

Dalit Ghettos and Social Exclusion: A Case Study of Chandkheda in Ahmedabad, Gujarat

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Ghetto is an area of voluntary first settlement leading toward assimilation (Hutchison and Haynes, 2012). Ghettos is supposed to be associated with the identity of 'we' and 'other'. The ghettos in this sense are developed in a process not only to feel a sense of belonging to one group but also to express against a prescribed 'other'. A range of old reasons like religion and cultural differences – and some relatively new ones such as migration and religious tensions – have led to a proliferation of what urban sociologist Loic Wacquant, referring to ghettos in French and American cities, has describes as “neighborhood of exile”. The paper tries explain the process and reasons behind the ghettoization of dalits in the urban space, taking a case study of Chandkheda, a part of Ahmedabad, Gujarat where in more than 300 'dalit societies' has come into existence in the recent times during the process of creating Ahmedabad as a Metro city. There are specific reasons and consequences to this ghettoization of dalits. Paper tries to explain the creation of these ghettos and its consequences on the lives of dalits and their participation in the city space. Thoughts of Dr. B R Ambedkar on ghettoization in general and social exclusion of dalits in particular is used as theoretical foundation for the study. Paper tries to understand the ground realities of ghettos resulting in social exclusion and proposes inclusion policy that can solve the problems of 'Dalit Ghettos' and can have the potential to create more inclusive city space. Ahmedabad, the heritage city, has historically special city characters, not only dalit ghettos but simultaneously there exist Muslim

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ghettos. An attempt has also been made to compare the dalit ghettos with muslim ghettos. (process, problems and consequences). As a proponent of social, political and economic equality the thoughts of B R Ambedkar are quite significant to the study of creation of ghettos, because in the same city among its residents, these ghettos creates two different identities – ‘we’ and the ‘other’, which at times results in conflicts and politics of fear.

Ghettos: Conceptual Understanding

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Ghettos have, for a long time, been associated with the settlements where Jews were forced to live in Europe.

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Ghettos in USA: Country of migrants and in light of September 11 (Terrorism and Violence)

After the crisis of September, 11 the muslim population in the USA faced severe discrimination and that ghettos were consequently viewed by muslims as the alternative to escape embarrassment of profiling (Abdo, 2006).

Dalit Ghettos in India: We can trace back the history of formation of ghettos in the structural arrangements and geographical division within Indian villages. The interior of Indian villages are constructed based on caste lines. In the state of Gujarat where Ahmedabad is located this segregation system within villages is called ‘Vas System’ and we can find names like Darbar Vas, patel Vas, Harijan (Dalit) Vas – a common feature of the villages here.

Harijan (Dalit) vas in a village we find generally situated at the

outskirt of the village and dalits are not allowed access to the vas of 'others'. Neither they can purchase land or build houses or do any business in the upper caste areas.

To escape the stifling caste-based discrimination in villages and in search of livelihood, dalits migrate to the cities. But, they still end up living in ghettos – a new form of vas system in urban spaces because of poverty and discrimination.

The rising urbanization was expected to blur caste boundaries, but that hasn't happened fully. So despite the fact that a large chunk of dalits from villages are migrating, they are forced to live in poverty-often in ghettos.

Who are Dalits

The Indian society is based on castes – Brahmins at the top followed by Kshatriyas followed by Vaishyas. Shudras (Dalits) are considered at the bottom of the social hierarchy. For more than 4000 years, they were considered "untouchables" based on the phenomena of pure and impure. Although untouchability is outlawed it still exists in Indian society, prevailing discrimination and exclusion of Dalits on caste lines is very much evident even after the seven decades of independence.

"The very identity of being 'Dalit' is equated with untouchability or 'Harijan' (Son of God) and is subject to exclusion, deprivation, marginalization and stigmatization that get reinforced in social and cultural practices. Consequently, they are ghettoized, lack acceptance in larger academic community, closure from markets in the peak hours, 'invisibility' or under representation in media and popular culture, and are restricted to sanitary, scavenging, sewage and toilet cleaning occupations." (Bhattacharyya and Basu, 2018).

