EXCURSUS

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MUSLIMS IN INDIA

Given the fact that Partition has caused considerable socio-economic dislocations and socio-psychological problems at the individual as well as collective level—not to speak of the extreme political effects of migration—, one might have thought of a variety of forthcoming academic enquiries into the social structure of Muslims in India, be it just for the sake of academic curiosity or for nagging political purposes. Yet this topic—despite of its being a crucial point, especially after its chequered history—did not find much interest in academia or in political discussions for many years. This is even more striking in that deep-rooted reciprocities had evolved between the carriers of the diverse Muslim and Hindu cultures after more than one thousand years of social, cultural, religious and political cohabitation. As has been shown in preceding chapters, the interaction between minorities and majorities indeed left profound traces of mutuality as far as religiously interpreted group-building processes are concerned. They can be retraced in a variety of forms of cultural articulation when religion becomes a linguistic and symbolic expression of minority-majority conflicts. By contrast, independent India is commonly perceived as a land of Hinduism alone, though overlapping semantics are obvious when it comes to central identity markers: the foundation stone of Qutub Minar, the highest brick minaret in the world, was laid by the first Sultan of Delhi, Qutb al-Din Aybak (died 1210) in 1193, and was completed during Firoz Shah Tughlaq’s rule in 1368. The Taj Mahal, awe-inspiring through its timelessness and built by the fifth Mughal emperor Shahjahan (1592–1666), is probably more popular as an Indian landmark than any Hindu Mandala amongst foreigners. However, a few scholarly works on Muslims in independent India have come done to us so far, most of them by cultural and social anthropologists; a smaller number was commissioned by the government. Therefore, a detailed ethnographic study of the variety of Muslim cultural articulations in independent India is not available, so that in the following it is attempted to give a broad overview of the social and religious complexities of Muslims, their composition and distribution, an overview that will nec-
The social structure of Muslims in India

The composition of Indian Muslim Society—the quantitative aspect

The major part of the world’s Muslim population today lives in the large countries of South Asia, e.g., Pakistan, India, Bangladesh. This population amounts to three times that of the Arab Middle East, and accounts for more than one third of the total Muslim world population. To be precise, in 1991 the number of Indian Muslims amounted to more than 120 million, and 140 million by the end of the millennium. This makes up about 12% of the contemporary Indian population. In contrast, the share of Indian Christians and other religious communities is negligible.

According to demographical estimates in late 1980s, Muslims in India are spread nearly all over the federal territory; they range from a high concentration of approx. 75% in Jammu and Kashmir, and approx. 27% in West Bihar and Assam, up to the lowest marker of 1% in Orissa.

In regions showing a proportionately high Muslim population (more than 10% of the respective population) Muslims can be identified as predominately living in rural areas, whereas they tend to be mostly urban in regions where they proportionately make up only 10%. Since

1 For some interesting studies see the contributions in the edited volumes by Imtiaz Ahmad: Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims, New Delhi: Manohar 1973; Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India, New Delhi: Manohar 1976; Modernization and Social Change among Muslims in India, New Delhi: Manohar 1983; Ritual and Religion among Muslims of the Sub-continent, Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd. 1985, and by T.N. Madan (ed.): Muslim Communities of South Asia, New Delhi: Manohar 2001(3); by M.K.A. Siddiqui (ed.): Marginal Muslim Communities in India, New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies 2004; see also Aijauddin Ahmad (ed.): Muslims in India; Vols. I–III, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications 1993–1995; the Rajinder Sachar Report on Muslims (2007) came up with interesting findings about Muslim under-representation in government employment and security agencies.