

Collective and Elective Ethnicity: Caste Among Urban Muslims in India

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This article explores how the significance of ethnic identity can vary within a stable population, using caste among Muslims in Hyderabad, India as a case study. While some Hyderabadi Muslims are still embedded in ethnic networks, most now experience ethnicity as elective and do not rely on a corporate caste group for their social connections. This reflects a decline in the value of caste identities, which no longer provide economic or political resources. Increasingly, Muslims seek status through education, profession, or income. Thus, most Muslims in Hyderabad experience caste membership, identity, and networks in a weakened or attenuated way.

KEY WORDS: ethnicity; caste; status; stratification; Muslim; India.

INTRODUCTION

How does the importance of ethnic identity vary *within* a given population? Why are some people involved in ethnic networks, while ethnicity for others is elective—what Gans (1979) calls “symbolic ethnicity,” which does not imply intrinsic or profound social connectedness with coethnics?

The literature on contemporary ethnicity in the United States suggests that the nature and strength of ethnic ties depend on the historical relation to immigration. Third- or fourth-generation white ethnic immigrants (e.g., Italian, Polish, etc.) are less likely to have strong ties with coethnics, while first- or second-generation (mostly non-white) immigrants are likely to be more strongly involved in ethnic networks (e.g., Alba, 1990; Portes and

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Rumbaut, 1996; Waters, 1990, 1996). Some scholars assert that the salience of ethnic networks is a function of the ways that immigrants are incorporated into their new economic and social environments. Thus some groups maintain their “ethnic ways,” while individuals of other groups assimilate more quickly. This differentiating process has been labeled “segmented assimilation” (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997).

But how do we account for variation in the strength of ethnic ties where immigration is *not* an important explanatory or contextual variable? In many societies and communities, the salience of ethnic group formations varies independently of migration status.

Much of the answer lies in the constructed and varying nature of ethnicity. Following Barth (1969), many scholars, viewing ethnicity as socially constructed, have focused on the *boundaries* of ethnic identities and how their significance varies over time and space. Barth writes that ethnic identities are “produced under particular interactional, historical, economic and political circumstances; they are highly situational (Barth, 1994:12).” Further, “ethnic group membership must depend on ascription [by others] and self-ascription: only in so far as individuals embrace it, are constrained by it, act on it, and experience it will ethnicity make organizational difference (ibid.)” Thus, ethnic identity is defined by others as well as self, and is often defined by self in opposition to others.

Building on Barth, scholars have shown that ethnicity is not only variable in salience, but also in scale (e.g., Brass, 1991; Hannan, 1979; Nagel, 1994, 1995; Nagel and Olzak, 1982; Olzak and Nagel, 1986). Some ethnic groups are the products of amalgamation, while others are the products of schisms (see Horowitz, 1975, 1985). What is missing in the literature on ethnicity, however, is a linking of the constructivist idea of ethnicity as a process of collective identity formation with the “deconstructed” idea of symbolic ethnicity as not associated with a collectivity. To pursue a linkage between these two ideas, I examine how caste, as a hierarchical form of ethnic identity, varies in salience among Muslims in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad. I explore how caste is an important institution for some Muslims, one that regulates a wide range of important social interactions, while for others caste affects little in the way of ritual or mundane relationships.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data for this paper come from research conducted in Hyderabad over a period of 16 months in 1997–98. I engaged in participant observation of religious festivals, shrines, prayers at mosques, weddings, a gym, a karate

Table I. Caste Background of Respondents

Caste	Total
Syed (Sunni)	33 (4)
Medhavi Syed	5
Sheikh	15 (11)
Mughal	15 (6)
Pathan (noncorporate)	42 (4)
Medhavi Pathan	14 (2)
Qureshi	10 (1)
Other corporate castes	
Baid Pathan	16
Chawsh	14
Caste not disclosed	29 (5)
Total	188 (33)

Note. Number of women is given in parentheses.

school, two computer-programming institutes, public meetings, and other functions. I lived in a neighborhood in the Muslim-majority Old City, and interacted closely with neighbors, local storeowners and their workers, and people in cafés, which are central points of male social life in Hyderabad. Participant observation allowed me to examine how people present and negotiate their identities and the identities of others in daily informal interactions both in public and private spaces.

I also conducted 188 open-ended interviews regarding the importance of different types of ethnic identities—caste, nobility, and different ways that being Muslim is expressed in Hyderabad. I obtained interviewees through nonrandom “snowball” sampling. Starting with a core of persons with whom I interacted, formally and informally in different social locations, such as neighborhood stores, mosques, and academic settings, I used their contacts to expand the scope of people with whom I conducted interviews. I also selected people to interview in order to capture a range based on criteria of caste and nobility (see Table I). This method of recruitment gave me access to a cross-section of Muslims corresponding with the social divisions that exist among Muslims in Hyderabad (see also Methodological Appendix).² Interviews were conducted in people’s homes, offices, cafés,

²The government of India stopped collecting data on non-Untouchable (or *Dalit*) castes after independence. Therefore we do not know how many people of each caste there are. The last census to consider caste for Hyderabad state was in 1921. In this census, in the state of Hyderabad, there were 1,298,277 Muslims counted, with 906,363 returned as Sheikh, 187,679 as Syed, 131,828 Pathans, and 50,048 Mughals. Only 22,359 other caste members were counted (Census of India, 1921:228–236). Although it would be foolish to extrapolate these numbers to today, my observations and conversations with scholars and others indicate that, as in 1921, there are relatively few people of low castes in Hyderabad, while the bulk of Muslims in the city are high caste, mostly Sheikhs. The collection of ethnographic data is valuable here precisely because caste groups are not identifiable through enumeration.

Table II. Relative Importance of Caste

Relative importance of caste	Very	Somewhat	Not important	Total
Syed (Sunni)	7 (2)	6	20 (2)	33 (4)
Medhavi Syed	5			5
Sheikh	1 (1)	6 (5)	8 (5)	15 (11)
Mughal	1	0	14 (6)	15 (6)
Pathan (noncorporate)	7	2	33 (4)	42 (4)
Medhavi Pathan	11	2 (2)	1	14 (2)
Oureshi	8 (1)	0	2	10 (1)
Other corporate castes				
Baid Pathan	12	3	1	16
Chawsh	8	2	4	14
Caste not disclosed	0	18 (3)	11 (2)	29 (5)
Total	54 (4)	39 (10)	95 (19)	188 (33)

Note. This table represents a composite of different questions asked of respondents. Not everyone was asked the same questions, and the phrasing of questions often differed. Number of women is given in parentheses.

stores, religious shrines, mosques, a slaughterhouse, and other places convenient for the interviewees. Most interviews were conducted in Deccani Urdu (a variation of Urdu spoken in Hyderabad),³ though many were in English or both Deccani Urdu and English. I asked a variety of questions in order to gain an understanding of the importance of caste for mundane and not so mundane activities (see Table II). The types of questions I asked regarding caste centered on how important respondents felt caste was for marriage, for maintaining purity of descent, for forming friendships, and generally for social and economic interactions with other Muslims.

