(Re)Framing the Issues:
Muslim Women's Activism in Contemporary India

Rafia Zaman*

Summary
In recent years, women and religion have received considerable attention, especially in the context of Muslim communities. Not only has religion acquired a new public presence, but in Muslim contexts the use of religiously grounded arguments by Muslim women to further their rights has also generated considerable excitement. Religion, once seen as the major obstacle to the development of those rights, has now become the solution; women, previously victims, have become the catalysts of change. These emerging voices have been identified under the rubric of a trans-local phenomenon of "Islamic feminism."
The paper focuses on the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA), roughly translated as the Indian Muslim Women's Movement, a loose network of individuals and organizations working with the Muslim community, particularly women. The BMMA is comprised of feminists who are attuned to global discourses and at the same time want answers to immediate issues. The network has increasingly used the language of "Islam" to promote its concerns, representing a concerted shift away from earlier positions. Formed at a time following the Gujarat pogrom in 2002, the highly publicized Imrana case and 9/11, the BMMA self-consciously promotes certain markers of identity around which an emancipatory movement is organized, and seeks to position itself as an alternative radical voice from the community. In this, the organization challenges the twin tropes of victim and ward that surround Muslim women. This paper explores the complexities, negotiations and contradictions entailed in the process of claiming a "Muslim" identity in an attempt to complicate the present understandings of this activism.

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a considerable and growing focus on women and religion, especially in the context of the Muslim community. Since September 11, predicated upon representations of veiling and the oppression of Muslim women, multiculturalism has been giving way to a new universalism throughout the world. The rights of Muslim women have engendered debate and discussion and have often

---

justified intervention in their communities (Abu-Lughod 2002).[1] This moment has also been one of emergence of the voices of women who have made efforts to renegotiate the interstitial spaces within various projects of building national and communal boundaries. The position of those who have been thus classified is diverse and evolving; what they have in common is their "concern for women's empowerment in a rethought Islam" (Yamani 1996: 1). These emerging voices have been identified under the rubric of a trans-local phenomenon of "Islamic feminism," in which religion, once seen as an obstacle to the development of women's rights, has now become the solution; women who were considered its victims have become the catalysts of change.

This paper focuses on the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA), a relatively new network (founded in 2007) that aims to link individuals and organizations working with the Muslim community, particularly Muslim women in India.[2] In a relatively short period of time, it has managed to gather an impressive number of members, and in April 2012 the total membership stood at over 30,000, spanning 15 states of India (Safianiaz and Soman 2012). Although membership is open to all, a majority of its supporters are women from the Muslim community living in urban areas and belonging to the lower-income group. All members join as individuals – however, they are usually already associated with some organization sympathetic to the BMMA. Of this membership, community-level activists are identified at state, district and block levels for training and leadership development. The main functions of community activists are 1) mobilization of women and men and 2) advocacy related to legal rights, Quranic injunctions, government schemes, etc. These activists also work to ascertain the problems that women and their immediate communities face, which in turn informs the BMMA's agenda. Many academics, activists and lawyers are also associated with the BMMA as either members or sympathizers. It is, however, the vision of the founders, who are also the national-level leaders, that sets the BMMA's agenda and steers its campaigns.

The BMMA is by no means the only group working with Muslim women in contemporary India. In fact, previous, similar attempts to link women's groups were made by the Muslim Women's Rights Network (MWRN), which continues to work on women's rights, while the All-India Democratic Women's Association has a larger number of Muslim women members than the BMMA, as does the women's

---

1   Such a concern for Muslim women's rights has a long history, dating back to the colonial period. According to the colonialists, the low status of women in their immediate cultures exemplified the inferiority of native cultures and thus "justified" their rule. The nationalist response, in turn, tried to show the high position that women were accorded in their respective cultural and religious traditions. In the case of Muslim societies, reformists sought to better achieve the Islamic ideal, and various scripturalist movements sought to renew religion in pursuit of the same ideal (Ahmed 1992; Abu-Lughod 1998; for India, Metcalf 2002).

2   "Indian Muslim Women's Movement" may be a misleading translation, as it is a network, although it aspires to launch a movement.

wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami-i-Hind (JIH).[3] What is interesting about the BMMA is the manner in which it has tried to re-enter the debate surrounding Muslim women's rights at a point when the debate on reform in personal laws seems to have ossified. As its name suggests, the BMMA promotes certain markers of identity around which an emancipatory politics is organized, and it seeks to position itself as an alternative radical voice from *within* the community. The network was formed by feminists who, attuned to global discourses, have increasingly used the language of "Islam" to promote their concerns within the family, representing a concerted shift away from the earlier positions that characterized the post-independence period.

At first glance, it may appear that what Sylvia Vatuk describes has come to fruition. She elucidates a "nascent Islamic feminist movement" taking shape in India, whereby Muslim women are increasingly "justifying demands for gender equity with religious arguments [and] referring to the authority of the Quran rather than to the Indian Constitution or to the universalistic principles of human rights that have long guided Indian secular feminists" (Vatuk 2008: 490). Nadja-Christina Schneider suggests an alternate description of the Indian context, where "Islamic feminism" is "a *discursive movement* or *strategy* that is adapted by certain actors to specific and local contexts" (emphasis in original; Schneider 2009: 58). In a detailed research study, Nida Kirmani interrogates the relationship that the BMMA has with religion and religious identity, and identifies a "mixed approach" that "combine[s] the values of secularism with progressive interpretations of Islamic texts" (Kirmani 2009: 34).[4] All three scholars take note of the role these activists play in "diversifying the women's movement" and also "challenging traditional authority" while "moving beyond the impasse" that the question of Muslim women's rights had reached in India.

This paper suggests that the issues that the BMMA takes up and the manner in which it frames them may be seen as an attempt to challenge the twin tropes that surround Muslim women, not only in India but also generally – that of wards of the community, and that of its victims. The first notion is accorded to women by those who claim to speak on behalf of the Muslim community, the second by its critics. The two approaches share common ground in privileging "Islam," especially its textual sources, to the exclusion of lived realities of women's lives (Kandiyoti 1991: 24; Lazreg 2001; Hasan and Menon 2006). The BMMA, however, refuses to allow the causal link that is usually made between Muslim women's lives and "Islam" to go unmediated by the social context. Thus, while the BMMA embraces a "Muslim" religio-cultural identity, it simultaneously stresses that "Muslim" is a socioeconomic and developmental category. The BMMA has also re-entered the debate on Muslim

---

3   An approximation based on newspaper reports regarding the numbers the AIDWA and JIH draw to their public meetings and other such events across the country, as well as observations by the BMMA's founding members.

