

# **Ganga-JamuniTahzeeb and Multicultural Space: Exploring the Identity of Muslims of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal)**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Muslims in India are one of the largest minority populations. One of the assumptions in the public domain is that, Muslims are homogeneous category. Interestingly, the cultural and traditional differences among Muslims of Indian subcontinent is multifarious. This diversity is also because of geographical locations and mixed population of different culture and tradition. One of the major questions in the postmodern times is the question of multiple identities, which also shackles preconceived notions about Muslims as homogeneous category. The politics of recognition (Charles Taylor) and difference has played crucial role in the political field by the marginalized populations to get the due rights and representation in the mainstream politics. This paper tries to reflect and explore some of the specificity and contiguity (inter-sectionality) in everyday life of Muslims of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal). Purvanchal is distinct region also because of confluence (mixing/plurality) of cultures due to its location bordering with Nepal on one side and Bihar on the other. In a way the most eulogized ganga-jamunitahzeeb gets reflected in this region. Muslims of this region are mainly in informal sector (business), farming and labourer in gulf and abroad. The intermixing of Hindus and Muslims on festive occasions and helping out each other in crisis has created peace and stability in the region. This paper in a way surveys the demographic mapping as well as documenting some of their everyday life routine and engagement in changing polity and society. This paper tries to answer some of the pertinent questions of multiculturalism, composite culture etc. and shows that why ganga-jamunitahzeeb needs to be engaged more in our everyday life.

**KEYWORDS:** Multiculturalism, Ganga-JamuniTahzeeb, Identity, Everyday Life, Purvanchal

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Purvanchal as a region is potentially a mini-state within Uttar Pradesh, mainly Bhojpuri speaking people and mix of Hindustani dialect in some of the pockets. It is surrounded by Bihar on the eastern side, Nepal on the northern side, Madhya Pradesh on the southern side and on the western side is the Avadh region. If we do the mapping religion wise, we find Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists and some heterodox mystic religions. Within Muslims, we have Shias and Sunnis sect wise and within Sunnis there are again division based on different parameters such as Ahle Hadith, Bareilvis, Wahhabis, Deobandis so on and so forth. Because of the limitations of my research, I am primarily focusing on the Gorakhpur region in general and Deoria in particular.

According to the 2011 Census, the population of Deoria is 3,100,946 of which male and female were 1,537,436 and 1,563,510 respectively. (Census of India: 2011). According to the 2001 Census, the Muslim population of Purvanchal region is 11.38% (308731) of the total population (TwoCircles.Net[http://twocircles.net/2011may27/muslim\\_representation\\_uttar\\_pradesh\\_assembly.html](http://twocircles.net/2011may27/muslim_representation_uttar_pradesh_assembly.html)). So, more or less 30 lakhs population is quite huge. The main source of income for the Muslim population is primarily farming and informal sector. As by the Sachar report suggest the literacy rate among Muslims is low, it is also stark reality that Muslims face discrimination in government jobs and otherwise in admission in higher education (Sachar Committee Report, 2006 [mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/sachar\\_comm.pdf](http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/sachar_comm.pdf)).

As demographic mapping and educational backgrounds of Muslim suggests they are not the part of mainstream society, hence also part of the fodder in identity politics. The negative image construction through media and electoral politics of extreme right, Muslims of Purvanchal have learnt to cope in the broader composite culture by creating their own space to acknowledge and compromise. This inculcated tolerance or acceptance of synthesis of Hindu-Muslim cultural relations has also created mutual trust among Hindus vis a vis Muslims. This attitude of recognition of difference has given birth to what we call *Ganga-JamuniTahzeeb*.

According to JaveedAlam,

*“the unique genius of India worked to evolve, over the centuries since the coming of Muslims into the Indian sub-continent, modes of thinking and living which are a subtle intermixing or synthesis of the world-views and living habits of Muslims and Hindus. In fact there is a further thesis, where it has been repeatedly said, that it has been a chief characteristic of Indian civilisation ever since antiquity to take over or assimilate or synthesise attributes from diverse cultures which came in contact with it” (Alam: 1999, 29-30).*

This paper tries to unravel some of the intricate relationship ethnographically, arguing that to make composite culture living reality and stabilizing peace in the turbulent times due to the conflicting narratives and politics, the strength of inter-sectionality (ganga-jamunitahzeeb) needs to be highlighted with its reflexive nature in our times.

## II. MULTICULTURAL SPACES

**Zabaan:** To articulate thoughts and feelings and emotions, we need language. In Purvanchal, language do not divide people based on their religion or sect. Mainly in Deoria people speak *Bhojpuri* with the changing dialect region to region.

