

Tracing Muslim Internal Displacement since Partition: A Case of Segregated Urbanization of Muslim Localities in Delhi

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In the wake of 1947 partition, Delhi experienced multiple riots on an unprecedented scale leading to mass refugee crisis and internal displacement. According to Gyanendra Pandey's account of violence in the city (Delhi), between 20-25 thousand Muslims were killed. More than 330,00 Muslims had left Delhi for Pakistan, reducing the Muslim population by 3.5 million by the time riots ended. The Muslim population in Delhi drastically declined from 33.22% in 1941 to 5.33% in 1951 (Gyanendra, 2001). A huge number of Muslim populations were not only uprooted from their economic, cultural, and political settlements, but was displaced from within their own history. Eventually, it results in the loss of identity, voice, and space of the Muslim community. The 1947 internal displacement of Muslim population occur within intra-district region of Delhi, evident even today as a segregated underdeveloped unregistered colony such as Shahdara, Okhla, Yamuna Vihar and so. Such forgotten internal displacement marginalized the community, undermine the identity, voice, and livelihood.

The 1947 Delhi's demography provided a limited space for the refugees coming from Punjab, Sindh, and North-East Frontier (Hashmi, 2017). Thus, the huge influx of refugees, limited space, violence, and riots displaced the large Muslim population on the edge of forced displacement. Intense scholarly research has been conducted on the partition refugees, however limited research exploration on the impact, and the aftermath of internally displaced Muslim population within old city of Delhi.

While exploring the forgotten history of internally displaced Muslim population in Delhi, the paper will address the erasure of Muslim property, space, and histories since partition, and the reoccupation, replacement, and re-definition of space, properties, and memories that they constituted (Ahmed, 2022). The abandonment of Muslim spaces can be traced through the oral history of Muslim family lineages that is on the brink of being erased, especially in old Delhi.

The protracted material displacement of Muslim property and spaces have been contributed to the erasure of the oral history and lived memories of Muslim, further resulting in the internal displacement from one district to another in Old Delhi. The Muslims' right to claim on space, after partition, was denied silently but violently. This led to the evolution of communal demography in Delhi. Further, Delhi's post-colonial history is not merely about the migration and arrival of refugees, but displacements and departure have produced the local marginalized neighborhood, while refugee arrival in Delhi developed a majoritarian space. Moreover, the Muslim population were forced to leave the areas like Paharganj, Karol Bagh, Sabzi Mandi and surrounding localities, where they were in minority. By tracing the afterlife of material displacements, it tracks how "narrative discourses draw on these Muslim absences and the sense of an abstract 'diverse space' to produce new set of exclusion and practices of othering in the present" (Ahmed, 2022), evident in the formation of present segregated urban Muslim segregated areas like Old Delhi, Jamia Nagar, Shahdara, Yamuna Vihar, and other localities.

Further, the paper will discuss the impact of internal displacements and the formation of segregated urbanization. In the process, it became vital to question the institutional failures at the time of partition. Although the political and economic institutions were neither designed to

displace Muslim or to accommodate them. However, as an outcome, the process unfolded through the bureaucratic in-competencies, failed managements, lack of policies implementations, delayed jurisdictional overlaps, and the failure to check the planned ideological attempt at dispossession, and abandoning of the marginalized (Muslim) community. In the last section, the paper will discuss the Muslim displacement at Delhi 2020 riots, enabled not only the visible and violent history of Muslim marginalization, but longer histories of non-overt erasure, displacement, and replacement. In the nutshell, the sudden flare-up of violence or explicitly ideological projection of the majoritarian intent at the Muslim erasure.

Methodologically, the paper will revisit the history of space and identity through archival work, field interviews, observations, and oral histories of internally displaced Muslims in Delhi. Snowball sampling method will be convenient to connect with the local individuals and organizations. The emphasis on oral histories will be a way to engage and revisit the history of space and identity in Muslim segregated area in Delhi.

Reference:

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