

Identity and Marginalisation: A Sociological Study of Muslims in Kanpur

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The present paper deals with the ghettoization of Muslims in Premnagar, Kanpur and their everyday negotiation for space and resources within a small area which also defines their life in a whole new way. It also tried to look at the socio-economic condition of the locals which often gets deteriorated due to constraint of movement and participation with the "mainstream" society. An exploration into their-socio economic experiences and their way of imaging in life in ghettos gives us an understanding of lives at those "marginal" spaces of a city. It gives us an understanding of Issue of governance and their sense of citizenship.

Introduction

Muslims of India since Independence (and partition) have undergone historical marginalisation. Hindu-Muslim communalism of pre-independence era has given way to Post-Independence communalism in India. Communal riots of past few decades have led to social and economic marginalisation of Muslims. The more obvious example of it would be segregated Muslim localities. Though communal tendency is visible from both the religious group, this segregation intensified in India with the rise of Hindu right groups which has created a discourse of ethno-nationalism where citizenship or rightful belongingness is determined by one's faith; people of faith having "foreign origin" are perceived as not worthy of citizenship or at worst traitor.

Similar to many other major cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta and Hyderabad, Muslim population in Kanpur also is seen to be concentrated in specific places like Chakanganj, Bekanganj, Premnagar etc. A few literature available on the marginalization of Muslims in a

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metropolitan city argues that this tendency to shift to a particular place starts from the partition of 1947 and continues till now. As the literatures argue, it increased in India after some “critical events” like “anti-Sikh riots” and “Babri Mosque demolition” in India (particularly with reference to Muslim ghettos in North India). This segregation of Muslims from mainstream society converted into ghettos and becomes a space with full sense of “security” for them. People of the same religious and cultural affinity started living in a homogeneous group and developed their own space and resources.

The present paper deals with the Marginalisation of Muslims in Prem Nagar, Kanpur and their everyday negotiation for space and resources within a small area which also defines their life in a whole new way. It also tried to look at the socio-economic condition of the locals which often gets deteriorated due to constraint of movement and participation with the “mainstream” society. An exploration into their socio-economic experiences and their way of imaging in life in ghettos gives us an understanding of lives at those congested spaces of the city. It gives us an understanding of Issue of governance and their sense of citizenship.

Objective of the Study:

To understand the socio-historical aspect of Premnagar and also to understand the how the contemporary demographic pattern came into being.

To understand the impact of the governmental affairs within their locality level and how the issue of governance is different from the “middle class” or porch inhabited localities?

To understand the space within different temporalities connected to the locality along with their social relations.

To understand their sense of citizenship and question of nationality inside that marginal space they live in

Research Methodology

I have tried to understand the Ghettoization of Muslim community and their life style and the impact of governance. For the purpose, of the study I have chosen Premnagar area of Kanpur. The intent was to historically trace segregation and/or ghettoization with the political developments, particularly with rise of right wing Hindutva politics. However, within a

limited period, and due methodological issues, it was difficult to do justice to the topic. Hence, I have tried to unravel the Issues of space, governance and its impact on their life style within the Ghetto or outside.

This study relied on qualitative approach; ethnography was employed to do a descriptive study of the field site. The aim was to collect needed data of the field. The study since encompasses a larger site initially had multiple variables to focus, in due course of time the significant concepts and themes emerged from the ground. The inductive logic was engaged to study the particular actions, situations, conversations, emotions that were then linked with the literature and the same path lead to the analysis of the data collected from the field. The data exposes the natural setting with in a specific context through evolved themes that are discussed in coming parts of the report.

Research approach

The aim of the study is to understand the situation of Muslim community and society. The study attempts to outline the socio historical background of the Muslim community and the impact of governance on their socio-economic lifestyle. Therefore I have used qualitative research which I believe it is an ideal approach where one can observe and analyse the socio-political life of people in their own natural setting and can also interact with them. Qualitative research is not based on a single unified theoretical and methodological concept. It is rather characterized by various approaches. These include;

- a) Symbolic interactionism, which uses the subjective viewpoints of individuals as a starting point;
- b) Ethnomethodology, which studies the making of social reality through the process of interactions between people; and
- c) Structuralism models, which seek to reconstruct the structures of the social field and the hidden or latent meaning of practices.

Research Methods and Techniques of Data Collection

The study has been done through ethnographic method and quasi participation observation method. As ethnographic method understands the special meanings and activities of peoples as they go about their everyday social life (Chapman and McNeil P: 2005: 89). Keeping the research objectives in mind I have traced the socio historical background of the area through Oral narrative.

