

Marginal Occupations and Modernising Cities
Muslim Butchers in Urban India

On 29 October 2009, the Supreme Court of India passed a judgment ordering the final closure of the 95-year-old idgah abattoir in Delhi. The abattoir was shifted to a mechanised modern plant in the eastern fringes of the city. Using the issue of relocation and modernisation as a starting point, this essay addresses the impact of planning and transformation of urban spaces on traditional and marginal occupations. Located in a multi-sited ethnography of the working lives of people in the meat sector, it emphasises the complexities of understanding an entangled reality. Butchers live and work in an intricate web of social, spatial and occupational relations. Hence, spatial and technological relocation is not only about losing skill sets and livelihoods. It challenges the very access to labour and uproots people from social and emotional spaces critical for stigmatised and marginal occupations who draw strength and support from familiar landscapes.

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Jarvis Ahmad (jarvis.ahmad@gmail.com) is New India Foundation Fellow and Affiliated Research Fellow at the Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi.

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needs to be pointed out that given the paucity of data, the political and economic scenario and the silence and secrecy often associated with an issue as sensitive as meat dispensing, particularly buffalo meat,² accessing the field was challenging initially, but once accepted, the butchers were forthcoming and cooperative. However, the private firm that leases the abattoir was far more inaccessible.

It needs to be flagged that there are three interconnected issues in this context which are part of the larger dynamics affecting the life, livelihood and legitimacy of the work of butchers. The first set of issues is located in the polemics around cow slaughter. The cow emerged as a symbol of Hindu nationalism in the colonial period leading to the formation of organisations like the Gaurakshini Sabha. The Constitution of India in the Directive Principles of State Policies directs the state to "take steps to prohibit cow slaughter". This has led most states in newly independent India to quickly pass laws banning cow slaughter. In the last few years, some states have passed more stringent laws against cow and bovine slaughter, particularly the states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) such as Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. These laws and mobilisations against cow slaughter have put significant pressure on butchers, particularly buffalo butchers. The second set of issues may seem to contradict the first set, but meat, more specifically buffalo meat, is a vibrant and growing sector in the Indian economy and a major foreign exchange earner. The growth in the industry has changed the organisational structure, ownership, technologies and supply chain of the meat industry. Some butchers have turned exporters and suppliers to supermarket meat shops and malls. This growth however benefits a very small section among butchers and does not necessarily augur well for small and medium individual and low-level butchers.³ The third set of issues relates to the nature and course of sanitisation, animal rights and the environmental discourse. Located in a particular social and class dimension, there is significant mobilisation against butchering within the pollution and animal rights framework. I have not discussed these issues at length here and focus primarily on the relocation of the workplace and its implications on the occupation. I first explain the ethnography of work and locate the marginality of butchers. The subsequent section documents the contours and complexities of relocating the idgah abattoir. The third addresses contested terrains between policies and people through the voices from the margins.

The People and Ethnography of Work

Community, Place and Marginality

This essay focuses on butchers' who slaughter and dispense buffalo meat and sheep and goat meat, commonly referred to as mutton. Slaughtering in India is traditionally done manually by *halal*⁴ or *halal*⁵ method. *Halal* is also referred to as *zabih* and *zabih*. *Zabih* butchers belong to the *Khatik* caste and are *dalit* Hindus.⁶ Muslim butchers are from the *Qureshi* or *Qureshi* *bradri*⁷ which is among the *Pasmanda* (backward) Muslim *bradris* in India.

By and large, the *Qureshi* *bradri* is an endogenous occupational group primarily engaged in slaughtering sheep, goats and bovines and selling meat. They are pejoratively and widely referred to as *kasai* and sometimes *Qureshi*, while the community prefers to call itself "Qureshi". The latter is an ascribed title, possibly adopted by the *bradri* around the time of the caste census of 1901, when a number of castes were socially upgrading themselves. Though there are internal social, occupational and regional distinctions, the *bradri* has maintained linkages within the neighbourhood, the city and even across the country. The main avenues of maintaining this link are: endogenous marriages, a common occupation, loosely structured *bradri* panchayats (for personal and social issues like marriage, divorce and internal disputes), *habitation* in a common locality, and a formal *bradri* or caste association like the *AQO*. These networks give the community a support structure of socialisation and social control (for example, in some cases, panchayats can impose sanctions). These linkages also provide the *Qureshis* with a sense of security, identity, mutual aid and credit for personal reasons (marriage, birth, death, illness) and occupational reasons (expansion, renovation or initial costs of starting up) and political mobilisation in crisis. Diametrically opposed yet closely interlinked to these small close networks is the butchers' distance with the larger society, both spatially and socially. Though this is not the exact focus here, it would be relevant to briefly outline the popular perception of butchers and their occupation, and the social location of butchers in Indian society.

