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The Neighbourhood and the School: Conflict, Educational Marginalisation and the State in Contemporary Gujarat

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THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE SCHOOL

CONFLICT, EDUCATIONAL MARGINALISATION AND THE STATE IN CONTEMPORARY GUJARAT

The complex linkages between urban neighbourhoods and schools have been the subject of research in several societies. These studies have employed different disciplinary frameworks to understand the significance of space and territory to modes of urban governmentality that structure educational processes (Grinberg, 2011). This paper draws on studies of urban education that show how spatial segmentation and segregation in cities along lines of class and community define distinct 'geographies' of schooling in cities.

Education itself has been shown to be an integral part of the reshaping of cities through neoliberal reforms in contemporary times through the ways in which housing policies, urban governance and market-oriented educational expansion differentially affect neighbourhoods and communities (Gulson and Fataar, 2011). Examining education and racial segregation in cities, Buendia et al (2004) show how historical and contemporary patterns of social access to education and low standards of public education in certain urban areas produce forms of status and stigma within cities and how these structural relations 'shape the types of educational programs and knowledge found in schools with particular populations' (p. 836). Studies that map neoliberal policy reforms in education, in particular the decline of public schools and the promotion of privatisation and school choice, alongside analyses of urban development policies, suggest ways to comprehend the complexities underlying the continuum as well as disjunctures between neighbourhood territory and school territory (Grinberg, 2011).

Social violence and the polarisation of communities along race, caste, ethnic, nationality and religious lines strengthen boundaries and borders within cities, hardening and exacerbating existing social inequalities within education. In these contexts, categories of neighbourhood and community are bound together in the public imagination in terms of stigma, fear and mistrust. The lack of access to good quality schooling for communities living in these neighbourhoods overlaps with poverty, inadequate access to material resources, and modes of discriminatory governance. Together, these construct neighbourhoods and the children in them as deficient and undeserving of focussed

attention of education policy makers. Moreover, public discourses around social identities and schooling create a template for the durability of these constructs which 'both organise and are organised by material relations that are integrated into school practice, epistemologies, and technologies (e.g. funding, curriculum)' (Buendia et al, 2004: 835). Through shorthand that never quite explicates its terms, certain neighbourhoods within cities often come to be designated as 'problem' areas.

In this paper, I attempt to examine the educational marginalisation of Muslim children with respect to mechanisms of social exclusion and discrimination that operate on schools, teachers and communities within the communalised spaces of contemporary Gujarat. The paper looks at two schools in an urban context, in what is often referred to as the 'walled' city in Baroda (Vadodara),1 the state's third largest city and a major industrial and educational centre. Based on preliminary findings from an ongoing study in two neighbourhoods of the city,[2] I attempt to explore the relationship between communities and the government schools they access, and how this relationship is mediated by their marginalised identity as both poor and Muslim. Such analysis would be applicable to many contexts within urban India, as suggested by data on the social, economic and educational profile of Muslims outlined in the Sachar Committee Report (2006), and reports from many cities of the 'unprecedented marginalisation' of Muslims (Gayer and Jaffrelot, 2012: p. 6).[3]

The paper is divided into three broad sections. The first section sets out the contemporary contexts of conflict within the state and its association with educational marginalisation of the Muslim community. The second section locates the schools within the communal geography of the old city, and discusses how the dynamics of neighbourhood and school are experienced and framed by marginalisation. The final section attempts to draw together the struggles for better education within a

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[1] Since the city is generally referred to as Baroda and not its official name Vadodara, I have used the former throughout the paper.
[2] This is part of a wider study of conflict and education in Gujarat. For this study reported here, a small household survey of 60 parents of children in Classes VI to VIII in the two schools was conducted. The study also involved interviews with teachers, parents, community members and a few children, as well as school observations.
[3] See, for example, Contractor (2012) for Mumbai, Kirmani (2008) for Zakir Nagar in Delhi, and Jaffrelot and Thomas (2012) for Juhapura in Ahmedabad. Robinson's (2005) important study has examined the aftermath of violence both in Mumbai and Gujarat in terms of social relations and distance between Hindu and Muslim communities.

predominantly impoverished Muslim community, framed within a context of real and perceived discrimination by society at large, and a communally biased administration.

<div align="center">**I**</div>

The Violence of 2002 and After

Gujarat is one of India's most industrialised and urbanised states; in recent times it has been promoted as a 'development model' for India. Since the 1980s, the state has seen a progressive consolidation of right wing politics that has resulted in repeated episodes of communal violence against religious minorities, particularly against the Muslim community that makes up around 9 per cent of the state's population. Rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and struggles for status and political power among different castes and communities resulted in political instability and provided a matrix for the consolidation of Hindutva politics, or the politics of Hindu cultural nationalism.[4]

In March 2002, the state witnessed widespread violence directed against the Muslim community after the deaths of 68 Hindu *kar sevaks* (devotee-workers) in a fire that broke out in a train returning from Ayodhya.[5] Mobs rampaged cities, towns and villages in Gujarat in a frenzy of looting, burning and killing – all directed towards people of the Muslim minority community, their properties and religious shrines, with the most hideous violence perpetrated against women and children (Sarkar, 2002). Two thousand Muslims lost their lives and more than a hundred and fifty thousand were rendered homeless. This violence was significantly ddifferent in nature from the many communal riots Gujarat had seen, in its geographical scale and magnitude, mobilisation at the grassroots level, and most significantly in terms of the complicity of the state and its machinery. Marking a paradigmatic shift in communal conflict in India by changing the very terms on which the normative secular state with all its imperfections are based, the

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[4] For a detailed analysis of communal mobilisation in Gujarat, see 'The Rise of Hindutva' in Yagnik and Sheth (2005).

