

CHAPTER – 5

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE MUSLIMS

5.1: Introduction

Indian Muslims shows a very distinctive character in their social structure and organization as they bear the traits of both the Islamic great tradition as well as the local or little traditions of the places in which they live in. The organizational structure of the Muslim society is supposed to be guided by the sources of *Quran*, *Hadith* and the interpretation of both the *Quran* and *Hadith* by some early theologians. Besides these three *Ijma* or consensus of the *ummah* (community) and *Qiyas* or analogical reasoning are another two important sources though these two has less universal acceptance by the Muslims (Siddiqui, 1974). The concept of society in Islam is based on equality. The basic principles of its structure are basically egalitarian. The ultimate guide of the Muslims, the *Quran* do not allow any kind of inequality or hierarchy in its social order. During the early period of its four rightly guided caliphates, the real practice of egalitarian social order was existed. But soon the structural and organizational egalitarianism gradually disappeared due to the process of acculturation in the course of its later expansion and came virtually to an end. However, society in India is structured on the principles of inequality. There are so many sects and segments among the Indian Muslims. The social structure is primarily based on caste, as the Hindus are the dominant social or religious group. And the structural basis of Hinduism is caste (Srinivas, 1972). Islam, in this complex framework of social structure accepts caste, as most of the Indian Muslims are the indigenous converts of their respective localities (Mendelbum, 1970). In most of the parts of India, the Muslim

society is characterized on the basis of some occupation specific endogamous *jatis* or *zaat* or *biratharies*.

Darjeeling, the small mountain town is multiethnic in its character and the Muslims are a minority group both in their religion and numerical strength. The Nepali speaking Hindus are the dominant communities both in socio-economic and political sphere. The available historical facts revealed that the Muslims migrated this mountain town from elsewhere India and outside India with their specific occupations to serve the imperial administrators and their native associates since its initiation as a sanatorium and later summer capital. The Muslim groups of the town exhibit diverse regional and ethnic variations. All the Muslim groups of the town are of Sunni in their faith. Previously there were some *Shia* Muslim families. They were in of various administrative posts of the then British governments. Some of them after retirement made shelters but not permanently settled down in the town. After the partition of India all these *Shia* families either went to Lucknow or in East Pakistan or present day Bangladesh. Presently all the Muslims in Darjeeling town belong to Sunni sect and are of *Hanafi* school (*Mojahabs*). There are two broad theological schools among these Sunni Muslims - *Berehvi* and *Deobandi*. Most of the cases in my field situation these two schools exhibits the characters of endogamous groups but not as rigid as among the Muslims in elsewhere India. Again these groups stratified on the basis of their specific occupations or *jati* characteristics. However, this is the rough sketch of the social structure of the Muslims of Darjeeling town. In the following lines, I am discussing elaborately the various sects, sub sects and also the various regional varieties and *jati* or *zaat* or *biratheries*.

5.2: Segments of Muslim Society

The Indian Muslims has two major sects - the *Shia's* and the *Sunnis*. The *Sunnis* comprises 90 percent of the Indian Muslim population and believes to be more traditional. The word "*Sunni*"

derived from the Arabic word "*Sunnah*", which means customary practices or oral traditions (*Hadiths*) of prophet Mohammad. *Quran* and *Hadiths* is the main pillar of *Sunni* doctrine. They believe that the Caliph should always be elected not by heredity and the first four *caliphs* were the equitable successors to prophet Mohammad. The *Sunnis* are of four theological schools or *Mojahabs* as per their adherence of *Shariat* laws. These are *Hanafi*, *Shafei*, *Malaki* and *Hambali*. The majority of the Indian Muslims are of *Hanafi* School. The *Shia's* are very small in their numerical strength and believes to be more orthodox. The word *Shia* is the short phrase of *Shiat Ali*, meaning the followers of Ali, Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law. They believe that only the decedents of Mohammad, who are termed as *Imam*, have the customary spiritual and political right to rule over the community. And Ali was the first Imam as he was the rightful successor of Prophet Mohammad.

5.2.1: Units Based on Sects and Sub-Sects

In Darjeeling town, the Muslim populations are all *Ahl-e-Sunnat-wal-jamat* or *Sunni* in their faith and devoted to *Hanafi* School. The *Mojahab Hanafi* is the oldest in comparison to other three. In eight century Iraq, Abu Hanifa founded the school in *Kufa*. The *Hanafites* emphasized more reasoning in their daily life. Irrespective of their regional and occupational variations, the *Sunni* Muslims of the town are well organized. The *Sunni Hanafites* of Darjeeling are more traditional in their custom and assimilated in to the greater Muslim society of the country with their acculturated little traditions.

There is no *Shia* family presently in the town. Some age old informants informed me that there were a few *Shia* families residing the town before partition. Most of these families were of government service holders. Some of these families had built shelters but not reside permanently as most of them were in transferable job. During that time there was no disharmony between these two sects though the *Sunnis* were always the dominant sects. Economically these

families were sounder and lived in a relative isolation. However, during the partition period almost all the *Shia* families migrated to Lucknow or in East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh). In present day scenario some *Shia* businessmen quit frequently visit the hill town but they are not a permanent resident of Darjeeling.

However, the *Sunni* Muslims of Darjeeling town has two main sub-sects - the *Berehvis* and the *Deobandis*. *Berehvis* and *Deobandis* are the two major groups of Muslims in the Subcontinent apart from the *Shia*. The differences between these sects can be difficult to understand. For the *Berehvis*, the holy Prophet is a superhuman figure whose presence is all around at all times; he is *hazir* (present); he is not *bashar* (material or flesh) but *noor* (light). The *Deobandis*, who also idolize the Prophet, argue he was the *insan-i-kamil*, the perfect person, but still only a man, a mortal. However, in Darjeeling most of the Muslims are of *Berehvi* except the Tibetan, who do not consider themselves bound by any particular school of law. The proselytized Nepali families were also adhere the *Berehvi* thoughts.

5.2.1.1: *Berehvi*

The term *Berehvi* is derived from the school of theology at *Bareli* of Uttar Pradesh. It is a movement of *Sunni* Muslims originated in the Indian soil. The movement was started by the writings of Ahmad Reza Khan (1856-1921) of *Bareli* to promote the distinctive Islamic practices of the Indian Muslims, which is deeply influenced by *Sufism*. Despite his physical death, the *Berehvis* believe that prophet is made out of *noor* (light), and can be present at all places and at all times with the will of Allah. They see the Muhammad as more than a man, a part of the divine light of Allah. He is human but not like other humans. Allah has given him the ability to see the whole of Creation. This is called being "*nazir*" ("witnessing"). Allah has also given him the ability to go physically and spiritually to anywhere in the Created Universes which is meant by "*hazir*" (present). This doctrine gives rise to a form of Islam that provides a space for holy men and esoteric practices and

graves appear to be often more ornate than those found within *Deobandi* communities. The *Berelvis* accept the socio-religious conditions of their previous generations without much criticism. They consider the *baiat* or client ship of *pir* is essential. They condone the presence of little traditions within their socio-religious life and consider the *Sufi aulias* or *pirs* as mediator and do the needful on behalf of the living.

