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Article

Bangladeshi "Infiltrators" and the Creeping Apartheid in Indian Cities[1]

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Abstract

The political discourse in India, particularly influenced by the politics of Hindu nationalism (Hindutva), has depicted the Bangladeshi (Muslim) migrant as an "infiltrator," a symbolic enemy figure. The article asserts that the governmentality of Hindutva citizenship in present-day India facilitates the conflation of Muslims in general with the label of Bangladeshi "infiltrators." This generates a milieu of social apartheid, giving rise to the establishment of internal boundaries and causing a destabilization and hierarchical arrangement of urban citizenship for impoverished Muslim migrants in Indian cities. The article posits that this situation can be categorized as an emerging form of 'creeping apartheid.'

Keywords

Migration, India, Bangladeshi, Infiltrator, Apartheid

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> "Crores of infiltrators have entered the country. Like *termites*, they have licked clean the future of the country. Shouldn't they be uprooted?"
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> - Amit Shah, October 2018 (Former BJP[2] president and present Union Minister of Home Affairs during an election campaign in the lead-up to general elections in 2019)
> (Venkataramakrishnan 2018)

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[2] BJP stands for Bharatiya Janata Party – the right-wing Hindu nationalist party currently in power in India.

1. Introduction

The figure of the Bangladeshi (Muslim) migrant has been a placeholder for many marginalised minority populations deemed 'unwanted' in several spaces in India. Outlook magazine – a widely circulated weekly in India – for one its issues in September 2012 slapped the title "The New Enemy" in bold across the face of a supposed Bangladeshi male Muslim immigrant on its cover page (Outlook 2012). But it was an open secret that the enemy was not 'new'. This 'enemy' figure made regular appearances in emotionally charged election campaigns since early 1990s in several states wherein polarisation against perceived 'outsiders' reaps major electoral benefits (Gillan 2002; Mehta 2018). It had even propelled major deportation drives in the metropolitan cities of Delhi and Mumbai with colourful names such as 'Operation Pushback', 'Operation Flush-Out' and 'Operation Find-and-Evict' (Ramachandran 2003; Schendel 2005). Besides these, however, the character had also been used to penalise and punish vulnerable urban populations for long.

The case of Mahagun Moderne society in urban Noida – part of the National Capital Territory of Delhi city – in the summer of 2017explicitly showcased what had implicitly been happening all along; how the bogey of the Bangladeshi "infiltrator" could be raised to disenfranchise poor workers in the garb of weeding out the 'enemy within' (Ghosh and Mehta 2017). When a group of local migrant workers and their families gathered outside the entrance to a posh gated community to enquire about their fellow domestic worker, Zohra Bibi, who also worked in the compound and had been missing, charges of vandalisation were levelled against them by the society residents. This resulted in the revocation of entrance cards of several workers, demolition of their informal settlement sites by the police and also arrests of men in the group, a majority of them Bengali speaking Muslims from the Indian state of West Bengal,

which shares a border with Bangladesh[3] (Dey 2017b). Many upper middle-class residents of the complex took to social media platforms including Twitter using the label of 'riot' to describe what they described as 'murderous mobs' employing the erroneous hashtag #MaldainNoida[4] (Ghosh and Mehta 2017). This was done to alert political actors to the allegation that the workers were 'illegal immigrants' and should be deported, betraying the simplistic assumption that Bengali Muslim workers were synonymous with Bangladeshi and therefore 'illegal' (Dey 2017a). Similarly, many informal settlements consisting of Muslim majority migrant populations in cities like Mumbai face regular cycles of state violence and demolitions, all in the name of tackling illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

The discourse of "infiltration" – economic migrants becoming characterised as 'illegal' and then as "infiltrators" (i.e., national enemies) – has steadily securitised migration in India by placing it as an issue of national (in)security. This 'enemy' figure garners excess visibility through spectacular political rhetoric that accuse them of encroaching on the scarce resources meant for bona-fide citizens. Although there are many state and non-state actors involved, it is the politics of insecurity propelled by political Hindutva[5] that has kept the discourse of "infiltration" politically relevant (Gillan 2002). The imprints of this discourse have shaped the national citizenship regime in the country since early 1980s.

