Chapter 3

Methodology: An Account of Ethnography Permeated with Resurgent Marxism

This chapter is an exercise in delineating the process adapted in the enquiry. It is divided into three parts. The first part begins with a presentation of the rationale for having taken up this study and contains a discussion of broad problems and questions that demarcate the study. The discussion proceeds to mark out the limits of this enquiry and culminates in the formulation of specific objectives of the study. The second part contains a delineation of sensitising concepts that outline the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the subject of enquiry, and consequential influence of the framework provided by these concepts on the methodological choices of this work. The third part contains discussion of issues that pertain to research design, methodological approach, and methods of data collection, analysis and presentation adopted in the study.

3.1 Demarcating the Study: Rationale, Statement of Problem, Research Questions, and Objectives

3.1.1 Rationale

3.1.1.1 Interpretation of a culturally, politically significant phenomenon and advancing theory

Urban centers are the new driving engines of developing economies just as urban
cultural fabric is where new pattern in social relationships are woven and; older, traditional bondages can be discarded with relative ease. Cities are often harbingers of change. “Cities are landscapes of cultural diversity and sub-cultural differentiation, what Robert Park called ‘mosaic of social worlds’.” (Lin & Mele, 2005) Metropolitan Delhi is a site of great inequity—stark poverty as well as immense affluence. It’s a place where opportunities abound but are not available to all equally. A hub for contemporary and traditional art and culture, it is one of the key centres, along with other metros of the country powering economic growth. It is where cultures meet often retreating back into their own contemporary shells. In a way it is a constituent of the nucleus/centre of the Indian society while at the same time there are numerous and complex forces of marginalisation within it.

While Delhi, its history, art and its poor have been much studied, Delhi’s Muslim population has made only occasional appearance in its researches and that too not in a lead role! In absence of studies that explore and illuminate changes that the urban Indian Muslim is undergoing in Delhi, the community remains a subject to thrust identities. Muslims are considered contemptible, backward due to the nature of their religion- Islam itself. They are suspected world over. Islamophobia is no longer politically incorrect and is growing.

This study aimed to be a step in the direction of understanding the changing Muslim communities. It is hoped that the new in-depth information about broad patterns that hold for Muslim communities in Delhi which have been discovered in the study and the theoretical analysis presented here give a new thrust to action.

3.1.1.2 A space for voice of the marginalised

Apart from a plethora of scholarship on studies of history of Islam and Muslims in India, much of the scholarship in India on Muslims lies in the realm of poverty studies. These have been concentrated on studying poverty initially as an economic phenomenon (income and expenditure) moving on to a multidimensional conceptualisation involving various deprivations. Some amount of research also traces socio-economic and political status of Muslims in general and Muslim women of India. Some studies related to caste and stratification among Indian Muslims also exist (Ali, 2002). Most of the
available information is quantitative in nature (Kazi, 1990; Mistry, 2005; Sachar report, 2006; Hasan and Menon, 2006). A lot of information also exists on various histories of communal relations of Hindus and Muslims in India (Pandey, 1992; Van der Veer, 1994; Varshney, 2002; Anand, 2005).

Even when we have all the statistics that illuminate the state of Muslims in India we miss their own voices telling us their understanding of how they have been pushed to the margins and how they languish there. In studies researching various aspects/issues of Muslims their own voices are marginalised. And thus, often Muslim lives are misrepresented- if they are represented at all. Mainstream audiences rarely hear their views because they are rarely published or carried in a distorted context by the media. Social scientists studying Muslim’s status are predisposed to quantitative studies that reduce experiences of people and communities into disjointed indicators that are then numbered and measured. This research study is an attempt to understand urban Muslims of Delhi through their lives and through their narrative in their own voice.

3.1.1.3 Problemetising the imageries of Muslims in the popular urban consciousness

In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001 Muslim communities world over find themselves staring at their own picture drawn by the media and intelligentsia which presents them in monochrome- devoid of any diversity or portrays them in a suspicious light if not in a downright sinister manner. The quantity of research undertaken on various aspects of Muslim societies has grown manifold but the narratives they produce are not always edifying. Media has consistently been producing reductive images of Muslim people, Muslim localities and practices that are deeply pervasive in popular culture. Some of these imageries are quite straightforward like those related to terrorism but some are also subtle for example Muslims as orthodox, irrational, fundamentalist people who are inherently ‘backward’ and frequently irrational about their ‘hurt sentiments’. These accounts have gained legitimacy in the popular consciousness and are in persistent currency by people to project images of Muslim in everyday usage. These and numerous other accounts, such as ‘Liberal Muslims’, ‘Muslim Women’ are deeply held and breed prejudice against Muslims. This research is borne out of the need to complicate and problemetise these sometimes false, sometimes uni-dimentional stereotypes.
Professional Social Workers in India tend more to be engaged in a much broader ‘development sector’ sharing space with people trained in other social science disciplines, humanities, management etc. Indeed, many of our pioneering change initiatives were the handy work of ‘untrained’ philanthropists and Gandhians on one hand and radical activists on the other. This reality is very different from licence-regulated, regimented, largely individual-centric, welfare administration oriented practise arena in the United States. Social work profession in India is being astonishingly short sighted and conceited in asserting that the professionals limit themselves to only a few areas of engagement. Working with minorities (Muslims) on political issues and those of representation is deemed to be out of bounds and beneath the profession (Jha, 2009, 2012). In the quest for a ‘scientific’ social work practise we are veering dangerously towards losing out on social work as a creative, humane and helping enterprise (Sheppard, 2006). Afraid and insecure that social work may be seen as fuzzy and lacking substance we are staring at the increasing regulation, proceduralisation and managerialisation of the profession. This conception of the profession extends to the conception of the social work research as an aid to the scientific, procedural enterprise

Not only do we disregard the diverse subaltern spaces within which social workers can make a contribution, we are also guilty of adopting stale and stodgy attitude to methodological innovation. The neo-conservative calls of evidence-based practise emanating from US and reverberating in India, have a debilitating impact on profession. What this means for future of social work research in India is that it is deliberately choosing to be out of sync and lag behind the contemporary developments in social science research elsewhere in the world. While qualitative social science research in Europe, especially Germany, has increasingly developed cutting edge methodological innovation and consolidation informed by contentious but rich epistemological debate (see the section on critical theory), US researchers are reverting to ‘correct’ application and canonisation of methods (Flick, 2009). Their Indian counterparts are unquestioningly following suit. The old school social work researchers may think they wear a grand cloak of ‘experience’ and ‘professionalism’ but it is time we told
the king that he stands exposed. The present study is an attempt to keep pace with these methodological innovations that the social science researchers across the world, including the global south, are utilising with increasing familiarity and to good effect.

