History and the Present in Mubarakpur: The Ethos

Mubarakpur is a qasba/small town located in the administrative district of Azamgarh, eastern Uttar Pradesh. From the district headquarters of Azamgarh, Mubarakpur is at a distance of around 11 km towards the north. According to the 2001 census, the total population of the qasba was 51,080\(^2\), although during the time of the field work in 2004, local estimates of the population were around 70,000. The Qasba is predominantly Muslim, and according to its residents, Muslims comprise around 80% of the total population. In the 2001 census, the literacy rate of the qasba was 49%\(^3\), the male literacy being 56% and female literacy rate being 43% which compares unfavourably with the overall district literacy rate of 56.15%\(^4\). In terms of spatial division, the qasba is divided into twenty five municipal wards, having an income of rupees twenty lakh per annum. The total voter strength of the qasba is around 31,000\(^5\).

To the outside world, Mubarakpur is a ‘Muslim area’. On my way to this ‘Muslim area’, I came to know that it is also referred to as a mini Pakistan. But this outsiders’ perception of Mubarakpur, as I would come to know, was not only

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\(^1\) By ethos I mean “the tone, character and quality of people’s life, its moral and aesthetic style, and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects,” following Clifford Geertz, quoted in Richard T. Antoun (1993), 'Themes and Symbols in the Religious Lesson: A Jordanian Case Study', p. 623.

\(^2\) Male: 26048, Female: 25032

\(^3\) The corresponding literacy rate for 1991 Census was 42.39%

\(^4\) In the Census of 2001, the literacy rate for Azamgarh as a whole is 56.15%. However, while the male literacy is way above the Mubarakpur rate at 70.5%, there is not much difference when it comes to female literacy rate which for the district stands at 42.4%.

\(^5\) Interview: Ameer Singh, Mubarakpur Municipality
misleading, but it said more about the people who called it mini Pakistan rather than about Mubarakpur itself. Indeed, it is not unusual for a city or a section of it having a sizable Muslim population, to be designated as a mini Pakistan. However, as one enters Mubarakpur, one cannot escape the Islamic symbolism with which the qasba is replete. Even before the actual habitation starts, one is greeted by the imposing building of Madrasa Ashtafiya. In the main qasba itself, there are a number of madrasas, mosques and imambaras. While some of them are around a century old, others are much more recent, and some in the process of being constructed. The Islamic symbolism can also be discerned at the local tea shops where Islamic/Muslim calendars and posters announce the dates of important religious occasions. To add to this sense of coming to a 'Muslim area' is the sheer absence of women from the streets. The occasional women one sees is always accompanied by some male relative, or in some cases they are seen in small groups, but never alone and never unveiled. Moreover, in mundane conversations, one also comes to know that Mubarkpuris take great pride in recalling that the area that they inhabit was once known as Shiraz of the East. As a continuation of Islamic phraseology, they stress the fact that Mubarakpur has been known as the birth place of various Islamic scholars who earned great fame not only here but also outside India. More contemporaneously, they talk of various madrasas that the qasba has and about its popularity which attracts students from all over India. It is this pride of belonging to the qasba which also reflects in the title 'Mubarakpuri', which some notables of the

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6 Athar Mubarakpuri (1974), Tazkira Ulama e Mubarakpur, p.5
qasba append to their names, particularly those belonging to the older generation. Religious significance is also underlined in the local history of the qasba. In popular memory the establishment of the qasba is associated with a Sufi saint of neighbouring Manikpur, whose descendants settled in the qasba and gave it the present name. Going further down in history, the people of Mubarakpur are proud to state that Islam came very early in this area around the 5th century and relate it to the exploits of Salar Masud Ghazi, who on his way to Bahraich, had stopped in a place called Bhagatpur, just eight miles north of Mubarakpur. For the people of Mubarakpur, the grace (baraka) of these early ‘holy men’ of Islam, still pervades the area.