[5] Ayodhya, a city in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, is the site of the Babri Masjid, named after Babar – the first Mughal emperor of India. A campaign (the Ramjanambhoomi movement) by Hindu fundamentalist groups from the late 1980s and early 1990s for the site to be declared the legitimate birthplace of Lord Rama and the eventual demolition of the mosque by these groups on 4 December 1992, led to widespread riots across the country. The worst hit was the city of Mumbai. The kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya and who were victims of the train fire, had been mobilised by these groups to do voluntary service in Ayodhya.

violence of Gujarat in 2002 bore all the features of an ethnic cleansing project, and has been variously referred to as a pogrom, a genocide and a crime against humanity.[6]

Education: An Axis of Violence

Since the early 1990s, education in Gujarat has been a site of intense ideological conflict. The years leading up to the 2002 violence in the state saw consistent propaganda and mobilisations by Hindu fundamentalist organisations around several issues that sought to polarise and communalise social perceptions (and education) in decisive ways. Some of these were: allegations of abductions of young Hindu girls from schools and forced conversions by Muslim youth; the recruitment of teachers, particularly in tribal areas, known to have links with the Rashtra Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); revision of school curricula to reflect a stronger majoritarian bias; subscriptions to RSS materials in government schools; demands to close down Muslim student hostels in some areas and the targeting of Christian missionary schools in tribal areas.

The ideological thrust of the Sangh Parivar[7] that drove the wide-scale violence in Gujarat in 2002 was directed towards the subjugation of the Muslim community. Sarkar's analysis of the violence shows how the violence was aimed at crippling reproduction of the community itself (Sarkar 2002). Education, as a signifier of potential social mobility of the community, was a strategic target of the 2002 violence. Muslim-run educational institutions were systematically attacked and destroyed, and over the most intense period of violence, in the month of March 2002, which coincided with the school-leaving examinations, a large number of Muslim children found themselves displaced and in relief camps, with no educational material or support. Studies and reports documenting those times demonstrate the trauma and anxiety of children who were not only witness to unspeakable violence within their homes and communities, but lost all connection with the routine and rhythm of school life (Panjabi et al, 2002; Patel, 2009). With the destruction of all documents in the attacks on their homes, these children also faced uncertainty and difficulties in terms of re-admission to schools after relocation to safer areas or camps, exacerbated by indifferent and hostile school administrations. All these experiences contributed to children's loss of self-esteem and identity. For children who experienced the violence first hand, getting back to school was seen to play a restorative

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[6] Comprehensive documentation of the violence in the form of reports and articles can be found on the website http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/

[7] The Sangh Parivar refers to the body of organisations owing primary affiliation to the RSS.

and rehabilitative role in the immediate post-conflict situation, restoring a sense of routine and a measure of stability in their lives.

The call for a social and economic boycott of the Muslim community completed the circle of structural, political and cultural marginalisation. The state government led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), widely believed to have played a role in the violence, continued to send a strong signal to the Muslim community that reparations were far from forthcoming. Internally displaced families in resettlement colonies continued to have sparse educational facilities and faced struggles in securing admission of their children in nearby schools. The state government returned a large percentage of central funds allocated for minority students even as Muslim students were unable to continue education for lack of financial support.[8]

More than a decade after the violence, the Muslim community in the state continues to face the effects of the social and economic fractures wrought by the violence of 2002. Fear and anxiety persist, with continuing harassment of the Muslim community in the form of arrests of men (within the larger communalised discourse of anti-terror operations), economic and social disruptions, pervasive and everyday contexts of conflict (hostilities, provocations, possibilities of violence) and betrayal and breakdown of trust. It is not uncommon to hear '*kisi ka bharosa nahi*'- one cannot trust anyone – signifying the sense of isolation, neglect and mistrust felt by the community. For young Muslims in particular, the critical issues remain unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, strained inter-communal relations, and the feeling of 'being haunted and branded because one has a Muslim name' (Spodek, 2010: 380). Prospects of adjustment and accommodation to an ethos of hostility on this scale are dependent on class, caste and location. Economic recovery has been somewhat easier for wealthier business communities such as the Bohras, Memons and Khojas, who faced communal violence on this scale for the first time in Gujarat's riot-scarred history. Muslims engaged as daily wagers in the informal

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[8] The Central government scheme of providing for pre-matric scholarships for Muslim students, initiated in 2008 provided for a 75:25 funding between the Centre and states to curb dropout of Muslim students. The Gujarat government refused to implement the scheme, filing legal cases against the scheme that provides for 55,000 scholarships of Rs 1,000 a year, on grounds of religious appeasement. The Gujarat high court ruled that these were in the nature of affirmative action and directed the state to do so, in 2013. Schools, however, have found it difficult to obtain the funds from the government http://muslimmirror.com/eng/gujarat-hc-asks-modi-govt-to-implement-minority-scholarship-schemes/.

economy and in traditional occupations have had found it far more difficult to rebuild their lives.

New forms of regulation of urban spaces arising out of ghettoisation, both forced and voluntary, have been accompanied by newer forms of discrimination by the state, and new compromises at different levels. Schooling decisions in families have increasingly come to be determined by what constitutes a safe space for children, with *mahaul* (ambience) and *mohalla* (neighbourhood) being crucial to these decisions for all communities (Sheth and Haeems, 2003).

A 2012 report by Abusaleh Shariff, principal author of the 2006 report on the status of Muslims in India (commonly referred to as the Sachar Committee report), which conclusively documented the low socioeconomic and educational levels of the community in India, shows that Muslims in the state of Gujarat, and particularly urban Muslims, are the worst off compared to all states, with extremely high dropout rates after Class V, and very few attaining higher education (Shariff, 2012: 11 12). Contrary to the claims of the 'Gujarat model' that has become firmly embedded in the public imagination and contributed to the installation of the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India in May 2014, Shariff's findings show that for Gujarat's Muslims, poverty and educational marginalisation have been reproduced through exclusionary modes of state governance.