At this juncture I make a renewed claim to the legacy of Jane Addams, a social worker par excellence primarily known in the professional circuits for her conception and leading of the Hull house in Chicago. What contemporary Social Work conveniently neglects doing is to give Addams due credit for her political and philosophical engagements (Lee, 1987). From her diverse and rich legacy, I would like to highlight one of the four interrelated cornerstones of her social philosophy- the concept of ‘sympathetic knowledge’ (the other three being- lateral progress, pluralism and fallibilism) which I have earnestly tried to incorporate in this study. The notion of sympathetic knowledge is a mingling of epistemology and ethics (Hamington, 2009) which asserts that moral content of epistemology must be one of the most important concerns of social work researchers. Addams believed that research or knowing one another better reinforces the common connection of people such that the potential for caring and empathetic moral actions increase. To quote Jane Addams (1912, p. 7) “Sympathetic knowledge is the only way of approach to any human problem, and the line of least resistance into the jungle of human wretchedness must always be through that region which is most thoroughly explored, not only by the information of the statistician, but by sympathetic understanding.”

3.1.2 Broad Statement of the Problem

The study began with a very broad view of the problems that were investigated. The entire vista of study of Muslims in Delhi, indeed in India, puts in sharp focus on a complete lack of credible and comprehensive accounts of temporal and spatial variety of Urban Muslim experience which includes an examination of community cohesion vis-à-vis class among Muslims and patterns of segregation of Muslims in ‘Muslims-only’ enclaves. The mainstream accounts neglect everyday experiences of Muslim people of relating to the State in the larger context of swift urbanisation and globalisation as well as those anxieties related to an overarching pall of prejudice, suspicion and surveillance. The specific urban nature of sites for production, expression, contestation and negotiation of identities including, for example, Muslim localities,
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Educational institutions, popular media as also party politics and political affiliations come across as heavily lopsided while, several identity constructs are unduly and chronically over emphasised - the ‘moderate’ Muslims, the Muslim ghetto, the Muslim woman, the violent-backward-poor Muslim, the ‘Islamic’ terrorist etcetera. And finally, the available studies rarely, if ever, attempt to identify space for optimism and action made by associations, organisations and institutions run by Muslims- for reform within and resistance to their subaltern status.

3.1.3 Key Research Questions

With the broad problem thus articulated, the key questions that the study addressed in the course of its enquiry were: Where do Muslims in Delhi find themselves placed/place themselves (geographic spatiality, and in terms of socio-political, economic positionality) in the changing urban landscape? Why? What forms does their exclusion take in the urban context? What constitutes their engagements with the mainstream? What are the prevalent identity-constructs (stereotypes) in popular media and collective urban consciousness representing Muslims? What relation do they have with stigmatisation of an entire community? What are the various identity-constructs regarding the urban Muslims? How are these formed? What are the ways in which urban Muslims are resisting their continued peripheralisation and subaltern status in the city?

3.1.4 Limits of this Enquiry

A discussion on the limitations in this study is not so much an effort to demarcate what I could not study during this research; rather it is a discussion of the limits that I set for the study given its theoretical framework and articulated rationale. I did not interview or include in my sample non-Muslims. Most studies that use this device do so for non-Muslim respondents’ (especially Hindus as significant ‘others’) take on the issues either for the purpose of some sort of comparisons or validation for the assertions made by the Muslims. This is in line with the ideological situations in which Muslim experience is sought to be defined as seen through the Hindu-gaze. I did not study the role of their faith- Islam, in everyday lives of people, and although caste differentiation and gender are considered in some parts of the analysis presented in this thesis these
do not form the foci of these study. This choice was made not because I think that these factors are unimportant or non-existent but because I think some understanding on these issues already exists and I wished to intensely focus my chosen territory of representational spaces and Muslims.

3.1.5 Research Objectives

Drawing from the research questions, four objective statements for the final outcomes of the study were outlined as follows. This study would aim to:

1. Present a detailed descriptive record of various aspects of marginalisation of urban Muslim life in Delhi, employing micro approaches that take life experiences of individuals into consideration and the macro analysis of the social, cultural, economic and political positioning of Muslims on the urban tapestry of Delhi.

2. Critically examine various representations of Muslims and Muslim areas of Delhi prevalent in the popular urban consciousness through analysis of dominant discourses.

3. Organise an archive of visual representations (photo-essays, charts, maps and satellite images etc) of Muslim population and/or areas in Delhi, using available secondary sources.

4. Extrapolate on avenues of optimism and future action for reduced exclusion of Muslims within the urban tapestry of diverse communities on the basis of present progressive trends and initiatives.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study does not follow the deductive logic of framing hypothesis from already existing theoretical models and then testing them. However, any approach to study or understand a social phenomenon is bound to be influenced by already existing knowledge on the issue. The attempt in this section is to layout the theoretical standpoints from which the study was approached. These have been delineated in exploration of certain concepts termed ‘sensitising concepts’ (Blumer, 1969 quoted from Flick 2009). The first grouping of sensitising concepts has to do with Philosophical perspectives that inform the choice of research methods. These pertain to the nature of reality and epistemology, and thus encapsulate my views on what are best ways to approach issues of collection of data in this enquiry. These are (i) Empiricism, and
(ii) Subjectivity. The second grouping is a selection of Social Theoretical Perspectives that have contributed to decisions on how to approach the analysis of the data in the study. These are (i) Marxist urbanism, and (ii) Critical theory. Within this grouping there is much contestation to be reconciled and numerous creases of disagreements that have to be ironed over. The final grouping of sensitising concepts comprises those that are being studied. It is along these co-ordinates of the study along which the data was collected. These concepts are (i) Positionality, (ii) Spatiality, and; (iii) Identity. A very brief discussion of the constituent concepts of these groups follows.

3.2.1 Philosophical Perspectives that Informed the Choice of Research Methods

In view of Social Work’s quest for professionalisation and gaining respectability for ‘evidence based’ practise, the primary concern of social work research has been to chart the established scientific methodological conventions rigorously. If in this endeavour the practitioners came across phenomenon that cannot be studied using the same conventions, it is unequivocally indicated that the query lies outside the realm of the profession’s concern. The contemporary debates point out the shortcomings of positivist research and increasing call for reflexivity of the researcher towards the power dynamics within the research process. These debates emphasise the responsibility of the researcher to not just select an appropriate method but also to select the principles by which the appropriate method to study a phenomenon can be decided upon. (Lorenz, 2008). The following discussion woven around the debates and criticisms regarding the sensitising concepts of Empiricism and Subjectivity define the choices made in this study on matters related to research methods.