With the ascent and cementing of religious nationalism in formal politics in 2014, when the BJP returned to power with a thumping victory after a ten-year period in opposition, the "infiltrator" has been a common public presence. The current Prime Minister Narendra Modi

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[3] Bengali is also the main spoken language in Bangladesh. Before partition, West Bengal and East Bengal, which later became East Pakistan and then Bangladesh, were part of one single province. Hence there is cultural and linguistic congruence between the two regions.

[4] Malda is a village in the Indian state of West Bengal bordering Bangladesh, which is often erroneously confused to be in Bangladesh by most mainland Indians in big cities.

[5] Ideology of Hindu nationalism, loosely understood as the 'Hinduness shared by all Hindus' (Jaffrelot, 1996; Hansen, 1999). Although complex in its main tenets, one way of understanding it could be as a political ideology that seeks to establish the hegemony of Hindus and Hinduism in multicultural and multireligious India.

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has accused the immigrants of 'intrusion' on several occasions (India Today 2014; Bal 2019),

while the current Home Minister has repeatedly sub-humanized them, as reflected in the

opening quote. The *Sankalp Patra* (election manifesto) of BJP in the 2019 national elections

highlight the party's primary concern as 'national security' – conjuring the image of a country

under siege in the very first section titled 'Nation First' (BJP 2019, p. 11). Under this section,

'combating infiltration' figures prominently as an action point which is proposed to be

executed by extending the controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) beyond its current

implementation in Assam[6] to the rest of the country, which will 'weed out infiltrators' through

'documentary evidence' of citizenship judged by tribunals. It also passed the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA) in December 2019**,** bestowing citizenship to migrants from certain

religious categories (all religions, except Muslims) from the neighbouring countries of

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, thus explicitly bringing in a religious criterion for the

first time in the definition of citizenship in the country. In this process, the legislation has

changed the definition of an 'illegal' immigrant in India – excluding non-Muslims from

neighbouring countries from the definition and cementing the Muslim immigrant (typified by

the "infiltrator" figure) as the sole carrier of the tag of illegality (Paul 2023). Detention centres

are being planned not just in Assam but also other cities such as Mumbai and Bengaluru to

house those deemed non-citizens by these processes (Tripathi 2019). Taken together the NRC

and CAA[7] confirm that the governmentality of Hindutva citizenship in contemporary India

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[6] Assam is a border state in North-East India, bordering Bangladesh. Almost 1.9 million people are rendered possibly stateless with the Assam NRC and many have lost/taken their lives because of the associated stress.

[7] The passing of this law had led to fervent nationwide protests cut off by the onset of COVID in 2020. The protestors contested that the law posed quite a palpable risk to a majority of poor Muslim Indians, who might not have documentary evidence of citizenship like so many others in the country (Roy, 2019).

seeks to affirm the 'Hindu identity' of the country and 'weed out infiltrators' – which scholars have argued is a public euphemism for Muslims in general (Chowdhury 2021).

This article argues that the resulting contemporary citizenship regime has led to creation of *internal borders* as well as a *destabilisation* and *hierarchisation* of urban citizenship in general for poor Muslim migrants in Indian cities. Through news media analysis examining state and public discourse towards Bangladeshi immigrants in India, as well as personal interviews undertaken by the author, the paper highlights that the easy conflation of all Muslims as Bangladeshi "infiltrators" makes it easy to portray them as 'outsiders' and renders the status of the whole community precarious. This precaritisation, moreover, leads to a milieu of boycott, displacement and separation that could be characterised as a 'creeping apartheid' order.

The purported presence of 'illegal' Bangladeshi migrants in the country, draining all its resources, which forms the basis of the proposed nation-wide NRC and is the cornerstone of CAA is argued to be hugely exaggerated, with the actual number of such immigrants present deemed not just impossible to ascertain but also numerically insignificant (Balakrishnan 2020). Besides, the so called 'illegal' migrants are extremely vulnerable themselves, as seen in the case of around 60 'illegal' Bangladeshis detained in Bengaluru late 2019 in the fervour gripping the state machinery post Assam NRC and CAA. The workers so captured and deported were working as manual scavengers and contractual labour – forming an essential backbone of the waste management industry in the city (Mondal 2019a). The punitive melding of the Bangladeshi "infiltrator" identity with Muslim migrant workers in general also already had consequences on the ground as exemplified by the eviction of over 100 migrant families from their settlement in the city of Bengaluru in January 2020 (Scroll.in 2020). Many

of these workers were Bengali speaking Muslims from West Bengal and also Muslims from other states in India. This case is elaborated in Section 2.

