

Delhi's Meatscapes: Cultural Politics of Meat in a Globalizing City

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Abstract

This article is located at the intersection of two distinct entry points—one, the development of Delhi as a global or world class city and two, the contested social location of meat in the city. Delhi is developing and is being projected as a world-class city with all the trappings of globalization which includes among other things state of art infrastructure, technologies, services and experiences. This development discourse is indeed a contested one and it is well-argued that urban transformations are beset with its own baggage of contradictions often resulting in marginalizing segments of its population. This article analyzes the construction of urban margins in contemporary globalizing Delhi through the lens of meat. Historical evidence shows that meat has been considered marginal to city spaces politically, spatially and socially. However, in the last two decades, the consumption, production, presentation and packaging of meat in India are in the throes of critical changes: in terms of technologies, geographies and actors. However, meat as a site is still beset with many tensions and contradictions which are located at the juncture between old and new forms of margin-making. Based on social and political contradictions regarding meat in India and specifically focusing on legal contestations and local activism around the relocation of the abattoir in Delhi, I argue that meat is a site around which margins are construed, transmitted and contested. Drawing from Appadurai, the article uses the concept of 'meatscapes' as a conceptual and linguistic tool to unravel the entangled reality of meat in Delhi.

Keywords

Cow slaughter, meat, margins, morality, urban spaces, food and dietary practices

Introduction

This article analyzes the construction of urban margins in contemporary globalizing Delhi through the lens of meat. Historical evidence shows that meat has been considered marginal to city spaces politically, spatially and socially. This sector has seen the emergence of new technologies, geographies and economies in the particularly in the post-liberalization period. However, meat as a site is still beset with many tensions and contradictions. Undoubtedly, this antagonism can be attributed to deep-set social and cultural imagination of meat in India. I look at meat as a marginal site in its different domains: social, cultural and political, and argue that while it is important to question the (il) legitimacy of meat within these parameters, it also poses further questions for understanding meat in its spatial domain where margins are constructed in a physical and tangible way. This article is therefore at the intersection of

globalizing and modernizing urban spaces and meat as a commodity of urban consumption.

Recent scholarship on what is referred to as the 'urban turn' has focused on how cities have emerged as arenas of conflict over urban spaces and resources in the wake of the 1991 neo-liberal reforms in India. Margins are created and are in fact inherent in urban policies and the activism(s) that surround it. Within these broad parameters, there is a rich body of literature which specifically and incisively analyzes urban margins through lenses of poverty (Motiram & Vakulabharanam, 2012), informality (Bhowmik, 2005; Bhowmik & More, 2001; Breman, 1996; Harriss, 2006) and religion (Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2012; Gayer & Mahajan, 2011). It is well-documented how middle-class activisms predominate contemporary urban public discourse in India (Anjaria, 2009; Baviskar, 2002; Fernandes, 2004, 2006; Srivastava, 2009). This often leads to an increasing control over urban populations which excludes and marginalizes

poor and informal sections (Harriss, 2006). Though the existing literature provides us with valuable insights and analytical categories in studying urban margins, the ways in which a section of the urban population is marginalized is more complex than merely what can be seen through the lenses of religion, poverty or informality. Our understanding, as Anjaria (2009, p. 404) suggests, ‘... might benefit from an expanded lens of who is excluded to include a focus on the particular kind of political imagination that produces these exclusions and to see what exactly is being contested’. Further, it would be relevant to understand the production of margins beyond the social and spatial. My effort in this article is to complicate the definition of margins and to include aspects of illegitimacy, morality, physical and symbolic pollution, and ‘othering’ in understanding margins. This article adds to the current discourse by an analysis of meat—its source, sale and consumption as a site for the production of urban margins. With the help of litigations around a meat shop and a *dhaba* (budget eating place), I further argue that while margins are constructed and maintained, they do not go uncontested.

I use the term ‘meatscapes’ as a conceptual and linguistic tool to explain and unravel the complexities of meat in contemporary Delhi. Through the use of this concept, my effort is to communicate and document the complex and dynamic landscape of meat. There is considerable diversity around meat which I try to unpack through the use of ‘meatscapes’. The concept owes its origin to Appadurai’s use of the term ‘scapes’. However the term ‘meatscapes’ as I use it, does not exactly derive from Appadurai’s five scapes (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes) which he delineates in his germinal work, *Modernity at Large: Cultural dimension of Globalization* (1996, p. 33). While Appadurai is concerned with the global political economy and the need for consideration of the shifting relationship between human movement, technological flow and financial transfers, the scope of meatscapes here sees the fluid context of meat in the cultural, political and urban context. Drawing from Appadurai, I would argue that ‘the suffix—scape allows us to point to the fluid irregular shapes of these landscapes ...’ (1997, p. 33). By working within the broader conceptual field of ‘scapes’ and drawing on the literature on urban transformations, my attempt is to analyze the production and contestation of margins around the site of meat.

