that the Qu'ran supports the principle

[1] Hadiths are the "Report of the words and deeds of Muhammad and other early Muslims; considered an authoritative source of revelation, second only to the Koran (sometimes referred to as sayings of the Prophet). Hadith … were collected, transmitted, and taught orally for two centuries after Muhammad's death and then began to be collected in written form and codified." (Esposito 2003: 101)

of equality and justice of all human beings but that the practice of equality of women and men in today's Muslim societies have been corrupted by patriarchal ideas, customs and practices" (Tønnessen 2014, p. 3). With regard to equality, it is vital to mention that although Muslim men and women are seen as equal in Islam, there is a distinction in relation to their gender-specific roles and responsibilities. What is meant by this is that men are referred to as the breadwinners of the home and women as the caretakers of the home. These two roles are viewed as complementary and not superior or inferior to one another: "Among Islamic authors and religious leaders, it is common to emphasize the equal value of women and men within a complementary gender system" (Predelli 2004, p. 475). One of the major ways by which this gender role specification is enforced is through the madrasah education system.

Madrasahs (literally meaning "places of study") are considered as places of learning in which the Qu'ran, hadiths and other religious-related texts, as well as religious subjects, are taught (Hoel 2016, p. 30). There are two types of madrasahs: (1) afternoon madrasahs where children go to learn religious texts such as the Qu'ran and hadiths and subjects such as Fiqh[2]; and (2) madrasahs that serve as secondary schools (known as dar-u-ulooms) and which are geared towards young adults for the acquisition of further studies in the examination of the religious texts of the Qu'ran, hadiths and history of Islam, as well as the study of subjects such as Fiqh. The second type of madrasah is segregated according to gender, resulting in male and female madrasahs offering aalim (male) and aalima (female) courses respectively. To date, there are two major Indian Muslim schools of thought that constitute learning systems in madrasah education: the Barelwi and Deobandi. The Barelwi and Deobandi reformist schools of thought that had emerged during the late 19th century of British India are both founded upon the following of the sunnahh of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). However, both schools of thought diverge in relation to beliefs and practices. The Barelwi school supports the presence of Islam based on the integration of folk beliefs and practices (such as Sufism[3]) whilst the Deobandi school of thought rejects it, and places the "pure" classical texts of Islam at its centre (Sidat, 2018, p. 2). The interpretations of Islam shared by the scholar Ahmad Riza from Bareilly

[2] Fiqh refers to the knowledge of the derived practical legal rules as acquired from their particular sources (Saleem, 2010, p. 287).

[3] "Sufism can be said to be a movement which aims at making people good and better Muslims. It is a call to them to actualize truly and internally those teachings of Islam they have accepted only formally or intellectually as part of their inheritance" (Bilqies, 2014, p. 55).

heavily form the focus of the Barelwi movement, whereas the Deobandi orientation of learning originates from a Darul-U-Uloom in a town located in Northern India called Deoband. This Darul-U-Uloom is considered to be the ümm ul-madaris, "the mother of all madrasahs" (Sikand, 2011, p.35). The Dars-e-Nizami is the curriculum that forms the basic guidelines of the Deobandi institution and movement, in conjunction with additional teachings that were not an aspect of the Dars-e-Nizami such as "manqulat", meaning religious science (Farooq 2007, p. 71). The Deobandi orientation of learning persists more commonly in the madrasah arena, given the extensive successful missionaries preaching across the globe.

The Deobandi school of thought and movements are considered to be highly patriarchal (Sikand 2011). To illustrate the patriarchal ideology that surrounds the Deobandi school of thought is the case of Moulana Thanvi's perception of nikah (marriage) in Islam. Moulana Thanvi is a prominent scholar at the Darul-U-Uloom in Deoband (Sikand 2011). He begins by deeming nikah as an exchange between two men, implying that Muslim women are simply the objects of exchange. Based on his logic, Thanvi views the father as the "giver of the woman" and the husband as the "the receiver" (Sikand 2011, p. 37). Muslim women are objectified and silenced as their opinion on the nikah does not matter even though it is believed that, Islamically, a woman needs to provide her permission to both her wali (Islamic legal guardian) and two witnesses to enter a marriage (Halim 2010).

The shaping of young Muslim girls occur at these institutions that serve as training grounds for teaching young women mainly domestic duties, which is in defiance of the rights that Muslim women are allotted to by Islam, such as education and economic rights. It must be mentioned that two outcomes exist when it comes to girls completing the aalima (female Islamic scholars) courses: economic empowerment or inhabiting the gender roles of a wife and mother respectively. What is meant by this is that once the girls have completed their education and become aalimas (female Islamic scholars), they are eligible to become teachers in gender progressive contexts, or to perform the roles of a wife and mother within the domestic realm. But, it must be strongly noted that the main purpose of madrasahs are to prepare girls mainly for the latter outcome as Naz (2016, p. 14) notes that it "is to make them more proficient wives, mothers and domestic managers". Raynor (2007) provide further evidence to Naz's (2016) claim: "There is evidence to indicate significant conservatism amongst female madrasah

graduates in relation to women's roles, supporting a traditional patriarchal social structure where boys are preferred and supported both for higher education and employment, while girls play a home-making role." (Raynor, 2007, n.p.). For this research study/project, the aalima course as lending to the purpose of preparing Indian Muslim girls for the domestic realm to play the roles of wives and mothers will be centralised.

Research shows that the entire premise of a female madrasah was and is based on issues of morality, in which young girls who receive a secular education are considered to be morally corrupt (Hoel 2016; Naz 2016). The issue of morality concerning Muslim girls is premised upon them being good Muslims, which is reinforced in female madrasahs that teach young Muslim women to maintain moral purity, as Hashim stated in his interview with Sayed: "When hadith texts have been taught, we stick strictly to moral issues. The issues of morality have always been and continue to be related to woman's conduct" (Sayed 2010, p. 46).

Despite the proliferation of female madrasahs in South Africa that support the patriarchal Deobandi logic which bases itself upon shaping these young Muslim girls to become good mothers and wives with a focus on morality as an extension of their piety, there are some Deobandi madrasahs in South Africa that challenge these said notions by providing an education that empowers young girls socially and economically amongst other fields, with courses and skills that promise social and economic standing (McDonald 2013). These madrasahs challenge patriarchal logic by teaching secular subjects such as Science, Maths Literacy and Business Economics, as well as skills that promise social and economic advancement such as computer literacy (McDonald 2013).

The social and economic empowerment of young Muslim girls allows them to escape rigid and patriarchal gender roles confined to spaces of the home that are encouraged by patriarchal Deobandi ideals. The perfect examples to illustrate Muslim women's rights to economic independence and educational empowerment are Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) wives, Sayyidatina Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (Peace Be Upon Her) and Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her). Sayyidatina Khadija bint Khuwaylid was the most successful tradeswoman in Saudi Arabia, whilst Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr was a prominent scholar

of Islam (Ullah, Mahmud & Yousef 2015; Rizwan & Awan 2019). Thus, this study aims to investigate how South African female madrasah teachers subvert the patriarchal Deobandi education system to promote the social and economic empowerment of young Indian Muslim girls.

1.2. Research problem

Based upon the background information provided above, it is evident that the school of thought that determines female madrasahs' curriculum, in this case, the Deobandi orientation of learning, is patriarchal. The content taught at Deobandi female madrasahs is gender-biased as these madrasahs were established in response to the perception of women as possessing "unfettered freedoms" when receiving secular education (Sayed 2010, p. 36). This served as justification for the removal of young women from secular institutions, as Muslim women are deemed to be the bearers of morality – the morality that is considered "lacking" in those who were attending secular schools (Sayed 2010, p. 36). As was noted earlier, the curriculum employed at female madrasahs is aligned to domestic duties which prepare young women to be future good wives and mothers – something deemed to be an extension of their piety. The texts studied in female madrasahs such as "The Ideal Mother" and "Upbringing of Children" emphasize this notion (Sayed 2010, p. 41; Hoel 2016, pp. 40- 41). This provides credibility to the claim that female madrasahs are spaces for the shaping of Muslim women in domesticity only, "to mould their female learners into becoming pious Muslim women who would prioritise their religious roles as wives and mothers" (Hoel 2016, p. 39).

This is in contravention of the rights that Muslim women possess as several scholars have argued (Doi 1990; Adeel 2010). Both men and women are deemed to be equal in position to each other within Islam (Adeel 2010). Therefore, the subjugation of Muslim women that Deobandi female madrasahs exert by educating women to stay within the domestic realm is invalid. The right that women possess to education is clearly spelt out in the following hadith compiled by Ibn Majah: "*The search for knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female*" (Lemu & Heeren, 1978, p. 15).[4] This hadith does not state that different types of

[4] Ibn Majah was one of the Islamic scholars who compiled the last of Sunni Islam's six canonical hadith collections, *Sunan Ibn Majah*.

education should be pursued by Muslim men and women. Evidence of this point is the fact that Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her) was a well learned woman, as was declared by one of her students, Urwah bin Zubair: "I remained in the company of Hazrat Ayesha R.A. I have not seen anybody knowing more than her about the background (shan-e-nazool) of Aayat, obligatory duties, sunnahh[5], poetry, literature, history, Gynecology and even medical (tibb)" (Rizwan & Awan 2019, p. 87). Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) also speaks of Sayyidatina Aisha's (Peace Be Upon Her) immense knowledge: "Seek knowledge (ilm) from Aisha" (Rizwan & Awan 2019, p. 87). She taught Muslim men knowledge about Islam using purdah guidelines. This disproves the Deobandi's patriarchal education system, as a number of prolific women within Islamic history asserted their rights to education and work (Ullah, Mahmud & Yousef 2015; Rizwan & Awan 2019).

The wives of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him), specifically Sayyidatina Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (Peace Be Upon Her) and Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her), played major roles in Islamic history. Their roles are in complete contrast to the domestic roles Muslim women are prepared for in these Deobandi madrasahs, leading to the claim that the male interpreters of the Qu'ran and hadiths, based in the Deobandi school of thought, were and still are patriarchal in their interpretations. Additionally, female madrasahs enforce conformity to prescribed gender roles by teaching a curriculum that is restricted to the performance of these roles. Islamic feminism's objective in allowing for a feminist interpretation of the Qu'ran and hadiths is therefore vital to reconstruct the female madrasah curriculum that needs to promote the social and economic empowerment of Indian Muslim girls. This study sought to investigate the role of South African female madrasah teachers in empowering Indian Muslim girls; that is, in helping Indian Muslim girls to understand the social and economic rights that Islam affords them. The contradiction between what girls are taught in patriarchal South African Deobandi madrasahs and what Islam allows them as their rights can only be resolved if a better understanding is gained on how female teachers in these Deobandi madrasahs subvert the patriarchal education system to teach with the purpose of empowering Indian Muslim girls.

[5] Sunnah is the following of the actions and lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

1.3. Research aim

The aim of this research was to investigate how South African female madrasah teachers subvert the patriarchal Deobandi madrasah education system to allow for the social and economic empowerment of Indian Muslim girls. As shown in the previous section, the Deobandi madrasah system is very patriarchal since it is designed for the education of girls to conform to the domestic roles of wives and mothers. This is in contravention of Islamic teachings which define roles for women beyond domesticity. As the studies cited earlier have pointed out, women play other roles as educated and working women; that the Deobandi madrasah education system tends to suppress these other roles is a matter of concern for Islamic feminists. Since women play a central role in changing systems that oppress them, it is important to find out how female madrasah teachers are finding ways around the patriarchal nature of the Deobandi madrasah system to empower young Muslim girls on their social and economic rights such as the right to education and work.

1.4. Research questions

To achieve the above research aim, the study had the following research questions:

i. To what extent do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers promote women's rights in Islam in their teaching?

ii. How do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers encourage Muslim girls to pursue further education?

iii. What specific pedagogies do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers use to help Muslim girls see social and economic empowerment as their rights?

iv. Do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers reinterpret the Qu'ran and hadiths from a feminist perspective?

v. What does the curriculum of female Indian Muslim madrasahs offer to girls as future careers?

1.5. Rationale for the study

The rationale for this study was the need to contribute towards scholarship development on the role of female madrasah teachers in the empowerment of Muslim girls, especially Indian Muslim girls in South Africa. The status of women in Islam and the status of women in the Indian Muslim culture are different, for whilst Islam is said to uphold gender equality, the Indian Muslim culture largely perceives women as inferior to men and are therefore required to serve men. The Deobandi school of thought that guides the learning at Indian Muslim madrasahs was formed as a response to British colonialism, and therefore integrated practices of the sociological time and setting into the jurists' interpretation of the Qu'ran and women's gender roles (Hoel 2016; Sharma & Sharma 2004). The gender roles constructed for Indian Muslim women in this system of learning predicates itself upon teaching Indian Muslim young women social expectations confined to domesticity. This is obvious in the type of knowledge that they are taught, including "Needle Work", "Cooking", "Baking" and "Cake Decorating" for the fulfillment of their roles as wives and mothers (Sayed 2010, p. 41). This is too limiting in comparison to the roles that prolific Muslim women throughout Islamic history played, such as Sayyidatina Aisha (Peace Be Upon Her) who was the custodian of great knowledge, Sayyidatina Khadija (Peace Be Upon Her) who was the owner of the biggest trading business in Saudi Arabia at the time, and Khawla bint Al-Azwhar who was a warrior in the Muslim army. The lack of knowledge about and lack of promotion of these types of women leads to the suppression of the rights of women in Islam and it is crucial to engage female madrasahs on how they are addressing this problem. Any change in the kind of education that the Deobandi madrasahs dish out in the Indian Muslim community in South Africa can only take place if female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers empower Muslim girls socially and economically by incorporating an education on women's rights in Islam. This study is therefore imperative in its determination of the role of South African Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers in subverting the Deobandi education system and empowering Indian Muslim girls, with educational institutions being recognized as major avenues of female empowerment. Such knowledge will deepen the understandings of Indian Muslim women's agency in the field of religious education.

1.6. Significance of the study

This study contributes to knowledge regarding the subversion of Islamic patriarchal teachings in Deobandi madrasahs and the role of female madrasah teachers in empowering Indian Muslim girls socially and economically in South Africa. Such empowerment is significant because it changes the current Islamic education geared towards Muslim women, divesting it of its patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts. Muslim women need to be taught the histories of prolific women in Islam and how Qu'ranic texts reinforce and promote gender equality as well as the rights of Muslim women. A study like this brings to scholarly attention the important role that female madrasah teachers play in feminist conscientisation among girls within the Indian Muslim community. The study is also significant for its reinforcement of Islam as a religion underpinned by ideals of gender equality, while underscoring the roles of its various adherents in making those ideals a reality. The next chapter presents the literature review.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This literature review looks at pertinent scholarship on madrasah education and women's rights in Islam. It is divided into five strands in which the relevant literature is analysed and criticisms are drawn from it. These strands are as follows: (1) the Deobandi madrasah system; (2) the subversion of the Deobandi madrasah system; (3) the South African madrasah system; (4) women's rights in Islam; (5) and women's empowerment in Islam.