However, as the colonial history notes, this self perception of the people of Mubarakpur is not reciprocated by official records. The Gazetteer of Azamgarh notes that “no references are made to it (Mubarakpur) in the Mohammedan history.” This sense of being ignored has also been a source of complaint of one of the more famous Mubarakpuris, who agonizingly notes that “Mubarakpur has hardly been mentioned for its achievements.” The ‘achievements’ that Athar Mubarakpuri is talking about has to do, among other things, with the presence of men of religious

7 The most prominent of them being Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri, author of an important work on religious scholars of Mubarakpur. For a historical narrative of some of the reasons of the development of such pride in one’s qasbas, see Bayly (2003), Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, pp.353-354
8 The name of the Sufi is Saiyyid Raja Shah Mubarak. The title of Raja might suggest that he had considerable land under his disposal. The earlier name of Mubarakpur seems to be Qasimabad which lay in ruins until re-populated by the descendants of above mentioned Sufi. The Sufi is also mentioned in D.L. Drake Brockmann, DGUPAO, Vol. xxxiii, p. 261; Athar Mubarakpuri, Tazkira, p. 14; Abdul Mannan (n.p), Ashrafiyas se al jamiatul Ashrafiyas Tak
9 The tomb of Salar Masud or Ghazi Mian as he is popularly known is located in Bahraich, a district in Uttar Pradesh. For more on Salar Masud Ghazi and the cult around his tomb, see Shahid Amin (2002), ‘On Retelling the Muslim Conquest of North India’; Kerrin Grafin Schwerin (2005), ‘The Cow Saving Muslim Saint: Elite and Folk Representations of a Tomb Cult in Oudh’
10 Azamgarh Gazetteer, p. 261
11 Athar Mubarakpuri, Tazkira, p. 58
learning in qasba who contributed to the strengthening of various schools of Islam present in this area. Among others, Athar Mubarakpuri mentions the name of Abdur Rahman\(^\text{12}\), who went on to become the foremost proponent of the Ahl e Hadis, not only in the qasba but also internationally.

Notwithstanding the paucity of early references to Mubarakpur, some sense of its establishment might come from the history of its neighbouring district of Mau. Mau was part of a jagir that was gifted to Jahan Ara by her father, Emperor Shah Jahan. It was Jahan Ara who built a *katra* or market place in the town of Mau\(^\text{13}\). This market place served as a trading centre for the silk produced in the area. Mubarakpur might have served as a centre for cotton and silk weaving and trade, as the long presence of weavers in this area might testify. The eastern limits of the Sharqi Sultanat, with its capital Jaunpur known for silk and cotton production included the present Mubarakpur. It must be noted, however, that as a producer for silk and cotton textiles, Mubarakpur ranked much below its neighbours like Mau and Muhhamadabad. The only exclusive mention of Mubarakpur in the Gazetteer is that of a producer of special mix of cotton and silk fabric called tasar silk\(^\text{14}\).

Administratively, the area of Mubarakpur came under the suzerainty of the British East India Company much earlier as compared to other areas of United Provinces. By the Treaty of Friendship, Nawab Sadat Ali Khan of Awadh had surrendered Ruhelkhand, Etawah, Kanpur, Fatehgarh, Allahabad, Azamgarh, Basti and

\(^{12}\) Abdur Rahman (1942-2004?) had his initial studies in Mubarakpur, but went to teach and research at various places, including the Jamia Salafia, the apex madrasa of Ahl e Hadis, in Varanasi and was the editor of its monthly magazine. He is credited with writing a biography (ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum) of the Prophet Muhammad during his stay in the Islamic University of Medina.

\(^{13}\) Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1900), *Silk Fabrics Produced in the North West Provinces and Oudh: A Monograph*, p. 102

\(^{14}\) Azamgarh Gazetteer, p. 62. Abdullah Yusuf Ali mentions a religious cause for the production of tasar, since wearing of silk for men was forbidden by the Islamic tenets, see Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *Silk Fabrics*, p. 103
Gorakhpur to the East Indian Company in November 1801. These areas were made part of Gorakhpur in 1801 by the East India Company. When in 1832, a new district of Azamgarh was formed, Mubarakpur was joined with it and a new Collector was made in-charge. In 1813, the population of the qasba was estimated at between 10,000 and 12,000, comprising of various labouring and service sections and those dependent on the expropriation of surplus. According to the gazetteer one fourth of the population comprised of Muslim weavers. The important elements of the qasba were the zamindars, weavers and trader and moneylenders. In 1881, the population rose to 13,157 (9,066 Muslims and 4,091 Hindus). Among the principal divisions recorded were 143 landholders and 1877 weavers. By 1901 the population was estimated at 15,433, with 11,442 Muslims and 3,991 Hindus.