Therefore, a systematic discrimination of the minority community of Muslims in the country is underway, as highlighted by several observers, leading to the creation of second class sub-citizens (Bhatia 2019) – not just in the extra-legal practices of violence (Shaban 2016), ghettoization (Contractor 2012) and marginalisation (Jaffrelot and Gayer 2013) as already exists in Indian cities, but in a more pernicious manner inscribed into its political infrastructure (Sharma 2018). This is characterised by criminalisation and targeted violence, institutional neglect, legalised injustice, political untouchability and economic/social boycott, marking a shift from marginalisation to exclusion (Mahmudabad 2020). This is examined in Section 3.

This exclusion is now inscribed into citizenship with the CAA and constructing internal faultiness for conflict, which may be classified as a 'creeping apartheid' order, which is the main theme of Section 4. The work on structurally embedded internal borders (Weber 2015) has highlighted how the technologies/ideologies that police the territorial limits as well as legal membership at the national borders are increasingly becoming entangled with the production of social boundaries of classificatory identities and symbolic differences within the polity (Fassin 2011). This internally suffused logic of the border (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) has created varied borderscapes within cities in India wherein internal bordering practices are dispersed onto many different state and community actors, instead of being restricted to specific border enforcement agencies (Weber 2019). As a result, there is a pervasive milieu of insecurity for both illegalised Bangladeshi migrants and the Indian Muslim poor, who as elaborated in later sections are increasingly fused social categories in public discourse, which leads to a milieu of social apartheid.

2. *"Is there a poster on my back saying I am Bangladeshi?"*: The Bengaluru Case

On January 19 2020, the Municipal Corporation of Bengaluru city – Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) – along with the police demolished over 100-200 settlements in a suburb called Bellandur in North Bengaluru's edges, citing suspicion that they were built by illegal Bangladeshi immigrants (Scroll.in 2020). The shanties in the locality called Kariyammana Agrahara consisted of makeshift hutments incrementally built by migrant workers hailing from different parts of India such as West Bengal, Assam, North and North-Eastern states, and even rural Karnataka – the state in which Bengaluru city is located (ibid). They were settled in the area doing various kinds of manual jobs, such as construction, security, waste segregation, housekeeping, and domestic work in the adjacent high rise upper middle-class residential and office complexes. This settlement is known as 'mini-Bangladesh' by people in the surrounding areas, displaying again the erroneous common-sensical notion that any Bengali speaking (or foreign sounding language, in this case) Muslim migrant majority area is Bangladeshi – imagined as 'an outsider'[8]. It is not a secret, however, that Bangladeshi migrants also reside in several informal settlements in Bengaluru, working as essential workers in the maintenance of the city (Mondal 2019b).

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[8] This information is gleaned from the personal interviews and group discussions conducted by the author in this area in March-April 2022.

Image: Settlements in Kariyammana Agrahara, ©Maggie Paul, 2022

The demolition was carried out on the basis of a letter that was dispatched by the Assistant

Executive Engineer of BBMP that claimed, "Bangladeshi nationals have built illegal sheds and

the residents here have converted this into a slum area" (Raj 2020), all without ever having

visited the settlement. He allegedly based his letter on the complaints by private citizens over

the previous year that "a lot of Bangladeshi immigrants are building up colonies and that they

are taking away all the labour/household work from the locals" (PUCL Vs State of Karnataka

2020). The immediate cause, though, seemed to be a video that was doing rounds on social

media (Bhat 2020) and shared by one prominent Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from

BJP, the ruling party in the state. In a Twitter post (Limbavali 2020), the MLA is heard

describing the settlement as a "thriving community" of Bangladeshi migrants with separate

access roads, electricity connections, water supply and other amenities. In the post he also

alleged that illegal activities were taking place in the sheds and "the environment was spoiled without cleanliness (sic)" (ibid). The action was also propelled by a letter issued by the central Ministry of Home Affairs (Foreigners Division) saying that from time to time, the Law Enforcement and Intelligence Agencies should be sensitized for taking prompt steps for identifying the illegal immigrants, especially after the CAA was passed (PUCL Vs State of Karnataka 2020). Therefore, a constellation of state and non-state actors succeeded in marking the area as 'Bangladeshi' and hence liable for violent state action, all without any systematic attempts at verification.

