

The struggle to belong
Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.
Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

**Spatiality of Differential Belonging: Variable (but Durable)
Marginalities among Muslims in Delhi**
Ghazala Jamil

Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011
Session number:29
Slums ghettos and the internal peripheries of the global urban

Assistant Professor,
Department of Social Work
University of Delhi

Address: 3, University Road,
Delhi-110007
India

e-mail: ghazalajamil@gmail.com

Abstract

Civic neglect by the state, discriminatory treatment of its agencies, and insecurity among urban Indian Muslims are prime reasons of their marginalisation and ghetto formation. Discourses on the related issues have long focused on the fact that margins separate and exclude. But not all Muslim localities in Delhi today are homogenous slums or classical 'ghettos'. During the last six to eight years Muslim neighbourhoods in Delhi have undergone changes that are complex in nature and merit fresh scrutiny.

While a people may be 'othered' because of some selected identity that separates them from the rest, they may themselves have varying perceptions regarding whom they belong with. Just as some boundaries are drawn by others to exclude, some are drawn by people within them to maintain 'exclusivity' or to 'preserve' their 'distinctiveness'. The subsets of people in these two kinds of boundaries may not always be mutually exclusive and may intersect. This is not to say that some parts of the Muslim neighbourhoods in Delhi have not fallen to 'hyperghettoisation' (Wacquant 2008) but that is not the only trend. Older Muslim neighbourhoods are altered in size, composition and scale of economic activity and have turned into contiguous clusters of several neighbourhoods with distinct features. New localities have also come up, many of which are gated enclaves of the more affluent among the Muslims.

In this paper, I attempt to present an account of the creation of these islands and oases of people whose sense of belonging with each other is a complex feeling that is subject to forces such as regional, lingual, class identities or professions etc even though they have all been lumped together because of their 'Muslimness'. For them, being on the margins of the city is less about one's undeviating and subservient status in the city and more a process of experiencing continuous progression of events and processes such as communal riots in the country, terrorist attacks and consequent targeting/stereotyping of Muslims as 'Islamic' terrorists or their supporters and, even globalisation and liberalisation. These events and experiences have meant that people needed to review and evaluate afresh the opportunities and choices available to them. I, thus, explore how individuals and families experience these changes in the spatiality of Muslim neighbourhoods, how it impacts their sense of belongingness and how people negotiate the intersection of these multiple, differential boundaries. Finally, I attempt to present a discerning picture of Muslim localities in Delhi that describes the altered logic of crafting margins and delineating spaces in which the variability and flexibility of these boundaries ensure that they are also durable and shatterproof.

Introduction

In absolute numbers 7-8 million people get added to urban population of India every year. 98 million people migrated in the 90s across India, an increase of 22% over the previous decade. 35 mega and metro cities in the country account for 37.8% of the total urban population. Delhi has outgrown all other urban centres since 1951- above 50% per decade. But unlike many other cities and even metropolises of India urbanization is not a new process in Delhi. Delhi has seen over 3000 years of continuous urban settlement.

11.7% of Delhi's population is Muslim (1,623,520 in absolute numbers- 2001 census). Only 66.6% are literate as compared to 82.8% Hindus. According to the Sachar Committee Report (2006) urban Muslims face much higher relative deprivation than Muslims in rural India. For the year 2004-05, the all India average Mean per Capita Expenditure (at current prices) for urban areas was Rs. 1,105. In comparative terms the figures were, upper caste Hindus (Rs.1,469), Other Minorities (Rs.1,485), OBC Hindus (Rs.955), Muslims (Rs. 804) and SCs/STs (Rs. 793). Thus, the MPCE of upper caste

Hindus was nearly 80% more than that of Muslims and SCs/STs. A substantially larger proportion of the Muslim households in urban areas are in the less than Rs.500 expenditure bracket. The participation of Muslims in regular jobs in urban areas is quite limited compared to even the traditionally disadvantaged SCs/STs.