2.2. The Deobandi female madrasah system

The Deobandi system of learning is based on patriarchal ideology (Patel 2013). Walby (1989, p. 214) defines patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Deobandi madrasahs are gender-segregated, and the purpose of this is not merely to separate women from men but also to teach them different contents. The curriculum for women and men are starkly different in preparing each gender to undertake their gendered responsibilities. The curriculum in the female madrasahs aim to domesticate Muslim women and teach them how to become good mothers and wives (Hoel 2016). In contrast, the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum at the male madrasahs concentrates on Islamic scholarly studies (Sayed 2010). This is exemplified by a study based on Madrasatul Nizwan, wherein the focus of the female curriculum was aimed at "teaching the traditions of Prophet (ahadith) and on 'grooming' the girls in a particular way of Islamic life, in keeping with the community's ideals regarding Islamic womanhood" (Winkelmann 2005, p. 68). Moreover, many male Muslim scholars view the knowledge taught at Indian Muslim male madrasahs to be unnecessary for female Indian Muslim women as they are not deemed suitable to become "fully fledged scholars" (Hoel 2016, pp. 40-41).

Looking at the subjects and many texts that form part of the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum taught at Deobandi male madrasahs, the female curriculum pales in comparison. Hoel (2016) mentions two empirically-based studies, Sayed (2010) and McDonald (2013), which have

shown that madrasahs in South Africa are structured to promote the discourse of domesticity: "Islamic teaching and learning in South African madrasahs that cater for female students only is a clear discernible commitment to the 'nurturing' of ideal wives and mothers" (Hoel 2016, p. 39). Hoel's continuous examination of these case studies allowed her to determine that "a Muslim woman's ability to be a good wife and mother can be seen as an extension of her piety" (Hoel 2016, p. 40). The male madrasahs teach various subjects and texts as listed below:

> *Fiqh*: Hanafi texts, al-Mukhtasar – of Abu 'l Hassan al-Quduri – (d.1037) and Sharh al-wiqaya by Mullah 'Ali Qari (d.1014); *Usul al-fiqh*: Usul al-shashi of Nizamuddin al-Shashi (d. 728) and Nur al-anwar of Mullah Jeevan ibn Sa'eed (d, 1717); *Usul al-hadith*: Nuzhat al- nadhr fi sharh nuqba of al-'Asqalani; *Tafsir*: Jalalayn of Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (d. 1505) and Jalaluddin al-Muhalli (d.1459) and Faws-al-kabir of Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi (d. 1762); *Aqida*: Sharh al-'aqa id al nasafi of Sa'd ad-Din al-Taftazani (d.1390) and Aqida al-tahawi of Abu Ja'far al Tahawi (d.933); *Tarikh*: Tarikh al-khulafa of al-Suyuti; and *Hadith*: Miskat al-masabih of Abu Muhammad al-Baghawi (d.1117) and the six core books of Sunni hadith literature. (Niehaus, Tayob & Weisse 2011, p. 66)

By contrast, female Deobandi madrasahs teach texts such as the 'Bihisti Zewar' which aims to teach young Muslim women that their subjugation to men is warranted and that they are simply objects who belong to men. An excerpt from the text illustrates this: "Never think of him [husband] as your equal, never let him do any work for you…If he comes to you and begins to massage your hands or feet, stop him; you would not let your father do this service, and your husband's rank is higher than your father's" (Farooq 2007, p. 77). Thus, the curriculum at female madrasahs limits women to domesticity through the teaching of texts such as the 'Bihisti Zewar'.

From an Islamic feminist perspective, this is deeply problematic as the subjects and texts that are taught at Deobandi female madrasahs perpetuate patriarchal notions of male superiority, and do not allow for the empowerment of young women in an economic and social sense. The texts contravene the very foundational teaching of the Qu'ran that places men and women as equals. Instead, the knowledge being taught to young Indian Muslim girls reinforce their

subjugation and alienation, disabling their rights to the true knowledge of the Qu'ran and to economic and social empowerment.

Although female madrasahs have grown in their establishment, male madrasahs are still prioritised and are more common. This is evidenced by Fair (2012, p. 136) who cites Pakistan's Federal Bureau (PFB) as saying that "boys…are far more likely to enrol in madrasas than girls, especially at higher levels of Islamic education". The reason provided for this inequity is that Muslim men need to possess such knowledge for economic purposes and to teach it to students in the future, whereas Muslim women are confined to the home and its duties. If young women can access an Islamic education, it is usually one in which the education itself focuses on how to mould these young women to become caretakers of the household. As indicated earlier, Islamic education for young women is based on the concept of morality, in which the young woman is seen as the bearer of morality (Sayed 2010).

At female madrasahs, the educators are usually male, just as the interpreters of the Qu'ran are male. Therefore, the Islamic education offered for both young men and women is steeped in patriarchal notions of men as the ultimate bearers of knowledge. The tool of the purdah[6] is used to separate young female students from their male educators (Bano & Kalmbach 2012). The Deobandi madrasah system is framed by patriarchal ideals of women as subordinate to men: "…it is clear that Thanvi, like his fellow Deobandis, considers women as subordinate to men" (Sikand 2011, p. 38). The scholar Thanvi, who was mentioned previously as spearheading the objectification of women in the nikah process, articulates his patriarchal view that women's education must only be with the intent of keeping them within their gender boundaries which he calls the 'civilizing mission':

> You should continue teaching your womenfolk and inculcate respect and good manners in them. Do not allow them to become imprudent and disrespectful. The intellect of women is deficient; it is, therefore, incumbent to take special measures in reforming them. (Sikand 2011, p. 38).

[6] The cloth or furniture that separates men and women.

With such gender-biased beliefs permeating the Deobandi madrasah education system, female students are severely disadvantaged as their limiting education inhibits aspirations to empowering goals. They are given an inferior quality of education so that the status of male dominance can be maintained: “The gender roles and stereotypes taught within these institutions sustain an unbalanced gender status quo” (Patel 2013, p. 46).

The Islamic education system possesses two types of outcomes for young men and women, respectively. Young men are empowered economically as the outcome of their education is to enable them to become moulanas (religious teachers) or respected religious leaders. However, as young women are mostly only ~~t~~aught knowledge that surrounds the household and their responsibilities as wives and mothers, they remain at a disadvantage economically. Unlike their counterpart gender, Muslim women become dependent on their parents, and then their husbands, leaving them at the economic mercy of such family members. As has been illustrated in Dhar and Letchmanan (2018), the reformation of secular universities that took place in Nepal acknowledged that for economic participation, it is essential that a degree or qualification is obtained. However, most of these universities are reserved for men, as women remain at the economic behest of those in their family structures and confined to performing patriarchal household duties as the Deobandi system of learning has taught them.

Nevertheless, it has been determined that there are Deobandi madrasahs that are progressive, that subvert the patriarchal madrasah education system by empowering Indian Muslim girls socially and economically, transforming them from being dependent on their male family members for financial and social status to becoming economically independent and socially stable.

2.3 The subversion of the Deobandi madrasah system

Muslim women’s rights are increasingly being taught at some Deobandi female madrasahs, especially in India. Such transformation is exemplified by Jahanara, a Muslim woman who left her violent marriage without her children, becoming one of the first female Muslim scholars in India. She was educated at Darul-U-Uloom Niswan which educates Muslim women on their

rights as elucidated in the Qu'ran, which they use to fight for Muslim women's rights (Dhillon 2017).

The change of teachers at female madrasahs from male to female authoritative figures is also an emerging trend that is being accepted globally. According to Bano and Kalmbach (2012, p. 31), this change indicates "a shift either within the working of Islamic authority or in the socio-economic context of Muslim societies, or a combination of the two". In China, there has been a long history of the presence of such madrasahs/mosques that enable and promote Muslim women in spaces of authority (Jaschok 2012). However, this emerging practice is often contested and labelled as 'bid'ah'[7] by the religious community due to the fact that it breaks the cycle of male-led madrasahs and mosques which is what the community has only ever known (Jaschok 2012). The notion of female-led madrasahs is however not a new phenomenon; it is one that has existed from centuries ago. Dale (2016, p. 6) states the following:

> A female religious scholar of 15th century Hadramawt, Yemen, al-Shaykha Sultana bint 'Ali al-Zubaydy was well known for her piety, knowledge, and teachings. One of her male counterparts, expressing the conventional opinion that religious scholarship and teaching were the domain of men, challenged her in verse: 'But can a female camel compete with a male camel?' She completed the couplet, responding: 'A female camel can carry the same load as a male, and produce offspring and milk as well.

The metaphor of the female camel in this quotation indicates the weighty responsibilities that women bear in Islam, including leading religious educational institutions.

Although women-led madrasahs are not popular, the practice is being normalised within Islamic religious communities and they are, according to Bano and Kalmbach (2012, p. 33), "gradually changing perceptions in both religious and secularist communities that women can be fully qualified scholars who publicly preach in mosque spaces". To reinforce this, during Prophet Muhammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) time, Muslim women were scholars of Islam and even taught at these madrasahs/mosques, as exemplified by Sayyidatina Aisha (Peace Be Upon Her) who, as mentioned before, was deemed by Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)

[7] 'Bi'dah' is the innovations of new Islamic knowledge which is disallowed.

himself to be extremely learned, stating that half of our religious instruction could be attained from her (Bux 2004). Dale (2016) affirms this when she speaks of how in the past Muslim women interpreted the Qu'ran and provided fatwas (legal rulings) to the followers of Islam. However, as the practice of Islam became deeply patriarchal over time, women were denied the space of teaching, and the interpretation of the Qu'ran and the legal rulings became solely men's jobs, pushing women into the domestic sphere as is common today.

With respect to Muslim women occupying the madrasah and mosque as authoritative figures, we see an example in 2008 when a female qazi (an authoritative figure who conducts nikah) became the first ever to conduct a nikah, as this is usually a male domain (Hameed 2008). India is a location where women-only madrasahs have become quite common. Under the traditional Sunni Muslims' Co-ordination of Islamic Colleges (CIC) that is a governing body of such madrasahs, there are "15 all-women seminaries" or, as they are also known, "Wafiyya colleges" (Wafy 2017, n.p.) in India. These colleges are the unique blend of both religious and secular education, and Al Gaith Wafiyya College embodies this blend. Located in Kerala, India, this institution boasts a five-year Islamic Studies course and "a Bachelor's from a recognised secular university" (Wafy 2017, n.p.). The reason for this blend is to allow for the production of female religious scholars who are well-versed in Islamic education as well as knowledgeable about contemporary sciences (which consist of cultural, political, intellectual, and scientific knowledge) which leads to their social and economic empowerment.

The all-female staff at Al Gaith Wafiyya College in India ensure that upon graduation, young women receive what is known as 'sanad'. 'Sanad' is the recognition of one as an Islamic scholar which is based on "the unbroken tradition of Islamic scholarship beginning with the Prophet Muhammad and entrusting them with its transmission to the next generation" (Wafy 2017, n.p.). This privilege was previously only conferred upon men as women were not at female madrasahs to become "fully-fledged scholars", but to be trained to take care of the home (Hoel 2016, p. 40-41). However, being recognised with this 'sanad' allows for the teaching of Islam by these Muslim female scholars, with them becoming teachers and lecturers amongst a cohort of professions, ultimately empowering them socially and economically (Wafy 2017). This alleviates the economic dependency on fathers and husbands which Deobandi female madrasahs enforce for Muslim women.

Female-led madrasahs allow for the questioning of cultural norms as Abdul Hakeem Faizy (quoted in Wafy 2017, n.p.) encourages Muslim women to be exposed to "all streams of knowledge" and blames the previous disenfranchisement of Muslim women on such cultural norms. The bachelor's degrees offered in these madrasahs further allow for critical inquiries into cultural and social norms, and enable Muslim women to develop critical thinking skills, analytical skills, and other skills necessary for personal development.

In South Africa, there is a dearth of such madrasahs in which Muslim women are empowered by female-led educators as in the case of India. This is mainly because the patriarchal Deobandi female madrasahs form the dominant type of madrasahs in South Africa. However, some research has suggested that there are some South African Deobandi female madrasahs that are oriented towards empowering young girls, thereby subverting the patriarchal Deobandi education system.

2.4. The South African madrasah system

The first madrasah in South Africa (Darul-U-Uloom for young Muslim men) was constructed in 1973 in Newcastle in the KwaZulu-Natal province and it follows the South Asian Deobandi school of thought which was and still is used as a model for madrasahs in South Africa, in the cases of both male and female madrasahs (Sayed 2010). Female madrasahs followed this patriarchal Deobandi logic as exemplified by Moulana Yunus Patel who expressed patriarchal views in the advent of the first female madrasah 'Madrasah Salihaat': "Patel told me that in 1982 teachers were indoctrinating Muslim girls at the secular schools by promoting the non-existence of God and 'unfettered' freedoms for women" (Sayed 2010, p. 36). What he meant by unfettered freedoms remains unclear, but the quotation shows how this kind of logic became a cornerstone of motivations for future female madrasahs. This patriarchal female Deobandi education system based on the patriarchal interpretations of the Qu'ran which is implemented at madrasahs throughout South Africa, as mentioned above, has been found to contribute to Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) among Indian Muslim women: "Biased interpretations of certain Islamic teachings may contribute to Muslim women experiencing mental health problems such as MDD" (Laher, Bemath & Subjee 2018: 628). The reason is that "these interpretations may reinforce authoritative societal roles in the community, whilst religious teachings that oppose oppression are given little to no consideration" (Laher, Bemath & Subjee

2018: 628). Such is evidence of how detrimental the patriarchal Deobandi education system is, as it not only adversely affects Muslim women in a social, cultural and economic sense, but also in a physical, and in this case mental, sense.

The Deobandi school of thought and movements are considered to be highly patriarchal by Muslim groups such as the Arabic Study Circle in South Africa as they believe that the interpretation of Islamic texts by male interpreters marginalizes Muslim women. The Arabic Study Circle was formed in 1950 with the aim of exposing more "modernist interpretations of Islam" (Patel 2013, p. 48). The beliefs of its members regarding gender were based on equality between men and women which allowed for the opportunity for both genders to contribute towards scholarship created by the Arabic Study Circle: "the Circle leadership believed in the equality of women and their capacity to participate on an equal footing in discussions about matters of religion and the world" (Jeppie 2007, p. 76). The Circle posed a threat to the Deobandi school of thought as it disturbed the Deobandi school of thought's premise that the ulamas[8] are the expert on Islamic praxis with regard to the interpretation of Islamic texts, by promoting the notion of a "personalized engagement with Islamic scriptural sources" (Patel 2013, p. 48).

Similar to the Arabic Study Circle, the Al Hudaar Foundation Girls Darul Uloom located in Lenasia in the Gauteng province is an example of a subversive South African Deobandi female madrasah. The aalima[9] course at this madrasah is composed of life skills such as cooking, computer literacy classes, English lessons and sewing lessons as their vision is "to empower our young ladies with all the necessary skills required to become financially independent as well so that when they qualify they are readily armed with knowledge to impart and can use one of their mastered skills to empower themselves and others" (Al Hudaar Foundation 2021). This madrasah can therefore be described as progressive as it is not aimed at grooming young Indian Muslim women into becoming stay-at-home wives and mothers but rather to become empowered, professional citizens.

[8] Ulamas are the authoritative bodies (usually reserved for men only) that make sense of Qu'ranic texts and scripts, including making important decisions on areas of Islamic praxis.

[9] Aalimas are the graduates of secondary or tertiary education.

The research studies undertaken by South African Islamic feminist scholars regarding the madrasah education system has addressed various elements. Sayed's (2010) study explores the transformations that have taken place in the South African madrasah education system in the last 48 years, including its link to the South African Muslim community and country at large, while Hoel's (2016) study looks at how female madrasahs have implications on the way Muslim personhood is structured and religious literacy is taught. However, both studies fail to address the way in which the South African Deobandi madrasah education system is being subverted by female teachers within it to empower Muslim girls in an economic and social sense. Therefore, this research study fills a gap in the literature on the Deobandi madrasah education system by showing how female madrasah teachers are both teaching Indian Muslim girls about women's rights in Islam and equipping them with skills to become economically and socially empowered in contemporary South Africa.

