Chapter 7

Muslims, Media and Representation of Space

7.1 Representation of Space and Identity Formation

Lefebvre’s Representational Spaces provided the framework in which Muslim neighbourhoods of Delhi were probed deeply in the last two chapters of this thesis. Continuing this discussion I now explore the issue of representation of these spaces and the Muslim identity. At the outset, one very simple way to understand representations is to see them as allegorical or metaphorical presentation of things, people and processes and spaces. They may also be understood as models of what they represent. They make it easy for people to understand what they sought to represent by scaling down (architectural models of buildings etc), presenting them as codes, symbols (images, music or other kinds of texts), or by converting them to a different but more tame and handle able form (such as a globe, or maps). But in scaling down or coding, distortions or caricaturing are bound to occur. In this process it is also perhaps inevitable that certain features of the represented will be important and others will be downplayed depending on the use or consumption of the outcome of representation.

If we see a human being as a whole, her identity may be seen as a representational model that presents her by highlighting certain of her features. Different identities of
a person may then be seen as ruptured pieces of the whole, but the whole- the human being- is always something more than the arithmetic total of all the identity pieces. Social relationships, interactions and experiences form the very substantial and critical glue that holds the whole together, the lifeblood that makes this whole- a person.

Within the layers of identity formation there are people who have the power to compose identities more or less at will. For example, at a given instant of time upper middle class youth may project themselves as ‘responsible citizens’ at a candle light protest, but in the next instant they exercise their choice and can be devil-may-care party boppers. Bauman has captured accurately the predicament of the marginalised and excluded people- like Muslims in India, when he points out in a different context that at “the other end are crowded those whose access to identity choice has been barred, people who are given no say in deciding their preferences and who in the end are burdened with identities enforced and imposed by others; identities which they themselves resent but are not allowed to shed and cannot manage to get rid of. Stereotyping, humiliating, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities…” (Bauman, 2004, p. 38).

In the eighteenth century Europe, Bauman (2004) tells us, ‘society’ was a localised phenomenon owing to very little contact with the outside world. He explains that owing to decreasing distances and ‘holding powers’ of a neighbourhood set the stage for identity to be born as a problem. But before that, fixing of identities was a task that needed to be completed. “The margins swelled rapidly, invading the core areas of human cohabitation. Suddenly, the question of identity needed to be asked.” (Bauman, 2004, p. 18) But in case of India, even before the advent of Islam, Caste System ensured that the question was an important one for individuals even in localised village societies as well as in the urban townships. The question, ‘Kaun jaat?’ (of which caste?) has always been a part of an Indian society however localised or small. So Bauman’s assertion that asking ‘who you are’ makes sense only if you believe you can be something else and have a choice- does not hold true entirely in India. Indians belonging to ‘lower’ castes have not had choice since the firm establishment of Varna in India. But he is right in asserting that “the idea of ‘identity’ was born out of the crisis of belonging” out of the gap between “what is” and “what ought to be”. It can
be inferred from Bauman’s description of identity that urbanisation is an intrinsic part of the development or presence of a scenario where owing to tight spatial organisation and close proximity the gap becomes much more visible/perceptible and thus, paradoxically, wider.

Social identity theories (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1996; Turner et al., 1987) have thrown light on cognitive processes that individuals use to assign self and others affiliation to a group and the processes that get group members to conform to group norms. The theory also has a detailed analysis of impact of low group status and intergroup conflict. These discussions though have a severe shortcoming in terms of identity as a political construct, especially failing to address issues of citizenship and nationalism. The social psychological formulations focus on the individual in a collective but it essentialises a community as a homogenous collectivity of individuals. The perception of intergroup differences (that are thought to be homogenous) in itself as an explanation of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination is not convincing. It is not necessary that all the members of a group may have internalised the label ascribed to them. Interestingly, Tajfel (1969) also suggested that stereotyping and prejudice develop as a result of coherent narratives and must not be seen as irrational responses. Tajfel (1996) further adds that it is not only intergroup differences but also a motivation for ‘positive distinctiveness’ that fuels discriminatory behavior as well as inter-group conflict.

In the two preceding chapters I have shown how capitalist relations of production are in synch with production of discriminatory geography and how governmentality and biopower aids this while producing Muslims as normative non-citizens. I contend that an understanding of identity also as a political (and not merely as a social-psychological) construct would help us to complete this examination of roots of discrimination and prejudice. Drawing from chapter five, I reassert that each of a person’s identities has a material function. An aspersed identity has a definitive oppressive and exploitative material function. The tangible and intangible benefits to be accrued out of discriminatory behavior make it worthwhile for a system of dominance to resist any changes and maintain itself. This fits very well in the Althusserian account of ideological state apparatus in which individuals work on their own to reproduce class relations which may not have any immediate consequence for
themselves but in the long run maintain the relationships which they have come to see as the actual, natural condition of their existence. In his book *For Marx* Althusser (1969) asserted that while in the last analysis the economic relations determined the political and ideological levels of the society, the three levels also had a certain degree of ‘relative autonomy’. While it is true that the process of defining, redefining and forging new identities is always carried on differentially. It is almost an aphorism now that people have multiple identities. One identity may be operationalised in a given context over others while in a different context some other identity of the same person may prevail. The process is quite dynamic and often it may be so that the individual herself has no control over which of her identity is interpellated (ibid) or called into action at a moment. People exercise agency in whatever limited scope available to them in proportion to their power through a play of comparisons, contrasts, and identifications. It would be travesty to consider any one identity as the original or foundational identity of the person, especially when identities tend to be given (‘gift’?) within the ideological constraints of society. This is why lumping together of people because they are Muslims does not make them stick together as Muslims only.

For example, in a hostile situation people sometimes may try to activate those of their identities that are less stigmatised or even try ‘passing’ as the ‘other’. The act of exercising agency in determining our identity in most cases is constrained and defined by our subjective knowledge of the perception of the ‘other’. A Muslim subject strives to ‘give up’ a part of his or her identity so that a new identity is ‘returned’. The ‘gift’ sought is a more favorable subjectivity (hence socio-political agency) of the Muslim as reflected in the eyes (gaze) of those who are capable of branding this person with an aspersed identity. This is what Muslims seeking to be recognised differentially as ‘educated’, ‘moderate’, ‘progressive’ are attempting. These contestations of Muslim people with their ‘given’ and ‘assumed’ identities in different contexts inevitably reshape their spatiality as we have seen in chapter 5.

Analysing media discourses (van Dijk, 1985, 1993) on Muslims, I see identity and representation in this framework of ideological obfuscation of distortions. It would also be prudent to remind myself at this moment that Althusser does not see ideology as insubstantial and imaginary but that it exist in material and real actions of individual
even though these actions may not reflect the real nature of relationships. Since ideology is eternal, analysis may not take us to some ‘truth’ that has been ‘corrupted’ but definitely it can lead us to understand dynamics of exercise of power and the means people employ to make sense of the world around them.

Portrayal of Muslims in films and news media is a much explored aspect in academia. This chapter takes a fresh look at understanding portrayal and representation of Muslims in congruence with the methodological choices in rest of this work. I attempt what is called in the Marxist tradition an engaged analysis- which is a form of analysis that aims at emancipation and not just describing. Continuing from conclusions drawn from the analytical discussion of findings in the preceding chapters I stress that uncovering discourses and their ideological content can have emancipatory impact. This is done in consonance with the thread of concern that runs through the entirety of this thesis which is space and Muslims, while also exploring the content of some of the prominent identity constructs prevalent in mainstream media including the aspersed identities. It is in this light that I shall undertake, in this chapter, a semiotic approach to analyse the mainstream media discourses. Semiotics in combination with discourse analysis is concerned not just with the contents of a text but also the meanings and implications that readers derive from the signs appearing in a text. In contrast to Content Analysis which focuses on presence and presentation of content in a text, this chapter is an attempt in semiotics so as to discern the conventions that direct the discourse in media texts (Chandler, 2002). What is being studied is not whether an article appears in a text and how frequently, but, what is the meaning of its appearance or non-appearance and how do these meanings get shaped. One of the central concerns is to discern what are the assumptions in the given text and how do these influence the narrative in the text. The issues of assumption directly relate to perceptions and thus to identities.

### 7.2 Representation and Cinema

Cinema’s potential for reproduction of human experiences and a realist representation of the same have been the cause for much of the fascination surrounding it. Representation and interpretation, like the broader culture, arise in specific historical
context to serve specific social functions and economic interests. In this way it is easy to see how films are, thus, performative political events, and form part of the superstructure in the Marxist materialist theory. Critical theorists alerted media analysts to the impact of consumer capitalism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) and global or late capitalism (Jameson, 1990) on mass society and culture, connecting culture and media to political economy. Because no representation is absolutely accurate it needs to be understood by a conceptual framework that orders impressions and assumptions of individuals. In this sense, cinema is also a myth in the sense used by Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes (Nichols, 1976).

A key question in any act of representation is with regards to who is representing and who is getting represented. The first question is in fact the question that forms the foundation of film theory. *Auteur* theory sees a film as a work of art, authored by a writer, and suggests that we look into the stylistic sensibilities of the author of the work in order to understand what he or she may be attempting to state. In the *genre* criticism recurrent themes in a genre are discerned and analysed. My efforts in analysis in this part of the thesis are a combination of Marxist criticism and semiology in film theory. These are characterised by a study of ideological nature of interceding social and historical factors, and the ‘formal properties of image as sign’ (ibid, p. 1).