3.2.1.1 Empiricism

Often research process is trusted with the responsibility of discovering and presenting ‘facts’ as ‘truths’. This envisaging of research as unearthing a ‘social reality’ that exists independent of the discoverer takes its evidence from the existence of things. It is, therefore, prone to becoming a view from within the existing order of things. Research is often reduced only to the research findings that exist independent of the process, while the process through which the phenomenon being studied came to exist is not afforded any attention. Add to this the fact that research process is also made to
appear impregnable and inaccessible instead of revealing the power dynamics of the persons participating in research.

‘Discoveries’ made empirically- relying only on sensory experiences, often preclude the social content of phenomenon being studied. Thus, it is easy to see why Marx thought that empiricism confirms the status quo because it ignores that behind the so called ‘facts’ there is any history, ideology and the relationships which produced these ‘facts’. Taking recourse to Marxists vocabulary, this tendency of reducing research to a commodity and concealing its real mechanisms can be termed as ‘fetishising research’. This is not to suggest that all experience is only a result of 

\textit{reification} in thought which Peter Berger labels a kind of forgetfulness “as if they (social phenomenon) were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will” (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 89). However, empiricism does stress that there is no rationale in believing any description (theoretical) of a reality that cannot be observed. Just as Althusser criticised empiricism for assuming that what is being observed through sensory experience is the thing itself (Resch, 1992). Clearly then, not all processes can be studied empirically. The approach adopted in selecting the methods for this study has followed Marx’s exhortation to conceptualise the experience of social phenomenon and the processes in which the phenomenon is produced- together and simultaneously (Merrifield, 2001).

\textbf{3.2.1.2 Subjectivity}

In rejection of vulgar empiricism and in asserting that the concept of 

\textit{tabula rasa} is, at best, a myth, this study braces the perspective that any thinking and investigation does not happen in ideological vacuum. To pretend so would only mean that the investigators do not wish to put up their political hues for scrutiny. In fact this study acknowledges the subjective communication of the researcher with the participants to be constructing knowledge rather than being an obstructing factor that brings in ‘biases’. Thus, reflexivity of the researcher and defining her own position vis-à-vis the participants becomes very important and integral part of the research.

But, I would like to expand the span of subjectivity to include reflexivity to discern relations of determination beyond \textit{mere descriptions} of institutions and behavior
patterns. Subjectivity in practice also reflects the power and position of subjects within the structures in which the subjects are located. This understanding of subjectivity borrows heavily from Althusser’s Structural Marxism which “explores the contradictions among the different ways we are all constituted as social subjects as well as the tensions between forces of submission—inhherent in our conformity to the roles and positions that we are assigned by society—and forces of empowerment stemming from our capacity to act as social subjects by means of these same roles and positions” (Resch, 1992, p. 27). Further, this understanding of subjectivity does not assert that there are no real world realities, and explores the prospects within Weber’s proposal that objectivity is possible, but only after a perspective has been established. Weber has variously been interpreted by various scholars (Lassman & Spiers 1994; Brubaker, 1984) to assert that even though a value neutral perspective can never be achieved, once a perspective is established it can and should be pursued with integrity which Weber calls ‘objectivity’.

3.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives that Informed Data Analyses

3.2.2.1 Marxist Urbanism

Marxism and Urbanism are not the two most easily reconciled perspectives. While most Marxists considered cities the engines of capitalism and all its negative implications, the prominent and mainstream urbanists of Chicago School have bypassed Marxism in painting a hopeless picture of city that is openly Social Darwinist in its ‘ecological’ approach (Merrified, 2002). It is in the work of such philosophers and urbanists as Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, and David Harvey that we see a new Urbanism that is imbued with resurgent Marxism. This theoretical lens provided by Marxist Urbanism is deemed to be the best to view and analyse the findings of this study from, because it is this perspective that acknowledges the deep connection between the negative and positive energies contained within an ‘urbanscape’. Marx’s conviction of “everything is pregnant with its contrary” enables us to view the hegemonic processes as well as the counter hegemonic undercurrents- the possibility of “something affirmative about urban life, keeping hold of a contradictory duality within a non-contradictory unity, grasping a dual material drama within a singular
consciousness” (Merrifield, 2002, p. 6). Marxist urbanism also arms this study a stance of integrity between methods and theoretical position. As Marx would have it- a collapsing of human/social and material worlds into a unity, a whole enables this study to say something meaningful about the conditions of spatial segregation and social discrimination being experienced by Muslims in Delhi.

Additionally, Marxists Urbanists have grappled with geographies of discrimination, pivoting their analysis on the ideas of cities as sites of capital accumulation and the resultant unleashing of discriminatory processes (Merrifield, 2002). This is not to say that this the only/ right lens through which Muslims localities and their residents must be seen but that this lens has hardly ever consistently and deeply used by those scholars who have shown interest in the problem. This is apparent in the way, urbanisation, globalisation and neo-liberalism are never seen to be processes that may impact Muslims in any way, whose problems are often reduced to discrimination, poverty, backwardness, etc that somehow seem problems internal and inherent to the people themselves.

3.2.2.2 Critical Theory

Critical theory began as an attempt to reinterpret Marxist ideas by a group of social scientists that came to be known as Frankfurt school. Though later critical theory came to known for many diverse intellectual streams than just toeing a dogmatic Marxist line, what is common between the two is the tenet that human history is a narrative of conflict between the interest groups (Delaney, 2005). Among the themes that occupied the critical theorist were forms of integration in post-liberal societies, family socialisation and ego development, mass media and mass culture, social psychology behind cessation of protest, theory of art, and the critique of positivism and science (Habermas, 1989). At the lowest common denominator what characterises all streams of critical theory is the aim of human emancipation, or as one of the main theorist of this group put it “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244).

Critical theory is of interest in this study because of its continuity with the most powerful and insightful features of Marxist analysis regarding historicism and
materiality of life processes of society (ibid, 1982), while revising those that it is often criticised for such as large scale, all encompassing explanatory narratives that pays heed only to economic aspects of processes. Critical theory’s interest in culture and communication posits it a vantage position to analyse processes such as globalisation and how it impacts institutions and life processes with an interdisciplinary approach.

