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Radical possibilities of the No-CAA/NRC movement in India

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converse with other radical movements around the
world today?

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The trascript and translation of Sharjeel Imam's speech taken
from "What was Sharjeel Imam saying at AMU?" *Raiot*.
<http://www.raiot.in/what-was-sharjeel-imam-saying-at-amu-trans>

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Even though the fees hike (and let's not forget the fellowship) struggle barely carried out a month before the anti-CAA/NRC struggles, the two never really joined hands in any substantial sense. The blame for this failure obviously lies with the left, which holds on dearly to its limited legitimacy in university politics [we can confirm now that such legitimacy is laid to rest]. Rather than working among its own constituency to bring their issues to the same platform as the anti-CAA/NRC protests, they were more keen to land up as professional organisers to direct the course of the anti-CAA/NRC protests. Sharjeel's comments are a very apt exposure of this bankruptcy.

The crux of the issue can be summarised as follows: if radical Muslim politics must live, the only place left for it is in the wider realm of working class Muslims. But as soon as it opens itself to working class Muslims, it must open itself to the problems of working class *as such*. This calls for a new language in which Muslim politics can no longer only be only about identity assertion. It identifies the other as strategically central to its project.

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strategy in university struggles shows that radical Muslim politics is already part of the wider struggles:

“I want to register this fact that the CPM has been a violent party, it has historically been violent. It beats people up, just like the ABVP does, remember that. Both these parties are extremely violent. I will talk about the left later but remember that the CPM is a violent party. You can read its history in Kerala and Bengal. The way they show masculinity is by forming a mob and beating up three people just because those three did something the day before... if you are fighting, then fight all the way, don't disappear when the fight comes to you, such that other students have to bear the brunt of what you did, if the campus is being attacked, then stand there like a wall. All of them were absent, this fact is very important and to be noted. Because of them common students got beaten up and got their heads smashed.” (This was in context of the clashes happening between left and right student organisations in JNU, when a right wing student group attacked students at random.)

“But as a University, Jamia has made zero contribution. We have been seeing them for the last one month. The same goes for JNU. You must have heard about the fee hike protests. We have been telling them for the last two months to get out of campus and on to the streets but they are not ready to move. Similarly about protests in Jamia. They have been going on for a month now. What do they do? They stand on their own road with few pamphlets and posters. For the last month, that's all they have done. Can you imagine how much energy they have wasted in this? And who are they showing the posters to? The same people who go from there every day.”

Rather, the radical potential of Muslim politics lies in its discontent with the Indian nation-state. It can neither accept the nation-state as it exists, nor can it put forth a demand for a separate nation-state. It can no longer trust its own representatives in the civil society, the ones who offer up dissidents to the police under charges of sedition. The only place left for radical Muslim politics to find its voice truly is either in its secure isolation from the rest of social life, or among the working classes. Doing so, however, requires overcoming two levels of othering – first, the othering of the Muslim working class within Muslims; second, the othering of the non-Muslim working class, as the Muslim working class cannot have a struggle of its own, cut off from the rest of the working class.

Questions for a radical Muslim politics

A radical Muslim politics would inevitably have to reinvent its language and practice in order to establish dialogue with other radical movements. Can such a politics relinquish the organisational form of *ulema* and end the separation between knowledge and life? Can it identify the glorification of *zakat* – charity – as merely another tool to preserve class society and maintain the social distance and differentiation between the haves and have nots?

Can it identify, especially with the onset of the recession, the difficult position of its own *tabka* (roughly, class) in the political economy, for its non-Muslim comrades of the same *tabka* to joyously chant *la-ilaha-illallah* at the barricades rather than merely performing it out of guilt? Is it capable of seeking solidarity from a mass of people that features, politically, as the enemy community in the imagination it has received so far? Sharjeel's comments on the Anti-Fees Hike struggle in Delhi already show that radical Muslim politics also sees struggle over access to education among its goals. Imam was part of that struggle, and his critique of the organisational left is pertinent. Imam's critique of the organisational

Introduction

[The right-wing BJP (Indian People's Party) won national elections for a second term in 2019, and among the many measures it took to hide the dwindling purpose of the state is enact a series of extreme acts. One such was the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which made religion a basis for citizenship by making provisions for persecuted non-Muslim minorities in South Asia (but not Tamils from Sri Lanka) to be given citizenship in India. Along with this, the then-president of the BJP had announced in the media on multiple occasions that they would conduct a National Registry of Citizens (NRC) all over the country to "detain or remove the outsiders," and even openly hinted that the CAA was the tool by which the Hindu "outsider" would be assimilated. This was a very well-thought out move to reinforce a sectarian divide between Hindus and Muslims. This was immediately followed by large-scale country-wide mobilisations, and in some places clashes with police in which about 31 people lost their lives.]