5.2.1.2: *Deobandi*

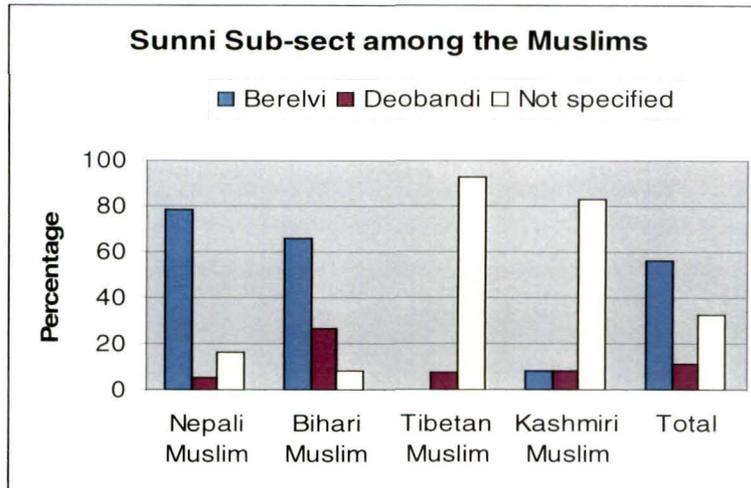
Deobandi is also a movement which began at the school of theology at Deoband in the Saharanpur district in Uttar Pradesh. The school was established in the year 1866 by some notable Muslim theologians. *Darul Ulum Deoband* is one such *madrassa* from where the movement initiates. Since 1920s, the movement was spread over the whole of Indian sub continent as *Tablighi Jamaat* movement. The objective of this *Tablighi Jamaat* movement is to purify the *Sunni Hanifites* from a number of customs and practices which do not have sanctioned from *Quran*. The *Deobandis* believe that little traditional elements of the Indian Muslims have no such relevance and are required to be abandoned. The *Deobandi* interpretation holds that a Muslim's first loyalty is to his religion. That is why they have long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models established in the Koran and the customary practices of the Prophet Mohammed.

Table: 5.1

Sunni Sect and Sub-sect among the Muslim Groups

Category	Nepali Muslim	Bihari Muslim	Tibetan Muslim	Kashmiri Muslim	Total
Berelvi	59 (78.66%)	25 (65.78%)	-	1 (8.33%)	85 (56.29%)
Deobandi	4 (5.33%)	10 (26.31%)	2 (7.69%)	1 (8.33%)	17 (11.25%)
Not Specified	12 (16%)	3 (7.89%)	24 (92.30%)	10 (83.33%)	49 (32.45%)
Total	75 (100%)	38 (100%)	26 (100%)	12 (100%)	151 (100%)

Fig: 5.1



But the situation is slightly different in Darjeeling. The *Berelvis* are the dominant sect in the town. And the missionary activities of the *Berelvis* by the *Dawat-E-Islami* or the green turban group are more dominant. They preached a small number of Nepali speaking people into Islam. They are still continuing their job. Only a few numbers of economically elite Muslim families are *Deobandi*. Mostly the marginal occupational groups are the followers of *Berelvi* thought. The *Nepali* Muslims of low income categories particularly the *Qureshi's* and *Ansari's* are the followers of *Berelvi* sect. There is a notion among the *Berelvis* and *Deobandis* to claim superiority over each other. But this notion of superiority is much more seen among the *Deobandi* followers of the town but not much rigid like the other parts of India. Whenever, I asked them about the adherence of this two theological school, almost majority of them certainly replied that they have no such sect or sub sect. They are only the Muslim. Mostly the elite families replied that they are *Deobandis*. But *pirs* are accepted among them. The *Deobandis* claim higher rank for their involvement in the holy work of purifying the life through Islamisation of life activities. The *Berelvis* do not take into account the above notion of the *Deobandis*, as they are of opinion that the interest of the latter is only to propagate the theological aspects Islam to the masses and has nothing to say about the problems of practical life of the Muslims.

5.2.2: Units Based on Spiritual and *Khanquah* Order

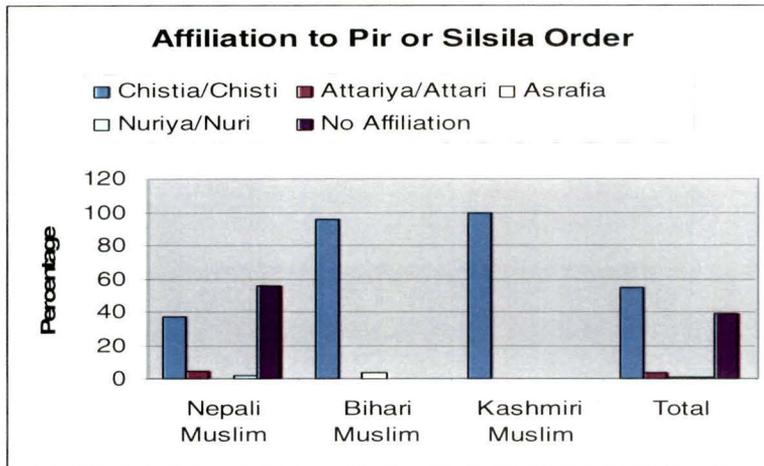
Believe in spiritualism or *tariquat* is a usual phenomenon among the Muslims of Darjeeling town on the basis of which the community is again segmented into various *silsila* orders. The spiritual specialists, who are known as *pir*, have a great role in binding their disciples to a united brotherhood irrespective of their *jat* and class status though only the *Berelvis* are the followers of the *pir* as *mureed*. But the unique thing among the Darjeeling Muslims is that the *Deobandis* of the town also tolerate to this spiritualism and pay respect to all the *silsila* orders. On account of the belief in supernatural power and hereditary character of the *pir*, the people have a wholehearted respect for the *pir* and also to his family members. The places where the *pir* cultivate their spiritual practices are termed as *Khanquah*. Each *pir* has its respective process of spiritual practices and teaching named as *Silsila*. The necessity of such spiritual guidance is however, accepted among all the Muslims with a highest degree among the Sunni *Berelvis*. The Nepali and Bihari Muslim groups have a highest degree of devotion to *tariquat*. The Kashmiri Muslim families are *Deobandi*, yet agree the necessity of spiritualism. However, the Tibetan Muslims do not accept any affiliation to *pir* or *silsila*.

Table: 5.2
Affiliation to *pir* or *Silsila* Order among the Muslim Groups

<i>Silsila</i> Order	Nepali Muslim	Bihari Muslim	Kashmiri Muslim	Total
Chistia/Chisti	22 (37.28%)	24 (96%)	1 (100%)	47 (55.29%)
Attariya/Attari	3 (5.08%)	-	-	3 (3.52%)
Asrafia	-	1 (4%)	-	1 (1.17%)
Nuriya/Nuri	1 (1.69%)	-	-	1 (1.17%)
No affiliation	33 (55.93%)	-	-	33 (38.82%)
Total	59 (69.41%)	25 (29.41%)	1 (1.17%)	85 (100%)

(Total numbers of *Berelvi* families are 85. Tibetan Muslim families are excluded)

Fig: 5.2



A very few number of *silsila* orders are found among these Muslims and among them a considerable number are not directly affiliated to any such *silsila* order but respect all the *sufi* orders. Almost all the Nepali Muslims have a tendency to affiliate themselves with the *Chisti* order of Ajmer. People of these groups often adopt the *silsila* orders of *Asraf* Muslim groups of socio-economically elite families which are a process of *Asrafization* and noticed more particularly among the *Arzal* category of Nepali Muslim groups. There is no *mazar sharif* since 1950 in the town. However, after 1950 a man named Md. Kashim, who was a Nepali Muslim, found a grave in the graveyard in his dream. He renovated the grave and started offering flowers and sweets during various occasions and ceremonies. After 1972, the grave was established a *mazar sharif* without any *silsila* order i.e. people did not know whose grave it is. However, the Darjeeling *Anjuman-E-Islamia* shapes the grave into the present form with building a tomb and shaded the grave. Every Friday people pray and offer sweets and flowers. Even the *mazar* is very popular among the non Muslim Nepali and Lepcha Hindu and Buddhist communities. They offer flower, sweets and *khada* to the *mazar* for their wishes.

