

Lives of Muslims in India: Politics, Exclusion and Violence (ed.) by Abdul Shaban, New Delhi: Routledge, 2012

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Lives of Muslims in India: Politics, Exclusion and Violence is indeed a commendable effort and profound contribution by Abdul Shaban in the field of “Indian Muslim Studies” as it enriches the existing literature on different aspects of Muslims living in India written by concerned academicians, activists, think tanks, policy makers, theologians, community groups and political figures. However, the book under review fills the much needed gap in research by focussing on three central issues of identity, equity and security and highlighting the life situations of Muslims in major cities, regions and at national levels by providing a multidisciplinary approach making use of advanced theories and concepts.

The book comprises of twelve chapters [falling under the sub-themes-Identity Politics, Security, Violence, and Exclusion] - preceded by List of Tables (p.vii), List of Figures (p.ix), Acknowledgment (p.xi) and Introduction (pp.1-24) by the editor and followed by About the Author (p.272), Notes on Contributors (pp.273-76), and Index (pp.277-87). The book aims to broaden the debate with regard to issues of identity, equity and security by exploring and analysing the relevant institutions, formations and processes.

In the Introduction, the editor discusses how politics of consolidation of identities along religious lines has lead to polarization of religious communities into ‘native’ Hindus and ‘alien’ Muslims and spatial segregation of spaces as ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ respectively and has ‘minoritised’ the latter who constitute approximately 14 % population of Independent India-“extremely divided along the base of caste, sect and region, like the majority religious community, the Hindus” (p.3) dispersed through the length and breadth of the country;

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how Muslims are fitted in the metaphorical space of ‘theirs’ by manipulating the history and circulating the past discordance to re-alive the past as present; and how institutionalized riot systems, politics of violence, confusing policy frameworks on caste and class lines and discrimination of state apparatus against the community and failure of leadership to address the problems of Muslim community and to bring “reforms within the community on many fronts, including those related to women” (p.17) has not only alienated and ghettoised the Muslims in India in general but has also excluded the Muslim women in particular-socially, politically and economically.

Delving upon various historical facts, philosophical and religious issues and current attempts by the Indian government to empower the Muslim community, M.J. Akbar, in Chapter 1 (“Minority and Minorityism: ...”; pp.25-34), discusses the issue related to identity of Muslims in India by attempting to explain the concepts, processes and practices to redefine the meaning of the ‘minority’ and situate Muslims of contemporary India within that defined framework. Akbar argues that “in demographic terms Muslims have always been a minority” (p.26) from their arrival on the Indian soil to the present day. He further argues that Muslims are minoritised as they are disempowered-socially, economically, politically-and are being labelled as anti-nationals who are used as vote bank and always remain under threat and “security becomes the prime motivator instead of development” (p.33). However, Akbar is optimistic that “Indian Muslims have begun to understand that if they vote out of fear, they will be fed fear; if they vote for development, they will get development,” (p.33).

In Chapter 2 (“The Muslim as Victim, The Muslim as Agent: ...,” pp.35-65), Markha Valenta extends many of the arguments put forward by M.J. Akbar. She talks about how politics of identity minoritises the Muslims who “as a political and religious abstraction ... are over-exposed in the life of India [both in public and media-particularly in the course of brutal riots, civil elections and the ongoing feud with Pakistan]” (p.35). The history of consolidation of religious identities should be traced in the colonial modernity rather than at some earlier moment. “the arrival of ‘the Muslim’ in India in the 19th century, rather than earlier, [is] simultaneous with the arrival of ‘the Hindu’ (‘the Sikh’, ‘the Christian’)” (p.49). It is the politics of representation which has transformed the religious identity which do not existed in South Asia till 19th century, into a modern geo (political) identity. While critically evaluating the Sachar Committee Report, work of Basant and Sharief, and Satish Saberwal, Valenta concludes that the development deficit among Muslims is the outcome of negligence on the part of the State which treats them as monolithic community devoid of diversity.

In Chapter 3 which deals with, what the title itself reveals, “Policies for Muslims in India: Locating Multiculturalism and Social Exclusion ...,” (pp. 66-87), Ranu Jain makes an effort to critically evaluate Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), one among the series of

recommendations of Sachar Committee for the development of Muslim minority (p.66). However historical analysis of the treatment meted out to the Muslim community reveals that India follows “liberal democratic framework” rather than a “critical multiculturalism”. Muslim community is “politically stigmatised”, “socially ostracised” (p.81) and “economically marginalized” because of the ‘unruly practices’ or gap between rules (suggestions or recommendations in this case) and their implementation (p.84).

Elaborating on how politics is configured around ethnicity and how Muslims become the victims of politics of exclusion, Ram Punyani in Chapter 4, “Muslims and Politics of Exclusion” (pp.88-106) discusses that the exclusion of Muslims at the economic, social and political level in the contemporary India has its roots in “colonial” (p.93) and “communal politics” (p.90). The pace of this exclusion is augmented by the repeated “communal violence” (pp.96-103) organized against them thereby inculcating a sense of insecurity reflected in increased ghettoisation of the community.

In Chapter 5, “Indian Muslims: Political Leadership ...” (pp.107-130), Irfan Engineer complements many of the arguments of Punyani and tries to explore the socio-political situation especially the role of “colonial ideology”, (p.110) “right-wing Hindutva” (p.123) leadership and “violence” in which Muslim leadership—having assimilative or separatist tendencies—evolved and developed by making use of “symbols” such as “discrimination to “Urdu” and its replacement by Hindi (p.117) and issues like “interference with Sharia” (p.116). Muslim leadership failed to achieve for what it aspired—empowerment: political, social, economic—both before and after independence. Now both the Muslim community as well as its leadership are “marginalized” (p.128) and it is the “secularist” front from the majority community which has to play its role in ameliorating the condition of this minority community.

