

## CHAPTER – 6

### CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES AND IDENTITY DYNAMICS OF THE MUSLIM GROUPS

#### 6.1: Introduction

Muslim culture in general represents the unification of all the cultures influenced by common beliefs and practices. The term is primarily used to describe the cultural practices common to historically Islamic peoples. As the religion of Islam originated in 7th century Arabia, the early forms of Muslim culture were predominantly Arab. With the rapid expansion of the Islamic empires, Muslim culture has influenced and assimilated much from the Persian, Turk, Indian and so called western cultures. The term Muslim culture is itself a contentious term. Muslims of the Darjeeling Himalayan region are from various places of inside and out side India and it can be difficult to isolate points of cultural unity among diverse Muslim groups, besides their adherence to the religion of Islam. Anthropologists nevertheless study Islam as an aspect of, and influence on, culture in the regions where the religion is predominant. Islamic culture generally includes all the practices which have developed around the religion of Islam, including *Quranic* ones and non *Quranic* which are popularly known as the textual and contextual issues.

#### 6.2: Cultural Attributes of Nepali Muslims

The Nepali Muslims popularly known as *paharia* (though the term is generic) Muslims are the hybrid of early Muslim migrants and the indigenous Nepali females. The category itself is more a very heterogeneous group. They constitute a small but an important chunk of the Muslim community living permanently in the Himalayan town of Darjeeling. Their affinal relation with the ethnic Nepalis keep their social status low to the overall Muslim community of the town. Their

culture is a mixture of both Islamic and local traditions. Local culture or traditions have effects a great in their food habit and other social and cultural matters which reflects in their daily life way activities.

### 6.2.1: Dress and Ornaments

As these Nepali Muslim families are integrated with the local cultures of their habitation, their dress pattern is not different from that of their neighbours. Traditionally *Kurta-Pajama* or *Lungi-Punjabi* was their typical dress pattern for man and *Salwar-Kamij* for woman. Still now the elderly males wear *Kurta-Pajama* and also *Lungi-Punjabi* in their locality but always prefer to wear Pantaloons and shirts when they are in out for various purposes. Some elderly males always prefer to wear scalp cap (*fez topi*) as a symbol of there adherence to Islam. The modern youths prefer to wear modern European dresses. The Western culture has always been a great influence in various mountainous pockets of India and the town Darjeeling has no exception to this. The youths of these Nepali Muslim families adhere this type of dresses from their Nepali and Bhutia neighbours. They wear jeans pants, cotton trousers, T-shirts, shirts as a symbol of modernity. Very recently it is noticed that a considerable number of these youth prefer to wear *fez topi* as a symbol of their identity and also the revival of their cultural traditions.

The Nepali Muslim families hardly observe the *pardha* as these families are very closely integrated with the traditions of their Nepali or Bhutia neighbours. The forefathers of these families married Nepali females and their descendents still now continuing this practice. Therefore, the system of veil was gradually disappeared as the Nepali caste or tribes have a history of matriarchal society to patriarchal society. Female had a major role in food production and other societal responsibilities. Most of these Muslim families have one or two female members from their neighbouring Nepali communities. Consequently, the dress pattern is also influenced a lot. The elderly females always

prefer to wear *shari* and blouse. Married females wear *salwar-kamij* and *dopatta* and unmarried girls prefer to wear modern *kurta-kamij*, skirts, tops or shirts. But jeans are not popular among these families. Married females who prositilysed before marriage wear *salwar-kamij* instead of their previous dress patterns. Some elderly married females who were basically from Nepali caste background still wear *choubandhi* to cover the upper portion of her body.

The majority of these Nepali Muslim families are from low income group and the collection of their ornaments is also very small. Gold is popular but because of its high cost silver is mostly utilized. Almost all of the females have some ornaments made of gold like ear rings, gold chain or necklace and finger rings. But these are secretly kept for festivals and ceremonies. Only silver ornaments are used day to day. Nose pin is popular among them. Elderly females of Nepali origin still prefer to wear their traditional ornaments like *fuli* on both the sides of their nose strills, large ear rings of brass and necklaces made of brass. Males prefer to wear wrist watch. *Tabiz* and amulets are very popular among them. The modern youths has a tendency to put a black *tabiz* and amulets of black cloth as a pendent of their chain.