II

The Old City in Baroda

The two neighbourhood schools on which this paper is based are located in the walled/old city of Baroda, which local residents refer to simply as 'city'. The localities constituting the old city made up the 16th century medieval town built within the four historic gates that are still landmarks of the city. Like many cities that emerged out of Muslim rule, the old city has a high concentration of Muslim residents, who make up around 12 per cent of Baroda's population of 1.4 million people. A high proportion of this population resides in the three densely populated municipal wards in the central and eastern parts of Baroda, where the old city is located. Some areas of the old city are 'mixed' with both Hindu and Muslim neighbourhoods, typically marked by 'borders' marked by the roads that divide them.

With the wholesale and large specialised marketplaces, the old city is a busy, congested area, its narrow roads bustling with people and vehicular traffic. Urban policy documents refer to the area as representing a 'chaotic urban scenario' and the 'lack of sensitivity' of the general public to its architectural heritage, abuse of soft landscape and indifference to law and enforcement (VMSS, 4(43): 26 29).

The connection to the old city is through arterial roads converging on the district court and the Sursagar lake where the annual Ganapati idol and Tazia immersions take place during the Ganesh Chaturthi and Moharram festivals. These processions have to go through mixed Hindu and Muslim areas which have been conflagration points for communal violence, particularly since the late 1970s. Most of the violence experienced in this period was linked to the communal turn of the anti-caste reservation riots that swept Gujarat, as well as rivalries between Hindu and Muslim gangs involved in the illicit liquor and gambling businesses that thrived in the area with the support of a powerful police-politician-builder nexus. The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign of the late 1980s and early 1990s saw consolidation of cadres and community-based mobilisation by Sangh Parivar outfits like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, and an increase in targeted attacks in Muslim-dominated neighbourhoods. In the late 1990s, with the coming to power of the BJP at both local and state levels, and the violence of 2002 in which Muslims in the old city were the focus of police atrocities, the stigmatisation of these areas as 'disturbed' acquired new dimensions.

The 2002 violence resulted in spatial reorganisation of Baroda along religious lines, with those in a position to leave the troubled areas moving to 'safer' localities dominated by their own religious community. As in other riot-affected cities, notably Mumbai after the 1992 93 riots, the need to seek out safer zones has seen the inevitable emergence of religion-wise homogenised spaces within Baroda, with realty developers capitalising on this trend in newer areas of the city.

In Gujarat, the stigmatisation of areas inhabited by Muslims has been further impacted through legal intervention initially promulgated in 1991 to restrain the distress sale of properties following riots in the state. Under the Disturbed Areas Act of 1991, which prohibits the sale of property in areas designated as 'disturbed' without the permission of

the District Collector, these conflicts have taken on a communal colour and intensified in several cities of Gujarat which have experienced renewed ghettoisation since 2002.[9] In particular, there has been mobilisation among Hindu residents in some areas to not sell their houses to Muslims.[10] Another axis of separation has been the informal system of zoning of street vendors along Hindu-Muslim lines, often overseen by the police and local thugs. Spatial segregation of local economic activity has impacted Muslims in the old city, since many are involved in street vending of vegetables and low-priced goods.

The walled city saw intense conflict in the violence of 2002. Muslim women were targeted in police operations in the area, especially during combing operations where women were sexually harassed, beaten and their homes ransacked, their children and elders beaten mercilessly. As elsewhere, young Muslim men were rounded up and kept in police custody where they were subjected to physical torture. Police atrocities on Muslim residents of the walled city have been a recurrent pattern since the violence of 2002. In 2006, residents had to relive this nightmare when a Sufi *dargah* was demolished near one of the large gates in the area (the Champaner Darwaza) on 1 May, Gujarat's '*Gaurav Divas*' (Day of Pride commemorating the formation of Gujarat as an independent state). The violence was ostensibly related to a road-widening project of the municipal corporation. In the police firing that followed public protests, two Muslim youth were killed and the area was subject to intense police surveillance and combing. As recently as September 2014, following relatively minor local skirmishes, police entered homes and mercilessly beat up residents of the area, in operations reminiscent of those carried out in 2002.[11]

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[9] The Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property and Provisions for Protection of Tenants from Eviction from Premises in Disturbed Areas Act, 1991 was first introduced in the mid-1980s as an ordinance by the Congress government of Madhavsinh Solanki. In theory, it was meant to be enforced for a limited period only in areas that could have experienced communal violence. In practice, the 'disturbed area' tag remains attached seemingly forever. Successive governments of varying ideological dispensations in Gujarat have continued with the Act till date. This has resulted in the continuation of demands for exclusively Hindu localities in many parts of Gujarat. In the capital city, Ahmedabad, for example, almost all Muslim-dominated areas affected by the 2002 violence have been brought under this Act. See http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/decade-after-riots-gujarat-adds-more-areas-to-disturbed-list/1159458/

[10] In 2010, Hindu residents of Chinwada, an area on the border where the Khatki or butcher community resides, were mobilised by the VHP to take out a rally to the city collectorate, demanding that action be taken against Muslim 'terrorists' seeking to take over their area. That Hindus were selling houses to Muslims was an irony lost on the demonstrators.

[11] For details of this incident, see People's Union of Civil Liberties, Vadodara (2014) Fact-finding into the Violence in Vadodara in September 2014 (http://www.sacw.net/article9762.html)

In the many years of communal tension and violence in the city, a kind of graveyard peace prevails in the old city largely through community-enforced restraint. It is common to hear Muslim elders speak of the challenge of restraining their youth, both in the face of deliberate provocation as well as in terms of dealing with a frequently hostile police and judiciary. The expectation of 'trouble' breaking out is ever-present, and the area is often referred to as a 'powder keg' waiting to explode.

Shahpura and Chinwada: Neighbourhoods and Schools

The two schools discussed here are in the contiguous neighbourhoods of Shahpura and Chinwada.[12] Shahpura is named after the Sufi saint Pir Shah, whose 400 year-old dargah is at one end of the neighbourhood. Chinwada is located on the edge of a Hindu locality; following popular spatial typology in Gujarat, it is often referred to as a 'border' area.

