

Exclusions and Exploitations: 'Beggars' of Delhi Jamia Masjid Market

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Abstract: The exclusions are deeply 'political' and the communities living on margins are vulnerable to wide-range of exploitations. The religious places of the minorities clearly bear out how a particular group or community is perceived and 'given' a life within the society where they live with a minimum of choices and freedoms. There might exist concentric circles of exclusions and exploitations within a particular minority community that itself lives on margins of society. The everydayness of market functioning, market contents and resistances reflect everyday 'political' and explore the hitherto hidden political neglect. The markets of 'historical' Grand Mosque Delhi adequately present this case for their 'smell', 'noise', 'filth' and 'choking space' clearly reflect everydayness of the political neglect and exclusion. There are exclusions within exclusion and exploitations are similarly multilayered. There are significant number of awkwardly-looking dirty bodies waiting at the entrance of Jamia Masjid gareeb-nawaz (pro-poor) 'hotels' and 'restaurants' who stretch their hands to 'beg' for the food. They are apparently beggars, but are part of working force of such hotels. This market requires a population that eats up the "half-decayed" vegetables and "intestines" of the cattle which the community cannot afford to throw and these apparently 'beggars' have done this job for decades. The Hoteliers are interested in their potential of eating, digesting and hunger as well. In the competition for this work, women face a different kind of challenge and resist against the 'overpowering' male-folk to get the food for themselves and families back home in slums. Such a plural exclusion and exploitation invites a different exploration of the 'political', not usually captured by political scientist but mainly is the task of political ethnographer.

The religious places enjoy a special status among all the structures of a society. These are said to be centres of spiritual salvation where a person attains the feeling of being-one-with-the-Creator and *lives* this moment. Supposedly these are the places which rescue people of miseries of material (read political) life and 'restore' the alienated life to the Whole—the spirit. Within the contours of this discourse, one expects of a 'religious' centre to have all absorbing environment within and without. Similar is true of Mosque for Muslims which is said to be the abode of God. Ideally no Muslim can own it or has a property right over it. There is a "code of conduct" restricting the human actions for a discipline within the Centre and according to them the highest esteem *must be* observed for the *Masjid*. Though not provided by the religious Scripture, few Muslim families particularly upper castes have benefitted politico-economically from the institution of *Imamat* (Prayer-leading) from centuries together and do not, thus, leave space for 'other' castes/classes to step in their 'clean' shoes. Undoubtedly, Mosque would be an indispensable subject for an anthropologist; it is no less important for political ethnographer. Jamia Masjid (Grand Mosque), Delhi, offers all together a different insight into *everydayness* of political power being exercised at *different* levels—wide and deep, to a political ethnographer. I shall confine my observations to 'political' and this "I" is very much situated in

the process; not distanced from ‘feeling’ it with only an exception of ‘articulating’ it for being an ‘outsider’.

Market—Everydayness of Political: Market is integral to human functioning. The ‘nature’ of the community (which most of the times is ‘constructed’ from outside) and, *importantly*, the general (political) perspective of the system about the inhabiting community *determine* the nature and form of the market that develops in those communities. “We, the residents of Jamia Masjid, are grateful to our young local councilor for the developmental works executed at the road leading to Jamia Masjid”, advertises one of the many political posters pasted on the walls at the mouth of the road approaching Jamia Masjid. As I try to rub shoulders to make way for my ‘small’ body with the ‘large-body’ crowd, I am almost pulled back as my small khadi bag stuck in the ‘crowd’. This choking road and pedestrian jam coupled with huge number of *Rikshwas* give a sense of life-lived by the community. With stepping in towards the ‘market’, nostrils sense a stinking smell, so intense and bad, coming from the chicken shops one feels to escape of the nostril burst. Then comes a ‘milder’ smell of intestines, livers, lungs, skulls, brains and finally meat of the cattle add onboiling oil, burning (animal) fat and filth of ‘dirt’ around and with the tough walk vanishes the smell from the ‘sense’. It is very much there, but goes unsensed even to the smell sensitive people. This market not only sells the non-vegetarian food, but also supplies it to the ‘clean’ areas of New Delhi which *do not* tolerate this filth. It routinely lives with and keeps the stinky smell to *itself*, but supplies the product to Delhi markets with a new look and healthy smell. In fact, the ‘boundary’ between the two smells is reflective of the wide gap between the ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ people.