"For example, we blocked one highway in Delhi. There are four major roadways that connect Delhi to UP, we have blocked one of them, which has increased the load on the other three. If we block one more they will be badly affected. Especially if DND is blocked someday, they will be brought to their knees. DND is in no man's land, nobody is there. What can we do? One morning, five hundred of us have to go, sit there and wait for the police. We have to reach at the peak time, like 8 or 9 in the morning, so that even the police is not able to come there. Till the evening, no one will be able to reach us. By the time they reach us, we will disperse and Delhi will remain shut for two days. We have to use our brains like this and strategize locally. We have enough people to shut down the

whole of India. This is where I want to end, thank you very much for listening.”

The above is a selection from a speech by Sharjeel Imam at Aligarh Muslim University. He is currently imprisoned under the charge of sedition, a PhD scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University, holds a Computer Science degree from IIT Bombay, and grew up in a town in the state of Bihar. Sharjeel gives historically informed voice, in a feverish but resolute tone, to a certain moment of eruption in Indian politics. This moment of eruption was not of complete glory or of triumph for the Muslim masses; nor was it merely a one-sided blow by the Goliath of fascism upon oppressed people. It was a very confused moment, and its passing (if it indeed has passed) has left more dead ends and forget-me-if-you-cans than conclusive answers for the questions of identity and community, as well as of solidarity. Sharjeel Imam’s account of what the situation has been, and what must be done, captures the confusion of the moment very well, and hence becomes an important one to converse with. It is impossible to accept all its assumptions as a not-a-Muslim, but South Asia’s radical movements must shun the avoidance of identity questions under the drooping banner of “secularism” or some other variety of transcendental humanism. The importance of Sharjeel’s ideas also lies in their firm resolve to act collectively, to move beyond the dangers which such confusion puts the collective in. Hence, this attempt is one to converse with Sharjeel Imam’s ideas to see if radical Muslim politics – of which that moment certainly was the most mature the world has seen in recent times – has scope to converse with other radical movements.

To summarise our line of enquiry, we list down the kind of questions which we submit Sharjeel’s arguments to: who are the “we” of radical Muslim politics? Does this “we” include the Muslim working masses? Where does the radical Muslim voice find (or is denied) its place in the political economy? How do radical Muslims

which although eaten by everybody, became a point of struggle in the working class Muslim palette time and again. Thus, the working class Muslim is strategically important to appropriate within the larger project of Muslim politics, without however addressing the overall question of the working class within Muslims. This is where Imam’s ideas lose out on their radical edge.

Is radical Muslim politics radical or conservative?

The Covid-19 pandemic provided a relief to a gory and intransigent conflict which had begun unfolding in *the attempt by the Indian state to protect itself through the CAA*. After the initial few days, the nationalist consensus gripped this struggle once again, and rendered it devoid of any content. The Covid-19 outbreak gave the state another imperative to follow, and averted the problem in the short run. However, this shift did not change the equation between various identities. The short period of the anti-CAA struggle, however, did a lot in breaking down (but also reconstituting) the civil society. Radical Muslim politics emerged through this break, only to be suppressed once again in the civil society’s reconstitution.

The reconstitution of civil society, in fact, is a process which had already begun with the new BJP. One could trace it back to the Anti-Corruption campaign of 2011 if one wishes. But the BJP (as the lackey of capital, of course) did manage to overrun all the cherished institutions which were crucial to preserve the running of civil society activity. This brought about the creation of a new civil society, one more closer to the project of *hindu rashtra* (Hindu nation) than to the older left-liberal welfarist project. Hence, it is not for this reason – the reason of challenging the consensus within the civil society – that radical Muslim politics can be understood as radical.

ment failed to spread among the largest segment of Muslim working classes – the industrial or the daily-wage workers. Once again, there turned out a wide chasm between the educated, politically articulate Muslim youth on one hand, and the labouring Muslim classes on the other.

It would be more appropriate to say that as a class, Muslim workers find themselves at greater proximity to their non-Muslim co-workers who work in the same establishments, frequently live in close vicinity in neighbouring colonies (or even the same colony), and have very little to cherish about citizenship, domicile, and property laws. Being Hindu or Muslim in such contexts is little more than a matter of occasional banter to deal with the boredom at work.