The two neighbourhoods are part of a large cluster of working class residential neighbourhoods in the walled city. The old walled city originally had a high proportion of Marathi-speaking Hindu communities – a legacy of Baroda's past as a princely state ruled since the mid-18th century by the Marathi-speaking Gaekwads. Successive communal conflagrations and riots have seen the area's population become largely dominated by Muslims.

Most of the people residing in Shahpura and Chinwada are from the lower middle and working classes, largely belonging to Muslim Other Backward Class (OBC).[13] The men are engaged in daily wage work, mainly street vending, driving auto rickshaws and semi-skilled and unskilled labour in the many small workshops in the area and the nearby wholesale markets. Women are mostly involved in home-based piece-rate work like sewing, embroidery, wrapping items, etc. The entire neighbourhood is also the heart of the city (and state's) home-based and seasonal kite and *rakhi*-making industry, in which Muslim women are employed. Many women are also employed as domestic workers in nearby middle-class housing societies.

Shahpura and Chinwada bear the hallmarks of neighbourhoods that have witnessed

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[12] Names of localities have been changed to protect the identity of residents.

[13] The different Muslim communities living in this area are apart from Sheikhs, Sayyads, Fakirs, Mansuri, Pathan, Khatki, Ansari, Ghanchi and Qureshi.

longstanding apathy and neglect by the civic authorities. A labyrinthine layout of lanes flanked by small tenements, open sewers, overhanging electric wires and stagnant pools of water, the area has seen little of the much-touted development taking place in the state of Gujarat. It is congested and underserved by public amenities, with problems of drinking water, sanitation and street lighting. However, even with the internal social differentiation in the community, the sense one gets of the large part of the community is that of self-reliance, with strong community and kin networks, and a self-defined distancing from the far more abject poor of the city who reside in shanties and slums. The neighbourhoods are marked by the distinctive poverty associated with the urban informal labour economy: never quite abject, but forever vulnerable.

The Schools: Struggles for Survival in Stigmatised Spaces

The shift of populations with each successive riot over the past fifty years has seen new configurations of space and stigma in the city. The sharpening of communal divides and the socio-spatial reorganisation of the city at large has had an irreversible impact on schooling. In the old city, a large number of municipal schools as well as private government-aided schools have seen greater homogenisation along religious lines. Over the years, a large number of low-fee private (LFP) schools of questionable quality have come up in areas of the old city, catering to the demand for segregated schools. The two schools in Shahpura and Chinwada are part of the municipal school system in Baroda, managed by the Nagar Prathmik Shiksha Sansthan (NPSS), the local municipal school board. Out of the 104 schools that the NPSS currently administers, seventeen are in the old city area. Shifts in demographic composition both locally and in different areas of the city, along with the mushrooming of low-cost private schools, have seen the progressive shutting down of many municipal schools.[14] Mirroring the situation in government schools across the country, these schools are accessed by the poorest communities in the city.[15] Unlike in cities like Ahmedabad, the corporation does not offer Urdu as a medium

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[14] Mirroring the composition of urban demography, municipal schools were earlier run in four mediums of instruction – Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi and Sindhi. The number of schools has been steadily showing a decrease: in 2000 there were 124 schools, by 2006–07 the number had come down to 114, and in 2012–13 to 104. The number of teachers in the corresponding period declined from 1424 to 1077. Enrolment in these schools has also been showing a decline: from 54,176 in 2000 to the current 38,444. The Sindhi-medium schools, located in areas where there was a sizeable Sindhi population resettled after Partition, have all closed down. Presently there are 10 Hindi-medium schools and 4 Marathi schools (NPSS, Vadodara).

[15] Data from the NPSS reveals that children from the SC, ST, OBC and Muslim communities make up

of instruction in any of its schools, and the two schools here have only Gujarati as the medium of instruction.

Within the overall decline of the municipal school system, the two schools in Shahpura and Chinwada are located very differently, although their battles for survival are similar. The Shahpura school in the relatively poorer, criminalised and 'backward' mohalla of Dabi Falia is popularly called 'Dabba school' by residents of the area. The term of ridicule 'dabba' describes both its physical appearance – from the road the windowless exterior facade resembles a box – as well as connoting the general perception that its students are box-heads: 'dabbas' in local parlance. The Chinwada school in Khatkiwad, where the Khatki community—butchers from the city's main mutton market reside, is located on the 'border' of a Hindu locality. It is also popularly referred to as 'Khadia school', after a 'border' locality in the city of Ahmedabad associated with communal riots. These terms of popular reference signify the ways in which both schools carry the stigma of their locations.

The stigmatisation of Shahpura and Chinwada in the imagination of the city and in the practices of the state is reflected in the large number of police outposts in the area. Both municipal schools had posts of the State Reserve Police (SRP) on their premises after violence erupted in the area in 2002. Policemen stationed in tents within the school buildings created an uneasy and threatening environment for the children, especially female students. Repeated complaints to the administration by local residents, parents and teachers were met with the stock response that the posts were there for their own protection, whereas in reality they signalled more fear and anxiety, and demarcated the neighbourhoods as 'disturbed'. The posts within the schools were removed as late as 2010, when municipal elections were held in the city, although police deployment continues to remain significant in many areas.

Schools as Pedagogic Spaces

The physical space of the school is an embodiment of the perspective through which the school operates. School buildings reflect assumptions underlying educational governance,

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the largest percentage of students in the municipal schools. Overall, the number of girls is slightly higher than boys at the primary level up to Class V (52 per cent) and about the same at the middle school level, in Classes VI–VIII. About half the teachers come from SC, ST and OBC communities.

mirroring how schools are viewed as institutions; in this sense the school building itself is a pedagogic space. The Shahpura and Chinwada schools were set up in the early 1970s as part of the expansion of municipal education within Gujarat's public school system. Like older public schools in many Indian cities, they are housed in large buildings, with several classrooms and a small open space functioning as a playground. However, with lack of funds for maintenance, the buildings are in poor physical condition. Basic infrastructural amenities like power, water and functional toilets are lacking in both schools.