Studies of Hindi films are mostly marked by genre criticisms which have also paid some attention of signs and symbols that are recurrently used in a genre. The genre that has had major presence and significance in Hindi cinema is the Nationalist film within which not only the content but the practice of film making was deemed to be a nationalist enterprise (Rajadhyaksha, 1987). The other themes that are often studied and invoked are the portrayal of women, families, mental illness and Muslims and other minorities. M. Madhava Prasad (1998) contends that the journey of Indian cinema in international history of theorisation of films began only in the study of realist cinema of the masters like Satyajit Ray. The cinema of fantasy or religious themes was regarded as ‘not-yet-cinema’ in film theory. Thus, Indian films become ‘Indian Cinema’ only as the brilliant *auteurs* begin representing and lauded for representing ‘Indian culture’ in as realistic way as possible. On the other hand, Prasad points out that some theorists even went so far as to utilise psychoanalytical conventions of Sudhir Kakar and Ashish
Nandy to associate popular Hindi cinema with the general masses and thus equivalent to trash in artistic terms. In both cases, it was thought to be possible to say something meaningful about Indian society and culture (both high and low/popular culture) by studying its cinema. In final analysis it consisted of two kinds of audience- a refined audience that was capable of analysis and enjoying realism, and the mass audience that could not discern between ‘myth’ and ‘fact’. These boundaries in understanding the difference in degree of representation of ‘reality’ in films and assessing the capacity of different kinds of viewers are not static. They are being frequently redrawn and repositioned.

Another framework pertains to the development of aesthetics of Hindi cinema whose co-ordinates are frontality and, again, realism. Both frontality and realism are a function of the relationship of the performers to the spectator. There is a sense of reciprocity in a film with frontal aesthetic sensibilities- the spectators face the performers and the performers also face the spectators just as in theatre performances. In frontality as a mode of representation, the cinematic image is not just a ‘capture’ of reality but a performed narrative which is addressed to the spectator and offered to them as an object to the spectators’ gaze. Interpretation of the representation by spectators involves a complex interplay of aesthetics, technology, narrative forms and conventions such as framing, editing and mise-en-scene1. (G. Kapur, 1987; A. Kapur, 1993 cited from Prasad, 1998)

For critical acclaim Indian cinema contrives hard to portray ‘reality’. Celebrated Bollywood filmmakers like Vishal Bhardwaj, Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, and Madhur Bhandarkar have been actually lauded for presenting versions of ‘reality’ that is celebrated not for its accurate portrayal but for the rare insights that it provides into the ‘reality’. These film makers present an analysis of reality that is not cryptically hidden into the narrative but quite frontal. Their films offer the viewers a view of ‘reality’ which makes them appreciate it and think of themselves as refined audience-different from the masses. This kind of cinema provides a more nuanced motivation to the audience to suspend their belief. The more they believe the ‘clever’ narrative,

---

1 *Mis-en-scene*: The way a scene is set up and everything contained in it – lighting, makeup and costumes, sets, positions, entry and exits etcetera.
situations and characters as ‘real’ the better they can think of themselves. Like Zizek says that no one believing in an ideological position believes that they are being deceived because of the pejorative connotations of ‘ideology’. Zizek says that the Marxist notion of ideology stands compromised today because everyone today agrees that there cannot be a singular truth that is obscured by hegemony of the powerful. But, he says further, that this understanding does not mean that we have seen the end of ideology, rather, this feeds into a situation Zizek calls ‘archideological fantasy’ (Sharpe & Boucher, 2010, p. 44) which refers to a situation when we know that a portrayal is not true but we pretend as if we do not know. Archideology is more effective than ideology because it means that people do not believe an idea to be a representation of truth but behave as if it was anyways.

In her classic article *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey (1975) brought forth the concept of ‘gaze’ to cinema in context of portrayal of women in Hollywood cinema and male gaze. She employed psychoanalytical techniques to discern the ways in which male gaze shapes the representation. Referring to this I attempt to understand Lacanian and Foucauldian conception of gaze that Mulvey drew from. While panoptican gaze is all seeing, collective, internalised and anonymised, Lacanian conception of gaze is hinged at an object who does not see you at all and therefore, induces shame and anxiety. This anxiety inducing ‘look’ does not originate in an eye nor in a mirror, it is rather, ‘a point of failure in the visual field’ (Krips, 2010, p. 93). While Foucault (1979) understands panoptican gaze as disciplinary power, according to Lacan the gaze is in the mind of the one who is being looked at. This is the conception of gaze that is really relevant to the representation of Muslims in Bollywood cinema. It is not so much an all seeing eye that deliberately misrepresents but a point of collapse in sensory faculties that does not see Muslims at all in its portrayal of their image and thus deeply humiliates them—shaming them into discipline. The failure in the field of vision that sees Muslims as the aspersed Other is the precursor to the suspension of faculties. We suspect that this might not be true but we lose nothing in behaving as if this was the truth. This is a position which is obviously more effective than the position that people do not know. It is effective in situation when people do not know their own position they define it as opposed to the position of what Zizek
(1989) calls the ‘big O Other’. The tag ‘Indian’ – the master signifier without a signified is substantiated by the decentring of portrayal of Muslims as big O Others.

Even when the representation is subject to political contestations and calls by minority and marginal groups which are routinely represented negatively to be exposed for their hidden manipulative content, Zizek contends that this does not mean an end of ideology. In Althusser’s idea of interpellation when the person hears ‘hey you’ called out by a police man he turns into a subject. In his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Zizek (1989) claims that this process is also not perfect. When the person who is being called out responds by turning, he is not turned into a perfect subject inside of ideology. That there is always a leftover, a residue, because the person being called out turns around and asks “why am I what you are saying I am?”

Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machine of ideology is ‘internalized’ into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth: but... that this ‘internalization’, by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, that there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and that this left over, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it: it is precisely this non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism which confers on the Law its unconditional authority: in other words, which – in so far as it escapes ideological sense – sustains what we might call the ideological jouis-sense, enjoyment-in-sense (enjoy-meant), proper to ideology. (ibid, p. 43-44, emphasis original)

These are the discursive considerations that frame my analysis of the film narratives and content for representation of Muslims. The questions being asked here pertain to assumptions regarding the attributes of society that are supposed to define the collective identity norms, the conventions and devices used to differentiate between identity markers- ‘us’ and ‘them’, and the changing nature of the discourse regarding identities itself in relation to the political economy of culture.
7.2.1 Muslim Identity: Narratives from Hindi Film

Films selected for the exercise of discourse analysis are popular Hindi films from among those that were released in the two year period between 1 April, 2008 and 1 April, 2010. This period is interesting because it saw many mainstream Hindi films with themes that spoke of Muslims and/or terrorism. For an easy categorisation, I differentiated between the films that had the theme of terrorism woven into the plot somehow and other films in which there were Muslim Protagonists but no references to terrorism. I selected films with their narratives placed in contemporary context and times. Therefore, even though Jodha Akbar was also released in this period and has interesting references to Hindu-Muslim relationships in the historical context, I decided to exclude it.

Among the films with terrorism references Agey Se Right (Nattoji, 2009) is unique in having a narrative that has a satirical and comedic take on various contemporary realities. For example, it makes a very astute and amusing comment on the corporatisation of the ‘underworld’. The film also makes interesting comments on several other issues such as corruption in corporate world, police and bureaucracy. Agey se right is a comedy of errors of a new Mumbai police recruit and a terrorist who lands on Mumbai shoreline from Pakistan with a plan to engineer a bomb blast at a Mumbai Police function. Because the plot makes a fervent attempt at humour it succumbs to exaggerated and stereotyped stock situations and stock characters. The Pakistani terrorist and his bosses in Pakistan keep talking about jang-e-azadi (war for freedom) but never elaborate whose freedom (azadi) and how did they zero on Mumbai Police event as the target which will ensure attainment of their goal. The ‘South Indian’ gangster who invites him to collaborate in the blast is clear that it will help him establish his supremacy in the Mumbai underworld. While there is a parallel of Jai Singh inviting Babar to ‘invade’ India, the situations in comedy never get really menacing. Within the first fifteen minutes of the film the terrorist renounces his mission after love at first sight situation with a svelte bar dancer. The Mumbai ‘don’ never quite becomes a ‘traitor’ he also renounces his dream of reigning over Mumbai underworld to tutor the terrorist on how best to pursue his love interest.
What is of interest for the present analysis is the film’s take on the politics of language? The don is stock ‘south Indian’ character. He has no ‘place’—we do not know where exactly in ‘South India’ he is from— but speaks in a Bollywood version of Mumbai tapori with a ‘south Indian’ accent. Right through the film he delivers funny one-liners. His mission undergoes change but not his language. For the terrorist, on the other hand, only a change of heart is not enough. He must undergo many more changes. He begins by vocalising the ferocious mission in chaste Persianised Urdu and when caught staring at the bar dancer he touches his ears in a gesture of reparation (tauba) and says, “jang-e-azadi mein ye sab haraam hai…” (All this is forbidden in the war for freedom) only to be reminded by the Don that, “haram ke bad harem bhi kartey hein.” (Harem can be done after the forbidden). The don is punning on the words Haraam (forbidden) and Harem alluding to the orientalist stereotype. Within the short span of the bar girl’s performance, interrupted by disturbance by another spectator and then an early closure by a police raid, the terrorist has undergone complete change of heart. When everyone runs from the police he miraculously acquires a burqa for disguise! In a scene resonating with reminiscences from tawaif (courtesan) films he must stop the bar girl’s auto to ask her what were the next line of the interrupted song she was singing. Bhaskar and Allen (2009, p. 45) opine that, “…the Islamicate idiom of the Muslim Courtesan film locate the tawaif and her art forms and values in the historical imaginary of nawabi Lakhnawi culture, and conceive the figure of the tawaif as a repository of social and cultural forms and values of this imagined world as they are expressed, and also transformed, in spaces other than Lucknow and in times other than nineteenth century”. Thus, the narrative partially inhabits this imaginary space.
and it is not surprising that in this transformation, the terrorist’s interest in Urdu poetry surfaces.