In fact, one can sense how working class Muslims are a problem for Imam's idea of radical Muslim politics. There is some tacit acknowledgement of working class Muslims in Imam's speech, and just one open reference. He writes that Muslims in India tended to be concentrated more in the towns and cities than in the rural parts. This meant that towns and cities in India, for Imam, have been centres for considerable Muslim hegemony, whereas the rural Muslims have faced a tough time dealing with Islamophobic mobilisations. There is an understanding among the educated classes since long that a Muslim middle-class has been largely absent. Imam's narrative seems to trudge along these lines, dismissing affluent Muslims as collaborators, while the rest belong to a uniform Muslim subjectivity.

Whether a Muslim middle class was absent or not in the past is a separate issue; it is no longer a valid claim today to state that there is no Muslim middle class. In suppressing the dynamic between small business holding and professional Muslims on one hand, and the working class Muslims with no permanent *thikana* (home and hearth) in cities, Imam achieves a Muslim subject which is uniform. Interestingly, the only time Imam mentions working class Muslims in his text is while referring to the issue of beef-eating,

acknowledge others (in such a climate)? What are the goals of radical Muslims? Do they see their cause as completely autonomous, or do they recognise other radical tendencies in their political ecosystem?

To also state our own position at the outset for clarity, we are interested in the emergence of radical global working class action in South Asia. If the nationalistic framework of organising political economy was already found at deathbed thirty years ago, we are living in a time where the fetters of the nation-state are rapidly becoming weaker today. While it is obvious that a global working class subjectivity is emerging in South Asia, its rootedness in ethnic identities, as well as the presence of ethnic discourse and local authority structures (fused in a "pluralistic" national identity) pose problems to radical self-organisation of working classes. It is from this concern that we approach radical Muslim politics.

Who are the "we" of radical Muslim politics?

Sharjeel Imam believes emphatically that the "we" of radical Muslim politics are the Muslims of India. Except for a handful of collaborators who either fled with the Muslim League or merged with the Congress, Imam sees a country full of Muslims who were left with no political leadership and were forced to accept the sovereignty of the next biggest political party, the Congress. "We are told that in 1946 Muslims voted for the Muslim league and the illusion is thus born that before that the Muslims voted for the congress. But the truth is that even in 1937 the Muslims did not vote for the congress. If you know anything about the elections, you must know that regional parties got votes everywhere... We never voted for congress unless partition happened and even then we only voted for them because we were forced to." On the one hand, Imam uses the "we" to refer to Muslims as a political bloc;

however, he also says, “If you know anything about the elections, you must know that regional parties got votes everywhere.”

Imam suggests that the Indian nation-state consolidated with the central hegemony of the Congress, a majoritarian Hindu party (and, we may add, the consolidation of business and landed class in large parts of India). On the other hand, the Muslim doppelganger, the Muslim League, established Pakistan with its central hegemony. In this consolidation of nationhood, the local, decentred blocs of Muslim power were uprooted and assimilated into the “nation” through paying homage to the Congress. This trend is further supported by Imam’s invoking the Deobandi vs. Barelvi school debates:

“Deobandi Ulema’s role in the national struggle has been greatly exaggerated by the congress. It is true that a large chunk went to them during Khilafat. It is astonishing that in the history that has been written in India, the role of the Barelvi Ulema is never talked about, except for mentioning that they are agents of the British. In one sentence, they do away with the Barelvi Ulema. Why? Because the Barelvis were against the Congress. They were always against the Congress, and they remained so till independence. They were not against Muslims. They did a lot for the community, they also held demonstrations, staged protests, distributed pamphlets, went to police stations and hospitals. When Muslims were attacked in 1946, they went door to door helping people. They were also doing what other movements and parties were doing. But because they are against the Congress, they are being told that they are British agents.”

For Imam, the true form of Muslim political justice would have been (and seems to be) in the growth of localised political blocs, as

Imam recounts in his speech how increasingly Muslims faced attacks from Hindu vigilante mobs from the 1890s onwards. The situation was particularly bad in rural parts, he says. Be it about cow protection, or about mingling in public spaces, Muslim *ulemas* increasingly came to understand who the “actual enemy” of Muslims was. His narration of these historical developments clearly come from – and add to – the sense of insecurity which many Muslims underwent throughout the last winter. However, this is all inside speak; the other appears as an enemy community; spaces are contested between percentages of Hindu and Muslim populations, and once again, there is no room for other kinds of solidarities or conflicts.