There has been a tendency to sensationalise and demonise butchers and their workplace. Popular culture represents butchers amidst filth and squalor and as ratfles. To quote a few instances, according to the philosopher Georges Bataille (1990), "the slaughter house is cursed – cursed and quarantined like a boat with cholera aboard" (Young Lee 2005: 7). In Victorian England, the slaughter men were considered "the most demoralised (sic) class of all" (Sumantra 2006: 200). More recently and closer home, Sam Miller, describing a slaughter space in Delhi, writes: "It was a scene of cruelty and comradeship, a giant courtyard of death and laughter" (Miller 2010: 120). The recent Hindi film *Ganga of Wassepur* (2012) is another instance where butchers are shown as rough and ruthless, flaunting knives at the slightest provocation.⁸ In the Indian context, butchers are one of the lowest in the varna system. Slaughtering and dispensing has always been the preserve of traditionally backward caste Hindus and Muslims. Handling meat, curries and dead animals is considered one of the most polluting occupations in the divisions of caste and labour. Butchering as an occupation and butchers per se have also always been at the periphery of the city and society. In fact, most old cities have a locality dedicated to the butchers variously known as *Khatik bari*, *Gali Khatikan*, *Kasai wala*, *Kasai basti* or *Qasabpura*, for instance. These neighbourhoods were located at the margins of the city while it was being planned. Anthropologists and urban historians of Delhi have also indicated the conjunction between occupation and neighbourhood.

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Though there is a body of work on the walled city, Old Delhi or Shahjahanabad – the city named after and built by Shahjahan (1626–1666), the Mughal Emperor with “a passion for building” – most studies focus on the palace, gardens, mosques, and bazars. However, the few that do talk about the lives of the city’s common people highlight the importance of the mohalla (localities) as an occupational and social unit. Elders and Kraft (2009: 59) explain the location and planning based on occupations in the context of the planning of Shahjahanabad.¹⁰ Goodfriend, basing his study in the walled city of Delhi, explains how oral histories indicate that people of certain trades and occupational groups lived in specific pockets:

Social status was reflected in distance from the Emperor’s palace. This formed the basis for the social ecology of the city. Areas such as Gali Dhobywa (washermen) Parak Talawa (oil pressers), Malhotra Chauri wala (thugge makers) and Qasabpura (butchers) were noted for the occupation of their inhabitants. The lower occupations were relegated to the edges of the city (Goodfriend 1996: 120).

An eminent historian of Delhi Narayani Gupta, elucidates that the poorer sections of the city were located at the city’s periphery, viz. Moti Gate, Farashkhana, Alimnagar Gate, Turkman Gate, and Delhi Gate (Gupta 1981: 120). In fact, there is a mention of Qasabpura in Shama Mirza Chishti’s (1998) historical study of the walled city and a mention of a Qasbi Masjid near Turkman Gate in a map of Shahjahanabad dated 1850 in Elvers et al (1992). Needless to add, the butchers’ residences and workplace (then Turkman Gate) in the walled city were at the margins of the city and farthest from Red Fort. However, with expanding city limits, these neighbourhoods and workplaces are converted and recreated in the new fabric of the city and this has paved the way for urban policies of relocation.

The People at Work

The number of people involved in the sector is difficult to estimate due to methodological reasons. It is not possible to get data from the scs because not all the people involved are registered butchers and the number of people changes based on the day of the week and time of year.¹¹ According to the Jain Commission report (Jain 1994: 13), the livelihood of 40,000–50,000 people was linked to the Idgah abattoir (Idg). According to the AAO press release of 25 October 2009:

The closure of the Idgah slaughter house has left about 40,000 families of Qureshi community without business. The butchers, livestock traders and people associated with the related business are deprived of their family trade.¹²

Clearly, these are two extremes. However, it needs to be pointed out that there has been a rise in meat consumption between 1993 and 2009 and the export sector has also grown substantially which might have led to an increase in the labour force associated with the meat market. Besides, the commission accounts exclusively for workforce in the abattoir while the AAO figure includes livestock, meat and ancillary industries.