4   See the classification into "Muslim," "Islamic," and "secular" feminists and their differentiation from "Islamist" women in Moghadam (2004).

women's rights in the family, and the form that this argument takes tries to negotiate the stalemate at which the question of reform in Muslim personal law has been stuck for decades. By contextualizing the BMMA's activism, the paper explores the complexities, negotiations and contradictions entailed in the process of claiming a "Muslim" identity in an attempt to complicate the understanding of this activism.[5]

Debating rights: The Indian case

The 1970s witnessed a build-up of an autonomous women's movement in post-independence India. Many organizations and struggles emerged around a range of issues – women's legal and political rights, violence against women, reproductive choice and abortion, sexual freedom, employment opportunities and discrimination, and women's political participation and representation (Gandhi and Shah 1992: 23; Basu 1995: 11; Kumar 1998; Ray 2012). Most of these groups and organizations were urban, and their organizers were middle-class women predominantly belonging to the upper-caste Hindu community. The 1980s became a watershed decade, foregrounding the issues of cultural and religious identity in feminist politics in India. The highly publicized *sati* of Roop Kanwar in 1987 led to the feminist movement clashing against Hindu cultural traditions, while the Shah Bano case in 1985 (discussed below) had pitted the movement against Muslim tradition and laws (Chachhi 1991).[6] The events of the period brought to light ideological fissures within the movement, as dissenting voices raised the question of secularity within the mainstream movement (Kishwar 1999; Agnes 1995). This period also shaped the manner in which Muslim women were represented in the decades that followed in academic and activist literature as well as by secular and conservative sections of both the Hindu and Muslim communities.

One of the longstanding demands of the women's movement was for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). The Indian Constitution, framed in the backdrop of intense communal conflict that ultimately led to India's partition, instituted a secular polity that not only ensured the individual's right to profess, practice and propagate religion but also recognized the importance of religious community for individual self-identification.[7] With the injunction to the state to intervene on behalf of vulnerable sections of the religious community, the Constitution nevertheless recognized rights to profess and propagate one's religion, including the right to create and enforce plural and diverse personal laws, some of which had been in

---

5   The paper is based on ongoing research and field work conducted in Delhi, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Godhra (Gujarat) and Mumbai.

6   *Sati* is the (outlawed) practice carried out by some Hindu communities of widow-burning on the husband's funeral pyre. This particular *sati* became the plank of the Hindu revivalist movement endorsed by right-wing parties.

7   A discussion of multiculturalism, minority rights and the idea of secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution may be found in Mahajan (1998); for a discussion on "minority within minority," see Mahajan (2005).

effect since the colonial period.[8] The personal laws provided a special guarantee to minority communities, who felt particularly vulnerable in the aftermath of the partition.[9] Nevertheless, within the Constituent Assembly there remained a distrust of the social community, as it was seen as an obstacle to national unity. The professed ideal of the Constitution's drafters was to create a single code for all communities, and the Directive Principles of State Policy instruct the state to strive for a UCC (Bajpai 2000: 1839).

For the Muslim community, enactments such as the Wakf Validating Act (1913), the Shariat Application Act (1937), and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act (1939) had codified some aspects of Muslim law during British colonial rule through an extensive exercise of consensus-building (Hussain 2006: 19–38; Sunetha 2011: 55–56). Ironically at this stage, although all codes were biased against women, it was the Muslim code with its contractual nature of marriage and provisions for some measure of economic security that was the relatively more progressive one (Agnes 2011: 1). In the late 1950s changes were brought about in the Hindu code, although the codes of the minorities remained unchanged, fostering resentment among reactionary groups in the majority community (Som 1994: 174). In this period, even though Muslim laws were only partly codified, the matrimonial rights of Muslim women had been put on a secure footing by progressive judgments; it was practices regarding such things as unequal rights surrounding divorce and inheritance that continued (Agnes 2004: 102). Through the 1960s and 1970s the feminist movement demanded a UCC and the focus was now on Muslim personal law.

In 1985, the Supreme Court of India upheld the order of a lower court to Shah Bano's husband to provide alimony under the Criminal Procedure Act.[10] Although Muslim women's rights had been secured by previous judgments without any controversy, the judge in this instance included a statement on the necessity for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), and an observation about the desirability of minority communities to act in the interest of national integration.[11] This judgment was opposed vehemently by conservative sections of the Muslim community, resulting in the passage of the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act in 1986. Since the UCC was a longstanding demand, women's groups upheld the

---

8   For a detailed discussion on the colonial encounter and its impact on Muslim law in India, see Anderson (1996).

9   Not unlike the reform movements that had taken place in the majority community, Muslim reformers sought a re-invigorated Islam from the mid-19th century. By the early 20th century a pan-Indian Muslim identity configured around Muslim personal law was being sought by the Muslim leadership and the *ulema* in order to consolidate an otherwise fragmented community.

10 Shah Bano was a 72-year-old woman, divorced after 50 years of marriage. When she was granted alimony by a lower court, her husband, a lawyer, contested the order as a contravention of Islamic law.

11 The establishment of a Uniform Civil Code was always seen in the light of national unity and not women's rights, thereby setting the terms of the debate, whereby the onus rests on minority groups to prove their loyalty to the nation (Agnes 2004; Suneetha 2011; Bajpai 2000).

judgment and protested against the new act. According to the lawyer-activist Flavia Agnes, the manner in which demands for a UCC were carried out reflect the biases, albeit inadvertent, of those involved in the women's movement. Despite unresolved issues, anomalies and anti-woman biases, it was the women's movement with its focus on the gender inequity of minority codes that inadvertently fueled the myth that the Hindu code is progressive (Agnes 1995: 143–146).