In the Indian Constitution Dalits are listed as 'scheduled Castes' and for this paper I consider these scheduled castes as Dalits.

Social Exclusion

Social Exclusion is defined as "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full

participation in the society within which they live” (European for the improvement of living and working conditions).

Social Exclusion is “rupture of a social bond – which is cultural and moral – between individual and society” (De Hann and Kabeer 2008).

For me it is difficult to understand Social Exclusion as a separate term. Since exclusion is closely related to inequality, caste system, religion, poverty, inaccessibility and so the meaning of exclusion itself depends on the context in which one tries to understand it.

Here the attempt is to understand the social exclusion in the caste context and how a marginalized caste like dalits are being affected through social exclusion, how they are forced into ghettos and what are the problems due to this ghettoization.

Dalit Ghettos in Ahmedabad

Whatever few literature that we find relating to ghettos focusing in Ahmedabad, the business capital of Gujarat state, is related to Muslims as the largest Muslim ghetto of Asia in Juhapura, Ahmedabad where nearly four lakh (4,00,000) Muslims live. The kind of communalism that prevails and historical events that has happened in the city has brought the religious (Hindu-Muslim) issues on front. It is important to note that because of such a religious construct the caste issues that Dalits face in the city is sidelined and not much thought and importance is given to Dalit concerns.

There are more than three hundred (300) dalit societies in Ahmedabad (Yagnik, 2018). Complaints of Ghettoization by choice or by compulsion, are not limited to Muslims alone. There have been frequent complains of access to lack of quality housing by Dalits.

How Dalit ghettos are different from Muslim ghettos

There are notable differences in the Muslim Ghettos and Dalit Ghettos in terms of the process of ghettoization, place and the size.

The ghettoization of Muslims has happened mostly after the 2002 communal riots that had shaken the city and due to sense of fear, majority of Muslims migrated to Juhapura. Before these communal

rights happened many of these Muslim families were living in the 'pols' together with the Hindus, mostly upper castes. But in the case of Dalits this segregation has existed from the centuries first in the villages and now in the cities.

Juhapura is a Muslim ghetto in Ahmedabad, majority of Muslims live here. But, the ghettos of Ahmedabad are scattered across Ahmedabad. One can find small size ghettos (slums, cluster of societies) all across Ahmedabad. Also Chandkheda has developed as a new Dalit Ghetto after 2002 riots and Dalits from Muslim dominated areas (Danilimda, Dilli Darwaja, Mirzapur etc.) have migrated to Chandkheda. Out of the three hundred (300) Dalit societies, two hundred (200) are in Chandkheda only.

Problems in the Dalit Ghettos are diverse including property pricing and legalization of property, sanitation, education, safe drinking water, poverty.

Most of the slums in form of small size ghettos in Ahmedabad are 'illegal' (either on the land which was earlier a common or sold by someone without any correct legal documents which they purchased due to lack of education).

Some of this small size ghettos are located in such part of Ahmedabad, where 'development' has not reached. There is no access to quality education especially English medium education.

There are issues concerning health because of shortage of safe drinking water, proper sanitation facility and drainage system. It is noted that because of these ghettoization process, Dalits in Ahmedabad are confined to employments such as labour in building in construction sites or sanitation workers.

It is evident that in the slums which are small size ghettos of Dalits, people are leaving below poverty.

Conclusion

The urbanization has failed to keep up with what was expected i.e. social inclusion. The Dalits in the city ghettoized and the Dalit ghettos are found all across the city. This ghettoization of Dalits has added further to their vulnerability. It is important to resolve the

concerns of Dalit Ghettos at first and to combat the ghettoization process then.

Government should legalize the Dalit slum and societies so that their right to property is safeguarded and also they can leave a dignified life under right to life. Local bodies should make special plans for improving the condition of Dalit ghettos so that their concerns such as health, sanitation, safe drinking water can be resolved.

To combat the Ghettoization and social exclusion emerging out of it this process in the cities Government should make a law making it mandatory for all the housing schemes to allot a minimum percentage of houses to the Dalits.

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