With this very brief backdrop of socio-economic status of Muslims in Delhi, let us go a little further back in history of Delhi to the revolt of 1857. After the British crushed the revolt and regained control of India, they judged all Muslims to be rebels and went after them ruthlessly. In fact all Muslims were evicted from the city and their properties confiscated (Khalidi, 2006). Many residents recount hearing stories about Muslims required to get a permit issued from their employer in order to gain entry in the city to work. This obviously took a huge toll on the community from which it took a lot of time to recover. Institutions like Dilli College and Hamdard Waqf (Trust) played a commendable role in this recuperation. When the anti-Muslim sentiment among the British ebbed, the walled city became a community of small manufacturers, shopkeepers and skilled workers. At the turn of twentieth century Muslims constituted 32.5% of the total population of Delhi (Khalidi, 2006).

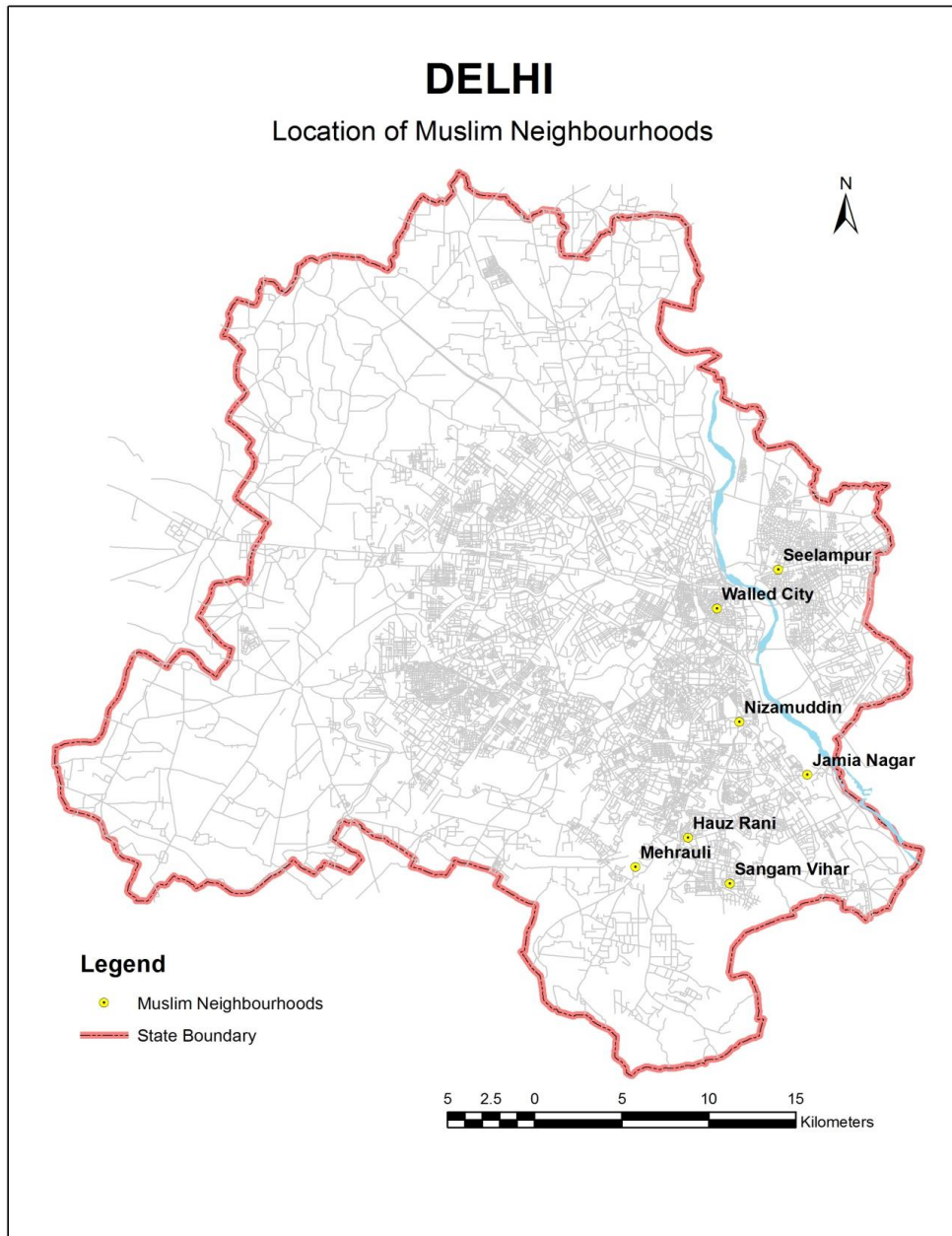
But before they fully recuperated the partition of British India into independent India and Pakistan befell them. People of Delhi actually experienced independence as rioting, looting and stabbings. By September 1947, 60 percent of the Muslims of Old Delhi and 90 percent of New Delhi had fled their homes. Between 20,000 and 25,000 were said to have been killed. Towards the end of October about 1.5 lakh of Delhi's 5 lakh Muslims remained." (Pandey, 2001). From the other side of newly crafted border Delhi received the highest number of refugees for a single city. The population of Delhi grew from under 1 million (917,939) to a little less than 2 million (1,744,072) in the period 1941-1951. (Census of India, 1941 and 1951).