The issue of the Muslim Women's Act was hijacked by the Hindu right-wing movement, which transformed a women's issue and an injustice to Muslim women into a Hindu grievance against "minority appeasement" while paying lip service to Muslim women's rights.[12] The rhetoric of the "oppressed" Muslim woman became the basis of building the counter-image of the emancipated Hindu woman and a dynamic Hindu community. A feminist language was co-opted in the right-wing Hindu movement during its campaigns against the Muslim community in order to mobilize women to support its agenda. The period between the passage of the act and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 led to an intensification of Hindu communalism. At the same time, the Shah Bano case, which was followed by the demolition of the Babri Masjid, produced anxiety about identity in the minority community. Bodies such as the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), the Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind and the All-India Muslim Majlis-i-Mushawarat responded by asserting Muslim identity via the preservation of the existing personal laws.[13] Despite the self-proclaimed nature of these groups' representation of the community, the Indian state, too, found it convenient to recognize them as the sole representatives of the Muslim community in India, ignoring progressive voices that viewed the judgment differently (Hasan 2000: 284–285). Thus, fundamentalist groups reinforced each other through collaboration and confrontation, and in both discourses, the construction of a "Muslim woman" became integral to their identity.

Women's participation in the massive violence in the destruction of the mosque, and against the Muslim community in 1992 in the aftermath of the demolition (and once again in Gujarat in 2002), brought into question the category of "woman" itself. The women's movement could no longer envision an unmarked "woman" available for mobilization. The large-scale participation of women in support of the MWA and the *sati* of Roop Kanwar begged a reassessment of what culture means to women (Sarkar and Butalia 1995). The feminist movement, too, had to confront the reality that it was, itself, marked by a majoritarian identity and symbols, whereby "Muslim" appeared as something different and aberrant from its discourse. In an attempt to

---

12 On the growth of the Hindu right-wing movement in India, see Basu et al. (1993).

13 The demolition of the Babri Masjid was followed by large-scale riots that engulfed the country. These came right on the heels of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, which left all minorities feeling insecure, and the anti-Muslim riots, whose participants followed in the footsteps of the political campaign known as the Rath-yatra, led by L.K. Adwani, at that time the leader of the BJP. For a discussion on the manner in which mobilizations around religious identities have shaped the question of Muslim women's rights, see Hasan (2009).

circumvent criticisms of being alien to local culture and Western in orientation, the women's movement, despite being secular, had adopted symbols of female power from Hindu mythology. Very few women from minority communities were present in these organizations; those that were, were in turn trying to prove their secular credentials by trying to fit in (Agnes 1995: 137–143; Agnes 2002). The debate on Shah Bano brought feminist concerns to the fore but also highlighted the sense of alienation among minority women and those from marginalized communities.

In an attempt to distance itself from the demands of the Hindu fundamentalists, the women's movement reconsidered its own position on the issue of a UCC (Menon 1996: 445–449). Some initiatives were made to that end in the 1990s, such as the Gender Just Code, which was differentiated from the UCC that was being promoted by Hindu right-wing forces and which was seen as nothing more than an imposition of existing Hindu laws. Another significant proposal put forth was of reverse optionality, where a person would be automatically ruled by a common gender-just code but could choose to go under a personal code, the decision being reversible. However, these efforts lacked the initial enthusiasm, as conservative forces of both communities appeared to have defeated the women's movement. There has been a lull since 1995, and the dominant thinking was that internal reform represented the only viable option. The question of reform seemed to have reached an impasse at a time when the feminist movement itself had come to the conclusion that the "law is not enough" (Menon 2007: 2–17).

As the discussion above demonstrates, the manner in which the Shah Bano case unfolded offered a choice between religion and rights, while the subsequent events, violence and marginalization meant that Muslim women were under pressure to subordinate their gender concerns (Hussain 2007: 72–73).[14] Discussions on Muslim women continued to focus on their status within the community and position in Muslim personal law even though they are also the most likely to belong to low-income, low-educational-attainment, low-aspiration groups, along with being among the most vulnerable citizens of society (Hasan and Menon 2006: 2–7; Lateef 2008). As community boundaries have hardened, Muslim women have borne the brunt of identity politics in terms of violence (from outside the community) and control over their life choices (from within the community). Agnes sums up the double marginalization of Muslim women thus: the intersectionality of Muslim women cannot be accommodated in a "raceless tale of gender subordination," nor in a "gender-less narrative of minority victimization for the Muslim community" (Agnes 2002: 3698).

---

14 Papanek, while comparing Hitler's Germany to post-revolutionary Iran, has argued that pressures on women to conform peak when community identities are being charted (Papanek 1996: 70).

Claiming a "Muslim" identity

While right-wing Hindu fundamentalism formed the background of Muslim women's activism in India, there was an anti-Muslim backlash worldwide during this period as well. The rest of the paper explores, through the specific experience of the BMMA, the negotiations of a "Muslim" identity that emerged after September 11 and the Gujarat pogrom of 2002.

Muslim as a sociocultural identity

Over the last three decades, Muslim women have occupied a large amount of space in the public debate without themselves having had a significant voice. This situation is gradually changing, as many women became active in the aftermath of the violence following the destruction of the Babri Masjid: many came to the forefront in the resistance against police atrocities and state hostility, while others began organizing various self-help groups or joining NGOs. Significant among these organizations was Awaaz-e-Niswan (AeN), a Mumbai-based group, founded around the same time as the Shah Bano controversy erupted by Shahnaz Sheikh, who had fought a similar case. The first attempt to link various organizations working with Muslim women to one another was the MWRN, formed in 1999 at the initiative of AeN. The MWRN is the oldest feminist coalition for groups working with Muslim women, and it aims to build consensus around reform in personal law. Although working predominantly with the Muslim community, Awaaz-e-Niswan sees itself as a part of the larger women's movement and is linked with radical women's groups such as the Forum Against Oppression (Mumbai) and Jagori (New Delhi). The MWRN works on building consensus regarding reform in personal laws, but ultimately Awaaz-e-Niswan is committed to the enactment of secular laws and the establishment of the Gender Just Code.

