

Title—Indian Muslims and Citizenship: Spaces for Jihad in Everyday Life

Author—Julten Abdelhalim

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Categories: Politics, Islam, Culture, Religion

Place: Independent India

Time: 1950-2000

Argument Synopsis:

Abdelhalim's book is based on her doctoral dissertation, which considers the language of citizenship and inclusion in India, finding it to be puzzling both in comprehension and in application. She seeks to investigate the nature of citizenship ideals and the ways the Indian Muslim community negotiate power relations and create spaces of agency and forms of self-representation. Abdelhalim is a Muslim woman from Egypt which shapes her approach to the study of both the Muslim community and the ways they perceive living in a secular democracy. She identifies Indian Muslims as strong political actors and not mere passive victims of alienated subjects, as it commonly argued and portrayed by the media and political leaders. Her central question asks how Indian Muslims make use of the spaces and channels granted by the democratic framework to accommodate their Islamic identity with the secular one; as well as the extent to which their Islamic identity is conceived as either conducive or conflicting with the political setting in which they live. To get at these questions, Abdelhalim utilizes two case studies, one in an area where Indian Muslims are the minority (Delhi with ~12% Muslims), and one in an area where they form the majority (Kerala with <60%). Her use of case studies helps to demonstrate the process of **'self-marginalization'** that average Muslims find themselves adopting, lest their claim for identity and cultural security be interpreted as disloyalty to the state.

In terms of sources, Abdelhalim makes use of a variety of different methods, including interview-based and ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 2010 to 2012, as well as more traditional sources like newspapers and fatwas. Her conceptual framework is based on the idea of temporal and empirical space as a context, jihad as a means, and citizenship as a goal. Importantly, she is using 'jihad' in the traditional Islamic sense, i.e. struggle, and not in the holy war context that is often highlighted in the West. She uses the term jihad to describe the everyday reality for Muslims in India. Her book seeks to project an honest picture of how young middle-class Muslims think. She argues that a comparison between the metropole and periphery is necessary in constructing a composite picture of political consciousness in India and is useful in demonstrating several contradictions of cultural belongings as modes of exercising claims to citizenship. The Indian case provides a postcolonial order of an application of a liberal conception of citizenship, coupled with an invention of minority status and adjustments guided by a uniquely secular constitution. For Indian Muslims, jihad can mean a multitude of things, including self-rule, education, striving for social mobility, and patience.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Indian Muslims should be seen as strong political actors and not mere passive victims of alienated subjects as is commonly argued and portrayed by the media and political leaders
- Through means of argumentative and spiritual jihad, Indian Muslims strive towards a realization of citizenship ideals as inscribed in the constitution
- Citizen Minority—status of Indian Muslims who are full citizens, yet possess in differing contexts different minority cultures