

Cultural, spatial and socio-economic fragmentation in the Indian megacity Hyderabad

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ABSTRACT

By virtue of the great appeal of megacities in developing and emerging countries on migrants from rural areas, the population of those urban areas grows at a rapid pace. Originating from different national, ethnic, religious, social and economic backgrounds, the migrants contribute to the urban life, thus effecting cultural change. Both migration and the current far-reaching socio-economic developments can boost social and spatial fragmentation of cities as well as contribute to the formation of new collective identities in the face of increasing globalisation.

This essay outlines the influence of migration and socio-economic changes on the spatial fragmentation and on collective identities for the emerging Indian megacity Hyderabad. As a result of the centuries-old tradition of immigration, the city is characterised by a motley blend of different cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic groups. Firstly, an overview of the circumstances for the migration movements is given. Secondly, the overlay of traditional identities, influences from overseas and new socio-economic patterns is described and, finally, the implications for a common identity on the urban meta-level are pointed out.

HYDERABAD AND ITS MIGRATION MOVEMENTS

Hyderabad, a city branded by the present boom of the information technology, is one of the fast-growing hot spots in India and capital of the State Andhra Pradesh. Along with the current economic growth, there is an enormous increase in population: Between 1975 and 2000, the United Nations Population Division calculated an annual population growth of 3.84% in the agglomeration Hyderabad (United Nations 2001:97). Since the formation of the Greater Municipal Corporation Hyderabad in April 2007², the area of Hyderabad is as large as 650 km² with more than 6 Mio inhabitants (GHMC 2007). The population increase is mainly due to immigrants: in 2001, 8.7% of the population of Hyderabad having moved in during the last decade (Census 2001:18). The phenomenon of immigration is, however, not a new one in the city: Founded in 1591 by the fifth sultan of the Muslim Qutb Shahi Dynasty as capital of the Deccan Empire, Hyderabad has been staging a continuous stream of immigrants during its 400 year history. Besides the then established Deccani population of Hindus and Muslims, the early prospering city attracted traders, such as Marwaris, Bawahirs and Gujaratis (Census 1989:79). They did not only bring different customs and skills, but also specifications in

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² New planning authority for the urban region Hyderabad – see <http://ghmc.gov.in/>.

religion and further languages (besides the then established Urdu, language of the Muslim population, and Telugu, language of the Hindu population).

After having lost its primacy position for almost 40 years, Hyderabad became again the capital of the Deccan Empire in 1724. This anew coronation entailed another great number of settlers, many of them military servants. The migrants included Arabs, Rohillas, Afghans, Rajputs, Turks, Pathans, Jotishi, Lodha and further more (Census 1989:80).

The third major immigration wave was set off at the end of the 18th century, when the ruling Nizam³ signed a contract, allowing the permanent residency of British armed forces. The British established a military base and founded the new town Secunderabad north of Hyderabad. The coexistence of the Christian (British) town and the predominantly Muslim old town formed a very special setting for the further development of Hyderabad. During the last century, the initially spatially separated cities grew into each other and thus form the contemporary city of Hyderabad.

Since the foundation of the State Andhra Pradesh in 1956 (following Indian Independence) and especially since the blossom of the New Economy in the early 1990s, the current stream of migrants, mainly formed by Hindus from Telangana and the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh, is moving to the state's capital.

ETHNICITY, RELIGION, LANGUAGE AND CASTE: INFLUENCES ON SEGREGATION

The groups arriving over the centuries differed in ethnicity, religion, language and caste. A number of those differing cultural groups continued to cultivate their specific collective identities, partly until today. In the following, I will shed light on the situation of Hindu-Muslim co-existence, the perception of specific collective identities, and the role of castes for the formation of identity in Hyderabad.

One of the most remarkable settings in the Indian city is the sizable share of Muslim population. The religious group accounts for 41.1% of the population⁴ (Bhatt 2005:61) – in comparison to 13.4% of the total of India (Census 2007). Thus, Muslims and Hindus (55.3%) form almost equally-sized communities with a pronounced stratification line between them. The stratification line is not just drawn by the differences in religion, but also by the differing languages. Whereas the Hindu community's language is still Telugu, most of the Muslims are Urdu-speaking.

In earlier centuries, when the sovereigns of Hyderabad were Muslim, the religious community even formed the majority of the population. In that time, a common Deccani culture was formed at the level of the Hindu and Muslim elites (Leonard 1973 cf. Ali 2002:598; Dalrymple 2003). The syncretic culture marked off the Deccan Empire from its neighbours and created a strong collective identity at its interior. Nowadays, parts of this culture are still intact: In his article *Hyderabadis are us* the journalist Ghose describes the influence of the Deccani identity (e.g. cuisine, social life) on today's urban life. But this appears to be more a glorification of a grandiose past in view of frequent communal riots and violence (esp. between Hindus and Muslims) in post-independent Hyderabad (Naidu 1990; Raghuraman 2007).