Later he requests the don to help him with requiting his love who retorts at the poetry spouting guy, “*Tum to maar kaat karo tumko wahi shobha deta hai*” (you kill and maim, that alone suits you). On being pressed further the don relents and diagnoses the problem- which is that he speaks in Urdu! To make the transition from a terrorist to a lover boy he must lose Urdu. This is a curious statement for a Mumbai film to make, where Urdu has long been the primary language for expression of love. The identification of Urdu poetry with expression of love is reiterated by the mastermind of the terror group in Pakistan who regrets having sent a ‘poet’ for a ‘job’ such as this one. We can argue that even though Hindi and Urdu are identified as different languages with distinct scripts, it is still difficult to ascertain where one language starts and the other ends. The basic structure, the grammatical sensibilities and even the vocabulary are shared to such an extent that a boundary between Urdu and Hindi is virtually non-existent. This fact is apparent even in this film which tries hard to labels Urdu the language only of Pakistan and the language of antiquity and anti-modern if not the language of terrorists. In one of the opening scenes when the terrorist lands on Mumbai shores he asks the don if the people accompanying him are loyal, using the word *wafadaar* and the don apparently not understanding the word because it is in Urdu replies in negative. ‘*Wafadar nahin*’ he says, ‘*bharose ke hein*’, using the word *bharosa* for trustworthiness. It would be difficult to argue which of these words, *wafadaar* and *bharosa* belongs more to Urdu and which to Hindi. Later, when the don hands over a pistol to the terrorist, he says, “*Hifazat ka waastey*” (for protection) which is again an expression which traverses the non-existent Hindi-Urdu schism.

An important aspect in the film is that even though it indicates that terrorists are made not born, it articulates a hierarchy of intent behind acts of terror. If the intent is rooted in alleged ‘Islamic fervour’ as that of the terrorist- it is dangerous- portrayed through menacing and frightening body language, makeup and costume. On the other hand, the intent of south Indian mafia don behind planning an act of terrorism is shown to be merely criminal intent- portrayed as if it is a project of a bumbling fool.
The Muslim practice of purdah is represented as being rooted in an essentially patriarchal Islam. A Muslim woman’s body that is cloaked by ‘patriarchal’ Islam is derided and resented, at once. Kay Kay falls in love with a ‘fallen woman’ but he then has to immediately slip into the ‘protective’ possessive patriarchal role. Mixing patriarchy with the terrorist violence the terrorist mission is portrayed in historical terms as a ‘Muslim’ project by revoking the viewers’ memory of Mughal king Akbar portrayed by Prithviraj Kapur in Mughl-e-azam. On hearing of Kay Kay’s forsaking the mission he vows to kill the bar girl and roars, “Jang-e-azadi ki zamin par ek laundi ko naachne nahin denge” (we will not let a servant girl dance on the land of war for freedom). Laundi, of course, is the epithet with which the Akbar had derided Anarkali.

Mumbai Meri Jaan (Kamat, 2008) is a collage of stories of seven protagonists living their lives in different milieu in the aftermath of the 2006 bomb blasts in Mumbai. Film narrative reads like a complex comment on terror as it impacts the everyday lives of people, almost becoming part of modern contemporary life just as sensationalisation and commodification of news and its increasing inability to say anything meaningful about human existence. Rupali, a TV news reporter played by Soha Ali Khan realises this only when her life is the one that is being commodified for consumption of the masses. In face of death and fear for life, Madhavan’s character becomes aware of increasing futility of his youthful nationalistic optimism. He is derided for being a ‘proactive citizen’ who cares for environment and the phenomenon of so called ‘brain drain’ but by the end of the film when he is ready to revise his utopia he must also confront his yearning for ‘security’ which seems to elude globalised spaces all over the world.

What comes through the dialogues of Paresh Rawal, a police constable who is soon going to retire, is sagacity in being ordinary-inactive spectator because little else makes any sense. To a colleague who is agitated at not being able to do anything of significance in life he says, “Tere man mein na ek art film chal raha hai... sifr picture dekhne ka acting nahin karne ka... man ke ek kone mein kursi pakadne ka aur picture dekhne ka...” (there is an art film running in your mind… you must only watch it, don’t start acting in it… prop a chair in a corner in your mind and just watch the film). Here I
am reminded of Zizek’s take on Hollywood films which according to him stage “a semblance of real life deprived of the weight and inertia of materiality – in the late capitalist consumerist society, ‘real social life’ itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbors behaving in ‘real’ life as stage actors and extras...
Again, the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian de-spiritualized universe is the de-materialization of the “real life” itself, its reversal into a spectral show” (Zizek 2002, p. 14). But Rawal’s advice for inaction extends to proactive inaction which extends into an explanation of the futility of retributive discourses of ‘action and reaction’. It is this that is seen as having the ability to reason with fanaticism of Hindu nationalism which is portrayed as being reproduced by bigoted narratives of a primordial Akhand Bharat (Unified India) and expressed in the everyday domestic sphere. This proactive inaction is also seen to be complimented by the global capitalism. While the disruption of everyday life arouses in the police officer and Suresh the hysteria of impotence and paranoid scapegoating respectively, it is the need for money to continue consumptive life is what keeps them both from tipping over. Wads of notes are received by both with gratitude and concerns of legality are brushed aside with a ‘resourceful’ logic of what is ‘fair’. It is only fair to take bribe for letting illegal businesses operate or to use pirated software because these are making a lot of money in any case and would continue regardless of one individual’s position of the matter.

In a very interesting sequence in the film, Suresh and friends are hanging out near a roadside tea-stall. They are recounting the horrific scenes and devastation they witnessed in the aftermath of the bomb blast. While the friends talk the camera focuses on Suresh who seems to be getting angrier with each description and stares ahead towards the deserted road. As if in answer to his prayer an old man appears pulling his bicycles. He is wearing a Lakhnavi cap and is sporting a white beard. Suresh begins to harass him when the inspector and the constable appear on their bike. Rawal calls out to him “kya ho raha hai?” (what is happening?). Suresh is undaunted and says, “Dekho saab kaun hai…” (Look sir, who is here). The expression on his face is one of complete self-assurance. Rawal retorts, “haan, toh?”(Yes, so what?). The expression on Suresh’s face now turns to one of surprise and incredulity. Clearly, he did not imagine that a Muslim could also be considered a citizen by a policeman who
would actually act to protect him, rather Suresh assumed the complicity of police in his harassment of a stranger for no reason but that he is a Muslim. In his surprise Suresh forgets his original victim. He gets into a scuffle with Rawal and has to flee the scene after pushing him to the ground.

In another sequence Suresh is convinced that Yusuf, who is also a regular at the restaurant where Suresh usually hangs out with his friend, is somehow involved in the bomb blasts. He decides to investigate himself and forces one of his friends to take him to Yusuf’s house. Until this event we have little idea where Suresh is from except that he sells computers and is not doing well in his occupation. At some point in their walk, the two friends reach a place where Suresh visibly winces and hesitates to continue walking. Clearly, Suresh does not belong to Mumbai slums. The camera zooms out and pans low, foregrounding a cage full of chickens presumably to signal that they have reached a Muslim neighbourhood. As they continue, the lanes become narrower and Suresh looks up to notice a minaret but the area is so congested that the mosque itself is not visible. This, of course, is a sure shot sign that they are indeed inside a Muslim locality. Along the way they hear the wafting lyrics of nationalist film song “Kar chale hum fida jano tan sathiyon/ab tumhare hawale watan saathiyon” (having given our life and being, we leave comrades/now the nation is in your custody comrades) sung by Mohd Rafi. The song and exchange of words regarding the religious identity of the singer is fully frontal and is obviously intended for the benefit of the viewer of the film. At Yusuf’s house they are met by his mother who is a warm and talkative woman. The way she is shown to talk of her son’s habits and schedules only confirms Suresh’s doubts. We know that the space in which this conversation is
occurring is a ‘Muslim space’ because throughout the conversation the sound of *azaan* is playing in the background.

Suresh and friend manage to find Yusuf and follow him. They find that he meets a *burqa* clad figure and rides away on his motor bike. Suresh is convinced that the person in *burqa* is a terrorist. The friend protest it’s a woman evidenced from the gait of the person. Suresh says in a totalising sort of way, “*Woh log sarey seekh kar aatey hein...*” (these people are all trained for this) it turns out that *burqa* clad figure is Yousuf’s girlfriend whom he is meeting clandestinely and taking her to Haji Ali *dargah*. Here too the hatred and envy of the Hindu patriarchal viewpoint on considering Muslim patriarchy evidences itself. The friend is given the task of keeping an eye on the lovers who gets bored soon because he cannot see much of the woman because of her *burqa*! Suresh chastises him and adds wryly, “*Ye log aise hi hein sab kuchh chupate phirte hein, ek hum hi log hein jo nange ghoomte hein...*” (These people are like this they keep hiding everything; it is we who go around naked...). Why do Yousuf and his girlfriend go to the *dargah* is not clear. Probably the film maker thought it important to keep Muslims in ‘Muslim’ spaces. Somehow in Hindi cinema lives of Muslim people are spent in spaces that are characterised by their ‘muslimness’. These spaces are different from secular spaces. Secular spaces in Bollywood formulation are where *everyone else* conducts their everyday lives and Muslims just pass through standing out and noticed for their Muslimness. This act of passing through is meant to bring discomfort and aversion to everyone while, for standing out Muslims bring anxiety and humiliation unto themselves.