2.5. Women's Rights in Islam

The equality between women and men in the Qu'ran has been a topic of contention among male jurists, with some interpreting the status of women and men as being equal and others promoting the patriarchal notion of women's inferiority and subordination to men (Engineer 2008). Engineer (2008) states that these various interpretations by jurists is based on the personal positions of the jurists, depending on whether they are pro-feminists or anti-feminists. In addition, these attitudes and personal positions have been influenced by the sociohistorical, cultural, and political environments of the jurists. Modern Islamic scholars promote the equality that men and women share, emphasizing that although their roles and responsibilities are different, the two exist in a relationship of complementarity (Nkealah 2006).

"O! mankind, be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women" is the Qu'ranic verse believed by modern scholars to enshrine the equality of women and men (An-Nisa, 4:1). This verse constructs women and men as emanating from the same living entity, thus indicating that there is no superiority of one gender over the other as believed by patriarchal jurists (Engineer 2008). There are other verses in the Qu'ran which serve to strengthen the notion of equality, with the same ideal that women and men are equal. Women's rights were first awarded to Muslim women in seventh century Arabia, which was

revolutionary in that Islam became the first religion to do so (Orakzai 2014). Both of Prophet Muhammed's (Peace Be Upon Him) wives, Sayyidatina Khadija bint Khuwaylid (Peace Be Upon Her) and Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her), exemplified these Qu'ranic ideals of equality and equal rights for both genders (Bux 2004), as previously mentioned.

While women and men are awarded equal rights in Islam, their roles and responsibilities are specific to each gender but considered to be complementary. A man's duty involves him being the breadwinner of the family, whilst the woman is to be the caretaker of the home and the mother and minder of children. Nevertheless, these roles and responsibilities are not stringent as to suggest that women cannot undertake any other activities besides homemaking and child raising; neither are men excluded from doing household duties, but are in fact encouraged to do so as set by the example of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) who helped his wives in the household (Kader 2019).

In Islam, a Muslim woman has various rights which allow her to pursue education, gain economic independence, decide on whether to get married or get divorced, and inherit property (Al-Hibri 2000; Nkealah 2006; Engineer 2008). Education is made a priority for both women and men in Islam as evident in the following hadith of Ibn Majah: "*The search for knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female*" (Lemu & Heeren, 1978, p. 15). Therefore, a Muslim woman is not confined to the domestic sphere, but is empowered to seek an education and other empowering opportunities. The only condition that must be adhered to in relation to education is that men and women must be segregated in an educational environment to prevent zina (intercourse between a man and a woman outside of wedlock) between genders to preserve their morality (Abdul Rahiman, 2008, p. 137). Fatima Al-Fihri proves to be the perfect example of a Muslim woman practising her rights to education with her being the founder of the first and oldest currently operational university in Morocco (Da Wan, Sirat & Razak 2015).

In relation to a woman being able to work, there are several conditions which she must fulfil in order to be able to do so, with the first being that a woman is permitted to work on the condition that her home and motherhood duties are still being fulfilled and that she has

permission from her husband if she is married (Ismail & Hasan, 2020, p. 287). In addition, the Muslim woman must not work in any profession that relates to dance, music, prostitution, modelling and waitressing (Bux 2004). She also possesses economic rights to the following: she is assigned inheritance from her male relatives such as her father, husband and children; her husband is to pay her mehr (dowry); she is allowed to keep for herself any money that she earns; in the case of divorce, all her possessions and dowry are considered to be hers; and lastly, she has the right to a settlement from her husband's assets that include property, no matter whether it is in a divorce or in the case of her husband's passing (Farooqi 1993; Bux 2004; Aslam & Kazmi 2009).

Therefore, as demonstrated above, women share the same equal status as men do in Islam. They have been afforded multiple rights in Islam which serve to illustrate this equality, especially in relation to education and economic empowerment.

2.6. Women's empowerment in Islam

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the West considers Muslim women to be oppressed by Islam in various ways. The two most prominent of these western misconceptions is that the hijab restricts the freedom of women to dress freely as they are religiously commanded to cover up and that Islam allows for the subjugation of Muslim women by Muslim men due to their roles being restricted to wives, mothers and caretakers (Bano 2009). The western conception of 'womanhood' with respect to gender equality focuses on the universalist perception of women's empowerment as promoted by western feminism. According to Chandra Mohanty as cited in Bano (2009, p. 6), western feminism labels any non-western culture as "Other" and any other non-western conception of women's rights as "backwards, ignorant or irrelevant". Nussbaum as cited in Bano (2009) 'justifies' why the non-western cultural conceptions of women are dismissed: the non-western culture is a representation of the male elite, and does not include the voices wanting change. Shaikh, Hoel and Kagee (2011) dismissed Nussbaum's claim of Islam as being patriarchal and controlled by men in their study on South African Muslim women's sexuality, marriage and reproductive choices in which the results highlighted how Muslim women are now being empowered in various aspects of their lives, such as employment (50% of the women in the sample were employed in some capacity); education (36.1% of women in the sample had completed or were completing a university degree); and

decision-making (two thirds of the women in the sample made decisions). These findings refute western feminism's misconception of Muslim women by showing that Muslim women resist patriarchal Muslim perspectives propagated by Muslim men and defy ideas of Muslim women's uniform oppression as viewed by the west: "Our findings thus present narratives of Muslim women's lives and beliefs that resist both patriarchal Muslim perspectives as well as reductionist western views on uniformly oppressed Muslim women" (Shaikh, Hoel & Kagee 2011, p. 121).

Social and economic empowerment in this research study is the ability of Muslim girls to pursue education and employment/work which equips them socially by providing them with an autonomous identity; allowing them to create change for themselves and within their communities. The religious authority these girls possess when they graduate from madrasahs makes them to become respected in their communities (Borker 2020). In relation to economic empowerment, Deobandi female madrasahs that subvert the purpose of the Deobandi education system provide an education that enables girls to work and maintain financial independence, including educating Muslim girls about their working rights and their rights to financial independence granted by Islam.

Western feminism's dismissal of Islam as patriarchal and incongruous with gender equality fails to examine the conception of womanhood within Islamic societal structures such as the madrasah system (Bano 2009, p. 5). This failure can only be remedied by transforming a universalist assumption of womanhood into a more considered understanding of womanhood within Islam. The rights of women within non-western religious societies need to be acknowledged as these societies foster women's empowerment within a religious framework, such as the educational and economic empowerment that Indian Muslim girls gain within the madrasah space.

It is imperative that western feminists acknowledge that all women are oppressed by an overall patriarchal system, not only religious women. In an important document posted online on 7 July 2017, the European Network Against Racism (2017, p. 2) states the following regarding the west's appraisal of the emancipation of women in Muslim societies:

> Just as any other religious, social or political frame, Islam can be used by men to impose a system of power that will preserve their privileges. Muslim women's emancipation should not be used as a smokescreen to divert attention from the overall patriarchal system that oppresses every woman and whose emancipation is far from being a given.

Implicitly, this Network cautions against the trivialisation of Muslim women's feminist accomplishments in the contemporary world and calls for a global effort to challenge patriarchy across all spectra of society.

2.7. Conclusion

The literature review has explored the following important subjects: the Deobandi madrasah education system and how it prepares Indian Muslim girls to be wives and mothers, whilst being premised upon the ideal of morality; the subversion of the patriarchal Deobandi education system on a global scale as evident in the shift from male-led madrasahs to female-led ones; the South African Deobandi madrasah education system and the subversion of its patriarchal foundations by female madrasahs; women's rights as afforded by Islam and the Qu'ran; and the concept of women's empowerment in Islam. The literature review has shown that there is a gap in knowledge in terms of how female madrasahs in South Africa are subverting the Deobandi patriarchal system and this study fills that gap by showing how female madrasah teachers are both teaching Indian Muslim girls about women's rights in Islam and equipping them with skills that can help them in future to become economically and socially empowered in contemporary South Africa. The next chapter presents the theory of Islamic feminism that underpins this study.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

This study is underpinned by an important theory in feminist and gender studies, namely, Islamic feminism. This theory has been selected because it is directly related to the research focus, which is to explore how female madrasah teachers subvert the patriarchal Deobandi education system to empower their Indian Muslim girls socially and economically. The theory of Islamic feminism is explained below.

3.2. Islamic feminism

As explained in Chapter 2, Islam holds both women and men in equal status. This notion of gender equality was introduced in early 7th century Saudi Arabia, and religious texts such as the Qu'ran and hadiths form the foundation upon which this notion, and the religion of Islam, is built (Barlas, 2005, p. 107). The Islamic feminist discourse arises from this principle of equality and is defined as "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism derives its understanding and mandate from the Qu'ran, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence" (Badran, 2009, p. 242).

Islamic feminism sits between two discourses: religious legitimation and secular rights. Hesová (2019) provides evidence to the claim of the nexus of Islamic feminism within the two discourses of religious legitimisation and secular rights: "Islamic feminism seems to combine two different sets of discourses: religious legitimation or a religious mandate (implying a normative heteronomy), and secular rights (implying personal autonomy) (Hesová, 2019, p. 29). The different conceptualisations of Islamic feminism are based on the diverse meanings of liberal freedom within the discourse (Weir, 2013, p. 99). These conceptualisations of liberal freedom are heavily influenced by the social, cultural, and political environments that these Islamic feminists belong to or interrogate: "Thus, Muslim women activists in diverse locations and diverse situations develop diverse arguments and forms of activism, grounded in diverse

individual and collective identities, as well as in diverse social and political discourses" (Weir, 2013, p. 103).

The Islamic feminist discourse calls for the feminist reinterpretation of texts that have been interpreted by patriarchal male jurists in ways that promote the subjugation of Muslim women and place Muslim men in a superior position (Mir-Hosseini 2011; Wadud 1999). A clarification needs to be made at this junction, that when Islamic feminists call for the 'reinterpretation' of the Qu'ran and other religious texts such as the sunnah of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him), they are speaking of the reinterpretation of these texts in a manner that is divested of patriarchal cultural, sociohistorical and political influences (Wadud 1999; Jeenah 2001; Anwar 2009). However, the extent to which these "reinterpretations" are conducted lend to two extremes of the spectrum: a radical or moderate approach. In the case of this research project, these two approaches will not be analysed in detail as part of the Islamic feminist theoretical lens due to their complexities that put them beyond the research scope. However, it must be noted that the discourse surrounding Islamic feminism is not monolithic, and homogenous. Rather, it is nuanced in the various elements that form different Islamic feminist ideological lenses which aim for the emancipation of Muslim women from patriarchy enforced by male jurists, and maintained by Muslim men.

The radical thought of Islamic feminism promotes the belief that the Qu'ran should be reinterpreted in different social contexts, such as scholar amina wadud who promotes the idea that Muslims as human beings are "agents of interpretation" (Weir, 2013, p. 109). Thus, they should use their agential capacity to rewrite Islamic law based on these new interpretations (Weir, 2013, p. 109). However, the Qu'ran is the word of God and is fixed, and thus her beliefs are in contravention of Islamic teachings. amina wadud forms a central figure within the radical wing of Islamic feminism as mentioned previously, and has inspired the works of other radical Islamic feminists, especially within a local context. This can be exemplified by South African radical Islamic feminist scholar, Fatima Seedat, who models amina wadud's notion of the attachment of gendered grammatical associations to God, specifically in relation to the masculine, and therefore patriarchal representation of the divine. She argues: "Scholars such as Wadud rejected the label as did Asma Barlas who argued that 'the rule of the father' (i.e. patriarchy) had historically provided the core of resistance to the divine truth but that divine

truth is characteristically anti-patriarchal" (Seedat, 2013, p. 406; Seedat, 2021, pp. 91-92). In a book chapter titled "South African Feminists in Search of the Sacred", Seedat calls for the "intentional recognition and engagement with masculinist constructions of divinity and religiosity, and a deep, intentional feminist response based on radical engagements with spiritual subjectivity" so that women and gender non-conforming individuals can identify with a genderless God (Seedat, 2021, p. 92).

At this point, two aspects need to be addressed within Seedat's radical scholarship. The first is that Seedat (2021) legitimises the gender identity of non-conforming individuals which is in violation of the beliefs of Islam that only recognizes the sex as male and female: "Narrated by Ibn 'Abbas: The Prophet cursed effeminate men and those women who assumed the manners of men, and he said, 'Turn them out of your houses'" (Sahih Bukhari, n.d.). The second aspect is that God in Islam is a divine, genderless being and Seedat notably acknowledges this point when she states that "among Muslims, the common response to associations of masculinity and divinity are that God in Islamic thought is not a father in the Christian sense of God the Father and God the Son" and equally notes the "…ungendered Muslim notion of God" (Seedat, 2021, p. 93). Therefore, the grammatical masculine that is attached to God in scripture is but male jurists' conception of masculinity as superior than femininity which Islamic feminism aims to dispel.

Sa'diyya Shaikh is a local South African feminist scholar whose work, primarily based on Sufism, can be deemed as a nuanced blend between radical and moderate Islamic feminist thought as she "accepts that some hadith may be authentic, but insists that these must be placed within a historical context, reflecting of a patriarchal mentality" (Adujar, 2013, p. 67). She states that her view of Islam as a religion "provides me with an organic epistemology and ontology to grapple with existential and political questions of being human, it is the grounding for my aspirations for ever more inclusive visions of 'the good life', and it is core to my strivings towards justice and dignity in social terms" (Shaikh, 2021, p. 121). She advocates for the new readings of the reinterpretation of Islam that recovers the role and rights of Muslim women in Islam, and explores the possibility of new understandings of gender dynamics within Islamic thought in her examination of Sufi thought, specifically that of Ibn 'Arabi (Hermansen, 2013, pp. 19-20). Therefore, at this stage, some of her works can position her within the

moderate version of Islamic feminism. However, the blend comes in through her enthusiastic support of amina wadud's revolutionary act of acting as the authoritative figure by giving the khutbah (lecture) during her visit to Cape Town, South Africa in 1994. Shaikh herself acknowledges this as "radical gender politics" (Shaikh, 2021, p. 122). In addition, she is also radical in her view on the genderless Allah Ta'Allah being associated with grammatical masculine representation, as previously stated by her University of Cape Town colleague, Fatima Seedat. Shaikh even goes a step further in attributing femininity, with the pronoun 'she', to Allah Ta'Allah to counter the masculine association, and she justifies this as follows: "I find a distinctive and powerful poetics of creation, nurture, power, and spirituality that weaves together the earth, maternity, femininity, women and the Divine Feminine" (Shaikh, 2021, p. 125).

There are scholars within the Islamic discourse who refuse vehemently to be recognized as Islamic feminists due to the association or expectations that feminism may give rise to a version of liberal Islam (Hesova, 2019, p. 28). Such is Asma Barlas who is a scholar who works within this feminist discourse, and motivates her rejection of the Islamic feminist identity to prevent a western appropriation of her scholarship by using a western term. Her motivation stems from her association of the west to colonialism, and the reifying of the notion of the west's orientalist perception of the east, and its "duty" to enlighten the backwards east through violent conquest: "To the extent that feminism in any form is complicit with this violence – which I believe it is when it reads oppression into Islam and reads liberation out of the West's imperialist depredations – I feel the need to resist it in all its forms" (Barlas, 2006, p. 20).