A new cadre of "Muslim" women has emerged in the decades following the Shah Bano judgment. These women have questioned the state and refashioned their personal lives, thereby challenging norms and also asserting their rights within the community. However, many of these women were uncomfortable with the mainstream women's movement and the MWRN, which demanded that they purge themselves of their community identity and their religious beliefs and practices. According to Khadijah Farouqi, a lawyer associated with both the MWRN and the BMMA, the idea of "secularism" in the Indian context means the "acceptance of the importance of religious and cultural identity" for each individual. The feminist movement, in spite of its secular credentials and its stark opposition to religion, had inadvertently "allowed Hindu symbols and imagery to seep into the movement" and this is proof that "individuals cannot be separated from their culture." However, the movement did not provide sufficient space to the minority communities. The MWRN, she points out, discourages the display of religious symbols, and in effect

this means that "Muslim culture and symbols continue to remain unacceptable" (Farouqi, March 12, 2012).[15]

The BMMA recognized that the reason Muslim women had remained apart from the women's movement in India was that, despite a secular orientation, the movement was marked by the majority Hindu culture. In the aftermath of the burning of a train carrying *kar-sevaks* at Godhra (Gujarat) in 2002, almost 2,000 Muslims were killed and thousands displaced.[16] The events in Gujarat brought the question of identity to the fore for many activists who had up to that point not given importance to the "Muslim-ness" of their identity.[17] Naish Hasan, one of the founding members of the BMMA, recounted, "[H]aving gone to Gujarat in 2002 to work with the relief camps somehow made one more sensitive to one's identity. [...] The victims were targeted because they were Muslim. [...] Coming back, the everyday practices such as that of a colleague who would not share a meal, put a huge question mark on the secularity of the organization" (Hasan, October 13, 2011). Post-Gujarat, "Muslim" was not just a religious identity but also a political one. One may say that the events between the formations of the two networks shaped the form that the BMMA would take.

All the founding members of the BMMA had previously been associated with the MWRN, as were many of the groups and individuals who joined it. The activists who came together to form the BMMA felt that an organization for Muslim women should be one that attaches a positive value to "Muslim" and "Islam." This notion represents a significant difference from the approach of the MWRN: the BMMA acknowledges the role and importance of religion and culture in women's lives and seeks to positively reclaim those structures.[18] Although there is a broad spectrum of engagement with Islam (as a faith) within the BMMA, there is strong sense of identification with "Muslim" as a sociocultural identity. This position stresses the value that culture holds for this minority community, including its women challenging the view that culture and religion, especially Islam, are only oppressive.

---

15 In the course of my field work, most grassroots workers and activists I have encountered have mentioned their discomfort with the MWRN, although there is a vast range of difference in the manner in which they engage with religion and *Sharia* law.

16 The term "*kar-sevak*" refers to anyone who offers voluntary service to a community or religious cause. In this context, the term has been appropriated by the Hindu right to denote those who have been associated with the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement, which culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid.

17 A recent booklet published by ANHAD documents various women activists from Gujarat with differing religious persuasions as they confront this aspect of identity and communalism, which has pervaded the social fabric since the violence of 2002 (ANHAD 2012). ANHAD was formed in response to the violence in Gujarat in 2002. For an analysis on the impact of the demolition of Babri Masjid on the Muslim community, see Hussain (2012).

18 For a comparison of the approaches of the two organizations, see Kirmani (2009).

"Muslim" as a developmental category

Since the demolition of the Babri Masjid, an important development has been a steady intra-community consolidation of opinion on the need to focus on the socioeconomic development of the community (Hussain 2012).[19] The Sachar Committee Report, presented in 2006, pointed to the systematic marginalization of Muslims that has taken place in the post-independence period. The report questions the longstanding Hindu right-wing rhetoric of the "pampering" of the community and paints a dismal picture of the community in socioeconomic and educational attainments, access to state resources and overall prospects, and also raises the question of caste in the community.[20] The report also bolstered the growing voices of dissatisfaction with the traditional Muslim leadership – many opponents felt that the Muslim leadership was overly concerned with symbolic identarian issues (such as the preservation of existing personal laws, the protection of Urdu, and the destruction of the Babri Masjid) to the detriment of the socioeconomic and developmental concerns of the community. These voices of dissent also felt that community leaders were presenting a false homogeneity of "Muslim" concerns without addressing issues of discrimination within the community (Alam 2003: 4882–4883).

This development is reflected in the BMMA's agenda as it links the inferior position of Muslim women to larger structural factors and argues that there is a need to talk of rights in a more holistic manner. Thus, the BMMA differed significantly in its approach – namely, it refused to talk about Muslim women only in terms of reform of personal law. The BMMA claims that it is impossible to seek rights within the home without addressing questions of security in a hostile environment, as long as the specter of communalism haunts women's physical well-being, and without addressing questions of the socioeconomic deprivation and backwardness of the community as a whole.

This position is important and a new one, especially when one looks at the manner in which Muslim women and their problems have been framed up to this point, although one may add that in academic work a change of position had appeared earlier. Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon's work questioned the triad of *talaq*, polygamy and *purdah* in which Muslim women are generally framed in India, in order to look into more specific ways that the marginality of Muslim women could be

---

19 This is something that has emerged repeatedly in my own discussions with community activists and general members of the BMMA.

20 Since Islam does not formally recognize hierarchy, the existence and persistence of caste within the Muslim community on the Indian subcontinent has been neglected within its traditional leadership, in most academic works (with some exceptions) and, until recently, also within governmental policies. The Patna Collective and the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz are important initiatives that focus on the issue of caste.

understood.[21] Although legal reform is an imperative, it is nevertheless a long and protracted issue that Hasan and Menon argue will not alleviate the problems of low status and general disempowerment, and lack of access to public goods. Moreover, such an approach leaves the problem and the solution at the level of community and religion and absolves the state of its responsibility. What is lacking, they point out, is "a sociology of the lived reality of women's lives" and its linkage with the processes of development (Hasan and Menon 2006: 3–5).

The BMMA's approach appears to share this vision and the question of development is linked with that of Muslim women's empowerment. Reform in personal law is only one part of the agenda. Poverty, underdevelopment, communalism and illiteracy have to be tackled urgently, they have argued. This new orientation is partly an outcome of the emergence of the new cadre of activists as well as grassroots community workers, themselves poor women, who recognize the importance of securing socioeconomic rights. In fact, socioeconomic deprivation, the threat of communal violence, lack of opportunities, and inability to access government schemes are the issues that come up repeatedly in conversation with the community activists. At the BMMA's inaugural session, co-founder Zakia Soman is reported to have said that "concern for security and their children's future were uppermost in the minds of Muslim women in Gujarat today, over and above issues such as *nikah* or *talaq*, and Muslim women wanted a system that could prevent the communalization of the administrative machinery and misuse of laws such as TADA/POTA against the community" (Tripathi 2007).[22]

In highlighting the systematic marginalization that has taken place, the BMMA is critical of both the hitherto leadership of the Muslim community and the state. Much of the work carried out by organizations that support the BMMA are routine things like getting children enrolled in schools and vocational courses; procuring ration cards, voter IDs and electricity and water connections; creating awareness about government schemes; and providing assistance to community members in availing themselves of such schemes Moreover, pressuring the government to implement the

---

21 (1) *Talaq* (divorce) for the Muslim community can be granted extrajudicially by verbal repudiation on the part of the husband or through a *Sharia* order requested and obtained by the wife, known as *khula*. (2) Polygamy is practiced in all communities although it is legally recognized only for the Muslim community. Case law has nevertheless recognized the rights of subsequent wives in order to protect the women and children involved. (3) *Purdah* can mean seclusion or veiling, depending on the context. *Purdah* was traditionally practiced by all communities to different extents but is largely disappearing in the Hindu community.