The next wave of destruction came during the period of Emergency, in 1975, when many parts of the walled city were bulldozed after forced evictions of mostly Muslim residents. Post 70's Muslim population was living scattered in pockets in Old Delhi, Okhla, Basti Hzt. Nizamuddin, Mehrauli and Seelampur. According to 2001 census 11.7% of Delhi's population was Muslim. (1,623,520 in absolute numbers). Very small portion of this population can trace their earlier generation residing in Delhi before 1947, a vast majority being migrants from UP and Bihar.

The pockets of Muslim population got consolidated (some even expanded) after each communal riot in the country especially the post Babri Masjid demolition riots in 1992 and Gujarat pogrom in 2002¹. It would be useful to note that discourses on African

¹ In February 2002 a Pogrom was unleashed by Hindutva (Hindu Nationlist) brigade against Muslims at various places in the Indian state of Gujarat. Ahmedabad, Surat and were the worst affected cities but Muslim families and businesses were attacked in many rural settlements as well across Gujarat. Muslims were brutally killed by murderous and organized mobs in an insane, frenzied death ritual under the protective gaze of the police for over a week. Thousands of families were driven out of their houses to 'refugee' camps and later to cramped Muslim ghettos. The surviving victims did not receive any relief or

American ghettos in the USA have long been employed to spawn research and popular imagination of Muslim localities in Delhi as dense, congested hubs of criminal activity. This study chose to limit itself for the purpose of commenting on issues related to belonging, to three clusters of Muslim population in Delhi- Seelampur and other Trans-Yamuna areas; Walled city in central part of Delhi and; Jamia Nagar in South Delhi.



compensation from the state government. Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi's BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party- a Hindu nationalist outfit) government, was alleged to be complicit to the violence. Modi is on record rationalising the pogrom as a 'spontaneous' reaction to the Godhra incident which took place on February 27, 2002 when a group of 'karsevaks' returning from controversial Babri Masjid-Ram Janmbhumi in Ayodhya were burnt alive in the train compartment they were travelling in just a few hundred metres from Godhra Railway station near a Muslim ghetto. The train was alleged to be set on fire by Muslim mobs in a pre-planned move. In the ensuing violence thousands of women were raped and killed.

A 'Ghetto' Resident

Sometimes days pass by before I explicitly think of many of my identities- academician, woman, mother, friend etc-etc. One of my identities, though, crops up more often than all others. I am a Muslim. I have realized that I am required to deal with this identity more frequently than others *because I live in Zakir Nagar*. While hiring a taxi-rickshaw, calling for pizza delivery, applying for a credit card or for my daughter's admission in a school- these and hundreds of other everyday tasks have to do with where I live, and the experience that follows invariably reminds me of my 'muslimness'. Zakir Nagar in Delhi is one of many areas in urban India where the overwhelming majority of residents are Muslim. These areas are commonly identified as Muslim 'ghettos' in both academic and non-academic parlance. They show most or all signs of being classical ghettos- spatial segregation based on identity, the near total absence of state- except in its role as an agency of surveillance and domination, the cutting off of economic ties with neighbouring localities and the rest of the city and, coming up of parallel institutions within the locality to serve the basic needs of the people (Wacquant, 2009).