The study draws on (i) court cases on buffalo meat in the Delhi High Court; (ii) documentation of activism around the abattoir in Idgah Delhi and its subsequent relocation to Ghazipur in East Delhi; (iii) my own participation

in related public events; (iv) ethnographic observation in meat shops and restaurants which particularly serve ‘beef’ and buffalo meat; and (v) conversations with a range of actors who work in the meat sector. I specifically draw upon this multi-sited data to highlight the complexity of meat in Delhi in all its different domains: source, sale and consumption. This article is divided into three sections. The first section discusses how meat is constitutive of margins and foregrounds the article in the pan-Indian practices and imagination around meat along three overlapping axes: social, cultural and political. The next section documents Delhi’s meatscapes in the colonial and post-colonial discourse. The third section analyzes the empirical data on how margins are being redrawn around the site of meat in contemporary Delhi.

Meat, Margins and Morality in the Everyday Context

Cow slaughter¹ is not permitted in most states in contemporary India, including Delhi. Instead of beef, buffalo meat is available and there is legally no issue regarding its sale and consumption. However, the complex morality around beef in all its domains translates to buffalo meat as well. The terms ‘buff’ and ‘beef’ are both used in popular parlance for buffalo meat. In this article, I use the term ‘meat’ broadly to refer to buffalo meat. I also draw on the larger questions on other meats, namely chicken and mutton. While the global discourse on meat is largely centred on the ecological aspects,² meat in the Indian context is far more polemical and complex. It carries with it multiple connotations: ecological, cultural, economic and political. It is fraught with many tensions and contradictions framed largely by the ethical debates around *ahimsa* (non-violence), caste and purity, environment and the cow as a sacred symbol. Though there are specific historical references to beef-eating in ancient India, the Vedic vegetarian tradition dominate the discourse on beef consumption in India. The history of beef-eating in India is abstruse³ yet polemical and divisive.

What one is permitted to eat, how to prepare it, when to eat it, how to exchange food are key questions in religious texts, anthropological literature and in common parlance. ‘Concerns about food abound in the Indian context—from village ethnographies to elite Sanskrit textual sources, to regional folk stories and even to urban middle-class India’ (Saunders, 2007, p. 212). Food transactions ‘... serve to regulate rank, reify roles, and signify privileges’ (Appadurai, 1981, p. 508). Khare (1992) locates

food as biological nutrition and as a cultural construct and argues that the two are inextricably linked. Food habits encode social structures and relationships and are an important key to understanding society. The food we eat defines caste, moral character, homeland and sectarian affiliation (Khare, 1992, p. 29). There are significant variations regarding the meaning of meat in different regions in India and within regions. Location in the caste hierarchy and consumption of meat are not always coterminous. For instance, Bengali Brahmins and Kashmiri Pandits are meat-eating communities. However, the dominant and overwhelming view links meat eating with lower caste ranking. The dominant discourse still privileges vegetarianism and places it at the top of the caste hierarchy followed by mutton eaters and beef or buffalo meat eaters who form the lowest rung of the pecking order.

Social boundaries are created around the site of meat. There is historical and sociological information which suggests that the very physical proximity of beef can amount to a loss of caste purity. One of the earliest cited sources of margin-making around the site of meat can be traced in Sunil Gangopadhyay's historical Bengali novel *Sei Somoy (Those Days)*. Gangopadhyay identifies Rabindranath Tagore's ancestry and narrates the story behind the Pirali Brahmin community which was based on beef. Around the 1450–1460s, two Brahmin brothers Jaydeb and Kamdeb inadvertently smelled beef being cooked in the mansion of 'Pir Ali'—a Brahmin converted to Islam. Based on the *shastras* (scriptures) which they had earlier quoted, (that smelling is as good as eating), the brothers lost their Brahmin status. Consequently, they converted and took on Muslim names Jamaluddin and Kamaluddin. The two other brothers Sukdeb⁴ and Ratideb who were not present during this event, also lost their caste status. Other Brahmins of the village refused to exchange food and water, or have marriage alliances with these two brothers and their families. Henceforth, they were referred to as 'Pirali' Brahmins (Gangopadhyay, 1991, pp. 96–97).

The taboo surrounding meat in India has not only found expression in caste hierarchies, but is also articulated in everyday contexts. Here, I cite some everyday examples to explicate how these engagements manifest themselves in myriad ways and to show that the moral and the social domains converge around the site of meat. The very use of the term 'non-veg' in the everyday discourse indicates the immorality and illegitimacy that meat carries. For instance, we often use the term 'non-veg' jokes to mean adult jokes with sexual overtones. Former cricket player and television commentator Ravi Shastri found himself at the receiving

end of a meat controversy in 2006 when he publicly expressed his taste for *biltong* (a South African dried beef preparation). The Bajrang Dal (an extreme Hindu Right organization), filed a case against Shastri for hurting the religious feelings of Hindus.⁵ Mani Shankar Aiyar, a Congress leader and minister, while endorsing his secular credentials was quoted saying, 'I am a Brahmin from Tanjore district, and yet I eat beef'.⁶ Aiyar, like Shastri was also severely reprimanded for this statement.⁷ Academics have not been spared in this margin-making either. Prominent Marxist historian R. S. Sharma's school textbook on ancient India in which he referred to India's beef-eating tradition was unsuccessfully sought to be banned by the post-emergency Janata Party government in 1977. D. N. Jha's *Myth of the Holy Cow* (2009) which argues that beef-eating in India was not a result of Muslim rule but a part of the cuisine of ancient India, faced a worse fate. Some right-wing politicians termed the book as blasphemous and managed to get a stay order from the court as a result of which the book had to be withdrawn. The book was later published by Verso (London) in 2002 and its first Indian edition came out seven years later (Jha, 2009, p. xi). The author also received death threats.

