

## Biopolitics and Marginality : The case of Muslims in Mumbai<sup>1</sup>

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Enjoyment of citizenship rights is a factor of the relative position of the community in question, in the social and political hierarchy in any society, among other things such as the type of state, governance mechanisms etc. in place. As regards Muslims in India, in general and those in urban spaces have remained at the receiving end of the intra-national and extra-national biopolitics surrounding **security, development deficit** and **victimization**. One of the expressions of biopolitics is the governmental power imposed on humans reducing them to their 'bare life', stripping them of their rational and political agency and advocating the precariousness of their passivity. The bare life of humans and the state of exception which defines the normativity of political life of Muslims in Mumbai clearly defines the process and status of marginality in the public sphere. In such circumstances, the state ceases to exist for those who constitute a very large section of population who live in constant fear of their personal safety and **security**. For them, the state ceases to exist not only because it failed to protect their lives and property, which is its constitutional obligation, but also because it allowed the extremist, fundamentalist groups to indulge in violent acts with a great sense of impunity. Thus the art of governance as a strategy of power of the state also includes the action of subjects upon others which in a way influences a process of increasing marginality of the 'others'. According to several members of the community, the life of Muslims in the city has never been peaceful especially after the 1992-93 riots. Even though riots do not happen quite often, a minor incident can send shock waves; it could be a protest morcha by Shiv Sena or even a religious procession organized by a local mandal. In most of the cases, the local mandals will have their own political connections and local leader as the patron. The fear is not only at the hands of religious extremists but also at the hands of Police. The police always look at them with suspicion.

**Development deficit** is yet another factor which describes the biopolitics surrounding marginalized communities such as Muslims in India. While approximately 60 per cent of the Mumbai's population lives in slums, these settlements become very important constituencies for any political parties. The process of exclusion and inclusion operates at a not so subtle level in these settlements on the basis of the electoral politics at play. There are reported to be certain pockets in most of the slums, where the political party in power have assured vote base and such pockets are well serviced as far as the civic services are concerned whereas pockets wherefrom the members vote consistently to other parties are reported to be perennially neglected. Such pockets of neglect are most often delineated based on either religion or caste. Though all declared slums are supposed to be provided with the basic amenities by the local governments, there is widespread anguish among the slum dwellers about the kind of services they enjoy in

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their localities. Moreover settlements with high concentration of Muslims are neglected as far as the services of the local governments as well as the state departments are concerned. Residents of Mumbra with as much as 80-85 percent Muslims have clear reasons to believe that the area is neglected by various arms of the state owing to its high Muslim population. Several inhabitants of the area strongly believe that the discrimination of certain localities has its religio-communal connotations as the case of neglect is strikingly visible in areas which are predominantly inhabited by Muslim community.

The state with its various power dispositifs plays a major role in the experience of **victimization** of the community in question. Police is the most important institution playing a vital role in generating and maintaining a sense of persecution among Muslims. The utmost betrayal experienced at the hands of Police during the Bombay Riots has left a major impact on the psyche of Muslims in the city. Even after one and half decade, incidents occurred in 1992-93 still remain powerful markers in this respect. Residents of Mumbra have peculiar experiences of being a *Mumbraite* as well as being a Muslim. Mumbra's image of being projected as a terrorist's den and one's religious identity of being Muslim make you a target of suspicion. There are several *bastis* in the city of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane which are declared as Bangladeshi bastis and are under close surveillance of Police which closely resembles Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. Illegal detention of people from Muslim *bastis* and torture in custody are reported to be highly common. Apart from normal biases against Muslims, the police are reported to be taking pride in presenting a Muslim petty criminal as a terrorist having connections with Pakistan or Bangladesh. The locality in which you live, the language you speak, your physical presentation all are factors determining the way you experience the power dispositifs.

With the biopolitics of development assuming considerable significance within the context of the modern state, populations are deemed to be controlled and fashioned with legal, social and moral techniques and practices in operation. The desire to control the conduct of others, always meets with resistance - a resistance to power that creates 'new forms of life'. An exploration into the lives of Muslims in Mumbai and its suburbs using a prism of citizenship rights is expected to bring forth this multifaceted reality of marginality and new forms of life experienced by them. Here the idea is to analyse the *biopolitics of otherness*.