The Shahpura school is a large two-storied structure with 34 rooms, of which only around 10 are in any physical condition to function as classrooms. A narrow alley (in which the SRP post was located up to 2010) leads to the main gate of the school. The alley is often flooded with sewage overflow, with sanitation workers spreading disinfectants to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in the stagnant pools. The school has no proper drinking water supply, and water is sourced from a municipal tap in the neighbourhood. There is only one functioning toilet for all the children. Even the undisputed marker of quality in government schools, a computer room, has no computer facilities at all.

The Chinwada school is a bit smaller, but also has a large number of rooms spread over two floors, most of which are in reasonably good physical condition. Several years ago the school board sanctioned an overhead water tank, but grants were not made available for a pump and so the tank lies unused and broken. Children have to draw drinking water from a tube-well in the compound, with availability dependent on an erratic municipal water supply schedule. Toilets in the Chinwada school are in better condition because funds obtained from a well-wisher were used to partially remodel them. There are two fully equipped computer rooms in this school, one from an earlier time which is kept locked, and a newer one fitted with flat screen computers and laser printers, but with no power supply and therefore unusable. School playground equipment arrived while we were doing fieldwork in the school, and these were grouted into the uneven and broken concrete tiles in the small open space that serves as a playground.

With basic issues of infrastructure unaddressed and an acute shortage of teachers, both schools have had to struggle for the attention of the NPSS. Both saw high enrolment (around 1,000 children) up to the 1990s, when they worked in two shifts. Administrative

apathy and negligence, demographic shifts, a general decline of infrastructure and the emergence of low-cost private schools in the area have seen enrolments fall to less than 300 in the Shahpura school and 400 in the Chinwada school. In 2012, the Shahpura school had only one teacher, and lost 60 students. Although both the current and the past principals of the school claim that enrolments decreased drastically after the violence of 2002, a look at school records since 2000 shows that the decline had already set in before the violence. Enrolments have fallen steeply in the higher classes, and now stand at a mere 30 in Classes VI VIII. The school has seen a steady turnover of teachers, who seek alternate postings using social connections with school and municipal administrators. The school now has four teachers for eight classes, two of whom are contract teachers. Not a single teacher in the school could give us any information about its history since they have been there for very short periods. The only person who had some knowledge about the past was the sweeper, a woman from the neighbourhood who has been working there for 20 years. With pressure from the school administration to form the mandatory School Management Committee, and teachers hesitant to entrust this responsibility to any community member, this woman has functioned as its president for the past five years.

The Chinwada school, located less than a kilometre away, is the preferred choice for most residents of the neighbourhoods, even if it means that children have to walk a longer distance to get there. This school also suffers from a lack of the full complement of teachers—six instead of eight. However, it has a good reputation in the community. This is largely due to efforts by its former principal, a Hindu, who tirelessly petitioned the administration and gathered resources for the school. His work has continued with the efforts of two teachers, one Hindu and the other Muslim, who have been with the school for more than 25 years. The community has high regard for Mohanbhai and Ismaelbhai, who are trusted for their commitment to the education of children of the area. These teachers have made efforts to raise funds for infrastructure through private philanthropy, donations from individuals and through *zakat* funds from a few prominent Muslim traders in the area. One of these traders is Ahmadbhai Sheikh, the biggest kite manufacturer and exporter in the city. A graduate of the Chinwada school from the 1970s and a respected community member, he supports the school in several ways. Ahmadbhai currently funds three young graduates from the area whom he has appointed to conduct remedial classes for the children. He makes regular visits to the

school to interact with teachers and address infrastructural and other problems. His remarkable commitment to improving the school is related to his own struggles after having to discontinue his education because of economic constraints, and his belief that government schools in the area have to be supported to ensure poverty does not prevent children from acquiring a good education.

Teachers

Senior teachers in both schools, as well as people in the area, recall a time when the schools were doing well; working in two shifts with multiple sections. Teachers attribute the decline of schools and schooling to four main factors: the indiscipline of the children; irregularity in attendance and non-seriousness about studies; poverty, which results in dropout; and wilful neglect by the authorities. Both Hindu and Muslim teachers in the schools are resentful of what they see as deliberate negligence and discrimination on the part of the administration. They see this neglect as extending to what they perceive as the administration's interest in granting permission to private agencies to set up schools in the area, one of the chief reasons for the declining enrolment of students.[16]

The pressing needs of both schools have had to be fought for with sustained struggles by teachers. The apathy of the administration in meeting their demands is seen as discriminatory because they are located in Muslim areas. Resources earmarked for all municipal schools rarely reach these schools. For example, teachers have been demanding class benches for more than five years, and while other schools in the city were supplied new ones, their requests were constantly ignored or turned down. When benches did finally arrive in the Chinwada school (at the time of our fieldwork), they were found to be second-hand and in run-down condition. Ismaelbhai lamented that this has been their fate throughout.

We can never get what we need, and it is a constant struggle to bring the officials here to understand the adverse conditions under which we are expected to teach. If we ask for equipment we get second-hand run-down stuff, if we ask for teachers, they send us those past their 'expiry date' who have 'mentally retired' and have no interest whatsoever in teaching these children. The officials come here and walk into classes to inspect them,

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[16] It was interesting, in this context, to note that the Shahpura school is now better known in the area by the name of the beauty parlour that has hired its premises to offer 'parlour training' to young women after school hours.

but they are not interested in seeing things improve. We have told them that they needn't come here for inspection if they are not interested in granting us the rights we deserve.