Muslims therefore have had a substantial presence in the history of the qasba. Among the Muslims it has been the weavers who have always been the numerical majority and have given this qasba an identity of its own. More requires to be said about the weavers and the particular way in which their own history has been linked up with the history of the qasba. That will be taken up in a later section. For the time being, let us continue with the relationship that the people have with the qasba. The present day qasba is divided into twelve Muballas and its various divisions form the

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16 Quoted in Gyanendra Pandey (1999), 'Encounters and Calamities: The History of a North Indian Qasba' p. 234
17 ibid
18 *District Gazetteer of United Provinces, Agra and Oudh*, Vol. xxxiii, p. 262
twenty five municipal wards of the qasba\textsuperscript{19}. It is interesting to note that the names of the Muhallas carry with them some religious significance. Thus the \textit{Muhalla} called Pura Sufi is said to be named after one Sufi Bahadur who is said to have captured a fort during the time of Shahjahan\textsuperscript{20}. Similar reasons are ascribed for naming of other \textit{Muhallas}. The area of the qasba is roughly nine square kilometres and is densely populated. The main road to the qasba starts from what is called the Roadways Chauraha\textsuperscript{21} and goes all the way up to the end of the qasba, roughly dividing it into two. There are no separate areas which one could demarcate as living areas or markets, but it is in the middle of the qasba that one would find the most number of shops. The \textit{Muhalla} of Pura Rani therefore serves as the economic fulcrum of the qasba. Mubarakpur is famous for saris\textsuperscript{22} and the shops in Pura Rani sell these wares to buyers from Gujarat, Varanasi, Mumbai, etc. Although the shops are open throughout the day, but most of the business is transacted during the evenings. Other areas of Mubarakpur do not have the same density of shops as the central area so that bazaar (market) here means the centre of the city. But this in no way should lead to the conclusion that this area is exclusively a space for economic exchange. In fact most of the shops are housed on the ground floor of what are otherwise normal households. The family resides on the first or second floor, while the ground floor

\textsuperscript{19} Athar Mubarakpuri (1974), mentions 28 \textit{Muhallas} during medieval times, but that seems to be an exaggeration, given the small population of that time. The present names of the Muhallas are: Pura Sufi, Pura Diwan, Pura Khijir, Shah Muhammadpur, Pura Bagh, Hyderabad, Pura Rani, Purani Basti, Pura Khaja, Katra, Ali Nagar, Nurpur Bootat. The word 'pura' signifies a locality/Muhalla and is a common usage among the Indian Muslims used both as a suffix and prefix. Thus designations like 'sheikhpura' means the locality of sheikhs, 'qassaabpura' means locality of butchers, etc.

\textsuperscript{20} Athar Mubarakpuri, \textit{Tazkira}, p. 21

\textsuperscript{21} Would translate as 'roadways square' and is so called because the state roadway buses starts and terminates here.

\textsuperscript{22} Sari is the most common form of dress for Indian women belonging to all religions. One of the sought out sari in North India is called the Banarsi, which is despite the name actually gets produced in places like Mubarakpur, Mau and other weaving towns of Eastern Uttar Pradesh.
serves a number of functions, including that of being a shop. Often this shop also serves as a space for social interaction. It is here that guests are welcomed, refreshments are served and local politics is discussed. Often the shop owner is assisted by a bevy of close family members, brothers or sons which leaves him to engage in conversations of social importance. He will be consulted by the less experienced family members prior to any sale but will be directly involved in any sale involving substantial amounts which is the case during the festival seasons. During these times the guests do not expect him to be too involved in conversation, or if the shop owner really gets busy, they would just leave. Not all shops, however, are housed within family quarters. For some then, residence and place of work are separated. But even here, the ideal type of market relations is typically absent. Shop floors in these cases too often serve as space for meeting friends and an important place to talk about the affairs of the qasba. Mubarakpur, therefore offers a contrast to the ideal typical representation of modern cities where place of work and residence are supposed to be physically separated. In the Indian context though, Mubarakpur shares this feature of mixed space use with most of the small towns. An average trader here therefore need not imagine himself as performing different roles suiting different situations. Here a shopkeeper is simultaneously a friend or a father, thus not compartmentalizing his social relationships as well as himself. Economic and social relationships go hand in hand and the same physical space can be used for a variety of purposes.