RESEARCH SITE

The city of Hyderabad was the capital of a princely state of the same name until 1948, when the Indian government dispatched its army forcibly to incorporate the state into the Republic of India. The state of Hyderabad had been the largest of the princely states in the subcontinent not directly ruled by the British. After the forced union with India, the king, the Nizam, lived until 1967, and many of his nobles are still alive today. In 1956, the government of India reorganized states along linguistic lines, and the Telugu-speaking

³Urdu is very close linguistically to Hindi. In spoken form, the two are nearly identical throughout India. Political developments in the nineteenth century, however, led to their separation (see Rai, 1991). In Hyderabad, the Hindi/Urdu that is spoken is called Deccani Urdu. This dialect has had its own literary tradition (though this tradition has long since passed) and has been considered a dialect of the Hindi/Urdu spoken in north India. Today it is intelligible to Hindi/Urdu speakers elsewhere.

districts of Hyderabad state were merged with the Telugu-speaking districts of the former Madras presidency to form the state of Andhra Pradesh, of which Hyderabad city was made the capital.

Since 1948, Muslims have experienced drastic downward social mobility as a result of the displacement of the regime of the Nizam. Many Muslims, who were educated only in Urdu or Persian, lost their positions in government service, as they were not functional in the new official state language of Telugu or the national languages of Hindi and English.⁴ Many who had been employed by the Nizam or his nobles in service positions found themselves displaced. A survey of rickshaw drivers in Hyderabad city in 1961 found that 28% of Muslim drivers were former employees of the Nizam's Estates (Indian Institute of Economics, 1962:14–15). Another survey found that 48% of beggars in Hyderabad were Muslim, many of whom had been employed in the service of the Nizam or his subordinates as regular or irregular armed forces (Alam, 1995; Indian Institute of Economics, 1956; Khan, 1971). More recently, though, there has been much upward mobility, in part as a result of remittances from family members in the Persian Gulf states and the West (Javed, 1990; Naidu, 1990). Such remittances have deeply affected social relations in Hyderabad, as in other places in South Asia and elsewhere (Kurien, 1993; Lefebvre, 1999; Levitt, 1998).

Muslims have a significant numerical presence in Hyderabad, accounting for 39% of the population of 3.1 million people, while in Andhra Pradesh the overall population of Muslims is only 9% (see <http://www.andhrapradesh.com>, the official website of the government of Andhra Pradesh, Table 1.21). Hyderabad has one of the largest concentrations of Muslims in an urban area of India. Nationwide the percentage of Muslims is 12% (or 101 million of nearly 840 million; see <http://www.censusindia.net/cendat/datatable23.html>).⁵ Further, Muslims account for more than half the population in the Old City, the center of Hyderabad Muslim culture.⁶ This large concentration of Muslims and the long history of Muslim rule have led to the

⁴The Indian constitution recognizes 18 languages, including English. Each state has its own official language(s), and conducts its affairs in those languages. Hindi is the official national language, and English is the "link language," the language that elites throughout India use to communicate.

⁵The numbers in both these web sites are taken from the 1991 census. Provisional data from the 2001 census are beginning to be tabulated. The population is given as 1,027,000,000 persons, but no breakdown by religion is yet available. See <http://www.censusindia.net/results/resultsmain.html>. If the proportion of Muslims remains at 12%, the Muslim population of India will be 124 million persons.

⁶Like many cities in South Asia, Hyderabad is divided into an old, walled city, and a new city. The new city became more important during the 1930s when the Nizam moved from the Old City to a new city area. The Nizam's nobles followed him, as did much productive economic activity. The Old City then became an economic shell of its former self, a slum. See Naidu (1990) for a description of the decay of the Old City. Little of the wall remains standing today.

development of a unique Hindu–Muslim syncretic culture in Hyderabad, at least at the elite level (Leonard, 1973). Today, however, this syncretic culture in Hyderabad has all but disappeared. Hindus and Muslims have become socially and economically estranged, as Hyderabad has become one of the cities in India most prone to communal (i.e., Hindu–Muslim) violence (see Kakar, 1996; Varshney, 1997).

Before discussing Muslim caste relations in Hyderabad, I must describe the theoretical relationship between caste and ethnicity, what I mean by Muslim caste, and its relationship to Hindu caste.

CASTE AND ETHNICITY AS STATUS FORMATIONS⁷

Classical Hindu texts divide the Hindu population into four ranked categories called *varnas*: the *Brahmins*, or priests; *Kshatriyas*, the warriors and kings; *Vaishyas*, the farmers and merchants; and the *Sudras*, the laborers and servants to the three higher caste categories. Below the *Sudras* is a fifth category, *ati-Sudras*—today known as untouchables, *Harijans*, or *Dalits*, as many political activists have taken to calling themselves. *Dalits* are not actually one caste, but a category that includes many hierarchically arranged castes, all of which are considered by upper castes to be ritually polluted, or untouchable.

While *varna* denotes the ideal-type category, people are grouped in terms of actual membership into many discrete castes called *jatis*. *Jatis* number in the thousands across India. Some are localized, occurring in only one village, while other *jatis* are found throughout India. These are further subdivided into (generally endogamous) marriage circles. The caste system is actually thousands of caste systems that vary village by village across the subcontinent. However, all these local caste systems represent closed, self-referencing, hierarchical stratification schemes.

⁷The literature on Hindu caste is vast, and beyond the scope of this paper (e.g., Dirks, 1987; Dumont, 1980; Raheja, 1988). Marriott (1976, 1989; see also Marriott and Inden, 1977) argues for interpreting Indian culture through indigenous sociological categories, while Milner (1994) employs a Weberian analysis to examine caste as the most extreme form of status stratification. Unlike Marriott, Milner sees caste as comparable to status systems elsewhere. While there are arguments over how best to understand the caste system, another question has been over just how rigid this system historically has been. Cohn (1987) argues that the caste system(s) were quite fluid and that hierarchies of caste were contingent upon local conditions of rule. This changed under the British, who established thorough and relatively stable control, directly and indirectly, over all of India. Also, through the British-administered census, caste was enumerated for the first time, and codified according to a Brahmanical view. Thus, in many places where caste was contested, a hierarchy of castes with Brahmins as superior was imposed by the British (Dirks, 1987). For the most thorough discussion of caste, see Bayly (1999), who gives an excellent account of the development and changes in caste throughout India from the ancient Vedic period to the present.

Caste groups take active steps to maintain or improve their positions in the caste hierarchy relative to other groups. They do this mainly by conforming to social norms specific to each caste group (their *dharma*), by showing concerns for purity and pollution, and through the regulation of associations with others, especially of marriage and eating (Milner, 1994:58–61).