'Are you vegetarian or non-vegetarian?' is a common question in the context of urban housing in Delhi and most Indian cities. Straying a bit from the main theme of the article, it would be relevant to add two more points. One, subtle mechanisms of pushing the good, clean, *satvik* (vegetarian), non-alcoholic ways of life abound in the everyday context. Two, located in a particular social, political and class dimension, there is significant mobilization against meat consumption within the ecological and animals' rights framework. Though not all of it should be observed with a critical eye, the upper class, upper caste Hindu way of life, usually a sub-text in these positions, cannot be overlooked either. The convergence of dietary practices with moral, social and spatial boundaries in the everyday is worth considering and might benefit from being read in the context of its ideological underpinnings and agenda.

Meat is deeply entangled with the politics of identity, nationalism and popular democracy in India. The terrain of past and contemporary Indian politics is replete with instances where meat has been invoked as an emotive and politically sensitive lever in order to mobilize and create political constituencies. The first war of independence in 1857 bears testimony to this fact. Apart from the larger politics of the time, Indian sepoy—both Hindus and Muslims—revolted because of the rumour that the new

batch of cartridges which they had to undo with their mouth was lined with beef and pork fat.

The Gaurakshini Sabha (cow protection committee), started by Dayanand Saraswati of the Arya Samaj in 1882, was one of the most potent markers of the Hindu revivalist movements in the nineteenth century and provoked a series of communal riots in the 1880s and 1890s.⁸ The issue of cow slaughter was comprehensively discussed during constitutional debates. Finally, the subject was accommodated in the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV of the Constitution. But this questions the very basis of constitutional secularism. Chigateri (2011) argues that the juridical discourse on cow slaughter was predicated along an economic and ecological understanding of the cow in a predominantly agrarian economy while simultaneously masking the prioritizing of a dominant caste-Hindu ideology. In the immediate post-Independence period, cow slaughter was banned in most states through a series of judicial acts. At present, most states with the exception of West Bengal, Kerala and some of the states in the north-east prohibit cow slaughter. The subject has remained a fertile electoral issue in post-colonial India and a trigger for communal violence. In August 2013, there was a riot in Indore city, because of a cow carcass. These instances indicate the complex social and political location of meat in India. Meat is invoked in electoral politics in creating constituencies, playing up identity and polarizing debates. Meat has a direct relevance on electoral politics in India. Meat is a site where identities are negotiated, and morality is asserted or divested.

Delhi's Meatscapes

Meat as a commodity for urban consumption in contemporary Delhi draws upon colonial urban concerns related to health, hygiene and sanitation.⁹ The urban context of meat in colonial Delhi in turn was broadly an extension of the hygiene and animal rights concerns in Europe and the United States. Starting from France (Muller, 2008) and the packing houses of Chicago, these debates focused on spaces of slaughter, the presentation and packaging of meat, and animal rights. The stench, the noise and the blood needed to be consigned to other spaces to ensure that all signs of its bloody and brutal origin had to be destroyed or cleaned.¹⁰ Through the establishment of a municipal committee for Delhi in 1863, the colonial administration focused on hygiene and sanitation in the abattoir and meat shops. All unclean occupations and neighbourhoods in the

city were confined or pushed to city margins or beyond (Sharan, 2006). Some of the principles that govern the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) rules on meat shops are directly related to colonial urban planning. The construction of a common municipal abattoir for slaughter of animals for meat consumption in the early part of the nineteenth century (functional until 2009) and which I will discuss later, was a product of colonial urbanization in Delhi. Also important to note is that the mandatory requirement for a meat-shop licence, which came into effect in 1904, is applicable even now.

Meat in its Different Contexts in Contemporary Delhi

Chicken, mutton, buffalo meat, fish, pork and sometimes eggs are the main foods categorized by the generic term 'non-vegetarian food' in India. Beef, that is, cow meat is not sold in Delhi as per the Delhi Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act 1994. Chicken is the highest consumed meat in Delhi followed by mutton and buffalo meat. According to the 66th round of household level consumption data provided by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) India, Delhiites consume 0.096 kilograms chicken per month, per member, per household. They consume 0.039 kilograms of mutton and 0.025 kilograms buffalo meat in the same parameter. This is below the national average and way below the consumption in Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh—the states which show the highest consumption of non-vegetarian diets. Within the religion sub-set of the NSSO data, Muslims are the highest consumers of buffalo meat in Delhi.¹¹

There are three main sites of meat: the source (abattoir), the point of sale (shop) and the place of public consumption (restaurants). The abattoir is the central workplace where livestock is transformed from an animal to a commodity. The Idgah abattoir was constructed by the colonial government in the early part of the last century, and was operational from 1914 to 2009. The MCD owned the space and also provided water, electricity and maintenance of the space (which includes the salaries of the veterinary doctors and cleaning staff). Until 2009, work in the abattoir was done manually. The butchers in the abattoir have a licence issued by the MCD which they are obliged to show if demanded by the officials in the abattoir. Since the end of 2009, this workplace has been modernized, mechanized and relocated to Ghazipur,¹² located on the eastern fringes

of Delhi, about 20 km from the Idgah. The space is still owned by the MCD, but it is leased out to a private firm. So the workers and meat shop owners now approach the workplace through the firm.¹³