This however is not to suggest that all spaces are permeable and fluid in the qasba. Rather there are fixed social boundaries when it comes to relations of gender. We have already referred to the physical segregation of gender space. Women are
considered to be the 'jewel' of the household (ghar ki zeenat). Their place properly speaking is within the house and like 'jewels', their preciousness is underlined by keeping them hidden from the public gaze. Accordingly, the houses in the qasba invariably are divided into male and female spaces. A male guest will be entertained in a room just near the entrance. Those who cannot afford a room exclusively for this purpose, often entertain guests in the same room which also serves as their work room for embroidering saris or working on the loom. If there is a man present in the house, women seldom answer the door. In the absence of men, women are not supposed to open the door and talk to men who are not related (ghair mahram) and visitors just have to come some other time. One of the ways in which the goodness of women is measured here relates to her not being seen in public spaces such as the market, etc. So although sari is a women's dress, women are not seen buying it for themselves, rather, it is the men of the house, who buy it for them. Women of course have the choice of either accepting or rejecting the selections made by the men of the household. Except for festivities at the time of Eid, Urs or Muharram, when the pressure of business on men is too high, women are hardly seen in the bazaar. And even when they are seen, they are often accompanied by a male relative or move about in groups but never alone. The meandering lanes and by-lanes of the qasba afford some privacy to the women, where they can be seen crossing from one house to other or generally chatting standing on the front entrance. However, as soon as a man passes by, they hide behind the doors and resume the chat once the man has passed by.

Muslim men of Mubarakpur argue that this segregation is expected from their religion, which enjoins the observance of parda on women. In their
conversation, the segregation of men and women is construed as an important marker of their Islamicity. Stating that the larger society is 'corrupt', women need to be safeguarded from the advances of men. It is for this reason that they need to be protected and guarded from the evil eye of the larger society. This understanding of women as fragile and in need of protection has produced the gender segregation practiced in the qasba. Yet not everyone seems to be happy about the existing state of affairs here. In conversation with a local Alim, considerably advanced in age, I realized that particularly the older generation thinks that moral standard of the qasba has declined. Morality, among other things is related to the state of women and their honour (izzat). On my prodding, the local Alim told me that these days he saw many women on streets, which was an indication of the moral decline of the qasba. On my being reminded that all the women were properly covered according to the 'Islamic norm', he said that in earlier times one could hardly see any women outside the house! The mere presence then, of women in the public spaces, even though they wear the burqa, gives enough cause for this Alim to ponder about the existing morality of the qasba. But as stated earlier this is only one of the many voices within the qasba. Other voices, especially those coming from the younger generation take pride in the fact that the girls of their qasba now go to school while earlier this was not the case. They mention with emphasis, that some girls commute to Azamgarh daily since there are no graduate colleges in Mubarakpur. But in the same voice they also articulate that women should always be in pardah.

23 I am reproducing the exact word used by the locals. The word corrupt is often used as part of Hindustani and connotes a variety of meaning depending on the context. In this particular usage, it means loose morals.

24 There are different kinds of burqa worn by Indian Muslim women. In Mubarakpur as well as the city of Azamgarh, the most common burqa is that which covers the whole face, leaving space for the eyes. This type of burqa is increasingly being called 'talibani burqa'.
There is therefore a consensus on how women should appear in public. According to this reasoning, it is better for women to stay indoors and look after the household. However, since times are changing, women should also take to education, but this should not mean that they take undue license of this ‘freedom’ and start going astray. While it is being acknowledged that women should be encouraged to go for higher education, yet at the same time there is fear that this opportunity might tempt them to try things, which are regarded un-Islamic. There is also the fear that modern education has a ‘corrupting’ influence since it does not teach respect of elders and how to relate to other men and women in an Islamic way. In short there is this anxiety about modern education being alien and having the potential to subvert the existing hierarchy of codes and honours in the everyday life of the qasba. But this fear is more pronounced when it comes to women. Part of the reason for such an understanding might lay in the fact that women have been considered as frivolous and ‘given to their nature’. It was perhaps this anxiety that drove the famous Deobandi Alim, Ashraf Ali Thanwi to caution Muslims against educating girls beyond the basics of reading and writing so that they may just be able to read the Quran and other elementary religious books. Although ideologically opposed to the Deobandis, the most famous Bareli Alim of Mubarakpur, Abdul Aziz, echoed the same view arguing that women hardly had any intelligence.