The experience of being a teacher in Shahpura or Chinwada is fraught with anxiety, both personally and professionally. The schools are seen as failed institutions by the administration on account of their location in a Muslim community, yet there is constant surveillance of teachers in these schools. A commonly held view is that appointments to these schools are punishment postings by the administration. Teachers spoke about how there is pressure from their families against working in communally 'sensitive' areas. We heard reports of many teachers having bribed officials for alternate postings to 'safer' areas of the city. Many of the teachers, particularly in the Shahpura school, shared that they were also trying to obtain transfers to other schools.

These experiences are inflected by the categories 'mohalla' and '*mahaul*' both materially and discursively. Not only are there real and imagined perceptions of danger, but also cynicism about the very worth of teaching in a situation of such alienation and despondency. The community is branded, largely by Hindu teachers, as '*toofani*' or disruptive by nature, with a complete disinterest in their children's education. The question of discipline assumes added significance when teachers see their role as 'reforming' the community. While one often hears of the value of education communicated through '*pyaar se samjhana*' – explaining with love there is also the sense that new regulations against corporal punishment are ineffective, especially for the 'unruly' children (mainly boys) who come to their schools, for whom only physical punishment can act as a deterrent to indiscipline.

These issues assume graver proportions in Shahpura, which in most respects is more abject than Chinwada, and also seen as more criminalised. Many parents complain that children often refuse to go to school because teachers beat them. Communal polarisation also affects the school in other ways. Constant reference is made to the fear that any perceived transgression could spark off a communal incident. The principal of the school, a Muslim woman, is often on leave and the other Hindu teachers are wary of 'taking on' the community in any way. A young Hindu male contract teacher described the violent brawls within the school between students, often involving parents who come in to intervene on the side of their wards. He says that there is little action that can be

taken other than to physically beat these children, even though he often has to do so at his own risk.

Teachers' interactions with the community contribute to the symbolic production of its 'backwardness' at an everyday level. They express exasperation with illiteracy, large families, high divorce rates, desertion of women and an overall disinterest in children's education. Teacher apathy towards the community constitutes an incomplete narrative, however. Although stereotyping and even prejudice are expressed in various forms, teachers are aware that children are in need of more attention, both in academic as well as in other areas. With an intimate knowledge of the neighbourhoods and the people, teachers understand the constraints of poverty and vulnerability that are part of the children's lives. They accept that the irregular attendance of many students is related to the need to supplement family incomes through labour. Absenteeism is high in the *rakhi* and kite-making seasons when many children help with work at home. Boys are often called in to assist their fathers in workshops or in street vending, girls assist their mothers in paid and unpaid domestic work. As Mohanbhai says, teachers have to accept this situation: 'Roti comes first, what can one say'. He also says that in the Chinwada school there are very poor children, even some who have to beg for a living, and it is impossible to expect them to attend school regularly.

The Burden of Administration

Teachers accept that the adversity of children's lives in this area requires additional efforts in terms of academic inputs. However, as documented in other studies (e.g. Mooij, 2008), the burden of administrative work of teachers results in very little time with students in classrooms. Although we did do classroom observations in the school, we could not in any meaningful way capture teaching-learning processes, since teachers were rarely in class over the period we were there. Teachers in both schools are almost always in the staff room or in their classrooms filling out details in the 20 registers they are expected to maintain, related to various administrative aspects of school management, such as monthly attendance and scholarships. In addition to this regular work, the new policy directive for direct cash transfer of scholarships, involving the opening of individual bank accounts, has placed an additional burden on teachers. Most of the children attending the Shahpura and Chinwada schools belong to Muslim OBC families and are eligible for state scholarships. Usually two or three teachers are assigned to carry

out this work since deadlines set by the administration have to be met. Teachers have to work individually with parents (usually mothers) on every document that has to be submitted, calling them to school over several days at times when they are free from work, sifting through all the documents and following up on others. Another directive, the issuing of Aadhar (identity) cards, is also the responsibility of municipal school teachers, for which they have been ordered to work on Sundays. Their demand for compensatory leave met with stiff opposition from the administration, which had to finally relent in the face of pressure.

The only teacher found teaching in her classroom every day was from the Chinwada school. Roshanara, a Special Training Programme (STP) teacher, is expected to identify out-of-school children in the neighbourhood and train them through a bridge course to prepare them for admission in regular school in the following academic year.[17] A college drop-out, Roshanara came every day to teach her class of 10-12 children. Her own duties towards these children were compromised by the burden on her to teach in the class of a senior teacher who was always involved in administrative work.

Left to Their own Devices: Parents and Schooling Decisions

Most of the parents we interacted with were between 2040 years of age and had received some level of formal education, usually up to the primary level. Most parents who had studied up to the elementary level had to drop out because of financial constraints, often precipitated by the death of a breadwinner in the family.

Interviews with parents showed that the Chinwada school enjoys a better reputation, largely due to the commitment of its teachers. However, families living in and around Dabi Falia are hesitant to send their children to a 'border' area. Enrolments in the Shahpura 'dabba' school testify to the fact that their children are placed in this school despite the fact that their parents believe it offers little value for their children's education. Most parents are clear that they would prefer sending their children to one of the many private schools in the area if they had the 'capacity', a widely used vernacular shorthand for both economic and social capital. Mohanbhai of Chinwada school

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[17] This scheme aims to bring out-of-school children into regular schools by providing four to nine month-long condensed bridge courses. A community-based teacher, paid between Rs 2,500-4,000 per month, is expected to teach these children for admission into the next academic year. Special materials have been developed for this programme.

dismissed the desire for private schools as part of the new '*dekha dekhi*', keeping up with the neighbours, that has emerged following the setting up of several private schools in the area. Many parents echoed his view that these schools offer little by way of teaching children, but nevertheless aspirations to enrol their children in private rather than '*sarkari*' schools are high. Some parents admit their children to private schools only to withdraw them and seek readmission in the municipal schools after a few months, when the hidden costs (travel, payments towards stationery, school events, etc.) become daunting.