The people involved in the meat industry or occupation broadly comprise the following: merchants, self-employed butchers and workers. Merchants include large shop owners, suppliers to restaurants and supermarkets and meat exporters.

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and commission agents coming and setting up shop. The shopkeepers, suppliers and slaughterers work in close alliance.

The first transaction takes place in the livestock market. It is an open area with some sheds on the side, set up by the commission agents. The livestock market is a place bustling with a variety of sights, sounds, odours, and action. At first, the place may seem completely chaotic. There is a jostle of livestock, livestock owners, animal handlers, truck drivers and their helpers, commission agents and their assistants, shop owners and suppliers and their assistants, the cart pullers and tea vendors, all making way in the same space. Amidst all of this there is also harmless fun and banter or heated arguments. Commission agents normally sit out on plastic chairs or chappos talking with the livestock owners, shopkeepers and suppliers, or just sitting out. The literature among them can be seen reading Urdu and sometimes Hindi newspapers. A truck driver, livestock owner or animal handler who has just arrived from a long journey may be seen washing his hands and face in a corner or feeding and giving water to the animals in large (waiting).

Depending on the day of the week, the shop owners or restaurant suppliers place the required demand to the commission agent. Communication often happens in a particular vernacular, which is a mix of Urdu and Arabic. The commission agent then negotiates with the livestock owner, while the helper or animal handler exhibits the animals. The meat yield is estimated through visual examination based on size, breed, age, musculature and fat distribution. Once the negotiation is over, the buyer of the livestock takes charge of the animal and proceeds to the same-nomine section to pay the slaughtering fees to the scs official (in occupational parlance *purchi karna*, or getting receipts) and subsequently to the slaughtering section.

Inside the abattoir, the shop owner or supplier approaches his regular slaughterer and passes on the live animals to him for slaughtering and de-skinning. The process is carried out manually, with a helper in case of buffaloes and alone in case of sheep and goat. Sometimes the job is shared by two brothers who work as a team and share the remuneration. The knife for slaughtering is called *salla* (hence the term *salla*kh) and cutting the jugular vein is called *silah karna* or *holi karna*, but in occupational parlance it is called *salla pharna*.¹³ The slaughterer separates the butchered animal into three distinct commodities: carcass, waste and animal hide, each following distinct trajectories and destinations. The carcass, which is the main commodity, is sent to the meat shop, restaurant or processing unit. The hide goes to the *chanda mandi* (skin and hide wholesale market). The waste, that is, head, hooves and entrails are generally sold to dairy women who later sell them in economically deprived neighbourhoods. Work in the livestock market and slaughter house normally ends by noon. The scs workers and some contract labourers clean the place and prepare it for the next morning. Most people go back home, take a siesta and then run errands, like getting knives sharpened or collecting dirt or just socialising. However, work in the shops continues through the day and evening.

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They procure the animal from the livestock market and delegate the slaughtering and other manual work to employees. Self-employed butchers are owners of small or medium-sized shops which they manage alone or with the help of immediate kin. Workers constitute the largest section of people who work in this sector, both inside and outside the abattoir. They include both skilled (butchers in the abattoir, skilled workers in shops) and unskilled workers (rickshaw or cart pullers, cleaners, helpers, animal handlers). Again, there are two distinct subdivisions among skilled butchers based on labour: the *kameldar*, who slaughters the bovines, and the *salla*kh, who slaughters goats and sheep. They work primarily in the abattoir.¹⁴ The *salla*kh and *kameldar* are paid per animal. The worker in the shop cuts and dresses the meat. He is paid either weekly or monthly. There is also the ubiquitous *adho*li (broker, intermediary middleman, or commission agent as they prefer being called), who are an important link in the market dynamics. Their role in the chain is necessary yet problematic. On the one hand, they do not have a good reputation because it is said they make a substantial profit in transactions, sometimes through the *huk*li system (where they do not disclose the price to the seller). On the other hand, they have an important role to play in linking the livestock market and farmers, and in helping butchers work on credit due to their personal contacts and credibility with the *ho*spiri (livestock trader).¹⁵