3.2.3 Social Co-ordinates Along which the Study is Situated

3.2.3.1 Positionality

The term, positionality, refers to how an entity is positioned with respect to another in space and time with relation to political power, economic position and social status. The use of term positionality in this study is influenced by feminist theory within which positionality was coined to describe the situated positions from which subjects come to know the world. Maher and Tetreault (1994, p.22) refer to positionality of “knower’s specific position in any context as defined by race, gender, class, and other socially significant dimensions”. According to them, positionality describes how people are defined, “not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed” (ibid, p.164). In feminist theory, the positionality of researchers is emphasised both to challenge the proposition that there is objective knowledge and to sensitise researchers how their analysis is shaped by their “social situatedness ... in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and other axes of social difference” (Nagar & Geiger, 2000).

While the feminist notion of positionality seems limited to subjective view of people’s experiences, and factors that shape or influence experiences, Eric Sheppard (2002) specifically adds geographic situatedness to render the concept more useful for analysing globalisation. “Positionality within the global economy...” Sheppard argues, is an expression of situation “…within the global economy in general and to the trajectories of particular places” (2002, p. 308). He suggests within the studies of globalisation an intense focus on territories and possibility of networked spaces has meant that the very role of connection between territories in creating relational inequalities within globalised/networked spaces has gone largely overlooked. And
finally, a third notion of positionality explored in this work is the foucauldian notion of individuals ‘positioned’ in the world experienced as a web or network of overlapping or competing discourses (Roberts, 2006). It is in this broad and dual usage of positionality that this work is engaging in its study of Muslim population in Delhi.

3.2.3.2 Spatiality

Space is not just physical or geographical condition. The term ‘space’ is a contested concept and elusive. It is often used metaphorically for the connection of human cognition to the body and its sensory-motor activities in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Bateson, 1973; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). In other words, spaces are made up (to a large degree) of the ways that people place themselves and others socially. Spaces always change importance, interpretation and relevance in relation to people that occupy them (Goffman, 1971). The social construction of meaning in relation to places takes place through different institutions, social relations and discourses (Harvey 1996).

If space is a place with social content, by a corollary ‘the social is inexorably also spatial’ (Massey, 1992, p 80). As such ‘spatiality’ is the expression of the relationship between people and spaces. It operationalises the way in which spaces and people communicate. A fundamental postulate of geography is that the relative positions of communities partly determine the form and intensity of social interactions. These in turn build back the main structures of geographical space, while increasingly distorting them. Use of a concept such as spatiality enables us to examine spatial relegation of a community and understand it as the ultimate symbol of its social marginalisation—highlighting the social difference and distance but also recreating these.

3.2.3.3 Identity

Identity, like positionality and spatiality, is a construct that is defined in relative terms—in comparison or contrast. It is also a concept that spawns passionate and violent hatreds. Even in the academic debates ‘identity’ is hotly debated and remains contentious. In social psychology identity is understood as a form of self-concept. Accordingly, Charles Cooley (1902) described the process of acquiring identity as a response to their perception of how other people see them and named it looking-glass
self. Mead (1934) expanded this ‘other’ into a more nuanced ‘significant other’ and ‘generalized other’. He also asserted that this individual-self is in relation to the selves of other members of the same group- reflecting and expressing broadly their outlook and behavior. Mead also stressed that this self is not a static or biologically ‘given’ but rather a ‘negotiated’, ‘cognitive’ entity “poised between an evolutionary notion of the creative, open, spontaneous, but potentially conflictual, individual and group action and an ‘instrumental rationality’ which attempts both practical and progressive social outcomes” (Roberts, 2006, p. 36-37).

This description of identity formation though valuable, supposes that the process is identity formulation is consensual. This view was countered by Giddens who, through his dramaturgical view, pointed out that social identity is a process of role-prescription-essentially a categorization or typification based on definite ‘social criterion’ and may contain a disconnect between what they prescribe and what actors actually carry out. Thus, identity roles contain within their scripting the conflicts that reflect broad structural features of society and linked to structures of domination (Roberts, 2006). Giddens’ conceptualisation of identity is also of particular interest to me in this study because he conceived the self in a wider arena of what he calls ‘reflexive modernity’ or high modernity’ and globalisation and asserts that in the global situation, the self and society are ‘intimately’ linked.

### 3.3 Research Methodology

This work identifies itself within the Urban Studies genre of research. This genre attempts to understand cities and city life as distinctive entities - exploring the meaning and function of various aspects of cities and their hierarchies in the larger society. Urban studies is an interdisciplinary genre of research/study, it encompasses the study of political institutions, economic and social relations, physical landscapes, and cultural frameworks that make the city life. Urban studies use the conceptual tools supplied by architecture, geography, sociology, art history, anthropology, economics, history, literature, and political science. Urban studies also examine the processes that produce certain patterns of human settlement and chart the changing relationships among areas shaped by urbanisation.
Delhi is seeing immense transformation in terms of infrastructure and facilities for those who can afford it but the change processes have also ended up marginalising further the already poor and marginalised sections of the urban population. The changes have, of course, also impacted urban spaces, social relationships as well as the way day-to-day life is lived by its inhabitants. No doubt that Urban Muslim has also been affected. Not much present scholarship is invested in studying the new Urban Indian Muslim. In this study I turned my attention to examining the New Urban Indian Muslim- the new processes of creation and expression of social identities of Muslims in Delhi, forms of articulation of Urban Muslim identities, curious construction of nationalistic and transnational Muslim identities at simultaneously scales and the embedded politics, Spatial components like residential segregation and ‘community cohesion’, interaction of urban Muslims with urban public spaces and institutions; and socio-political positionality of Muslim in urban social fabric. I also hope to have illuminated, in this bid, the heterogeneity among Muslims in Delhi especially along the class differences.

The chosen research design is Exploratory as the goal of the study was more to explore and provide clarifications regarding the dynamics of everyday lives, social realities and cultural-political structures vis-à-vis Muslim population residing in Delhi, than to predict the future direction of some well known phenomenon or to establish a causal relationship between various ‘variables’. The choice also afforded me a possibility of increased familiarity with the concepts and of better formulation of some of the questions that could be pursued in further research.