Abdul Aziz gave the above statement sometimes in the early 1970s. Much has changed between then and now. Today there are at least three Inter Colleges especially for the education of girls in Mubarakpur. One of the earliest in this field

Ansar Girls School was founded in 1976 and developed into an Inter College in 1999. Another recent entrant is the Millat Girls Higher Secondary School. And more importantly, Ashrafiya Girls High School, which is run by the same madrasa of which Abdul Aziz was the Principal. What is more, according to the present Nazim (Manager) of this madrasa, there are plans to build a degree college for girls for which land has already been acquired. In 2004-05, while there were 1336 Muslim girls studying in Ansar Girls High School, there number in Millat Girls High school, which officially started only in 1997, was around 540. Given the fact that the latter school is not even funded by the state, it shows the growing demand for girls' education in the qasba. This was certainly not the case earlier. According to the Principal of Ansar Girls High School, there was active opposition to the founding of this school by the people of the qasba. It was argued then that there is no need to educate girls and it was feared that they will become be-parda (lit. without parda/immodest). It was the weight of notables of the qasba such as Qazi Athar Mubarakpuri which saw the opposition eventually peter away. Mention must be made of M.P Inter College, the oldest school in the qasba, started in 1970 and eventually becoming an Inter College in 1970. This is a minority co-educational school having strength of 3500 students out of which 1300 are girls. This school has an equal proportion of Hindu and Muslim students although increasingly Muslim girls are outnumbering Hindu girls from the neighbouring areas.

27 Interview with Muhammad Sarfaraz, Nazim/Manager, Madrasa Ashrafiya
28 The data is culled from the offices of these schools
29 Interview with Nigar Bano, Principal, Ansar Girls High School
30 All figures for the academic year 2004-2005
31 Interview with Nurul Hasan, Principal, M.P Inter College
It is interesting to note that the single sex girls' schools mentioned above, despite being advocates of girls' schooling do not have a favourable opinion about the co-educational character of M.P Inter College. They argue that girls after a certain age should not study along with boys as it might lead to moral degradation. However, the M.P Inter College is not co-educational in the strict sense of the term. Girls' classes from class eighth onwards are held separately from boys, for which there is a separate building. In this institution also Muslim girls come burqa clad and there are strict rules for segregation of boys and girls. Part of the reason for such a low assessment of this College has also to do with its catering to a different social class. The M.P Inter College is a government College and hence charges considerably lower fees as compared to the Girls High School, which charge a considerable higher fee structure since it is not fully aided by the state. As one of the Principal's of Girls' College said, 'students there come from poor families and are not aware of the Islamic tenets.'\textsuperscript{32} Awareness of being Islamic and conducting oneself Islamically therefore, has also to do with one's economic location in society. For the all girls' institutions, this Islamic awareness translated into closing the gates of the school when the school resumes and only opening them when the day ends. Islamicity here is inculcated through teaching of 'appropriate' Islamic books. According to the Principal of Ansar Girls High School, apart from modern education, they also teach the 'true' teachings of Islam and its etiquettes\textsuperscript{33}. It is not just important to know Islam but also learn about what Islam says about husbands, the duties of being a Muslim wife, respect to elders, etc. It is argued that the government syllabus does not teach such tenets and as a result, Muslim children do not know anything about Islam.

\textsuperscript{32} Interview, Principal Ansar Girls High School
\textsuperscript{33} ibid
One of the important points which came out of the discussion with Principals of these schools was their insistence that education does not make women rebellious. Rather it makes them obedient and more respectful of authority, since they are taught the 'command of Allah'.