5.2.3: Units Based on Regional and Ethnic Components

Though Islam advocates an egalitarian view of social structure, yet stratification in diverse forms has shown almost all the spheres of

their social structure and organization. These divisions are often not only based on regional or ethnic backgrounds but also on sects and mystic orders within the greater framework of Islam. Belief in spiritualism is a popular phenomenon among the Indian Muslims. Indian spiritual tradition and cultural practices was widely accepted by a large number of spiritual experts or specialists who are popularly known as *Pir* or *Musrhid* or *Aulias*. Each *pir* has its own procedure or tradition of teachings or guidance which tend to develop groupings among the disciples or *Mureeds*. As the town Darjeeling was rapidly grown up for its colonial importance, Muslim communities from various places and elsewhere came and settled permanently through out the ages. The Indian Muslim, as are the indigenous converts, always bears the ethnic characters of their regions (Mandelbum; 1970). There is a great debate among the social scientists that whether the Muslim communities are ethnic or not. But practically speaking some peripheral Muslim communities bears ethnic characters. Before partition there were a lot of Muslim groups from various corners of Indian peninsula in the town. The Gujrati Muslims, Kashmiri Muslims and the Tibetan Muslims who used to visit Darjeeling quite frequently were mainly trading communities. Small marginal groups from various corners were also in flocked in Darjeeling. However in present day Darjeeling town the Muslim population has significantly divided into four main regional or ethnic varieties. These groups either came to the town for trade or as a servant of colonial government. The varieties are -

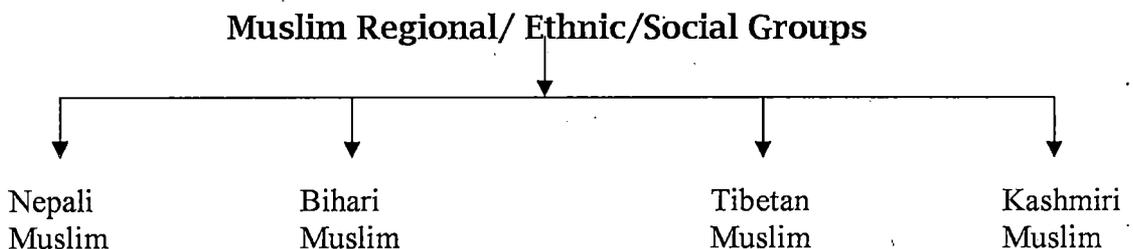
1. *Nepali* Muslims or the embraced caste families of Nepali origin and the decedents of marriages between Muslim father and Nepali mother.
2. *Bihari* Muslims or the Muslim groups migrated from various districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
3. *Bhutia/Bhote* or Tibetan Muslims who took shelter from Tibet after 1962.

4. *Kashmiri* Muslims or the Muslims migrated from Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Beside these four major regional or ethnic varieties there are one important Bengali speaking Muslim groups residing in the hill town as a temporary settler. Popularly they are termed as *Islampur* as these men are migrated from Islampur subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal. Most of the cases these *Islampur* are in the occupation of house servant and shopkeepers of various Muslim traders. A considerable number of other Muslim communities from various parts of India are also visible though they are not a permanent residence of the town.

The Muslim population of the town Darjeeling is mostly restricted in *Dr. Zakir Hussain Basti (Butcher Basti)* as the place was traditionally inhabited by the Muslim migrants. Besides a considerable number of families are also visible in *Tungtung Basti, Kaak Jhora, Darga Bazar, Chandmari* and *Singamari*. Mostly the Kashmiri and Nepali Muslim families are residing in *Dr. Z K Basti*. *Darga Bazar* is mainly for temporary settlers. Tibetan Muslims are mainly concentrated in *Kaak Jhora* and scattered in various market places where their shops and hotels are established.

Fig: 5.3



4.2.3.1: *Nepali* Muslims

Nepali Muslims constitute a small but an important chunk to constitute the overall framework of Muslim community residing permanently in the Himalayan town of Darjeeling. They are a very little known community and are less attracted by the social researcher. The

term is given by other Muslim groups as of their origin and consanguinal affiliation with Nepali castes and tribes. The Nepali Muslims itself is more a very heterogeneous group. They are not only the embraced caste families of diverse Nepali origin but also the products of marriages between Muslim fathers and Nepali mothers of different caste and tribe background. That is why, their culture is a mixture of both Islamic and Nepali traditions. They are largely integrated with the local or little traditions of their habitat which often act as a barrier in interaction with greater Muslim society of the town. Their social position is very low among the Muslim society of the town. And lived almost in a relative social isolation from the rest (particularly the elite Muslim families) of Muslim families. The Nepali Muslim families are traditionally concentrated mainly in Butcher *Basti*. It was earlier mentioned that the *basti* was established since the very formation of the town. And the migrated Muslims settled their houses there as the place was below the then European and elite Indian settlements. The slaughter house is also just below the *basti*. This indicates that, the butcher families settled or the colonial administration set up the habitation there for the above said cause. The non familial Muslim males married the Nepali girls of diverse caste and tribe origin and ultimately after one or two generation, these families formed a new Muslim group of different cultural practices. Some Nepali male individuals of the *basti* was also embraced Islam after fall in love with Muslim ladies. It is very difficult to find out the exact figure of these Nepali Muslim families. There is no available census records as both the Municipality and district administration never interested to bring the touch of development in the socio-economic life of these Muslims.

The somatoscopic observations reveals the fact that these Nepali Muslim individuals bears the prominent typical Mongoloid feature. We can very easily identify themselves from their other coreligionists.

The Nepali Muslims considered themselves as the native of Darjeeling. They are a heterogeneous group of diverse origins. Technically we can categorize the Nepali Muslims into three categories.

1. The descendent of earlier Muslim migrants whose forefathers migrated from various parts of India and mixed up after intermarriage with local people.
2. Nepali males embraced Islam before marriage with a Muslim girl.
And
3. Embraced Nepali families of caste and tribal background.

Because of its commercial importance many Muslim occupational groups were invited or rather encouraged migrating Darjeeling by the colonial administrators. These Muslims had occupational specializations which the city dwellers require. The present day Nepali Muslims are the descendent of them and highly heterogeneous in character. Among them there are various *biradaries* or caste groups. Many *kureshi* Muslims whose traditional occupation was butchering of beef and mutton came to settled here. Some of their male individuals or the non familial male individuals took marriage with the Nepali girls and mixed up with the local population. Some other Muslim occupational groups were also mixed up by marriage and integrated with the local culture. Their integration with local cultures gradually secluded them from main land Muslim population. The present day *Zakir Hussain basti* or butcher *basti* was traditionally dominated by the Muslims. But a considerable number of Nepali lower caste families were also reside side by side with their Muslim brothers as beef is edible to them. Some male individuals of these families embraced Islam after fall in love with Muslim ladies to marry them. Their later generations gradually enriched to build the separate identity. There were also some caste Nepali families embraced Islam. The present day missionary activities of *Dawat-I-Islami*, a *Berelvi* mission, proselytized some few families to Islam. These peripheral Muslim community exhibits a great similarity with the native Nepali people and

dissimilarity with their other Muslim *biratheries* except in the basic religious practices. They maintain a distinct cultural and social identity from the rest Muslim groups of diverge ethnic or caste backgrounds.

As we already told that the Nepali Muslims are the conglomeration of diverse ethnic and caste backgrounds, there occupation is also highly diversified. Majority of them are self employed or engaged in various skilled and unskilled sectors as a daily wage basis. Some still are in their traditional occupations. The traditional butcher families of *kureshi* origin are still continuing their forefather's occupation in beef market. They are either beef stall owner or beef seller or working as a daily wage labour. Some families are engaged in business related to beef and mutton supply to various educational institutions of Darjeeling hills. A few families are engaged in wielding household utensils repair shop. A few of them are in service of both government and private sectors. But their number is microscopic It is to be noted here that since colonial times major portion of this Nepali Muslim families are engaged in various marginal occupation which cater to the necessities of hill population. Economically they are considered a marginal group of low income range. The plight of this group is that neither the Muslims nor the other hill communities accept them wholeheartedly as a part of their society.