Weber sees caste as the extreme form of ethnicity, and both caste and ethnicity as types of status formations:

A status segregation grown into a caste differs in its structure from a mere ethnic segregation: the caste structure transforms the horizontal and unconnected coexistences of ethnically segregated groups into a vertical social system of super- and subordination. . . . Ethnic coexistence, based on mutual repulsion and disdain, allows each ethnic community to consider its own honor as the highest one; the caste structure brings about a social subordination and an acknowledgement of “more honor” in favor of the privileged caste and status groups. (Weber, 1968:934)

Both ranked caste and unranked ethnic groups, then, are types of status formations, and lie on a continuum; their only theoretical difference is one of domination. But the structure of caste stratification and domination is giving way in India to other types of status definition, class concerns, and the leveling effects of politics in the postcolonial, democratic era.

Due largely to processes of political competition in the arena of parliamentary politics and to the effects of economic expansion, Weber’s transformation of ethnicity to caste is proceeding in reverse in contemporary India, where hierarchy is giving way to horizontally differentiated ethnic groups. A situation of vertical integration and interdependence is changing into one of competition among groups for economic and especially political resources (Fuller, 1997a:22; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967). Modern urban India, as Beteille (1997) points out, remains status conscious, but distinctions of status are more and more based on education, occupation, income, and wealth. This change in the meaning of caste is not just an urban phenomenon; it is strikingly apparent in villages, where caste stratification has historically been most firmly rooted. For example, Mayer (1997) on his return to Ramkheri village, where he had studied from 1954 to 1956, found that restrictions on the sharing of food between castes had greatly lessened and that few people continued their traditional occupations. Wealth in 1992 was not as positively correlated with caste as it was in 1954. Mayer did find, however, that the most crucial marker of caste, endogamy, was still quite important, although it was justified more in terms of cultural difference than of rank. Today, the term used to refer to caste has changed from the “loaded” term *jati* (lit. species) to the more inoffensive *samaj* (association)—a change from a language of hierarchical ranking to one of mere difference (Mayer, 1997:59).

In addition to this seeming change from ranked to unranked ethnicity, I argue that there is a further change from caste and ethnicity as *group*

identities to caste as an *individual identity*, what Gans (1979) has termed “symbolic ethnicity,” where the individual makes ethnic choices that have little or no social repercussions. Gans’s argument is formulated with regard to third- and fourth-generation descendants of white ethnic immigrants in the United States, where individuals appropriate the symbols of being ethnic but are not connected to ascribed group formations.⁸ Gans writes, “Symbolic ethnicity . . . does not require functioning groups or networks; feelings of identity can be developed by allegiances to symbolic groups that never meet, or to collectivities that meet only occasionally” (12).

What makes this symbolic ethnicity possible? When ethnicity is not a basis for determining life chances, when economic or political resources cannot be acquired or denied based on one’s ascribed identity, the salience of group identity will diminish. Little practical cost or benefit accrues to white ethnics (e.g., Italian, Polish, etc.) in America who maintain their particular ethnicities. Gans writes that ethnicity as a group practice is a “working class style,” a strategy used by poorer ethnics who are “less touched by acculturation and assimilation than middle class ethnics, and who have in some cases used ethnicity and ethnic organization as a psychological and political defense against the injustices which they suffer in an unequal society” (1979:3).

This is also true for non-whites in the United States, no matter their class background. The salience of identities for non-whites generally has not diminished or become “merely” symbolic, in the manner that it has for whites. There are real costs and benefits to being black, Native American, Latino, or Asian in America. People of these groups have their identity defined for them by others, in ways that often override definitions they impute themselves, or might otherwise impute. Unlike middle-class whites, they do not have the luxury of defining themselves in idiosyncratic ways. While whites can make unchallenged claims to be part Native American, part Dutch, and part Latvian, blacks cannot make unchallenged claims to have descended from Irish ancestry or to be related to Thomas Jefferson (Hollinger, 1995:chap. 2). West Indians may identify primarily as West Indian, but they will usually be primarily identified as black by whites. Within the black community, however, West Indians can foreground their identity as West Indians and

⁸ Fuller rejects Gans’s notion of symbolic ethnicity for understanding Hindu caste in urban India on the grounds that, while “ethnic distinctiveness is evaluated positively in modern America, caste division is not, so that urban, middle-class Indians are highly ambivalent about the place of caste in defining their own identities” (1979:23). I disagree with this assessment for Muslims in India, because caste does not have the same degree of negative connotations for Muslims as it does for Hindus. I will show how the notion of symbolic ethnicity, when divorced from the context of immigrant assimilation, can help to understand how caste distinctions among Muslims in Hyderabad are made and foregrounded where there are no social ties among the actors.

socially distance themselves from other blacks (Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1991).⁹

Like West Indians and blacks in the United States, higher caste Muslims in Hyderabad can emphasize their higher caste vis-à-vis lower castes. They have the luxury of emphasizing or not emphasizing their caste identity, or just identifying as Muslim. Lower caste individuals however do not have the choice of downplaying their caste identity, as others will identify them as butchers or weavers and treat them as such. As it does between West Indians and other blacks, this status negotiation occurs within the context of the overall community—in this case, the Muslim community, the largest minority in India, whose members are generally poorer and less educated relative to Hindus, who constitute the majority community. Whites generally are not observant of status differentiation within the black community; likewise Hindus do not know, or care, about status negotiations among Muslims. They generally ascribe the (largely negative) identity of Muslim to all Muslims, high or low caste, with few exceptions. When dealing with the state bureaucracy, or with non-Muslims, Muslims are Muslims.¹⁰

Within this frame of caste and ethnicity as status formations, how can we examine social change among caste groups and individuals? The Indian anthropologist Srinivas proposes two interrelated concepts of Sanskritization and Westernization in order to understand the specific means by which mobility is achieved within the caste system. Sanskritization refers to the tendency of lower status caste members to emulate the lifestyles and behavioral patterns of higher status groups, such as vegetarianism, teetotaling, prohibitions on widow remarriage, and so on (Srinivas, 1966, 1989). Many low-status groups have Sanskritized to turn economic and political gains into improved position within the caste hierarchy (e.g., Rao, 1979). Srinivas characterizes Westernization as “the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels—technology, institutions,

⁹There is a major, unresolved debate surrounding the question of whether race is a type of ethnic identity, or is a separate social formation (on race as a separate social formation, see Banton, 1983; Smith, 1982; van den Berghe, 1967; on race as a type of ethnic identity, see Horowitz, 1985). Alba (1991) asserts that race is more commonly seen as a variant of ethnicity.