In the Metropolitan Indian urban spaces, contrary to their representation of being 'melting pots' in the popular imagination, identities are layered, fractured and, complex. Existence of people as different from each others may be presented as adding to the diversity and colour of urban mosaic but a closer look will uncover divisive and discriminatory processes of identity formation. The question of identity is anything but absent. Within the layers of identity formation there are people who have the power to compose identities more or less at will. For example, at a given instant of time upper middle class youth may project themselves as responsible citizens at a candle light protest, but in the next instant they exercise their choice and can be devil-may-care party boppers featured in a tabloid. Bauman has captured accurately the predicament of the marginalised and excluded people- like Muslims in India, when he points out that at "the other end are crowded those whose access to identity choice has been barred, people who are given no say in deciding their preferences and who in the end are burdened with identities enforced and imposed *by others*; identities which they themselves resent but are not allowed to shed and cannot manage to get rid of. Stereotyping, humiliating, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities..." (Bauman 2004. pp 38).

What exactly are the factors in Muslim marginalization in Delhi is a complex question that has been answered variously, yet there can be little denying that large scale poverty, the activities of the far right and the global Islamaphobia have impacted the way the word 'Muslims' becomes configured. Embedded within this, lies the conception that Islam is a foreign imposition and being Hindu is a natural condition of Indians. Denied of individuality and cast outside the mainstream city space, Muslims in Delhi, nevertheless, contest and negotiate the homogenised monolithic and almost hideous identity thrust upon them.

In the eighteenth century Europe, Bauman (2004) tells us, 'society' was a localized phenomenon owing to very little contact with the outside world. He explains that owing to decreasing distances and 'holding powers' of a neighbourhood set the stage for identity to be born as a *problem*. But before that, fixing of identities was a *task* that needed to be completed. "The margins swelled rapidly, invading the core areas of human cohabitation. Suddenly, the question of identity needed to be asked." (Bauman 2004: pp) But in case of India, even before the advent of Islam, Caste System ensured that the question was an important one for individuals even in localised village societies as well as in the urban townships. '*Kaun jaat?*' (of which caste?) has always been a part of an Indian society however localized or small. So Bauman's assertion that asking 'who you are' makes sense only if you believe you can be something else and have a choice does not hold true entirely in India. Dalits- lower caste Indians never did since the firm establishment of *Varna* in India. But he is right in asserting that "the idea of 'identity' was born out of the crisis of belonging" out of the gap between "what is" and "what ought to be". It can be inferred from Bauman's description of identity that urbanisation is an intrinsic part of the development/presence of a scenario where owing to tight spatial organization and close proximity the gap becomes much more visible/perceptible and thus, paradoxically, wider.

In this paper, I hope to illuminate the heterogeneity and *differential belonging* among Muslims in Delhi with respect to their multiple, sometimes different sometimes overlapping caste, class, regional, lingual and, professional identities. This is attempted through an examination of the processes of creation and expression of social identities of Muslims in Delhi in 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 of Delhi.

Prison Ghetto

On the eastern side of river Yamuna, popularly called trans-Yamuna in Delhi is a belt of exclusive or predominantly Muslim settlements beginning from Seelampur and extending to Loni Border including Gautam puri, Jafferabad, Welcome etc. Seelampur and Welcome are first two in this belt and were essentially resettlement colonies of Muslims evicted during Emergency from Yamuna Bazar, Dilli Gate, Turkman Gate, Daryaganj and Ballimaran areas of old city and various other parts of the city. In later years, a large number of people from western UP also migrated to Seelampur. Some areas of this belt of *jhuggi* (shanty) squatters and slum resettlement colonies have lower caste poor Hindu population too in varying proportions but in the largely Muslim population Hindus remain concentrated and separately on Hindus only streets. The localities are a very picture of dereliction. The lanes crisscross the small shanties and one-room dwellings of corrugated roofs. People literally live half their day to day lives on the street. Sitting and working in front of their houses, some even bathing or cooking. There is not enough space and there are no public services to speak of. From their meagre earnings people take money out to pay the quack doctors for medicines. In the

name of educational institutions there are a few government schools where most people allege they teach nothing. People do not make attempts to keep their children in schools because the experiences of discrimination have worn them out and made them cynical about value of education in building livelihoods. Some children go to the Madarsas to learn to read the scriptures. Most Madarsas are themselves shacks or permanent but almost bare structures. Many are also residential. There are predominantly children from districts of Bihar which were ravaged by floods almost three years ago- residing and reading scriptures. Everyone seems weary. And everyone is wary of visitors.