Interviews: Through interviews basic information was noted down with consent from participants in the research. The primary data collection tool used was semi-structured interview. Participants were encouraged to talk about all the aspects of their lives that they considered significant. The interviews ranged in length from 20-30 minutes, and were usually conducted at the public place usually at their work place. A minimum of one interview was conducted with each respondent. The interviews were done with semi-structured questionnaire in the sense that respondents were free to talk as much or as little as they liked about topics, revert back to earlier topics, introduce new topics or avoid certain topics altogether.

Participant Observation: The narratives built up through long interviews yielded rich data about socio-historical background of the Community and locality. The data has also been developed through Participation observation. Observation of the locality, their occupation, drinking tea with respondents, walking along and having lunch together was part of the entire process of my research.

Field Setting: The universe:

The location of my field taken for study is located nearly about 11 kilometres away from IIT Kanpur. When I visited the field for the first time, I took an auto to Rawatpur from the main gate of IIT Kanpur. Then from *Rawatpur*, I took another auto which dropped me at *Parade Chauraha* by almost 25 minutes. This location where I got down is just connected to an area called *Bekanganj* which is also a densely Muslim populated ghetto. But I choose to go inside through *Bekanganj* and in the process I took a rickshaw which dropped me at *Premnagar*. *Premnagar* is a very small locality where couple of hundred Muslim families reside. I took *Premnagar* as my area of study for two reason. First, for a small project like this it was difficult to access other Muslim localities which are even bigger in such a small time;

building report in such a small time with participant was not possible. Secondly, I came to know one my key informant through a friend of mine, who advised me to begin my research work for that area for some interesting findings.

Premnagar area is just like other Muslim localities around that part of the city. Premnagar thus one among many Muslim populated clusters around the area. This is the last part of those clusters where Muslim people resides. After Premnagar, the Muslim settlement ends and Hindu localities start, as shown to me by my key informant. The PremnagarChauaraha acts as a boundary between this two localities.

Sample Selection and Strategy:

Sample was selected on random basis. The purpose for this study was to take narrative of older people of the locality.

Thematic findings and Analysis

१६८८मउदं८त रु ैमजजसमउमदज चंजमतदए जीम ैचंम ंदक वंस
भ्जेवतलरु

Premnagar is a very small area as mentioned before. But what is more interesting and exceptional about Premnagar is the emergence of the locality itself. Premnagar one was a mixed locality and there was no distinction between two particular religious groups. The area starts from Gurudwarachauraha and ends at the Premanagar area in a straight line; though there are homes on the both the right and left and side of the straight line.

Abid (65) gave an interesting account about communal violence of post-Bari Mosque demolition in 1992 and how it impacted their locality. Abiz told that though many Muslim people must have left Kanpur during partition, this was not very part of public memories during the 1980 and 1990s. But it was the riots of 1992 that changed the entire picture of the locality. The riot severely impacted Kanpur as well as this locality. The tendency to move to safer place became priority for both Hindus and Muslims and in that process localities were becoming ghettos with people from same religious affinity. Abid said:

“We all were living peacefully in this area until that riot. Premnagar was almost the last mixed locality after the end of Muslim localities like Chamangaj etc. When riots broke out, nearing a Muslim attack many Hinuds left home and went to safer places. After the riots was

over Hindus came back; but since this area is mostly dominated by Muslims, fearing clashes again they decided to sell their lands and property to settle in some other areas. Gradually all the Hindus left and it became a Muslim locality. Similarly many Muslim from other areas of city came to settled here fearing attacks from Hindus. That is how segregation happened in this locality; I hope you wanted know this only.....”²

Like many other theories of segregation of localities into communal belongings, this interesting narrative depicts the process of emergence of Hindu and Muslim distinct Localities in the area.

Difference of Settlement Pattern and Buildings between Hindus and Muslims:

The interesting narration of formation localities becomes more evident into reality when one tries to look and distinguish between houses and their patterns in both the localities. Perhaps, the narrative of Muslim ghettoization becomes evident in Premnagar when one looks at the houses of both the communities and compares them. This interesting observation was initially pointed out to me by my key informant Naim (30) while taking a walk with him in Premnagar. In the side of the Muslim settlement, the buildings are taller and bigger whereas on the side of the locality the buildings are smaller as there are space beyond this locality. Naim explained to me that this clearly means that Muslim here are struggling with spaces and since they do not feel safe to reside in non-Muslim localities, the buildings are growing vertically. Naim said that in riots both the communities get affected, not only Muslim, but being minority, they have only limited options of settling down in a particular place. He told that this increasing ghettoization is becoming a severe issue in terms living standards and quality of life. For me life for them is becoming increasingly compartmentalised with a restricted mobility of both young and elderly which might affect both their mental and physical health in due course of time.