5.2.3.2: *Bihari* Muslims

Bihari Muslims in Darjeeling town are basically the migrants from various districts of the Indian state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They are the descendents of the migrants who came to Darjeeling town after the establishment of the town as a sanatorium by the colonial governments. They are not a separate ethnic entity like their other Muslim brethren. Among them there are so many ethnic groups or *biratharies* or occupational groups (Siddique: 1974). Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had always a good number of Muslim occupational groups who were primarily seasonal migrants. After the very formation of the

town as a sanatorium, a flock of Europeans along with their native elites took place. Roads and buildings were constructed for city dwellers. As a result, the citizens had a great need of urban services for better livelihood. Muslims in India are a marginal community. Among them there are so many social groups on the basis of their generation wise occupation. Their specialization occupation gave them opportunity to come to Darjeeling town. Majority of them initially came alone and settled temporarily at the then butcher *basti* area. Some of them later made marital alliance with the local native Nepalese and others still maintain their purity by maintain connection with their place of origin. The former group is later known as Nepali Muslims and the later still known popularly as Bihari Muslims. As majority of these marginal people are of the occupation of animal slaughter, the *basti* later termed as butcher *basti* by the Europeans.

Presently Bihari Muslims are the dominant Muslim group in the town in terms of power, prestige and economy and concentrated mainly in the butcher *basti* (Dr. Zakir Hussain Basti) area. Majority of them are of Bihar origin along with some families from Uttar Pradesh. They are very much caste conscious and always try to maintain a distance from the Nepali Muslims whom they believe as polluted as of their marital alliance with the locals. They claimed higher social position in the community hierarchy. The elite Muslim families also belong to this group and economically these groups are in much more better position.

The town Darjeeling has a colonial history which told that before the invention of the place by the British, the area was inhabited by some *Lepcha* families. Their life way activities were very simple because of their need. Soon the place was selected as a sanatorium for the British troops and Dr. Campbell took initiative to build the town suitable for the Europeans. Gradually the town Darjeeling got significance as it was treated as a summer capital of then India government or later Bengal. A huge number of people particularly the

elite native section made their leisure shelters there. To serve their necessities, a large number of Muslim groups came and settled. To supply the regular need animal protein, some *kureshis* from Bihar came. *Khansamas* were come for cooking. *Ansari* and other Muslims groups also came for their specialized services. Their migration was also encouraged by the British government. Because of this, the then Darjeeling Municipality build a separate market for the Muslim traders which is known as *zudge bazaar*. A separate place for common Muslim serve groups were also established which later known as butcher *basti* by them. Before partition, there were a large number of Muslims from Up and Bihar. But after the Independence of India, a large number of them migrated to present day Bangladesh. But still they are the dominant group among the Muslim *umma*.

Bihari Muslims are of diverse occupational background. And still majority of them trying to maintain their generation wise occupation. A large portion of them are engaged in order supply business of mutton. Some are in the traditional business of selling brass made household utensils. Some are in bakery industry. A considerable number are engaged in repairing watches and spectacles. Some are also in white colour job like teaching and other government and private sectors. However, their economy are presently as per of the opportunity and education which these families found.

5.2.3.3: *Bhote/Bhutia* or Tibetan Muslims

Tibetan Muslims are a very small migrant group in India who migrated from Tibet during the early sixties of twentieth century and are residing as a refugee in Srinagar, Gangtok and Darjeeling-Kalimpong town of Darjeeling Himalayan region. We know very little about Tibetan Muslims as the historians mentioned nothing about them in the chronological history of Tibet. Another reason is that these groups remained cut off for a long period of time from the Muslim brethren elsewhere due to the lack of communication of Tibet

with other world. It is very difficult to say how and when the preaching of Islam in Tibet initiated as because history throws a meager light on it. Tibetan Muslims in Tibet are of three main ancestral roots – Central Asia, Kashmir-Ladakh, China and Nepal (Butt, 1994; Mondal, 1999; Nadwi, 2004). Tibetan Muslims are the descendents of Muslim traders or merchants who came from these regions between 12th centuries to 16th centuries, married Tibetan women and settled permanently. Particularly the Muslims from Kashmir-Ladakh region is popularly known as the Tibetan Muslims as they acquired Tibetan culture and tradition through the course of time which is reflected almost all the aspects of their social and cultural life. They enjoyed special privileges and treated as the ‘Ornaments of Lasha’. However, during the Chinese occupation to Tibet, a major portion of Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri origin, consequently opted to leave rather than live under the Chinese occupation and migrated to India during 1959 to 1962. They settled primarily the border towns of Gangtok, Kalimpong and Darjeeling and later a considerable number of families moved to Srinagar. On the basis of their ancestry, these Tibetan Muslim families were given Indian citizenship and still living peacefully with their coreligionists in these above said regions.

All the Tibetan Muslims in India are of Kashmir-Ladakh origin. Their forefathers during the 12th century regularly visit Tibet for trading and gradually settled after marriage with local Tibetan women (Butt: 1994, Mondal: 1999, Nadwi: 2004). The historical record regarding the penetration of Islam in Tibet is meager. It is an established fact that there was a close trade relation with Arab traders who often came to Tibet via Samarkhand, Kashgarh and Ladakh. And religious preachers spread the voice of Islam in these places much earlier. Muslim rulers of these places later attacked Tibet and successfully preached Islam in the places adjoining the traditional old Tibet trade route (Nadwi: 2004). The invasion by Bakhtiar Khalji also helped Islam to penetrate the monolithic Buddhist state of Tibet. But

there was no large scale conversion to Islam in Tibet. The community was the blend of different cultural strains. However, it is popularly believed that Muslim traders from Kashmir and Ladakh region was first entered Tibet around the 12th century (Butt: 1994). T. W. Arnold in his famous book 'Preaching of Islam....' Said that "Islam has also been carried into Tibet proper by Kashmiri merchant. Settlements of such merchants are to be found in all the chief cities of Tibet: they marry Tibetan women, who often adopt the religion of their husbands". Muslims are also known as '*khache*' by Tibetans, which is spoliation of '*khachad*', the Ladakhi word for Kashmiri Muslims (Nadwi: 2004). Dr. Adu Bakar Amir Uddin Nadwi in his own research work confirms the facts that the majority of the Tibetan Muslims are of Kashmiri-Ladakh origin. That is why, the Muslims are known as '*Khache*' by the Tibetans. He established the facts by some socio-religious traditions like kashmiri terms for different *namaz* or prayers, kashmiri surnames, marriage customs and worshipping graves. The Muslim people often said that, there was a severe famine in Kashmir once upon a time which pushed the Muslims to migrate various neighbourin countries. One such group came to Tibet and settled permanently as the place appeared congenital to them (Nadwi, 2004).

However, the Tibetan Muslims enjoyed special privileges by the Tibetan governments which were withdrawn soon after the Chinese occupation in Tibet in 1959. The situation of Tibet was turned into a burning pan. The Tibetan Muslim of Lasha were facing extortion and cruelty under the hand of Chinese Red Army like their fellow Tibetan Buddhists (Butt: 1994). The Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri origin soon decided to migrate to India to think that the teachings of communist China will destroy their religion and belief. They organized themselves and approached themselves to the Indian mission at Lasha to claim for Indian citizenship for their escape. They petitioned to the then the head of Indian counsel Mr. P.N. Kaul, referring to their Kashmiri ancestry, they sought permission for them to return back to their

ancestral place Kashmir and claiming for Indian citizenship. But the Chinese started torture and extortion to these Muslims for their demand. The Chinese occupation Army jailed a number of senior Tibetan Muslim leader. Haji Habibulla Shami, the panch or chairman of Muslim council at Tibet, was thrown into jail. Bhai Abdulgani La, Rapse Hamidulla, Abdul Ahad, Haji Abdul Quader Jami, Haji Abdul Gani Thapchi Shawa were under Chinese detention under various severe charges. In the mean time, the then Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru accepts the Kashmiri ancestry of these Tibetan Muslim groups and requested Chinese government through diplomatic channels to allow these Muslims leave return to India (Nadwi: 2004). Initially the Indian mission at Tibet accepts a few Muslim families as Indian and gave them white paper for citizenship on the basis of the following criteria (Butt, 1994) -

- Permanent domicile remained in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Who visited India time to time.
- One of the parents or grandparents was born in undivided India.