In the film *Amir* (Gupta, 2008), the protagonist is a young Muslim doctor returning from London. The film makes an explicit statement that he is inconvenienced and harassed at the customs solely because of his name which is a marker of his Muslim identity. When he exits the airport, for inexplicable reasons, he is informed that he must follow the orders of a mysterious person over phone if he wants to see his family alive. Thus begins, Dr Amir’s journey to various ‘Muslim spaces’ in Mumbai that *even he is completely unfamiliar with*. The film is extremely fast paced like one in a thriller genre and moves from one space to another in fast succession. Somehow the logic of this imposed tour of Muslim areas is to convince Dr Amir of the legitimacy
of the terror project because of the socio-economic positioning of Muslims in these
dark, dense and derelict spaces. While in Agey se right the binary between good
Muslim and bad Muslim was internalised into the metamorphosis within an individual
Amir makes it more a real world contestation between two categories of people. But
there is a third category of Muslims whom everyone talks of but who themselves are
only pawns in carrying the story forward. The Bad- Terrorist Muslim and the Good-
Progressive Muslim are in a tight faceoff with each other in Amir but the silent
multitudes are represented to be habitating dark ‘ghettos’ not even been given place
to shit (hagne ki jagah bhi nahin dete…) as told to Amir by his mysterious caller. It is
these people and their existence that is portrayed as making the terrorists want to
unleash their terror over innocent world but these people and their situation only makes
the progressive Muslim throw-up in disgust. Amir tries hard, he empathises but all he
wishes is to go back to his ‘normal’ life with his friends where little inconveniences
(at airports for example) may be the forms of discrimination that he faces. In an
extremely tragic end of the film, while Amir chooses to kill himself rather than become
part of perpetration of violence on others, he dies not as a sensitive, caring, responsible
citizen but as a failed suicide bomber because as a Muslim of any hue he has no
option or opportunity to redeem his image in face of predicament.

This is the reason why the media formulation of ‘moderate’ Muslim, the ‘progressive’
Muslim must get rid of all or most signs of their Muslimness. ‘The progressive Muslim’
is heralded for not looking like a Muslim. S/He does not invoke his Muslim identity in
casual conversations. S/He must display that Islam plays no role whatsoever in his/
her everyday life or even in major decisions. In fact, if they renounce Islam totally or
some key (but arbitrarily decided) feature of it that is even better. But s/he must be
ready to serve up Islamicate culture for consumption of the mainstream- serve sivaiyan
on Eid, *biryani* and *quorma* on others and recite Urdu poetry etcetera. They must appear very keen to castigate Muslim fundamentalism and specially move around with a ‘not in our name’ placard in their hands all the time to be put up for display in ‘secular spaces’ as and when required. But the bottom-line is that a Muslim is a Muslim. The Muslimness represented by symbolic costume or signifiers of space may be discarded by people in their quest for more convenient lives free from day to day discrimination. This may earn them a label of ‘progressive Muslims’ and exclamation of how they do not look like Muslims at all but when the chips are down these things are of little relevance. I connect this discussion to the one in the last two chapters and I contend that the notion of ‘Muslimness’ is not limited to physical or symbolic attributes of a person or a space but is a function of being understood and portrayed in the mainstream discourses as a distinctive political community with common political interests and aims. Mushirul Hasan (2008) in his recent work titled *Moderate or Militant: Images of India’s Muslims* investigates these discourses regarding the ‘Muslimness’ in political participation of Muslims and refutes the charges of homogeneity of Indian Muslims political interests. He further explicates, “Put briefly, a decidedly elitist discourse should not be seen as reflective of Indian Muslims or their so-called communal consciousness. Nor can the politics of Muslim identity be reduced to a mere rationalisation of normative Islamic discourse. There is much variation even within this elitist discourse, not all of which is focused on electoral representation, and still of Muslim willingness to differ from rather than defer to the consensus of the community, however construed, in the rough and tumble of practical politics” (ibid, p. 73).

The construction of ‘good Muslim’ and dynamics of appeals to his understanding for, or his inherent complicity with, the cause of the bad ‘terrorist Muslims’ can be seen in other films such as *A Wednesday*, *New York, Kurbaan* and *My Name is Khan*. In *A Wednesday* (Pandey, 2008), the main protagonist played by Naseeruddin Shah is portrayed for the most part of the film as a Muslim terrorist working to secure release of four dreaded criminals involved in various cases of terror. In the end, it is revealed that his real motive was to kill them rather than get them released. It is in this moment that the film takes a frontal position of not divulging his real religious identity. Writing
on ‘encounters’ (or extra-constitutional killings) in Hindi films, Anustup Basu (2010, p. 185) says, ‘A “good” follower of Islam is also, by differential measures, a figure of vice; if one acquires urban chic beyond that, one stops being “Muslim” altogether, no matter what one’s identity is’. Basu is emphatic that even though, the body on the receiving end in an encounter is that of a Muslim the narratives are often careful in stating this is not an all out undeclared war by the Indian state against Muslims. Killing of a Muslim by the state is always represented as a stray, isolated incident.

According to him this feat is achieved by presence of a Muslim assistant to the Hindu encounter specialist. In A Wednesday, the last terrorist is killed not by the bombs set up by Shah’s aam aadmi, but shot simultaneously by a Hindu cop and a Muslim cop. Casting of these characters is interesting as the Hindu cop is portrayed by a Muslim actor Aamir Basheer and the Muslim cop is played by Jimmy Shergill. The curious thing here is that the ‘good Muslim’ in this film is not playing the second fiddle. Jimmy Shergil is a portrayed as overzealous and not averse to illegal and extra-constitutional methods to punish those whom he deems to be in the wrong. A lot of footage in film is used to establish this representation of his character through his modus operandi in other unrelated cases. This is also noted in several reviews of the film. Several blogs called him ruthless, violent. He is described as a ‘volatile cop’ in a review by Taran Adarsh (2008). In another review which describes this character as ‘hot-blooded and impulsive’, the reviewer Rajiv Masand (2008) further states, “It’s

![](image7.4.png) Image 7.4: Jimmy Shergill at the overzealous and ‘volatile’ Muslim cop.
Shergill who shines in this film with a performance that is measured and meticulous. It’s the most ‘showy’ of all roles in this film and the other actors allow Shergill to steal the film.” Basu posits that these killings or ‘encounters’ are built in the narrative of Hindi films as an opportunity to the ‘good Muslim’ character to redeem his status to that of a loyal patriot. My contention is that this is actually a fallacious situation in which while the patriotic sentiment can be proved by the Muslim cop with his involvement in concrete act of extra-constitutional killing but the killing itself proves the Muslim character true to the stereotype of Muslims bearing volatile and impulsive persona and not being averse to violence and killings.

In a long speech regarding his aims and motivations Shah claims that he is an aam aadmi (common man) who is simply fed up of living a life constantly threatened by terrorists. Here Shah uses the analogy of ‘cockroaches’ for terrorists as infiltrators that have ‘invaded’ and ‘polluted’ his ‘home’ and thus must be killed. The fascist analogy is tellingly similar to the one employed by present day anti-Muslim right and Neo-Nazis all over Europe and by Sangh groups in India. The seamless collusion of everyone involved in the extra-constitutional killing of the last terrorist is a reminder of the discussion of Muslims as homo sacri earlier in this thesis.

New York (Khan, 2009) has two ‘good’ Muslims Umar and Roshan. While Roshan is an FBI agent, he chooses Umar for his friendship in the past with Sameer, who is suspected to be an operative of a terrorist group. The ‘bad Muslim’ in New York in fact is also a ‘good Muslim’ when the narrative begins because as a student on NYU campus he has hardly any markers of religious identity on his person or in his outlook. The narrative in fact has a clichéd college life track of the protagonists which serves
to establish that Samir is completely oblivious to his Muslim identity. The character’s name which is also ambiguous to identity naming goes great length to establish this it is interesting to note that neither Roshan nor Umar want Samir to be killed and are shown to be shocked and anguished when Samir is shot by FBI shooters from a helicopter.

In Kurbaan (D’Silva, 2009), even though ‘good Muslim’ Riaz is not a cop, yet he does not find it too difficult to shoot to kill the ‘bad Muslim’ Ehsaan when it comes to proving his goodness. The message, clearly is that all Muslims are prone to violence it is just a matter of what and when triggers it. Some analysis has also pointed out the symbolism of Shah Rukh Khan’s character in My Name is Khan (Jowhar, 2010) as a person with ‘disability’ indicates that your ‘regular’, ‘normal’ everyday Muslim is, somehow, always complicit and thus, cannot be completely innocent.

I propose that Rizwan Khan having Asperger’s syndrome is part of the larger metaphor for being a misfit in the world of ‘normal’ people. The film’s narrative engages in a fantasy of a Muslim being able to say ‘I’m not a terrorist’ just as a mentally ‘disabled’ person can communicate to the ‘normal’ world that he is not a lunatic. The allegations of ‘madness’ of an autistic person and ‘unreason’ of Muslim are not completely disconnected. When Foucault (1961) challenged the formulation of ‘madness’ as ‘mental illness’, he was essentially challenging the use of this formulation as a legitimate reason for separating people ‘displaying’ signs of madness from the larger society. He was also indicating towards a breakdown of communication between ‘mad’ and ‘sane’ persons that was contingent upon acceptance of inexact and non-uniform language rules. Thus, the mad persons, now separated in asylums, cannot ‘speak’ because their language has been taken away from them and we are left only what Foucault calls a ‘monologue’ about madness. Foucault does not dispute the existence of difference but strikes at the logic of difference as moral error and unreason. The social forces that see the reason to confine the unreason of madness in order to control it are the same, in Foucault’s view, as those seeking to control and regulate the other ‘undesirables’. The differences of belief, behavior or appearance from the ‘norm’ can get any group to tagged as ‘undesirable’ and this tagging may be utilised to control, regulate or get rid of these.
Rizwan Khan is a curious character also because of his unmistakable ‘Muslimness’. Rizwan is spiritually and emotionally attached to the scripture which he frequently recites unabashedly in situations where most Muslims would hesitate today - at the airport when he is apprehended after suspicion and at a memorial service for 9/11 victims. He posses deep understanding of Islamic symbols - he carries three pebbles in his hands which he uses to hit a hate mongering cleric in a mosque, just as devout Muslims hit the Satan with three pebbles in a symbolic ritual during Haj. And he is able to challenge being tagged as an ‘undesirable’ successfully and ‘speak’ about his position as a Muslim but not a terrorist (literally, with US President Obama in the film). What makes this film a fantasy is that this cannot be done in reality within the original precepts of the debate that assumes the ‘truth’ of some predefined ‘norms’. That Rizwan Khan is able to claim liberty in the film as an autistic person with his love interest Mandira and with the state in US is a fantasy which can be made believable only if Rizwan Khan is portrayed as having some extraordinary capacity that makes him unaware of the normalizing discourse (Tortured in an extremely cold room he offers to repair the air conditioning). To make Rizwan appear a ‘good Muslim’ My name is Khan does not make him strip off or dilute his identity. Because his Muslim identity includes a pre-enacted judgment autism or Asperger’s syndrome has to be added to it.

II

Among the films that were selected for this analysis because they had a Muslim protagonist but no reference to terrorism, I begin with Aaloo Chaat (Grewal, 2009).
In the film, Nikhil (played by Aftab Shivdasani) has just returned from America and loves a Muslim girl Aamna. His Panjabi family lives in Lajpat Nagar and came to Delhi as refugees after partition. Right in beginning of the film it is made known to the viewers that for the family ‘Batware ke zakhm bharey nahin hein’ (the wounds of Partition have not healed). He dare not tell anyone in the family that he wants to marry a Muslim girl. Nikhil can only tell his secret to an ‘uncle’ and ask for help. This is interesting because the uncle is a hakeem who treats persons with sexual dysfunctions and thus, privy to numerous confessions regarding another taboo topic. The film employs the character of hakeem to present with double meaning jokes alluding to sex. But the character also serves as a devise to indicate that a Hindu boy’s wish to marry a Muslim girl is an ‘unnatural’ wish, as much taboo as talking about sexual dysfunction.

The films narrative moves forward using racist and cultural stereotypes even though on the issue of religious communalism it tries hard to maintain a progressive stance. While Nikhil’s parents still have no knowledge of his intentions they set up a matrimony meeting, with a girl and her parents. The families are obviously well acquainted with each other because Nikhil’s father asks the girl’s father about someone he replies, “chachaji se koi relation nahin... bete ki intercaste marriage jo ki hai” (we have no relations with uncle... they got their son into an inter-caste marriage) to which Nikhil father says, “matlab first class ticket hai par second class mein ghus rahe hein... gori larki se shadi karta to ek darja upar to chadh jaata” (so they had a first class ticket but are entering second class... had he married a white girl he would have climbed one step up in status).
Inspired by *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Jowhar, 1995) Nikhil and his uncle hatch a plan of telling his parents that he wants to marry a white American girl but call Aamna also to come home so that she may endear herself to Nikhil’s parents by her supposed cultural superiority compared to an American girl. The narrative constantly runs into and gets entangled in a complex matrix of superiority and inferiority. A white skinned person is claimed superior to a brown and Indian person, but Indian culture is proclaimed as superior to western culture. Still, for the family, marrying a white girl is seen as a symbol of social advancement. There is also an underlying anxiety regarding the changes in contemporary Indian society and world but the family does not wish to come across as anti-modern. Amidst all these anxieties the anxiety of Aamna’s identity in everyday life of the family is dealt by her willingness to be assimilated into the culture of Hindu Panjabi family of Nikhil. Cooking their kind of food, singing Punjabi folk songs at a wedding function – Aamna is a perfect potential daughter-in-law bearing no reference to her real identity except her name. In the film’s narrative there is no mention of where Aamna hails from or where is her family. Even when Nikhil’s family comes to know of the truth in the end no one bothers to enquire of Aamna’s family and their views on the match. It is eminently convenient that Aamna is without a place and family.

This is typical of patriarchal norms of Indian society where inter-religious marriages, the rarity that they are, it is the woman who invariably converts because of her subordinated position. While in reality there is enough reason to believe that interreligious marriages in which Hindu women marry Muslim men also exist just as the vice-versa, in Hindi cinema inter-religious marriages are always between Hindu men and Muslim women. Sunil Menon (2012) says, “The society of idealised Indian types on screen, thus, came about through exogamous marriage, in its virilocal form—the men stay where they are, the women move, shedding their origins, their language” and their religion, I may add.

The issue of inferiority of Muslims and undesirability of a Hindu-Muslim marriage is not addressed directly but resolved in a strange hierarchy of all kinds of crises posited in front of this family by modern times. Alluding to ‘worse’ scenario of the son declaring himself to be gay, Hakim sahab says, “*aaj kal ki duniya mein isse achchhi khabar hi*
... America se ladka bhi laa sakta tha” (consider this good news in today’s world… he could have also brought a boy from America).

*Three Idiots* (Hirani, 2009) is a comment on the education system, attitudes towards learning and factors determining career choices. The protagonist are three friends who are classmates in an engineering college each contesting his own demons of the past, family expectations and responsibilities. Three idiots makes this selection because one of the protagonist is has a Muslim name. Of interest in this analysis is the fact that like Aamna in Aaloo chaat, Farhan Qureshi is also ‘placeless’ and shows no signs of the stereotypical ‘Muslimness’ in his personality and mannerism. But while Aamna’s religious identity was a pivot to the narrative, Farhan’s religious identity is not invoked anywhere in any manner in the film. Neither does the film raise any questions or issues that are of special or specific interest to Muslims. When the three friends visit his house twice we look for any signs of the space being inhabited by Muslims. Even Farhan’s parents do not express their anxiety regarding their son’s education or career prospects vis-à-vis their identity. Three idiots is probably the first film one of whose key characters is a Muslim but he only happens to be a Muslim. This is a deviation from the normal course of things in Hindi Cinema where a character is Muslim only when his/her Muslimness is of some consequence to the narrative. Alternatively a Muslim character is sometimes inserted as a tokenism for diversity even when he/she is not required to take the narrative forward. But this tokenism is also centred on the Muslim identity as a marker of difference. Since Farhan is neither in this film his character pays by not being fleshed out as well as that of the third friend Raju. The film narrative contains a lot of information about Rancho’s background and Raju’s

![Image 7.8: Farhan Qureshi has the most sketchy background from amongst the 3 idiots.](image-url)
family problems but hardly anything about Farhan, except a brief about Frahan’s father’s expectations and sacrifices he has made. Perhaps an acquaintance with Farhan at this level could not have been achieved without invoking some reference to the family’s identity.

_Well Done Abba_ (Benegal, 2010) is a story of a family’s quest to benefit from the welfare state and this they have to wrangle out from the bureaucratic state with cunning and plotting. This could be a story of any underprivileged family in any rural area in India except that the protagonists of the film do happen to be Muslims. The film unlike most films portraying the stories of characters with marginal identities is located roughly in a real place. The drought prone Deccan plateau with people speaking in Dakkani Urdu forms the backdrop of Muslim characters that, during the course of the film, also touch upon trials and tribulations that are specific to their Muslimness. The director Shyam Benegal is a participant of the new age cinema movement that takes pains to avoid stereotyping any identity into stock characters and stock situations in its quest for realism. It takes note of the changes Muslims communities are seeing in the attitudes of its younger generation, which is more assertive and less apologetic.

Minisha Lamba as Muskaan is a feisty intelligent young woman who does not fit into any stereotype. She has been refreshingly imagined as a girl who is comfortable with her Muslimness which she wears without much fuss and any shame. In her dress, her head covered with _dupatta_ Muskaan does not feel the need to negotiate her space by rejecting Islam and its everyday symbols.
Well Done Abba weaves these strands in its narrative very self-consciously but in the end succumbs to a ‘balancing act’ in the narrative and includes a moral lecture (which is again a hallmark of new wave cinema). It is towards this quest that the film narrative has a related side track on poverty stricken Muslim families ‘selling’ off their daughters in ‘marriages’ to old Arab sheikhs in the region. The final analysis seems to be that Muslims do face problems of general nature like drought, poverty and corruption but the community is also a site of problematic and clearly patriarchal practices. As far as the realism of the film goes, it makes no mention of the systemic and individual prejudice and discriminations faced by Muslims in its entire narrative.

Delhi-6 (Mehra, 2009) is another film that also engages in some fantasising just like My Name is Khan, though it is not so much about Muslim identity per se. Delhi-6 belongs to the older genre of films, namely, Hindu-Muslim or communal relations in India. It is essentially an optimistic romanticised look at the imagined ‘Indianness’ from the unique perspective of its main protagonist who straddles many binaries without taking sides. Roshan, played by Abhishek Bachchan is both Hindu and Muslim, he is both traditionalist and modern, and he is an Indian and an American.

Delhi-6 portrays the Old Delhi in contemporary times that is lurching towards a modern consumptive milieu yet is held back by its rootedness in the old. The tussle is bound to give rise to trauma. An important feature of the film is that its narrative upsets the stereotype of Old Delhi as a Muslim locality. It meticulously shows the culture of the
Hindu *Dilliwallahs* but portrays at least two generations of both Muslim and Hindu residents of the walled city as having been ‘left-behind’. Both in their tradition and in their yearning for modernity the characters that inhabit Old Delhi strike as ‘unreal’ to Roshan’s sensibilities. The film portrays the fantastic *Kala Bandar* (black monkey) as the metaphor for communalism calling it a ‘beastly’ feeling. In the film, but also in reality a couple of years before the release of the film, *Kala Bandar* is an urban myth that is spawned by rumours and outlandish media coverage- a hysterical reaction of people who do not quite know between the demands of modernity but living in antiquity, which is which. The film builds up to tension between Hindus and Muslims in the walled city that in reality has not seen any riots since after the partition of the country and the horrific killings and looting in its wake. The appearance of black monkey from the imaginary to the ‘impossible real’ can be interpreted in the Lacanian fashion, in a way, as a desire which is brought forth by naming it (Lacan 1991). Roshan, who chastised the *Dilliwallahs* to ‘get real’ in the end becomes the *Kala Bandar*, perhaps because, the myth of *Kala Bandar* needed to acquire a material persona to be destroyed.

Whether in their portrayal of Muslims as terrorists, as loyal cops or progressive ‘good Muslims’ the representation of Muslims in Bollywood films remains mired in the dominant discourse. This is true when the film narrative just echoes the dominant monologue. But even when the characters genuinely try to break the mould they either end up being impetuous, interrupted or as apparition.

### 7.3 The Industrialised Mass Media

One way to see the preceding discussion is to understand how Bollywood cinema not only attempts to remodel the ‘realities’ it claims to represent but also attempts to often frontally convey to viewers that a representation is ‘real’. Muslims have been an intrinsic part of Hindi (Hindustani and Urdu included) Cinema. This is also the cinema that hardly ever breaks the mould of dominant discourses and gives expression to these. Fredrick Jameson (1979) acknowledges a tendency in academia to study popular and mass media as an exalted form of media because it is thought to be the one that speaks to and is ‘understood’ by a vast multitude. On the other hand Frankfurt school
especially Horkheimer and Adorno [2007(1944)] also advocate the study of media culture of the same stream but stigmatising it by calling it culture industry. Jameson points to the usefulness of Frankfurt school’s methods and their view of ‘instrumentality’ of culture. Jameson elaborates how in the contemporary times because of a ‘universal commodification of labour power’ all forms of occupations which used to have different and distinct end use are now suspended into different activities which are geared towards one end only which is to become more and more effective (1979, p. 130). Thus journalism or film making like agriculture or pottery or any other activity are no longer about their unique end, rather all of these activities are now just means for a universal valuation in terms of money. As an example illustrating this process, he poignantly puts it thus:

“The objects of the commodity world of capitalism also shed their independent “being” and intrinsic qualities and come to be so many instruments of commodity satisfaction: the familiar example is that of tourism-the American tourist no longer lets the landscape “be in its being” as Heidegger would have said, but takes a snapshot of it, thereby graphically transforming space into its own material image. The concrete activity of looking at a landscape-including, no doubt, the disquieting bewilderment with the activity itself, the anxiety that must arise when human beings, confronting the non-human, wonder what they are doing there and what the point or purpose of such a confrontation might be in the first place-is thus comfortably replaced by the act of taking possession of it and converting it into a form of personal property.” (ibid, pp 131)

Most important in this quote is the ‘image’ which, according to Guy Debord (1983 cf Jameson 1979), is the ultimate form of commodity reification. As discussed in chapter 5, we consume not so much a commodity but the image- of us consuming the said commodity conveyed to us by advertising. Jameson (1979) uses the example of consuming the popular pulp literature like detective stories that are read only for their ‘end’ to illustrate the supremacy in the contemporary world given to ‘the end’ compared to ‘the value’ could be inherent in the non-commodified activity. It is in this light that Jameson asserts that ‘popular’ as opposed to ‘high culture’ does not exist any longer
in the same way as it did when there clearly was a creation of organic ‘popular’ in unified social groups that were culturally specific like peasants or a medieval city etcetera. It has been replaced by a new commodified industrial mass culture.

As far as representation of Muslims is concerned cinema and news media thus churn out those ‘commodity’ images of Muslims that distorted by their taylorisation in order to make most profit and the same are ‘consumed’ by the viewers who do not wonder regarding their position in this industrialised mass media. The ‘popularity’ of a film measured quantitatively by the box office collection is ultimately about profit. The formulaic films that were a loath to experiment, and the present day Bollywood with its claims of ‘fresh’ stories, look and approach in a film were both measured by the money the film made. Efficiency may demand different means but the instrumental end remains the same. Similarly, a TV show continues to be judged for its popularity by its TRP, a newspaper by its circulation etc. This is also because as a discourse gains currency its hegemonising potential also increases. Hegemonic discourses that fall out of favour (reduced ‘popularity’) due to demands of being political correct, thus, have to rehash themselves so as to appear that these have undergone transformation. While Bollywood cinema is understood to be only a re-presentation of a reality, people trust news media to give them truthful accounts of events.

I again alert myself to Edward Said’s (1998) cautionary discussion of orientalism and how media images distorted by it continue to be presented as authentic and believed by the viewers also to be the same. In this regard, continuing from the story of built spaces in Jamia Nagar in chapter 5 and drawing on the discussion on representation of Muslim identity and Muslim localities I take up an example of reportage in print news media to analyse and illustrate the instrumentality of representation in media. Within this frame of reference I invoke the usefulness of conceptual frameworks in media studies such as agenda-setting theory and cultivation theory. Both these frameworks point to the repeated news coverage so that an issue assumes importance also that the repeated messages within an agenda cultivate in people’s minds a given viewpoint (Severin & Tankard, 2000). Van Dijk (1991) also discusses the role of media in prioritizing which news are worthy of public attention and also ‘suggest’ rather emphatically what views people must adopt in discussions so propped up. George
Gerbner who along with his team of researchers pioneered development of cultivation theory found the more time people were exposed to particular view on television affected their perceptions and attitudes (Gerbner et al 1994). Agenda setting theory also has a conception of ‘gatekeepers’ in the news media who decides what finally makes the news, in what sequence and with how much priority (McCombs & Shaw 1972).

7.4 Print News Media – Reportage on Terror

On the evening of September 13, 2008 five bomb blasts at different locations rocked Delhi. The death toll reported by police was 20, though some newspapers reported that in all 30 people had died- some succumbing to their injuries later. On the morning of September 19, 2008 Delhi police raided a flat in a building numbered L-18 in Batla House, Jamia Nagar. Two boys alleged to be terrorists to made and planted the bomb were killed in ‘encounter’, two others were arrested while according to media reports one ‘managed to escape’. One inspector, Mohan Chandra Sharma, received bullet wounds and died later in the hospital due to heart attack induced by excessive bleeding. Sharma who had killed 35 terror suspects in his career, was hailed by the media as ‘brave heart’ and ‘winner of 75 odd-encounters’. His exploits as ‘encounter specialist’ had received state recognition in his 150 medals and four gallantry awards.

The boys who were killed or arrested were students of Jamia Millia Islamia almost all aspiring to be computer professional and studying or getting trained for the same. More arrests followed and the same trend was seen. Newspapers went agog with stories with details of the courses they were studying, their home towns and conditions in which they lived. Prominent space was given to minute details of the interactions of the alleged terrorists before and after the blasts- including the jokes they allegedly cracked amongst themselves. The Times of India and Hindustan Times printed the photographs of the arrested suspects with their faces covered in red kafiyeh scarves that were originally used by Arab men to cover their head and are popular among Muslims all over the world.

The newspapers also carried many stories giving details of an intricate network of spaces from different neighbourhoods within Jamia Nagar and Sangam Vihar in Delhi.
to Mumbra and Cheetah Camp in Mumbai and Sanjarpur village in Azamgarh. The group was linked to blasts in Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Varanasi and a failed attempt at Surat. The university- Jamia Millia Islamia was portrayed as having a link with all these ‘operatives’. Police rounded this off with the claims at first that the money came from ‘a gulf country’ and later mentioning western union transfers from Riyadh. There were also many reports that dwelled on the fact that many of these ‘terrorists’ were educated, techno savvy individuals. They were represented as consciously creating and being affected by their own history. Their connection with larger political processes, the material logic of their condition was often brought into picture to legitimise prejudice against all Muslims. Their religiosity was also brought into picture as an explanation of their ‘irrational attitudes’ and ‘dangerous behaviour’.

The contradiction here is that detrimental material socio-economic conditions and violent oppression of Muslims in various parts of the country was invoked as a cause for ‘Islamic terrorism’ in these discourses. Not a single story questioned why if such deep rooted oppression is being faced by Muslims there are no stories in the media reporting the same. Both the cautious educated progressive Muslim and the supposedly more volatile orthodox backward illiterate Muslim were portrayed in the media as drifting into terrorism as an act of resistance to this oppression which had gone largely unreported. There were also sporadic stories regarding the Muslim discomfort and dismay at being portrayed thus but these were also written in a way that made their discomfort also sound suspicious. Broadly, the contemporary media discourses ascribe conscious complicity of the entire community to acts of terrorism of some Muslims.

Findings of Sachar committee report were also used to legitimise the (seemingly benign) reasoning that acute deprivation and communal attacks/violence are potentially potent enough causes to turn Muslim people into terrorists. Following this logic it was thus only reasonable that we suspect all Muslims as potential terrorists. This logic was bought by even those Muslims who are well to do, are not poor, do not live in ghettos. They found it easy to believe that poverty, deprivation and ghetto living are conditions enough to turn Muslims into ‘Islamist terrorists’. I reproduce one such feature article (Nomani 2008) that appeared in the LA Times and has been quoted by numerous academic and journalistic writing since then.
The Sachar committee report recommended creating a commission to remedy the systemic discrimination and promote affirmative-action programs. So far, very few of the recommendations have been put in place.

Since reading the report, I have feared that Islamic militancy would be born out of such despair. Even if last week’s terrorist plot was hatched outside India, a cycle of sectarian violence could break out in the country and push some disenfranchised Muslim youth to join militant groups using hot-button issues like Israel and Kashmir as inspiration.

What has irked me these last years is how the world has glossed over India’s problems. In 2006, for instance, former U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen, whose Cohen Group invests heavily in India, said the U.S. and India were “perfect partners” because of their “multiethnic and secular democracies.” When I asked to interview Cohen about the socioeconomic condition of Muslims, his public relations staffer said that conversation was too “in the weeds.” But, to me, the condition of Muslims needs frank and open discussion if there is to be any hope of stemming Islamic radicalism and realizing true secular democracy in the country.

Image 7.11: News reportage of Batla House encounter - 1.
Neighbours know them as helpful chaps; families defend their sons

Zia’s sister says he had only helped a friend get accommodation for his friends

Zia’s sister says he had only helped a friend get accommodation for his friends.

The only mistake the 23-year-old made was to help his friend, Saqib, find accommodation for his friends from the mosque. The house of L.M. Mohsin Nisar, where the encounter took place, is owned by Zia’s father, Abdul Rehman, and Saqib is a tenant. “My father is a manager of the tenant of this house. He arranged the house for the boy’s family, who were staying with their personal details verified,” his sister said.

Zia’s father is a tenant and the police never entered the house. “After getting to know people about the incident, they went to the police with the rent papers on Saturday that the police reviewed them then and told us not to meet him,” she said. The family was extremely wary of talking to the media for fear of inviting more police trouble.

Saqib was picked up on his birthday

It was Saqib Nisar’s 26th birthday on Saturday but instead of celebrating the day, he was being interrogated by police. Saqib, the alleged terrorist, had applied to become an IAS officer. He had even taken the UPSC exams in 2007, but was not able to crack the exam.

Then he decided to pursue MBA from Sikkim Manipal University. Saqib Ahmed Anizmi cannot believe that his son is a suspected terrorist.

Saqib was picked up on his birthday.

IT WAS SAQIB NISAR’S 26TH BIRTHDAY ON SATURDAY BUT INSTEAD OF CELEBRATING THE DAY, HE WAS BEING INTERROGATED BY POLICE.

Saqib, the alleged terrorist, had applied to become an IAS officer. He had even taken the UPSC exams in 2007, but was not able to crack the exam.

Then he decided to pursue MBA from Sikkim Manipal University.

Saqib Ahmed Anizmi cannot believe that his son is a suspected terrorist. Aftab was from Azamgarh. So, my son may have met him and taken his phone number in variants. He may even have met him a few times. But all this does not make him a terrorist. It was his birthday yesterday and the police took it as wrong,” he said.

He added: “The police barged into their house and said they wanted to take Saqib for questioning. Saqib has two brothers and two sisters.

The narrow lane in Azam Pundit Enclave part II in Shahnawaz was filled with people who were talking about Saqib’s arrest.

“I have seen him quite a number of times. He is a nice boy who has never caused any trouble here. I have heard nothing bad about him from anyone,” said Mustafar, who runs a tailoring shop near Saqib’s house.

Saqib completed his graduation in economics and has enrolled in exams. How can such a person be a terrorist,” said his younger brother Sharif, who is in first-year of a Vocational Programme in Jamia Millia Islamia.

The relations of Shahnawaz are angry at the turn of events. They are blaming the police for harassing innocent people and putting their family in anguish.

Many were with his father to show their support to the family.

They fooled police, media, parents

Saqib, the alleged mastermind.

The Delhi Police are to believed, then the alleged terrorist hoodwinked everybody. Fake police stamps, fake identity verification forms and even a fake voter ID card—they planted it all.

Saqib Nisar, Zia Rehman and Mohammed Shakeel, the people allegedly responsible for the Delhi blasts, managed to fool everybody—including the police, media and even their parents.

On the day of the encounter, HT had spoken to Saqib and Zia, two of the terror suspects. Both claimed not personally knowing Aftab, the alleged mastermind.

Talking to HT, Saqib had said: “I met Aftab through my cousin who knew him from Azamgarh. We just met socially. I wanted a place to stay near the university and he helped me out. But he was never my good friend.”

Zia had a similar story to tell. It was the house of the father’s colleagues where the encounter took place. The police have charged his father Abdul Rehman for his alleged help Aftab and his friends to forge a tenant verification form. They managed to fool the owner of the flat.

Mohsin Nisar, an executive with PWC, Ghitorni, with the fake tenant verification form.

“I was introduced to Aftab by Saqib. Aftab wanted a place to stay so I took him to my father who I the caretaker of the flat. I just knew him, he was not a friend but an acquaintance,” Zia had told HT. Zia’s family is from Meerut while Saqib belongs in Azamgarh.

Both had also said they had no clue Aftab was allegedly a terrorist. They had said that they just thought Aftab was a student studying in Jamia Millia Islamia.

According to police, the ingenuity in the work of these young terrorists can be seen from the fact that they managed to make or procure a fake stamp of the Delhi Police.

Atif Ahmed Aka Bashir had submitted a photo copy of this driving license in his tenant verification form.

Muslims, Media and Representation of Space

Chapter 7

Two suspects enrolled in Jamia

Ritika Chopra
New Delhi, September 22

CONFUSION AMONG students and the staff of Jamia Millia Islamia University gave way to disbelief on Monday as the vice-chancellor’s office confirmed that two of the three suspects arrested on Sunday were in fact enrolled as students with the institution.

The university has suspended Ziaur-Rahman, a third year student of BA (Pass) and Mohammad Shakheel, a final year student of MA Economics, and initiated an internal inquiry headed by Proctor Masud Alam. The inquiry report will be presented before the inter-disciplinary committee on Tuesday.

The university proctor, scrutinised the records of all the students last night and informed me this morning that two of the three people arrested on Sunday were our students. The students have been suspended for now and a final decision will be taken after the inter-disciplinary committee meeting on Tuesday,” said Vice-Chancellor Mushirul Hasan.

Media reports on Mohammad Saff also being a student of the university were, however, tagged as baseless and untrue. “According to a few newspaper reports, Saif was pursuing a course in English speaking here. Our scrutiny has revealed that he is not our student and moreover Jamia does not offer any such course,” said media co-ordinator Bakshishda Jali.

Meanwhile, the mood on campus was that of apprehension and disbelief.

“I’ve known Shakheel for more than a year and I spoke to him last week. He is a friendly guy and was working towards being elected as the class representative. He didn’t appear to be an extremist and it’s difficult for me to associate him with such activities,” said an MA Economics student.

Shakheel was hanging out with a friend on the university campus while the encounter was on in Jamia Nagar. “Why would be do this if he was a terrorist?” said another MA Economics student on conditions of anonymity.

The students now fear alienation. The vice-chancellor hopes to address this issue through orientation programmes and interactive sessions. “I will soon address the students about how we can best deal with this crisis,” said Hasan.


We have no doubt, Mumbai was the next target.

We still do not know when but they were fully prepared.

HASAN GAFORES, MUMBAI POLICE COMMISSIONER

GOT ‘EM?

Police claim to have arrested key members of the Indian Mujahideen, the shadowy outfit behind the bloodiest bombings across India since 2005

The most recent incidents were the September 13 serial blasts at Mulund station that killed 68. It is also suspected to be behind the October 2002 Godhra railway station and the July 26, 2006, serial blasts in Vavunia.

The new — Station Master

BEHIND BARS

MOHAMMAD AIF BAIR HOMAMAN (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Electrician in Mumbai

Beef to meat: Associated with all major Indian Mujahideen attacks since 2005. Made bombs in UK but continued to work in Mumbai. For recent attack, arrested in Earls, held in Indian high-security jail, sentenced to life in prison.

MOHAMMAD MUJAHED ANSARI (31)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

Beef to meat: Associated with all major Indian Mujahideen attacks since 2005. Made bombs in UK but continued to work in Mumbai. For recent attack, arrested in Earls, held in Indian high-security jail, sentenced to life in prison.

Outside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.

FOREGED IN THE HEART OF NEW INDIA, TERROR’S UNRECOGNISABLE FACE

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

Inside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.

FOREGED IN THE HEART OF NEW INDIA, TERROR’S UNRECOGNISABLE FACE

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

Inside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.

FOREGED IN THE HEART OF NEW INDIA, TERROR’S UNRECOGNISABLE FACE

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

Inside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.

FOREGED IN THE HEART OF NEW INDIA, TERROR’S UNRECOGNISABLE FACE

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

Inside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.