¹⁰One major exception is with regard to reservations, the term for affirmative action in India. Low caste Hindus and Muslims (Backward Castes in official parlance) are eligible for benefits. In Hyderabad, the only caste of any size that was eligible was the butchers, or Qureshis. In 1994, they successfully petitioned to have their caste removed from the list of eligible castes in Andhra Pradesh. The head of the caste explained to me that they preferred that either all Muslims should be eligible or none should be. He did not want to be responsible for promoting divisions among Muslims in Hyderabad. In the north, divisions between Muslim castes are more evident, especially with regard to reservation programs, not surprising as there are many lower caste Muslims who are eligible for such programs (see Mann, 1990).

ideology, values” (Srinivas, 1966:47). Important among the changes brought about by Westernization are education, increased income, and urbanization (Srinivas, 1966:54). Both Sanskritization and Westernization are processes of status mobility, of attempting to move upwards within the context of the caste hierarchy. These are not exclusive processes. Commonly, a caste group will increase its wealth through Westernization, perhaps by sending children to the city or abroad to work. As their economic position becomes secure, they will then attempt to translate that into status gains through Sanskritization.

While Sanskritization is still an important model of status mobility for both Hindus and Muslims in India,¹¹ for Muslims in Hyderabad it is not nearly as important as Westernization. Westernization serves to help high-status groups and individuals to maintain their status positions against lower status groups; it is also a means by which lower status individuals and groups can raise their status. Westernization, while providing an avenue for caste mobility also—somewhat paradoxically—affects changes in the definition of status and undermines the basis of the caste hierarchy. Where status in India has traditionally been based on ascription (i.e., caste), the process of Westernization has worked to begin to displace status hierarchy based on group affiliation, making individually achieved status more important. I explore this theme below. First, we must discuss what we mean when we speak of caste among Muslims in the Indian context.

CASTE AMONG MUSLIMS IN INDIA

The idea may seem strange that in an egalitarian religion like Islam, there would be ranked, hierarchical divisions among Muslims. Many scholars have debated this point, whether or not caste exists among Muslims in India. It has been clearly established that in some parts of India, and for certain Muslims, caste considerations are strong (e.g., Ahmad, 1976, 1978b, 1981, 1983; Ansari, 1960; Jamous, 1997; Madan, 1995), while for others they are less important (e.g., Fanselow, 1997; Mines, 1978; Vatuk, 1997).

Since ethnographic research on Muslims clearly shows that in some parts of South Asia caste is important, while in others it is not, the question of the *existence* of caste among Muslims in India is no longer fruitful. Muslims in South Asia often have caste, or more specifically, Muslims have ascribed status based on certain conceptions of lineage that correspond to Hindu notions of caste. Muslim caste, however, need not be situated in hierarchical

¹¹The analog of Sanskritization for Muslims is called Ashrafization, the emulation of the behaviors of upper caste Muslims (Vreede-de-Steurs, 1968).

relations. That is, it is not necessary for *all* Muslims in a given area to act upon their caste identities—though in most villages and northern Indian cities they do. In contrast to its function for Hindus, the caste system is not the main mediator between Muslims, or between Muslims and Hindus. Caste hierarchy then is more limited in scope; that is, it does not regulate mundane, ritual, and religious activities in the manner it does for Hindus.

This has led to much confusion and debate over the notion of caste among Muslims. Many studies of caste among Muslims argue for its Indian roots and its similarity to Hindu caste. Dumont (1980:210) finds that caste among Muslims is “weakened or incomplete, but not lacking altogether.” Ahmad (1978a:12) similarly asserts that caste exists among Muslims as a basis of social relations, but its form has been greatly weakened and modified. It differs from the Hindu caste model in certain details: for example, Muslim caste is not as elaborated; there is no sense of purity and pollution; occupational specialization is not as well developed; and restrictions on who can and cannot exchange food are not as well developed. Further, any Muslim, without restriction, may enter mosques (Hindus, in contrast, still in many places do not allow *Dalits* entry into temples), and among Muslims there is no ritually pure caste such as the Brahmins. Others argue that caste among Muslims may be derived from Central and Western Asian influences. While not called caste, the existence of hierarchical, endogamous status groups among Muslims across the Middle East is common (e.g., Lindholm, 1986).

The fixation on the extent to which Muslim caste is similar to or deviates from Hindu caste, or whether the origin of hierarchy among Muslims is Middle Eastern or Indian, I argue, is misplaced and unproductive in helping us understand the significance of caste today. Caste for Muslims does not have the ideological or religious basis that it has for Hindus. Yet, in India, it is a type of identity that people use, or do not use, which may or may not be situated in hierarchical relations (see Vatuk, 1997). How much Muslim caste is similar to, or different from, Hindu caste gives us no better understanding of how caste functions for Muslims, or of how and why it is or is not important in different contexts. I argue that it is more useful to conceive of caste not as an encompassing, orienting identity, but as one type of identity that varies in salience.

Caste in Hyderabad

In India, Muslim castes generally fall into two categories: higher castes of Syed, Sheikh, Pathan, and Mughal, and lower, service castes. The high castes claim foreign origin from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, or Central Asia, while the members of the low castes are low-caste Hindu converts. Many high castes however are also Hindu converts. For example, many

Pathans are publicly known as high-caste Hindu converts. The large number of Sheikhs, as seen in census data on Muslim caste throughout India, makes it probable that many if not most of the Sheikhs are Hindu converts (see Ahmad, 1978a, for a study of a converted Hindu caste that regards itself as a Sheikh subcaste). This is likely a result of what Goodfriend (1983:123) calls the “Sheikh factor” (or Sanskritization in Srinivas’s terminology), that is, of lower ranking Muslim caste groups attempting to raise their status over time by claiming that they are Sheikhs. These four Muslim high castes are *categories*, and often (though by no means always) there will be corporate subgroups formed from these categories.

In Hyderabad, in addition to the four higher caste categories, the most well-known lower caste groups are the Qureshi (or Qassab, butchers) and Ladaf (cotton beaters). Other castes that are important in the local hierarchy are Baid Pathan (who have a near-monopoly on the local wholesale betel nut trade) and Chawsh (descendents of Yemeni Arabs who migrated to serve in the Nizam’s forces; see Khalidi, 1997). We should note that being high caste does not necessarily mean that the caste is high status; that is, caste does not fully determine a group’s status. For example, Chawsh, while Arab, are of distinctly lower status than Syeds, Sheikhs, and Mughals in Hyderabad, since their main employment was as military personnel, and others regard them as rough and uncivil. They are not as low as service castes, such as weavers and butchers. However, because of their military background, they are considered lower than “genteel” castes of Syeds, Sheikhs, and Mughals, yet they are still high because of their Arab descent.¹²

In the following two sections, I examine caste as a collective entity and caste as individual choice. The first of these sections examines how caste is maintained as a collectivity, mainly through the regulation of caste boundaries through endogamous marriage strategies. I examine two corporate caste groups to illustrate “ideal-type” behavior of people in corporate Muslim castes. In the second section, I examine how caste for most people is of secondary concern. I explore the relative unimportance of caste by looking at marriage practices and by considering the knowledge and meaning of caste expressed by members of different Muslim castes.