The working class as the ‘Other’ within Muslims

Contrast this with the experiences of workers returning back home from cities¹ recently, which became a flashpoint of collective action for many workers, irrespective of religion or language or region. These included large masses of non-Muslims and Muslims who were pit against the vagaries of capitalist society to return home by whatever meagre means they could find. What is interesting about this return home of workers is that it starts off rather immediately after the conflict around the CAA and NRC was settling down across most of India. Judging by reports, a large section of Muslim civil society also organised charity and aid to unemployed and returning workers once they began returning; however, there was no political response on part of radical Muslim politics to this situation. We have already noted how the anti-NRC/CAA move-

¹ For an account of this massive country-wide workers’ offensive, refer to this article <https://kaamsechhutti.home.blog/2020/06/02/little-strokes-big-oaks-recession-on-Kaam-Se-Chhutti>.

our crowd, which is what they have done for the past 70 years. The time has come when we make clear to non-Muslims that, if they sympathize with us, they should stand with us on our terms. If they can't do that, they are not our sympathizers."

These arguments are well grounded in the concerns raised by Imam. His contention has been that liberal centrists and leftists have forever "used Muslims" as a crowd. He wants to break the cycle. And truly, it could be a radical step if non-Muslims were to assert their resentment against the prevailing order by adopting the reviled symbols and chants of Muslims. However, such a solidarity could only come from a common cause. Imam wishes to arrange this effect by taking charge of his segment of research scholars on behalf of Muslims – in short, use the "non-Muslims" as his crowd. To be sure here, there are many "non-Muslims" who do not mind this (coming from the same liberal sensibility under attack), and we won't repeat the argument of leftists accusing Imam of communalising the issue. But there is no force in this sort of solidarity. The "non-Muslim" who stands by the Muslim here does so out of little concern for his or her own survival or interests, but out of guilt towards his more oppressed brother. Because there is nothing on the political agenda for the non-Muslims here. The entire exercise would be in the service of Muslim politics. Imam fails to see that this kind of instrumentalised liberal guilt has already been identified by the enemy, and fails to produce the effects he wants. Much more, it fails to create strength. A few sympathetic liberals who do not know what to say, do not have the will to retaliate will necessarily do more harm than good. This shows a cynicism within the class of academic researchers, in which politics becomes an instrumental calculus of who is more oppressed, a spectacle of guilt, rather than an attempt to find out together how our lives are connected, finding common goals, and so on.

opposed to its easy assimilation (through collaborators) into majoritarian politics. Imam invokes this original sin of the transfer of power in arguing that the Muslims have not only been cheated by the nation-state, but also by a section of their own leadership. A confederated collective of local Muslim leadership lies at the heart of Imam's idea of a radical Muslim "we." The reappearance of this radically autonomous "we" in today's situation is no doubt understandable. By invoking it, Imam is asking those Muslims who had hitherto organised themselves under the political consensus of the Congress bloc to abandon it once and for all, and assert their autonomous power. He acknowledges that with the assertion by Muslims of such autonomy, the present organisation of the nation-state would be overturned. For Imam, Muslims organising themselves in their true form is important as it alone can save them, and by extension save the country. If the Muslims fail to organise themselves, Imam argues, the unorganised form of the conflict will not only harm the Muslims terribly, it will also break the country.

There is one serious problem with Imam's arguments: they do not tell us about the position of the local Muslim organisations with respect to the wider Muslim "masses" (as he calls them). For example, his argument with the election results of 1937 and 1945 fails to mention that voting in 1937 was reserved to property owners and tax payers, whereas in 1945 it was limited merely to tax payers. While the involvement of the Bareilvi ulema in the political lives of the Muslims might be a reality, Imam fails to address why, if such a form of organisation was radical, did it not survive against the takeover by the Congress collaborators. Imam would no doubt argue that this is the hegemony of the majority consensus, but the question which arises there is how did a large number of Muslims turn towards such a consensus rather than their true form of political organisation? One has to take the advent of universal franchise – and its poster boy the Congress – more seriously to understand this. For example, what beliefs did the various ulemas and other

local organisations hold regarding universal adult franchise would be an important question to start from.