22 Anti-terror laws such as the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1985, lapsed in 1995) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2002, repealed in 2004) have been used to target Muslim boys and men. These laws and their gross misuse by state agencies have come under strong criticism by civil society groups.

recommendations made by the Sachar Commission is an important part of the BMMA's agenda.[23]

Although BMMA makes a strong plea against the systemic exclusion of Muslims from the processes of development, there is an accompanying awareness that in an already volatile environment, this can further fuel communal tensions. The violence of 1992 and 2002 forms a common thread in the narrative of activists from Mumbai and Gujarat. In such a context, Shabnam Hashmi of ANHAD, for instance, argues that while it is important to highlight that Muslims are suffering, this also has to be linked to structural patterns of inequality, or one may end up simply reinforcing identity. According to her, society needs to fight communalism, poverty and developmental patterns in a manner in which one can build bridges across community divides (Hashmi, October 22, 2011).

The BMMA has repeatedly tried to address this concern by stating that it wants to join hands with all those who are working against any form of discrimination in society. It has also repeatedly issued statements re-stressing its objectives – namely, that it wants to fight all forms of discrimination.[24] Zakia says that as Muslims, as women, "we have to fight on many fronts [...,] we have to claim our rights as citizens [...,] but we also have to take on the spaces occupied by the obscurantist voices in our community" (Soman, March 4, 2012). The BMMA therefore seeks to position itself as an alternative voice from *within* the community. The emancipatory movement that the BMMA claims to represent is organized around each of these identities – being a citizen of India, being a Muslim and being a woman. One thing that needs to be emphasized from this discussion of the BMMA is that even as it recognizes the importance of religion and cultural identity and the positive value that these hold for many women, it attempts to move the discourse of "rights" beyond that of religion and personal law. In addition, by shifting its emphasis on "Muslim" as a socioeconomic and developmental category within which Muslim women are doubly disadvantaged, the BMMA is also taking issue with the manner in which debates on Muslim women have centered upon Muslim personal law.

Engaging with personal law

While the BMMA has stressed the need to focus on the socioeconomic development of the community as a whole and its women in particular, it has nevertheless also intervened in the matter of reform in personal laws – in fact, the founding members agree upon the great urgency for reform. As part of initiatives for internal reform in the 1990s, a number of women's groups began working on a model *nikahnama* to promote rights within marriage.[25] *Nikahnama*, the contract signed by the bride and

---

23 Details of these are outlined in various pamphlets, BMMA Annual Reports 2008 and 2009, and the Short Report (2010).

24 Objectives as stated in pamphlets, annual reports and various conferences organized by the BMMA.

25 For a detailed discussion on *nikahnama*, see Kirmani (2009) and A. Suneetha (2011). For a critique of the *nikahnama* approach, see Ali (2006).

groom at the time of marriage, can be an important tool to safeguard at least some of the interests of women entering marriage. Women can stipulate almost any condition in the contract during the course of married life, including providing for future economic needs. Muslim personal law in India is only partly codified, which means that even the rights available based on *Sharia* may get mitigated by customary practices.[26] According to Khadijah, the *nikahnama* can help launch an attack on the present practices, often endorsed by *ulema* (religious scholars), on the latters' own grounds (Farouqi, March 12, 2012). However, there are limitations to the rights that can be guaranteed by the *nikahnama* – namely, it cannot stop a man from entering a subsequent polygamous marriage, though it does allow a woman to stipulate a right to divorce in this event.

The BMMA, too, advocates the model *nikahnama* and has used it in mass wedding ceremonies it has arranged in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. However, there is a sense of dissatisfaction, and Noorjehan Safia Niaz, the third co-founder of the BMMA, who has been involved in efforts to realize both the Gender Just Code and internal reform, points out that there are obvious legal and social limitations to what the model *nikahnama* can achieve. As a result, the BMMA has been unable to arrive at a draft of the *nikahnama* with which it is completely satisfied. But a bigger issue has been the question of implementation, as there are very few marriages that use a standard *nikahnama*, let alone the one advocated by women's groups. Often, "a girl and her family will not push for stipulations, so that they may not appear too demanding." In a society where the bride and her family are at a disadvantage, "who is going to stipulate the terms of the contract?" asks Noorjehan (Niaz, June 9, 2012). The security that a *nikahnama* can provide therefore remains meaningless unless it is mandatory to use the gender-just model, a goal that remains elusive.[27]

While debates on reform seem to have reached a standstill, incidents such as Gudiya (2004) and Imrana (2005) point to an urgent need for intervention (Hasan, October 13, 2011; Niaz, June 9, 2012). Gudiya's first husband, who went missing while serving in the Indian army, reappeared several years into her second marriage. The local *khap-panchayat* (extrajudicial court) and *maulvi* (religious scholar) ordered her to go back to the first husband in spite of her own wish to remain with her second husband.[28] In another case, Imrana was allegedly raped by her father-in-law. Upon her complaint, another quasi-judicial court with the help of a local *maulvi* declared

---

26 Across the Muslim world, women's rights activists have used the strategy of differentiating between Quranic and customary practices, as often it is the latter that are extremely misogynistic.

27 I by no means intend to suggest that changes are not taking place within traditional Muslim organizations; however, the pace often does not match the demands of women's rights activists. For changes in the Jamaat-i-Islami, see Ahmad (2008); for the experience of women's organizations with AIMPLB, see Kirmani (2009); and for negotiations on the *nikahnama*, see Suneetha (2011). BMMA activists have identified religious scholars who are sympathetic to their concerns and use their help in resolving extrajudicial cases.