3.3.1 Ethnography as Method: Rationale and ‘Fit’

As I have shown in the preceding parts of this chapter, the process of choosing research methods is an integral part of the methodology. The methodological approach followed in this work pertains to ethnographic research. Hamersley and Atkinson (1995) assert that ethnography should be understood in the broader context of a principled use of research methods rather than the narrow view of ethnography as a method or an assortment of methods. Ethnography emphasises close, first-hand, and sustained contact with the subjects within their milieu. This is because verstehen- a rich understanding
of social world is a central objective of ethnographic research (Flick, 2009). Luders
(1995 quoted from Flick 2009), lists out the defining features of ethnography thus,
“...first there is the risk and moments of the research process which cannot be planned
and are situational, coincidental and individual. ...second, the researcher’s skilful activity
becomes more important. ...third, ethnography transforms into a strategy of research
which includes as many options of collecting data as can be imagined and are
justifiable.”

The original claim of Ethnography was that it was ‘objective and scientific’ method
for study of ‘native’ cultures by persons not from within the culture. Since then it has
had to contend with charges or colonial attitude and also of ‘positivism’ and
‘naturalism’. The present debates on ethnography are more to do with the limits of
representation and power relations between the representer and the represented. Within
this is also the matter of reflexivity of the ethnographer- the degree of her own
awareness and acknowledgement of her subjectivity stemming from her position. The
job that confronts ethnographers today is to ‘struggle self-consciously to avoid
portraying abstract ahistorical ‘others’ (Clifford 1988, p23). In The Predicament of
Culture (1988) Clifford presents an optimist exploration of forms and manner of
ethnographic writing that may escape the epistemological limits of ethnography’s past
as western colonial mode of representation of the colonised. This can be achieved by
displacing the locus of ethnographic practice to forms that interrupt objectification
and interpellation of people. For ethnographic researchers like myself, who reside and
come from within the culture they are studying the problem of avoiding the binary of
‘us’ and ‘them’ is already taken care of to a certain extent (but not wholly, since, after
all, identities are not singular but intersectional). In an operational way the issues of
representation and power can be addressed partly by paying heed to Clifford’s
understanding of ethnography as a form of writing and thus, ethnography as textual.
Writing being an important part of ethnography and discourse analysis both I borrowed
conceptual framework provided by Clifford for writing (and reading) of ethnography
which constitutes of ‘language, rhetoric, power and history’ (Clifford, 1986, p 25).

My own contention from the above discussion and the experiences during ethnographic
fieldwork mirrors a familiar argument that human life and even a limited view of
experiences and opinions are far too complex to make all encompassing ‘true’ representations. Any representation, however close to a facet of human existence is at best ‘a representation of a facet of human existence. Thus in this study which attempts to overcome the historical moorings of discourses that relate to prejudice, discrimination and segregation experienced by Muslims in Delhi finds a perfect methodological accomplice in ethnography. The thick descriptions in this work use language, rhetoric, power and history consciously (and I hope effectively) to disrupt the dominant discourses from the position of those that are being studied. In this attempt I also hope to fulfill what Clifford asserts is one of the crucial contemporary needs, ‘for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them’ (ibid, 23).

I make a claim of having permeated this ethnographic work with Marxism because of the stress I have laid on the historicity of the subject as well as on the process. Also contributing is the keen awareness that the knowledge produced here itself is subject to contestations and negotiations with the dominant ideology. The methodology is also infused with ‘resurgent’ Marxism because I am keenly aware of the allegations of determinism that made Marxist perspective unfashionable in contemporary discussions. I contend that the post-structuralist argument that Marxism has no new insights to offer in a scenario where social scientists and philosophers are confronted with questions of identity and communalism is misplaced. In this work, dominant ideology is not understood as entirely coherent, consistent and devoid of any contradiction. In fact, I follow the recent recognition among Marxist social scientists that macroexplanations stand in need of microfoundations’ (Little, 1986, pp 127 emphasis original). In substantive terms, I drew from Daniel Little (1986) and especially tried to study material factors related to labour, land etc and non-material processes such as identity formations, culture etcetera for their ideological position within a system of production and control. I enquired into class character of inter-group relationships of exploitation and structures of dominance that these require. I did this through a close examination of everyday and lived experiences of people including their resistance to/negotiations within the social experience. Finally, throughout the examination of these everyday experiences I attempted to demarcate stable and continuing structures through which people experience their everyday.
3.3.2 Sites of Interaction – Geographical Markouts

Muslim population in Delhi is clustered in three comparatively large pockets, namely (i) Seelampur and the contiguous trans-Yamuna areas; (ii) Walled city, Bara Hindu Rao and contiguous areas of old Delhi and; (iii) Jamia Nagar and contiguous South Delhi localities. There are several smaller pockets in areas such as Nizamuddin, Hauz Rani, Uttam Nagar, Inderlok and Mehrauli. Finally there are also a few elite gated housing societies such as Taj Enclave, Abul Fazal Apartments, Zakir Bagh.

For the ethnographic fieldwork I chose several areas from each of the three large clusters. In the first cluster, henceforth called Old Delhi cluster or Old Delhi for brevity, I limited my forays to Beri wallah Bagh, Hathi khana, Ahata Kedara, Bara Hindu Rao, Qasab Pura in old Delhi outside the precincts of Shahjahanbad, and Matia Mahal, Chitli Qabar, Darya Ganj, Chandni Chowk, Bazar Sita Ram, Turkman Gate, Bawarchi Khana inside the walled city- The Purani Dilli (literally, Old Delhi). In the second cluster, henceforth referred to as Trans Yamuna cluster, I limited myself to New Seelampur, Chauhan Bangar, Jaffrabad and New Jaffrabad. From the third large cluster, Jamia Nagar, I covered Zakir Nagar, Joga Bai, Batla House, Abul Fazal Enclave, and

Map 3.1: Geographical Markouts of the Area
Shahin Bagh. From the smaller clusters I chose Nizamuddin covering both the Nizamuddin West and Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin. And, finally, I conducted field work in Taj Enclave (also trans-Yamuna) as an example of an elite Muslim housing society. Evidently, these choices cover a lot of geographical ground and the selection was made with conscious intent to cover a lot of ground in order to explore the spatial expression of the heterogeneity of Muslim population in Delhi in terms of class, occupational and cultural diversity. Temporality of the areas was also of significance in terms of change and developments within the areas. The historical significance and architectural continuity of history in everyday life of the walled city and Nizamuddin were important markers of selection. The centrality of Jamia Millia Islamia in the expression of (spatial) identity of Jamia Nagar is the main marker in selection of the area. And Trans-Yamuna as a closer extension to old Delhi in the post partition Delhi and Delhi during constitutional emergency. These areas were chosen for intensive fieldwork also because Jama Masjid, Seelampur, Batla House and Nizamuddin are the nomenclatures of which the ‘Muslim ghettos’ narrative of popular discourses is made up of. Taj Enclave is the newest in terms of chronology of settlements and has been chosen to explore the hitherto unexplored construct of the elite Muslims and their viewpoint.