Image: Settlements in Kariyammana Agrahara, ©Maggie Paul, 2022.

The families so evicted were not given any prior notice. The citizenship documents that many

of the evicted families possessed and showcased did not aid them against the violence meted

out to them. Many angrily held up their state ID documents – national identity *Aadhar* cards,

Voter ID cards and PAN cards – which did not seem to matter (Prajwal 2020). A resident of

Kariyammana Agrahara, hailing from the state of West Bengal[9], stated:

> "No prior intimation was given. The police came without notice and began demolishing our
> homes. We were not even given some time to retrieve our items in the rooms. Many people
> had gone to work leaving all their possessions in their houses, which was all lost in the
> demolitions including rations and valuables. The police did not even check our documents. *Is
> there a poster on my back saying I am Bangladeshi?*"

The affected families were assisted by a Human Rights organisation People's Union For Civil

Liberties (PUCL) to file a petition in court against the arbitrary state violence. Upon perusing

all submitted documents and explanations from both sides, the High Court of Karnataka

deemed the demolitions unauthorized since no investigations were done by the police or the

BBMP; "large number of persons were illegally and high handedly deprived of their shelters

without following the due process of law (sic)" (PUCL Vs State of Karnataka 2020). The court

directed the state to pay compensations to the affected families and prepare for their

rehabilitation. The actual disbursal of compensation remains patchy, and the affected families

have been dispersed in different areas, many struggling to build shelter and means of

livelihoods again.

3. Marginalisation to Exclusion: A Milieu of Social Apartheid

This case is ensconced within a larger effort to entrench internal fault-lines based on religious

difference and conflict mentality in the public psyche. The communal ethos is increasingly

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[9] Personal interview, 2022.

becoming hegemonic in the popular sphere, especially in BJP ruled states such as Karnataka, played out most frequently in cities like Bengaluru. The perpetual state of conflict bolsters the ethno-religious brand of politics. From meddling with several cultural aspects of the Islamic faith (The Hindu 2022), such as banning the use of headscarves in educational institutions by Muslim girls, campaign against halal meat sold by Muslim traders and calls for putting an end to *azaan*[10] on loudspeakers, the state of Karnataka has been hailed as the "new anti-Muslim hate factory", in line with the maliciously anti-minority state of Uttar Pradesh – both BJP ruled states (Srikonda 2022). Over the past two years, the tenor of this conflict mentality has taken a turn from endemic religious violence and marginalisation (Brass 2005) to that of effective and explicit social boycott and exclusion.

Muslim businesses were boycotted in local Hindu temple fairs in early 2022 barring Muslim traders from setting up stalls in their premises (OpIndia 2022). This is unprecedented in the history of these annually held affairs, breaking from decades-old local traditions, and led to huge losses for the traders, who were still reeling from the debilitating effects of COVID-19 measures such as multiple lockdowns. A banner outside one of the temples reportedly read as follows (Parashar 2022), "people who don't respect the law or the land and who kill the cows that we pray and who is against the unity will not be allowed to do business. We will not allow them to do business. Hindu is aware. (sic)".

The Hindu *awareness* is not limited to the state of Karnataka and has been invoked repeatedly in the past few years, to guard itself against Muslim *insidiousness*, often with explicit support of state officials (Poovanna and Dev 2022). In June 2021, self-proclaimed Hindutva activists of various hues had 'protested' against what they claimed was the violence and

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[10] *Azaan* is the call for prayers made in the mosques.

encroachment of 'jihadi' fruit sellers in the national capital territory of Delhi city (Jafri 2021).

'Jihadi' here is an explicit reference to 'illegal' Bangladeshis and Rohingya refugees[11] (ibid).

Implicitly though it is meant to refer to the whole Muslim community; the former two and

the latter being increasingly conflated and synonymously used in the Hindutva universe. The

protestors resorted to violence and harked back on their advocacy for the economic boycott

of Muslim enterprises raised even earlier in March 2020 (Sudarshan News 2020), after riots

in the capital city of Delhi which led to the death of over 50 people, mostly Muslims. Public

discourse about this riot – perpetrated by Hindutva groups as a response to the countrywide

protests against the passing of CAA 2019 often led by Muslim women – was absurdly twisted,

leading to state investigations targeting the Muslim 'rioter' and activists (Human Rights Watch

2022).