A Day in the Idgah Abattoir¹⁶

The Idgah abattoir was constructed by the colonial government in the early part of the last century, operational from 1904. According to *bradit* elders, there was a slaughtering space in Shahji ka Talab behind Turkman Gate¹⁷ before the Idgah abattoir was constructed. The abattoir¹⁸ is located in Moti Khan (close to Sadar thana (police station)). It covers an area of seven acres, which includes the livestock market, the abattoir and the offices of the scs (Jain 1994), the municipal body responsible for the maintenance of the abattoir. The government owns the space and also provides water, electricity and maintenance of the space (that is, the salaries of the veterinary doctors and the cleaning staff). For this, the merchant butcher pays a nominal fee per animal to the scs. The butchers in the abattoir have a licence issued by the scs which they are obliged to show if demanded by the officials in the abattoir.¹⁹ The space is divided into two sections: the *mandi* or livestock market and the slaughtering area. The latter is again divided into three sections: *hala*, *par*ka and *buffalo*. Due to religious reasons the *hala* and *buffalo* sections are adjacent to each other while the *par*ka section has different entry and exit points within the same premises.²⁰

The abattoir operates from 5 am to 12 noon everyday, except Tuesdays since this is an auspicious day for Hindus and is therefore observed as a *mehnat* day by most people.²¹ A normal day starts before the crack of dawn because the trucks (carrying livestock from Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh) ply by night and also because fresh meat has to reach the shops by 8 am. The day starts with the livestock owners

The life of the butchers primarily revolves around the *mandi*, *kameldar* (abattoir), *mohalla* (locality) *dahat* (dip), and the primary meat and by-product processing units which are located in the vicinity. People reside in specific pockets around the abattoir, namely, Qasabpura (Qureshiwala), Rakabgani, Chhatta Lal Myra, Turkman Gate, Delhi cinema (locality behind Delhi theatre), Bara Hindu Rao, and Kali Masjid. These are the oldest continuing butchers’ residences in the city.²² Work in the abattoir is embedded in a complex system of social and occupational relations. There is long-term reciprocity based on trust and mutual relations which often cut across generations between the different actors. For example, a shopkeeper will transact business with the same commission agent to procure livestock from when he started his shop. At times, the earlier generations of shopkeepers would have also interacted with the same agents or possibly even his father. Similarly, slaughtering and selling the hide and waste is also passed on to the same person that the shopkeeper has been working with since he started his shop or again possibly even a generation before that. This does not mean that relations are always static, ideal and egalitarian among the different levels and actors. Sometimes, there is mutual discord or there is a different style of working between father and son, where the son changes the set of people his father worked with or vice versa.

There is a certain rhythm and sociability between the different people at different stages. This is evident during work as well as in personal interactions. Transactions are often informal with distinct occupational expressions (which are often of Arabic origin)²³ particularly between the commission agent, merchant and slaughterer. Since the level of literacy is low, transactions are quite often verbal or (illegibly) written in small notebooks or scribbled on small slips of paper. There are no ledgers or legally binding records and documents, particularly in the abattoir and livestock market. Now the shopkeepers maintain proper documents for tax purposes and for the scs. The relationship between the employers and employees is fluid and interdependent. The labour market in meat and the ancillary industries operates on small social and geographic scales within localities; most people are known to each other either directly or through word of mouth.

From Idgah to Ghazipur: Big Leap Forward?

The Story of Slaughter House Reforms

The history of slaughter houses has seen a gradual progression from individual ownership to state ownership to commercial or private ownership. Slaughter houses were initially either privately owned or the butchers slaughtered their animals outside the shop in full public view. The concept of a common abattoir was introduced in the 19th century when city regulations became important.²⁴ The abattoir, like the railway station and the department store, was a structure utterly unseen before the 19th century²⁵ (Oster 2005). In fact, the word *abattoir* can be traced back to 1809 and owes its origin to Napoleon’s five abattoirs around the city of Paris. There is a long and chequered history of transformations which made it mandatory to

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slaughter animals outside the periphery of the city. This led to the construction of five public abattoirs outside Paris in 1848 followed by Versailles in 1850, Marseille in 1848 and Lyon in 1851 (Miller 2008: 47). Slaughterhouse reforms gradually became a phenomenon in the 19th century in various cities – Berlin (Rutaz 2005), London, Mexico city (Pikler 2003). The period saw a profound restructuring in the way butchering and the nuisance trades in general operated in cities. Objectives, regulations and legislations emanated from three diverse concerns – clean cities and urban planning, environment and hygiene concerns, and cruelty against animals. These developments were also connected to other large-scale developments, like growing cities and urbanisation, population growth, new industries, the development of new technologies, expansion of scientific knowledge and the transformation of political agencies and public hygiene regimes (Rutaz 2005) and underscored the shift to an industrialised society.¹⁸