From a commodity that was sold door-to-door in the early colonial period to the stylish meat kiosks in high-end shopping malls, world-class Delhi's meatscapes are changing.¹⁴ Meat shops in contemporary Delhi exhibit considerable diversity in terms of their social and economic locations despite a common requirement for all meat shops to have a licence issued by the municipal authority. Buffalo meat shops also have to provide a 'no objection certificate' from the nearest police station. For the purpose of this article, I elaborate upon a broad typology of meat shops in Delhi, based on my field research. I have used the following parameters: location, presentation and decor of shop, ownership (self-managed or managed by employees), price, packaging and range of products (Indian or imported) available to categorize meat shops. The four aggregations are high-end, rich, self-sufficient and poor. The first category includes high-end exclusive meat shops. They are located in extremely well-heeled neighbourhoods like Khan Market and Vasant Vihar in central and south Delhi and meat kiosks in shopping malls. These shops are a new addition to Delhi's meatscapes and opened in the last few years. The shops are often managed by paid employees comprising a manager-cum-cashier (who often does not touch raw meat) at the main counter and a few skilled butchers who do the cutting and dressing. These shops sell chicken, mutton (which includes both goat and sheep meat), fish, dressed meats based on specific cuts, frozen meats, imported pork products, spices and semi-cooked meat products. Importantly, these shops do not sell beef, buffalo meat or its products.

The second category includes well-heeled meat shops also in fairly up-market or upper middle-class neighbourhoods like East of Kailash and Hauz Khas in central and South Delhi. They are traditional meat shops which were granted licence as the neighbourhoods were being set up, but which have upgraded the decor, the range of products and presentation as these localities gained in affluence. The owner still manages the shop and even cuts and dresses meat when necessary. These shops deal exclusively with mutton, chicken (and sometimes fish), some marinated meats and spices. The third category includes what I identify as self-sufficient shops which exclusively sell either mutton and/or chicken. The neighbourhoods range from Lajpat Nagar and Sarita Vihar in South Delhi to Uttam Nagar and Naraina in West Delhi. The location,

presentation and clientele and average sale of the shops is basic and they are often self-owned and managed. The lowest category in this spectrum includes roadside chicken shops and buffalo meat shops in poor neighbourhoods. These shops generally sell only chicken or buffalo meat and are located in poor neighbourhoods which have a predominantly lower class Muslim population. These shops have very basic infrastructure, are not air-conditioned and do not sell any other related products like spices, and marinated or frozen meats. Some of the roadside chicken stalls are run by Muslim youth from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They do not have an MCD licence. Apart from these shops, some Dalit women from the neighbouring state of Rajasthan also sell animal parts (heads, hooves and offals). Their clientele—often the poorest sections include Dalit and caste-Hindu labourers and construction workers.

There are specific caste and religious strictures regarding meat which further categorize mutton shops into *halal* and *jhatka* shops (it is prominently displayed in the shop which kind of shop it is). *Halal* is the process of slaughtering as per the Islamic Shariat and is also referred to as *Zibah* and *Zabiha*. The *jhatka* method is the preferred process of slaughtering for Hindus and a mandatory requirement for Sikhs. People who work in the meat sector at the different levels include merchants, self-sufficient shop owners and skilled and unskilled labourers. Traditionally, the slaughter of animals and sale of meat has been the preserve of Dalit Khatik Hindus and Qureshi Muslims (included among Muslim Other Backward Castes (OBCs)). In recent times, the social profile of these actors is changing. Muslims who are not Qureshi and upper caste Hindus have also entered this occupation as managers and owners. The two high-end meat shops I categorized earlier are both owned by caste-Hindus. At the level of sale and slaughter, some Muslim youth from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, have also set up makeshift chicken shops in the city or work as helpers in meat shops.

There is a wide variety of restaurants where meat is served, catering to different classes and income groups. However, beef is served in select places only: in the extremely high-end restaurants or five-star hotels which serve international cuisine. The 'beef' used in these restaurants is imported or claimed to be imported from Australia and New Zealand. The other category comprises low-end neighbourhoods with a substantial Muslim population. Even middle-end Muslim-owned and managed restaurants do not serve buffalo meat in order to retain a Hindu clientele. It is not uncommon to see restaurants displaying a 'no beef' placard across cities in India. Some restaurants

serve buffalo meat but do not specify it in the menu. Also, many restaurants in Delhi which serve chicken and mutton remove these items from their menu during the biennial Navratra festival while some restaurants and mutton chicken outlets shut shop during the entire nine-day period.