It is largely via shadow schooling, or tuitions, that parents hope to see their children through to higher levels of school education. Almost all the children, barring those who come from extremely straitened circumstances, are sent to tuition classes. These classes generally charge fees between Rs 200 and 400 a month, although there are teachers who charge much less. The tuition class market in the area seems to cater to every pocket and serves an essential function – that of ensuring some measure of learning, even if by no more than pure rote – to enable children to access opportunities for private schooling later. There is general acknowledgement among parents that, although not much is learned in the municipal schools, extra inputs by way of tuitions can help them to acquire the basics of reading and writing to enable them to go on to the secondary level.

For most parents, the limited aim is to ensure that their children complete the elementary cycle up to Class VIII and, 'capacity' permitting, admit them at the next level in the Muslim Education Society (MES) schools nearby. These older established state-aided schools are seen as offering good quality education. Three out of four of the MES schools are in the old city area; over time they have lost Hindu students and now cater exclusively to the Muslim community. Parents see these schools as more culturally appropriate and secure spaces. With a 'no detention' policy in place under the Right to Education Act, certification at the elementary level is a certainty[18] and parents, under considerable pressure of opportunity and other hidden costs, struggle to see that their children remain enrolled up to Class VII, even while realising that low learning levels in

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[18] Under Section 16 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, no child can be held back or expelled before he/she completes elementary education (Class VIII). This section has been a matter of considerable debate. Some argue that it militates against the idea of learning, especially within a context of highly stratified and unequal systems of schooling. (See http://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/lgdi/rtewatch/scs-dismissal-of-no-detention-petition-judicial-restraint-or-judicial-inaction/)

the municipal schools puts children at great disadvantage at higher levels of schooling.

To a large extent, women's labour sustains children's education. We came across many mothers struggling against odds to see their children through school. Many do multiple jobs. Firoza, who at 23, has two children in the Chinwada school. She works as an ayah (helper) in a nearby nursing home and then goes to work as a domestic worker in a middle class residential colony. She says, 'I am working so hard for my children's *likhna padhna*' (reading and writing). That's all I want, to see them be able to read and write'. Shabana makes *rakhi*s in her dimly-lit one room house with daughter Mahenoor's assistance. Mahenoor is often absent from school during the *rakhi* season, but Shabana hopes to see both her and her younger brother finish school. Education, she says, will 'make them good'.

Early withdrawal from school is higher in the case of boys, who are often withdrawn so that they can work more hours assisting their fathers, or do part-time wage work. If families can sustain them through secondary education, they prefer vocational courses like those offered by the Industrial Training Institutes. In the case of girls, early marriage and cultural reasons are most frequently cited as reasons for discontinuing studies.

The few who have managed to go on do so in the hope of achieving some sense of distinction. However, that hope can be fragile. Farheen, a bright, energetic young girl whom I first met in 2010, had dropped out of the Shahpura school the previous year after completing Class VII. She was under no pressure to get married and her mother, herself educated in a municipal school, supported her free-spirited ways and her desire to continue her studies. 'I learned nothing, absolutely nothing, in the school. There were just fights everyday and teachers would always taunt us that we came only for the scholarship and the mid-day meal, which I didn't even have! There was no '*padhai*' (learning), only '*dhamaal*' (chaos, indiscipline). Teachers would say, "Anyway you won't learn anything so why come?"'

In 2013, Farheen re-enrolled in Class VIII in the MES Girls School. The intervening two years had seen a criminal case being filed against her brother for attacking a neighbour who took his spot on the road where he sold vegetables. The family went into hiding for two years and when they came back, she felt it was important to continue her studies.

The lack of basic reading and writing skills has made it very difficult to adjust to the demands of a higher level education but she is determined to continue.

Narratives like Farheen's are not unusual among the youth of the area. Common themes are alienation and eventual discontinuation of school, restraints on mobility for girls, economic hardship made worse with the loss of male breadwinners on account of arbitrary arrests, the desire to continue education and seeking support to do so. For young children attending the Shahpura and Chinwada schools, imaginings of 'becoming educated' are bound to these realities.

III

In Conclusion

The struggles of poor Muslim children of Shahpura and Chinwada to be educated, to become somebody – in the words of eleven year-old Asif, who has re-enrolled in Class III after dropping out for several years: 'With education can I become anyone I want?' -- are seriously undermined by the ways in which these schools are situated within the larger contexts of social, economic and political disenfranchisement faced by Muslims in contemporary Gujarat. In this paper I have presented some broad outlines of these contexts in relation to public schooling in two neighbourhoods. Within the context of the state of urban government schools in general, the picture that emerges – the increasing administrative burden of teachers, inadequate infrastructure and systemic institutional apathy is by no means exceptional (Menon, 2014). However, schools in neighbourhoods like Shahpura and Chinwada are doubly jeopardised – by these factors, as well as by local geography and histories that contribute to administrative indifference or outright hostility.

In the 1960s, the idea of the 'neighbourhood school' was recommended as a measure to promote the 'emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society' in India (Education Commission, 1964 66). By the late 1970s, this larger social vision of free, equal and accessible schools offering quality education had been jettisoned in favour of a market-driven, highly stratified schooling system promoting the interests of elites, reflecting the complex dynamics of education in a postcolonial context of educational inequality and structures of domination. Neoliberal reforms in recent times have served to further

these social priorities, with education becoming increasingly integrated into the free market economy (Nambissan, 2010; Sadgopal, 2009; Velaskar, 2010).

However, the poor urban neighbourhood is increasingly emerging as a contested category unstable, fragmented, isolated and even ghettoised, particularly under new regimes of urban development. While functioning as neighbourhood schools, the Shahpura and Chinwada schools operate from a position of extreme disadvantage, struggling to live up to the promise of serving children of the community. In these neighbourhoods, the relationship of the community to education is complex and contradictory. While there is recognition of the need for education, wider processes of alienation, aggravated by scarce resources and lack of employment opportunities, constantly reassert their place in the imagination of education as potentially liberatory. In such a situation of abjectness, the onus is on the individual to struggle to continue and find meaning in education (Grinberg, 2011). There have been instances of collective action on the part of the community and teachers in Shahpura and Chinwada to oppose crassly majoritarian measures on the part of the administration, such as the renaming of schools or the imposition of a dress code for teachers,[19] but these have remained confined and narrow in scope.