28 *Khap-panchayat* are extrajudicial, localized systems of community arbitration (although illegal) that dole out their own version of justice across all religious communities.

her *haram*, or forbidden to her husband, and she was told to leave her marital home, while the father-in-law went scot-free. It was only with the intervention by women's groups that the father-in-law was booked and his subsequent bail applications thwarted. Both cases caught national attention and received enormous media publicity followed by a blitz of anti-Muslim coverage. Although such quasi-judicial systems operate across all communities, in the case of the Muslim community it is difficult to appeal against the rulings. As Muslim personal law remains uncodified, there is no legal protection for the Muslim woman.

The BMMA trains community activists to intervene in cases of abuse, violence and destitution and to help those affected file First Information Reports (FIR) under the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (PDVA). However, the BMMA's experience shows that there is resistance among police officers to file such complaints, even when a trained community worker is present (Hasan, October 13, 2011). But in most such cases the woman is ignorant of the legal action she can take. An even bigger problem is that a woman's case in general will often not reach legal avenues, as quasi-judicial authorities such as a local *maulvi* or *panchayat* and *Sharia* courts may be the first arbitrators. As a result, the BMMA also teaches its community workers the rights available to women in the *Sharia*, thereby enabling them to argue a given woman's case within frameworks of local arbitration.

The founding members also deem intervention necessary to counter the influence of neoconservative groups and ideologies. Groups such as the Jamaat-i-Islami have intervened in times of crisis (1992 and 2002) by providing relief and helping rehabilitate victims of violence when the state machinery has repeatedly failed to deliver. But these interventions usually accompany notions of how social relations should be structured, especially the gender norms they endorse (Khan 2007: 1530; Jasani 2008: 435). All three founding members have repeatedly expressed their concerns about the growing influence of conservative forces in the community.

For these various reasons, the BMMA leadership felt the need to intervene in the discussion of the reform of personal law. According to Noorjehan, working for women's rights outside the framework of Islam does not appear to be an option *at present*: "Whether one likes it or not, women who are victimized by the police, the state, and by society at large for being [...] Muslim cannot be told that we have to fight against patriarchy in Islam. [...] It is better to use the reverse position and use resources available in the Islamic vocabulary [... in order to] fight patriarchal interpretations" (Niaz, June 9, 2012). In fact, there is often wariness among Muslim women activists to take up the issue of reform in personal laws at all. In a communally charged and politically vitiated environment, a critique of the prevailing laws governing the Muslim community is often lapped up and then presented and used as a beating stick for the community already under pressure. With a uniform code receding into the background and efforts for reforms taking

place in the family laws of other minority communities, the idea behind the new initiative was to explore the possibilities of a reform from within the resources available in Islam itself.

In other Muslim contexts, Islamic laws have been reformed by making use of the best available interpretations within various schools of thought in Islam. In India, too, there has been a long tradition of engagement with Islamic precepts, which, as was the case of reforms that took place in the early 20th century, enhanced women's rights beyond those available under customary practices. According to Naish, "a secular approach had already been tried […,] so we thought that why not try and work from within Islam" (Hasan, October 13, 2011).[29] In practice, too, they have found that the differences in interpretation within the schools of thought of Islam can be helpful in securing a favorable outcome. In a case in Lucknow, a couple came seeking help because the husband had declared *talaq* three times in a single sitting. They did not wish to be separated but both feared that they may now be living in sin. According to Naish, had they approached the seminary of Nadwa or Firangi Mahal or Deoband, the divorce would have been valid, but a fatwa was obtained from a seminary in Delhi that proclaimed that a *talaq* in a single sitting as one instance and revocable, and therefore that resumption of sexual relations was not a sin. So the case was "resolved" without much difficulty (Hasan, March 23, 2012). Asghar Ali Engineer, who has done pioneering work in Muslim women's rights advocacy in India, acts as a consultant in such cases.[30] BMMA activists also try to locate and work with local religious scholars who sympathize with their concerns.

Moreover, due to its uncodified nature, aspects where there are clear rulings in the *Sharia* in favor of women often get subverted by customary practices, without an avenue for appeal. Since its efforts remain sporadic and limited by physical outreach, the BMMA has pursued the codification of Muslim personal law. In order to arrive at a consensus over various clauses, the BMMA is carrying out consultations with various concerned groups and lawyers across the country with the objective of preparing a draft code that would then be placed before the parliament. However, negotiations on codification based on the use of divergences in interpretation within various Islamic schools of thought cannot elicit all that the BMMA may want to achieve. So while, for instance, in the consultation held in Delhi in February 2012, there was agreement on limiting polygamy to the extent that the practice becomes impossibly difficult, the BMMA's demand that it be completely abolished was not met (Hasan, March 22, 2012). Similarly, in the case of

---

29 The BMMA has associated itself with international organizations such as Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Sisters in Islam and, more recently, Musawah. The works of Aziza al Hibri also encouraged thinking on the possibilities of reform within Islam, and she was consulted in the codification process.

30 Asghar Ali Engineer has been a pioneering voice of gender equality and encourages women to take an active part in reclaiming their religious rights. See, for instance, Engineer (1987 and 2001).

inheritance where the injunctions are clearly unequal, it is difficult for a re-reading to arrive at a gender-just interpretation. According to Noorjehan, these are obvious limitations, but she sees this process as cumulative. The need of the moment, according to her, is to build consensus across the community about the need for reform (Niaz, June 9, 2012).

The attempt at codification has been criticized not only by outside groups such as the MWRN, but also internally in the BMMA. While agreeing that there is value in reclaiming the cultural category of "Muslim," and while supporting women's initiatives to reclaim their rights to religion and religious interpretation, Khadijah is critical of codification. According to her, "it is important to claim our cultural spaces [...,] both those which are shared [...] and [those] which claim our Muslim-ness" but "law ultimately has to be separated from religion." She argues that it is better to work for laws that target specific aspects of gender inequity and cites the example of the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, saying that it can be used creatively and be applicable to women of all communities (Farouqi, March 12, 2012).