### 6.2.2: Food and Drinks

As we already categories these Muslim families into three categories, there food and beverages are also varies to one another. The families of the descendents of migrated Muslims from Bihar and UP have almost an identical food practice of their recent migrated Muslim brothers from Bihar and UP. Only some few items are incorporated due to the culture contact or intermarriage with their Nepali neighbours. Wheat made *roti* or *chapatti* and *sabji* or vegetables are their staple food. While rice is the staple food of both the next two categories. Beef is very popular among them and because of its low price and availability, one item of beef is always present in their daily

dietary habit. Peoples who are working in the beef market regularly used to come home with chaat (unsold pieces of cow flesh). They prepare *sabji* with this by adding potato, *rai shaak*, onion, garlic and ginger. The poor families really fond of it. Besides *kabab*, *bhuna* is also regularly prepared from beef. All these above said preparations are also very popular among them. They always take *halal gost* (ritually slaughtered meat). Due to the cultural contact with their Nepali and Bhutia neighbours, a large number of hill food preparations are present in their daily dietary habit. These preparations are mainly fast food type. Among them *momo*, *thukpa* and *gundruk* (dried *rai shak*) are most popular. During the festivals they prepare various types of traditional *moglaui* dishes like *biryani*, *korma*, *kopta*, *firni* etc. Some typical dishes of these families are given below -

1. '*Khenama*' is a local seed which they usually take after frying.
2. '*Simki*' is a pickle made of radish.
3. '*Soljaar*' is a liquid drink. It is a mixture of the extraction of boiled rice with onion, salt, chili powder and oil.
4. '*Sindra*' is a dried fish pickle made of small *puti* fish.
5. '*Sukeko masu*' is the dried beef. They use it in every vegetables and *daal*.

Drinking alcohol is not popular among them. Though the elite Muslim classes believed that these Muslim families are fond of indigenous country liquor. But we have seen that these degraded Muslim families try to observe the basic religious guidelines and banned alcohol as it is strictly against religious scripture. *Samaj* (local council of elderly members) has a great role on the ban of selling liquor in the *basti*. Tea is a very popular beverage among them as like the other hill peoples. They prepare it with adding salt instead of sugar. This tea is popularly known as *noon ki chia*.

### 6.2.3: Life Cycle Rituals

#### 6.2.3.1: Birth

Birth of a child is a very important phenomenon among the Nepali Muslim families. During the time of pregnancy, women have to observe several restrictions regarding her daily activities. She almost stays as a captive in her husband's house. These are for the protection from evil spirits. Today most of the deliveries are occurred in government hospitals or private nursing homes, but previously a corner of the room was used for the purpose. An experienced lady or *dhai* assist the delivery work. When a new baby born, *azan* is give by a male member of the family. After the birth, a separate room is allowed for her, if possible. After the delivery, the mother observes a period of pollution for six days. A special ceremony is observed in the six day which is called '*Shatti*'. Both mother and child are bathed on this day and the head of the child is shaved by *hazam* (barber). The child is dressed by new cloths and *kajal* is put on his/her forehead for the protection from evil eyes. Neighbouring women are invited to attend the ceremony for singing folk songs. The mother of the child takes normal diet along with some females. After all this, rice, new cloths and money is given to *hazam* and *dhai* for their duties. Some special guests are fed in this day. A name is also given to the child by either family members or by a *moulavi* or the local imam.

After 45 days of the birth a special ceremony is organized this is popularly known as '*Sowamahina*'. This is the formal feast and all the neighbours and relatives are fed in this day. Both the mother and child is bathed and dressed by new cloths. A *moulavi* is called for organizing *Milad Meahfil*. Circumcision or *Sunnat* or *mussalmani* or *khatna* is must for the Muslim boys. There is no fixed age or day for this. Some people prefer to do this in the day of '*Sowamahina*'. A *hazam* or *nai* is invited to do the job. But people to day used to prefer it after the birth of the child in hospital by the doctor. Some gifts in a

bamboo made basket are given to *hazam* for his job. The gifts are called '*nichawar*' and are given as per the economy of the family.

Name giving ceremony or *akika* is also a very important ceremony for the Muslims. If *akika* is not observed after the birth, then it can be observed in any time even in the time of *Kurbani eid*. Preferably a domestic animal is sacrificed by a *maulavi* and the meat is distributed to mostly among the fakirs and neighbours.