Almost everyone I spoke to in Jafferabad, Welcome and Silampur recounted some other part of the city or country that they belonged to. Girls working at home to strip wire or sorting out metal from assorted scrap said they came from the walled city. There were workers in small manufacturing workshops in shanties or at home- making bangles, artificial scissors, stitching sequins to cloth, tailoring in denim units said they were from various towns of UP and Bihar. Everyone tried to sound as if they came from 'home' to go somewhere and just happened to 'stop-by' at these localities in 'trans-Yamuna'- "*hum to yahan ke nahin hein...*" (literally, we are not from here). They feel belong elsewhere- because belonging is also association and identification. In her work on Emergency Emma Tarlo says that "A map indicating the key sites of demolition may look more like a bombardment plan than a development plan (the similarity is not incidental), but it testifies to the varied spatial trajectories of the displaced. This means that although today the inhabitants of Welcome are based within the confines of a single colony they carry with them memories and experiences of elsewhere." (Tarlo 2003, pp 15).

People feel they belong when they are among people like themselves. And if they say they belong- they accept the similarity in identity and semblance in social circumstances. They stay together without any cohesive element to keep them together but only their experience, memory and fear of violence. In their life experiences and shared memories of riots, evictions people know that their 'muslimness' warrants violence. Ghetto is persuasive because it offers protection from violence. Then, from this account, belonging is first and foremost protection from violence. Whether we like it or not we belong where we are safe.

Limits to the choices available to the trans-Yamuna Muslims are also circumscribe this sense of belonging. In my discussions with young girls in their early twenties about work and daily life at silampur Huma says, "*bohot gandagi hai yahan... koi suvidha bhi nahin hai. Log itne kharab hein koi kisi ki madad nahin karta. par ham bachpan se yahan hein yahan ka to sara system humko pata hai. Kaam hai... aur kahan jayen... wahan kya karenge?*" (trans- this place is so dirty... we get no services... people are so bad that no one helps anyone. But we have been living here from childhood. We know the system here. We have work... if we moved from here where will we go? What will we do there?)

To the fear of violence add the fear of the unfamiliar. 'Belonging' in a poor Muslim ghetto is not a warm fuzzy feeling similar to those of invoked by the common usage of

the word. If these skilled and unskilled workers of the silampur could sell their labour and set up their manufacturing units outside the ghetto freely, without discrimination and fear for property and life their material conditions could be different, but as Wacquant (2009) points out, the ghetto becomes a prison for its inhabitants incarcerating its members as a dishonoured category while it severely curtails their life chances in support of the “monopolisation of ideal and material goods or opportunities” (Weber 1918, quoted in Wacquant) by the dominant group living outside the ghetto.

Museum Ghetto

Jama Masjid is peculiar in the number of visitors these places. Both areas have some religious and historical significance. What is part of daily life of some Muslims in other localities becomes here (and in Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin) a full time occupation for the residents. Their lives become a distinct cultural theatre for visitors to watch and be entertained. On any given day you can find Delhi’s Muslim and non-Muslim small time intellectual celebrities taking groups of people on guided ‘walks’ here. Not only the historical monuments and spiritual/religious shrines in the areas but the less significant buildings, the history and legacy of partition, the dresses, the restaurants, the smells become live artefacts and installations for the visitors and tourists (many of them Muslims from other parts of Delhi and elsewhere) and give them some stimulus for their curiosity regarding Muslims and ‘muslimness’.

Despite the fact that of all the ghetto clusters in Delhi Jama Masjid and other parts of walled city get the most visitors of the general kind (Silampur gets mostly social workers and social science researchers) the people of this Muslim Ghetto people seem to be living in an almost-time-warp. They operate their businesses- their museum kiosks with cultural finesse to make a living. The businesses are old and owners are full of curious old stories of grandiosity of olden days and VIP visitors who frequent their business. Talk to anyone from the walled city and they will tell you that what you see is just a shadow that remains of the grand Delhi *Tehzeeb* (culture) and that Muslims and Hindus both shared this *tehzeeb*. Mr Qamar’s family came to Khari Baoli Delhi from Muzaffarnagar in western UP in 1942, when his father got a job with popular Urdu Shama Magazine. He says the walled city residents called themselves ‘*Dilliwallah*’ (Delhiite), looked down upon anyone- including Delhi Muslims who did not reside within the walls of the old city. Here only a *dilliwallah* ‘belongs’. In adjoining markets- Chawri Bazaar, Nai Sarak, Chandni Chowk thousands of homeless daily wage labourers find employment. A large proportion of these are Muslim migrants from eastern UP, Bihar and, Bengal. They work during the day and sleep out in the open compound in front of the Jama Masjid. The *Dilliwallah* petty shopkeepers, retailers, small traders and middlemen do not think the homeless Muslim labourers belong with them and the homeless themselves cannot even confidently say that they are even citizens of India. Belonging is also an issue embroiled in class and culture.