The reinterpretation of the religious texts is what Asma Barlas labels "unreading patriarchy" which she elaborates on by stating that one engages in the abuse of Islam when a misreading of Islam by a certain authority is accepted (Barlas, 2002, p. 134). Barlas argues in her book *Believing Women in Islam* (2002) that Muslim men have typically read the Qu'ran in ways that justify the oppression of women. In following this egregious version of Islam, women can also become complicit in the abuse of women in Islam (Barlas, 2002). Thus, scholars like Barlas (2002) found it imperative to offer a woman-centred reinterpretation of Islamic religious texts by going back to Islamic history. The roles of both Sayyidatina Aisha (Peace Be Upon Her) and Sayyidatina Umm Salama (whose real name was Hind bint Abi Umayya) in the production

of knowledge on Islamic texts such as the hadiths and sunnah show that the goal of Islamic feminism is justified (Hamdan 2014).

Despite these prolific female figures contributing significantly to knowledge of Islam, male jurists have abused Islam by feigning memory loss and promoting a patriarchal form of Islam that abuses Muslim women. Muslim culture involves the practice of Islam that was influenced by colonialism as well as the immigration of Muslims into spaces that allowed them to integrate new teachings, based on the geographical area, into their culture and in the long run to transmit those teachings learned to other new spaces (Inglehart & Norris 2009). In the advent of colonialism, Muslim culture was also affected by the new teachings brought by the colonisers and so Muslim culture left pre-Arab societies that were based on gender equality into post-colonial societies steeped in patriarchy: "After the departure of colonial powers, the pervasive influence of Western cultural models remained untouched, thus exacerbating an identity crisis that permeated Arab societies" (Eid 2002, p. 49). Muslim women were confined to the home in an attempt by post-colonial Arab societies to maintain the gender inequality ideal prevalent during colonialism, which made women financially dependent on their fathers and husbands and encouraged them to fulfil their biological roles as wives, mothers and caretakers of the household.

In order to keep Muslim women hostage to the home arena, patriarchal male jurists emphasize the notion of the woman's biological role of being a wife and mother as colonial and post-colonial Arab societies did. However, Muslim women are not limited to their biological roles even though their biological functions of giving birth to children are upheld. This is one point on which both radical and moderate Islamic feminists agree on. According to Cailo (2011), Islam simply holds women to their ability to have children in order to distinguish between women and men, and that this biological role is not the only role possible for women. In her book *Woman and Qur'an*, Wadud (1999) offers an analytical reinterpretation of the Qu'ran that includes women's lived realities as well as their voices, making her work a counter-discourse to male jurists' patriarchal interpretations.

Islamic feminism pushes for the empowerment of Muslim women as indicated by their multiple rights that are free from patriarchal sentiments, especially the rights to education and work which lead to social and economic empowerment. Beginning with the right to an education, it is revealed by the following hadith of Ibn Majah: "*The search for knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female*" (Lemu & Heeren, 1978, p. 15). As pointed out in Chapter 1, Muslim girls in female madrasahs are taught an 'easier' curriculum, with the scholarly aspect not as focussed upon as it is in male madrasahs, such that cooking and baking are made important subjects for the female students in order to prepare them for their future duties as wives and mothers (Hoel 2016). In the Qu'ranic verse quoted above, the type of knowledge that a Muslim woman learns is not policed, and this proves that there is no valid explanation that determines which gender should pursue what kind of knowledge. Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her) who has been spoken of previously in various instances typifies this claim. The concept of education for Muslim women is further epitomised by Fatima Al-Fihri who was the founder of the first and oldest currently operational university in Morocco (Da Wan, Sirat & Razak 2015).

In relation to Muslim women being economically empowered, with Sayyidatina Khadija bint Khuwaylid (Peace Be Upon Her) as the prime example, Islamic feminist scholars have noted that a Muslim woman has the right to work and earn her own money, according to the following Qu'ranic verse: "Men have the right to what they can earn by their efforts, and women have the right to what they can earn also" (quoted in El Saadawi 1982, p. 201). It is also necessary that a working woman meets the following conditions: she has permission from her husband to do so, and that her home responsibilities are not compromised (Bux 2004). In addition to this, it is critical that the job is not that of dancing, modelling or prostitution as these are considered as haram (Bux 2004). Islam's construction of women's work can be criticised for its conditions and restrictions on women. However, as El Saadawi (1982) mentions, the logic is that men would also have restrictions even though they are the providers of the home, according to Islam. Therefore, Muslim women who graduate from gender-segregated madrasahs are able to earn money, all of which is theirs: "The woman is not obliged to spend any of her money on the house, but she can opt freely to do so if she wishes" (El Saadawi 1982, p. 200). If a woman is unable to work, she still possesses her dowry (which is her security for the future); she is eligible to receive an inheritance from her husband, father and children; and in the case of divorce or death, a Muslim woman still has rights to her settlement of her

husband's property (Bux 2004, p. 34). These are all avenues that Islam affords women to be economically empowered.

South Africa boasts many Islamic feminist scholars that include Sa'diyyah Shaikh and Fatima Seedat as previously mentioned, as well as Naeem Jeenah, whose scholarship has contributed to the development of Islamic feminism in South Africa. Their aim to fight for gender equality in the South African Islamic arena is exemplified by the following statement made by Shaikh, Hoel and Kagee (2011, p. 98): "Islamic Feminism which critically engages the relationship between gender and power in Muslim societies challenges patriarchal understandings of Islam, and advances gender justice within Muslim communities". As these scholars note, the goal of Islamic feminism is to challenge patriarchal understandings of Islam so as to ensure that Muslim communities practice gender justice in relation to women.

Al-Sharmani (2014, 83) speaks of the fierce critique by Muslim scholars who deem Islamic feminism irrelevant because of "having weak methodological links to classical religious sciences and being politically insignificant, or even counterproductive, for women". In contrast to these skeptics, many Muslim scholars, such as Al-Sharmani herself, have embraced Islamic feminism for its reform of religious knowledge: "I argue that Islamic feminism, as a new body of reform-centred religious knowledge, can be better understood through an analysis of the goals and interpretive methodologies of certain interconnected, transnational and national knowledge projects" (Al-Sharmani 2014, p. 92). Religious reform in this context is the revision of socio-cultural conceptions of Muslim women to better align them to Islam. The Islamic feminist discourse is continually being developed by scholars globally and in South Africa. An example is the Musawah movement (Arabic term for 'equality') whose co-pioneer, Zainah Anwar, enables this platform to generate knowledge about Muslim women by Muslim women. Ziba Mir-Hosseini's (2011) research concentrates on how the Islamic jurisprudence proves to be patriarchal, specifically in relation to marriage and its associative responsibilities. Additionally, Nina Hoel's (2016) work concerns itself with how female madrasahs work towards indoctrinating the subjugation of Muslim women and their place in the household. Several prolific women in Islam's history who have been mentioned previously epitomise the concept of Islamic feminism which is ignored by Muslim male interpreters in their patriarchal interpretations of Islamic sources. This leads to the marginalisation of Muslim women which

is in direct conflict with the prominence of women in Islamic history, and the suppression of women's rights in Islam. Therefore, the work of Islamic feminists continues to be relevant today.

Other prominent Islamic feminist scholars on the global arena such as Moroccan Fatima Mernissi and Indian Chandra Talpade Mohanty have made major contributions to Islamic feminist scholarship. The late Mernissi's work on Islamic feminism interrogated socio-political organisation that sidelines women, sexual ideology, gender identity and the status of women in Islam. Being a Moroccan woman, her work was primarily based on the Moroccan society and culture. The aim of her scholarship was to interrogate the oppressive system that disenfranchised women in Morocco. This interrogation was often conducted from an ideological and political lens. In her book, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1987), Mernissi brought to the fore the topic of women's sexuality which is often suppressed by Muslim men. In *Women and Islam*: *An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (1991), she explored patriarchal interpretations of the Qu'ran which she argued stemmed from the patriarchal thinking of male jurists. Mohanty's (1988) work, specifically her article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", involved making the third-world woman visible in feminist scholarship by opposing the western feminist idea of the 'third world woman' as a hegemonic category. She questioned western feminism's goal to create a universalisation of gender oppression that is unrealistic, and simply untrue for women in third-world countries that are plagued by the colonial, postcolonial socio-economic, and political environments created by the west. Her work on third-world women furthers the project of Islamic feminism as it challenges the west's view of the hijab as a symbol of oppression.

Islamic feminism is the appropriate theoretical lens through which to analyse the data that was collected in this study as it is centred on the promotion of women's rights in Islam and this study sought to unpack the ways in which female madrasah teachers promote knowledge about women's rights in Islam in their teaching. Islamic feminism is also an appropriate framework to examine the role which South African female madrasah teachers play in empowering young Indian Muslim women socially and economically because women's empowerment is key to Islamic feminism, where education and work are central tenets of female power.

3.3. Conclusion

The aim of the Islamic feminist movement is the transformation of the patriarchal Muslim culture that is disguised as Islamic teachings, thereby oppressing Muslim women. As shown in this chapter, an important mechanism for dismantling this patriarchy that controls Muslim women's lives is Islamic feminism's call for the reinterpretation of the Qu'ran and other religious texts from a woman-centred perspective, in order to award equality and deserved rights to Muslim women. The next chapter outlines the research methodology for this study.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter of the research study presents the following methodology components: research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations. As this research study was conducted within the field of Critical Diversity Studies, it utilised a qualitative research methodology which is a natural approach in this field as the objective of such research is "to address social justice, lack of representation, and discrimination within society and organizations alike" (Ahonen et al. 2014, p. 263). The purpose of this specific research study was to find out the ways in which South African female madrasah teachers were subverting the patriarchal Deobandi education system to provide education that allows for the social and economic empowerment of young Indian Muslim girls.

The qualitative research methodology was well suited to this study as it allowed the researcher to receive the "the elaborate description of the 'meaning' of the phenomena for the people or culture under examination" (Newman & Ridenour 1998, p. 9), in this case the female madrasah teachers at Deobandi madrasahs for Indian Muslim girls. The study was underpinned by the theory of Islamic feminism which is about the re-examination of Qu'ranic texts and hadiths from a feminist perspective that foregrounds women's rights in Islam (Kynsihleto 2008).

The chosen research design for the study was a descriptive design, while the sampling within this design aimed at identifying six female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers with a minimum of three years teaching experience. The data collection involved the use of semi-structured interviews. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were done via Zoom to protect both the researcher and participants from the risk of transmission of the SARS-COV-2 virus. The data analysis was conducted using a thematic content analysis method with the application of Islamic feminism theory. Finally, the ethical requirements for studies involving human participants were adhered to all stages of the data collection.

4.2. Research design

A descriptive research design was selected for this research study. Sahin & Mete (2021) state that the purpose of such a design allows for the investigation of a research problem by answering related research questions such as what, when, where, and how by describing "a population, situation, or phenomenon that is being studied" (Sahin & Mete, 2021, p. 24). The advantage of utilising this design was depicted in the fruitful and extensive information that was collected which allowed for the analysis of the place of the Muslim culture in defining the types of empowerment Indian Muslim girls can attain as well as the extent to which they can do so. Thus, the design of descriptive research enables the development of knowledge not just about the madrasah education system which is located within Islam but also about the empowering practices of Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers as a category of women within the Indian Muslim community in South Africa.

4.3. Sampling

A purposive selection was conducted as the best participants who had represented the sample size were chosen: "The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses" (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2016, p. 2). For the semi-structured interviews, the intention was to interview six participants, but in the end the number of participants were five as one participant was unable to participate in an interview due to her hospitalisation from COVID-19. One-hour interviews were conducted with each of the five participants to obtain information with which to answer the research questions. The selection criteria of participants were that: (1) participants had to be Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers from different madrasahs in various provinces across South Africa; and (2) participants had to have been teaching for at least three years. The reason for these criteria was to ensure that only educators who had experience in teaching at madrasahs and who were knowledgeable about Islam, based on their years of teaching experience, were chosen. The five participants for the study were deemed adequate for a small-scale masters by coursework research project.

4.4 Participants

The five participants and their biographical details are presented in the table below. The names used in the table are pseudonyms that protect the identities of the participants.

Table 1: Biographical information of participants

Participant	Age (years)	Province	Area	Number of years teaching at current madrasah	Total number of years of teaching
Zara	34	KwaZulu-Natal	Chatsworth	5	11
Zoya	32	KwaZulu-Natal	Chatsworth	7	9
Nadia	41	Gauteng	Lenasia	8	18
Lana	35	Gauteng	Marlboro Gardens	13	14
Farah	43	Gauteng	Azaadville	5	22

From this table, it is clear that all the participants met the selection criteria for the study as all of them had been teaching at madrasahs for over three years. All the five participants were also Indian Muslim women.

4.5. Data collection

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, semi-structured interviews were the tool utilised for the collection of data. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to tailor the questions to a specific participant and to probe participants for more detailed and concise information. Miles and Gilbert (2005, 66) state: “The flexibility of semi-structured interviews makes them so well suited to answering a ‘why’ question. By changing the questions and the areas discussed during the interview we can address aspects that are important to individual participants, and by doing so we can gain a better understanding of the research question”. These semi-structured interviews were conducted through Zoom conferencing due to COVID-19 restrictions on human contact. The researcher struggled to get participants for the study

because 56 out of 60 madrasahs contacted by email and telephone were unwilling to allow their female teachers to be participants in the study. This proved very frustrating for the researcher as the unwillingness of the madrasahs to participate in the study delayed the completion of the data collection. Thus, data was collected from February 2021 until August 2021. The madrasahs' refusal to engage in the interviews revealed the patriarchal mindset that pervades the Deobandi Islamic education system holistically, as was discussed in Chapter 2. In the end, six female madrasah teachers agreed to participate in the study. Unfortunately, the sixth interview could not take place as the participant was hospitalised for COVID-19 around the time the interview was scheduled and she remained in hospital for over a month. As time was fast running out for the research project to be completed, the researcher had to proceed with the data analysis of the interviews with five participants only.

The interviews were recorded using the recording feature on Zoom, with permission granted by each participant. However, only participants' voices were recorded as participants did not have their cameras on to maintain anonymity. The advantage of this is that it enabled the researcher to concentrate fully on the interview and not be distracted by participants' faces. The researcher supplemented the interview recordings with notes taken in the course of the interviews. After each interview, the recording was downloaded, played and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions formed the basis for the data analysis.

4.6. Data analysis

The data analysis utilised a thematic content analysis method which involved identifying recurrent themes in the data and making sense of them based on the chosen theoretical framework of Islamic feminism. In a thematic content analysis, the researcher looks for "patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue" (Maguire & Delahunt 2017, p. 3353). Anderson (2007) points to the objectivity of this method of analysis which enabled the researcher to remain impartial in her analysis, despite being an Indian Muslim female herself and having received a similar madrasah education. The themes identified in the data are presented in Chapter 5 of this research report.

4.7. Reliability, validity, and objectivity

In designing the research, collecting data and analysing the collected data, the researcher had to take into consideration issues of reliability, validity and objectivity.

4.7.1. Reliability

Generally, the reliability of a research study lies in its ability to be replicated and for similar findings to be arrived at. However, in a qualitative study like this, no such guarantees can be made as findings will depend on participants' individual experiences. This study was designed as a descriptive qualitative study that drew on participants, not from a specific madrasah, but from different madrasahs across South Africa to gain a general understanding of how female madrasah teachers were navigating the patriarchal Deobandi education system to teach Indian Muslim girls in ways that offered them empowering possibilities. While this design can be replicated by other researchers, their studies may or may not yield similar findings.

4.7.2. Validity

The validity of the research study is that the data was collected using an in-built Zoom recording facility, and simultaneously notes were taken during the interviews to ensure that the transcribed data was captured accurately. All transcriptions were done by the researcher herself and participants' responses have been presented verbatim.