Buffalo meat consumption is also based on religion and income. The 66th round of NSSO data (July 2009 to June 2010) of household level consumption indicates that Muslims (and Christians) are the highest consumers of buffalo meat. Since buffalo meat priced at INR 130 per kilogram (approximately 2.3 US dollars) costs half the price of mutton (INR 280 per kilogram or roughly 4.8 US dollars), it is often consumed by the lowest economic categories. Chicken is also affordable non-vegetarian food (ranging between INR 150 to 200 per kilogram, roughly 3–4 US dollars). However, chicken prices are dynamic. Further chicken is lean meat and needs more cooking medium. Hence, buffalo meat is the most affordable source of protein and needs less cooking medium due to the fat content. Further, my ethnographic data indicates that upper class and upper-middle class Muslim families rarely consume buffalo meat and the latter is rarely on the menu in high-end Muslim weddings.

The Politics of Meat in a Globalizing City: The Meat Shop, the *Dhaba* and the Abattoir

In this section, I draw upon two litigations, one regarding a buffalo meat shop and the other pertaining to a *dhaba*¹⁵ to discuss how the discourse of meat shapes urban dynamics in Delhi. Further, I elaborate upon the conflict around the relocation of the Idgah abattoir to Ghazipur to situate meat as a contested site in Delhi.

The Meat Shop and the Dhaba

Mohammad Sahim was granted licence for a buffalo meat shop in the Uttam Nagar neighbourhood of West Delhi on 31 May 2000. However, soon after, the MCD (based on the recommendation of the Deputy Commissioner of Police), issued him a show cause notice to revoke his licence. The rationale behind the notice was based on a complaint filed by 150 local residents, who had objected to the meat shop, citing that it was located within 100 metres' radius of a Hanuman temple; a closer perusal of the court case.¹⁶

Momina Qureshi had been running a *dhaba* with her family at F-218, Lado Sarai, Mehrauli, South Delhi. The *dhaba* was registered with the MCD since 1994. In June 2000, Momina was served a show cause notice-cum-order by the MCD which rejected her registration on the following grounds: 'preparing buffalo's meat opposite religious temple under insanitary conditions and without licence' (sic).¹⁷ She was also directed to close her *dhaba* within three days failing which action was proposed to be taken under the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act for sealing the premise. Momina approached the High Court. Her case brings forth four facts: First, residents complained that her *dhaba* was located opposite the Kali Temple. Second, she was serving raw and baked meat (which was subsequently proved to be incorrect in the court). Third, the photograph of the plaque at the temple confirmed that Shri Sidhi Nath Kali Temple was inaugurated on 22 January 1999, that is, approximately five years after the *dhaba*. Fourth, the temple was constructed on Delhi Development Authority (DDA) land, indicating that the temple itself constituted an encroachment.

These cases offer several insights into understanding the larger discourse of urban margins around the site of meat in contemporary Delhi. To start on a positive note, both Sahim and Momina won their respective court cases and were able to restore their businesses and livelihoods. Their cases exemplify successful attempts at (re)claiming spaces which shows that while margins are being constructed, they are also being successfully contested.¹⁸ Now I discuss some of the finer points of these cases which indicate the ways in which boundaries and margins are being constructed/reconstructed around meat in Delhi. Both cases draw attention to the use of meat as a site in drawing multiple boundaries along various axes: hygiene, morality, legality, religion, violence and pollution which were raised against the meat shop and the *dhaba*.

Legality

The language of (ill)legality was used in both cases and their establishments were rendered illegal. In Sahim's case, his shop was supposedly causing a 'law and order' problem. The case of the *dhaba*, shows that it was the temple that was an encroachment on public land and not the *dhaba*. While the framework of legality was used to shut both establishments, it was proved that not only was the framework erroneously used by the state but the local police itself was unaware in Sahim's case (the mandatory distance

between a temple and meat shop) was itself unaware of legal procedures regarding the site of meat shops, specifically the requirement that a certain distance be maintained between a meat shop and a temple.

Hygiene and Sanitation

One of the complaints against the *dhaba* was the fact that Momina was selling raw meat under 'unsanitary conditions'. I am tempted here to draw parallels with Anjaria's term *bahar ka khana* (2004, pp. 396–397) or outside food, which is considered a symbolic transgression as against 'pure and controlled' home food. Though the argument against the *dhaba* is predicated along the lines of hygiene and sanitation, it is not just the physical nature of the impurity or contamination of the food served in her *dhaba* that was disturbing to those who protested, (because they in all likelihood would not even have tasted her food) but the fact that meat constitutes (borrowing once again from Anjaria, 2004, pp. 396–397), a 'spatial and symbolic transgression'.

Illegitimacy/Immorality of Meat

The above avenues of margin-making bring me to the third point. Why were the police and the municipal authority in such a hurry to pass orders for closure of the establishments without in-depth scrutiny of the cases? It could very well be argued that the representatives of the state were corrupt, ill-informed or biased. But this arbitrariness could also be attributed to the immorality and illegitimacy that is associated with meat, which I have referred to in the section on meat, margins and morality. Moral aversions to meat are so deeply embedded, that the police who investigated the case and the municipal body which passed the orders for closure did not consider it necessary to view the merits of the case.

Meat: Cutting Across Class-lines

Considering that the location of Sahim and Momina's outlet in Lado Sarai and Uttam Nagar were not in high-end,¹⁹ neighbourhoods indicates that margin-making around meat is not confined to elite or upper middle class imaginations of the city. Based on public objections to these cases, I argue that meat in India is a deeply divisive site and cuts across class lines.