British policies in India reflected similar thought. Oldenburg (1984), writing in the context of Lucknow, locates colonial policies of urban reconstruction along three axes – safety, sanitation and loyalty. Pushing of nuisance trades to the periphery was a significant marker in the colonial urban dynamics. Tanners, dyers, lime kilns, hide trade, and the slaughterhouse were high on the list of nuisance trades in the city. Such policies dispossessed economically marginal groups thereby reflecting the class divide of the colonial policymakers (Saran 2006: 4906). Samant's (2008) study on the Calcutta slaughter house, places the reforms in the context of an expanding army or its military requirement, with the pressing need for sanitation and hygiene in a burgeoning metropolis and a growing leather industry. The Igah abattoir in Delhi, which was constructed in the early 20th century, indicates that it too was a product of the colonial discourse.

Igah Abattoir and the Contours of Relocation

Located in diverse concerns, the issue of the Igah abattoir has been a locus of activity for the socio, environmentalists and the judiciary, and workers in the meat industry, particularly the butchers. Though relocating the abattoir was proposed and discussed in the colonial administration¹⁹ in the 1930s, the issue came to the fore with the introduction of the Master Plan Delhi, 2001. In the postcolonial period, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) envisaged that the existence of noxious trades (like tannery, tanning and slaughtering) should be located outside the periphery of the city. The issue gained momentum in the 1990s through the combined and sometimes overlapping concerns of urban planning of sanitation and hygiene, mobilising riots against cow slaughter, the right-wing anti-Muslim agenda, and a proactive judiciary. There were strong protests from local residents in areas near the proposed sites and the proposals were dropped. With the Supreme Court order of July 2004, Ghazipur was finalised as the site for the mechanised abattoir but again there were objections and litigations from butchers as well as residents of Ghazipur.

In the butchers' memory and narratives, the crisis dates back to 1990 when a member of the community, Md Iqbal Qureshi,

filed a civil writ petition (Cw no 2267 of 1990) by way of public interest litigation in the High Court of Delhi for issuing mandamus to the sec to make the functioning of the slaughter house more hygienic. In the meantime, another writ petition (Cw no 158 of 1991) was filed by some private citizens, educational institutions and socio-religious organisations including Shri Satsang Dharma Sabha (Hind Mandir) situated in the Nahi Karim area close to the abattoir asking for "closure and removal" of the slaughter house because it was a "health hazard" and "nuisance". The court directed the relocation and modernisation of the Igah abattoir. According to the court order, the Igah abattoir had outlived its utility and lacked in all modern techniques of slaughtering and proper treatment of effluents. The high court in its judgment on all petitions directed the sec to close the slaughter house with effect from

Table 1: Chronology of Main Events Leading to the Closure of Igah Abattoir

| | CW 2267/1990 |
|-----------------|---|
| 1990 | NDA Govt. |
| | Negotiation of MCD |
| 1991 | CW 158/1991 |
| | Private citizens and Satsang Dharma Sabha, Hind Mandir |
| | Health hazard and nuisance |
| 1992 | CW 832/1992 |
| | All India Meat and Livestock exporters' association |
| | Turnover available slaughterhouse for export |
| 10 October 1992 | High Court judgment |
| | Closure of slaughterhouse w.e.f 31 December 1993 |
| 1992 | CW 2941/1990, Manuka Gandhi |
| | Chhatrapati, Chhatrapati, Chhatrapati |
| March 1994 | Closure of slaughterhouse and reduction to 2,500 animals per day |
| March 1994 | Butchery on strike |
| March 1994 | Formation of IG Jan Committee to give directions and ensure compliance of court order |
| July 2004 | Supreme Court orders closure and relocation to Ghazipur |
| October 2004 | Supreme Court orders that all butchers of Igah abattoir |
| December 2009 | Igah Market where all butchers are moved to work from Ghazipur |

31 December 1993. The court observed that, "the existence of the slaughter house in the congested locality was proving to be hazardous to the health of the people residing in the vicinity and the conditions prevailing there were appalling". In its judgment of 10 March 1992, the court ordered the closure of the slaughter house, but if it functioned it ordered a substantial reduction in the number of animals slaughtered. As a response to the court's order, the butchers went on strike for three months. Between 1994 and 2004, the relocation plan remained on the agenda but status quo was maintained due to a variety of reasons, including resistance from the butchers and protests from local residents where it was proposed to be shifted. However, on 10 July 2004, the Supreme Court of India passed an order directing the sec to construct a modern abattoir in Ghazipur, east Delhi. The Igah abattoir finally stopped functioning in December 2009 amidst protest and a strike by the butchers. It is now under the sec. The structure that was once the abattoir is razed. The space is broadly divided into two sections. One part is used as a parking lot and the other as a site for an MCC plant.