The lane, opposite to *Bab Abdullah* (Gate No. 1) which is a green gate with green board to a red-coloured sand stone mosque having white dome, bisects the market and, surprisingly, the smell also. It is a different, but similarly, bad smell: smell of old vehicle tyres, deteriorated engine oil, vehicle engines, all kinds of vehicle spare parts and shrill sounds of hammers make it all the more reflective of ‘how’ the community is perceived and the (manual labour) role given to it. This side of market has a different look as it deals with the “already used” vehicle spare parts, ‘re-fits’ them and extract ‘healthy’ parts for their re-use. Similar hierarchy as of the other side: heavy, medium and light and finally bike spare parts. As I try to converse with a community member over ‘how’ they look at themselves, he cautions to make a distinction with how they are

made to look at themselves as the *only* community capable of slaughtering animals and birds, singing *qawali* and procreating huge number of children [though the decadal population growth among Indian Muslims is *not* higher than National average]. *They are bound to 'live' a life they live.* Apart from very few shops including three small bookshops, the entire market deals with hard manual jobs of butchery, cooking, repairing and selling the already used, “second-hand” as they call it, and inferior goods. The market attracts customers of its own kind. All the national and international ‘big-brands’ are alien to this market for ‘customers’ come for specific target goods conceived of and for this market. This market has hundreds of shops and is one of the busiest markets in Delhi with huge inhabiting population and a great influx of ‘customers’ to market and of ‘people’ to Mosque, it does not have a *modern* Public Convenience whose absence bear out a new dimensions of exclusion and neglect. [Does it really require a modern public convenience?] It is perhaps ‘smell’, ‘noise’, ‘filth’ and ‘choking space’ that make the place ‘historical’ but it clearly reflects *everydayness* of the political neglect and exclusion.

Exclusions within Exclusion: the ‘Beggars’ of Jamia Masjid

Begging is very prominent in this market. Given the nature and duration of the study, I shall confine myself to very specific issue of ‘begging’ which to my understanding and observation is not begging but an innovative mechanism of exploitation done to a *worker* who is dressed up in beggar’s clothes, awkwardly-looking dirty body apparently a beggar, but he is a worker. There is a unique aspect of market functioning that few hoteliers ‘allow’ (infact, they *keep*) 10-20 beggars at the entry point of the hotel who keep on waiting for a charity donor who ‘pays’ to the hotelier on their behalf for their food. They start gathering around 11: 00 am and as the day progresses, the number goes on increasing till the lunch time and leave by late evening around 10:00 pm. My entrance to these hotels is intentional only to get a *feel* of the exclusion that these beggars are subjected to [remember these are ‘hotels’ of Jamia Masjid Market not of Connaught Place]. But, I am shocked to see altogether a different life of *exclusions* within exclusion. There is a serious plurality of exclusion that is so central to the whole functioning of market. This market *requires* a population that eats up the “half-decayed” vegetables and “intestines” of the cattle which the community cannot afford to throw. The lower classes purchase it from market wherein it is kept in separate shops. There is a *compartmentalization* done to separate and prevent meat from the rest of the animal body like intestines and stomach

(called *Ujjde*), brain (*Baija*) and skull meat and are sold separately to respective 'lovers'. This separates smell of slaughtered animal parts also. Since they may not find 'have-not' customers frequently, they need *workers* who have a capacity to consume it daily and as many a times as given the same to them. The shoppers supply this 'waste' (which cannot be supplied to 'clean' markets in a city that goes 'green') to their brethren in the same market or may be elsewhere. The hoteliers cook it and keep a force to cling the business on. The Hoteliers are interested in their potential of *eating, digesting* and *hunger* as well. They form the 'work-force' for the Hotel-owner who work by sitting beside the entrance, keep on waiting for food, go on eating when 'blessed' and also return home *without* having anything for the entire day "when no angel" comes to feed, murmured a middle-aged man to me. They 'sell' this labour and get the half-cooked improper food as the wages. "Do feed these poor people and get *Jannah* (Paradise) as a reward from *Allah*", asks the Hotel manager to almost every well-dressed customer. For every Rs. 20.00, the 'beggar' is given two *tandoori roti* (worth Rs. 4.00 each) and *sabzi* (cooked vegetable mixed with animal intestine which possibly limits latter's smell) in a small disposable bowl basically meant to serve two-three pieces of sweets. According to the same market value of the 'food' that is given, it is not even half the worth charged to a philanthropist. Neither the donor nor the receiver (who is a worker of the Hotelier) bargain with the manager over the transaction. This consequently brings the Hotelier into a position where he is capable of making a huge profit by exploiting both the agencies.