Calls for being 'self-sufficient', preventing the theft of a majority of professions by Muslims,

fighting against the 'economic jihad' by Muslims who are accused of creating a 'parallel

economy' and in turn supporting a 'Hindu economy' as an alternative to 'Halal economy' have

blatantly been made for the past few years (Sharma 2020). The 'solutions' touted by motley

Hindutva groups include hurting the Muslims economically by removing them from jobs, not

giving them any jobs, not allowing them to occupy any professional positions, removing them

as tenants, and not buying/using products from Muslim businesses (News Views 2020). These

measures have been called out as a form of 'social apartheid' with the explicit intention to

ostracize and segregate Muslims from mainstream social and community resources (All India

Lawyers' Association for Justice 2022). By cutting off a community from informal means of

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[11] The Indian government under BJP has shown a visibly belligerent attitude towards Rohingya refugees from Myanmar seeking refuge in India. These refugees have been categorised by the United Nations Human Rights Council as the 'most persecuted minority in the world'. But even after the passing of CAA 2019 purportedly to support persecuted minorities in the neighbouring Muslim majority countries, this group of refugees has seen visible state disavowal (Chakravarty, 2022).

livelihood and social life in general, the aim seems to be to build internal walls to intentionally cause harm.

The calls for economic and social boycott are itself contextualised within an even larger communal common-sensical ethos against Muslims within several BJP-ruled states. Economic or social boycott is not deemed enough and repeated calls for genocide and mass murder of Muslims have been made that go unchecked and unpunished (Daniyal 2021). This genocidal impulse has been normalised as a way to "show the Muslims that this is *our* country", as one of the Hindu instigators in a communal clash implied (Pandey 2022). There is a wanton merging of Muslims in the country as being the 'hated' Bangladeshi – a proxy to stress their foreignness – in these narratives. Starting with a ban on consumption and selling of beef, which eventually led to large scale lynching of Muslims all over the country by cow-vigilantes after the ascent of BJP in 2014, mob violence and hate speeches against the community have now turned banal (Daniyal 2021). In the meantime, history textbooks for children have been re-written to weave in fictional Hindu supremacy over Muslim 'barbarism and oppression' in the past (Truschke 2020), public markers of syncretism have been obliterated like changing of names of cities from Muslim sounding ones to Hindu sounding ones (Outlook 2022) and purported 'anti-conversion laws' have been passed in several BJP-ruled Indian states with the actual intent of preventing interfaith marriages which is now dubbed as 'love jihad'[12] in common parlance (Jamil 2021). Muslims are increasingly presented as anti-social, anti-national, non-law abiding, betrayers, killers, and serial rioters in public discourse (Jafri 2021). Although presented as 'fringe' activity by far-right groups, the state is implicitly or explicitly involved, as several BJP ministers actively participate in these calls (Barton 2022). Senior BJP

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[12] 'Love Jihad' is an unproven conspiracy theory used by Hindutva leaders and Hindu far-right groups to accuse Muslim men of converting Hindu women by marriage, without any valid proof. See (Frydenlund and Leidig 2022).

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leaders - including the otherwise hyper-vocal right-wing Prime Minister - often either turn a blind eye to these incidents, implicitly condoning them, or actively support them (Human Rights Watch 2021). The Hindutva network finds allies in the police and administration which creates a milieu of 'de facto legalised violence' (Apoorvanand 2022).

Beginning in April 2022, a series of communal clashes in several Indian states ruled by the BJP (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka) following a prominent Hindu festival led to large scale evictions and demolitions of properties belonging to the minority community in several cities (Al Jazeera 2022). In all the cases, a Hindu religious procession deliberately raised provocative slogans and was made an excuse to incite harm against Muslims, which led to clashes between communities. In a twisted interpretation of events, the minority Muslim communities were disproportionately assigned blame by the state, were prosecuted as 'stone pelters' and their properties demolished involving large-scale use of excavators (ibid). This has led to the solidifying of an earlier epithet used to describe the working of the currently dominant political party in India: 'bulldozer politics' (Firstpost 2022). Informed commentators have termed this brand of politics as "an 'idea' meant to cement hate politics, couched in the innocuous framework of good and effective governance" (Pradhan 2022) that metes out swift and instant "bulldozer justice" to alleged 'rioters', 'stone pelters', 'miscreants' and 'transgressors' (Mahmudabad 2022) – which are all openly euphemistic terms for the Muslim community as a whole. In this way the bulldozer has become a symbol of Hindutva idea of 'justice' for minorities in a majoritarian vision of the nation (Shih and Gupta 2022).