Caste as Collective

Caste, as most authors describe it, is marked primarily by endogamy (marriage within the caste), with a tendency toward *hypergamy*, where a

¹²To complicate matters further, the Chawsh themselves are internally ranked by caste. Some are Syeds, while most are Sheikh. But other Muslims do not acknowledge these distinctions, and treat all Chawsh as one distinct group.

higher status male will marry a lower status female, but not *hypogamy*, where a higher status female marries a lower status male (see Milner, 1994:143–162). There is a basic notion that castes are groups that act *collectively*, formally or informally. The group has the power to exercise control over the individual and is responsible for the individual; likewise the individual is responsible to the group. In Hyderabad, only a few Muslim subgroups can be regarded in this manner. I discuss in some detail two such groups, Qureshi and Medhavi Pathans. These groups have their own neighborhoods, though many members live outside them. Qureshis are occupationally concentrated as butchers, while the Medhavi Pathans are not now occupationally concentrated, though their primary occupation before independence was as personnel in the Nizam's armed forces. I detail how the group is defined as important and how the group's boundaries are defined, defended, and reinforced.

Qureshi

The Qureshi in Hyderabad, like many butchers elsewhere in India, attempt to trace their lineage back to the Arab tribe Quresh. Recently, the name Qureshi has been used by the butchers instead of the somewhat pejorative Qassab, an attempt at Ashrafization (i.e., Sanskritization), that is, at laying claim to an Arab (i.e., foreign) origin. The butchers are usually recognizable by their use of the name Qureshi, and those who are not butchers but whose names are Qureshi are sometimes taken for butchers. Many people, however, still call the butchers Qassab, though not to their faces, and even those who accept the name Qureshi attribute no great significance to the name change; they still see them as butchers, and the attempt at Ashrafization has changed nothing but the name. There are actually two butcher castes: buffalo and goat. They are each endogamous, and they do not intermarry. I concentrate here on the goat butchers, or Bakr Qureshi.

The Qureshi have a caste (*biraderi*) organization that collects dues from members, mainly from the collection and sale of blood from the slaughterhouses. It has regular meetings at which they discuss matters relating to the group, usually economic, though sometimes relating to social issues like marriage, welfare for widows, and legal aid. The *biraderi* also runs a school for Qureshi children. The *biraderi* provides many benefits for its members, though many butchers criticize the organization for not doing enough for individual butchers.

Blood purity is an important concern for Qureshis; they only give and take marriage partners amongst themselves. Qadeer, a 25-year-old butcher, said that if he were to marry out, it would be a major problem. The butchers are very keen on this. There is a distinct sense of honor among them, which is manifest mainly through the maintenance of endogamy (they do not give or

take girls from “just anyone”), and the type of work they do—they slaughter only goats. They do not slaughter large animals such as buffalo and cattle, so they feel superior to the buffalo butchers. They also do not slaughter chickens, which is not the province of any particular caste.

Migrating to work in the Persian Gulf or the West is extremely popular among Hyderabad Muslims, but not among Qureshis. They do not let their young women emigrate to be servants in the Persian Gulf. They consider it dirty. Even the young men do not emigrate nearly as much as others in Hyderabad. The elders look down upon labor migration, preferring the young to stay in Hyderabad and do business. This is becoming more difficult, though; younger butchers are finding it harder to start their own shops, as there is less opportunity for them than for their parents’ generation. Slowly, more and more young men are taking to labor migration and leaving for the Persian Gulf countries.

While the Qureshi are endogamous as a matter of honor, others who are higher caste do not want to associate downward with them. One doctor (a Syed) looking for a wife for her son (a Pathan) told me in a firm manner, “No Qureshis. Their culture is completely different.” Aijaz, a marriage lawyer, said that there is *biraderi* endogamy among groups like butchers because others do not want to marry them, since they always have knives in their hands, and they are a little *jahil*, rough and uncivil. “But what if they are not practicing butchers?” I asked. He reflected and said, “Yes, I know of one doctor who is of the Qureshi *biraderi* in Mallepally neighborhood, and his wife is not a butcher.” So, he said, people are only considering money and education now.

A similar story I was told concerned a rich Qureshi who was a contractor. His two older sons married out of the *biraderi*, and migrated to Saudi. The younger one sold the family house and lives comfortably from the profits. The daughters married out of the *biraderi* also. The family members, on their own, cut their ties to the *biraderi*.

These two examples point to the possibility that as the butchers find economic prosperity and occupational diversity, they may begin to marry out in increasing numbers. Also, as more and more Qureshis become educated, many are likely to resist entering their fathers’ occupation. Will they then feel any need or compulsion to maintain caste ties (independent of family ties)? Or will they turn their backs on their other caste members, like the contractor mentioned above? Or will the more successful merely dissociate themselves from poorer caste members, leaving an impoverished butcher caste behind? This is an open question that can only be answered in years to come. In the present, though, the butchers have adopted the trope of caste as an entity that has its own honor and culture, something to be preserved and reveled in; this is a strategy that the upper castes in Hyderabad have largely abandoned.

Medhavi Pathans

The Medhavi Pathans belong to a different religious sect (Medhavis) than the vast majority of Muslims in Hyderabad, who are Sunni. Medhavis include two castes: Syeds and Pathans. Most Medhavis are Pathans. The Medhavis believe that Hazrat Syed Muhammed Jaunpuri (1443–1505) is the *Mehdi*, “the one who is believed to come to show to the men the correct path to follow towards the close of the world (Qamaruddin, 1985:2).”¹³

Among Medhavi Pathans, religion is central to their group identity, but they marry along lines of caste. Other Muslims mistakenly refer to the entire community as Medhavi Pathan. The Medhavi Pathans came from Afghanistan to Delhi during the rule of Sher Shah Suri (1540–45). A genealogist in a village near Jaipur in Rajasthan keeps their records, which go back at least 25 generations. The genealogist is of the Baaraah Hazaari family, which has kept the genealogy of the Medhavi Pathans (and their Sunni Pathan relations) since before their arrival in India. The president of the Medhavi Anjuman (community organization for all Medhavis) related a story to me about the Baaraah Hazaari. He said that Sher Shah Suri, a Pathan king of Delhi, called all the leaders of the various Afghan tribes to court one day and said, “You know, now that you are in India your *nasl* (lineage) will become impure through marrying Indians and your children will no longer be Pathan.” They said, “But look, we marry amongst ourselves, and we even brought our genealogist to prove this.” The king said to bring him. And they did. And the king was so pleased with the way they kept their blood clean that he gave the genealogist a *mansab* (honorific rank) and gave these Pathans his approval.

Within the Medhavi Pathans, there are numerous Pathan tribal lineages, such as *Yusufzai*, *Alizai*, *Yahyahzai*, and *Mansoozai*. In India, these lineages are unranked. The Pathans will not, however, marry Syed Medhavis, except occasionally to give a girl in a hypergamous marriage. But that is not common. It is more common for them to marry Sunni Pathans, crossing lines of religious practice rather than violate caste boundaries. But they will not marry just any Pathans. They have to be of the lineages that the Baaraah Hazaari keeps track of, as there are many different types of Pathans, and it is difficult to know who is and is not a “real” Pathan with proven descent from Afghanistan or northern Pakistan.