4.7.3. Objectivity

The method of a thematic content analysis enabled the researcher to remain impartial in her analysis even though she had received a similar madrasah education and was an Indian Muslim woman herself. The researcher acknowledged that this was research and her personal views did not count. The data therefore presents the views of the participants as expressed during the interviews.

4.8. Ethical considerations

There were several ethical matters to be considered in this research project as the project involved human participants. These were informed consent of participants, confidentiality of participants' classified information, and anonymity of participants.

4.8.1. Informed consent

The participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) that stipulated that their involvement in the research project was voluntary and not forced. The Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) provided details about the research project and stated the additional agreements to be entered into with regard to confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) notified the prospective participants of the mode of data collection which was semi-structured interviews.

4.8.2. Confidentiality

This is a crucial aspect of any research that involves human participants. In this study, participants were assured that their classified information would remain confidential and not be disclosed to any outside parties. The Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) and the consent agreement form (Appendix B) gave participants this assurance. The researcher maintained the confidentiality of the participants by storing the interview recordings and transcribed data on her password protected laptop which ensured that nobody had access to the participants' classified information.

4.8.3 Anonymity

A consent agreement (Appendix B) legally protected the identities of the participants. In this research report, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the participants.

4.8.4 General

As indicated earlier, only Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers from different provinces that had a minimum of three years teaching experience were chosen for participation in this study. Thus, the participants were 18 years and older and no permission was needed from parents or guardians. No monetary or material reward was offered to participants for their participation in the study. In spite of the difficulty in finding willing participants, all those who were eventually interviewed volunteered. The next chapter contains the data presentation and analysis.

Chapter 5

Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

As stated in Chapter 4, the semi-structured interviews in this study were conducted during the period of February to August 2021 due to the struggle to find willing participants. Zoom was the tool used for the interviews as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had made in-person interviews impossible. The selection criteria were that the Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers interviewed had to be from different provinces, and had to possess a minimum of three years teaching experience. Five participants were interviewed instead of six as the last participant was unable to attend an interview due to her having COVID-19 and being hospitalised. As mentioned previously, 56 out of 60 madrasahs were unwilling to allow their Indian Muslim female madrasah teachers to be participants for the study as the madrasah heads were the ones approached to gain access to the teachers. Thus, the five participants interviewed came from four madrasahs in the KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces. The Zoom recordings were downloaded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions which consisted of a total of 75 pages were done immediately after each individual interview had ended. The data analysis highlights the major themes in response to each interview question asked.

Initially, the intention was to video record the participants so as to capture their body-language as well. However, all five participants were uncomfortable to show their screens and therefore only their voices were captured. Pseudonyms have been allocated to each participant to maintain anonymity of their identities. Forms were given to all the participants (Appendix A and Appendix B) via email, and the signed consent form (Appendix B) were scanned by the participants and sent back to the researcher via email. The forms sent to the participants included an information sheet regarding the details of the project (Appendix A). The consent form was signed by each participant to indicate their voluntary participation and to promise the confidentiality of information shared between the researcher and the participants. The pseudonyms that have been assigned to each participant are as follows:

Participant 1 – Zara

Participant 2 – Zoya

Participant 3 – Nadia

Participant 4 – Lana

Participant 5 – Farah

These pseudonyms are used throughout the reporting of the findings of this study to protect the identities of the participants.

As a reminder, the aim of the research was to investigate how South African Indian female madrasah teachers were subverting the patriarchal ethos of the Deobandi madrasah education system to allow for the social and economic empowerment of Indian Muslim girls. The thematic content analysis of the data revealed four major themes which are presented in this chapter. These are: (1) the promotion women's rights in Islam using various pedagogies; (2) the encouragement of students to pursue further education (religious education and secular education); (3) the use of the curriculum to equip students with skills for economic empowerment; and (4) the contestation against the 'reinterpretation' of religious texts from a feminist perspective.

5.2. The promotion of women's rights in Islam using various pedagogies

All five participants interviewed confirmed that they were promoting women's rights in Islam in their teaching of Indian Muslim girls at their madrasahs. The pedagogies they used ranged from the use of religious texts to the modelling of prominent female figures in Islamic history, the facilitation of debates in the classroom, and the application of authentic learning approaches.

5.2.1. Religious texts

All the participants said that they addressed women's rights in Islam as they encountered them in the teaching of the Qu'ran, hadiths, sunnah and other religious texts in various subjects. The following statement by Zara attests to this point:

Zara:

> We do hadith kitabs, tafseer, seerah and stories of the Sahaba and Sahabiyat. So, we come to the hadith and as you know, the hadith, tafseer and that has many places that discuss women's rights. As we come across that, we elaborate about women's rights in Islam, and we discuss this extensively.

Zara's response indicates that knowledge about women's rights in Islam is not hidden as it is an intrinsic part of the religious texts taught at madrasahs. This is in line with the goal of Islamic feminists to highlight these intrinsic women's rights which patriarchal male jurists often seek to suppress.

When asked by the researcher why the teachers did not concentrate on women's rights as a subject or topic on its own rather than teaching them as they did, Zoya provided a thoughtful answer: the same rights, such as the right to economic independence, cannot be taught in isolation as they are embedded in all the religious texts and thus appear across all the subjects.

Zoya:

> You see the most important aspect of woman's economic empowerment is that Islam has recognized their separate and independent identity and has given them economic rights like to own property, right of inheritance, right to engage in economic activities to increase their fortune Islamically. So, all of that is said in hadith, tafseer and fiqh. So in tafseer you get Surah Nisaa, the subject of inheritance. So there we discuss a woman's inheritance/share and the rights Islam has given women when it comes to inheritance and so in many hadith, there are many aspects discussed as well. So there are many subjects that discuss the same issues; it's not in one specific subject.

This quotation from Zoya points to the centrality of the discourse of women's rights in Islamic religious texts as all the texts such as hadith, tafseer and fiqh speak about women's rights in Islam. Zoya provided a hadith which teaches the students about their right to economic independence in relation to the property that belongs to a woman and explained that when the woman spent her money on her family, she accrues the same reward as her husband whose duty it is to support his family financially.

Zoya:

> In the recent hadith that we did, the hadith where Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) was encouraging people to spend on their family and the virtues of it, wherein if a man works, earns and spends on their family, he is actually rewarded for it... So when one of the Sahabiyat of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Her) heard of this, she went to her husband and she told him that he is a man who doesn't earn very much, but she does have a lot of wealth, a lot of jewellery which belongs to her only. This is where we spoke about a Muslim woman's right to inheritance, etc. Therefore, what she wanted to do was she wanted to spend it on her family, but she wanted to know if she will also get the reward that Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) was speaking about. This led her to ask him this question and Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) said that she will be rewarded the same if she spends on her family.

As Zoya mentions, she had used this particular hadith that she and her students came across to teach the students about the heavenly rewards that a married woman would receive if she spent her own finances on her family, just as her husband would do since it is his assigned responsibility (El Saadawi 1982). Through this hadith, Zoya highlighted two important notions regarding a Muslim woman's right to economic empowerment in Islam. First, as hadiths are incidents and events narrated by the Prophet's (Peace Be Upon Him) companions, the revolutionary rights of Muslim women in seventh century Saudi Arabia are showcased by this hadith that reveals that women during the time of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) were given economic rights where their wealth, such as jewelry mentioned in this hadith, belonged solely to them. Thus, in Zoya's class, the economic rights of Muslim women were addressed with respect to money that they earn from their business which is to be theirs alone, as Islamic feminist scholar Nawal El Saadawi (1982) has pointed out.

Secondly, women and men receive equal divine rewards for spending their wealth on their families, so there is nothing like a man receives more rewards than a woman simply because of his gender. This understanding of the hadith affirms the need to interpret the Qu'ran and other religious texts from a woman-centered perspective, which is what Islamic feminism is all about. The participants in this study used the various religious texts that they came across in their various subjects to address women's rights in relation to specific events, incidents, and the lifestyle of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) which provide a template for how

Muslim men and women should live. Therefore, the use of religious texts forms one of the pedagogies used by female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers to teach Indian Muslim girls about women's rights in Islam. This proves to be a very effective pedagogic practice as these religious texts form the foundation upon which Islam is interpreted.

However, the use of religious texts to teach women's rights in Islam can be critiqued by feminist approaches to pedagogy for its evident patriarchal connotations since most, if not all, religious texts such as the Qu'ran and hadiths have traditionally been interpreted by male scholars: "A pedagogy that is premised on a hierarchal, elite system of knowledge production is already apparent. There is a clear sense that the origin and creation of religious knowledge are monopolized by an authoritative cohort of elite men" (Patel 2013, p. 72). Thus, the call from Islamic feminists to reinterpret the religious sources from a feminist perspective or to undertake to do what Asma Barlas calls "unreading patriarchy" from the religious sources (Barlas, 2002, p. 134) is highly imperative.

It is important to reiterate that the Qu'ran and other religious texts are not patriarchal in their original form, but rather that they were interpreted mainly by male jurists who were influenced by the patriarchal beliefs of their sociohistorical, cultural and political environments (Anwar 2009). When Islamic feminists call for the reinterpretation of religious texts, they mean interpreting these religious texts from a perspective free from these patriarchal beliefs. The practice of Islam as influenced by these beliefs will be further elaborated under the last theme to be discussed in this chapter.

5.2.2. Modelling

The second pedagogical approach to teaching women's rights in Islam that the participants used in their classes was the modelling of prominent women in Islamic history for Indian Muslim girls to appreciate that they had role models to follow. Women's rights such as the rights to education and economic empowerment were taught through the consistent mention of Prophet Muhammed's (Peace Be Upon Him) wives, Sayyidatina Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (Peace Be Upon Her) and Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her). Zara's statement below provides proof of this practice:

Zara:

> Most of the Sahabiyat can be used as examples, especially the wives of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). So, if we take the example of Aisha (Peace Be Upon Her) and her life and time she spent with Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) and after, she was a prominent figure as a teacher. She used to teach and was very knowledgeable about Fiqh which is a difficult subject for men. She was fluent in inheritance and even the Sahabah would go to her. Even if you think of Khadijah (Peace Be Upon Her), the wife of Nabi (Peace Be Upon Him) was a very wealthy businesswoman before she married Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) and whilst she was married to him. There are many aspects of the Sahabiyats' (female companions of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him)) lives that we can take into account as examples. You don't look at a Sahabi and her entire life, but there are many examples from many Sahabiyat.

From Zara's response above, it is clear that she promotes the discourse of women's empowerment in her class using the approach of modelling in which she focalises important women figures in Islam who have demonstrated empowering qualities and uses these models to entrench ideas of Muslim women as very capable of being scholars and entrepreneurs. This enables the girls in her class to understand that Islam does not restrict them from pursuing education and economic activities. If the wives of the Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) engaged in education and big and profitable businesses, why should modern Muslim women not do the same and, in fact, why should young girls now not be encouraged to develop aspirations towards furthering their education and owning their own businesses? Effectively, Zara instils in the girls in her class the idea that they too can study further to become teachers of Islamic religious texts like Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her) and businesswomen like Sayyidatina Khadija bint Khuwaylid (Peace Be Upon Her). Modelling thus becomes a pedagogic practice aimed at enshrining the importance of the education and economic rights of Muslim girls which is fundamental to their empowerment.

Zoya mentioned that the pedagogic practice of modelling is also used in showcasing examples of successful Muslim women within the Indian Muslim community.

Zoya:

> We also like to use examples of people they actually know in their communities or someone they would look up to who is independent, knowledgeable of Islam, doing everything the way of sharia, etc. So, they actually know of someone and they have someone to look up to as a guide as they go on through their own journeys.

By localising the application of modelling to women in the girls' communities, the students are able to understand that the successes of these women can be replicated in their own realities. So Zoya helps her students to see that there are already women who have emulated the wives of the Prophet in becoming successful and that they too can emulate these women to grow into economically and educationally successful women. Local examples of role models help the students to see that it is not impossible for Indian Muslim girls to attain success in life as economically and socially empowered women.

5.2.3. Debates

Zara engages her students in debates which address their rights as prescribed in Islam. In order to centre these rights within the reality of current times, the students are asked to debate about topical issues such as the right of a woman to wear the hijab and how the symbol of a hijab is constructed in the west as oppressive.

Zara:

> A lot of times, we have debates in class and one of the topics would be women's rights in Islam. So, we do focus a lot on encouraging the students to understand women's rights in an Islamic perspective as opposed to what the world is telling us is women's rights … The rights of hijab (as a right for women) as opposed to the west and media who like to think that the hijab is imposed on us. But it's our right, so for example, in France they are banning hijab, they are taking away a simple right of a person to be able to cover herself.

Malone and Michael (2018) mention that one of the chief benefits of using debates as a pedagogic practice allows for the application of critical thinking skills. In having debates on topics such as the ones mentioned by Zara, her students are able to provide a critical analysis of how women's rights in the west differ from women's rights in Islam. The students come to

understand that the wearing of the hijab, which is a Muslim woman's right, is misconstrued by the west as an oppressive practice, and they engage in coming up with possible solutions to the banning of the hijab in certain countries. The hijab debate helps students to see the contradiction between the west's labelling of the hijab as patriarchal and their policing of the rights of women to what they wear through the enforcement of bans in countries such as France. Such a debate then empowers the students socially as they begin to grow a consciousness of the external challenges Indian Muslim women face which, in addition to the internal challenges, make life very difficult for them.

5.2.4. Authentic learning

Lombardi (2007, p. 2) defines authentic learning as a pedagogic practice that "typically focuses on real-world, complex problems and their solutions, using role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies, and participation in virtual communities of practice". The data analysis reveals that the study's participants used the authentic learning approach also to teach women's rights in Islam and empower girls for the future. Nadia utilises this pedagogic practice of authentic learning with respect to real-world problems and role-playing activities in the form of market days. A student is given the chance to practice her right to economic empowerment through market days that occur monthly. This is conducted through the 'tuck-shop' in which each student sells her own goods and earns a profit, enabling the teaching of business skills and principles such as budgeting, profiting, supply and demand. In enabling this practice, Nadia instils in her students the importance of a woman's right to own her own business, and equips them with the skills to run their own future businesses. This serves to allow her students to begin thinking of possible business ideas from the time they are in madrasah, and to establish businesses once they have qualified as they were introduced to these principles during their madrasah education. Nadia presents these ideas in the following quote:

> Nadia:
>
> Every month, a different student would have their chance at hosting their business at the tuck-shop, so they'd bring their own goods and sell it and make a profit. So, young girls are encouraged to be businesswomen, and to think about aspects of a business such as budgeting, profiting, supply, and demand so they can apply it in their possible future businesses. This also gets them to think about what possible business they might want to start in the future.

Authentic learning here is a very effective pedagogical strategy that Nadia uses to inculcate ideas of economic empowerment in her students.

5.3. The encouragement of students to pursue further education

In this study, all of the participants expressed the sentiment that they encouraged their students to pursue further education i.e. education beyond madrasah. Both religious and secular education were encouraged by the teachers, with the central principle being that neither type of education must transgress the boundaries of sharia (Islamic law). The following statement by Lana is enlightening:

> Lana:
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> We see that Sahabiyat in the time of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) achieved much. Some of them had degrees that were higher than the males at the time. So, the students are encouraged to pursue any type of further knowledge, but are reminded that they are Muslim first. So, whatever they do, we do not forget that Islam comes first and the rights that we are owed. If it is within Islamic law (sharia), it is 100% permissible to pursue education to study further.