### 6.2.3.2: Marriage

As the basic Islamic teachings are same, the Nepali Muslim groups perform their marriages or *nikaha* according to the rule of Muslim rituals. Local influences are also very prominent among them as they are the indigenous converts or a hybrid of the locals. Majority of the marriages are through negotiation but love marriage with Nepali girls are frequent among them. Always the marriage proposal goes from the groom's house to the bride. This practice is very popular among them which popularly known as '*mangni bia* or *magni saadi*'. Before the wedding day turmeric paste is applied to the both bride and bridegrooms. The marriage ceremony is observed generally in the day time. For this they generally hire the hall of *Anjuman-i-Islamia*. The *nikaha* is solemnized by a *maulavi* according to the Islamic principles. *Denmohar* is compulsory and settled by the kinsmen of both the parties but the amount is very low as it is customary. After that a feast is organized at the house of the bridegroom. Some respectable and influential community members along with kinsmen of both the parties are invited. Non-Muslim neighbours are also invited in the wedding feast.

If, the bride is from a Nepali caste or tribe family, then before marriage the girl is converted to Islam by a *maulavi* or by the *Imam* of the mosque. Such case is happened if both of them are fall in love. Earlier days the Nepali girls after fall in love with a Muslim boy fled away from her house. But presently both of the parents eagerly give

their permission to marriage. '*Dhokbeth*' is a special ceremony in this kind of intercommunity marriage. The tradition is purely local and practiced only by the Nepali Muslim families. If a Muslim boy marries a Nepali caste girl, the parents of the Muslim boy send milk, fruits and meat along with some other gift items to the girl's house. And if the parents of the girl satisfied or agree to their marriage, accept the gifts and invited the boys parents and set the day of the marriage ceremony. On the eve of the ceremony the parents of the groom come to the house of the bride and all the elderly members of both the parties bent to touch the feet of each other. The bride and groom also do the same. This typical custom is known as '*dhokbeth*'. After that both the parties go to the marriage ceremony hall. *Maulavi* or *imam* come and proselytized the lady. After that *nikaha* is done according to the Islamic traditions.

#### 6.2.3.3: Death

After the death of a person the dead body is buried in the burial ground specified for the Darjeeling Muslims. The ground is just below the butcher *basti* and very near to the slaughter house. The burial ground is maintained by *Anjuman*. After the death, the body is washed by water and thus purified by spraying cent or *ittar*. A new white cloth is used for covering the body which is known as 'kafan'. If the deceased person is a female or mother, all her offspring beg pardon for their limitations to their deceased mother as she during her life time feed breast milk. This is called *maaf talab* or *dudh baskna*. All the kinsmen and community neighbours are then invited to attend the *Namaaz-e-Janaza*. There is a room in the burial ground for *Janaja*. But people used to prefer this in their home. For *dafan* places is cleaned and dig and the *dafan* process is observed as per Islamic norms. The head of the body is placed to west and the feet to east as the direction of the holy city *Madina* is in the west. At first the family members give earth to the body and then other relatives and neighbours covered the

body by offering earth. *Monajat* or a prayer is performed for the peace of the departed soul.

A period of mourning is observed by the family members and several rituals are performed though some are not sanctioned by the traditional Islamic traditions. After three days *teza* is held. It includes reading of *Quran* or *Quran khani*. There is no feast in this day. Only some *fakirs* are invited to feed. After 10 days is called *dashma*. No such customs are observed. After 20 days is called *bishma*. After 40 days the main programme or *kria* is observed. The day is known as *chalisa*. On the eve of the day a *milad mehfil* is performed. *Maulavi* read the Koran. Actually from the day of the death, *maulavi* used to read the Koran daily and finished the reading in the 40th day. Kinsmen and neighbours are also feed in this day.

### 6.3: Cultural Attributes of Bihari Muslims

Bihari Muslims category includes the families of the descendents of the migrants who came to Darjeeling town after during the colonial times and also early independence periods from various districts of the Indian state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Among them there are so many ethnic groups or *biratharies* or occupational groups. They are the dominant Muslim group in the town both in numeric sence and socio-political matters and concentrated mainly in the butcher *basti* (Dr. Zakir Hussain Basti) area. 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. Bihari Muslims are of diverse occupational background. And still majority of them trying to maintain their generation wise occupation. And the most striking feature of this group is they still have relation with their place of migration or ancestral place and strongly deny adopting local cultures.