My own family used to live in Bara Hindu Rao, which was a mixed locality of Punjabi Hindus and local Muslims in the old Delhi outside the walled city. My parents had migrated from Faizabad in eastern UP just before the emergency in 1974 and always remained outsiders both to the Muslims and the Hindus. My family shifted from Bara Hindu Rao to Zakir Nagar in 1985 after we were witness to anti-Sikh rioting and massacres in wake of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination. My elder brother was a teenager and about to finish his schooling- a fact which prompted my father to decide that it was time to move to Jamia Nagar located then, on the outskirts of Delhi, so that he could study at Jamia Millia Islamia. I and my two siblings, in fact pursued our graduate and post graduate studies from the Jamia.

Some families shifting outside the Jama Masjid area moved to Jamia Nagar because the area's proximity to Jamia Millia Islamia a central university but the small manufacturers, and skilled workers either moved only their work places or both workplace and residence to Seelampur due to its close proximity to the old Delhi for availability of work orders and supply of raw materials.

Ghetto of Hope

Jamia Nagar- at present a cluster of several contiguous small and big localities now. At the time my family moved to this area it consisted mainly of small settlements separated from each other by small tracts of forest like growth. Mr Shakeel, whose wealthy family came from a village in Aligarh in western UP to invest in the soon booming real estate business in the area, opines that most of these people were scared to live in the vast open areas adjoining the river Yamuna. There were still some wild animals in the woods and nights were especially difficult with swarms of mosquitoes and fear aroused by howling hyenas etc. Joga bai and Okhla were old villages of Hindu Gujars and Yadavs. Ghafoor Nagar and Batla House were small but dense clusters of double storied box like houses and narrow lanes similar to old Delhi where mostly teachers and clerical staff etc working in the Jamia lived. Some residents held jobs in other Muslim institutions or in government jobs. There were also some residents who had been evicted from Turkman gate in walled city during the Emergency.

Some old Delhi residents recognised the opportunity for investment but confess today that they never seriously entertained the thought of shifting to Jamia Nagar. Culturally, and in terms of infrastructure, access to markets and other amenities etc the two places were poles apart. Jamia Nagar made no display of its 'muslimness'- probably making the *Dilliwallahs* feel out of place. The openness of the area also attracted some old Delhi residents whose joint-extended families had grown too large to be accommodated in small dwellings in the walled city. High premium was placed on education and people saw their shift to the area as a progressive move. Any sacrifices and hardships in daily life were mentioned with pride and borne with a brave front. It was their chance to an almost-escape. Jamia continued to attract people slowly but steadily with the promise of education and possibly jobs from Delhi and UP. The Jamia continued to be a focal point

of community cohesion even for those who had neither studied at Jamia nor worked there. Mr Rizwan (name changed) came to Delhi as a young journalist from Aurangabad in Maharashtra. He initially landed up in Hauzrani area which is an old village in south Delhi inhabited by a large number of Mewati (or Meo) Muslims originally from the Mewat region of neighbouring state of Haryana. Mr Rizwan says that the place was steeped in the orthodox and feudal culture and values of Mewati people that he felt like the odd one out who always was uncomfortably different from everyone else in the locality. When he came to Jamia Nagar the first time he says he felt like he belonged there because Zakir Nagar's openness allowed him to blend right in. Even among strangers here he felt his family was safe.

In 1990, as part of Ramjanmbhoomi² Movement wide spread Hindu right-wing mobilisation by the *Rath Yatra* (literally, chariot journey) led by LK Advani, Leader of Hindu Nationalist party BJP left a trail of anti-Muslim riots and massacres in many parts of North India. Beginning with this event, the entire period that includes the decade of 1990s and culminated in 2002 Gujarat Pogrom- Jamia Nagar saw a surge of in-migrants from various parts of north India especially from Bihar. The area saw unprecedented expansion. All the green forest tracts were gone and many new colonies came up. In the meantime, the Jamia also grew from a laid back educational institution with moderate academic ambitions to a hub of professional courses. Teachers, social workers, engineers, lawyers, media professionals were being trained there and finding jobs in the new liberalised regime. Upcoming business sectors in India- BPOs, software firms, TV channels etc needed a large number of skilled people to perform jobs and were willing to hire even Muslims. The profit motivation in these industries could not afford to continue making stringent identity distinction, marking a beginning of a new trend unlike a long standing trend of very low representation of Muslims in public services and private jobs.