Lana stresses to her students that as long as their pursuit of further education did not transgress sharia law, it is allowed. At the same time, she emphasizes the importance of education in Islamic history by mentioning that the sahabiyats or female companions of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) were more knowledgeable than the men around them, and that education is a right for Muslim women. What is also striking in her response is her warning to her students that "they are Muslim first", meaning that their Islamic identity remains prioritised and must be protected even when they go in pursuit of higher education. By implication, these Indian Muslim girls may attend universities but must do so within the boundaries of what Islam allows, such as wearing their hijabs when they go to campus. Zara endorses these views in her response:

> Zara:
>
> So, we try to make students understand that they are allowed to pursue any further education as long as they are following Islam, the rules of Sharia and not compromising on deen.

Zara confirms the principle stated by Lana, stating that as long as her students' religion and the rules of sharia are respected, the students are welcome to pursue any further education, be it secular education or religious education. Nadia's view also resonates with these sentiments:

> Nadia:
>
> I encourage my students to get an education in both religious and secular education. Like I said, best of dunya, best of akhirah, as long as you don't break Allah's laws, and the sharia.

Nadia affirms the importance of respecting the sharia when considering the type of education a student wants to pursue just like Lana and Zara, but unlike them, she specifically mentions both types of education that students are free to pursue within the boundaries of sharia. This is in line with Islamic feminism which encourages both religious and secular education for girls, in contrast to patriarchal Indian Muslim culture which frowns upon secular education for girls and sees it as threatening their morality (Sayed 2010). Farah's point of view about girls' pursuit of further education echoes the views already expressed by Lana, Zara and Nadia.

> Farah:
>
> I tell them to go ahead; there is no restrictions on the type of education, unless it goes against sharia or deen and, if so, then that isn't permissible.

Farah expresses the same ideology as the other participants mentioned by encouraging an education that does not cross the line of sharia; if it does, then it is not allowed.

Sharia (Islamic law) dictates the conditions that govern the pursuit of further education which all Muslim women must adhere to. The two conditions are that: (1) there must be separate premises for women and men, preventing the mixing of the genders; and (2) the knowledge being acquired must not be related to the professions of dancing, waitressing, modelling, acting, prostitution and music affiliated professions (Bux 2004). Given the context of contemporary education globally, separate premises for women and men are not possible everywhere as practiced in Muslim-majority countries like Saudi Arabia. Zoya responded to my follow-up question of how to address the reality of the impossibility of separate premises for both genders:

Zoya:

So, um there are different ways, some courses can be completely online and that's great because there's more flexibility and you can do it in the confines of your home which prevents the mixing of men and women. And, then if there is a need to go out to attain knowledge, there should be strength against fitnahs… you need to be aware that those things that will lead to haram or is haram, you have to stay away from it. Whether that's intermingling or looking at the opposite sex. As the Indian Muslim girls come from a strong knowledge of sharia as taught to them in madrasah, they are able to discern between what is morally Islamically correct behaviour when they are being educated at co-educational tertiary institutions.

Zoya's response indicates that Indian Muslim female students are encouraged to pursue further education that is in keeping with the limits of sharia as mentioned previously, and to use sharia to their discretion in the case of being educated at co-educational institutions which are more common than gender segregated universities. Zoya acknowledges that ensuring separate premises for women and men at universities was not easily attainable, but that the strong religious background of her students was a good protection for them against doing anything that may transgress sharia and thus bring disgrace to Islam and shame on their families. Such things, as she mentions, include girls freely socializing with boys. Her response indicates a very clear moral standing against such practices. By implication, while she, like all the other participants, is in support of Indian Muslim girls acquiring university education, she is adamant that such a pursuit should not be used as an excuse for engaging in conduct that is unacceptable within Islam.

Zoya's response above raises the issue of girl's morality in Islam. Curious to know whether the discourse of morality with respect to sharia law in the pursuit of further education was only emphasized when it came to Indian Muslim girls and not Indian Muslim boys, the researcher asked Zara what she thought about this, to which she responded:

Zara:

It's obviously for both, so even for men it is important that when they are pursuing such further education, that there is no intermingling. They also have to make sure that they

keep their Islamic identity in place and Islamic morals and ethics whilst they are doing, whichever suitable career they are pursuing.

Zara's answer addresses the misconception that only Muslim girls and women are expected to ensure the maintenance of their morality when pursuing further education. Her response shows that the issue of morality must be applied to both Muslim women and men, that no gender is free to act the way they like but that all are guided by Islamic principles.

However, it must be acknowledged that despite the injunction for both women and men to apply the same moral principles from the sharia to their lifestyle, Muslim women are morally policed in a harsher way than Muslim men. The reason is that patriarchal structures within Muslim societies are fearful of women's educational and economic progression and success, especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia: "Fearful of the implications of rapid social and economic changes on gender ideology, conservative religious authorities pushed for a significantly larger moral police force, primarily charged with the duty to ensure women's obedience to the Wahhabi moral code" (Hoodfar & Ghoreishian 2012, n.p.). An example of the harsh moral policing of Muslim women is the high rate of the so-called honour killings that take place in Muslim-majority countries: "Amnesty International… defines honour killing as usually committed by male family members against a female relative, when they believe she has brought shame on the family" (Smartt 2006, p. 4). Honour killings target women only, not men who may have equally brought shame on their families. By implication, men's immoral behaviour is condoned while women's indiscretions are severely penalised. The heinous act of honour killings is justified by male religious figures in Islam who twist the religious sources to suit their own purpose. Thus, while female madrasah teachers like Zara may believe that moral expectations apply to both girls and boys, everyday realities tell a different tale and these are some of the inconsistencies in the practice of Islam that Islamic feminism challenges.

Despite the promotion of both Islamic and secular further education by the female Indian Muslim teachers, they maintain the ideal that the value of secular education should not be considered to be better than that of a religious one as promoted by mainstream western feminism. Zoya indicates this in the following statement: "The distinction I am trying to make here is whatever degree they are trying to attain it shouldn't make them feel that now they

attained something better than Qu'ran and hadith". Mainstream western feminism promotes educational empowerment for women only through secular education and labels religious knowledge as patriarchal, a problem that King and Beattie (2005, p. 66) refer to "as something of a cuckoo in the nest of academia". Salem (2013, p. 1) highlights what underpins the tension between mainstream western feminism and religion: "The silence around feminism and religion is a profound one, and its roots lie in the metanarrative of secularising that influences knowledge production in the field of feminism (and more broadly the social sciences)".

According to Salem in this quotation, the tension arises out of the way western feminism has conceptualised knowledge as the product of only secular education, sidelining any kind of knowledge produced in religious institutions. The participants in this study believed that Islamic education should be valued by their students as this education forms their identity and the template for their lives: "The hadith and the Qu'ran that has been attained is directly from Allah Ta'Allah and Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) and attaining this is great; it is attaining something for my community, and my life in terms of bettering certain aspects of my life" (Zoya). So, in contrast to western feminists who demonise religious knowledge, these female madrasah teachers, like Islamic feminists, value their religious knowledge and therefore encourage their students to pursue further education to acquire religious knowledge as well as secular knowledge. This suggests an unbiased attitude towards secular education, which stands in contradistinction to white western feminism's narrowed and biased views about Islamic religious knowledge.

5.4. The use of the curriculum to equip students with skills for economic empowerment

In this study, it was important to find out from the participants what their curriculum entailed, and how it promoted Indian Muslim girls' economic empowerment. Nadia's madrasah curriculum focused on religious subjects only. While this may be narrowing the choices available for female Indian Muslim students to pursue as a profession, they are still empowered to become teachers at madrasahs as the curriculum offered all the necessary subjects such as Qu'ran, hadith, tafseer and seerah. Farah's madrasah offered a curriculum that primarily concentrated on religious subjects, but provided an informal secular education with respect to the secular activities offered:

Farah:

> We do have, not formally, but in an informal way. Pre-covid, we had specific days set aside for home economics, handwork, arts or crafts. In terms of counseling, on an informal level, we'd be equipping them on an informal basis. But, formally, there is no courses, but there are ones at other madrasahs

Although the secular activities that Farah lists here are not part of the formal curriculum, the students are able to acquire knowledge on subjects like home economics, handwork, arts and craft. This means that they can be empowered to join the food entertainment, arts and crafts, and fashion designing industries after they graduate. They are also able, with additional training, to establish their own businesses such as running restaurants, bakeries, arts shops, and dressmaking shops.

The curriculum at the madrasah Lana teaches at provided various more formalised and structured secular courses such as home economics that enabled the students to use the skills learned to set up their own businesses or to work within such industries. This secular curriculum operates in conjunction with the religious curriculum that empowers the girls to become madrasah teachers, as do Nadia and Farah's madrasahs. Lana's madrasah also encourages its students to engage in social work activities, which can serve as a basis for a university degree in social work.

Lana:

> So, in our madrasah, we have home economics, we also get them to join social work organizations after they have completed, such as in orphanages. We have lessons like first aid courses, and fitness trainings to make them independent. Then, we do teaching, where the girls can become teachers and join Islamic schools, so that also gives them an opportunity.

In comparison to Nadia and Farah's madrasahs which are more oriented towards religious education, Lana's madrasah offered an all-round curriculum that provides both religious and secular subjects, thereby increasing students' opportunities to gain economic empowerment when they graduate as students can pursue further education in various secular subjects and find jobs in those fields.

Social work is a particularly vibrant field of study at South African universities and there is a big need for social workers in a country where the abuse of women and children is a constant. Besides social work, the curriculum at Lana's madrasah offered courses in first aid training which can propel students towards a career in medicine, as well as fitness training which can prepare students for a career in physical education. These are all empowering possibilities for the Indian Muslim girls studying at this madrasah. The curriculum offered by Lana's madrasah therefore serves as a means by which Lana equips her students with the skills necessary to become economically empowered in the future.

In Zoya's response, she highlighted the subjects that form part of the religious and secular education curriculum at her madrasah and explained how the subjects address economic empowerment of girls.

> Zoya:
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> So, a lot of the economic empowerment that we would do is part of our lessons. So, like I told you, we would come across those topics when we come across Fiqh, hadith and tafseer where we cover the main Islamic perspectives of all of those things. Then, we also do life skills where we teach them the basics of or just guide them on simple things whether its finance or budgeting, savings, smart ways of spending, steps to create a business, things like that. When it comes to home businesses, steps you should take or mistakes you should avoid to have a successful business etc. So, that's one thing and also, what I encourage is the skills that they do have or are interested in to keep themselves empowered, to be independent.

Zoya's madrasah incorporates secular education within its primary focus on religious education; in other words, the two are taught inseparably. While there is no separate secular curriculum, secular knowledge is disseminated within the ambit of religious teaching. This teaching includes a focus on life skills such as business skills that will assist the students to become owners of their own businesses, enabling their financial independence. Like Lana's madrasah, Zoya's madrasah prepares its students for life by teaching them financial literacy and equipping them with valuable skills needed for the establishment and successful running of their own businesses, such as budgeting money, saving money, and managing money. Such education empowers the Indian Muslim girls at this madrasah to pursue future goals that will make them economically independent. The result will be the creation of a new socio-economic

order that is based on ideals of justice and gender equality in Islam, where Muslim women are supported rather than subjugated (Nkealah 2006). This will be the ultimate achievement of Islamic feminism.

In a comparison to the other madrasahs examined above, Zara's madrasah curriculum targets some professional and vocational skills specifically, such as teacher training which enables her students to pursue further tertiary education in the field of secular or religious education, allowing for them to teach at secular schools or to start their own madrasahs once they are certified.

> Zara:
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> Like I mentioned, this is like a degree on its own, the Islamic teachings so like the Fiqh, the hadith, tafseer, that we teaching them, the Qu'ran. Later, they go on to become teachers of the Qu'ran, they teach the Qu'ran, Hifz, the memorisation of the Qu'ran as we do teacher training as well. So, there's many things that a person can choose to teach from the curriculum. If they want to know more about Fiqh, they can pursue their studies on Fiqh or if a person would like to memorize the Qu'ran, they can later go to other madrasahs where they can complete the memorization of the Qu'ran.

The curriculum at Zara's madrasah is therefore enriching as students get the chance to acquire both religious and secular knowledge that equips them for the world of work.

Based on the responses by all the female Indian Muslim teachers, it can be asserted that there are two types of curricula that madrasah education can offer Indian Muslim girls: it can be a curriculum with religious education at the forefront or a curriculum with a focus on both religious and secular education concurrently. It is also evident from the participants' responses that there are different degrees to which madrasahs offer secular education, with some offering more secular subjects than others while some do not offer secular subjects at all, and still others offer an enmeshed programme of religious and secular subjects.

5.5. The contestation against the 'reinterpretation' of religious texts

The data presented in this chapter so far suggest that the female madrasah teachers interviewed in this study were practising Islamic feminism in their teaching. Surprisingly, all five of them dissociated their teaching from feminist praxis. A sentiment that was expressed by all five participants was that Islam and its religious texts do not need to be reinterpreted from a feminist perspective as Islam already holds men and women in equal status, and promotes the rights of women. The following statements by all the participants support this finding:

> Zara:
>
> As far as reinterpreting the Qu'ran and hadith are concerned, there is no reason for us to reinterpret it because it is just. There can be no law, commandment, that is more fair than the Qu'ran and hadith, so we don't need to reinterpret the Qu'ran and hadith in any way because we teach them about women's rights in Islam. So, like I had mentioned, in the Qu'ran, it is most just in terms of women's rights, so like I had mentioned with inheritance, the dowry, rights of women, rights of mothers, rights of daughters, all of that is something we teach the girls. In no way, do we try and reinterpret the Qu'ran and hadith from a western standard.
>
> Zoya:
>
> So, when it comes to Islam or Islamically, we should look at it, women, Allah (SWT) created women, he created men, he created them, we are not created the same, we have differences but at the same time we are created equally.
>
> Nadia:
>
> No, I don't do this [reinterpretation of the Qu'ran].
>
> Lana:
>
> The Qu'ran is the best remedy for justice. So, all the laws in the Qu'ran are 100% equally with rights of men and women.
>
> Farah:
>
> I think the Qu'ran and hadith have done it for us. I would never be able to do that. I would use these sources exactly as it is.

The concept of Islamic feminism was explained by the researcher to the participants before they had given the above responses. This was done to prevent the female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers from conflating a mainstream western feminist perspective with an Islamic feminist one. However, as shown by the participants' responses, it was not a successful attempt. Despite the said explanation provided by the researcher, Nadia who possessed knowledge of Islamic feminism and Islamic feminists from her masters degree was particularly insistent that the religious texts do not need to be reinterpreted from a feminist perspective as Islamic feminist scholars such as amina wadud promote:

> Nadia:
>
> I wrote an assignment, a mini thesis against, I don't know if you know, amina wadud's interpretation of the Qu'ran. So, uh, I wasn't happy with certain things there so I wrote against it. I don't believe that we need to reinterpret it.

As one of the most radical scholars of Islamic feminism, wadud has argued that the Qu'ran and other Islamic sources need to be reinterpreted from a feminist perspective to include women's voices, thereby dismantling male hegemony (wadud 2021). She states: "Although Islamic feminist exegesis is more than just women, to include women's lived realities in Qur'anic analysis challenges the dominant and prolific model of centering analysis of the sacred text and religious practices around men and men's experience as if universal" (wadud 2021, p. 2). As noted in Chapter 3, wadud's work is on the radical side of Islamic feminism. It is thus not surprising that Nadia had contested wadud's reinterpretation of the Qu'ran in her own research.