After one such similar incident in the city of Delhi in a Muslim dominated informal settlement, the local BJP leaders gave a spin to the communal clashes and termed it as a 'conspiracy' by

'illegal immigrants' (The Print 2022). They resorted again to the phantom[13] of Bangladeshi "infiltrator" to belittle and provoke the local government led by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), asking them why electricity and water was being provided to the supposedly illegal settlement thus legitimizing them. BJP leaders publicized the communal clash as a 'terrorist attack' aimed to spoil the 'harmony' of the nation by Bangladeshis and Rohingya – increasingly clubbed together, as if they are a homogenous group (Times Now 2022). The chief of the party in the city exhorted the use of bulldozers in a bid to 'rid' the city of 'anti-social elements' and 'illegal encroachments' (Hindustan Times 2022).

This led to a large scale 'anti-encroachment' demolition in the area, despite a stay on the same by the Supreme Court of India. Close observers pointed out how the demolitions were selective, based on religious lines and that the legal/illegal divide was arbitrarily employed to target one section of the population based on their identity (Prakash 2022). More such anti-encroachment drives against 'illegal Bangladeshi' settlements were planned by the city Municipal Corporation over the coming months. This is not merely an 'unprecedented' assault on the urban poor considered the 'not quite citizens' (Sharma 2022) but another example of how the 'Bangladeshi' dog whistle can be used to justify arbitrary state violence (Hossain 2022) and further otherization of poor Muslims in the name of 'security' for the 'Hindu India'. The loss of shelter and livelihood is not compensated by the state due to the tag of "infiltration" imposed on the people.

These razing of walls, of poor households, is happening amidst a building of others. In a tier two city in the state of Uttar Pradesh, a wall was constructed to segregate a Muslim neighbourhood cutting them off from the rest of the city, businesses, and resources, without

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[13] I argue that the "infiltrator" has become a phantom figure in the Indian political space, whose presence seems larger and scarier than one can prove.

any forewarning or explanation. The erstwhile space over which the wall appeared had been

a traditional pathway used for several generations. The wall was allegedly celebrated by the

Hindus on the other side for having 'cleared the filth' (Article 14 2022). There are echoes of

Israel's 'separation wall' (Peteet 2016) here, bringing group-based separation, closure and

exclusion into dramatic visual focus.

4. A "Creeping Apartheid"?

The term apartheid is morally loaded and invites straightforward ethical implications (Peteet

2016). Thus, I think that it has to be used with utmost caution, for it to not lose its political

and symbolic weight (Chiodelli 2022). I agree with scholars for a *selective and cautious*

broadening of the concept to contexts outside its socio-historical origination, so as to enable

its use to signal "proclaimed ethical unacceptability" (ibid) and propel appropriate socio-

political actions. That is why I wish to tread carefully with extending the concept to the

context of contemporary politics of separation in Indian cities. A 2021 report in the context

of Palestine-Israel argues that a threshold has been crossed by the Israeli state apparatus into

what may be called out as 'apartheid' (Human Rights Watch 2021). This has been argued by

several scholars and organisations over the past. Through this section, I wish to examine

whether that threshold has been crossed in the case of India.

Apartheid is an institutionalised regime of discrimination and repression wherein there is an

"*intent to maintain a system of domination* by one racial group over another; *systematic*

oppression by one racial group over another; and one or more *inhumane acts*, as defined,

carried out on a widespread or systematic basis pursuant to those policies" (ibid, pp. 5-6).

Overall, this means "systematically promoting the dominance of one group over another and

working to cement it" (B'Tselem 2021, p. 8). This dominance is buoyed by "schemes, discourses, ideologies, and practices of separation and exclusivism" (Peteet 2016, p. 249).