Nistula Hebbler, in Chapter 6, “Precedents and Exceptions: ...”, (pp.131-140), argues that BJP has positioned itself between two poles—a hard-line right wing Hindu party, showing “disenchantment” with a “pan-Islamic identity” (p.133) of Muslims, and a centrist one which looks itself as part of a larger anti-congress coalition. When BJP or its allies came in power, appeasement policies such as providing “Haj subsidies” (p.131), recruiting Muslim MPs like “Shahnawaz Hussain” (p.138), and helping to elect a Muslim as president of India are adopted and when out of power, the party unleashes its Hindutva ideology to consolidate the Hindu vote by mobilising them against Muslims on issues like “Ramjanmabhoomi” (p.137), “Uniform Civil Code” and Muslim specific “entitlements” (p.142). Muslim leadership is in dilemma to decide whether the community should associate itself with BJP’s right wing or centrist agenda, because its terms of engagement have remained “ambiguous” (p.143).

In Chapter 7, “Structure of Violence and Muslims”, (pp.145-162), Taha Abdul Rauf makes use of the “Galtung’s theory of violence-cultural, direct and structural”- to explain the development deficit among Muslims. The right-wing majoritarians makes use of nomenclature such as “love jihad” (p.148), “aliens” (p.150), “other” (p.151) and symbolic imagery such as “dying Hindu race” (p.147)-cultural violence to demonise Muslims and “legitimate” their acts of direct violence-communal riots and structural violence-exclusion: social, economic and political. Muslims have been repeatedly victimized in communal violence organized against them by the majority community in which innumerable Muslims are murdered and maimed; their women are raped and their hard earned property is demolished and looted. Inclusion of Muslims in Indian democracy is possible only when exclusionary forces are neutralized by granting Muslims “access to opportunities, participation in democratic processes and negotiability in everyday life, free of violence and inequality” (p.158).

In Chapter 8, “Hindu-Muslim Riots: ...”, (pp.163-186), R.B. Bhagat examines the pattern of Hindu-Muslim riots from demographic perspective and argues that riots occur predominantly in “urban” (p.174) areas because of “economic competition” (p.179) and most affected state being Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Bihar. He further concludes that Muslim population and literacy rate has no empirical relationship with riots whereas “lower female-to-male ratio” is associated with “higher” (p.182) Hindu-Muslim riots.

In Chapter 9, “Police Conduct during Communal Riots: ...” (pp. 187-207), Jyoti Punwani argues that during communal riots Police as an institution has always remained “partisan”-“pro-Hindu” and “anti-Muslims” (p.187) allowing right-wing Hindutva groups to carry out their activities such as “maha aartis”, “rath yatras” and “inflammatory slogans”-labelling them as “religious” (p.198) and stopping Muslims from offering “*namaz*” on the streets and “*aazaan*” being blurred through loudspeakers (p.197). The attitude of police that “one Muslim killed is one Muslim less” (p.188) substantiate their biasness towards Muslims. This kind of behaviour along with state’s failure to deliver “justice” has made the victims (Muslims) lose hope in the State and its institutions (p.206).

What it means to be Muslim in contemporary Indian cities and how Muslims are spatially segregated and excluded is explored in Chapter 10 (“Ethnic Politics, Muslims ...”, (pp.208-225) by Abdul Shaban and in Chapter 11 (“Social Exclusion and Muslims ...” (pp.226-249) by Sanjukta Sattar. Political parties who follow *Hindutva* ideology enhance their political productivity of consolidating the Hindu vote by manipulating history and constructing the identity of Muslims as the ‘other’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘foreigners’, ‘undesirables’ etc and their place of living as “mini-Pakistan”, thereby creating a “metaphorical space” by “denationalizing” and “deterritorialising” (p.214) them in the territory of country. They are

forced to live in “spatially segregated” (p.244) spaces-enclaves and ghettos, characterized by lack of development and fear of others. This stigmatized minority community has been excluded and pressed to the lowest socio-economic stratum in India during the British rule as well as after the independence of the country. They are “educationally most backward, economically poor and politically a powerless” community of the country.

In Chapter 12, “Muslim Women and Law Reforms ...” (pp.250-271), J.S. Niaz and J.S. Alpte asserts that Muslim women suffer from the triple burdens of their “class, community and gender” (p.250). Interpretation of religious texts and implementation of Islamic code of conduct “Sharia” and “legal reforms” in favour of Muslim women reflects the “patriarchal” (p.251) attitude of Muslim leadership. Interference with “Muslim Personal Law” and other related institutions in the form of reforms by State is constructed as an attack on the identity of the community by the leaders.

“Muslim women are caught in a bind, always having to choose between her rights and rights of the community ... her identity as a ‘women’ and as a ‘Muslim’ is always in a state of conflict” (p.251-52, italics added).

Lack of political will to codify the laws and alienation and exclusion of Muslims compelled Muslim women to assert themselves as a movement and establish organizations-“Mahila Shakti Mandal (MSM)” (p.256) and forums-“Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA)” (p.261) to ensure justice and equality for themselves.

This is a stimulating, interesting, thought-provoking and thoroughly absorbing collection that will be of value for academics, students and researchers interested in political sociology, minority studies, Asian politics, cultural and religious studies, anthropology and social sciences. The series of articles that individually represent important contributions to the debate about the lives of Muslims in India and present a series of interesting observations, comparisons, interpretations and questions make it a book worth reading.