It must, however, be pointed out at the outset that even though fieldwork was not conducted in other areas the participants often invoke their awareness of and connections with other Muslim settlements and some of these areas are a significant presence in their narratives.

3.3.2.1 Approaching the Sites and Familiarity

As mentioned earlier, the choice of sites of ethnographic fieldwork was made in effect to cover as much geographical ground as possible with regards the entity called ‘Muslim areas’ in Delhi. In case of Old Delhi and Jamia Nagar the choice was also influenced by my own familiarity with the localities- I spent my childhood in Ahata Kedara in Old Delhi and have lived in Zakir Nagar for over twenty five years now. Nizamuddin was also a familiar location due to its proximity to Jamia Nagar and its location en route Central Delhi from there. It is also historically and spiritually a significant location.
due to the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin. The trans-Yamuna cluster was completely unfamiliar territory for me, thus, the one where I did most rigorous fieldwork and spent disproportionately large amounts of time.

3.3.2.2 Ethnographer’s Routine

I formally began my fieldwork from December 2009 and continued till March 2012 as I wrote the thesis. The most intensive period being between September 2010- January 2012. The days were used for mostly visiting, walking through and informally talking to people in the selected localities. The informal discussions sometimes also led to recruiting participants for more detailed interviews. Most of the formal and recorded interviews happened during late evenings at the participants’ homes, sometimes at a stretch and sometimes over more than one sitting.

Apart from this, memoing based on my continuous lived experiences as a researcher formed a part of my routine. It was almost akin to living life always with the ‘researcher-antennae’ up. Passing through a neighbourhood I was constantly on a lookout for a rich-substantial detail. Drawing room discussions, celebrations, visits to friends, a trip to the local general store, eating out, wait at the auto-rickshaw stand all became research time. Not to undermine personal memories of the events witnessed, participated in, and experienced from the past.

3.3.3 Ethnography: Issues of Immersion

I identify myself as a Muslim and have lived all my life in two Muslim localities in Delhi. It can safely be claimed that I have always been ‘immersed’ in the ‘culture under study’. Even for formal purposes my consciously aware registering of distinct realities of my surroundings, as such began much before I began this study. Ethnography of this scale was possible only as I had access to the use of my identity as a heuristic attribute/device. The fact that I am an ‘insider’ made it possible that many ways of speaking make sense to me without the speakers having to make everything explicit-just as the participants in my study also knew that they could, communicate to me simply about some of the experiential complexities of being a Muslim in Delhi (India). My identity of being a Muslim as a heuristic device- enabled an understanding of, or
knowledge concerning my participants that would have been cognitively at a level of complexity that would be difficult to discern, at this scale in the given period of time for another researcher who did not have access to this device.

I must point out, though, that I did not begin with the full import or awareness of how I might put my identity to use for making my interactions richer. I did take care of the need to be sensitive to the sensibilities of my study participants in my dress and communication but I also realised quickly that I needed to also project myself as worthy of initiating and facilitating a discussion about Muslims and Muslim localities in Delhi. After all people do not discuss these issues all the time, and they do not ensue or pursue these discussions with anybody and everybody. I perceived that my differences in my position as a researcher and differences in my demeanour needed to be downplayed a little but not entirely eliminated. If I tried to completely eliminate all differences I would have become like everybody with whom you may not want to discuss issues at a given point of time or feel that the discussion was futile.

A mention of my identity as a Muslim woman researcher is extremely pertinent here, especially as a researcher whose enquiry was not focused on issues of women or whose content was not solely gendered nature of phenomenon under study. I found that my own apprehensions were unfounded and definitely coloured by prevalent discourses of researching Muslim populations (despite my best efforts at cautious reading of these discourses). I have had much more difficult time communicating with self-proclaimed feminists on university campuses who find my mix of Muslimness and assertive feminism in my everyday demeanour, personal choices and political positions tough to decode. During my fieldwork, I often interacted with complete strangers with barely a reference and sometimes even made cold calls on people engaged in their day to day life- at their shops, workshops, shopping for groceries, doctors seeing their patients. Always, I found myself welcomed by individuals and families into their homes, extending warm hospitality and amenable to deep and sometimes disturbing discussions. I found myself also welcomed in institutions-madarsa, charitable organisations, coaching classes, occupational associations, informal groups of community leaders, office bearers of RWAs. As it turned out, a large portion of them were men. Many of these people may appear on the face value eligible to be
branded ‘conservative’ in the mainstream discourse but after an initial few awkward moments they not only discussed many issues and experiences openly but also invited me for events they were organising later. Some even sought my council on matters that they thought I could comment on as a Social worker. The group that I found was most comfortable with comprised of older men- with some even deciding that I needed more help with my endeavour and helped me meet other people by inviting their friends to meet me or walking me around the locales that they thought would be of interest to me.

Women participants (of all ages) tended to ask me a lot more questions than men participants regarding my personal experiences and my political stances, and the interviews with them were more conversational and dialogical. This was probably because they wished to explore my positions such that they knew if and how I would judge them or, whether they could be honest and open with me about their true opinions. Some were also curious about my life and asked me questions about my life choices as a married woman, as a mother and my everyday experiences. Interacting with a Muslim woman researcher was a first time experience for most of my participants. Many told me that they appreciated the work I did. Younger men also appeared to be enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and insights. They were aware that these were being registered in a formal research and were confident about their views. I found older men welcoming and keen to engage with me for the research. With a hint of benevolent patriarchy they pointed out that I was much younger and they were passing on their experiences and knowledge of the world to the generations to come through me. All in all, in most cases it appeared that my affiliation with University of Delhi as a scholar and a member of faculty also somehow made the interaction important for them and threw open many sites of interactions that usually are not accessed by Muslim women for a variety of reasons.

This discussion of my experiences as a researcher is not meant to indicate that the gender divide does not exist at all among Muslims. In fact, it is interesting to note that some interviews that could have been very interesting- with educated men who were my contemporary in age and of comparable social standing- never materialised despite my most persistence efforts. Possibly because research like many other human
interactions is rarely a site for communications between equals. It probably made them uncomfortable that being on an equal footing they would not be able to patronise me but neither could they look up to me as a person of authority directing the interview as a researcher. What this does indicate is that the boundaries of the gender divide are not as airtight or straight as they are often made out to be even by Muslims themselves. It also means that my intuitive methodological tightrope act of balancing insider-outsider roles afforded to me a situated view that threw-up deep insights and helped me access the complex and embedded knowledge of people about their own lives.