But suddenly the Indian government accepts all the Tibetan Muslims as the potential citizens of India and gave them white paper for their Indian Identity. In the late 1959, a few numbers of Muslim families somehow left Tibet and migrate to adjoining states of India and Nepal. But the major portions of Tibetan Muslims were migrating to India officially in 1960. After suffering a lot, 124 Muslim families were escorted by Chinese army, came to the Nathula border of Sikkim in 1960 for immigration. They were welcomed by the Indian government and shifted to the temporary colony of Gangtok, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. A majority of these 124 families were shifted to Srinagar during the time from 1961-1964. Presently majority of the Tibetan Muslims are in Srinagar and only some families are permanently reside in the town of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Approximately 50 families are in Darjeeling-Kalimpong town. The

Tibetan Muslims also warmly welcomed His Holiness Dalai Lama during his visit at Darjeeling town in April, 1993.

Traditionally all the Tibetan Muslim families are from the trader and merchant background. In Tibet they usually were the shopkeepers, meat suppliers and various businesses of Tibetan arts and crafts. They still are maintaining their business tradition after migration to India. Before migration to India the Chinese government gave some compensation to them and the India government also gave some money for the initiation of their business. In Darjeeling town, the Tibetan Muslim families are engaged in various business activities. Majority of them are in garments business. They sell woolen garments, Tibetan dress and modern European garments. Most of these shops are in *Mahakal* market (near GPO building) and *Chourasta*. Besides a considerable number of these families have hotels and restaurants at various places of Darjeeling town. A few are in various government services at various departments. Some have their own car which they rent to the tourists as taxi. Besides the modern youths are in various academic institutions in various corners of the country as student.

5.2.3.4: *Kashmiri* Muslims

Islam was established as a new faith in kashmir valley when the region was predominated by the Buddhist and ruled by the Hindus. There were various tribal communities of animistic faith. The major economic activities were grazing, animal husbandry, handicraft from sheep wool and cultivation. The propagation of Islam was first initiated by Bulbul Sah, a *sufi Sayed* from Turkistan. Gradually, the overall dissatisfaction compelled the peoples to convert into Islam. The Kashmiri Muslims are of diverse ethnic backgrounds and occupational specializations. Trading of handicrafts made of wood and *pashmina* or wool is very common among them. Earlier days they stretched their business up to Central Asia along with the neighbouring regions of Tibet and China. *Kashmiris* are a very small but well known regional Muslim group in the Darjeeling Himalayan

region. We can easily identify them as of their typical physical features of tall stature and fair complexion. All of them are the adherent of Sunni Islam and observes the teachings of *Hanifi* School. There are a few *kashmiri* families in the town residing permanently. Their traditional occupation was selling *kashmiri sawls*, handicrafts, gems, woolen garments and curio items. Almost all the curio shops around the Darjeeling mall are owned by the Kashmiri families. The famous *Habib Mallik* curio shop at the mall is also owned by a *kashmiri* family and it was the first curio shop at the town. *Habib Mallik* himself was the first *kashmiri* who set a curio shop during the 1890. Except the *Habib Mallik's* family, all other *kashmiri* families are close relative to each other. Since 1880s a few *kashmiris* used to visit Darjeeling seasonally without their female members for business purpose. Few of them later settled permanently with their families. Some of them called their other relatives from kashmir to the town to open new shops as the town is a internationally recognized tourist spot. And the curio items have a great demand to the tourists particularly to the Europeans as a symbol of memory.

During the late fifties of nineteenth century Darjeeling was abruptly changed into an affluent urban centre as of its colonial importance. Businessmen from various corners of the country set their business. Migrations from various corners were also encouraged. As of its similarity with the physical environment of England, Darjeeling then became a tourist place to the Europeans in India. The Europeans coined the name 'Queen of Hills' to her. Kashmiri Muslim families were traditionally a trading community. They are a mobile community and seen almost all corners of the country during the winter season to sell door to door woolen garments and handicrafts particularly *pashmina* and *shawl*. But in Darjeeling town the monopoly of this business was gradually hijacked by the Tibetans or *Bhutias* as they also sell their woolen handicraft items by hacking. At present the *kashmiris* only confined themselves in selling curio items to the tourists. There is no

authentic documentation of their migration to the town. But some very old *kashmiri* families of the town confirmed that during 1880, a considerable *kashmiri* businessmen came the town as of its commercial importance and started their business by hacking. After the establishment of *Zudge Bazar* which was dominated by the Muslim traders, a number of *kashmiri* businessmen also opened shops there. But these shops were basically sold the *kashmiri* shawls and other *pashmina* items. It was late Habib Mallik who established a curio shop at *Zudge bazaar* in the year 1890. He sold *kashmiri* handicrafts, *pashmina*, traditional masks and gems. During that time the Muslim shops were around the *Zudge bazaar*. Later when the *chourasta* was prepared the Habib Mallik's shop was transferred to there and later shifted to the famous mall where still it standing. Almost all the families are of Butt lineage except the late Habib Mallik's family.

Traditionally the *kashmiris* are a trading community. And in Darjeeling, they are also in their traditional business of selling handicrafts and art objects of their country. During very early of their migration to this town, they started business mostly by hacking in a particular spot. After the establishment of *Zudze Bazar*, some of them made permanent stall there. The famous Habib Mallik shop was the first curio shop in the town which was established in 1890 in *Zudge Bazar*. Later particularly the beginning of the last century all other curio shops of the *kashmiris* are erected in various important business places or roads of the town. There are six curio shops in the town owned by *kashmiri* families.

5.3: Marriage, Family and Kinship

5.3.1: Nepali Muslim

5.3.1.1: Marriage

The Nepali Muslim families of Darjeeling town form a unique cluster within the Muslim society as they almost disconnected from their forefather's birth places and thus form a social group. Their cultural integration with the locals also separates them from their other Muslim brothers. Hence, they are now practicing endogamy

though the Nepali Muslims are highly heterogeneous in character. Among them there are so many occupational groups or caste like *biratharies*. They confined themselves within their social and cultural circle. The other Muslim families of the town do not make marital relationship with them because of their social position. The Nepali Muslims generally marry within their community or social surroundings. They strictly follow monogamy. Marriage by negotiation is commonly practiced. Love marriage is also sanctioned. Marriage by love with Nepali girls is very popular among them. When a Muslim boy falls in love with a Nepali or Bhutia girl, they convert the girl before marriage and then make *nikaha*. Widow remarriage is also practiced.

5.3.1.2: Family

They generally prefer to live in joint families. But the shortage of living rooms separates the males from their father's house after marriage. Nuclear families are now prevalent among them. But the values of the traditions of joint family never decayed. Elderly persons like father and mother are the head of the family. Popular patrilineal structure is not strictly practiced by them. It is because of the admixture of cultural traditions of their habitation. Females perform household duties to contribute to a part of family economy. The status of the females is much higher in comparison to their other Muslim groups. *Purdha* is not strictly observed in their families.

5.3.1.3: Kinship

Kinship system is very interesting among them. They follow the classificatory and denotative type of kinship terminology. They use both Nepali and Urdu terminologies. The kinship plays a significant role in their life way activities. The converted families or individuals of Nepali origin still maintain relationship with their caste kinsmen. But their religion or adherent community never make bar between them. They invited their kinsmen in their various festivals like *Eid*, *Sabebarat* and other religious and cultural ceremonies. In return their kinsmen

also invited them in their religious and cultural festivals. Avoidance is not strictly observed. They designate their blood related or consanguinal kinsmen as *Khandan* and affinal kins as *Mehaman*. The relationship with *Khandan* is very much informal and close while among the *Mehaman*, the relationship is highly formal and occasional.