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The Shift to Ghazipur: Changes and Challenges

The Ghazipur mechanised abattoir was constructed between 2004 and 2006. A private firm was given the contract for construction, and they in turn handed it over to the sec. The Jaika section was officially made operational in December 2007 followed by the halal and haddis sections. However, the sec could not run the mechanised abattoir when it was operating in full capacity due to logistical issues. The operating unit, particularly electricity used in running the plant, were very high (since it is a completely air-conditioned unit). It also required specialised maintenance for the hi-tech plant, a further expenditure which the sec did not budget for. Consequently, it was leased to a private firm for a period of 10 years. The firm manages the abattoir and the old actors access it via a fee system. The firm also uses the plant for its meat export business.

There are two separate units in the new set-up: the abattoir and the livestock market, which is located approximately a kilometre away from the abattoir. A large iron gate with a guard and three smaller gates lead to the abattoir. There are four gates in the main abattoir: Gate A for the workers, Gate B is closed (possibly an emergency exit), Gate C for dispatch of meat, and Gate D for officials. The new abattoir is a completely closed unit with armed guards at every entry and exit point. Outsiders are not allowed unless they come with prior permission of the company and are shown around by the staff of the company. Though there is a class divide here, there is no designated exit for halal and haddis sections.

The shop owners and suppliers or their representatives buy the animals from the livestock market and take them to the abattoir. There they deposit the animals and pay the fee and are given a token and wait for delivery at the dispatch gate. Sometimes they have to wait for a few hours to get the carcass and veins. The abattoir has modern amenities like stainers, cutters, conveyor belts, cleaners, rendering unit, and water treatment plant. The machinery is imported from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and France. Workers follow the assembly line system of production. Nine workers are required in the six-step procedure. It includes: stunning, slitting the jugular vein, flaying, evisceration, splitting, washing, and chilling (the last step is not required for fresh meat sold in the domestic market). Most of the work is done on machines. Here each worker performs the same minute operation during a full workday.²⁰ The carcass is transported to the destination by vehicles either owned or hired by the shop owners or suppliers. The abattoir works three shifts per day catering to the domestic market and the exporters; a shift is run exclusively for the firm that leases the abattoir. It employs 450 people per shift, mostly technicians, and about 125 butchers. The butchers are properly attired; they have uniforms, gloves and boots. The interactions are professional and impersonal. Even now, the butchers are paid daily wages ranging from Rs 250-Rs 400 per day. The firm has employed a supervisor (a Qureshi from Amroha in Uttar Pradesh) who recruits butchers and supervises their work, but the butchers are not on the pay roll of the firm. The relocation of the abattoir from Igah to Ghazipur in

effect means transformation at three levels: technological change, structural reforms and spatial relocation of the abattoir. The following section documents the butchers' narratives with regard to these changes.

The Impact on Livelihoods and Beyond

This section documents the narratives of the butchers and locates them in the larger debates on occupations and urban planning.

Assigning Honour to a Stigmatised Occupation

The relocation from the traditional system in Igah to the new system in Ghazipur signals a huge shift for the labour force. There is a shift from independent work to daily wage work. The butchers' narratives reflect this loss of independent agency in the new Fordist style of working. As Md Asad Qureshi, president of the Delhi Meat Merchants' Association,²¹ put it: *Ye ek chad kaam fida fida in jay hindub mein hai* ("This was an independent occupation, but now it is in chains"). For the butchers, working independently was one of the mechanisms with which to assign honour and prestige to their work. Hence the loss is deeply felt by most. Though some butchers feel their work to be arduous and messy, they also feel it is important. However, they take great pride in, and associate immense prestige with, their occupation. As Mushtaq, a slaughtering in Igah, put it: *Ye koi aam kam nahin hai. Taqat aur musahqat ki aurour hai* ("This is no ordinary work one needs strength and skill"). Butchers assign skill and masculinity to the occupation. The expertise is passed on and often confined to close kin and members of the biradri through an apprenticeship. According to Hughes (1970: 340), society delegates dirty work to people who act as agents on its behalf and then proceeds to stigmatise them. However, the people involved in such occupations have "arrangements and devices by which men make their work tolerable and even glorious to themselves and to others" (Hughes 1970: 342). An empirical study by Hannah Meers (1974) on Turkish butchers and American meat carvers explicates how people in marginal occupations delegate honour to their work. This is also reflected in Searle Chatterjee's research on the sweepers of Varanasi: "they (the sweepers) consider their work to be dirty rather than polluting and that in most cases they attribute lowliness to the power rather than the superiority of others" (1979: 284).

