Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation

By Christophe Jaffrelot & Laurent Gayer

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Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation provides a detailed, ethnographically based discussion on the situation of urban Muslims in India and, in particular, on spaces often referred to as 'Muslim Ghettos'. Coming in the wake of major Indian government reports on the condition of the country's Muslim minority, the book provides a well overdue contribution. It covers the situation of Muslim neighbourhoods within eleven cities, each of which has a separately authored chapter. In introducing the book, Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot argue that this focus is particularly relevant given the propensity of Indian Muslims to reside in urban spaces in greater relative numbers than any other groups. They present a variety of data from the aforementioned reports and other sources detailing the case for categorising Indian Muslims as a marginalised group in terms of socio-economic factors and in terms of massive underrepresentation within institutions of the state. Following this the authors lay out a brief history of Muslims in India and of the diversity and stratification within the community, as well as the role of unifying aspects and the re-emergence of a Muslim middle class. Whilst these discussions are not new, the sections provide a useful introduction to orientate the reader. The authors frame there primary focus in terms of debate regarding the application of the term 'ghetto' to urban spaces. Here the authors critique Louis Wirth's notion of the 'voluntary ghetto', instead following Loïc Wacquant's definition of the ghetto as "a bounded, ethnically [or religiously] uniform socio-spacial formation born of the forcible relegation of a negatively typed population" (p.21). This, Gayer and Jaffrelot, then go on to break down into five characteristics of 'the ghetto' composing: A degree of constraint on residential choices; the grouping of people based on religion or ethnicity, rather than class or caste; low levels of state presence; a disconnection from other areas of the city; and a 'subjective sense of closure'.

The chapters are separated into three broad categories. Those that deal with Muslim neighbourhoods that have seen large decline following the end of princely rule (such as Hyderabad and Bhopal), those that have seen large scale ghettoization following communal violence (such as Mumbai and Ahmedabad) and those where Muslims are more secure (such as Bangalore and Kozhikode). Chapter 1, by Qudsiya Contractor, deals with Shivaji Nager in Mumbai. The area is predominantly, although not entirely, a Muslim neighbourhood and is seen as such by outsiders who also stereotype it as 'dirty'. Countering the various processes of exclusion, the author suggests, requires residents to engage in "everyday negotiation with the state as well as with society in general" (p.42). Chapter 2, by Christophe Jaffrelot and Charlotte Thomas, covers the neighbourhood of Juhapura in Ahmedabad. The authors describe waves of riots that increasingly forced the Muslim population into segregated spaces, generally located away from the city's core. The nature of this area, they suggest, makes it a

true ghetto. They acknowledge arguments from some quarters that the 'ghetto' has in some ways become a 'city', with the population developing markets, schools and institutions. However, they go on to suggest that the absence of the state makes this argument problematic. The authors conclude on a positive suggesting that "communal violence and ghettoization have [also] prepared the ground for a modernisation whose symbol lays in education" (p.79). In chapter 3, by Gayatri Jai Singh Rathore describes the side-lining of Muslims in the Ramganj (Jaipur) as Hindus took control of export and wholesale in the gemstone industry, leaving Muslims as petty manufacturers and craft-workers. In addition economic contractions led to the Muslim community to fall back on caste and *biraderi* identities to protect their diminishing economic realms. Chapter 4, by Gilles Verniers, describes a Shia community in Lucknow, a 'minority within a minority' where sectarian, as well as communal violence, has been a factor in creating the 'ghetto'. Whilst the previous chapters discuss the re-emergence of a middle class even within ghettoised neighbourhoods, the author suggests that here those gaining an education seek to migrate away. Chapter 5, by Juliette Golonnier, details two contrasting areas in the city of Aligargh. One, Sir Syed Nagar, is home to academics from the famous Aligargh Muslim University. The other, Shah Jamal, is a poor neighbourhood. The city has also experienced communal violence and although Sir Syed Nagar is prosperous, Galonnier suggests that the bounded nature of the neighbourhood and low municipal investment still embodies elements of the ghetto.