Before independence, most Medhavi Pathan males served in the Nizam’s forces. After independence, there was economic hardship for them, just like for other Muslims in Hyderabad, as the Nizam’s forces were

¹³This sets them apart from Sunni Muslims, who believe the *Mehdi* will come before the Day of Judgment.

disbanded. But it was not as difficult for them to adjust as it was for other Muslims, because many Medhavi Pathans held fairly high ranks in the Nizam's services and were able to shift more easily into other areas of employment. They diversified by putting emphasis on liberal and technical education, and business. There is a "culture of education" among the Medhavis that most other Muslims will readily comment upon. They are relatively well off economically, compared to the rest of the Muslim population in Hyderabad. This cultural and economic capital has also aided them in taking advantage of migration opportunities. Many have migrated in large numbers to the United States; the president of the Anjuman believes there are as many as 10,000. While such a large number is unlikely, there are still so many Medhavis in Chicago from their Chanchalguda neighborhood in Hyderabad that they refer to Chicago as "little Chanchalguda."

Medhavi Pathans are renowned for being straightforward, religious, trustworthy, conservative, and enterprising. In spite of this, and despite their having higher ranks in the armed forces and being economically and educationally more advanced than other Muslims in Hyderabad, they still have a reputation among Muslims in Hyderabad as rough because they served in the army and are Pathans, who are feared in general anyway. The Medhavi Pathans had been evicted en masse from Hyderabad twice for sectarian violence during their long residence there; once in 1822, and again in 1876 (Hyderabad [India; State] Central Records Office, 1954:170–171, 315–316; Roosa, 1998: chaps. 1–2). While there has not been any sectarian violence in recent years, they are still feared, and valorized, by other Muslims. Their neighborhood has not seen religious violence on the scale of other neighborhoods in the Old City, perhaps indicating that their Hindu neighbors also know of their ferocity, real or otherwise.

Like the Qureshi, the Medhavi Pathans are keen to maintain blood purity, but others are equally given to discriminate against them with regard to marriage, mainly because of their reputation as rough, military people. Pathans generally have this reputation as rough and uncivil, but the Medhavi Pathans are especially known for this, rightly or wrongly. Unlike the Qureshi, the Medhavi Pathans are relatively well off economically and educationally. Also unlike the Qureshi, now they are not concentrated in any particular occupations. How do they maintain their boundaries? Why does their identity not become "symbolic"? Religious difference is a partial explanation; their practices in prayer and burial rituals differ slightly from those of orthodox Sunnis. But this is an unsatisfying explanation, as the Medhavi Pathans will marry Sunni Pathans of a certain genealogical descent. The common thread between Medhavi Pathans, Qureshi, and other corporate castes is that they define themselves as honorable, *and* others define them as *jahil*, or uncivil, refusing to enter into marriage alliances with them. The Medhavis are defined

this way because of their martial traditions in Hyderabad, and the Qureshi are so defined because of their low-status occupation. The key to understanding the corporate behavior of these groups then is the dialectical process of ascription and self-definition, and the turning of rejection by others into their own rejection of the other. In the United States, this takes the form of “black is beautiful,” while in Hyderabad, the Qureshi, Medhavi Pathans and other corporate castes “won’t marry just anyone.”

Caste as Elective

Despite the way most scholars portray Muslim social organization in South Asia, corporate caste is not a widespread phenomenon in Hyderabad. Aside from the examples of the Qureshi and Medhavi Pathans, there are no corporate organizations for Syeds, Sheikhs, Mughals, or for the bulk of the Pathans in Hyderabad. There are no subcastes, councils, or even informal groupings that can exercise control over persons. There is no mechanism by which an individual can be censured, shamed, or expelled from the caste.

I outlined some major traits of these groups above to emphasize the features of some Muslim corporate castes. Highlighting what it is that makes groups, throws into relief the process of “symbolization” of ethnic identity. It is useful to distinguish between Muslim castes as categories of *individuals* who share a common past, an ethnic mythology, and Muslim castes as *groups* who have a degree of social control over the individual. The vast majority of Muslims in Hyderabad exhibit “symbolic caste”; that is, their caste affiliation has neither negative consequences nor economic or political benefits. Caste also provides little in the way of social prestige on its own. Other than surname, there is little else that binds Syeds, Pathans, Sheikhs, or Mughals to each other *as* Syeds, Pathans, Sheikhs, or Mughals, in the manner that Qureshi and Medhavi Pathans are bound to each other.

In the preceding section, I examined how corporate castes approach marriage, mainly through endogamy. In the following sections, I explore how those Muslims who are not members of corporate castes contract marriages, and how they use knowledge of caste, or lack thereof, to formulate what caste means for them.

Marriage

Marriage is the key to any understanding of caste. Milner (1994:143) writes, “At the core of the [Hindu] caste system is the arrangement of marriage alliances based on religious or ritual status [i.e., caste]. When marriages . . . take into account only the socio-economic position of the families, the caste system will cease to exist.” The same thing can be said for

Muslims in the Indian context. Where income, education, and occupation become primary considerations for marriage, we can say that caste is no longer important, or, at the least, that it is not the primary orienting social identity.

In Hyderabad, I found three basic strategies of match-making: where caste is a primary concern; where caste is given some weight, but is bounded by concerns of wealth and education; and where little if any concern is given to caste. The first strategy of endogamous marriage is not particularly common in Hyderabad, and it is limited to some numerically small subgroups, such as those discussed above. More commonly, caste is taken into consideration, with other things being equal. Usually this takes the form of discrimination against lower status groups.

Many people say that they will give preference to someone who is from their caste or near to their caste. A common statement that I heard from people who were Sheikhs, Mughals, or Pathans was that they would marry their children to individuals of any of these castes, but not to Syeds, who are considered the highest status among Muslims, as they are blood descendents of the Prophet Muhammed.¹⁴ For the most part, people condone hypergamy and even hypogamy, so long as the gap is not too distant. It is fine for Sheikhs, Pathans, and Mughals to intermarry, as they are close in status. Some think that Syeds, though, should have only hypergamous marriages, that it is fine for Syed boys to marry others, but unwise for others to marry Syed girls. One lady told a story of a couple whose marriage ended in divorce. "Of course it did," she said, "because she is Syed, and he is Pathan. Boys should never marry up." "But you're Sheikh and you're married to a Pathan," I said. She said, "Yes, but there's not so much of a gap, so it's alright. If the gap is too much, then that is a bad thing. It is too much of a gap between Syeds and us. This mixing is all right for us, but is a more important issue for Syeds. They're from the Prophet's line after all. When we look for a wife for our son, we will take this into account."

Many people like the woman above emphasize the social importance of Syeds and how they are, or should be, endogamous. It is not required, but is looked upon favorably. One noble's son said to me that there is nothing wrong with marrying out of your caste, but how nice it would be for a Syed like you to marry a Syedni (female Syed). It would be best, especially if you are Syed on both sides.