Labour and Livelihood Concerns

For the people working in the Igah, there are three major shifts in terms of labour patterns: (i) exit from the occupation, (ii) shift to Ghazipur, and (iii) transfer of labour from Delhi.

(i) Exit from the occupation: When a sector is modernised there is a shift from a labour-intensive to capital-intensive sector, hence the most obvious and tangible impact is clearly on livelihood. The change has affected the livelihood of people in two specific ways. One, the old skill becomes redundant in the wake of new technology and, two, a mechanised unit needs fewer labourers. This was clearly reflected in Zakir's narrative,

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a karnafar interviewed in Qasabpura in December 2010: *Pehle haam milta thha ab yun hi phir ruka haan* ("Earlier I used to get work, now I am just bairring around"). However, the government did not provide viable exit options to those who would have to opt out of this occupation, particularly those who are older than 50 years of age and hesitant about learning the new skill. Man: 52 and ka haon, kya I am mere phir se padhai karoon? ("I am 52 years old, should I go to school at this age?") (Rafiq, slaughterer, December 2009.) These people are now mainly unemployed. Sometimes they work for festivals where animals are sacrificed, like Bakr Id and the Agria or naming ceremony of new-born Muslim children. They normally go from Qasabpura to other Muslim neighbourhoods on Bakr Id and work for the festival. Though they earn well on these occasions, these opportunities are few and far between and definitely not a regular source of income. Studies on the Indian labour market (Harris-White 2003) show its segmented nature and how it is at best difficult and at worst impossible to get access to the labour market without specific contacts. The Sachar Committee report also indicated that India's Muslims face discrimination in the job market. Being Muslim, particularly "kasta", further complicates and reduces their employment chances outside the meat and livestock sectors.

(ii) *Transfer of labour to Ghazipur:* Members of the Qureshi biradri say that just 25-30 boys from the biradri have been absorbed in the new set up where 5,000 were earlier working. Previously, the slaughterers were paid per animal. Now they are paid daily wages, which, as they say, is also not on a regular basis. According to Jameel Qureshi, one of the butchers who shifted to Ghazipur immediately after the relocation in December 2009:

In Ghazipur, I earn Rs 300 a day. But I spend Rs 100-120 per day for food and transport. The employer does not provide anything else apart from the daily wage; no medical facility, no holiday, no transport or destress allowance, not even a cup of tea. On certain days I went to Ghazipur, and did not get work, those were the worst days because I spent money on commuting but did not earn. I used to earn 300-400 in a day in Idgah and that too in less number of hours and spent nothing, less was always at home.

(iii) *Transfer of labour from Delhi:* The butchers present an interesting contradiction to the general trend of migration to Delhi. A group of butchers from Qasabpura Delhi now travels to neighbouring towns in Uttar Pradesh for work:

As I met with an accident on way to Ghazipur ahomai, since I would also be the day's work if I happened to, I was behind a wheel and fell from the running bus. After that incident I don't go there anymore. I commute to Hapur everyday & a way lie the wages are better I get Rs 300 a day and an amount of work from Bahadurpur, Ghazipur (December 2010).

The butchers mention that sellers and makers of specialised knives are also affected. The leftovers and hides are also often retained by the company and delivered directly to the leather factories. So a range of suppliers and the first stage and second stage processing units in the by-product industries also stand to lose in the changed dynamics of the meat industry.

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a private firm. When a butcher passed away after a massive heart attack in the livestock market, they said that it was due to the stress of the business. There is a gradual withdrawal of the state by leasing out the abattoir to a private firm. This has made the butchers totally dependent on a private agency. The butchers are conscious of this concern, and articulate it: *Allana eye ya Allana ka bhai eye ye koi bhi private company aye, wo nah apna hi jayda dekhenge, hamen sarkar ki madad chahye* (kahi hamen kisi ke agye maghne se hame paid) ("Whether it is Allana (referring to Ferozifco Allansons, the firm that runs the abattoir) or Allana's brother, or whoever it maybe, a private company will seek its own interest. We seek the support of the government so that we are not forced to depend on anybody") (Sadiq Qureshi, Qasabpura, December 2010.)