Having worked our way north from Mumbai to Uttar Pradesh, Chapter 6 takes us back south to the old city areas of Bhopal. It is also the first where marginalisation is seen as tied up with the ending of princely rule. The author discusses the loss of Urdu as the official language as a marginalising factor. The decline of the old aristocracy had an effect on artisans who suddenly lost their patrons. Recently, however, a middle class has emerged which may lead to change. Chapter 7, by Neena Ambre Rao and S. Abdul Thaha, tells a similar historical story of the end of princely rule in Hyderabad. The authors are critical of certain Muslim politicians who "cash in on identity politics and neglect education and other facilities in order to retain their influence" (p.211). However, it is also suggested that this can be challenged by increasing education among poor Muslims and by an emerging middle class. Laurent Gayer, in chapter 8, looks at Abdul Fazl Enclave (AFE), a largely illegal residential colony in Delhi. Here ghettoization is challenged as "rather than projecting AFE as a victimised Muslim locality, its members chose to secularise their discourse and project AFE as on unauthorised colony among others" (p.229). Chapter 9, by Pralay Kunungo, discusses Cuttack in Orissa. Muslims express a sense of safety and the notion of *bhaichara* (brotherhood) exists between groups. The little communal tension that has occurred has not led to loss of life and many of the city's neighbourhoods are mixed. This is repeated in Kozhikode's Kuttichira neighbourhood (chapter 10 by Radhika Kanchana). Although there is some segregation and low representation in government jobs, the population have built successfully on long established connections with the Gulf and there is little sense of marginalisation or decline. In the final chapter, Aminah Mohammad Arif looks at Shivaji Nager in Bangalore. Here again the Muslim community is 'at ease', a fact which Arif attributes to a state presence, and the influence of Muslim politicians. Interaction in the area with both co-religionists and with those of other faiths ensures that communal violence is rare. Although this cosmopolitanism is effective in Bangalore the author points out that it has not been so in some of the other cities discussed.

In concluding, Gayer and Jeffrelot suggest that marginalisation of Indian Muslims is real, but that there are regional disparities and that it takes place unevenly across class and caste groups. They lay out three factors contributing to this: Firstly, loss of power both during the colonial period and partition; secondly, that successful Muslim trading castes are not integrated into the broader Muslim

population; and thirdly that there has been deliberate marginalisation by the state. They challenge the view that Muslims have been partly responsible by shirking modern education, pointing out that Muslims were ahead of Hindus in this regard during the colonial period and that even the Madrassas now offer 'modern subjects' but that educational investment often yields little in the way of jobs. For the authors it is education, along with efforts undertaken by urban Muslims themselves to counter marginalisation, which offer the greatest hope. They also problematize the idea of the 'Muslim Ghetto' suggesting that many are in fact 'ethnic enclaves' and that the true ghettos only exist in areas of extreme violence such as Ahmedabad. This, they suggest, creates a distinction between voluntary and forced segregation, although the two are often mutually reinforcing. These enclaves, they argue, have long existed in Indian cities. Other factors interplaying here are self-segregation, a desire to 'feel safe' and difficulty accessing housing in other areas. In summing up they suggest that the largest driver of true ghettoization is violence and that other factors are secondary.

This is a well-researched book which makes an important contribution. As such my critique is primarily focused on areas for expansion. One area that may have added would be to give the reader more on the partition period. For example some discussion on the sudden and mass reconfiguring of cities as Punjabi migrants arrived en-mass and established large neighbourhood which now dominate many North Indian cities. The main area, however, I would suggest needs some additional attention is to gain some understanding of connections between these 'ethnic enclaves'. For example many neighbourhoods have large Muslim populations from other cities who are clustered around particular trades yet retain links to their place of origin leading to urban to urban migration.