The food given to them is in separate utensils and cooked for them only. They in any case cannot enter the main entrance of the hotel or eat in hotel plates. They form the queues and take the 'wage' and sit on the road to "enjoy the reward of the labour". I saw some of them collecting the *sabzi* (Cooked vegetable) in small polythene bags which they take 'home'—the Delhi Junction Railway Station over-bridge beneath which some of them live and behind Red Fort in a slum area. They have adjusted themselves to a very strange eating habit: they *do not* ask for and go on eating without having water (may be they consent to not to ask for it). There is a famous joke of a Mullah (Muslim priest) who frowned at his son for taking with the food at a party where both had come to recite verses of Quran. To him, water would *occupy* stomach space and would, therefore, deprive his son of the feast. Sometimes these workers get a *roti* only after a day-long hunger and on few occasions they return home without doing any work and thus whole family faces night in open sky with stomachs empty. And at times get work and some do not.

This exhibits a contrary capacity to that of eating anything and as many a times as they are given. Sometimes their 'work' demands them to remain hungry until they see an angel by the "will of God". As I was talking to the Hotel Manager who fortunately offered me a vacant seat by his left on the road side wherefrom I could see them face-to-face (It was all coincidental as his younger brother left for afternoon prayers and his seat fell vacant. Initially he took me Irani, then Afghani and finally got it correctly as I talked in his first language, Urdu. It was my fifth visit to his shop), he started explaining me the "divine design" of "food entitlement" as he could notice my interest in his workers. "Allah grants *Rizq* (food or livelihood) in *any* way". Question heaved upto my lips whether dignity is a qualification and finds a place in this narrative, I strategically avoided asking for my study.

Meanwhile, one of the 'customers' who came after offering afternoon prayers ordered the manager to "distribute" a plate of rice [meant for one person] among 'beggars' who are 15 in number in my counting, I wondered how would they "manage" for one plate of rice! *Hey! Kapda Lao!* (O! Bring the cloth here) shouts a boy at them. Shockingly, he is one among four people serving customers inside with "tasty" food and certainly with sweet Urdu language. This language shift is everyday practice for him. He dropped the rice from a height into a piece of cloth which each of them wrap round the head to prevent the sweat from pouring into the eyes and skull from scorching sun. Forming a circle, three of them start eating the rice "thrown" along few spoons of *sabzi* into the cloth without washing the hands before or after and without asking for water. They do not carry any water at all. Public drinking water station is nowhere in sight.

Gender and Labour: the everyday resistance

Taking a shelter at a nearby place (only few feet away) to escape the heat of the sun, an Old lady misses her share twice in this *beed* (rush). She curses the *rikshaw* pullers and pedestrian 'crowd' as she struggles to be in time and attempts to meet the challenge of fellow workers to stretch hands. Her age, 'weak body' and consequent 'incapacity' hamper her reach and the resultant failure deprives her of the food for herself and her daughters at home (they are homeless and call their makeshift polythene tents and in many cases footpaths beneath flyovers home). As I try to talk to her she is quick to narrate her ordeal: "I miss my share four to five times daily" partly due to knee-joint pain and partly for being a woman for the "owner

encourages only men to sit in front of hotel". The women are not allowed to be "associated" with any particular hotel. "We beg before every individual holding children with one hand and stretching the other for help" and men only sit and wait. It is only sometimes "we are given a share only after we forcefully ask for it". In fact, they bow down to knees, follow a person to a distance humbly begging, touching feet of the "angels" and pray for the person to receive something in kind or cash. They do for they don't have a work and alternative livelihood. The old-lady resisted against my new 'friend' manager for the latter's neglect of the former. As she went on arguing in a softer voice against frequent denial of her "share", the infuriated manager sarcastically asked the counter boy to "give her entire set" of fully loaded cooked food containers so that she carried them home "on head". She is an old lady possibly in 60's as her age could apparently be deceptive because of her weakness, shabby clothes and loose skin. Her response in a typical Urdu vocabulary captures the everyday resistance: *Khuda nay mujhe chaar beitiyan dee hain, aap ko das day de!* (Allah gave me four daughters, May He (as punishment) bestow you ten!) This is more than a statement. This is the everyday phenomenon of exclusion, exploitation and resistance.

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