This outcome of the interviews illustrates that even when Muslim women use the Qu'ran to teach women's rights in Islam, this is not always an indication that they affiliate with Islamic feminism and its ideologies. Islamic feminist scholarship speaks about the need to reinterpret the Qu'ran from a gender equality lens since the sociohistorical, cultural and political backgrounds of male jurists have influenced their interpretation of many Qu'ranic verses (Eid 2002; Inglehart & Norris 2009; Engineer 2008). Nadia, Zara, Lana and Farah refused to acknowledge that Muslim women's subjugation is due to the twisted interpretation of religious texts by male jurists from a patriarchal cultural, sociohistorical and political angle affected by colonialism and cultural integration (Eid 2002; Inglehart & Norris 2009; Engineer 2008). It is important to distinguish here that Islamic feminism does not view the religious texts as patriarchal, but the interpretation of it, which is used by Muslim men to oppress Muslim

women. Zoya was the only teacher who acknowledged the role of culture in the victimisation of Muslim women. She supplies an example of the distinction between Islam and the Indian Muslim culture specifically in the following statement:

> Zoya:
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> A very simple example would be a woman's dressing. So, of course we know hijab and niqab is mandatory and the covering of the body and not showing your body to non-mahram men. That is all part of Qu'ran, and hadith, but one extreme that we see in society is that a woman is expected to cover her hair in many places, where she is allowed to show it such as in front of other woman. If her hands are showing, she is considered to be an immodest woman, even if she is not in the presence of men. At a wedding that is segregated, a woman tends to open her hair or open her hijab or she is wearing a short-sleeved dress or something tight, some Muslim women would tend to look down upon her but we show them that difference in culture and Islam. So, Islamically, when she is in the presence of other woman or her mahram, her hair can be open, the parts of the body that can be shown are allowed, she can dress up, wear her makeup, dress beautifully, that is all fine and good. There shouldn't be anybody looking down on her or making her feel bad because that is allowed in Islam. So, that part that comes in a person's mindset, it is because of the Indian culture.

Zoya's example illustrates the difference between Islam and Muslim culture. A Muslim woman is allowed to show her hair and parts of her body when she is in the presence of other women, and in the case of those men who are her mahrams (her father, brother and husband). However, as the patriarchal Indian Muslim culture has been infused with the moral policing ideology and subjugation of women, any freedom that has been provided by Islam to a Muslim woman is taken away or scrutinised, especially by other women who are usually so entangled within cultural practices that they fail to see their contradiction of Islam.

The above response given by Zoya does provide some hope that some Indian Muslim girls are being taught the difference between culture and Islam, even though Zoya does not recognise that this can only happen if religious texts are reinterpreted from a feminist perspective. It must be acknowledged before concluding that just because these madrasah teachers refused vehemently to associate themselves with Islamic feminism due to the western conception of feminism, they were still engaging in feminist actions such as teaching their students about

women's economic and education rights as dictated by Islam. This resembles what Saba Mahmood (2005) brings to the fore in her book 'Politics of Piety' in her analysis of the Islamic revival movement in Cairo, Egypt. She notes that even though these actions were performed within their rights as cited in this religious framework, these women had agency. As agency within this space would not be recognized as such by the west, but rather as these women's passive submission to the norms, she states that the west should reformulate its conception of agency (Mahmood, 2005).

5.6. Conclusion

The findings from the data revealed that the Indian Muslim madrasah teachers involved in this study promote women's rights in Islam using various pedagogies: religious texts, modelling, debates, and authentic learning. In conjunction with this, it was found that both religious and secular education were encouraged by the female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers, with the only condition being that the that type/s of education must not transgress the boundaries of sharia (Islamic law). Additionally, it was deduced that the curriculum at these madrasahs were used as a means to ensure Indian Muslim girls' economic empowerment and social empowerment. These curriculums implemented at the five female Indian Muslim teachers' madrasahs ranged from a religious educational curriculum only, allowing students to become future teachers at madrasahs, to a combined religious and secular education curriculum which enabled the attainment of skills in both spheres of education. Lastly, the data analysis has shown that the female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers contest the idea of reinterpreting the Qu'ran from a feminist perspective as they all believed that the Qu'ran and other religious texts already promote gender equality and women's rights in Islam. Their rejection of Islamic feminism was motivated by their conflation of feminism as being a western product, which is incompatible with Islam.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the role of South Africa's female madrasah teachers in subverting the Deobandi purpose of education by empowering Indian Muslim girls, helping them to understand the social and economic rights that Islam affords them as opposed to preparing them to become wives and mothers. As indicated in the literature review in Chapter 2, there was a lack of research studies conducted on how the Deobandi madrasah system in South Africa is subverted by some female madrasahs in an attempt to empower Indian Muslim girls rather than merely teaching them to be homemakers. Thus, this study remedies this situation by providing empirical evidence of progressive madrasah teachers who are empowering Indian Muslim girls economically and socially.

The findings of this research study, as previously stated in the conclusion of Chapter 5, were as follows: female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers utilise a variety of pedagogies to promote women's rights in Islam such as religious texts, modelling, debates, and authentic learning; the female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers encouraged the pursuit of religious further education as well as the pursuit of a combined religious and secular further education as long as the sharia (Islamic law) was upheld; the curricula at the female Indian Muslim teachers' madrasahs, whether based strictly on religious education or on both a religious and secular education, enabled their students to learn skills that would empower them economically and socially; finally, the female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers contended that the Qu'ran and other religious texts provide Muslim women with knowledge of women's rights in Islam and gender equality and therefore did not need to be reinterpreted from a feminist perspective.

The discussion in this chapter is an examination of the findings that were prominent, and of interest to the researcher, and their relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3.

6.2. Traditional Deobandi madrasah education vs progressive madrasah education

Through the literature review presented in Chapter 2, it was determined that the purpose of Deobandi female madrasahs was to prepare Muslim women for their future roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers of the household, in a subjugated sense that deems morality as being synonymous with Muslim womanhood (Hoel 2016). However, the analysis of the data shows that the Indian Muslim madrasah teachers that were interviewed subverted the purpose of the Deobandi female madrasah system to empower their Indian Muslim students economically and socially. All the participants said that their teaching was based on the ideal of gender equality that is an intrinsic part of Islam. Their views support the idea that women and men were created from one entity, thus making both genders to have equal status in Islam (Engineer 2008). While patriarchal Deobandi education seeks to educate girls only to the extent that they can fulfil their biological roles as mothers and wives, progressive madrasah education equips girls with skills that make them more than just housekeepers: they can become owners of profitable businesses, teachers, fitness trainers, social workers and bookkeepers. Indian Muslim girls taught by progressive female madrasah teachers are taught in ways that make them see the roles of women and men as complementary, not women being inferior as in the case of the roles of women promoted by the Deobandi madrasah system (Predelli 2004). Where the madrasah teachers have a progressive outlook on girls' education, they influence the institution itself to be progressive, which is why one can speak here of progressive madrasahs.

The study showed that progressive madrasahs encourage girls to pursue further education, whether it is religious education or secular education or both, as long as these pursuits did not transgress the boundaries of Islam. The issue of morality featured prominently in the study but whereas the Deobandi madrasah system associates moral purity only with girls, the progressive madrasah system demands that both girls and boys follow the moral code of sharia (Sayed 2010). This gender parity in expectations will in fact be a motivation for girls and boys to respect sharia restrictions on gender mixing when they go to university. One of the study's participants makes a valuable suggestion in this regard when she mentions online education as one way to get around the problem of not having gender segregated spaces at universities. In the era of Covid-19, online education has become the predominant mode of teaching and learning across universities in South Africa. This can actually be encouraged among young

Indian Muslim girls in cases where families are too strict to allow girls to pursue contact education that might presumably affect their morals.

Fallon (2013, p. 158) explains the importance of all Muslims following the sharia as it allows for the fulfilment of the proper path towards becoming close to Allah and for the justness of a good Muslim society:

> Sharia represents the path of proper action that Allah, the Supreme Being, has shown through his messengers, primarily the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims must follow this path to achieve the goals of becoming closer to Allah and producing a just society in which individuals are able to achieve their potential and society as a whole prospers.

Thus, where both Muslim women and Muslim men are expected to uphold morality at all times, it should not be an issue for girls to seek further education at universities so as to be socially and economically empowered.

A common misconception about Muslim women that is promoted by the west is that they are forbidden to pursue education and employment as their assigned roles are to be wives, mothers and caretakers of the home. This is partly the reason why the west considers Muslim women to be oppressed. However, Muslim women are not confined to their biological roles as Cailo (2011, p. 26) notes: “Contrary to common belief, Islam does not confine women to the role of mother, in spite of the fact that this role is an inherent biological function of women… Islam reveres the biological function of mothering as a distinction between men and women, but does not define this as the psychological and social limitation for women”. According to Doi (1990, p. 138), Muslim women possess the right to education as stated by Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him): “The search for knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female” (Ibn Majah, 2008). Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr and Sayyidatina Umm Salama (whose real name was Hind bint Abi Umayya), two of Prophet Muhammed’s (Peace Be Upon Him) wives, were great Islamic scholars. Sayyidatina Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her) had notably transmitted about 2,210 hadiths, while Sayyidatina Umm Salama was a leading authority on the sunnah of Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) and served as chief advisor to the head of state (Hamdan 2014).

Unlike patriarchal Deobandi female madrasahs that are centered on ensuring an education that prepares Muslim girls for their future roles of being wives and mothers, the madrasahs from which the participants in this study come are considered to be offering an education that, according to Islamic feminist scholarship, enables the economic empowerment of these students (El Saadawi 1982; Bux 2004; Sayed 2010; Shaik, Hoel & Kagee 2011; Hoel 2016). Thus, these female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers are subverting the purpose of patriarchal Deobandi institutions by providing an education that focuses on Muslim women's equality and right to economic empowerment as propagated by the Qu'ran, as opposed to male jurists' propagation of women's subjugation. Naz (2016, p. 3) notes that feminist scholarship challenges gender inequality and misreadings of the Qu'ran: "Feminist scholarship contends that Islamic jurisprudence has developed in ways that are contrary to gender equality. This is not because the Qu'ran is clearly aimed in that direction, but is a result of the selective interpretation of the verses of the Qu'ran by patriarchal leaders." In line with this view, the female madrasah teachers interviewed in this study uphold Islamic feminist goals by promoting the empowerment of Indian Muslim girls through their teaching.

6.3. Contesting Islamic feminism

A very surprising outcome of this study was that the female madrasah teachers who were interviewed did not see the need for an Islamic feminist practice of reinterpreting the Qu'ran and other religious texts from a feminist perspective that challenges the current male jurists' patriarchal interpretations influenced by sociohistorical, cultural and political experiences. These women reasoned that the equality of women and men as well as the fair rights of Muslim women were already promoted by these religious texts. If such is the case, why then are Indian Muslim women not treated fairly in society? The study by Laher, Bemath and Subjee (2018, p. 628) found that Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is common among Indian Muslim women in South Africa because of the impact of patriarchal interpretations of the Qu'ran that are enforced on women:

> Biased interpretations of certain Islamic teachings may contribute to Muslim women experiencing mental health problems such as MDD…. These interpretations may reinforce authoritative societal roles in the community, whilst religious teachings that oppose oppression are given little to no consideration.

There seems then to be a disconnection between what Muslim women believe about equality and what society dishes out to them as fair treatment. Yes, the ideal of equality remains enshrined in religious texts but the practice of Islam is anything but equal. Muslim culture in many societies treats women unfairly: "while Islamic culture endorses equality of rights for both men and women, Muslim culture, like many traditional African cultures, has in the recent past denied women their basic rights to freedom of choice, education and employment" (Nkealah 2006, 14). In this study, only Zoya addressed the issue of the oppressive nature of Muslim culture in her interview, which shows her awareness of the disparities between the ideal Islam that she teaches her students and the culture that is practised in Indian Muslim communities. Lana, Zara, Farah and Nadia did not voice out similar awareness but were rather adamant that Islamic religious texts did not require a reinterpretation from a feminist perspective. The reality of the Muslim culture is that women are suppressed in many ways by male jurists who distort the Qu'ran and other religious texts to suit their own patriarchal agenda. This explains why practices such as the domestic abuse of women, female genital mutilation and honour killings are widespread in Muslim societies; they are justified using Islam couched in patriarchal language.

In Muslim-majority countries such as Palestine and Egypt, domestic violence is a common occurrence, with Douki et al (2003) stating that one in three women are victims of domestic violence. Wife battery is deemed acceptable in Arab societies, and is viewed as an appropriate punishment for a woman who resists her cultural role. As this abhorrent practice is considered to be a family matter, police do not interfere; police interference would put the family's name at risk, and that is a far more disturbing notion than the domestic abuse itself. In South Africa, violence against married women is common in Muslim communities and Muslim religious leaders protect abusive husbands while denying women representation because the religious bodies that handle cases of domestic violence are made up predominantly of men (Suleman 2020). The cultural climate is to blame for the acceptance and practice of abuse.

Douki et al. (2003) provide the three factors upon which domestic abuse is 'religiously' allowed: a wife's misbehaviour, the religious commandment, and the conditions of the husband's daily life. In the context of this study, the factor of religious commandment is particularly striking as this exemplifies how male jurists use religious texts to assert a man's

dominance: “the religious commandment” allegedly prompts the justification of spousal abuse by Qu’ranic verses (Douki et al. 2003, pp. 167-168). This is clearly a case of Qu’ranic misinterpretation that warrants feminist intervention. Islamic feminist intervention in this case would centre on re-reading the religious texts from a woman-centred perspective that rids the texts of male oppressive assumptions.

A common custom that happens in Muslim countries is female genital mutilation which is often misconstrued as a religious requirement for women. This custom has no support in religious texts. Egypt banned the practice of female genital mutilation in 1997, with a court concluding that “circumcision of girls is not an individual right under Sharia (the Muslim canon law)”, adding that “there is nothing in the Qu’ran that authorizes it” (Rizvi et al. 1999, p. 14). While there is no basis for it in the Qu’ran, many Muslim countries such as Sierra Leone, Somalia, Guinea, Mali and Egypt continue to make it mandatory for women on the pretext of religion, and even women enforce it on their daughters. This is another case that illustrates the disconnection between what Islam is and what its interpreters say it is.

Middle-Eastern and South Asian countries are popular sites for honour killings. Since Muslim women are associated with morality in the Muslim culture, they symbolically represent the honour and reputation of a family. If a woman is suspected of having been involved in any type of interaction with a man that may cause shame to her family, the male members of her family react by killing her in order to restore their reputation. These reprehensible acts range from “murder, attempted murder, acid attacks and female infanticides” (Neshwiwat 2004, p. 253). Honour killings are condoned by the state in the interpretation of sharia law (Islamic penal law) that is discerned again from religious texts by male jurists (Neshwiwat 2004). This proves that, indeed, male jurists do use religious texts to give grounds for Muslim men’s violence against Muslim women which is in contravention of the rights of Muslim women as dictated by the Qu’ran.

On the whole, these practices of domestic abuse, female genital mutilation and honour killings are only targeted at women, enabling male privilege to dominate. Thus, it is hard to agree with the participants of this study that the Qu’ran and other religious texts do not need

reinterpretation. Perhaps it is time to redefine Islamic feminism by positing it as the project to interpret the Qu'ran and other religious texts from a woman-centred lens rather than a feminist lens which seems to create resistance among female madrasah teachers. One possibility for the participants' resistance of Islamic feminism in this research study could be their association of the term 'feminism' with white western feminism. As wadud (2021, p. 2) has noted, in the past "Muslim women and men who identified with feminism identified with the dominant imperialist feminism of the global north". Muslim women who are aware of the west's prejudices against Islam would therefore not want anything to do with western feminism. It might be fair to assume that the five Indian Muslim madrasah teachers who participated in this study and whose responses to the interview questions clearly show feminist inclinations and actions may be resisting association to an imperialist feminism rather than to Islamic feminism *per se*.