Meat Margins and Religion

The historical, cultural and political context of beef is invariably associated with Muslims.²⁰ The immediate cause of contention and objections against the *dhaba* and the meat shop emanated from their vicinity to different temples and the social protests and aversion toward the site of meats. This indicates that meats serve to re-inscribe religious differences. Here, I would like to go back to an earlier point about protests, threats, litigation and public criticisms against celebrities and scholars regarding their distinct articulations about beef-eating. It is politically and culturally important for the Hindu right to maintain this historical imagination and association of meat with Muslims which serves as a margin between Hindus and Muslims. Hence there were protests and threats against historians who argue that beef-eating was not a result of Muslim rule but a part of the cuisine of ancient India or caste Hindu celebrities who expressed their preference for beef.

Spatial and Symbolic Pollution

I further complicate the above argument by drawing specific attention to Momina's *dhaba* which is located in the vicinity of the Kali temple. Maa Kali is the primordial Mother Goddess in the Hindu pantheon and is regarded as a warrior Goddess. Kali is traditionally worshipped with *bali* (animal sacrifice) and offerings of blood (in a skull), meat and liquor. Uncastrated male animals like bulls, buffaloes, goats, chicken and pigs were traditionally sacrificed as part of Kali worship. This system is now restricted mainly to goats and chicken though bull sacrifice is still prevalent in Uttarakhand state in India (and Nepal).²¹ *Bali* is also offered to Goddess Durga who is regarded as an incarnation of Kali. Animal sacrifice is still prevalent in various parts of India particularly during Durga Puja and Kali Puja festivals and as offerings in Kali temples like Kalighat in Calcutta throughout the year. The objection to the existence of a *dhaba* serving buffalo meat in the vicinity of a Kali temple is, therefore, more complex than the issue of ritual or pollution emanating from buffalo meat. Quoting a recent example from Patna, in October 2012 further illustrates this point, when the district magistrate was questioned regarding animal sacrifice in the city during Durga Puja, he replied, 'We have received no complaints' (*Times of India*, 2012).²² One may argue that meat margins can be porous and may change according to 'who' slaughters and consumes, and not just the polluting value of meat.

The Abattoir

The abattoir is another place where boundaries are being redrawn albeit at a different level. The Idgah abattoir has been a locus of activity for the MCD, environmentalists, local activists, the judiciary, and those working in the meat industry, particularly the butchers. Relocating the Idgah abattoir was first proposed but not implemented by the colonial administration in 1939–1940.²³ In the post-colonial period, the 1962 Master Plan of Delhi envisaged that obnoxious trades like pottery, tanning and slaughtering should be located outside the city. The issue gained momentum in the 1990s through the combined and sometimes overlapping concerns of health and hygiene and Hindutva agenda and a proactive judiciary. Mohammed Iqbal Qureshi, a butcher from Idgah, first filed a civil writ petition (CW no. 2267 of 1990) in the Delhi High Court as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) 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 organizations including Shri Sanatan Dharma Sabha (Hari Mandir) situated in Nabi Karim area close to the abattoir asking for ‘closure and removal’ of the slaughter house because it was a ‘health hazard’ and ‘nuisance’. In its judgement on 18 March, 1992, the court ordered closure of the slaughter house.²⁴ However, if the abattoir continued operations for some time then there should be a substantial reduction in the number of animals slaughtered. The High Court in its judgement on all three petitions directed the MCD to close the abattoir with effect from 31 December 1993. The court observed, ‘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’ (Jain, 1994, p. 2). The court also appointed a commission headed by Justice J. D. Jain and C. K. Chaturvedi to look into the working of the Idgah abattoir. The abattoir issue came to the fore again in July 2004 when the Supreme Court ordered its relocation to Ghazipur.

A perfunctory reading of the Idgah relocation could indicate that it was a case of immense and unprecedented population growth in the metropolis resulting in an increased demand for meat. The demand for meat outpaced the 90-year old infrastructure, requiring, as a result, expansion, relocation and modernization of the same. The secular language of ‘health hazard’, ‘public nuisance’, ‘congestion’, ‘pollution’, etc. were used in all the above litigations (even the case filed by the Sanatan temple).

However, a closer look at the Commission’s report on the issue and the fierce protest and furore (that followed the Supreme Court order, 2004) against the abattoir lead one to question the legitimacy of this seemingly secular discourse. To start with, the formation of a committee headed by two people—a Jain and a Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh—both in all likelihood vegetarians is a travesty of justice. There were ideological differences within the panel and consequently it split into two. Three of the six expert members refused to sign the final report. They wrote a note of dissension (also filed in the report), asserting Justice Jain’s biased views. I quote two excerpts from the report which the (dissenting) expert members of the Jain Commission wrote:

At one point when the question was raised that a large number of poor people were being unemployed, the Chairman made a statement that Muslims created problems anyway as they were multiplying at a faster rate than others. He was immediately corrected by a member who pointed out that the non-Muslim population in the same income and literacy bracket was multiplying at the same rate or even perhaps faster as has been proven by the facts. This further reflected prejudiced thinking of the Chairman and his assumption that only people of one community were meat consumers and butchers. Therefore it was again pointed out to him that 70–80% of meat consumers in Delhi were not Muslims and that a good number of butchers were also non-Muslims.²⁵