While caste is often a consideration for marriage, it is not necessarily a primary concern. Exogamous marriages are common for upper castes, including Syeds. The idea that Syeds are too high-status to marry those

¹⁴On the changing roles and positions of Syeds as religious and political elites in South Asia, see Wright (1999).

of other castes was not common among most people I talked with. One Syed woman, who became disgusted with the obsession with caste and the idea of the lofty identity of Syeds, wrote the following in an online discussion:

Dear List—I have jumped in simply because the discussion is getting to be more and more tedious and at the same time the implication now seems to be that Sayyeds are some rare breed not to be found in reality. . . . There was a time, and for some the tradition hasn't changed, when Sayyeds would only marry Sayyeds, just as Brahmins will only marry Brahmins, etc. When I got married I couldn't dream of marrying anyone but a Sayyed. My son will not carry that tradition forward. Times change. I hope we can put this discussion to rest.¹⁵

Iqbal the *payamwala* (matchmaker) puts caste low on the scale of things important for marriage, ranking far below family wealth and education, not just of the prospective bride or groom, but also of other family members. I was often told that the amount of dowry a woman can bring is the final determinant, even if the bride and groom are related. The amount of dowry is related to whether or not the man is an emigrant, and to occupation. Marriage counselors and other matchmakers I spoke with agreed that caste is not a top priority when considering proper matches. I examined 6 months worth of matrimonial advertisements in *Siyasat* (the most popular Urdu-language daily in Hyderabad), and also examined responses that came to an advertisement placed in *Siyasat*. None of them included a caste name. It is true that one can often surmise caste from a name, but none of the ads specified any particular caste. In the ads, people stress their education, religiosity, and fairness of skin tone. In the responses to one advertisement for a young man with an MCA (master's degree in computer applications), the biodatas (matrimonial resumes) all stressed the academic and employment achievements of immediate family members, especially if there were family members living abroad, while none stressed caste.

To sum up, hypergamy, common in Hindu matches, is also common for Muslims. But hypogamy is also common among Sheikhs, Mughals, and Pathans. Hypogamy also happens between these three castes and Syeds, though not as often. Caste endogamy, hypergamy, and hypogamy in Hyderabad are not necessarily deliberate strategies of matching, but—and this is an important point—they are often incidental to matches made on the basis of financial, educational, and professional criteria¹⁶. For most Muslims in Hyderabad, the arrangement of marriages, the most obvious articulation of status, is made on achieved rather than ascribed criteria.

¹⁵This exchange occurred in the discussion group *SASIALIT—Literature of South Asia and the Indian diaspora*, November 12, 1999. See <http://is.rice.edu/~riddle/mlists/SASIALIT/msg00660.html>.

¹⁶Ethnographers often are so inclined to see caste logic, that they will see caste among Muslims where Muslims and even Hindus will not (Fanselow, 1997).

Knowledge

Most Muslims that I met in Hyderabad have little knowledge of what it means to be of a particular caste and little knowledge of caste history. An example of this comes from Majid Bhai, a Pathan moneychanger. His father was Afghani and came to Hyderabad with his brother before independence. They were both married in Hyderabad, thought of going back, but had children and so were unable.

Majid Bhai says that it is a shame that people should be Pathan in name only. They should have some knowledge of their roots, which he unfortunately does not have. He was not close to his father, and so knows little of the details of his family's past. His father used to speak Pushto with his own brother (the language of the Pathans in Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan), but Majid Bhai does not speak it.

He told me of how a famous smuggler came from Bombay to Hyderabad for a wedding. Majid Bhai's Pathan friends (moneychangers and moneylenders) introduced them. The smuggler asked Majid Bhai if he spoke Pushto. He said no, and the smuggler said, "*Arre, Pushto nahin bolta? Kai ka Pathan hai tu?!*" (What, you don't speak Pushto? What kind of Pathan are you?!)

Majid Bhai's cultural ignorance is a result of the contingencies of familial relations. Collective amnesia, though, is not uncommon among Muslims downplaying once glorious identities. An example of collective forgetting regards the identity of Mughals. Mr Ziaddin Tacy founded the Mughals of Hyderabad, a family society with 40 members, to try to revive the culture and importance of Mughals in Hyderabad, and to try to create group solidarity. The Mughals are descended from Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last of the Mughal emperors of Delhi, who was exiled by the British to Burma after the Mutiny of 1857, which challenged and nearly overthrew British rule.

The times after the Mutiny were dangerous for the emperor's family; many left Delhi, and others went into hiding. The Nizam allowed many of these descendents to settle in Hyderabad, though they received no official recognition as descendents of the last Indian emperor. Tacy claims that from 1857 until the end of British paramountcy in Hyderabad in 1947, Mughals were afraid to openly declare their royal blood. By the time of Indian independence, then, their social ties and identification as Mughals were almost completely gone. Tacy established the Mughals of Hyderabad society in 1962, the centenary anniversary of Bahadur Shah Zafar's death. The government of Uzbekistan has taken much interest in his work to try to revive the memory of the emperor and to revive a collective identity of Mughals, as the Mughal emperors came from that area. They have invited him twice to Samarkhand, and offered his children scholarships for higher studies. Two of his six children have gone so far. While grateful for

the generosity, Tucu says that his children think that he is crazy, and that he is wasting his time. “They say to me, the only people interested in this are people at the Salar Jung Museum [a research museum of international repute], and scholars like you.” He himself knows that it is a fruitless struggle. “Who is going to say that they are Mughal now? It’s like saying that you are a nawab [noble], it is an insult.” Most of the people whom Mr Tucu has contacted about being Mughal either do not know that they are Mughal (he can tell by the name) or else do not care.

Lessons and glories of many Muslim identities have been lost, and even if they are available for recounting, they are being purposefully lost. Many, mostly younger persons, are not at all aware of (or concerned with) the meaning of caste or the honor associated with particular castes. In response to a question that I commonly posed about what respondents knew about their caste, I was often greeted with a blank look. A young Syed man, waiting (hoping) for his uncle’s friend to send him a visa to work in his hotel in New Jersey said to me, “I don’t know anything about this Syed business. It might have something to do with marriage.” Others I spoke with insisted that these caste identities were un-Islamic, and asked, “Why should we bother with such things when they have no bearing on our lives?”

For most Muslims in Hyderabad, there is no material benefit to belonging to a particular caste. For example, Syeds, the highest status persons among Muslims, are indistinguishable by occupation or residence from other Muslims. Being Syed cannot get them jobs, or cheaper prices in the bazaar, or free movie tickets. Perhaps it may help in getting a better dowry or match, but this was not evident from the data. In Hyderabad, in general, there is no segregation by caste in the neighborhoods. There is little occupational specialization among Muslims by caste (unlike in other parts of India), and there is little correlation of caste and class, save for low-status groups such as the Qureshi. Socially, caste on its own provides little prestige. People who demand deference simply because they are from a high-status lineage are derided for putting on airs.