The point above is not to rubbish Imam's arguments. Rather, we seek to know what kind of organisational form does Muslim politics ground itself in, and if this radical Muslim "we" suffers from a class divide within it which cannot be left unaddressed. In South Asia, this question of the divide within is the only contradiction which challenges religious authority, and Imam's ideas about masses and their sensitisation continue to suggest how religious politics has still not found a way to surpass these problems.

The Split "We"

One of the problems which was evident during the Anti-CAA/NRC *rasta-jam* (highway blockade) at Shaheen Bagh was that the Muslim working class was more or less absent from it. Shaheen Bagh lies at a crucial spot, with Okhla Industrial Area lying barely 2kms to its West. It is surrounded by working class colonies in Okhla, Mohan Estate, as well as Badarpur. Madanpur Khadar, another working class locality, is not far away. NOIDA is just across from the bridge. All these places have a sizable number of Muslim workers. In the initial days itself, when the protest was a more local event, it was apparent that most of the people present were not strategically located in these industrial areas. The blockade would be relatively empty during the day, and would fill up only at night, suggesting that people there continued going to work. A friend who lives in Okhla remarked that if Muslim workers would have called a strike in support of Shaheen Bagh, boycotting their work, many factories of Okhla Industrial Area would be shut. Nothing of the sort was seen. A few workers we were in touch with told us that Muslim workers were discussing Shaheen Bagh and the legislations at work, but were reporting to work daily. A few Muslim workers along with a non-Muslim worker went to the protest site

500 Hindus will come to their support when there is an urgent requirement... non-Muslims chant Nara-e-Takbeer with us and stand there on our terms."

Radical Muslim politics emerged at a time when the Congress or nationalist consensus among the Muslims had splintered. It arose in the heart of the upwardly mobile Muslim youth, and sought to reorganise the Muslim middle-classes around it. In that sense, it was a negation of civil society. However, the fusion of the Muslim middle classes in the left-liberal civil society proved stronger and managed to suppress it for that moment at least. It is not hard to see how radical Muslim politics is at the peril of being marginalised even within the already marginalised civil society it seeks to negate. Its fate hangs low as an ideology without any grounding. Imam is aware of this. This is why he argues that if Muslims are unable to organise themselves, the unorganised response would be the end of India as a country (to be marked, not as a nation). This unorganised mass of Muslims cannot refer to those who are part of the civil society. It refers to those who have no vested interests in such a civil society, and we can surmise that this chiefly refers to the Muslim working class. However, Imam's universal Islam does not see class within the Muslim "we."

How does radical Muslim politics see others?

"If all we want is to save ourselves from being tagged communal, and it is not really the tag that matters, what matters is brutality, what matters is being alone and getting badly beaten up by the police. I am saying this because this communal tag thing was being talked about a lot in Delhi. In Delhi, our attempt has been to get a crowd together in which non-Muslims chant Nara-e-Takbeer with us and stand there on our terms. If they are not willing to accept our terms, then they are using us and

the entire system, the eruption of this politics also comes when the Muslim middle classes get anxious about citizenship, domicile, property rights, etc. In the course of this, Imam's confrontational politics too gets marginalised. Thus, the lack of participation of working class Muslims is not hard to understand.

Where does radical Muslim politics ground itself?

Imam is a PhD researcher. He holds a degree in Computer Science. Many of his comrades in action – “organisers” – were/are students and researchers at universities. He must have developed ties with community leaders at Shaheen Bagh (and other places) in the course of discussions, no matter if they broke eventually. The speech being quoted here was delivered to students of Aligarh Muslim University. This suggests that the articulation of radical Muslim politics is emerging from a section of educated, upwardly mobile cognitariat with social and cultural capital. But given how the same networks of organisers end up marginalising somebody like Imam suggests how such radical voices remain at the lower end of the bargain. Eventually, the tussle between radical and moderate at Shaheen Bagh resulted into a fight over who controls what happens with the blockade, and Imam was not only expelled, but his speeches were released, and he was arrested under charges of sedition.

Thus, radical Muslim politics tried grounding itself at the helm of “the Muslim community,” as its voice, but was displaced from it, soon to be replaced by a moderate politics backed by the left-liberal civil society and centrist politicians – the very forces Imam argued against. No doubt, it is a politics shaped in the anti-liberal milieu of identity assertion/intersectionality which increasingly holds sway in academic social science today. “We make a team of 500 Muslim scholars in Delhi,” Imam says in his speech, “and make sure that

on a Sunday (after the left-liberal civil society got involved and began with the routine of big spectacles) with some workers' newsletters; they were met with responses of officious solidarity by the organisers they spoke to.