3.3.4 Sampling

Ethnography is characterised (among others things) by a lack of pre-determined sample. Neither does it have any interest in counting and reaching a certain number of interviews to be considered finished nor does it aim at any ‘probable representativeness’ of the sample. In this study the approach that was adopted to sampling the participants for interviews is Theoretical Sampling. The concept has been borrowed for this study from the grounded theory methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). They define theoretical sampling as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory,” (p 45). Theoretical sampling is valuable in exploratory studies where features of population being studied are not known in advance (Weidemann, 1955, cf Flick, 2009).

Flick (2009) points out the necessity in this form of sampling to define criteria regarding two crucial factors, first being the decision regarding the choice of next case and the decision regarding when to stop recruiting and integrating further cases. Again in both the scenarios the criteria are defined in relation to development of theory. In the first scenario it is promise that the case shows in aiding the theory development and in the latter it is what Glaser and Strauss called the criterion of theoretical saturation.

In this study I began by recruiting a few “excellent participants” (Morse, 2007, p 231) in a targeted, purposeful way and then analysing the data collected from this initial sample to find specific cases relevant to theoretical development. This technique
finds support from recent qualitative research literature which asserts that theoretical sampling is a refined state for sampling for conceptual and theoretical development (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3.5 Nature of Interactions: Real life Methods

Multiplicities of methods were adopted for data collection in the study. These may be clubbed together into an umbrella term- Real Life Methods- such as observations, walking, walking interviews, family interviews, individual interviews, focus group discussions, and autoethnography.

3.3.5.1 Walking as a Research Device

Walking is a privilege that is contingent upon one’s social and class standing. A landless labourer bonded to a landlord would never move beyond the limits of the village community. For an ‘untouchable’, walking was an activity that had to be undertaken in a strictly predefined way, any deviation from which could be fatal. While a trader could travel from the local haat to the town market or wholesale mandis, a woman’s place was the char-divari (four walls). Mobility for women was often spoken of in terms of getting married and traveling to the in-laws’s household in a doli (palanquin) and then in a final journey upon death to cremation ground in an arthi (a cot for carrying corpse in funeral procession). A woman loitering alone or a group of women hanging out in street corners is liable be judged prostitutes or of ‘loose-character’, while the same activity is a routinised daily affair for men. Thus, you can become only as mobile as the limits of your identities would allow you to.

In terms of sociological imagination walking gives you vantage point of being a participant and at the same time a detached observer. Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin talk of this ‘flâneur’ who is the product of modernity much as the ‘tourist’ is.

While walking as an ethnographic researcher, I experienced various emotions such as pleasure, awe, dismay from the sights that I witnessed but I was constantly on the lookout for insights that could challenge the very landscape of discrimination. As a researcher I delved into the everyday mobility patterns of people on one hand, while
on the other, I, myself broke the sluggish structured routes by walking on a meandering, variable and random path within the sites that I was observing (and experiencing).

Solitary walks (loitering) were easy for me in Jamia Nagar because of my familiarity with the place. Parts of Old Delhi and walled city were also not difficult as I had lived here as a child and had continued the connection well into my late adolescence. My walks in these sites were akin to rediscovery. While the geographical distance between Okhla, Jamia Nagar and Nizamuddin is not much, the social distance is also not greatly felt. This helped my forays into Nizamuddin on my own. Jamia Nagar is my domain and my appearance does not raise any eyebrows here. Nizamuddin and Walled city get a lot of outside visitors (tourists etc) so that covered my differences. While Seelampur felt like a space of absolute difference. As a result throughout my ethnographic fieldwork I never grew into a completely independent walker in Trans-Yamuna cluster. It was here that walking interviews helped the most.

Walking and talking with participants of the study was another rich experience as it was accompanied by seeing and showing. The strength of this method was the opportunity available to me as a researcher to validate my interpretation. In case my interpretation of an observation did not fit the participant’s interpretation I could observe the dissonance and reflect into the causes of dissonance. These interviews gave me great starting point of analysing how people experience outdoor spaces and built environments. It also provided more maneuvering room to the participant in deciding where to take me, in what sequence, and from which route. The participant-interviewee had enhanced power to steer the course of interview compared to other kinds of interviews including semi-structured ones. In a way, the participant edited my observations as a researcher like a montage of images that take on a special meaning because of their very organisation and presentation. My interaction with the participants and simultaneously with the spaces that form their lived environment offered me insights that were much more valuable especially for the spaces that I was not familiar with.

During a walking interview, the participants and I would sometimes bump into anyone the participant knew who became curious as to the activity and its purpose.
Metaphorically, this situation could turn the walk into infinite number of directions, but literally it was always a boon for the ethnographic project and, I learnt that even a trip on a tangent may prove to heighten the serendipitous element of fieldwork. The walks (solitary and interview walks) also helped me to develop a tacit knowledge of the spaces or tap into tacit knowledge of the participants about the way spaces are organised. After the walk I took notes of the routes and characteristics of different areas and linked with co-ordinates on a phone GPS device during walks in order to be plotted on a map.

3.3.5.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnography has been called an internalised ethnographic practice in which the researcher uses her lived experiences and personal history as a cultural site (Alexander 2005, p 422). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnograhy as a form that intentionally stretches the limits of individualised cultural identity and its presentation to audiences. While writing memos regarding my interviews or writing observational ethnographic field notes I realised that my own life experiences sometimes threw in additional illustrations into the emerging theoretical narratives because of my own identity as a Muslim resident of Delhi. The feminist methodological underpinning in my work was also the reason why I decided to include a chapter on autoethnography in my thesis in which I analyse my recollections as anthropological data for the study.

3.3.5.3 Home/Family Interviews

Semi-structured interviews of key participants took place at the homes of the participants. To begin with I had not planned interviewing members of same family but because the interviews happened at home sometimes a family member would be listening and would decide to contribute. Also during some individual interviews there were references to another relative with an experience or profile that fulfilled the requirements at hand of theoretical sampling. I requested for a reference and contacted this family member also for interview. It was clear to me that interviewing families together at one site or separately was an extremely powerful method. I always found the narratives illuminated further in detail by supplementary information provided by family members. In case of family members interviewed, especially a parent and an
adult son/daughter there was often a clear difference in analysis of same event in life highlighting generational difference of opinion. In many instances, family members reported that some of the information they shared with me had never ever been discussed explicitly, especially losses incurred by the family during partition and other episodes of communal violence. The interviews conducted at homes were recorded using a digital voice recorder and then a selection of key participants’ (individual and families) interviews was transcribed verbatim to be used as data text.