³ Abbr. from Nizam-ul-Mulk; title of the sovereigns of Hyderabad since 1724 (Asaf Jah Dynasty)

⁴ Population of the district Hyderabad

The Census Report of 1981 gives detailed information about the perception of specific collective identities in Hyderabad. It distinguishes 17 groups with “ethnic and demographic characteristics“ that can be found in larger contiguous zones all over the city (Census 1989:79-104)⁵ (figure 1). It differentiates between some ethnic groups, such as Arabs, Marwaris, Marathas, Bohoras, Pathans, Pardhis, Jotishi, Lodha, Parsis and Andhras, religious groups (Shi’ahs, Sunnis, Kayasths, Khatri, Christians) as well as social groups (Eunuchs, Prostitutes). The classification of these groups is based on subjective perceptions of specific collective identities. The existence of the report throws, on the one hand, light on the specific collective identities found in Hyderabad and shows, on the other hand, that (ethnic, religious and social) marking-off characteristics might not be congruent: The ethnic groups of Bohoras and Pathans, for instance, consist of Shi’ahs and Sunnis. Contrary, the religious community of Christians is composed of different ethnic groups.

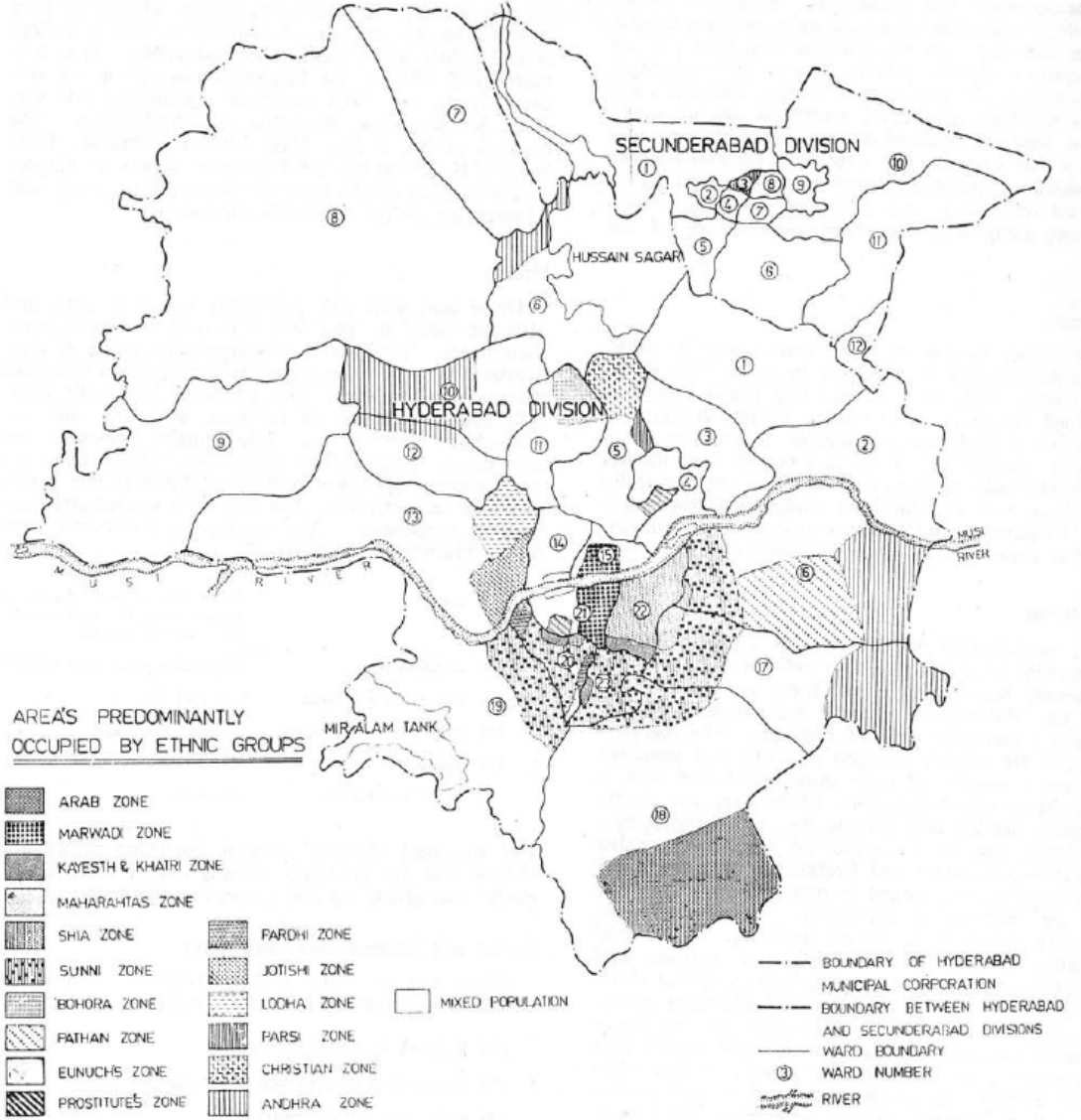


Figure 1: Ethnic zones in Hyderabad city in 1981⁶

⁵ According to locals, the outlined zones of specific collective identities can still be found in the city.
⁶ Source: Census of India 1989:78.