5.3.2: Bihari Muslim

5.3.2.1: Marriage

Negotiation marriage is most common among them. Monogamy is commonly practiced by them. Previously their forefathers marry the local native ladies and mixed up with the local culture. This gives rise a separate ethnic identity among the Muslims living in Darjeeling Himalayan region. However, this can be elaborate in a separate chapter later. These Bihari Muslims presently try to maintain purity by not to make marital alliance with the families who have a past of indigenous marriage. Usually they collect ladies from elsewhere Darjeeling or particularly from Bihar and UP. The whole programme of *nikah* is done as per Islamic rule. Notwithstanding there are some caste (or caste like) specific little traditions in their marriage programme.

5.3.2.2: Family

Both nuclear and joint families are common among them. But as there is a shortage of room in their houses, they generally live separately after marriage. They have strong bondage with family members. And some times, married brothers in family jointly look after their traditional business though they live separately. Still they have connection with their place of migration i.e. Bihar and UP. They usually collect girls for marriage from there. Some families still have houses and cultivable lands there. Generally their family structure is orthodox. All the male members have a dominant rule over females. Aged member is obeyed by all the family members. He becomes the head of the family. Only females can give decisions in the internal familial matters. *Pardha* is also strictly observed by the members to maintain the family honour.

5.3.2.3: Kinship

As it is already mentioned that these Muslim groups are of diverse caste (or caste like) backgrounds. Their kinship system is tightly organized. The basic unit is a household as it is an assemblage of kinsmen of patrilineal descent. In their kinship relations close consanguine has a significant role in maintaining kinship relations. The households belong to same caste as a *birathari*. We found very interestingly the same thing which Imtiaz Ahmed found. While a man says something about his own caste or group, he smartly says that it is his *birathary*. And while the other caste or social group, he gently replied that is the *jat*. *Birathery* is a restricted group of kin (Ahmed: 1976). All these *biratharies* or *jats* are strictly endogamous group. Their kinship terminologies are a mixture of Hindi, Arabic, Bhojपुरi and some local dialects. Primary kinship terminologies are in Urdu. Secondary and other terminologies are identical to the main land Hindi belt. Kinship usages are seen. Avoidance from the husband's elder brother or in law relations is common.

5.3.3: Bhote/Bhutia or Tibetan Muslim

5.3.3.1: Marriage

Tibetan Muslims are endogamous but as they are very small in numerical strength, marriage alliance with some kashmiri families elsewhere is noticed. But they generally marry within their own community. Marriage by negotiation is most common. Majority of their community members are live in Srinagar, so, they usually make marriage alliances with their relatives there. Cousin marriage of both types is very common. Marriage customs are organized as per Islamic law and rules, but a considerable number of local influences are present due to acculturation. Weeding dress and foods are almost identical to the greater Tibetan society. Some kashmiri rituals are also found like the ceremonial *wazwan* type meal of 30 - 40 dishes. All the

marriages are now takes place at *Anjuman* hall room. Dowry is not taken by the bridegroom.

5.3.3.2: Family

Both nuclear and joint families are prevalent among the Tibetan Muslims in Darjeeling town. Traditionally they had the system of joint family system. All the male members look after their familial business. But soon after migration to India, the system of joint family system decayed as of their refugee settlement. They usually separate after marriage. But still the Tibetan Muslim at Darjeeling has a tendency to live in joint families. The family is patrilineal and daughter leave the parental house after marriage. Women had and have a significant role in families. She also look after her husband's business along with her household activities. Even after the death of her husband, she runs the business successfully.

5.3.3.3: Kinship:

Kinship plays a crucial role in their social and cultural life. The community is closely tied by kinship bondage. Incest rules are strictly observed. Both the classificatory and denotative types of kinship terminology are prevalent. The terminologies are identical to the Tibetan Buddhist community. Some *urdu* terminologies are also found. Kinship usages are also noticed. Some common kinship terminologies are -

Father - *Abala*

Mother - *Amala*

Grandfather - *pola*

Grandmother - *mola*

Sister - *aza*

Brother - *Bhai*

5.3.4: Kashmiri Muslim

5.3.4.1: Marriage

Monogamy is the general rule of *kashmiri* marriage. Almost all the marriages are take place on negotiation by both the parties. They prefer to marry with near relations or within their own social group or status. If there is no such suitable mate, marriages are arranged outside the circle of relatives or status groups. The wedding ceremony is celebrated on a grand scale and it takes place over a period of three to five days. They usually collect bride from their native villages and the ceremony is observed in their native house at Kashmir with their relatives.

5.3.4.2: Family

The families are of nuclear type. Traditionally joint family was popular among them which help them in maintaining and controlling their property, business and wealth. But this traditional system of family type is gradually broken because of their migration to the town. In Darjeeling town all the families are nuclear type that means parents with their unmarried offspring. But they never break connection with Kashmir where all other family members including their father, mother, brother and other members are live jointly. They regular visit their homeland and vise versa. Even they have property and business there. The families strictly follow the system of *pardha* in Kashmir but not usually in the town Darjeeling as the Muslim mind in the town are much more liberal in comparison with elsewhere India.

5.3.4.3: Kinship

Kashmiri Muslims of Darjeeling town have very strong *birathery* system. Majority of these families reside permanently at the town but they have a strong bondage with their kinsmen at Kashmir. Almost all the socio-religious ceremonies are observed with the kinsmen at their original habitat at Kashmir. They follow the patrilineal system of property inheritance. Father or age old male member are the head of

the family and all other members are bound to listen his order. Females are only allowed in giving household decisions.

5.4: Socio-Political Organization

5.4.1: Organization of the Nepali Muslims

The Nepali Muslims has no such traditional political organization. Of course there is a non formal council of elderly men which only exercise power in social control. They mainly settle the social disputes among their members. However, due to the influence of dominant communities in the hill town and as the Butcher *basti* is a multi-ethnic locality, the traditional socio-political organization of the traditional Nepali society is exists among them. '*Samaj*', a non formal village council is prevalent among them. Each and every *mahalla* or locality has their own *samaj*. The council has three tier members. The 1st tire includes the elderly persons of the locality irrespective of their caste and cred background. Then the youth volunteers are in 2nd tire. Ultimately all the families are the members of each *samaj* to complete the configuration of it. *Samaj* has a great role to preside over important social and cultural activities like birth, marriage and death ceremonies. Each and every *samaj* has a *samaj ghar* or room in their respective locality or *mahalla*. The members buy all the utensils and other materials which are necessary in social cultural programmes. Medical kit, stretcher etc. are also always present in their *samaj ghar*.

The Nepali Muslims are not politically inactive. Since the colonial times they are participated various national movements and campaigns under the banner of National Congress Party. Later the influence of CPI (M) was also seen among them. But when the *Gorkhaland* agitation initiated under the leadership of *Subhas Ghising*, they first realized that until and unless they raised their voice of their cultural integration with the hill community, they will never get any substantial facilities from the administration. As a religious minority they always refused by the greater hill society. So, they initiated a movement in the early nineties which was popularly known as *Gorkha*

Muslim movement from Kalimpong. This successful movement later helps all the Muslim inhabitants of Darjeeling Himalaya to establish their right over the hills as like as their Nepali and *Bhutia* communities. They also participated in the present movement by the *Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha*. The details of this movement regarding their identity and other issues is discussed in chapter 6.

5.4.2: Organization of the Bihari Muslims

They are the largest regional segment in the hill Muslim community both in numerical and political power. Most of their forefathers came here long back. A sense of rootness and identity is originated because of this. There is no formal traditional socio-political organization like in the villages of Bihar and UP. But *Anjuman-e-Islamia* has a great role in controlling the society as a whole. The *Anjuman* executive members are invited various meetings or *shabhas* to handle the social and familial disorder. And the *Anjuman* executive council is occupied by the elite members from Bihar and UP Muslims. After the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1988, the Muslim groups of the town felt deprivation from the Nepali dominated society. As they have no separate political wing to rise up their voices against deprivation, the *Anjuman* council then took the initiative as the formal voices of Darjeeling Muslim. One of the main objectives of *Anjuman-e-Islamia* is to endeavour for moral, social, cultural and religious upliftment of the Muslims. All the Sunni Muslims of the town are the member of the organization. But as *Anjuman* is headed by the Muslim elites, the common Muslims have an overall dissatisfaction against them. Some Bihari Muslims in 1992 formed a separate socio-political organization not only for the Muslims but also with other minority groups. The name is Muslim and Other Minority Forum. There are 65 members but majority of the members are from Muslims. Still they are working to upgrade the socio-political life of the Muslims. After the political shift of *Gorkhaland* movement, the Muslims of Darjeeling particularly some elite Bihari and other Muslims joined to

organize a united minority forum to support the *Gorkhaland* movement headed by Bimal Gurung. The forum All *Gorkha Minority Front* is pure a political wing of both religious and numerical minority groups. Some Muslim elites are in various important position of this front and they also have successfully organized some demonstration at Delhi in support of *Gorkhaland* movement. But majority of the Muslims are not with them as they believe that separate state of *Gorkhaland* will not help them in upliftment or mainstreaming to the greater society.

5.4.3: Organization of the *Bhote/Bhutia* or Tibetan Muslims

In Tibet, they have their own political system or council of elders which controls the society. The council which was known as *panch*, had five members who were elected to take care of the affairs within the Tibetan Muslim community. The council was recognized and loyal to the Dalai Lamas. Tibetan Muslims in India still trying to maintain this *panch* or council of elders. But as the Community detached from their kinsmen and is living different places, the traditional role of the community is gradually decaying. But still the committee has some control over the community which runs its affair from two different places. One is in Srinagar, which controls the Tibetan Muslims at Kashmir and another at Kalimpong which jurisdiction is Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kathmandu town. In addition to their formal traditional political system, the Tibetan Muslims at Darjeeling and Kalimpong town have a united welfare association. The Indian Tibetan Muslim Welfare Association was established in the year 1961 at Kalimpong by some notable elder Tibetan Muslims for the development of the community. Initially the association looks after the matters related to the socio-economic problems. But soon, it controls all the problems including social and familial disputes among the community. Right now the association only looks after the Tibetan Muslims living in Darjeeling, Gangtok and Kalimpong town. There are seven executive members and all the Tibetan Muslims are the

members of the association. They don't have any connection with the association in Srinagar.

5.4.4: Organization of the Kashmiri Muslims

Kashmiris in the town are very few in number and all are engaged in curio trading. Hence, there is no formal traditional political structure of them in the town. Council of the elders of them is also absent as the age old population of their families permanently transferred to their native land Kashmir. Because of their economic well being, they intermingled with the elite Muslim socio-political association of Darjeeling. Some Kashmiri men are in the governing body of *Anjuman-E-Islamia*, the traditional formal socio-religious organization of the Darjeeling town Muslims. One or two influential persons among them are also a part of the formal Muslim council who take part in various '*salish*' to control the social disharmony among the Muslim *umma*.

5.5: Notion of Social Gradation and Inter-Ethnic Stratification

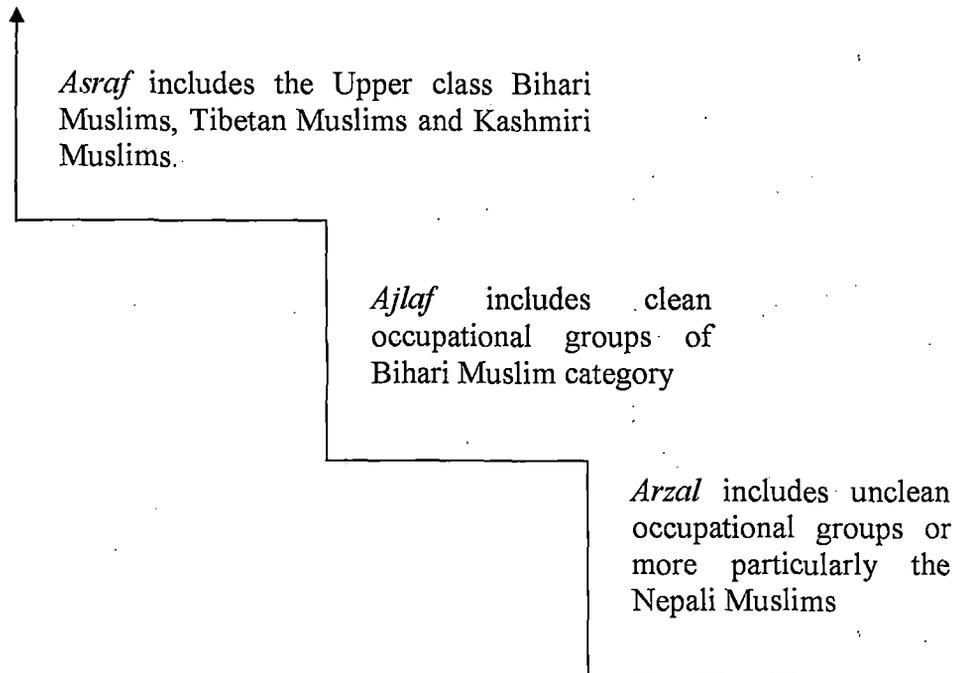
After examining the Darjeeling Muslim society to a very close look, a visible degree of social gradation has been observed among themselves. The division of noble groups and inferior groups is observed among them and still it plays a great role in their social and cultural relations. The stratified Muslim society in the town has a notion of gradation or hierarchy but not identical with the Hindus as the Muslim social gradation or hierarchy in this mountainous town is also not an open system but not rigid like the Hindus. The gradation or superiority over each other among the *Berehvi* and *Dobandi* sub-sect among themselves are a usual phenomenon and these two groups keep their social boundaries by adopting endogamy. However, a small number of the Muslims in the town did not answer the question of their affiliation with these two schools as they strictly believe the principle of egalitarianism in an Islamic society. They replied that "we

are all equal and the best ones are the ones who are most righteous, and only God knows who is the most noble righteous. However, the claim of superiority over each other is still a common phenomenon among the believers of these two sub-sects.

They have a strong objection to use the term 'caste' as it creates a lot of confusion within the frame of religion. Rather the term '*jat*' or '*birathery*' is more appropriate to them. Each *Jat* professes an occupation or specific profession traditionally. And these *Jats* often claim superior or high status but their exact status is not clear as different communities give different interpretations to their status of different *Jats*. However, the Muslims in the town are divided in to three broad categories in terms of their ethnic markers and occupational backgrounds like the other parts of India, the *Asraf*, *Ajlaf* and *Arzal*. And all the occupational categories or *jat* along with regional groups fit within this social stratification or gradation. It is to be believed that the *Asrafs* claim a foreign decent, the *Ajlafs* are the converts of clean occupational groups and the *Arzals* are the indigenous converts from unclean occupational groups or *jats*. And all these categories maintain a sharp notion of superiority like the caste hierarchy of the Hindus but not rigid like the Hindus. The system is only open in occupational mobility. Except the Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslim groups, the Nepali and Bihari Muslim groups are a conglomeration of diverse *jats* or *biratheries*. All the four groups i.e. Nepali Muslim, Bihari Muslim, Tibetan Muslim and Kashmiri Muslim are endogamous in character. These four social groups has a notion of gradation or system of stratification which is as follows —

Fig: 5.4

System of Social Gradation among the Muslim Groups



The upper class *Ajlafs* which includes the economically well to do Bihari, Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslims not have close social relations with lower classes more particularly the *Arzals* which includes the Nepali Muslims, the same way the Nepali Muslims do not normally have close social relations with Bihari, Tibetan or Kashmiri Muslims of *Asraf* category. But the purity pollution and commensality is not practiced among them though each and every group practiced endogamy within their own social group or *jat* arrangement. These groups do not marry out side their *birathery* or *jat*. The Kashmiri Muslim or a Tibetan Muslim always makes affinity within their own social group. These two groups strictly follow or what we say obey the rule of endogamy. But the Bihari Muslim and Nepali Muslim families are more open in marital affairs as these two social categories is highly heterogeneous and stratified in various *jat* or *biratheries*. Though the upper class Bihari Muslims or *Asrafs* and *Ajlaf* never make marriage alliance with the unclean occupational groups of Nepali Muslim groups

or *Arzals*. A Muslim belongs to *Asraf* category can marry a Muslim girl belongs to *Azlaf* category of same social and economic status, but an *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* man cannot marry a *Asraf* woman since they considered these two categories to be inferior to them.