3.3.5.4 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are a very popular method of qualitative data collection because of the ease with which they can be organised when compared with the rich and valuable data that would otherwise have to be collected through individual interviews. Apart from the ease and efficiency of the process FGDs are especially valuable because of the scope of conversation and discussion amongst the small group of similar participants. The method also corresponds to real life ways in which people form, express and exchange their opinions (Flick 2009). This method was found to be particularly useful in interaction with younger participants who felt more comfortable and confident in groups of their peers. A few group discussions were held with adolescent school children, young professionals in IT enabled industries. One group discussion in Seelampur was also organised with community elders who are active in local politics.

3.3.5.5 Informal Discussions

During the entire period of research I had countless short discussions with individuals and groups that were not recorded or were very short and contained nuggets of useful insights rather than rich and long narratives. These discussions were of great use in determining the possible directions data collections could take and phenomenon that could be studied.

3.3.6 Pictures and Maps

When the study was envisaged I had decided to collect maps and pictures depicting
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Chapter 3

various aspects of representation of Muslims in Delhi into a small archive. As the nature of archival practices demand this was done throughout the duration of the study by collecting those images and visual texts that were created through various discursive processes in their regular course of activity not specifically for this study. Even though these images were not all to be put through analysis the task of collection was a still too unwieldy. Also, the ethnographic engagement pointed that there were many gaps between the realities of these areas and their representations. I therefore decided to also create some maps and take pictures which could possibly lessen this gap. Many of these images that have relevance to the narrative presented in subsequent chapters have been included in printed copy of the thesis. All the images procured that were not in digital form were scanned and have been organised in a small digital archive attached with the thesis in a DVD.

3.3.7 The Issue of Validity of Methods

This study takes the position that there are more than three sides from which a phenomenon may be approached. The prime concern was not to ascertain a truth out-there and test its validity by a triangulation of methods but rather to use diverse methods to crystallise (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963) the findings which is achieved when a multiplicity of methods adds ‘rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry’ (Flick cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p 5)

3.4 Recording, Treatment and Analysis of Data

The formal individual, group and family interviews were digitally recorded, except in a few cases when the participants did not wish to record the interactions. Apart from digital voice recording and then transcribing interviews and group discussions, I maintained a research diary which included field notes regarding my own observations and inferences. Verbatim transcription of recordings was done but roman script was used for ease in typing. I also maintained a record of some personal details of the key participants whose interviews were transcribed. My auto-ethnographic account was another textual data source. Apart from this some media texts such as news reports regarding some selected news events from two English mainstream news dailies and a selection of popular Bollywood films were included. Finally, some of the information
shared by the participants regarding the Muslim localities was plotted on maps using popular web based applications such as Google earth and Google maps. These maps and maps from secondary sources were also used as textual data to be analysed.

Considering the volume of data collected only those interviews were transcribed that pertained closely to the research questions. The transcripts, observation notes, and memos on interviews and group discussions were labeled and dated to keep them organised. The context of each interaction in the field was recorded along with the information and comments on the profile of key participants in documentation sheets.

### 3.4.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is an approach of analysing texts with an implicit assumption that different kinds of texts (in this case, news reports, features and films etc) draw on wider hegemonic discourses circulating within the public space to construct their narratives and also act as tools for reproducing power relations. Discourse analysis is different from content analysis and conversation analysis as the focus shifts from
syntactic or linguistic analysis to, what is called in Foucauldian terms, tracing the archaeology (in local discourses) and genealogy (formalisation of these discourses into disciplines) of the subject. In other words, the primary concern in discourse analysis is to trace out the history of “how a set of ‘statements’ get converted into the subject itself” (emphasis added Perakyla, 2005, p 871). Often discourse analysis is associated with postmodernism and allied approaches because it of the foucauldian association and also because it seems to embrace the multiple and fragmented meanings behind texts. But discourse analysis is found to be in congruence with the general thrust of this work being capable of adaptation of Marxist notion of ideological content in texts. Discourse analysis has been selected as the appropriate approach to data analysis for this study as it ,is especially suited to discover the conditions that underlie the production and content of textual data, and the assumptions on which it is based.

3.4.1.1 Thematising Text to Discern Discourses

Verbatim transcripts of interviews and groups discussions, and field observation notes and memos were read again and again to discern thematic patterns. Often, I would play the recordings and try to ‘listen’ to the patterns. An against-the-grain reading and listening of the texts was performed purposively in order to discern counter-narrative

Figure 3.3: Thematising Narratives
themes. Simultaneous free association with and comparison between photographs, maps, news reports and films further helped in the thematising process. Theoretical sampling was applied continually as the themes kept emerging and data was enriched through subsequently more focused interactions. Portions of text being analysed was extracted and translated (since most of it was in Hindi-Urdu). The analysis of text within a thematic category was analysed studying closely the framework of context in which the text was produced and the interpretive repertoire used in the text by the participant. Throughout the process of analysis writing remains an integral part.

3.4.2 Writing Ethnography

The narratives woven and presented in the study are sought to be poised as counternarratives—counter to the various mainstream narratives. The ‘against-the-grain’ approach of these counternarratives is especially suited for an attempted process of deliberate disruption by exposing the complexity and inherent contradiction of the ‘official’ and accepted discourses (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005). This work aims to represent Muslims in Delhi in a theoretical model. A theoretical model, which may not be an exact replica of the actual communities since some kind of distortions are bound to occur but rather like an Impressionist painting—brushing small dabs of paint
rather than broad strokes. It also involves lot of broad outdoor impressions (plien painting) of to catch a fleeting yet all-embracing glimpse of impression of details and lighting. The attempt is to emphasise researcher’s (artist’s) perception of the subject as much as the depiction of the subject per se.

In the chapters to come in this thesis, the narratives of the participants collected using the aforementioned real-life methods will unfold. These would be analysed for their discursive content. In order to set the context for the same, the next chapter presents a brief but reflexive autoethnographic account of my experiences as a Muslim resident of Delhi. Biographical accounts, whether of the researcher or of the other participant in an ethnographic research, are of obvious immense value (Denzin, 1989, 1997). It is through these accounts of the everyday life being communicated between spaces and people and media that an alternative and comprehensive ‘story’ of urban Muslims in Delhi is sought to be ‘painted’.