Besides ethnicity, religion, language and social characteristics, castes play still an important role in the formation process of specific collective identities in Hyderabad. Besides a number of Hindu castes, Muslim castes are found in the city like among other South Asian Muslims. The sociologist Ali analysed the relevance of ethnic identity within nine castes (Syed, Medhavi Syed, Sheikh, Mughal, Pathan, Medhavi Pathan, Quereshi, Baid Pathan, Chawsh) and showed that the classification in castes can fulfil two kinds of functions: "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" (Ali 2002:609). In Hyderabad, there are only two castes acting as corporate groups (thus entailing a strong collective identity): Medhavi Pathan and Quereshi, but also the other castes do have a significant influence on the values and the identity of their members.

SHIFTING THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION LINES

Having thrown light on ethnic, religious, linguistic and castal segregation in Hyderabad, there are two more phenomena that have had an influence on the shift of cultural boundaries, the fragmentation of social groups and their identities: lively exchange with overseas and socio-economic changes.

In the last 200 years, and especially since the economic boom of the IT-industry in the 1990s, the traditional values of castes and social groups have partially experienced a blending with Western values. As almost everywhere in India, the colonial presence of the British was the first to bring 'Western' culture in a larger extent to Hyderabad. Children of well-to-do families got a traditional British education and later, after Independence, they themselves sent their children to Britain or the US for education or employment. Besides the boundaries with the western world, there is a close tie with the Arab Gulf Countries. With the incorporation of the Indian state in the middle of the last century, a bulk of (Muslim) employees of the royal household and army lost their jobs. Since then, it has become popular among most groups of Hyderabad Muslims to migrate for labour (Naidu 1990:19-21). Both migration to the west and to the Gulf influences group identities in Hyderabad: the sociologist Naidu observes a consolidation of Arabic ethnic identity in the old town of Hyderabad, whereas different authors record a growing 'Westernisation' among a number of Hindu and Muslim castes (Varma 1998:152; Ali 2002:615; Krank 2006:48). As 'Westernisation' and Arabicization led to a shift in values, the orientation towards different global lifestyles has an enforcingly separative effect on the Hyderabad sense of community and thus collective identity.

In recent years, socio-economic changes contributed also significantly to a shift of social stratification lines in Hyderabad. The above described effect of separation between Hindu and Muslim groups has been enforced through the pattern of employment. As Varshney has shown, 65-70% of the Muslim population is working in the informal sector whereas the bigger part of Hindus takes part in the formal economy (Varshney 1997:14). The thereby missing web of interdependence, not economic inequality, is considered to be the main reason for the frequently occurring riots.

Another phenomenon for a change of stratification is the increase in income of parts of the population. Both financial support from family members in the Gulf and in the West as well as the urban booming economy create modest wealth for a number of families. As their revenues increase, better education becomes affordable even for lower castes and they climb the socio-economic ladder to the middle-

class. Rising income and higher education of an individual leads consequently to a shift of values and identity: "Where income, education, and occupation become primary considerations for marriage⁷, we can say that caste is no longer important, or, at least, that it is not the primary orienting social identity" (Ali 2002:610). In Hyderabad, the middle and upper class is today composed of the traditional middle and upper class of Hyderabad, the newly risen middle class of the city and the recently immigrated middle class from the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh. The identities of those different groups within the same socio-economic span diverge insofar, as their original cultural backgrounds differ. The primary orientation for those groups of the middle class are rather values like revenue and education than a strong ethnic-religious affiliation. In contrary, we can also see that the economically disadvantaged continue to adhere to the traditional caste structures. This group is composed both of old-established groups and recent immigrants from the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh.

CONCLUSIONS

Hyderabad has, as pointed out, always been a centre of immigration – not just in recent years in the age of globalisation. The continuous phenomenon of migration has led to a pronounced diversification of the population that is still visible in the population structure and the perception of collective identities. Simultaneously, Hyderabad shows all indications of 'Westernisation' and globalisation that are typical for megacities of emerging countries, but also tendencies of withdrawal and consolidation of Arab culture of the Muslim community. The development of a collective identity around a common centre on the level of the megacity failed. As close the cohesiveness within parts of the urban communities is, as loose it is between communities.

The syncretic Deccani identity that has been developed in earlier centuries is more a memory of the past than a living culture. Today this syncretic culture in Hyderabad has virtually disappeared. Hindus and Muslims have become culturally and socio-economically alienated. However, learning from the past could offer a great opportunity to tackle with the current rift between identities. Developing a new framework for a collective identity would not be about equalizing (e.g. in the form of further 'Westernisation' of all urban groups), but about profiting from the cultural diversity and creating a common identity out of it.

Developing and implementing political measures to cope with ethnic and social segregation amongst the disadvantaged have shown to be a necessary pre-condition for their integration in cities of European countries (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2003). This requires citizen participation, combating discrimination and, especially in Hyderabad, this would primarily mean to establish a web of interdependence on the economic level in order to provide access to the formal labour market for both Hindus and Muslims.

⁷ Marriages are considered to display the value system of castes (Milner 1994:143).

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