This disjoint between radical Muslim politics and the concerns of large number of Muslim working class people can be seen often enough in Sharjeel Imam's statement of the problem. On the one hand, Imam recognises that large numbers among the masses have no “vested interests in the Indian system.” He is aware that the anger which spilled out at the time of the Anti-NRC/CAA protests was not as focused or articulate as the readership of left-liberal viewpoint assumed or claimed; it was more symptomatic, against a betrayal which they don't necessarily associate with facts like CAA or NRC, but perceive as beyond remedy in the present system. However, the split comes to the fore when Imam presents this symptomatic anger as one to be *informed* by the university scholar, and specifically the radical Muslim university scholar. The masses must be informed of the history of oppression of their people with dates and facts, things which they obviously would not know. Police brutality, army brutality must be explained through recounting tales of Muslims killed in other places.

Radical Muslim politics thus assumes for itself the task of rekindling a sense of innate brotherhood among Muslims *as Muslims*. This definitely challenges the nationalist advice to Muslims: “think as Indians;” but it falls into the trap of putting the radical masses under the tutelage of the scholar informing them about the truth (displaced in time and space) rather than appealing to their own immanent experiences and concerns. It also puts a question upon the form of political organisation: is Imam arguing now for a new pan-Indian Muslim political bloc? Needless to say, it sets arbitrary limits upon Muslim masses in perceiving which experiences must they feel solidarity with. Just the atrocities against Muslims? Imam's idea of radical politics presupposes a young *ulema* which is both sympathetic to the Muslim cause, but emerges from modern uni-

versities like Jamia and JNU in order to give direction to the anger of Muslim masses:

“Students have the responsibility to educate themselves and then to educate others. We shouldn’t waste our time sitting inside campuses. The same amount of time you take to sensitise 3 people inside the campus can be used to sensitise 3000 people among the masses. If you go to the masses and tell them that you neither want votes nor money, then the masses will listen to you, this I say from experience...”

“our history has been written by pandits (Hindu clergy/literate caste) and the time has come when we write our own history. It takes a lot of hard work to write history, you can’t just do it superficially. You have to research and write about the same thing ten times over for it to become a respectable thesis that can be accepted...”

“If you are a scholar, your responsibility is to be on the streets, not stay confined to the campus. If you are educated, it is your responsibility to educate the masses... The protest should be done in a manner in which all of us are able to use our energies and our skills to the fullest. We are scholars, we are young, we have energy. we can run, we can take a few blows of the lathi, we can take tear gas, you guys have done so much yourselves, a civil war happened here. We can write pamphlets, we can speak, we can make videos, we can edit videos, we can go door to door and argue with people, we can do all these things. A common man can’t do all this. A common man doesn’t even know what to say. We can argue. It is our job to get on the streets and argue with people and sensitize people. Our second job is to make a plan of action. The plan of action is not going to be the same for the whole of India.

Every neighbourhood needs its own plan of action. For example, a highway runs next to Shaheen Bagh. It was possible to convince the crowd to just keep sitting there and block the highway. In Delhi, over the last month, we have gathered a team of about 300 scholars from different fields who are ready and willing to take forward the plan of action we are discussing right now. It is your responsibility also that you join us. There can be many ideas, many strategies, but we need to have consensus about the fact that we have gathered to change the system. It is not a fight about Congress and BJP. It is not any party’s fight. This is a fight of oppressed minorities against the state and the system. We have to make an intellectual cell and I request you all to join that as well. Everyone should do whatever they can, based on their abilities. We have enough young people to cover the whole way from Delhi to Aligarh. We have to make a separate strategy for every locality regarding the most effective mode of protest to pressurize the state.”

Behind the sturdy zeal to do something is also a conviction that every locality and every Muslim subject is already part of the plan, if only the radical scholar went to the streets to talk to them. While understandably this was a moment of Muslim politics asserting itself, and was surely echoed all over India, particularly the urban centres, this expression leaves absolutely no room for any other goal but to assert oppressed Muslimhood against a majoritarian state. While strategy may vary as per each locality, the goal is assumed to be plain and simple as “the fight of the oppressed minorities against the state and the system.” That the “system” could mean forms of oppression which do not target one’s minority-ness, but rather one’s majority-ness as a working class is the most obvious slip up of this plan, as there could be no other ways in which the fight presents itself. As much as Imam’s criticism is directed against