As Buendia et al (2006: 1) point out, 'The meanings of place inscribe persons, urban spaces and institutions in particular ways. They are codes underpinned by local knowledge … that index racial and classed meanings of people as well as construct places within institutional and city spaces.' The low status attached to the schools is organically related to the stigma of their location. An air of despondency and despair is palpable in conversations with local people. Hareshbhai Christian, a private tutor who grew up in the area and has a special affiliation to it (having been saved by local people during a riot in the 1980s), continues to tutor children for a living, although he has shifted his family out of the area because of the constant insecurity. According to him, people in Shahpura

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[19] The cultural politics of education in Gujarat that has evolved over the past twenty years and the consolidation of conservative forces has had several dimensions (see Manjrekar, 2010). In 2009, municipal schools in Baroda were named after nationalist leaders from either the Hindutva pantheon (Savarkar, Hegdewar, Shyamji Krishna Verma, 'Ma Bharati' are some examples) or after others like renowned litterateurs Rabindranath Tagore and Zaverchand Meghani (the names given to the Shahpura and Chinwada schools). Some parents led, interestingly, by women who had got involved with women's organisations after 2002, took out a delegation to the Samiti for naming them after Muslim leaders like Abbas Tyabji, who set up the first Muslim girls' school in Baroda. Another instance of opposition to administrative diktats was against the imposition of a dress code for teachers that mandated all women to wear sarees, not the traditional attire for Muslim women (Manjrekar, 2013).

and Chinwada are desperate for the educational situation to improve. Parents want their children to get ahead and compete in the 'English *ka zamaana*'.[20] Unlike earlier, according to him, they also see a need to educate their daughters. However, Hareshbhai does not see any resolution to the insurmountable problems the community faces. Hope in this context is futile – in his words, like '*lohen ka chana chibana*' (chewing on nuts made of iron). In similar vein, a former Congress corporator who had worked to improve the infrastructure in the area and in the schools told us that she sees no hope for improvement.

School teachers, who play an important part in creating and sustaining a positive imagination of education, are caught up in the routines of administrative tasks, and see in their struggles a collective failure to fight the stigma of their schools as failed institutions. Largely, they perceive the situation as being beyond redemption.

What does not quite emerge from the extensive literature on poverty, vulnerability and the grossly ahistorical, essentialised construction of educational 'backwardness' of Muslims in India (Ahmad, 2012) is the place of marginalisation and social discrimination in their lives. Concentrated in the unorganised sector in cities and as small and landless peasants in rural areas, largely self-employed in petty trade or engaged in casual labour, the lack of education acts as a 'dual hindrance', serving to reproduce their status as an 'excluded community' (Islam, 2012: 65), especially in terms of availing of benefits and entitlements from the state. Structural violence associated with poverty faced by many marginalised communities in India is, for Muslims, compounded by the violence of communalism. It is important to bring communalism and the impact of communal politics into discussions on social, economic and political exclusion in education, particularly within the context of public education. In the case of Muslims, an exclusive focus on religion, produced and sustained by larger local as well as global socio-political contexts, have served the strident campaigns against the community, even as incidents of violence against them have assumed troublesome proportions in recent times.

It has been argued that steering the debate on 'Muslim educational backwardness' away from the emerging focus on religion and identity would re-assert the claim of all

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[20] This popular phrase connotes the rising social demand for English-medium education, where knowledge of English is seen as the gateway to occupational opportunities. The appeal of low-fee private (LFP) schools is that they claim to offer education in English.

communities to equitable access to good, secular public schooling for all (Ibid.: 66). Social and political pressures on the community appear to have triggered an opposite trend. There is a widespread sense that in the face of a hostile state, reform of the community must come from within. One often hears, especially from middle-class Muslims, that the violence of 2002 was in the nature of a wake-up call, and reform of the community will enable it to withstand the pressures of marginalisation in the future (Gayer and Jaffrelot, 2012: p. 6). For the Muslim community, the adversity of their situation has been matched by a new-found impulse for self-reform, articulated primarily through the language of educational 'advancement' as necessary for survival and progress. Community-level initiatives by Muslim trusts have focused on drawing more Muslim students into school education as well as general and technical education at higher levels through scholarships, waivers and sponsorships. Private initiatives by of Muslim trusts backed by funding from businessmen and utilisation of *zakat* funds are being used to set up minority status institutions under the NCMEI.[21] This permits a degree of independence to frame curricular strategies and appoint teachers of their choice, outside of state directives. Some institutions have also been set up within strict religious norms, like English-medium 'Islamic convents' which teach the Islamic way of life through instruction in English, a phenomenon documented in Mumbai as well (Khan, 2012).[22] These schools, while providing a model for 'ideal' schools for Muslim children, are unable to reach the most socially and economically vulnerable and create further social differentiation within the community.

The struggles for defining and achieving an educated, forward looking, even global, identity for Muslims in India are increasingly becoming bound to new conflicts around identity and difference in a context of increasing marginalisation. The implications of these struggles for public education for poor Muslims in urban neighbourhoods like Shahpura and Chinwada clearly require more detailed examination.

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[21] National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, set up under the UPA1 regime in 2004.

[22] These schools aim to impart the cultural codes and deportment of English-educated children, but within Islamic codes of dress and knowledge. Assemblies include recitations from the *kalimahs*, and nursery rhymes are adapted from the popular English ones using Muslim names. A Muslim teacher from the Chinwada school introduced me to one such school, a girls' 'convent' (called Fatima al Zuhara) that has come up in the past year in a Muslim-dominated mohalla near Shahpura.

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