6.4. Circumventing prescribed gender roles

Despite the equal status of women and men in Islam and equal rights that are promoted by religious texts, there is a difference between women and men in relation to their biological roles and duties. According to Bux (2004), Muslim men and women have different roles and responsibilities based on their biological difference (Bux, 2004, p. 8)). However, the question is: why are the biological roles of a wife, and especially of a mother, always emphasized more than the role of Muslim men as fathers and providers for the home? The reasonable answer is that these biological roles of a woman are concentrated upon, despite their rights to education and economic empowerment, because Muslim men are able to restrict women to the household and to prevent their social participation in fear of the fall of patriarchy: "These extremist interpretations, coupled with social pressure, have significantly limited Muslim women's educational and social freedom throughout the Islamic world… There is, in fact, no conflict between Islamic teachings and women's active participation in society" (Hamdan 2014, pp. 80-81). The point Hamdan makes here is that there are extremist interpretations of the Qu'ran that often disadvantage women, whereas Islam itself does not restrict women from public life. The findings of this study indicate that the female madrasah teachers interpreted the Qu'ran and other religious texts in ways that enabled their students to think of their future lives beyond the home, to envisage their roles in the public sphere where they can serve their communities as teachers in secular and religious schools, social workers or fitness trainers. So, these women,

while not negating women's biological roles, conveyed the idea to their students that women could fulfil both public and private responsibilities.

The study by Shaikh, Hoel and Kagee (2011) in Cape Town found that there were two types of Muslim women in Cape Town: those who were conservative and subscribed to traditional cultural gender roles set aside for women and those who were egalitarian and believed that Islam holds men and women in equal status. The results indicated that even though 63.8% of Muslim women were uneducated, 36.1% of Muslim women have been or are being educated at tertiary institutions, showing a shift in the empowerment of Muslim women through education (Shaikh, Hoel & Kagee 2011). Unfortunately, when it comes to work, even though half of the women were employed, with a third of women supplying an equal or greater economic contribution than their husbands to the household, their husbands were still revered as the breadwinners (Shaikh, Hoel & Kagee 2011). The question that is glaringly obvious to ask is that if, according to Islam, it is a man's job to be the breadwinner, and a woman's financial property is to remain hers only, as indicated by Bux (2004), why is she contributing to the household in the first place? This leads to the conclusion that Muslim women, despite exercising their rights to education and economic empowerment that are Islamically given, still live in a patriarchal world, be it the global North or the global South. Men take credit for things women accomplish in the family. The findings of Shaik, Hoel and Kagee's study imply that gaining social and economic empowerment through education and work will not be enough for Indian Muslim girls in future; to survive in the patriarchal Muslim society, they will have to constantly resist injustice, whether it is within their families or outside of the home environment. With regard to the current study, it can only be hoped that with the training Indian Muslim girls have received from their progressive female madrasah teachers, they will be strong enough to resist attempts by society, family and the state to disempower them.

6.5. Madrasah resistance to feminist research

As pointed out in Chapter 4, it was difficult to get participants for this research study due to the refusal of madrasahs to allow the researcher to interview their female Indian Muslim teachers. The Participant Information Sheet that was emailed to each school specifically stated: "The aim of this research project is to find out how female oriented madrasahs subvert the patriarchal nature of the madrassah system to empower Indian Muslim girls educationally and

economically". However, an exceptionally high number of 56 madrasahs out of 60 that were contacted took a firm stance against the research being conducted with their female teachers. This was a significant hindrance to the data collection which was initially scheduled for February and March 2021 but eventually took up to August 2021 to be completed. The high number of madrasahs unwilling to lend their teachers for an interview suggests that their hostility was based on fear: perhaps fear that certain practices in their madrasahs will be exposed through talking to the teachers, or just plain fear of the unknown. It can also be argued that the madrasahs did not want to discuss women's rights in Islam as they may not be educating their Indian Muslim girls about these rights, or about the need for the girls to become socially and economically empowered. Linked to this point is the possibility that the principals may have assumed that they were 'protecting' the female teachers from harassment by an unknown researcher. Since almost all of these madrasahs had males appointed as principals, this is a very likely conclusion. The dominance of male principals in the madrasahs makes the accomplishments of the five female madrasah teachers interviewed in this study all the more significant as they were empowering Indian Muslim girls in their classes despite possible backlash from male authority.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the pertinent findings of this study in relation to the literature presented earlier on various aspects of Muslim women's lives as well as the theory of Islamic feminism. It has highlighted the notion that the biological roles of Muslim women were overly emphasized in order for men to restrict them to the household and prevent their participation in public life which may lead to the dismantling of patriarchal structures. Muslim women's access to public life would also make them become aware of the patriarchal culture that is disguised as Islam. This is the kind of twisted ideology promoted by the dominant Deobandi education system. However, the female Indian Muslim teachers' madrasahs were progressive as they involved religious education, and secular education to a certain degree. This combination of the two types of education enabled their students not only to gain an education that equips them from a religious point of view to become future religious educators, but also to pursue secular educational programmes and professions such as psychology, social work, bookkeeping, fitness training, entrepreneurship and fashion design. Thus, these progressive female madrasahs empower Indian Muslim girls both socially and economically

through the type of education they offer, allowing for the practice of their Islamic rights. The female teachers interviewed in this study use their teaching to break the patriarchal Muslim cultural ideology that the roles of a Muslim woman are those of a wife, mother and home caretaker only. As was shown in Chapter 5, these teachers do believe that the Qu'ran and other religious texts promote the equality of women and men, as well as women's rights. However, it has been shown in this chapter that their resistance to the notion of 'reinterpreting' these texts may be based on a misunderstanding of what Islamic feminism represents. The need for Islamic feminism remains valid as Muslim women are still treated unfairly in various cultures as they are victims of domestic abuse, female genital mutilation and honour killings. The next chapter will present a summary of this study's findings, its conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 7

Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Summary of findings

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this research study was to investigate how female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers were subverting the patriarchal Deobandi education system to empower their Indian Muslim girl students socially and economically. The methodology involved a descriptive research design that allowed the researcher to obtain data from a small group of madrasah teachers who shared similar characteristics of being female, Indian, and Muslim. Data was then collected from these participants using one-hour semi-structured interviews. Six participants were initially targeted but in the end five were interviewed due to the hospitalisation of the sixth participant. The sampled participants had met the criteria for selection as each had over three years teaching experience, and they came from four regions in two provinces in South Africa. The participants were emailed a Participation Information Sheet (Appendix A) which outlined the details of the project and their role in it, and a Consent Form (Appendix B) which they had to sign and send back to the researcher. The semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the Covid-19 restrictions which prohibited contact interviews. These interviews took place from February to August 2021.

The findings from the study answered all the five research questions outlined in Chapter 1 of this research report. The first research question was: to what extent do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers promote women's rights in Islam in their teaching? The study found that all the five female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers who were interviewed promoted women's rights in their teaching, especially the rights to gender equality, educational pursuits and financial independence. However, there were different extents to which they had each done so, with Zara, Zoya and Lana doing so stridently in their classes while Nadia and Farah can be said to have done so moderately. Irrespective of the extent to which each one had done so, what the study found significant is the fact that they did not perpetuate patriarchal Deobandi ideologies of grooming girls strictly for homemaking. Instead, by creating awareness about women's rights in Islam, they motivated their students to seek empowerment in both private and public life.

The second research question was: how do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers encourage Muslim girls to pursue further education? The research findings show that the teachers encouraged the pursuit of further education using mainly the examples of famous women in Islamic history who had also attained a high level of learning, such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr (Peace Be Upon Her) who was a prominent scholar of Islam and to whom the Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) attributed much of Islamic knowledge. The teachers also profiled successful women within their local Muslim communities so that their students could understand that achievements in religious and secular further education were attainable for them. Students were encouraged to pursue further education in Islamic religious studies to become Islamic educators, as well as in secular programmes such as social work, psychology, fashion design and business studies. However, for these teachers it was important for their students to understand that such pursuits of further education, whether religious or secular education, should be done in line with sharia regulations as maintaining their Muslim identity was most important.

The third research question was: what specific pedagogies do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers use to help Indian Muslim girls see social and economic empowerment as their rights? As the data indicates, the five Indian Muslim teachers used four pedagogical approaches to help their students understand their rights to social and economic empowerment. These pedagogies were: (1) the use of religious texts to show the centrality of women's rights in Islam; (2) modelling of prominent women in Islamic history; (3) debates on significant topics around women's rights in Islam such as the right to wear the hijab; (4) and authentic learning which enabled students to explore their potential as future businesswomen. These pedagogies were found to be effective and relevant to the students' context.

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Since the study had chosen Islamic feminism as its theoretical lens, it was important to find out if female madrasah teachers were involved in reinterpreting the religious texts they teach from a feminist perspective, which is what Islamic feminism is all about. So, the fourth research question was: do female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers reinterpret the Qu'ran and hadiths from a feminist perspective? The findings show an overwhelming rejection of the notion of 'reinterpretation' in relation to the rights of women and gender equality. The participants were all of the view that the religious texts did not need reinterpretation as they were explicit about

women's rights in Islam and the equality of women and men. The idea that previous interpretations had been done by male jurists who infused patriarchal ideas into the interpretations was not enough to convince the participants that the texts needed reinterpretation. Since this was a surprising outcome of the research, it was shown in the discussion chapter that although Muslim women believe in the equality of women and men based on Islamic teachings, the realities that Muslim women experience, such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation and honour killings which are justified using Islam, defy an easy acceptance of gender equality as being understood by all and rather call for a questioning of women's experiences of gender injustice, which is the task of Islamic feminism.

Lastly, this study wanted to find out what beacons of hope the female madrasahs hold out for their Indian Muslim students and thus the last research question was: what does the curriculum of female Indian Muslim madrasahs offer to girls as future careers? It was found that collectively the curriculums of the four madrasahs were made up of both religious and secular subjects which allowed for the future social and economic empowerment of the Indian Muslim girls as they are equipped to enter into various industries and professions in future. The training the girls received at their madrasahs prepared them to pursue future careers as counsellors, psychologists, social workers, fitness trainers, business owners, art and crafts people, and bookkeepers. This means that their lives were not limited to becoming homemakers as the patriarchal Deobandi curriculum desired.

The contribution of this research study to knowledge is that it provides empirical evidence of progressive madrasah teachers who are empowering Indian Muslim girls socially and economically, thereby subverting the patriarchal Deobandi ideology that girls should only be educated to fulfil their biological roles as wives and mothers. This study has presented a South African perspective about progressive female madrasah education that is informative, innovative and inspiring for young Indian Muslim women who may be suffocating within patriarchal Deobandi female madrasahs without knowing that there are possibilities of receiving an empowering education still through the madrasah system. The study has demonstrated the agency of female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers in undercutting patriarchy by using resources from within Islam to teach girls the principles of gender equality

in Islam and women's rights to social and economic empowerment, individually and collectively.

7.2. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there are some South African female madrasahs that subvert the purpose of the Deobandi education system, by providing an education that empowers Indian Muslim girls economically and socially – preparing them for the world of work rather than simply preparing them for marriage. The Indian Muslim teachers interviewed in this study attest to the crucial role female madrasah teachers play in engineering a transformation of the Deobandi madrasah system. However, such transformation happens within narrow confines that do not seek to upset the status quo as the participants in this study did not see the value of Islamic feminism as a theory that informed their actions. In other words, although their teaching of Indian Muslim girls can be located within feminist pedagogies, their own self-awareness of Islamic feminism was quite low and their attitude towards it was lethargic. This suggests that the theory and practice of Islamic feminism remains largely a project for elite educated women while ordinary Indian Muslim women prefer to steer clear of it. The tasks for Islamic feminists is to break the barriers between themselves and grassroots women who are in fact doing feminist work.

7.3. Recommendations

This research study was conducted using only five participants, which is appropriate for a small-scale research project at masters level. A bigger-scale research could be conducted to find out how Indian Muslim female teachers are bringing innovation into their teaching so as to dismantle the patriarchal structures holding the Deobandi education system in place. From the researcher's experiences of trying to get willing participants for the study being made difficult by madrasah authorities, it is evident that madrasahs in South Africa are hostile towards the advocacy of Islamic feminism. It would be worthwhile to conduct a study to find out from these madrasahs the reasons behind their hostility towards Islamic feminism. That would be one step towards bridging the current gap between scholars of Islamic feminism who thrive on theory and ordinary women doing their Islamic feminism in the ways they know how. Lastly, since this study only focused on female madrasah teachers, it would be useful to have a study that investigates women's social and economic empowerment in Islam from the perspective of Indian Muslim girls attending madrasah. That would provide a closer insight

into the experiences of Indian Muslim girls as they navigate the deeply patriarchal Deobandi educational system within which they find themselves.

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Appendix A

Participation Information Sheet for Individual Interviews

Definition of participant: an individual who takes part in a research study.

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Bibi Faatima Kader and I am a Masters' student in Critical Diversity Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the role of female madrasahs in the empowerment of Indian Muslim girls in South Africa under the supervision of Dr Naomi Nkealah. The aim of this research project is to find out how female oriented madrasahs subvert the patriarchal nature of the madrassah system to empower Indian Muslim girls educationally and economically.

As part of this research project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview, either by telephone or Zoom call at a time to be arranged at your convenience. This activity will involve one session and will take about an hour. With your permission, I would also like to voice record the interview.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation, but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any questions if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not be disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. You will be completely free to withdraw your participation at any time in the course of the interview.

If you have questions during or afterward about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available to you on request. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored in my password protected computer and will be kept for five years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Bibi Faatima Kader, faatimakader@gmail.com, 078 460 7411

Dr Naomi Nkealah, naomi.nkealah@wits.ac.za, 078 374 3068

Appendix B

Consent Form for the individual interview

Title of project: Women's rights in Islam: The role of female madrasahs in the empowerment of Indian Muslim girls

Name of researcher: Bibi Faatima Kader

I…….. agree to participate in this research project. This research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous YES NO
(please circle)

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes

in his/her research report YES NO

I agree that the interview may be voice recorded YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after

this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers,

subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained. YES NO

…….. (signature of the participant)

…….. (name of participant)
……... (date)

Appendix C

Interview questions

To achieve the above research aims, the study has the following research questions:

1. To what extent do you as a female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers promote women's rights in Islam in your teaching?

2. How do you as a female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers encourage Muslim girls to pursue further education?

3. What pedagogies do you as a female Indian Muslim madrasah teachers use to help Muslim girls see economic empowerment as their right?

4. Do you as a female Indian Muslim madrasah teacher reinterpret the Qu'ran and hadith from a feminist perspective?

5. What does the curriculum of female Indian Muslim madrasahs offer to girls as future careers?

Appendix D

Ethics Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: DIV201002**
PROJECT TITLE	Women's Rights in Islam: The role of female madrasahs in the empowerment of Indian Muslim girls
INVESTIGATOR	Bibi Faatima Kader
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	Centre for Diversity Studies
DATE CONSIDERED	24 November 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal RISK
EXPIRY DATE	29 October 2021

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 25 November 2020 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(DR C. Tagwirei)

cc: Supervisor: Dr Naomi Nkealah

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

___ _____ __15____/__12_____/__2020_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES