Chapter 8

Avenues of Hope and Optimism

Thus far, I have described the material conditions that perpetuate and sustain prejudice against Muslims in Delhi and how the cultural industrialisation as well as exploitative relations of production and accumulation ‘produce’ segregated Muslim neighbourhoods. I have also discussed how the familiar methods of resistance, protest, and claim-making that are accessed by other marginalised and subaltern groups like tribals, dalits and LGBT are unavailable to Muslims due to their peculiar and precarious position in the globalised capitalist urban spaces. As normative non-citizens, and *homo-sacri* they find themselves included in the political community only for exclusion and elimination. Their representation in dominant discourses of mass media as vessels of irrational, anti-modern, aggressive/violent ideology, plague and haunt almost all their endeavours. Admittedly, this does look like a picture where Muslims are doomed to flounder from one *faux pas* to another- some fatal, some humiliating and others just gaffes of people caught in an absurdist modern conjecture. Clearly, there is a need to look for those spaces where, somehow, the contradictory logic of total dominance and the willingness of people to let them be defined by the symbolic markers of the same give way. Succumbing to a Stockholm syndrome\(^1\) may be the easiest option but it is not an option in the true sense of the word. Towards the end of the thesis, I employ the

\(^1\) A condition when victims identify with the oppressors with a subconscious hope that they would be accepted within the oppressors group. Stockholm syndrome is thus, only a defensive wish to relieve oppressive tensions rather than a true desire for freedom.
overarching framework in this chapter to explicitly examine the avenues that are source hope and optimism for the people who participated in this study.

Orthodox readings of Marxism have often charged that it is a unified position that aims at totalising explanations. There has not been a worse misreading of any concept which has been as prevalent as this. Marxism is not above the historical processes that it seeks to understand and it can hardly be accused to be a framework that has been static. From Foucault, Derrida, Gramsci, Althusser, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Lefebvre, Harvey, Jameson, and Zizek the influence of Marxism and its own metamorphosis has been phenomenal (Daly, 2006). On its own, but even when it infuses any other perspective, Marxism has a way of filling the view with deep insights, passion and hope. Critical theory enters at a point when finding ways to resist the complete commodification by late capitalism becomes an imperative. With an insight into their experiences, I embrace the critical theory’s call for critical engagement but refuse to share its enthusiasm for ‘doomed’ prophesies. While doing this I am keenly aware of the deep prevalence of capitalist commodification of all forms of life. Be that as it may, this section has been not written as if there are some spaces that are immune to or even unrelated to the logic of capital accumulation. What is being evidenced here is that “everything is pregnant with its contrary” (Marx, 1958, p. 577). What gives hope is that within the hegemonic narratives are not seamless and that people spawn their own counter narratives. They interpret their realities and respond to them in a way that may not amount to total liberation from all forms of subjugation and prejudice but signal anticipation of definite amelioration. I also deliberate on those avenues that are not yet explored but have an immense theoretical potential to assume such a position.

8.1 Education and Solidarity – A Community Helps Itself

Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork a most striking attitudinal change that I observed was that every single participant of this study without any exceptions stressed the importance for Muslims to get educated. This is a far cry from the laments heard around 10-12 years among Muslims- “what’s the good of getting an education; it’s not as if a job is waiting for us”. The examples that I recount in this section are representative of intent and aspiration for education among Muslims in Delhi. These
must be read with a caution that these are avenues that help people keep their hope up in a larger reality where the provision for education for Muslims made by the government educational institutions and arrangements made by the members of the community themselves fall woefully short of the need. In most circumstances it was a scenario in which the system made it easier for the young students to fail in their quest for education. The purpose of this exercise would be achieved if it can serve as an inspiration of improvement within the existing institutions and initiation of new spaces where education can be fostered.

Mr Mohd Sadiq is an auto-rickshaw driver who lives in Jaffrabad. He can barely write his own name for putting his signatures and works all day long to make around seventeen-eighteen thousand rupees a month to support a family of seven. He has two sons in their late teens and a daughter. All of them go to school. I asked him if his sons are also apprenticing in some trade or skill together with their studies. He replied in negative. He tells me “hamne to kisi tarah zindagi guzar li lekin aaj kal bepadha aadmi to naa hone ke barabar hai” (we spent our lives somehow but nowadays, an uneducated man is as if he does not even exists), and proceeded to ask me what kind of job his eldest son can get after he passes his class twelfth exams and if it would be better to let him study further.

Ms Parveen Bano came to Jamia Nagar, Delhi in her early teens with her mother and seven other siblings, escaping starvation, from Dhanbad in Jharkhand (erstwhile Bihar). Her mother, she and her four sisters have worked as domestic workers for the past 15 years, while her brothers have largely remained oscillating between periods of unemployment and underemployment as unskilled workers in advertisement hoarding industry. Ms Parveen’s husband is a cycle rickshaw puller and together they spend almost half of their total earnings to send their children- two daughters- to a local private English medium school. Till last year, she lived with her mother in a shack put-up on a plot of land of a builder right next to the river Yamuna behind Batla House. During rains, or when the concerned authorities decided to release more water in the river, her entire family would sometime live in knee deep waters. For the most part of rest of the year this would leave the kuchcha floor slushy. She tells me she stayed because she did not have to pay rent,
Aisi haalat mein kai saal nikal diya baaji, ke chaar paisa bach jaega to bachhon ko padhaenge. Magar jab Seema aur Saima log badi ho rahi to padhai mein pareshani hoti hai. Sab kharcha ke liye mushkil se bachta hai par kiraya ka kamra lena hi pada...

(Trans. In this state I passed so many years, sister, so that some money can be saved and children can be educated. But now Seema and Saima are growing up, it was inconvenient for studies. For other expenses there is hardly anything left but we had to rent a room…)

I met Dr Mohammad Kamran in a clinic attached to a madarsa in Jaffrabad. He has a BSc from Zakir Husain College and BUMS from Tibbiya College. He comes from family of Darzis (tailors) originally from Bijnor. His grandfather and two brothers were taken from Bijnor as children to work with reputed tailors in Lahore before partition. Interestingly, immediately after the partition the brothers came back to live in the walled Delhi and started working for some tailors in Connaught Place. They later established their own shop called Iqbal and Brothers. Mr Iqbal was interested in education and always encouraged his children to pursue his dream. While Dr Kamran was still studying, he started teaching children wishing to study in science stream in the vicinity. This effort grew so much that today he has coaching classes running for over three hundred students of secondary and senior secondary classes. The coaching classes run on two floors of his small house. College students are employed as teachers and students pay minimally 100 rupees per subject for a month, which also Dr Kamran is amenable to waive off partially or fully when petitioned by needy parents. The centre makes no profit and barely breaks even because Dr Kamran does not have to pay rent for the space and teaches several classes himself without drawing any payment. The sight of teenagers studying in this coaching centre is moving. There are many more girls than boys. They sit on simple wooden benches. There are no desks to keep books or to write, and the students must make do with their bags on their laps. In a small well lit room, but with barely any ventilation, 45-50 children are engrossed in studying. With the knees of children in one row touching the backs of children in the next there is barely room for the teacher to stand. I visited the centre twice in winters but found myself imagining what it must be like during summers. Dr Kamran
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says it gets pretty impossible sometimes with the power outages but the children and the students carry on as best as they can.

The coaching centre invited me again in their annual career counseling cum felicitation ceremony for its students who had passed board exams of tenth and twelfth classes. The children are keenly aware of the stigma their identity, and their locality carries. They are also extremely upbeat about getting education and dreaming of professions. None of the children’s parents that I spoke to in class ninth had been to a university. No one had a working mother. When I asked them about what their father did most said ‘business’ or ‘job’. Dr Kamran later clarified that ‘business’ mostly meant a small retail shop of some kind or a manufacturing unit, and ‘job’ meant employment in a small manufacturing unit. He said that in the last seven years that he has been running the coaching centre there is a great change in children’s attitude to studies. So many come each year that he barely can accommodate them. Among the parents, he complains, the change is there but not as much as he would like to see. “...achchhe gharon mein aisa nahin hota... bachchon ke paas choice nahin hoti... unko to padhna hi padta hai. Yahan toh agar nahin padhna chahtey to parents kehte hein theek hai... kaam pe baitha dete hein. Koi pressure nahin hai. Par tabdili hai... pehle to school kya, padhai kya... kuchchh khabar hain thi... par agar ab bachha padh raha hai to who support karte hein”. (Trans. In well to do families it is not like this… the children do not have a choice… they must study. Here if they don’t want to study parents say fine… and put them to work. There is no pressure. But there is a change… earlier they used to not bother about the schools, education… but now if the child is interested they support.) From what I learned about jobs in IT enabled industries it is no surprise that many children want to become computer professionals but there is also fair share of aspirations along the gender lines- most girls wishing to be teachers and doctors, and most boys engineers.

Anglo-Arabic school is an old institution that has provided education to boys for generations in Old Delhi. One of my respondents Mr Azeem Akhtar who is an alumnus of the school and has been very active for years in the Old Boys’ (alumni) Association told me that the schools has its genesis in a madarsa started three hundred years ago in 1960s. It is in this madarsa that even Zakir Husain College (earlier known as Delhi
college) has its genesis. The Anglo-Arabic school has only this year started to admit girls as its students and is now a co-educational school. Other schools such as the Fatehpuri Senior Secondary School attached to the Fatehpuri Masjid, Shafiq Memorial School are also important in this regard. Boys from Seelampur localities also come and study in these schools. Rabia Girls’ School in Daryaganj caters to Muslim girls’ education. St Anthony and Presentation Convent Schools are among other schools popular among parents who can afford to and wish to send their children to these. In Old Delhi there is also a school that is at once the symbol of tragic and valiant state of Muslims’ education. It is the school that runs inside the Shahi Eidgah near Quraish Nagar. Qaumi Senior Secondary School was originally located at Sarai Khalil where its building was demolished during emergency. The school was not given any land to rehabilitate but was asked to temporarily store their furniture and records etcetera at the Eidgah. Later the school started its regular teaching at the same sites and continues even today in a makeshift state. Between all these schools and the several government schools in and around Muslim localities the Muslim people strive hard to educate themselves.

Mr Azeem Akhtar, told me that Hakim Abdul Hameed who turned entire Hamdard operations into a Waqf2 is called ‘Sir Syed-us-Sani’ (the second Sir Syed) for his love of education and his keen interest that Muslims receive education). Even today apart from the much respected Hamdard Public School, the Hamdard Waqf through Hamdard Educational Society makes important contribution in management and running of many of these schools. The role of Hamdard Educational Society to large extent and the involvement of functionaries of Jamia Millia Islamia in the schools run by Muslim bodies and societies are commendable and must increase exponentially.

Early mornings near Zakir Nagar auto stand, and Ghaffar Manzil, Batla House, Okhla, Abul Fazal bus stands look very busy with school buses and vans picking-up children for schools. Most children from middle class families go to schools such as Hamdard Public School, Crescent Public School, New Horizon School, MAF Academy even though these are quite a distance away from the neighbourhood. These schools are

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2 Waqf is an Islamic concept of charitable trust that holds donated property or assets, income or profit from which is to be spent on welfare and charity while the asset itself cannot be sold.
being run by Muslim managements. Many also go to schools like Dev Samaj Modern School, Fr Agnel School and Mayoor School which are near the neighbourhood and opened their doors for Muslim children. The upper class families manage to get their children into schools like Delhi Public School, Sardar Patel Vidhyalaya etcetera by using the influence of their relatives and acquaintances who are ministers or senior bureaucrats and paying exorbitant amount of money as ‘donation’ for the school. Amir Ahmed is a travel agent whose father retired from a senior position in Air India. He was able to get his son admitted in a ‘reputed’ public school by paying a donation of over a lakh rupees to the school after they had rejected turned his application and the admissions had officially closed. He says, “Aap donation dene ke liye tayyar bhi hon to yeh kaise maloom hoga ke kisko, kya dena hai? Paise bhi woh log har kisi se nahiin lete. koi source ho to hi batate hein ke bhai itne de do to admission ho jaaega” (Trans. Even if you are ready to give ‘donation’ how would you know who to pay how much? These people do not take money from just anyone. Only if you have a ‘source’ do they tell that if you pay so much the admission will come through.)

The lower middle class sends their children mostly either to numerous Jamia Schools or to the government schools in the vicinity. Like everywhere else government schools are not parents first choice because of the perceptions about their quality of education. Jamia is preferred because of the quality education it offers and also the chance for students to become a Jamia Internal student which is a category that has reserved quota in seats in all the university courses. Once a child got into Jamia access to even higher education was assured. Also unlike any other school the scale at which the Jamia services the educational needs of the locality cannot be matched by any other institution. The Jamia runs many schools inside its sprawling campus in shifts catering to different needs. There is very large and well conceived, well equipped and staffed nursery school. There is a main Urdu medium primary and middle school that also turns into English medium after eighth standard, there is a second shift English medium self-finance school (but the fee is still much less than the public schools), there is a school for girls who may have dropped out of school at some earlier stage and wish to study again.
A very large number of girls are also enrolled as private candidates, who cannot or do not wish to attend regular school and come to write only their examination. The option for women to study as private students continues well into undergraduate and postgraduate courses, which is often utilized by women who want to resume studying after their families moved from other parts of India to Jamia Nagar. Ms Ranam is young mother of three children whose two sons are now studying in Mayoor School in II standard and nursery. Her youngest, a girl, has yet to start school. Her husband is a software engineer working with TCS. When their first son was born they worried that in the point system their son would lose out because Ms Ranam was only a graduate. She enrolled in Jamia as a private candidate to study for a postgraduate degree in Public Administration and by the time her son was three and half and eligible for school she was also a postgraduate mustering a few more but precious points.

Mr Khalid Javed was a small vendor in Saharanpur where he used to servicing the hardware needs of the local BSNL. When BSNL as a matter of policy shifted from engaging with small vendors and centralised the process with larger firms he was unemployed for two years. He shifted to Delhi and found a low paying job as hardware and networking engineer. His wife Ms Asma Javed shifted a year later with their three year old son. It was difficult to make ends meet. She started giving tuitions and enrolled in a post-graduate degree programme in Jamia as a private candidate. Today he has finished her Masters in Education Planning and Administration. She is enrolled in the B.Ed. programme of the newest of the Jamia initiatives which is a Centre for Distance Education offering even professional courses. She also teaches during the morning in a neighbourhood private school and continues to give tuitions in the evening.

Ms Sabiha Ahmed is a software engineer who works in a small private firm that provides custom-made software to clients. The firm is located in one of the posh colonies near Jamia Nagar neighbourhoods and the list of their clients reads like who’s who of the corporate sector in Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon. The owner of the firm is a Hindu but the employees are mostly Muslims. Ms Ahmed has been working there now for the last twelve years and is the senior most employee who is trusted with managing all the operations of the firm by the owner. She does not want to change her job because the daily commute is convenient and it is important for her that she is
available at a short notice in case her two young children need it. Ms Sabiha says that the employee turnover at her office is high because they pay miniscule salaries. The business model of her boss is to provide cutting edge software and support for the same to his clients at very competitive prices. This he is able to do because he routinely hires employees who are qualified- BTech, MCAs but have no experience. These Muslim freshers find it difficult to get jobs partially because of, sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit, discrimination and partially because their backgrounds have not allowed them to pick up requisite communication skills and confidence. They are paid salaries that are sometimes less than even the minimum wages for the skilled workers but they are happy and grateful for the opportunity, because for them it is a rare opportunity to break into this industry, get on-the-job training, and precious experience with reputed clients. When they leave after a couple of years their resumes are impressive with the name of firms that are leaders in their industry and the jobs that they get pay them exponentially more. In the last twelve years, Ms Ahmed has trained so many of these youngsters that she has lost count. Her ability and willingness to this role as a mentor serves her employer well and he compensates her comparably to industry standards in order to retain her. It is a situation that everyone involved sees as a win-win. But not everyone is even this fortunate. There are many other firms that exist which hire freshers as trainees and do not pay them at all for a year, sometimes even for two years if they are still unable to find jobs elsewhere. It is a situation that gives us deep insight into the situation of capitalist accumulation and its conjunction with communal prejudice and discrimination but it is also a process that provides people to escape worse forms of subjugation. It has to be recognised that these are the situations that make it worthwhile for youngsters and parents to make an effort for education.

Similar to this situation is that of large number of youth working in call centres. Just as one can see a crowd of school children going to school in the morning and coming back in the afternoon, one can also see a steady stream of cabs picking-up and dropping smartly dressed call centre executive through the day as well as late nights at various Jamia Nagar exit and entry points. Most of these youngsters are students studying for their undergraduate or postgraduate degrees and excited about making decent money alongside. The parents are happy too, to see their children earn money in a manner
and at an age which was unthinkable even ten years ago. Some call centre executives are also MCAs, MBAs who are waiting to get more appropriate jobs. Although I did not meet any such person myself but some of the call centre employees told me that a small number of people have stuck in this field and made ‘stable’ careers within the call centre industry.

The manufacturers in Seelampur and Old Delhi extend credit to each other on basis of little else but trust and solidarity. We have seen in chapter five how this solidarity networking also enable capitalist entrepreneur among Muslims to make profit in housing but the process does allow people to possess affordable housing in absence of any housing finance services from private or public financial institutions. Just as they are expending effort to educate themselves and their children, people are also investing energies in creating mostly informal networks for jobs, businesses, education, housing and much else. In the hegemonic din of market economy, an economy of solidarity is only a humane but decidedly counter hegemonic response. These processes and changed attitudes are not isolated from the larger structural scheme but well within the logic of globalised, neo-liberal set-up. Muslims (who had lost their old-traditional skills which had become redundant) are gaining new skills that are saleable and required by the market. They are buoyed by the changed atmosphere that may not be just and inclusive but is marked by a breathing space and a hint at dignified sustenance that has eluded them for long.

8.2 Countering Epistemological Islamophobia

Another avenue for hope consists of works such as the one being presented in this thesis – Ethnographic, narrative enquiries that become spaces/opportunities to give tongue to the language of the marginalised and through this new articulation aim to give rise to a new political consciousness that brings change and creates new realities. Efforts must be made to study the society from the peripheral perspectives and strive to present these to the larger society. This task has barely begun to be undertaken by scholars and involves claiming the epistemological value of perspectives of Muslims per se, as well as the importance of putting forward this claim as a political strategy in the movement for justice and equality for Muslims. This is a task that would entail
an exploration of their identity by people and must end in the creation of a new altered identity for those who engage with the process. The primary aim here must be to support knowledge creation by people about themselves and the world they co-inhabit with other people and communities, and bring it to fore to the space where it can be used. Here language (or articulation) and the socio-political conditions shaped by it are the central theme since, through communication or an inability to communicate, specific ideas and interpretations of the world and how people behave in it are formulated.

We are confronting a moment of global proportions when merely bearing a ‘Muslim’ identity is aspersed as a political position, and ‘muslim-ness’ of a subject often brings in connotations of ‘fanatic’, ‘irrational’ and ‘contentious’. In the orientalist tradition Muslims have been portrayed in the present epoch as people who not only face a deficit in development and but also have no sense of the ‘superior’ values of modernity, rationality and democracy. In this section I engage briefly with an understanding of Islamophobia explored more in detail in the review of literature in chapter three. This relates not only to a broad fear of Islam and Muslims but a phobic position that extends itself into epistemology of Muslims both globally and in India. ‘Studies of Muslims’ abound measuring their socio-economic status, representation in various sectors of economy and public service, and attitudes of Muslims to issues such as encounters, terrorism etcetera. While these studies have their utility it is pertinent to point out that what is also needed are studies from the perspectives of Muslims and studies that are useful for Muslims to understand their own situatedness in the larger political economic paradigm. Genres such as studies of globalisation, urban studies, and labour studies etcetera have barely begun to make a mention of Muslims. I am not contending that non-Muslim scholars cannot ever possibly don this outlook but pointing out the fact that Muslims scholars, researchers and commentators often feel obliged to abandon a situated perspective, shed their particularity- their ‘Muslimness’ in order to be taken seriously. This is a major impediment in the way of any genuine effort to eliminate ‘Epistemological Islamophobia’ from knowledge production/discursive processes and outcomes. This thesis sees itself as claiming the epistemological value of perspectives of Muslims per se, as well as the importance of putting forward this claim as a political strategy in the movement for justice and equality for Muslims.
As an illustration of the foregoing theoretical argument, I narrow my focus to argue that discourses on African American ghettos in the United States have long been employed uncritically to spawn research and popular imagination of Muslim localities in Delhi as dense, congested hubs of criminal activity. Observations from within the Muslim clusters in Delhi show that these are contiguous or discontinuous but segregated areas that may or may not be poor and decrepit. But because all Muslim localities are labelled ‘Ghettos’, it is difficult for them to be imagined by anyone as otherwise. The ‘common sense’ usages of the term limit the expression of existing reality of these spaces. These limits are rarely, if ever, contested by researchers, journalists, documentary filmmakers who are often Muslim themselves but whose intended audience/readers are rarely Muslim people. In order to challenge the utility of the term ‘ghetto’ as a discourse marker this thesis has provided thick descriptions of these localities and interactions with the residents that in turn challenge the view that involuntary segregation is an undesigned, uncontrolled and ecological process as understood by Chicago school and, shows that people clearly perceive it to occur with full complicity of the neo-liberal structures (Wacquant 2011). Wacquant further asserts that the Jewish ghetto marks an ‘inaugural’ moment of rise of ‘ghetto’ as a socio-organisational device that employs space to unleash an oppressive process aims at maximising the material profits extracted out of the discriminated category while at the same time minimising intimate contact of its members to avoid an alleged defiling and contagion the segregated are believed to carry.

I assert that once a neighbourhood is branded a ‘ghetto’ it is imagined in a certain way only by the discursive practices. For example, while only a small area of Seelampur constituency comprises of squatter hutments/jhuggis, but this is the part of Seelampur that captures the imagination of the Social Workers, Urban Planners and other people interested in ‘slums’ defining the entire locality by their myopic view. In another instance, during the course of my research I was asked by a Development consultant to meet a group of planning students and professionals from Barcelona, Spain because of my familiarity and work in Jamia Nagar localities. These students are working in a collaborative engagement with School of Architecture and Ekistics, and Sarojini Naidu Women’s Studies Centre at Jamia Millia Islamia. The group is being facilitated by the consultant who, incidentally, is not a resident of this area. They had been planning
and have designed a detailed project for building several ‘gender resource zones’, as they called them, in the area. One of this entailed a horticulture programme for livelihood and income generation for Muslim women of Shahin Bagh and Abul Fazal Enclave. Considering that these are the most expensive and ‘posh’ areas of Jamia Nagar I advised them to make sure that they have ample parking space and grow ‘organic’ vegetables because that might bring the women to their centre to buy the vegetables. For actually working in the fields they would have to maybe get the women who are employed as domestic workers in the area and live in Taimur Nagar rather than in Jamia Nagar. The other parts of the project were also full of assumptions about the area that were grounded in the perception of the area as a ‘ghetto’. When I said that Jamia Nagar is a hub of educated, professional, white collar workers she disagreed with me. But confronted with the same opinion by an ecological scientist (and male, I must point out) who is the resident of Shahin Bagh and she relented her position. Later she told me that the areas was a poor area because she had found out that it had no drinking water supply by the Delhi Jal Board and based her entire opinion on this, having little clue that the residents of the area are serviced by private pumps for drawing out groundwater and huge overhead tanks to store it just like other posh areas of Delhi. For their drinking water there is elaborate network of private players supplying bottled water to each individual household according to their requirement and collecting payments from them.

It must be mentioned here that post Batla house ‘encounter’ in 2008, Jamia Nagar’s enthusiasm regarding education and upward mobility is a bit tainted by the discourses that paint the area as a terrorist den and the Jamia as harbouring the terrorists. The ‘encounter’ also marks a new low on the residents’ relationship with the state. From within the Muslim clusters the state appears so eager to deliver penal justice without due process and paint the people criminal but when it comes to delivery of welfare services and facilitating integration with rest of the society, polity and economy it marks a naught. Jamia Teachers Solidarity Group (JTSA) has worked relentlessly to point out the extra judicial dealings of the law enforcement agencies vis-a-vis Muslims but even they succumbed to the epistemological Islamophobia that has permeated deeply into all public space discussions regarding according the Jamia a status of minority educational institution. These mostly point out to an understanding of all
Muslims as fundamentalist and parochial whose presence in larger numbers enforced through reservation would rob the Jamia of its ‘cosmopolitan’ atmosphere.

In the analysis drawn from narrative of this study I am not merely claiming that residents of Muslim enclaves in Delhi are experiencing a deficit in welfare benefits and governance in the urban setup. The making of the normative non-citizen is a much more complex process that has historical content related to the material forces and relationships of production, as well as content stemming from contemporary discourse weaving practises such as news media and films. In Delhi, apart from the mainstream media, social science researchers, urban planners, social work field trainees and supervisors, historians and/or intellectual celebrities guiding ‘heritage’ tours and walks, journalists, bloggers writing food columns on Ramzan delicacies, ‘secular’ feminists and ‘progressive-liberal’ Muslims all contribute to discourses on Muslim areas. These numerous and diverse disciplines or practices nourish on spatial segregation and churn out all kinds of representations of Muslims as a spectacle-outlandish and exotic, wretched and inert, irrational and dangerous. In turn, these representations discursively feed the logic of othering and segregation, fortifying around the marginalised people a sort of discursive fencing or trap which is tough to escape from.

Traditional activities that seek equal status for Muslim citizen are located in the sphere of Muslims ‘representation’ (in the sense of presence and participation) in processes which influence public policy on issues concerning Muslim community. Nancy Fraser (1997) designates this as ‘official-political sphere’ and it involves, for example, demanding legislative support or affirmative policy measures regarding development and welfare allocations, equal presence in social, economic and political arena by way of reservations etc. Countering epistemological Islamophobia would entail changes in the other sphere which Fraser calls ‘discursive-political’. These lie in those realms that are mostly perceived as apolitical- culture, conduct and other manifestation of everyday life. Activities belonging to this sphere, she explains further, involve transformative political practices that reveal ‘contingent and socially constructed’ nature of what is portrayed as ‘necessary and natural’. 
8.3 Re-imagining Resistance

We have now amply demonstrated in the preceding chapters why we need to re-imagine resistance by Muslims from their constraining, subjugating and degrading position. In order to be able to do this let us revisit the earlier discussion briefly. As discussed earlier in the thesis, identity has a material function. In this understanding it can also thus assume both the “use value” and the “exchange-value” and act as a ‘thing’, a commodity in the real world. Any exchange, any bartering between various facets of identity may seem to be an individual, internal, symbolic act but it is never uninformed by the surrounding society. In a social structure where ‘Muslim’ identity comes along with many negative aspersed characteristics it becomes difficult for a person to exchange it with any of their other identities that has equivalent value in this arbitrary system of valuing or devaluing identities over one another. The subjective internal and social agency of a Muslim person is almost always subordinated to the communal codes located in relation to the gaze of the Hindus, which reflects those ideas that paradoxically produce Muslims as inferior objects of suspicion. In Hegel’s words, “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself by virtue of the fact that it is in and for itself for another. That is, it exists only in being recognized” (quoted from Rauch & Sharman, 1999, p. 20). This is reminiscent of foucauldian panoptican gaze. Indeed, Foucault clarifies this idea further when he asserts that it is not just the act of being observed by the other alone, but also the subjective internalisation of how-to-be which together operationalise the panoptican gaze (Foucault 1996). “This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity... It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control or dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.” (Foucault, 1982, p. 212) This explanation serves us well because it leaves open the possibility of ‘practices of freedom’ where a subject may resist either through overtly contrarian and/or disruptive behaviour or through bringing forth to their subjective consciousness the constraining forms of identity in order to subvert it.

Yet, self avowed Marxist Zizek alerts us to an innate knack of systems of dominance of co-opting and, indeed, drawing legitimacy from acts of resistance and transgression. I am reminded of recent reaction by Barack Obama to protestors outside the NATO
summit in Chicago, US in May 2012, “That is what NATO is here to protect ... that’s what America is all about...” (NATO summit, 2012). Zizek (1997) points out that the ideological limits of a system of domination are around the edges of the questions that are never asked. Indeed these limits themselves must not ever be revealed or articulated so that a notion of the fantasy as reality is sustained. Just as in the movie *Truman Show*, teenaged Truman theoretically has a choice (which even he recognises as a fantasy) of leaving the island - a choice that must never be made. According to Zizek, when the system accommodates resistance, true resistance can only be through making those choices that are theoretically available (fantasies) but are forever unavailable through unwritten limits. How are these choices to be made? One of the characteristic ways these choices are made is what Zizek calls subversion-through-identification “sometimes, at least – the truly subversive thing is not to disregard the explicit letter of Law on behalf of the underlying fantasies, but to stick to this letter against the fantasy which sustains it.” (ibid, p. 29).