An important agenda of the BMMA is to question the authority that the *ulema* have enjoyed. This authority rests precisely on their claim to the power of interpretation of Islamic texts. A move that validates laws as emerging from the *Sharia* may end up endorsing the legitimacy of the very authority that the BMMA seeks to challenge. It may also be recalled that the reforms that took place in the 1930s were not concerned with gender justice but rather with the establishment of a more authentically "Islamic" social world for the community (Minault 2009: 83; Metcalf 2002: 2–3). In her study of Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi's work, Lamia Zayzafoon has argued that relying on a discourse of re-authentification is problematic because it appropriates the very language of interpretation that it seeks to challenge. In the act of reclaiming traditions rather than loosening their hold, a task that Mernissi deems important, she inadvertently ends up "reinforcing the power of tradition to re-inscribe and perpetuate itself" (Zayzafoon 2005: 22).

While advocacy on the *nikahnama* and disseminating information regarding rights in the *Sharia* provides a space for intervention in the present context, this form of "entryism" is accompanied by a serious limitation whereby women's rights once again are hinged upon religion.[31] Codification, with the inherent limitations of what the present process can secure, entails the danger of slipping from the position that "the rights we seek are compatible with Islam" into one that can read "our rights emerge from the *Sharia*." Perhaps in order to circumvent precisely such a situation, the BMMA constantly refers to the notion of equality enshrined in the Constitution of India.

---

31 For a detailed discussion of "entryism," its advantages and limitations, see Helie-Lucus (1993). See Balchin (2003) for the manner in which "Islam" gets foregrounded as a developmental concern in Muslim contexts.

Conclusion

A substantial amount of scholarship in the past decade has focused on Muslim women's engagements with Islam to claim those rights that are guaranteed by the Quran yet subverted by patriarchal interpretations. Since the first limited usage of the term "Islamic feminism" to describe the activism emerging in post-revolutionary Iran, it has now entered general lexicology to describe women's struggles for their rights in Muslim contexts, engendering a debate on its possibilities and limitations. The term "Islamic feminism," however, remains fairly ambiguous, requiring further classification of the women whose position it seeks to classify into "secular," "Muslim" and "Islamic" feminists, who are then further differentiated from "Islamist" women. Alternatively, Islamic feminism has been seen as a "textual" and "discursive" strategy now being used by various individuals and actors.

By contextualizing the approach that the BMMA employs, two arguments have been made in the paper: First, while the question of Muslim women's rights has generally been debated in the context of Islam, the BMMA relocates women's marginality into social, economic and developmental spheres. For Muslim women in particular, this is an important move as it allows a conceptual shift away from the frame of religion. The second argument is that the BMMA re-appropriates a "Muslim" identity and Islam as positive and of value to women. In what would appear to be a contradiction to the first argument, when they *do* approach the question of reform in personal law, the BMMA argues for rights that are available in the Quran and therefore engages with positive readings of the *Sharia*. Those commenting on the Indian situation agree that when facing an entrenched conservative opponent, this appears the best way to challenge patriarchal structures, but the BMMA's own analysis points in another direction. Admittedly, the paper focuses on one form of engagement with religion, identity and rights undertaken in India, and there are, of course, other ways in which women have articulated around similar concerns.[32] The present context of communalism, identity politics and Islamophobia continuously foregrounds the "Muslim" identity in a manner that does not allow them to voice their concern in an unrestrained way. However, as the paper attempts to point out, the appropriation of a "Muslim" identity entails certain negotiations and contradictions. It is this caution that should undergird engagements with Muslim women's activism.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila (1998): "Introduction. Feminist Longings and the Post-colonial Conditions", in: Abu-Lughod, Lila (ed.): *Remaking Women. Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1–31
— (2002): "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others", in: *American Anthropologist*, 104, 3: 783–790

---

32 For religion-based activism, see Geetha (2011) and Suneetha (2012). For a discussion on AeN and the MWRN, see Kirmani (2009).

Agnes, Flavia (1995): "Redefining the Agenda of the Women's Movement within a Secular Framework", in: Sarkar, Tanika; Butalia, Urvashi (eds.): *Women and Right-Wing Movements. Indian Experiences*. London: Zed, 136–55
— (2002): "Transgressing Boundaries of Gender and Identity", in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, 36: 3695–3698
— (2004): *Women and Law in India. An Omnibus.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press
— (2011): "Interrogating Consent and Agency Across the Complex Terrain of Family Laws in India", in: *Social Difference-Online*, 1: 1–16, http://www.socialdifference.org/files/SocDifOnlineDec7-Vol1.pdf (accessed: 2012-07-06)
Ahmad, Irfan (2008): "Cracks in the 'Mightiest Fortress'. Jamaate Islami's Changing Discourse on Women", in: *Modern Asian Studies*, 42, 2–3: 549–575
Ahmed, Leila (1992): *Women and Gender in Islam.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press
Alam, Anwar (2003): "Democratisation of Indian Muslims. Some Reflections", in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38, 46: 4881–4885
Ali, Kecia (2006): "Progressive Muslims and Islamic Jurisprudence. the Necessity for Critical Engagement with Marriage and Divorce Law", in: Safi, Omid (ed.), *Progressive Muslims. On Justice Gender and Pluralism.* Oxford: Oneworld, 163–189
Anderson, Michael R. (1996): "Islamic Law and the Colonial Encounter in India", in: *WLUML Occasional Paper*, 7, http://www.wluml.org/node/5627 (accessed: 2008-10-03)
ANHAD (2012): *And Miles to Go. Ten Years of a Journey.* New Delhi: ANHAD
Bajpai, Rochna (2000): "Constituent Assembly Debates and Minority Rights", in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35, 21–22, 1837–1845
Balchin, Cassandra (2003): "With her Feet on the Ground. Women, Religion and Muslim Communities", in: *Development*, 46, 4: 39–49
Basu, Amrita (1995): "Feminism Inverted. The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism", in: Sarkar, Tanika; Butalia, Urvashi (eds.): *Women and Right-Wing Movements. Indian Experiences.* London: Zed, 158–180
Basu, Tapan et al. (1993): *Khaki Shorts Saffron Flags. A Critique of the Hindu Right.* New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited (Tracts for the Times; 1)
BMMA (n.d.): *Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan. A Report* (received Nov. 12., 2010)
Chhachhi, Amrita (1991): "Forced Identities. The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism and Women in India", in: Kandiyoti, Deniz (ed.): *Women, Islamism and the State.* New Delhi: Mac Millan, 144–175
Engineer, Asghar Ali (2001): *Islam Women and Gender Justice.* New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House
— (ed.) (1987): *The Shah Bano Controversy.* New Delhi: Orient Longman
Gandhi, Nandita; Shah, Nandita (1992): *The Issues at Stake. Theory and Practice in the Early Women's Movement.* New Delhi: Kali for Women
Geetha, V. (2011): "'Applying Laws to their Advantage.' Muslim Women Debate Faith, Gender and Citizenship", in: Geetha, V.; Rajan, Nalini (eds.): *Religious Faith, Ideology, Citizenship. The View From Below.* New Delhi: Routledge, 166–190
Hasan, Zoya (ed.) (1994): *Forging Identities. Gender, Communities and the State in India.* Delhi: Kali for Women
— (2000): "Religion and Politics in Secular India. Law, Community and Gender", in: Hasan, Zoya (ed.): *Politics and the State in India.* New Delhi: Sage, 269–289
— (2009): "Gender, Religion and Democratic Politics in India", UNRISD Report, http://www.gwi-boell.de/downloads/Final_Country_Report_India_Sept2009.pdf (accessed: 2011-02-05)
Hasan, Zoya; Menon, Ritu (2006): *Unequal Citizens. A Study of Muslim Women in India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press
Helie-Lucas, Marie-Aimee (1993): "Women's Struggles and Strategies in the Rise of Fundamentalism in the Muslim World. From Entryism to Internationalism", in: Afshar, Haleh (ed.): *Women in the Middle East. Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation.* London: Macmillan Press, 206–241
Hussain, Mazher (2012): "Op-Ed. The Demolition That Rebuilt a Community", in: *The Hindu*, Dec. 6
Hussain, Sabiha (2006): *Muslim Women's Rights Discourse in Pre-Independence Period.* New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS Occassional Papers)
— (2007): "Reflections on Islamic Identity, Citizenship Rights and Women's Struggle For Gender Justice. Illustration From India", in: *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9, 1: 63–79
Jasani, Rubina (2008): "Violence, Reconstruction and Islamic Reform. Stories from the Indian 'Ghetto'", in: *Modern South Asian Studies*, 42, 2–3: 431–456
Khan, Sameera (2007): "Negotiating the Mohalla. Exclusion, Identity and Muslim Women in Mumbai", in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42, 17: 1527–1533