This place was out of Delhi city at one time, but now it has come in the middle of the city as unplanned growth has been permitted around it. Even a temple and two schools have been allowed to be constructed next to the abattoir subsequently. It may be pointed out that even in the case of preventing depletion of the ozone layer as a result of the use of chloro-fluro-carbons (CFC) adequate time has been given by the UN Conference on Environment to its users up to 2000 AD (sic). Then why is the Delhi High Court in such an unreasonable hurry overlooking all human and consumer considerations in case of a slaughter house which has much less of the far-reaching consequences than CFC.²⁶

These extracts from the Jain Commission report explicitly point towards the bias shown by the head of the expert committee. The first instance clearly shows the religious discrimination against Muslims. In the second instance there is a broad secular reference to hygiene and sanitation concerns, but the sub-text indicates that this seemingly secular discourse is not innocent and probably a window dressing for deep-rooted religious biases. Further, drawing from the long and chequered account of protests that ensued between the Supreme Court order of July 2004 to 2009 (when the abattoir was finally moved), I will further explicate the point that I made earlier—meat is

a site for margin-making in a putatively secular society. During these five years, there were fierce protests from private individuals and a newly created local organization in Ghazipur called the *Butcherkhana Virodhi Manch* (Platform to Oppose the Abattoir). Members of the BVM demonstrated outside the Municipal Commissioner's residence and irate protesters even threatened to slaughter animals at his doorstep.²⁷

Parallel to the activities of the BVM, there were other avenues to avoid the construction of a new abattoir. Air Commodore G.R. Prasad filed a suit that the abattoir was located within 10 km radius of the Hindon Airbase. He argued that the abattoir would attract birds and hence endanger aircraft operation. The bench took strong exception to the affidavit and showed photographs of the Ghazipur landfill site which was being used as a dumping ground where thousands of birds were hovering. Moreover, the Director General of Civil Aviation had given permission for the construction. In another instance, Air Chief Marshal Krishnaswamy wrote to the Delhi Chief Minister, opposing the construction of the abattoir in Ghazipur close to the Hindon Airbase. He asserted that the abattoir would attract birds and affect flights at the Hindon Airbase. But the MCD Commissioner replied that the abattoir would be a completely covered unit and would not attract birds or affect flights. Interestingly, the landfill site which predates the abattoir actually attracts scavenger birds of all kinds.²⁸ It is worth noting that most of the activism discussed above happened after the 2004 Supreme Court order to shift the abattoir to Ghazipur, by which time the wholesale chicken, vegetable and fish market were already relocated to Ghazipur. But most of the activism happened after the 2004 Supreme Court order to shift the abattoir to Ghazipur. Furthermore, Air Chief Marshal Krishnaswamy asserted that the abattoir would attract birds and affect flights at the Hindon Airbase. But the landfill site which predates the abattoir attracts scavenger birds of all kinds.²⁹

At a practical level, the policies and activism around meat in Delhi were contradictory: relocating an abattoir near a landfill site defeats the purpose of health and hygiene. Cows dying in cow shelters (*Dainik Bhaskar*, 2011; *The Hindu*, 2012) and roaming the streets of Delhi and chewing plastic bags does not speak much for cow-protection.³⁰ According to local residents land prices depreciated in Ghazipur when the abattoir site was finalized which also indicates the deep-rooted aversion to the site of meat. Meat is opposed and marginalized in all its different sites—at the source, the point of sale and consumption. These imagined hygiene and environmental

concerns around meat provides insights into how meat is a site in drawing margins and segregating sections of Delhi's urban population (Muslims) using the language of environment, legality, law and order.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the city's meatscapes, I have analyzed the production and contestations of urban margins in contemporary Delhi. While world-class Delhi is experimenting with *haute* cuisine and fine-dining, and modern high-end shops are being set up in elite neighbourhoods of the city, buffalo meat in all remains an entangled site. Historically, margins around meat have been anchored in notions of caste, pollution and religion. Meat has been a site of relegation, socially and spatially. Slaughter, sale and often meat consumption has been traditionally associated with Dalits and Muslims. Even amongst Muslims, the OBC Qureshis or Kasais slaughter animals and sell meat. The ritual pollution around meat is said to have been so strong for Brahmin Hindus that not only the site, even the smell could lead to a loss of caste status. It is not surprising then that the palpable political sensitivity of beef and cow-slaughter in the Indian political and social terrain has remained critical in marking meat-margins. Meat is a site where identities are negotiated, and morality is asserted or divested. Meat is a potent marker of creating and maintaining boundaries in all its different contexts—social, spatial and political. The article has shown that the status of meat as a margin in the social, political and everyday domains is germane to the urban landscape.

However, Delhi's meatscapes are changing. Old spaces, actors and skills are withdrawing from the frame. There is new vigour and activity in the meat sector which has served to expand the number of places, locations and opportunities that it offers. There are new geographies, new technologies and new actors. The new dynamism and visibility of meat has led to new contexts which are anchored in animal rights, environment, health, hygiene and legal concerns. Nonetheless, meat is still beset with many of the old tensions and contradictions which remain anchored in the old arguments pertaining to class, caste, physical and ritual pollution, religion and morality. The new and old forms of margin-making are not water-tight compartments and draw upon each other in complex and myriad ways. More specifically, the new activism(s) around the site of meat appear to speak a secular language but a closer analysis reveals further complexities and deep-rooted

aversions. However, the article has also shown that whilst meat margins are either intact or being redrawn, they are also being negotiated and sometimes successfully contested in contemporary Delhi.