Stories and stereotypes of different castes are common, but they are often just that—stories and stereotypes. In practice, very few people differentiate based on caste. That type of ascribed status has little currency in Hyderabad today. Rashid, a young Pathan studying law, summed up this transformation nicely:

Look. Today we are concerned with luxuries. We want our TVs, fridge, VCR, car, motorcycle. We are not concerned with this being Arab or Pathan. Before, if a man says hey, you’re a stupid Pathan, I will kill him. Now, if he says that, I will not care. I have my luxuries; I don’t care for him. If I do, I will go to jail. Why do I want to go to jail? Those people who don’t have money, maybe they still care for this being Pathan or Arab. I don’t care for it. I don’t know much about it. I am young and free. I just want to enjoy.

He points out that economically disadvantaged Muslims may be more concerned with issues of caste. Status for “those people” is ascribed rather than achieved. But for him, the need to uphold ethnic honor is far outweighed by the need to be economically mobile and acquire material goods.

With the expansion of economic and political opportunities since independence, the importance of lineage-based status identities such as caste has greatly diminished. It has moved to the point where corporate caste organization is giving way to symbolic caste, a type of self-referenced identity with little bearing upon one’s life chances, and simply one of many factors that define an individual’s status. This is brought out quite clearly in an interview with the movie megastar, Shah Rukh Khan on a popular television show in India called *Aap ki Adaalat* (Your Court of Justice). Mr Khan was asked why he was so hotheaded at times, and his response was “*Hum Pathan hain!*” (I’m a Pathan!) He said it with a wink and a faux ferocious look, a caricature of how a “real” Afghani Pathan might snarl. The point is not that he is not a real Pathan (he may or may not be descended from Afghani Pathans). The point is that he is of the film world, and his personal status is rooted in areas other than being of a particular caste. He can claim to be Pathan when it suits him, but otherwise he is the heartthrob of millions—not because he is Pathan or Muslim, but because he is cute and performs well in fight scenes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have linked the constructivist idea of ethnicity as a process of collective identity formation with symbolic ethnicity, the idea that ethnic identity need not be attached to a collectivity. Caste identity for Muslims in Hyderabad is a social formation that varies in importance for people in different life situations. I have shown how caste as a collective formation exists along with, and in opposition to, symbolic caste, that is, individually displayed ethnic identity. Corporate caste groups are important for some, but most Muslims in Hyderabad exhibit either symbolic caste or often claim no caste at all. Ties between members have weakened, and caste identities have waned in importance, as they are no longer useful in garnering economic or political resources; this is the case for the bulk of Muslims in Hyderabad. There is no social benefit from simply being high caste, unless one has also achieved status through education, profession, or income. Those who try to claim status simply through lineage are mocked and derided for living in the past.

But for the corporate groups of Qureshi and Medhavi Pathans, there are benefits to caste membership, as well as costs of negative stereotyping by others. This encourages and even requires the practice of endogamy, which for people in these groups is, on the one hand, a rational choice to take advantage of certain kinds of opportunities and, on the other hand, a

reaction to negative criticism of being *jahil*, uncouth people. These groups are endogamous because they find it to be an honorable practice (they consider those people who are not endogamous as having mixed, dirty blood), and because other high castes will generally not enter into marriage relations with them.

Finally, I want to stress two ideas regarding ethnicity construction. The first concerns the symbolization of ethnicity. For Gans (1979), this process is tied directly to assimilation. As white immigrants became third- and fourth-generation Americans, the ties that bound individuals to each other as a collectivity weakened. This is not the case in Hyderabad. In Hyderabad, caste ties have weakened and become elective as class and being Muslim have displaced caste as the most important identities for Muslims, and as definitions of status have become based on ascribed rather than achieved criteria. I also want to emphasize that ethnicity construction is not a one-way process here of corporate caste becoming symbolic caste. Corporate groups may be created out of symbols of caste, as Mr Tacy has attempted to do with the Mughals of Hyderabad.

Related to the changes in the ways that status has come to be defined, as cause and consequence, is the differential strategy and efficacy of Westernization. Among the corporate castes, the Medhavi Pathans are the most Westernized and the most respected of corporate groups, though still less respected than other high castes. Qureshi have for the most part not Westernized, and their status remains low.

For people of the upper, noncorporate castes, Westernization is the key to improving one's status. Education, professional occupations, and working abroad (or having family members abroad) greatly improve one's marketability in the most important arena of status competition, the marriage market. As Westernization becomes the more important mode of status mobility, it works to undercut caste as a marker of identity and as the basis of an individual's status. As more and more low castes take to education and employment abroad, it is likely that they will become attractive marriage partners to higher caste persons, making caste less relevant in the last remaining social forum in which it is important. While Medhavi Pathans and Qureshi are defined as uncouth, this definition may change as they further Westernize, and as Muslims in the city in general further Westernize. As these processes occur, the importance of caste for these groups may begin to wane.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

As a fieldworker, I engaged with Hyderabad Muslims as a Muslim, as the son of Hyderabad emigrants, and as a high-caste Syed. As a Muslim studying Muslims, I was privy to certain types of information that other

ethnographers may not have had access to. But as a Syed, I was perhaps excluded from certain types of information, since respondents may have assumed that I held some factional affiliation. I did not feel that my being a Syed excluded me, as no one I interacted with asked about my caste until I inquired about his or hers, which usually did not occur until well into the interviews. My caste was never a factor with people I interacted with more closely. I also had to fight the assumptions that because I am Hyderabadi (or at least my parents are), I understood the rituals and underlying social meaning of different events. Usually this was not the case. I became jealous of white, Western ethnographers I met during field research because they often were treated better than I under the assumption that they were ignorant and needed to be instructed in detail. However, there were many things that I was privileged to be told or shown from which they were led away.

Another possible limitation of this study is gender bias. The people I interviewed were disproportionately male; only 33 of the 188 people interviewed were women. Gender segregation is the norm among Muslims in Hyderabad, and for a male to interview women to whom he is not related is problematic. I usually interviewed women in the presence of people with whom they felt comfortable, which seemed to minimize this problem. I found that the responses I received did not differ substantially by gender (see Table II).

The generalizability of this study to other cities in the Indian subcontinent may also be problematic. Hyderabad is unique for its legacy of Muslim rule and its large Muslim population. Caste has historically not been as important an institution in Hyderabad as it has been in north India, and so we should expect that it will be less important today. Politically, Hyderabad is the only place in India where there is a viable Muslim political party, and this has had a great effect on the shaping of ethnic identities. Further, Muslims migrate from Hyderabad at rates that are likely higher than almost any other place in India, save for the state of Kerala. While these factors point to the uniqueness of Hyderabad, the analysis I pursue in this paper is based on a strategy of examining how changes in resource structures affect ethnic identity and how people go about the business of negotiating and constructing identities. This same framework can be used to make comparisons with other cities and villages, examining the effects of different resource structures on ethnic formations. The same strategy should be useful in examining variation in other places, and times, and different types of ethnic formation.

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