**Chai kiDukan:** At the *bhor* (dawn), when everybody must be sleeping or redying to sleep after late night work, the nearby temple in the village of Tarkulwa starts playing *ghanta* [big bell] and loudspeaker starts playing morning *aarti* from *santoshimata* to *hanuman aarti* to *gayatri mantra* (chants), midway the moment it is *subhesadiq* means time for *azaan* (Muslim call for prayer). The *ghanta* stops for a while, *azaan* ends and *aarti* on loudspeaker starts. *Namazis* (those who offer prayer) are readying for *jamaat* (gathering). Why the loudspeaker did stops during the time of *azaan*? Was there any pre-adjustment planning for that? No one has any answer. Definitely long time ago when there was no loudspeaker, *ghanta* must be not a problem. This mere adjustment in this village is cherished and people feel proud about that.

Sudama, Kailash and Shankar (real figures) are also readying and burning their coals with *mittikatel* (kerosene oil) in their *angithi* (furnace). The fume is creating different fragrance initially and it is becoming slowly radiant embers like a morning sun in the sky. Sudama had the oldest *gumti* (small wooden shop), when he used to prepare tea and his famous *jhurri* (fried potatoes). Shankar had *thela* (four wheeler shop) long ago, on which in summer he used to sell *kulfi*, and in winter *moongfali*. He switched over to tea shop one and half decade ago. Kailash is new entrant in DubeyTola came at the same time Shankar arrived. The special item of Shankar is *Samosa* and Kailash's is *aloo chips pakoda*. Now, in morning all these three shops prepare the same item which is *Chana*, *Jalebi* and *chai*. People flock to their shop after their daily routine to have breakfast, mainly male with their kids. Women prepare their tea at home. After breakfast, old people stay at *dukaan* and younger move to school or on their business as usual cricket ground as the tournament is in offing. Some people who has to go to *kutchehry* or hospital has already moved to their destinations.

The real politics begin, when newspaper arrives at seven. Everyone tries to grab newspaper as the adjacent shops are yet to open, the owners are at the tea shops and they too grab their newspaper of their liking as Sudama reads *DainikJagaran*, Shankar reads *Rshtriya Sahara* and Kailash, the more sensible and intellectual kind who speaks less, because he is always mouthful with *gutkha*, reads *Hindustan*.

After half an hour of read, the oldies gets ready for battle and recollects informations from their memories for defence to their political parties. Critics are ready with their vitriol to dismantle every narrative. They are of postmodern like in our universities. The reading or discussion happens on priority basis first it starts from village level news if any which is of utmost importance, moving on to the district level and state, then national and lastly on *Desh-Videsh*. Interestingly heated debates turned out to be personal and culminates into scuffle only restrained when mediated by the most wisdomful of all Sudama, with his wit and pun and threatening *gaali* that he will not allow anyone next day onwards. The fighting party shares tea and entire debate fizzes out on cricket as everybody seems happy with the performance of their team. Young people are searching about their performance in the district level cricket tournament.

Now as explicated at length, no one is conscious of their religious identity as everyone mourns when they read that flood, earthquake, riot or civil war has killed innocent lives. People literally feel bad and pray for the bereaved families. Muslims comprised of 45% of DubeyTola. The Jama Masjid is just fifty steps away from these shops and people mingle in such a way that it becomes difficult to identify who is who. Hence, *Chai kiDukaan* becomes one of the spaces which imbibe all the tolerance and multiculturalism making it one of the vibrant public spaces.

**Bazaar:** In villages people mainly grow their vegetables and consume and sell in the market. This process is commonly followed by the people of DubeyTola. Now, why *bazaar* becomes one of the important multicultural spaces is precisely because of the transaction among different sets of people. In DubeyTola, people gather at *SabziMandi* on two days in a week. One on Saturday and another on Tuesday. Intercultural transaction do take place in the bazaar because of the people from all across district come and buy goods. Tarkulwabazaar is also one of the biggest *bazaar* of thana. One major point which needs to be highlighted is most of the youths

who live abroad or in other cities of India, leave their wives and families in the village. Now in some families when there is no single male to fetch some vegetable or other goods from *bazaar*, they ask male of neighbouring house to do the favor. Mostly houses are constructed in such a fashion that it is not ghettoized like in cities that people from particular religion will stay in this pocket of the city or that. Houses in DubeyTola are mixed where Hindus and Muslims live side by side and hence, they do favor on daily basis in the time of need. So, *bazaar* is one such place when favor is required most and they do it happily.

**Khalahaan:** To organize an event or for marriage ceremony, big barren fields are required to make the staying arrangement for the *baraatis* and also if *baraatis* come up with their own arrangements of CD/VCR or *Naach*. In marriages, people cutting across sect and religions or castes give their helping hand in organizing the events. There is no distinction that who will serve the feast to the *baraatis*. In Muslim ceremonies Hindus serve with their fellow Muslim brethren and Muslim do the same in the ceremonies of Hindus. After *dawat* or *bhoj*, *baraatis* move to the *Khalahaan* where they, help in raising the tent one for audiences, other for *baraatis* and *nautanki* party.