Kirmani, Nida (2009): *Beyond the Religious Impasse. Mobilizing for Muslim Women's Rights in India*. Birmingham: RAD
Kishwar, Madhu (1999): *Off the Beaten Track. Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press
Kumar, Radha (1998): *The History of Doing. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1990*. New Delhi: Kali for Women
Lateef, Shahida (2008): "From Shahbano to Sachar", in: *Seminar*, 583, online: http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/583/583_shahida_lateef.htm (accessed 2008-05-06)
Lazreg, Marnia (2001): "Decolonizing Feminism", in: Bhavani, Kumkum (ed.): *Feminism and Race*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 281–293
Mahajan, Gurpreet (1998): *Identities and Rights. Aspects of Liberal Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press
— (2005): "Can Intra-Group Equality Co-exist With Cultural Diversity? Reexamining Multicultural Frameworks of Accomodation", in: Eisenburg, Avigail; Spinner-Halev, Jeff (eds.): *Minorities within Minorities. Equality, Rights and Diversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 90–112
Menon, Nivedita (1996): "Uniform Civil Code. Debates in Feminism Today", in: Rao, Nitya; Rurup, Luisa; Sudarshan, R. (eds.): *Sites of Change. The Structural Context for Empowering Women in India*. New Delhi: Tulika, 445–459
— (2007): *Recovering Subversion. Feminist Politics Beyond the Law*. Urbana and Chicago: Permanent Black and University of Illinois Press
Metcalf, Barbara Daly (2002): *Perfecting Women. Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press
Minault, Gail (2009): *Gender, Language and Learning. Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black
Moghadam, Valentine (2004): "Towards Gender Equality in the Arab/Middle East Region. Islam, Culture and Feminist Activism", UNDP Human Development Report Occassional Paper, http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2004/papers/HDR2004_Valentine_Moghadam.pdf (accessed: 2010-05-01)
Papanek, Hannah (1994): "The Ideal Woman and the Ideal Society. Control and Autonomy in the Construction of Identity", in: Moghadam, Valentine M. (ed.): *Identity Politics and Women*. Boulder: Westview Press, 42–75
Ray, Raka (2012): *Handbook of Gender*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press
Sachar Committee (2006): *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India. A Report*. New Delhi: Prime minister's High level Committee
Niaz, Noorjehan Safia; Soman, Zakia (2012): *Muslim Women's Movement. Dismantling Patriarchy*, http:feministindia.com/tag/bharatiya-muslim-mahila-andolan/ (accessed: 2012-04-09)
Sarkar, Tanika; Butalia, Urvashi (eds.) (1995): *Women and Right-Wing Movements. Indian Experiences*. London: Zed
Schneider, Nadja-Christina (2009): "Islamic Feminism and Muslim Women's Rights Activism in India: from Transnational Discourse to Local Movement. Or Vice Versa?", in: *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11, 1: 56–71
Shaheed, Farida (1994): "Controlled or Autonomous. Identity and the Experience of the Network, Women Living under Muslim Laws", in: *Feminism and the Law*, 19, 4: 997–1019
Som, Reba (1994): "Jawaharlal Nehru and the Hindu Code. A Victory of Symbol over Substance", in: *Modern Asian Studies*, 28, 61: 165–194
Suneetha, A. (2011): "Indian Secularism and Muslim Personal Law. The Story of Model Nikahnama", in: *Social Difference-OnLine*, 1: 54–62, http://www.socialdifference.org/files/SocDifOnlineDec7-Vol1.pdf (accessed: 2012-12-06)
— (2012): "Between Haquq and Taaleem. Muslim Women's Activism in Contemporary Hyderabad", in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47, 34: 57–63
Tripathi, Purnima S. (2007): "Joining Forces", in: *Frontline*, 24, 2, http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2402/stories/20070209002710800.htm (accessed: 2010-05-01)
Vatuk, Sylvia (2008): "Islamic Feminism in India. Indian Muslim Women Activists and the Reform of Muslim Personal Law", in: *Modern Asian Studies*, 42, 2–3: 489–518
Yamani, Mai (ed.) (1996): *Feminism and Islam. Legal and Literary Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press
Zayzafoon, Lamia Ben Youssef (2005): *The Production of the Muslim Woman. Negotiating Text History and Ideology*. New York: Lexington Books