Despite the claims that girls' education is not making them rebellious, these institutions do provide the girls of the qasba upward social mobility. For example, most of the teachers in these Colleges/schools were themselves students of the respective schools\textsuperscript{34}. Some have also gone for higher education in the district headquarters of Azamgarh. Again, being a teacher in a school brings in prestige in this qasba as well as a certain amount of economic independence. For women's education in the qasba, this is a long way since the time when mothers used to teach their daughters the basics of religion within the household. More importantly, this has helped in the self-image of these women and their confidence has, at times, threatened the existing gender relationship and authority structure within the qasba.

One of the important reasons for educating girls, from the parents' point of view is that it becomes much easier to find a husband. Nowadays, says a parent, 'the boys' family expects that the girl should be educated\textsuperscript{35}. It is also argued that the education of the children depends on the education of the mothers. So, 'if the mother is educated, she will guide the children and will see to it that they perform well in school'\textsuperscript{36}. Both the arguments are related, and it seems that one of the prime reasons for educating girls seems to be to better their chances in the marriage market.

\textsuperscript{34} Thus out of 22 teachers in Ansar Girls High School, 18 are its old students.
\textsuperscript{35} The assertion is based on discussions with teachers of some of the above mentioned schools
\textsuperscript{36} ibid
Again the search for educated brides and consequently educated mothers appears to have a class component behind it. It is argued in the qasba that since men have to look after providing for the finances, they hardly have time to look into their children’s education. Partly this explanation holds since the majority of the workforce of the qasba either sells its labour, or engages in trade or combines both. But this is not a forte of men alone. Women often contribute in such works, especially at the house looms where they employ their own labour. Thus the Municipal Register records the presence of 4,527 women as family workers, 1,634 as marginal workers and 3,356 as main workers in the qasba. Paradoxically however, the presence of women workers carries with it the sense of low social status.

Families in Mubarakpur, which work on the looms, are invariably poor, and as such cannot afford to pay the fees for educating their girl child. They remain content with a modicum of religious education. It is not for any other reason, that only the relatively poor families send their daughters to M.P Inter College, since it charges a much lower fee as compared to others. Despite this, more than fifty percent of the girls of this institution are not from the qasba. It seems more likely then, that the new demand for girls’ education is still not universal in its appeal, but is confined to the higher class who can afford such education. As shop owners and traders, they have to spend considerable amount of time outside the house. It is understandable then, that they would prefer such women who would also take the responsibility

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37 In Mubarakpur, the majority is occupied in the textile sector. According to the local Municipal Register, the proportion of those engaging in agriculture related activities is only 264.
38 Data from Mubarakpur Municipal Register based on the census of 2001.
39 Women working alongside men has been a marker of low social status. Higher work participation of females has been one of the important markers for the lower castes in India.
looking after the education of children, thereby leaving him with more free time to engage in his business.

But there are some unintended consequences of this action, which is putting gender relations within the qasba under some strain. For although the male literacy rate is higher than the females, there appears to be too few boys willing to continue their education after standard tenth. One indication of this is that whereas there are three Inter Colleges in the qasba exclusively for girls, there is only one for boys and that too is co-educational. The reason why males do not continue their schooling further is related to the occupational structure of the qasba and the cultural role assigned to men. The majority in the qasba are self-employed. For a shop owner, a trader or a loom worker, it is always better to have an additional hand and the family provides it without added costs. Moreover, initiating a son into the business also means that the apprenticeship so given would sharpen his acumen and the sooner it is done, the better it will be for the son's future. The patriarchal ideological structure puts additional pressure on the sons to join the business soon, since the norm dictates that a man's worth is related to his income. This creates a situation, in families who can afford education, where boys in the family drop out early while the girls continue their education till they find a suitable groom. The qasba therefore finds itself in a piquant situation where girls are more educated than boys and the difference in numbers is rising. Education has raised the expectation of girls also and they demand grooms commensurate to their educational qualifications. But this is getting increasingly hard to come by. During my fieldwork, I came to know about two cases where girls refused to marry because their prospective husbands were not
as educated as themselves. This challenge to the existing authority pattern has started to make the qasba uneasy. It is perhaps for this reason that the Principal of the one of the Girls’ school emphatically asserted that they also taught their students to obey their husbands. But how far they will be successful is an open question. In the meantime, families having educated girls are increasingly looking outside the qasba in search for grooms. This kind of exogamy creates another set of problems. An outsider to the qasba brings new ideas and opinions and is bound to have an effect on the existing normative structure of the qasba.