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Notes

1. The Delhi Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act 1994 bans the slaughter of cows of all ages, calves of cows of all ages, bulls and bullocks. The 1994 Act replaced the Uttar Pradesh Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act 1955 (Act No.1 of 1956).
2. The global discourse on meat locates itself in the parameters of the ecological footprint of the meat industry. Their arguments centre around two main concerns: depletion of forests to feed the livestock sector and unethical and relentless killing of animals. See, for instances, Emel and Neo (2011) and Wolch and Emel (1998).
3. For a discussion on the practice of beef consumption in ancient India, see Jha (2009).
4. Rabindranath Tagore's family draws lineage from Sukdeb. Gangopadhyay writes in the second volume *Prothom Alo* (First Light) that Pirali Brahmin status was one of the reasons why it was difficult for Tagore boys to find eligible Brahmin brides even three centuries later.
5. A case was filed under Section 295 (A) and 298 (A) (deliberate and malicious words and acts intended to outrage religious feelings) of the Indian Penal Code. http://zeenews.india.com/news/sports/case-filed-against-ravi-shastri-for-eating-beef_343792.html accessed on 21 May 2013.
6. Vembu (2012).
7. For details, see S. Gurumurthy (2004).
8. See, for instance, Blom-Hansen, Thomas (1999) and Jones (2007).
9. Cow slaughter was also a politically sensitive subject for the colonial administration as well as the indigenous ruling elite. See Gupta, N. (2002, p. 10).
10. See, for instance, Brantz (2005).
11. The NSSO is considered to be the most-reliable and scientific statistical consumption level data in the country. However, the total number of respondents in Delhi for the NSSO is just about 900 households. So the data may not give a very accurate picture of the consumption variance within caste, class and religious categories in the state.
12. Ghazipur is an eastern suburb of Delhi located at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border. Initially a village mainly comprising farmlands, it is now urbanized and most of the land (roughly 70–80 acres) has been acquired by the Delhi government. The Patparganj depot, the fish and chicken wholesale markets, dairy farms and the Ghaziabad highway abattoir have been constructed here. Housing societies have come up in the remaining area particularly since the Delhi Metro Railway Corporation announced its plans to extend the metro line up to Vaishali in Ghaziabad.
13. For details on the relocation of the Idgah abattoir and workers' protests against this, see Ahmad (2013).
14. The ministry of Food Processing Industries of the government of India has also proposed and is gradually implementing the modernization of abattoirs and meat shops across India.
15. A *dhaba* is a diner or a truck stop common on highways across India loosely used to categorize budget eating places. The food is cheap and infrastructure and services are very basic. The Oxford dictionary defines a *dhaba* as a roadside eating stall. But unlike roadside eating stalls, a *dhaba* is often registered with the municipality.
16. Details of the case and judgement of Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw; *Md Sahim vs MCD and Another W.P.(C) no.4235/2010*, 18 October 2010, is available at <http://www.indiankanoon.org/doc/1848831/> accessed on 31 March 2013.
17. Details of the judgement of Justice Manmohan Sarin in *Momina Qureshi vs N.C.T. Of Delhi and Others* on 18 September 2000, are available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1540560/> accessed on 31 March 2013.
18. However, it would be disingenuous to say that all such cases have met with success. There are many who do not have the economic wherewithal, family support or resourcefulness to fight long-drawn court cases.
19. I categorize neighbourhoods on the basis of real estate prices and observation.
20. It has historical and political associations with Dalits as well and this was a major issue in 2012 in Osmania University, when Dalit students decided to cook beef on campus on Ambedkar Jayanti as a mark of Dalit reassertion.
21. Radhika Govindarajan, 'Blood Death and Love: Animal Sacrifice and the Politics of Cultural Difference in Central Himalayas', lecture in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, 20 July 2012.
22. For details, see *Times of India*, Patna edition (2012), 'Animal Sacrifice still in vogue', 23 October.
23. Official communication of the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Delhi Archives, File no 2(34), 1940.
24. For details, see Jain (1994, p. 4).
25. Jain (1994, p. 75).
26. Jain (1994, p. 77).
27. Ethnographic data collected during conversations with butchers and a range of actors in Qasabpura, the butchers' oldest existing residential neighbourhood in Delhi, Idgah abattoir and Ghazipur between January 2007 and December 2011.
28. For details, see Gupta, R. (2001).
29. Ethnographic data collected during conversations with butchers and a range of actors in Qasabpura, the butchers' oldest existing residential neighbourhood in Delhi, Idgah abattoir and Ghazipur between January 2007 and December 2011.
30. *The Hindu*, New Delhi (2012), '23 Cows Die in Gaushalas within 48 Hours', 12 September. See also *Dainik Bhaskar*, New Delhi (2011), '46,000 stray cattle dead in MCD managed *gaushalas*', 11 September.

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