Meat butchers grapple with the loss of familiarity of space, which is a physical, economic and emotional struggle for them. This cannot be quantified and explained in absolute terms. However, the occupation and the Idgah abattoir as a site are closely intertwined with the basic socio-economic fabric of the biradri. Referring to the chaos in Idgah, Niyaz wistfully pointed out (in blooded mein ham sab hi ek jagah hie ("All of us had our place in that crowd"). According to Wicquaint (2007: 241), marginalised urban populations identify with and feel "at home and in relative security" in socially filtered locales. He considers such spaces as humanised and culturally familiar spaces and the loss of such landscapes is in effect a "the dissolution of place" for people at the margins.

Policies and People: Contested Terrains

The butchers say they were actively consulted during the planning or construction of the abattoir. Hence there is a gap between the services and the people who use them. There are practical issues with the new set up which have an indirect yet crucial impact for the butchers. This section briefly points out some of these practical and everyday concerns.

Increase in cost: Since the abattoir was mechanised and leased out, the nominal fees that the merchants paid for using the new space has increased from Rs 5 to Rs 30 for sheep and goat and from Rs 30 to Rs 120 for buffaloes.

Rise in transportation costs: Since the abattoir in Ghazipur is about 30 kilometers away from Idgah, the butchers, particularly at the labour level, have to spend about Rs 50 to Rs 100 per day in commuting, which is a substantial drain on their wages. For meat shop owners this means that they have to spend more money to transport meat, adding to the already increased fee. The distance from the abattoir to the meat shop also means they have to bribe officials along the route even if they have the parchi or required papers from a certified abattoir. According to Alapuri, an affluent meat shop owner in central Delhi, "the longer the distance the larger the bribe".

Loss of time due to distance: Since meat is a highly perishable commodity, time is of crucial significance for the butchers. Fresh meat needs to be sold at the earliest, particularly in the

summer months, between April and October. Butchers often suffer losses due to the time spent in transporting the product from Ghazipur as well as the time spent waiting at the Ghazipur abattoir for the meat to be delivered.

There is now a much more stringent restriction on the amount of meat they can access and this is limited to two small or one large animal per shop. According to butchers, this rule is in force since 1994. However, it is more strictly implemented by the firm because they would like to wind up the shift at the earliest so they can use the plant for their own work. Referring to the reduction in meat supply to the shopkeepers, Khabra's articulates, "Delhi just had one railway station, now there are six. So you deal with the needs of a growing city. How come these concerns are not shown, when it comes to meat?" (president Jhatka Association, Karol Bagh, Delhi, January 2011).

Corruption and bribing: The relocation and lack of access has also compelled some to resort to illegal slaughtering in their living spaces. Apart from the health concern, the bigger issue for the butchers is the corruption they are willy-nilly part of. In one of a raid, either the shop is sealed or a large amount of money is paid as bribe to health department officials and the Delhi police. As Shahid says, "For us the choice is simple, either bribe or starve". It needs to be added that only the well-off butchers are able to pay up and extricate themselves.

Sensitisation in transporting meat, especially buffalo meat: Previously, since most of the meat shops or processing units were located in the bylanes of the abattoirs in Idgah, this was not a concern. However, transporting meat and waste from east Delhi, the butchers fear, can be a sensitive issue, particularly since they have to cross the Akshardham temple complex.

Technical issues of mechanisation: According to the butchers, the machines used in the mechanised abattoir are not suited for Indian conditions, since Indian cattle are of smaller breed. The machines are not suited for the smaller breed of animals, since they were designed in Europe and meant for the larger animals. Indian bovines are leaner and therefore are sometimes unable to survive the stunning process which results in losses. Also, there is a religious and practical issue associated with the stunning of animals before slaughter. Both Muslim and Hindu butchers feel that stunning affects the quality of meat and reduces the shelf life of fresh meat in a tropical country. Deep freezing and air-conditioned shops are increasingly becoming necessary to preserve meat. This in effect means better and more expensive infrastructure and higher electricity costs. Such transformations reflect a deeper process of recasting urban spaces.

In the larger picture, the structure of the meat industry is changing rapidly. Setting up and running a mechanised industrial plant needs substantial capital. This has resulted in the emergence of a few relatively large firms owning the entire chain of production, from the livestock to meat and beyond. These transformations have changed the structure of the industry in such a way that lower or mid-level butchers find it

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