To be sure, consensus within the qasba has always been fragile. In the last hundred and fifty years of the qasba, there have been various competing groups. These groups have sometimes articulated their differences in class terms and sometimes in religious terms. The traditional division between zamindars, trader money-lenders and labourers of the early twentieth century by Gyan Pandey no longer exists. The Zamindars have either been obliterated or have migrated to urban areas and changed their strategies of social reproduction. Families which were earlier much respected and wielded religious or secular clout in the qasba have undergone changes in fortune. The communal riots of the nineteenth and twentieth century that Pandey so brilliantly excavates has also changed its character. The principal antagonism in the qasba is no longer between Hindus and Muslims; rather it is between different social groups of Muslims themselves. During the course of my fieldwork I was time and again reminded of the riots in Mubarakpur that took place

40 The very fact that this became a public discussion in itself shows the consternation that a girls’ refusal can evoke in a male dominated social set up.
41 Cf. Gyanendra Pandey, ‘Encounter and Calamities’, p. 234
42 Ibid; pp. 231-270; for a fuller treatment of the communal problem see, by the same author, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India
during 2001. While in the popular media, this riot was made sense of by referring to it as a Shia Sunni problem\(^{43}\), the reality was more complex. It made more sense to understand the 2001 riot as a Deobandi versus Shia problem rather than a Shia Sunni problem. The presence of sectarian groups is not new in the qasba. As the next chapter will show, sectarian groups have had a long presence here and their rivalries have had a bearing on the history of the qasba. Yet social everyday relationships were hardly affected by such competitive religiosity. However, over the years, sectarian discourse seems to have a bearing on the way the people of the qasba conduct their social relations. Thus, despite the polemics against the Shias, intermarriage among the Sunnis and the Shias was common\(^{44}\). Today one hardly hears of such marriage alliances.

Within the Sunnis themselves, sectarianism manifests in deriding each other, trying to prove that ones’ own interpretation of Islam is necessarily superior to the other. So although the qasba might appear to be following plural notions of Islam, the attitude does not translate into one of pluralism, which would imply a certain level of dialogue and sharing. Although intra Sunni religious polemics have not affected social conduct to the extent that it has affected the Shia-Sunni social exchange, yet denominational identities have hardened. So although it is quite common to see a Barelwi sipping tea with an Ahl e Hadis or a Deobandi, yet they do not pray in the same mosque. No wonder then, Mubarakpur, has nearly one hundred big and small mosques, which is a sure reflection of the widening divide on sectarian lines among the people of Mubarakpur. It is important to understand that in Muslim societies, mosques combine within them the role of community space, a place for

\(^{43}\) 'Riots in Mubarakpur', \textit{The Milli Gazette}, 16-30 November, 2000

\(^{44}\) Based on discussions with some elderly residents of Mubarakpur
prayer, religious instruction and political discussion⁴⁵. The many mosques of Mubarakpur serve to consolidate such sectarian identities through their institutions such as the Friday sermon or through special congregation which detail the finer points of differences of each denomination (*maslak*). The strength and size of the mosque also becomes a matter of pride for these denominations. Thus, two of the biggest mosques in Mubarakpur belong to the dominant denominations of the qasba, the Barelwis and the Deobandis. The mosques of other denominations are much smaller in size which shows their relative strength within the qasba. Much of this denominational competition is couched in religious terms. During my fieldwork, construction of Deobandi mosque was in full swing. Overseen by the management of a famous Deobandi madrasa in the qasba, the secretary proudly told me that the minarets of the mosque will be the highest in Mubarakpur, if Allah so wishes. Arguing that Deobandis are the correct followers of Islam, he said that the true light would shine from these minarets and dispel the darkness of those who are steeped in ignorance⁴⁶.

But then resources need to be mobilized for such work and rather than being an affirmation of the true faith, the height of the minaret depends more on the economic clout of the Deobandis and the finances that they can muster. Such competitive religiosity among various *maslaks* has created a situation where the public debate is mostly on matters of religion and the rightness or wrongness of various *maslaks* in the qasba, to the detriment of issues like access to health and education.