5.6: Interrelationship of Social Segments and Organization of the Muslim Society

The creed Islam though theoretically advocated on egalitarian social order yet professes on stratification in terms of sects or sub-sects and ethnic or social groups along with their generation wise occupation. In Darjeeling, the Muslims are highly stratified in terms of class and caste like stratifications or status groups. As the majority of Indians Muslims are converted, exhibits in most of the cases the same social status as they had before their conversion to Islam. They thought that by converting to Islam would come out from the Hindu hierarchy system, but in most of the cases they remained in the same hierarchy level after they converted. The Muslims in the town has no exception to this. Muslims are divided into some close communities there. And these communities are commonly known as *jat* among themselves on the basis of their generation wise occupation but not identical with the caste or *jati* system of Hindus. The *jat Qureshi* or *Quasab* has the exclusive profession of animal slaughter and selling meat as they only killed the animal as per Islamic rule and that meat (*halal* meat) is the only acceptable meat among the Muslims. A big chunk of the *birathery Ansaris* has the traditional occupation of tailoring. *Mansuris* have the profession of cotton carding and crashing. But today there are also many cases where these *Jat* members do not profess their traditional occupation.

They have a strong objection to use the term 'caste' as it creates a lot of confusion within the frame of religion. Rather the term '*jat*' is more appropriate as the Indians adopt the term for any community who have something common like religion, language, origin, similar

geographical background and so on since the earlier days. They often use the term '*birathery*' for the same which means marriage relation groups or a restricted circle in which to choose wife. Each *Jat* professes an occupation or specific profession traditionally. Religiously marriage occurs within the *Jat*. The different *Jats* members almost always respected this rule and people who dared break this rule are outcaste. But this type of endogamy also have exceptions and not rigid like the Hindus. Usually the higher status groups are very strict about this custom.

Apart of this *jat* arrangement the Muslims are segmented into various orders on the basis of *Mojhabs* or *Ferkka* and affiliation to *Pir* (*mureed*). The Sunni Muslims of the town have two exclusive theological schools - *Berelvi* and *Deobandi*. And the *Berelvis* again segmented on the basis of their affiliation with various spiritual orders i.e. *Khanquah* and *Silsila* of popular Islam. In the town, majority of the Sunnis except the Tibetan Muslims, are *Berelvis* and each and every *Berelvi* family is affiliated to some spiritual abode or *Khanquah* where spiritual specialists or *pirs* guide their disciples or give teachings to their *Mureeds*. Each *pir* have their own and separate spiritual teachings or guidance which is popularly known as *silsila*. The *mureeds* of a common *pir* are called as *pir bhai* who have some roles and responsibilities towards each other. This relationship of a common brotherhood helped them in various social matters viz. marital alliance, social disputes and etc. Moreover, interaction among different *mureeds* of different *khanquah* is a common phenomenon among them i.e. a *chisti mureed* is not hostile to a *quadiria mureed*. The spiritualism cut across the various social boundaries among the Muslim communities like *jat* and class or status. A *Berelvi Asraf* can be a *pir bhai* of an *Ajlaf* or *Arzal* person. But there is no clear cut hierarchical order observed among various *silsila* orders among the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya. However, among the Nepali Muslims of poor social status have a tendency to find themselves with some

famous *khanquah* and *silsila* of distant places as a symbol of the process of *Asrafization* which started among themselves since the last 30 years. The *Dawat-e-Islami*, a religious institution, has a great role in building spiritual consciousness of *khanquah* and *silsila* among the Nepali Muslim groups.

Inequality in social position in terms of tradition and economy is markedly noticed among the Muslim communities of Darjeeling town. The gradually decreasing of traditional *jat* arrangement is replaced by the new type of social stratification of 'status group' among them. The emerging economic mobility of some families' creates a clear social distinction of the society into two major parts with unequal distribution of Muslim families or communities - *Rais* and *Garib*. And very interestingly the traditional *jat* system has also a shadow on these status groups. Very few *Asraf* families, because to their acquired economic capability occupied in the top of the social ladder of the Muslim community and identified as a *Rais Admi*. They controlled the whole *Anjuman* administration and even the government agencies often take advice from them for various minority issues. Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslim families along with some Bihari Muslim families are all categorized as *Rais*. And *Garib* includes marginal occupational categories of Bihari and more particularly the Nepali Muslim groups which is the bottom of the social ladder of the Muslims in terms of social prestige and power. But the situation is now changing. The identity conscious Nepali Muslims are now raised their voice in favour of *Gorkhaland* movement of Darjeeling hills and established their control in the administration of *Anjuman* which is the supreme official body of Darjeeling Muslim communities.

However, all these above discussions suggest that the social organization of the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya in general and Darjeeling town in particular is characterized by diverse social groups or social segments with compound relations and interactions with each other. These groups or social or religious segments often

overlapping to each other in terms of kinship relations. The social segments viz. *Berehvi*, *Deobandi*, *mojhab*, *khanquah*, *pir*, *mureed*, endogamous *jat*, status group *rais* and *garib* are all situation specific development of the Muslim *Ummah* in Darjeeling town and operates within the greater circle or framework of the community. Still contextual social values of both Islamic great tradition and little or local traditions are acting some roles in building social structure and social organization of the Muslim communities living in Darjeeling hills.

5.7: Findings

The Muslim society of Darjeeling town is a best example to break the popular believes of monolithic Muslim society though theoretically Islam advocates an egalitarian social order. The Muslim society in Darjeeling is thereof divided into a number of segments and social groupings. There are both macro and micro units. The first major distinction of classification of Muslim population is obviously based on the adherence of religious basics i.e. sect or better to say the division of society in *Sunni* and *Shia* sects. However, there is no *Shia* Muslim family in Darjeeling town and the Muslims are all belongs to *Sunni* sect. The *Sunni* sect is again divided into two sub sects - *Berehvi* and *Dobandi* which are nothing but the two different schools of Islamic theology. The *Berehvis* are the dominant group in Darjeeling town as they incline to accept the social and cultural conditions of their habitat and past generations without much criticism. On the basis of spiritualism and adherence of *sufi* orders the society is again divided into a number of groups or *khanquah* orders or *silsila*. And the major distinction is based on ethnic and regional variances. There are four types of Muslim groups in the town namely Nepali Muslims, Bihari Muslims, Tibetan Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims. The Nepali Muslims are the decedents of early migrant Muslim males married with local girls. The group is also highly heterogeneous in terms of occupation and ethnic characters but construct an identity on the

basis of marital alliance with the local girls historically. Perhaps they are the dominant in their numerical strengths among the Muslims. The Biharis comes next which are also a migrant group from various districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar but maintains strong relationship with their place of migration. Tibetan Muslims came from Tibet after Chinese occupation there and the Kashmiris from Kashmir considered the smallest Muslim group in the town. However, their social structure and organization exhibits some unique characteristics features and exhibits the notion of hierarchy or social gradation among themselves though purity pollution is not strictly followed by them. But endogamy is strictly followed. Social status, traditional occupation and economy are no doubt the major reasons for such stratification or gradation. However, there is a gradually decreasing of traditional *jat* arrangement is seen among the Muslim groups of the town and the traditional *jat* arrangement or the *asraf*, *ajlaf* and *arzal* division is observed to be replaced by the new type of social stratification of 'status group' among them. The emerging economic mobility of some families' creates a clear social distinction of the society into two major parts with unequal distribution of Muslim families or communities - *Rais* and *Garib*. But very interestingly the traditional *jat* system has also a shadow on these status groups.