A middle class locality to begin with now Jamia Nagar became more diverse in terms of economic classes. The affluent among the residents clustered together in some part of the locality- Zakir Nagar Extension, Joga Bai extension, Johari Farms came up as affluent enclaves. The residents even though affluent could not leave the ghetto either because the threat and fear of violence or in numerous instances house and plot owners in the other parts of the city where Hindus lived would not sell/rent their property to Muslims. The residents of these oases of affluence sought to put up gates to enclose themselves and preserve their exclusivity. They were in Jamia Nagar but they felt they did not entirely belong.

The ghetto grows like a living organism. After exhausting all the possibilities of expanding horizontally, some are even growing vertically upwards- building multi-storied flats to packing in as many people as possible in a bid not to spill over the

² Literally, Birth place of Ram. A long standing controversy over a mosque in holy town of Ayodhya in UP. Which is alleged to be the birthplace of Hindu God Ram. The controversy is mired in numerous legal disputes but more importantly is at the epicentre of Anti-Muslim mobilisation in the country by the Hindu right.

boundary. It is a comforting thought to know that there are hundreds of thousands of individuals like you and families like yours, who have similar fears and desires. Muslims arrived here at various points in the history... points when history wasn't too kind to them. '75, '84, '92... and 2002. Willingly or otherwise they were forced to take some decisions- To decide where they belong.

Sometimes willingly and sometimes grudgingly, people also 'self-categorise' themselves exaggerating the similarities of those in the same group and exaggerating the differences between those in different groups thus 'stereotyping' (Oaks, Haslam, Turner; 1990s) them. One's self-concept is influenced by gaze of the 'other'. In simpler terms, the awareness that I am being looked at and judged as a stereotyped individual belonging to an already formed category, influences even the way I think about my 'self'. This exchange of gaze between self and other is a dynamic process that depends only a little on actual experiences or information but draws a lot from historical context and emotional content of inter-group relations. Accordingly, stereotypes cannot be seen as "irrational and invalid cognitive prejudices" (Turner, 1999). Exaggerated stereotypes are only a result of "rational selectivity of perception in which it is more appropriate to see people in some context at the level of social category identity than at the level of personal identity".

It would be useful to draw in a discussion of power of social groups. Those groups that have more power see their own image in a more positive light and position themselves at a relatively higher status. More powerful group seeks to distance itself from the less powerful. While the powerful group employs increased ethnocentric and discriminatory practices and attitudes, in context of Hindu-Muslim relations this results in formation of Muslim ghettos because Muslims find it extremely difficult to rent or buy accommodation in Hindu areas. An offshoot of this process is akin to 'sanskritisation' process whereby the low power group may become socially creative or adopt the strategy of individual upward mobility.

It is also in this light that I see the gated enclaves of affluent Muslims within and outside these ghettos. Still shunned from the affluent Hindu areas they resort to using a new group membership as a source of positive self-esteem. Social identity perspective emphasises that 'Social Conflicts' are psychologically meaningful phenomenon that are a way of people defining themselves and their understanding of the reality of inter-group relations. Social conflicts may be rational reactions of people with a particular historical understanding of themselves in relation to the social structure.

The ghetto grows like a living organism. After exhausting all the possibilities of expanding horizontally, some are even growing vertically upwards. Building multi-storied flats to pack in as many people as possible, in a bid not to spill over the boundary. It is a comforting thought to know that there are hundreds of thousands of

individuals like you and families like yours. Who have similar fears and desires. Muslims arrived here at various points in the history... points when history wasn't too kind to them. '75, '84, '92... and 2002. Willingly or otherwise they were forced to take some decisions- To decide where they belong.