This kind of resistance is seen, for example, being enacted by the ‘untouchable’ castes in asserting their subordinate- Dalit (literally, oppressed) identity which itself is grounded in the very system of caste domination that it aims to oppose. We know historically that this can be an effective political strategy. Gyanendra Pandey suggested in answer to a question at a lecture³ I attended that in a movement for equality there is a political moment when those who have been victimised must defensively assert their subordinated position and say that the ‘other’ would ‘never understand’. A parallel may be read in the example of a woman whose right to equality and liberty a state professes to protect such that she legally has a choice regarding who to marry, whether to work, what to wear etcetera. But the unwritten rules of a patriarchal society, limit for individual women the choices that must not be made. It is through demanding that the state stick to the letter of its promise precisely in each of the circumstances, that effective resistance in *•i•ekian* terms can be offered. Perhaps, this is what the woman who chooses to don any form of *hijab* is asserting symbolically, just as the woman who participates in ‘slut walk’ is doing- asserting her freedom as a woman to resist the unwritten rules that seek to regulate her body and clothing choices. I speculate

³ *Un-archived Histories: Reflections on the struggle against caste and race in India and the USA* Public lecture by Prof. Gyanendra Pandey, Emory University, Atlanta, USA organised by The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library on 19 December 2011
theoretically that this may also be the essence of exercising the choice of living in a Muslim neighbourhood. Although the act of defensive assertion of a subordinate identity may possibly be a powerful political strategy, I contend that it addresses the system of dominance only partially and never effectively challenges the limits of pre-existing suppositions regarding these identities.

But clearly, in case of Muslims in Delhi the resistance that can be provided to the spatial fantasmic unwritten law which states that Muslims must not live alongside ‘others’, either through juridico-legal action or via subversion-through-identification is grossly inadequate in challenging the structures that reproduce segregated, representational spaces. Why may that be so? I again take recourse to foucauldian notion of governmentality that classifies and regulates people by subjecting them to norms and discursive practices, producing them as certain types of subjects. For example, Muslims as reluctant and disloyal citizens, prone to violent behaviour and irrational outlooks, as dirty and polluted etc. These discourses are efficient because they generate the possibility of events that fit to the T as self-fulfilling prophesies (fantasies?) that maintain themselves. In the last analysis, it appears that identities may indeed be used as a tool for subjugation in maintaining and reproducing the oppressive relationships of production lucratively. This normalising power of identity calls for fresh relook at methods of juridico-legal resistance and resistance-through-identification, both. It seems logical to resist identification as this or that per se but Foucault warns us that this in itself may not be enough. He further requires that a new kind of subjectivity may be fostered which is empowered to transform the very content of self-representation.

Because some individuals manage to avoid experiencing one form of dominance, say being target of communal violence or prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour, they may easily be deluded into thinking that they have attained true liberty. But to individually avoid the subjugation many Muslims abrogate the power to craft a new critical subjectivity that problematises the prevailing identity stereotypes of Muslims. Foucault calls into question this tendency of the contemporary systems of domination to simultaneously individualise and totalise. He points out that, “…the task nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political “double bind,” which is the simultaneous individualization and totalisation of modern power structures...
have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us…” (Foucault, 1982, p. 216)

The moment of problematizing a prevailing discursive content of an identity is defined not by some altruistic or divine intervention but is indicated by a combination of events or social, political, economic processes occurring together to throw light upon the system of subjugation and enabling people to see it as unjust. This is not to say that some kind of final unveiling and toppling of injustice would take place as a consequence but that in foucauldian sense freedom is something that is exercised, rather than achieved, in a process that must run in tandem with careful and creative exercise of power. This is the way in which we can effectively hope for emergence of a capacity of people positioned adversely within a system of domination to seize the moment and draw the power to re-imagine themselves. Instead of seeing your own normalised reflection in the gaze of ‘the other’, resistance would involve saying “I see you” without succumbing to feelings of shame and anxiety.

In the next and the last chapter, I bring this thesis to a close by engaging in a critical exercise of recounting a complex web of problems which get into the very way of imagining Delhi as a city that may include all its residents as equals. The exercise, though critical, is not meant to be an exercise in cynicism. It is conceived in a way, however inadequate, to regard the problems of Delhi as a global urban and the Muslim residents of Delhi in a philosophical thread. The last chapter thus closes off with a brief statement of the core inferences drawn in the thesis in an attempt to respond to the problem of research, that Horkheimer posed in his 1931 (p. 14) address, as “symbolic of the peculiar difficulty of social philosophy – the difficulty concerning the interpenetration of general and particular, of theoretical design and individual experience”.