⁴⁶ The reference is towards other denominations but more particularly towards the Barelwis, who according to the Deobandis are *bidatis* (innovators in religion)
Literacy levels have remained low and health services in the qasba remain woefully inadequate. This is not to suggest that Mubarakpur is unique when it comes to the state delivering these basic facilities. Yet as we have seen, this has also do with the kind of priority that the qasba seems to have set for itself. The only visible markers of ‘development’ which the qasba has witnessed are related to religious signifiers, be they mosques or madrasas. This is not to suggest that the state has been altogether absent here. But even the state seems to be able to perpetuate its agenda through religious institutions. Thus educational schemes run by the government seem to be implemented by madrasas in the Muslim localities. It seems that for the government, madrasas provide the only agency here through which it can implement its various educational programs. The fact that madrasas are willing to implement such programs also suggests that they see some merit in modern education. How it will impact on the educational and ideological moorings of the qasba is an open question.

What is more certain however is the surge in demand for ‘school’ rather than traditional education of the madrasas. We have already seen the demand for girls’ education and the way in which madrasas have responded to cater to this demand. Although not on the same scale, but in the last decade or so, Mubarakpur, has witnessed the growth of primary level schools whose medium of instruction is English. Although, it is stressed that these schools also teach ‘Islam’, the emphasis does not seem to be as pronounced as in the case of girls’ school as mentioned.

47 Thus the Basic Education Scheme of the government is implemented entirely by Madrasas in Mubarakpur. For the madrasa implementing this scheme, resources are provided in terms of teachers' salaries and classroom equipment. The standard practice in Mubarakpur, in to convert part of the madrasa into a ‘school’ which lacks decent facilities for students. Moreover, it seems that lack of governmental supervision results in such schools utilizing the existing madrasa teachers, having no special knowledge, to teach the students. Altogether four madrasas implement the basic education scheme of the government, cf. Basic Shikhsa Adhikari, Sathiaon Block, Azamgarh
above. As we noted earlier, the boys in Mubarakpur seldom take to higher education, owing partly to the occupational structure of the qasba. However, during interviews with respondents, I became aware that now they were keen to educate their sons as they felt that the security that the loom provided them was no longer there. There were various reasons given for the decline of business in Mubarakpur. Some had to do with globalization, particularly, the large scale dumping of Chinese silk and cotton which is considerably cheaper than those produced by the looms of Mubarakpur.\textsuperscript{48} Added to this were the sectarian clashes of 2001 referred to earlier which seems to have scared prospective buyers away from Mubarakpur. Residents of Mubarakpur told me that earlier buyers from Gujarat, Mumbai, Varanasi, etc used to come directly to Mubarakpur to buy finished products, but now, they no longer do so. As a result of which traders in Mubarakpur take bookings from bigger merchants outside and then get the work done. Payments therefore have become mostly deferred as merchants insist on paying only after the goods have been sold. For the worker at the loom, this has meant decreasing margins of profit per sari, partly also owing to the import of Chinese silk.

In the historical memory of the qasba, this economic uncertainty is unique. They fondly refer to 'those days' when business was conducted till midnight and profits brought a degree of prosperity in the qasba. Almost all the respondents agreed that the business was at an all time low. Interestingly, some argue that the spread of educational awareness in the qasba is a result of its economic decline. They argue that since the profit margins have become low, people have started looking for other avenues and education is one of them. As in other parts of India, education is

\textsuperscript{48} This is not just in Mubarakpur, but was a constant reference in its neighboring districts of Mau and Varanasi.
looked upon as a lever to employment. There seems to be some truth in this assertion. For if we look at the girls' education, three out of four inter colleges were started after 1999, just after the outbreak of sectarian clashes. As commented earlier, we do not see the same level of commitment when it comes to boys' education.

The *tana-bana*- the vertical and horizontal weaving pattern- which goes into the making of any piece of cloth- of Mubarakpur is thus ever evolving. And this study is an attempt to chart this evolution of the qasba. While in this chapter we have seen the emerging fault lines along the dimension of gender, other chapters highlight fractures within the qasba along the question of caste and denomination. The Muslim qasba is thus not just about mosques and madrasas but carries within itself various other stories; stories which are the common heritage of most ordinary Indians.

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49 Ansar Girls High School started its Inter College in 1999, followed by Millat Girls' High School and Ashrafiya Girls' High School in 2000