FOREGED IN THE HEART OF NEW INDIA, TERROR’S UNRECOGNISABLE FACE

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

Inside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.

FOREGED IN THE HEART OF NEW INDIA, TERROR’S UNRECOGNISABLE FACE

NAZIR RAO (32)
Firm: Siddhivinayak Construction
Profession: |Software engineer from Chattagram, Bangladesh

We have suffered the beef to meat — the Messiah of the Indian Mujahideen.

Inside, behind bars, the sacrifice of the Indian Mujahideen.
India’s 150 million Muslims represent the second-largest Muslim population in the world, smaller only than Indonesia’s 190 million Muslims. That is just bigger than Pakistan’s 140 million Muslims or the entire population of Arab Muslims, which numbers about 140 million. U.S. intelligence reports continually warn that economic, social and political discontent are catalysts for radicalism, so we would be naive to continue to ignore this potential threat to the national security of not just India but the United States.

Throughout my 2006 journey, I found the idea of India’s potential for danger unavoidable. On one leg, my son tucked safely in bed with my mother in our Taj hotel room, I went out to watch the filming of “A Mighty Heart,” the movie about the murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl by Muslim militants in Pakistan. When the location scouts needed to replicate the treacherous streets of Karachi’s militant Islamist culture, they didn’t have to go far. They found the perfect spot in a poor Muslim neighborhood of Mumbai.”

I also reproduce extracts from other articles that attempt to understand the root cause of the alleged ‘Muslim terrorism’

That was the essence of SIMI. They didn’t feel they belonged to India, or any one country, but to the global Islamic community. Their lives were ruled not by the Indian Constitution, but by the Quran. The fact that they lived in a country overwhelmingly populated by non-Muslims only strengthened their resolve to convert it into an Islamic State. Living in harmony with the non-Muslim majority, as their community had for centuries, meant abdicating their religious duty as Muslims. If, in working towards an Islamic state, they offended the sensibilities of the majority community or broke a law or two, so be it. The latter were kafirs anyway. (Punwani 2008)

In another article about Azamgarh, the writer refers to Shibli College as being ineffective in combating ‘Muslim backwardness’.
Anil Gaur, a lawyer in Azamgarh district court, traces the spiralling crime to the administrative neglect. Muslims are vulnerable due to their economic and educational backwardness, despite the presence of Shibli College run by the minority community, which had secular credentials. Terror outfits are now trying to cash in on their ambitions and energy that lie largely untapped. (Mishra 2008)

Yet another article combines the techno-savvy image of the terrorist with the image of the ‘boys-who-saw-their-relatives-raped-and-murdered’:

Since terrorists are increasingly becoming tech-savvy and writing emails in perfect English, the theory that deprivation alone breeds terror does not apply any longer. Eminent journalist M J Akbar, in a recent column, beautifully explained the trend: “The email (of the Indian Mujahideen sent a few hours before the Ahmedabad blasts) destroys the subliminal connect we make between terror and deprivation. This is the work of someone who speaks English and therefore must be educated.” The terror outfits’ increasing use of cyberspace (succinctly called a “virtual caliphate”) to spread the word is another disturbing reiteration of the fact.

Nothing makes a terror group’s task easier than a deep alienation and a sense of victimhood among a section of the educated youth. Scholars point out that this alienation has steadily taken place owing to a stream of political events, beginning with the destruction of the Babri masjid and the subsequent Mumbai riots to the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. “Those boys who witnessed the rape and murder of their relatives in the post-Godhra pogrom have now grown up. They are seething with anger and want to avenge the riots. Some of them could have been recruited by the terrorists,” admits Vadodara’s scholar-activist J S Bandukwala. “I have been appealing to the Hindus of Gujarat to publicly apologise for the genocide. This will help initiate a process of reconciliation.” (Wajihuddin 2008)

These articles get space not for their incisive journalism on discrimination and violence faced by Muslims but for using the fact of this discrimination to implicate that all
Muslims, Media and Representation of Space

Chapter 7

Muslims are either potential terrorists or sympathisers. In my discussions with Muslim individuals from different classes and localities in Delhi I observed that the sense of persecution that Muslims feel is felt more like a burden that they are keen to get rid of. The truth is that Muslim have far too much at stake, and terrorism- even as a desperate act- provides no way out of a despicable conditions of existence. Also, as shown in earlier chapters the conditions are made bearable by the efforts and contestations of people themselves.

The reproduction of the image of Muslim community as an entirety complicit into the terrorising designs of the extremist outfits is also a reproduction of an orientalist image of Muslims across the world. Like all other hegemonising orientalist images it is nothing but a part of the simulacrum in which the images are reproduced mechanically and repeatedly while no original of the image exists. It is in Baudrillard’s sense that the media (especially news media) has itself become simulacra in which situations devoid of meaning are continually simulated and nothing is sacred- least of all the life of a member of an ‘undesirable’ group. But that makes a Muslim life profane and a Muslim body homo sacri is a process that voids and profanes other realities too. In such a commodified media all reality is reified and no one can be sure what a thing means. After the western world had watched 24X7 footage of the Gulf war when Baudrillard (1995) questioned whether the ‘war’ had actually taken place he was not deluded as much as he was questioning the meaning of the concept behind the word ‘war’- whether the overwhelmingly one-sided and overpowering US aggression in Kuwait and Iraq could be called a ‘war’. What Indian media uncritically calls ‘encounter’ is not a case of rose by another name. It is rather a case of truth being replaced by appearances repeatedly till all involved forget what the original looks like. Following Baudrillard’s methods I assert that while Sachar committee report becomes useful to justify allegation of complicity of all Muslims in so called Islamic Terrorism it is reduced to a pataphysical document (Bök, 2001) because it is never used for purposes towards amelioration of Muslim rather in a absurd (sinister?) twist to intended meaning it is used to eliminate the very need for amelioration of Muslim population.

The stigmatisation of Muslim neighbourhoods in Delhi as harbouring criminals and of ‘new age techno-savvy terrorists’ has served to contain and control the Muslim
youth that was finding space in computer related professions. Jamia Nagar neighbourhoods that were being gentrified as middle class neighbourhoods that gathered their own resources wherever possible, especially housing, were painted as hub of illegal activities and irrational people. This is evidenced in a recent affidavit filed by a SHO (Station Head Officer) of Jamia Nagar Police station. In the affidavit he called the area, “Highly sensitive from the point of view of law and order; residents have scant regard for the government and especially police; tendency to overreact and indulge in confrontation after getting united on communal lines; more volatile situation after Batla House encounter… Majority of the people are illiterate or semi-literate and they have scant regard for the government, particularly the police. They have tendency to over-react and indulge in confrontation with government agencies even on petty issues.” The incident and the contents of the affidavit were reported in the Indian Express. The article further reports that, “This affidavit left Justice Kohl incensed. She described the comments against the minority community as ‘uncalled for and without any cogent basis.’… The judge also refused to accept this affidavit saying this was not filed in terms of the court order. ‘There are areas like Pandav Nagar, Govindpuri, Seelampur where residents belong to one community. How can the police have a different take on only Jamia Nagar?’ it observed.”

As this last report demonstrates there is now (at the point of finalisation of thesis in second half of 2012) a beginning in some parts of news media (both print and electronic) to enthusiastically report and question some instances of discrimination against Muslims especially their persecution by law enforcement agencies. I posit that it is the material conditions of the positioning of the specialised workforce in the Muslim areas that probably have given rise to this counter-trend in media. Given the ideal-exploitative positioning of Muslim neighbourhoods in the network of relationships of production it was hoped by scholars that that the communal conflict may not played out in the similar way in future that was possible in not so distant past and that would prevent the kind of open instances of violence and riots that have destroyed trades that flourished among Muslims in Meerut, Muradabad, Aligarh and Bhagalpur. We have seen in the last chapter that the most recent threat that happened was actually in Delhi at Seelampur during the sealing drive of businesses and industrial units in residential areas by Delhi government in keeping with its urban plan vision of no
mixed land-use. I contend that, unfortunately, since these exploitative relationships of production are maintained to a great extent by the threat of communal and state violence, it would be wishful thinking that the outcome of process would automatically root out its own foundation. It would be also useful in future enquiries to consider whether it also because of the onset of this curious change in the relationships of production, that we are encountering in academia the discourses that explain segregation of Muslims in certain neighbourhoods as being practiced voluntarily in an attempt to maintain their cultural distinction.

This chapter may be brought to a closure by reiterating that Muslims are continually represented such that their own voices are silenced by the most outrageous claims handed out as the truth by industrialised media in the age of commodified culture and global capitalism. Indeed, what the entire discussion in this chapter clears is that the assertion that identities have material function is not just an abstract theoretical position. In context of media industry, ‘identity’ is clearly plowed to garner and accumulate profits. When the cinema ‘strives’ to and the news media ‘claims’ to depict and report, respectively, the ‘reality’ it also becomes possible, according to Jameson (1992) to ‘read’ the ‘symbolic solutions’ being offered in the narrative. It is this that would enable the Muslims to re-imagine a form of resistance that will allow them to break the confines of their status as the new sub-proletariat of the urban.

In chapter 5 and 6, I charter out the traditional forms of resistance and claim-making that are available to other oppressed classes have been made unavailable to Muslims because of their unique positionality in the global capitalist economy and the practices of governmentality. In this chapter (chapter 7) I explored how the dominant discourses not only essentialise the aspersed identity but also utilised these rationalise the oppressive material conditions and thereby accumulate more capital. In the next chapter, I take up an exercise in faith and optimism and explore how Muslims in Delhi have created spaces from which they may draw hope for emancipation.