*Khalahaan* is also the site of playing for kids in the time when there is no harvesting season. In winter, old and young mix of experienced volleyball players of the village, play volleyball in the evening. In summer they play *chikka* and *kabaddi* in the morning. *Kushti* is also organized time to time. During harvesting time, people allot places for their ripen products to dry and do the other needful to remove husk from the wheat or paddy to be thrashed. In doing this, again it is a community work where people help each other in finishing their tasks.

**Dargaah:** *Dargaah*'s are another place which do not distinguish people based on religion, sect, caste or creed. There are famous *dargaah*'s which are known for their charismatic and magical powers of those *pirs* on whose name those tombs are built. Those *khadims* do not ask the name of the devotees of *pirs* and offer the *tabarruk* to people with ease to everyone. *Dargaah* is also supposed to one of the foremost secular place unlike *Masjid* or *Mandir*, where you are supposed to go in different attire or do certain rituals which should certify that you are the real worshipper of that god or goddesses. So, *dargaah* becomes one of the constitutive of *ganga-jamunitahzeeb*.

**Tournament:** Youth of Dubeytola organize tournament once in a year with much grandiose and pomp. It is basically cricket tournament. The preparation of the tournament requires lot of rigourousness and preparation. Teams of co-ordinators are made who send invitations to the teams of different villages. The players in the villages are identified with their second name based on their qualities. Such as good spinner is called Kumble, there are Desilvas, Schwags, Tendulkars, Ranatungas, Afridis, Azhars so on and so forth. They break the boundaries of territoriality and nationalities in identifying the qualities and talent unlike the chauvinist nationalist who only praise their teams even if the other teams perform outstandingly. The extraordinary broadmindedness of those budding cricketers is what old people cherish and give *misaal* (milestone/anecdote) when somewhere some skirmishes or tensions occurs based on religion or caste.

**Tyohaar:** Be it Eid or Holi or Diwali or for that matter Nag Panchami on which day, people gather in the *khalahaan* for famous *Kushti* and *Kabaddi* event. On festive occasion, invitations are sent before the festival to arrive and join for the feast. Like on Holi, Muslims go to their respective friends home to relish *puaa*, *mutton and puri*. On Diwali it is *mithai* and On Eid Hindus come to relish *meethisewayin* and *chhole* and many other sweet items. During *Ramzan*, Hindu friends are even invited for *iftaar* in *Masjid* who come and wait till the time of *Maghribazaan*. These traditions are not new. They mark the *ganga-jamunitahzeeb* more alive than just a lip service.

### III. CONCLUSION

The above discussion shows that composite culture are important dimension and binding factor of India's Cultural life. India may be a arrive of peace, love and unity. It is the most excellent illustration within the world to claim "unity in diversity", comprising of all qualities of sub-continent, of course, India may be a sub landmass with its quality rest on its Persistence at the foot creating its possess composite culture and standards. One of the assumptions in the public domain is that, Muslims are homogeneous category. Interestingly, the cultural and traditional differences among Muslims of Indian subcontinent is multifarious. Purvanchal is distinct region also because of confluence (mixing/plurality) of cultures due to its location bordering with Nepal on one side and Bihar on the other. Muslims of Purvanchal have learnt to cope in the broader composite culture by creating their own space to acknowledge and compromise. This inculcated tolerance or acceptance of synthesis of Hindu-Muslim cultural relations has also created mutual trust among Hindus vis a vis Muslims. This attitude of recognition of difference has given birth to what we call *Ganga-JamuniTahzeeb*.

In a way the most eulogized *ganga-jamunitahzeeb* gets reflected in this region. Muslims of this region are mainly in informal sector (business), farming and labourer in gulf and abroad. The intermixing of Hindus and Muslims on festive occasions and helping out each other in crisis has created peace and stability in the

region. This paper in a way surveys the demographic mapping as well as documenting some of their everyday life routine and engagement in changing polity and society. Be that as it may, it is incomprehensible for anybody to conclude the social overview of India—as he does with the Greek or the Roman or the Babylonian, for, Indian culture is still dynamic, still exceptionally much lively because it was within the past because it is nowadays and proceed till mankind endures. This paper tries to answer some of the pertinent questions of multiculturalism, composite culture etc. and shows that why Ganga-JamuniTahzeeb needs to be engaged more in our everyday life.

To conclude one should not hesitate to recite secular poetries. Interestingly shayari are the most often used medium of communication which in its subtlety describes many intricate issues in nutshell. In the words of Anwar Jalalpuri:

*Hum KashiKabaKeRahi Hum Kia JaaneinJhagda Baba,  
ApneDil Mein SabkiUlfatApna Sab Se Rishta Baba,  
HarInsaan Mein Noor-e KhudaHai Sari Kitabo Mein LikhaHai,  
VedHo 'nYaInjeel-e Muqaddas Ho Quran Ki Geeta Baba.*

His another couplet concludes ganga-jamunitahzeeb in this way:

*Anekta Mein JahanEktaMili Anwar,  
Hum Is DayarKo Hindustan KehneLage*

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