Thus, this process of defining, redefining and forging new identities is always carried on differentially. People exercise agency in whatever limited scope available to them in proportion to their power through a play of comparisons, contrasts, and identifications. This is why lumping together of people because they are Muslims does not make them stick together as Muslims *only*. The Muslim identity (like any other identity!) is thus, not a root identity for these people. For deconstructionists such as Derrida and Spivak there always lurks a 'suspicion of origins'- the idea that identities can be traced back to some original root. Spivak approaches this same issue from a different direction. According to her, identity itself can be viewed as a reflexive 'gift' (as in 'given?') stuck in a churning network of identities within the ideological constraints of society. For example, exiled persons may pass as natives, a person with black ancestry may pass as white, queers may "pass" for straight, or a Muslim may "pass" for a Hindu etc in hostile situations. The idea of agency and subjectivity are entangled. A Muslim subject strives to 'give up' a part of his or her identity so that a new identity is 'returned'. The 'gift' sought is a more favorable subjectivity (hence socio-political agency) of the Muslim as reflected in the eyes of those who would otherwise brand this person as "other". One example may be Muslims seeking to be recognised differentially- as educated/moderate/progressive Muslims. Identity is, hence, a social complex that inevitably gets internally tangled up with compromises that can be favorable or not. Indeed, when we "give" ourselves different identities in different contexts, we inevitably reshape the geographies within which we are role-playing.

Spivak further contends that if identity has the capacity to assume the properties of the gift, it can also assume both the "use value" (its intrinsic potential for utility) and the "exchange-value" (its value in a system of equivalence that is arbitrary) of the commodity. Drawing from her work, we may say that for Muslims identity has some use-value in the schema of society but little exchange-value, since religious identity cannot reach a point where it establishes an equivalence with another facet of identity as rooted so deeply within both the self and society (subjectivity and agency). Any compromise; the bartering of other facets of identity is thus an individual, internal, symbolic act never uninformed by the surrounding society. For a Muslim subaltern, this means subordination to the communal codes that constitute their subjectivity, for they must be, to a certain extent, validated by those in power. In Hegel's words, "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself by virtue of the fact that it is in and for itself for another. That is, it exists only in being recognized" (Rauch 20). As such, the Muslims locate their internal and social agency in relation to the gaze of the Hindus, whose eyes

reflect those ideas that paradoxically produce them as inferior objects of suspicion and whose gaze is somewhat regulated by the paternal gaze of British colonialism.

In a subaltern reading of Muslim history, it can be seen how colonial English writers-bureaucrats and missionaries presented a convenient image of the Muslim rule to legitimize the British seizure of India from the remnants of the Mughal Empire. Indian historians and writers uncritically borrowed these colonial narratives on the 'Hindu' India and 'Muslim' ruler – despotic, foreign and imperial – as authoritative statements about India's past. "Subaltern," Spivak insists, is not "just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie." She points out that in Gramsci's original covert usage (being obliged to encrypt his writing to get it past prison censors), it signified "proletarian," whose voice could not be heard, being structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. In postcolonial terms, "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern- a space of difference. Now who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern" (deKock interview). Residents of Muslim enclaves are not simply claiming disenfranchisement within the system of hegemonic discourse. It is not that they can speak and feel they are not being given their turn, but that within the mechanics of the discrimination they are already spoken for- their own voices situated outside the hegemonic discourse.

References:

- Ahmed, Aijazuddin. 1995. *Muslims in India- Volume III (Delhi)*. New Delhi: Inter-India Publications
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2004. *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecci*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Hussain, Sabiha. 2008. *Exposing the Myths of Muslim Fertility: Gender and Religion in a Resettlement Colony of Delhi*. New Delhi: Promilla and Bibliophile South Asia
- Khalidi, Omar. 2006. *Muslims in Indian Economy*. New Delhi: Three Essays Collective
- Oakes JP, Haslam SA and Turner JC. 1994. *Stereotyping and Social reality*. Wiley-Blackwell
- Tarlo, Emma. 2003. *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's Emergency*. New Delhi: Permanent Black
- Wacquant, Loic. 2009. *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Government of India. 2001. *Census of India, 2001*
- _____ 2006. *Social Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Community of India (Sachar Committee Report)*. Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat
- De Kock, Leon. Vol 23, No 3. 1992. An interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Ariel: A review of international English literature*
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 2001. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*. Cambridge: University Press
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 1998. Can the Subaltern Speak? in Nelson and Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press