The Israeli tactics of engineering and fragmentation of space differently for Jews and Palestinians that results in a contiguous space for the former, while a "fragmented mosaic" for the latter, dividing the Palestinian population into dozens of disconnected enclaves; and a differential regime of rights in all the fragmented Palestinian units – which overall remain inferior to the rights extended to Jewish citizens – has indications, one might argue, of an apartheid order (B'Tselem 2021, p. 2). In the case of Israel, the intent to maintain domination is explicit and legally instituted by recognition of Israel as "the nation-state of the Jewish people" in statute. The gradations of citizenship and different parcelling of rights and protections are somewhat apparent, although Israel engages in a sort of "discursive subterfuge" to manage its democratic image in the international arena (Peteet 2016, p. 260). In India, such tactics are less unambiguous at present. The secular foundations of the country and constitutional guarantees that secure equal rights for all religious groups still remain as a straw to hold onto in theory, even though institutional malpractice and discrimination against Muslims are slowly becoming a norm; accepted as everyday political reality (Hansen and Roy 2022). It is also important to point out that legal redress is still possible in some cases, extolling constitutional morality in the face of social morality. This could be seen in the case of the Bengaluru demolitions, wherein the court stepped in to aid the displaced people in the face of state violence in Section 2 (PUCL Vs State of Karnataka 2020). Moreover, there remains a huge array of individual citizens and civil society organisations that explicitly resist the segregatory and genocidal impulses of the Hindu right.

However, if we understand new forms of apartheid or neo-apartheid to be "a set of totalising practices of discrimination towards ethnically connoted groups, aimed at subjugating and making them (economically and politically) disposable" (Chiodelli 2022), then the previous two sections of this paper do signal a "creeping apartheid" (Yacobi 2015, p. 583) in the case of Indian cities. Economic and social exclusion pioneered by the state apparatus coupled with violent displacements, based on the erroneous conflation of internal minority populations with 'outsiders' renders both categories unstable and politically marginalised in the cities. This "spatial and political regime of division" (Yacobi et al., 2022) increasingly becoming prominent under the current political dispensation is driven by a long-standing ideology "regarding the right of one group to control 'its' (self-defined) homeland, while controlling and marginalizing other groups residing in the same space" (Yacobi 2015, p. 584). Similar to the Zionist proposition, the political Hindutva project is a "will to nationhood" (Hansen 1999, p. 78); a nationhood that aims to shape and bring into existence a reified, monolithic form of societal identity, a *Hindu rashtra* or Hindu nation, that is totally incongruous with the supremely diverse reality of the Indian context.

The Hindutva ethos constantly keeps alive the narrative that the Muslim Bangladeshi migrants' presence symbolizes a "silent demographic aggression" (Rai 1993) against the nation. This is based on and fuels a majoritarian feeling of insecurity towards a 'threat by numbers' posed by the Muslim minority, that is projected as a possible "minoritising of the majority" in the future (Appadurai 2006, p. 8). Pseudo-demographic arguments of uneven population growth rates bolster these claims. The threatening "avalanche" of Muslim Bangladeshi migrants in this discourse leads to a "demographic disaster" – by causing a population imbalance, i.e., by increasing the number of Muslims against the Hindu majority

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in the country (Das 2016). While actual data on population trends and religious compositions would quell many of these fears (Pew Research Center 2021), it is the political creation and circulation of a latent majoritarian insecurity by Hindutva groups and politicians that keeps this discourse based on fear alive and relevant.

In the Hindutva imagination, the Indian Muslims along with the Bangladeshi "infiltrators" pose a planned subversion of Hindu India (Gillan 2002) – out to materialise the concept of a "greater Islamic nation" (Bhattacharyya 2018). This ideology that is becoming deeply embedded in the political functioning of India is a neo-apartheid force that, as presented in section 2 and 3, is (re)producing a deeply flawed urban order in several Indian cities, bound to cause further conflicts and instability in the coming future.

5. Conclusion

It could be contended that the conceptual frame of 'creeping apartheid' presents a lens with which to explain the comprehensive prejudicial practices directed towards religiously marked minorities, aiming to impose subjugation, displacement, and disposability through a multifaceted system of spatial and political division. This frame can potentially be applied to the present political landscape in India, specifically concerning the minority Muslim population. The prevailing state apparatus pioneers economic and social exclusion, which, in conjunction with violent forced relocations, inaccurately conflates internal minority populations with 'outsiders,' thereby destabilizing and politically marginalizing both categories within urban settings. Consequently, a milieu of social apartheid emerges, fortified by the tenets of Hindu nationalism, giving rise to the establishment of internal boundaries

and engendering a destabilized and hierarchical urban citizenship for impoverished Muslim

migrants in Indian cities.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

There are no conflicts of interest.

ORCiD

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