२६ जेम फ्कमं वचिं बम दक पेनम वत्सिचतमेमदजं जपवद रु

City is a juxtaposition of different spatialities and temporalities. City is in reality a differential space created and recreated out of numerous social relations. City promises a

²Interview taken with Abid in Premnagar on 17th November, 2018.

uniform representations and materiality but of no relief to hierarchized dwellers. Ghettos, slums would possibly be the illustration of these differential spaces. The dwellers of these differentials spaces are always tied to the 'other' of the chimera called city.

The changes of lanes were fast, each lane interpenetrating into the other in a labyrinth narrowing down at almost every corner as I was approaching Premnagar. Visuals were constantly changing from open sunny streets to narrow roads passing through shanty neighbourhood. The study is an engagement with this differential space. It tries to uncover the hidden network existing between the city's self-representation of inclusiveness and unrepresented exclusiveness. The premise of visualisation with which the encounter with the field started, consequently negotiated with the perspectives of the dwellers interviewed.

Jafar (32) clearly brought out the issues of struggle for resources and space. Emphasizing on this the exclusion in terms of both space and resources he has own way of explaining the situation. Being aware of general socio-economic condition of Muslim in India, Jafar told:

*"One of the reasons I feel about the existing condition of Muslim in India is both going away from their cultural identity and religion. Like Urdu is our language, it is in fact and Indian language, but we are ashamed to carry this tradition. I am not saying modern education is not important but we should not be ashamed to assert our cultural identity as citizen. This is issue of resource and ghettos will never end unless there is an end to communal politics where "non-issue" becomes the actual issue"*³

He clearly highlighted the issues of power cut, cleanliness and drainage issues in the area and how they have been continuously ignored. Though consciously aware of being left out from the promises of a better life, the sense of belonging for them is inclusive within this particular space. The residents are conscious of their peripheral status on several crucial issues in relation to their fellow dwellers of other well off areas of the city. Their sense of belonging is mediated by this complex process of spatiality. Spatial exclusiveness from the state's realm of 'civil society' is often supplemented by a different sort of inclusiveness within this space. A discourse is prevalent among the dwellers that underline this inclusiveness. A discourse of being united on common concerns of education, health, uncovered and overflowing drains, garbage for them is crucial than being divided on the lines of caste and religion.

³Interview with Jafar at Premnagar on 17th November, 2018.

On Citizenship and Political Representation:

Jafar (32) gave a long response to one of my questions related to present day communalism and impact on the minorities. Being aware of the recent political developments in the country, as an educated and learned young man he seemed to have more discontent in the political process rather than blaming any political party. He said

“It was all good for India to start with the vision of Nehru and the idea of socialist democracy. But the contemporary issue of Muslims and their condition is a creation of the later leader of Congress. Like people like Indira Gandhi, being close to Shahi Imam of Delhi, Indira projected an image of appeasing the Muslims. In reality whatever we got that is a different thing, but her way of expressing likeliness for the Muslim projected her to be a biased leader and then later Rajiv Gandhi also capitalised on it. This actually helped in creating the narration of politics of Muslim appeasement and it is directly creating a discourse of majority communalism”

This came as a surprise to me where Jafar was tracing issue of backwardness to a history of communal polarisation. For a moment I forgot whether I was in field or in a class room of politics. Nevertheless, this analysis comes a more intellectual and deep rooted perspective of understanding present day issues. As a citizen of India Jafar was full of anguish that the question of law implementation. Though he knew that there was communal polarisation, still he was wondering why law enforcement can't be done in a neutral manner. He had a fear of coming majoritarian democracy in the country where there might be possibility of serious law violation with the use of state machinery.

He had a say in political representation of the Muslim in the country. What Jafar feels is needed was political representation rather than token. He asks the question of a poor political representation from the area. Emphasizing that they do not want any community based reservation, he asked the government to give them resources for starting an enterprise. For Jafar, it also taken by the privileged one where there is connection with electoral politics. Youths from this kind of places would be in almost social isolation if the government cannot provide enough resources to start a basic enterprise. He questions government's selective attitude in terms of distributing and allocating the government resources.

Limitation of the Study:

The study was within a very less time and resource. It often takes time to build a trustworthy and comfortable relationship with the respondents to talk about some sensitive and confidential issues. Many people were less interested to talk and we could hardly get any chance to talk with women. By not taking the perspectives of women we are missing the other half of the narratives about their lives in that space. But due to lack of several factors such key informants, availability of time of respondent etc. I had to limit my study.

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