### 6.3.1: Dress and Ornaments

The dress pattern is almost same as like other communities of the hill as because of its cold environment. But still the age old person continues to wear traditional Muslim dresses like *pajama*, *panjabi*, *jahar* coat etc. Usually the modern youth prefer to wear modern European dresses like shirts, jeans, t-shirts, pantaloons. A majority of them used to prefer to put *fez topi* on their scalp. Muslim ladies usually wear *shari-blouse* and *salwar-kamiz*. The ladies observe *parda* but not to wear *burkha*. They usually wrap a piece of white, black or pink *chadar* around their head so that their head is covered.

Ornament is popular among them as like as other females. Usually they wear the common ornaments made of gold and silver like ear rings, nose pin, chain etc. They also prefer to wear glass made *churi* and other ornaments made of imitation. They modern boys have a latest fashion of wearing black *tabiz* on neck with either gold or silver chain. Wrist watch is popular to them.

### 6.3.2: Food and Drinks

Wheat made *roti* or *chapati* is their staple food. They take rice only once or twice in a week. Generally they take this with vegetables or beef curry. In the morning they take bakery bread or other hand made snacks as breakfast along with tea. In lunch the take hand made *roti* with vegetables. They are fond of beef. Almost every day they consume beef made preparations. They make their food with more onion, garlic and spices. In occasions they make *biriyani*, *polouw*, *kabab*, *korma*, *firni* etc. Their food items are the mixture of Afgan, Arab and local traditions.

They usually take hot as beverages. There is no limit of taking tea. They prefer to make it with sugar and milk. Alcohol is restricted among them.

### 6.3.3: Life Cycle Rituals

#### 6.3.3.1: Birth

The birth of a child is considered one of the happiest occasions in their family. The first delivery usually takes place in the traditional house at Bihar or UP. And the ceremonies related birth usually takes places at there. But presently majority of these births takes place at Darjeeling. The traditional role of *dhai* is almost absent as it takes places at hospital. The news of birth is celebrated by azan and distributing sweets to the neighbours. After birth, the mother has to observe a six day pollution. After six days a ceremony takes place which is known as *chhati*. In this very day, the mother takes bathe and a feast is organized. Some special foods are delivered to the invitees. Sometimes after 10 days a *milad mehfil* is organized. Generally a *maulavi* is invited and some close relatives and kinsmen are invited to attend. After finishing religious scripts, sweets and other snacks items are distributed. Some times foods are distributed among poor Muslim families. After 5-6 month, solid food is given to the child. If the child is a boy and first child of their parents, a special ceremony is observed to celebrate the day. Khatna or circumcision is performed at the age of 5 years to 10 years. The role of *hajam* or *barbar* is replaced by modern doctors. Yet, *hajam* is invited and some gifts are given to him. Some times a animal like goat or cow is slaughter as per the economic condition of the family.

#### 6.3.3.2: Marriage

Marriage customs are similar with other communities residing at Bihar. Their diverse caste or *jati* background reflects is every aspect of their custom related to the ceremony. Notwithstanding, the primary rule is observed as per Islamic law. Before marriage, both the boy and girl applied turmeric paste in their respective houses. Usually marriage ceremony is observed in *Anjuman* hall room as of shortage of space in their houses. Generally hall room is hired by the bride party and the whole programme is in the day time. *Baraties* or the groom parties are

accepted by elder and young females with folk marital songs. Invitees come to join the feast. *Maulavi* or Imam *saheb* is invited to perform the *nikah*. *Denmohar* is generally fixed before *nikah* by the elder members of both the families. After all these, newly couple is served food and all the *baraties* joined the feast. Next day after the marriage, the newly couple is taken to the *majar sarif* at burial ground and *fateha* is observed by offering flowers and sweets.

### 6.3.3.3: Death

After the death, the body is bathed and covered a white cloth (*kafan*). All the relatives and kinsmen come take the body to the grave yard. There us only one grave yard for the Muslims which is maintained by *Anjuman*. The burial takes place after *Namaz-e-janaja*. But often the offering of *janaja* is observed at the burial ground. A separate room with shade is exclusively for this purpose. The body is buried as per Islamic rule. After that rituals are observed which are similar to the Muslim *umma*. Rituals include *chautha* (after 4<sup>th</sup> day), *dashma* (after 10 days), *bisma* (after 20 days) and *chaliswa* (after 40 days). From burial day up to the 40<sup>th</sup>, the successive reading of the holy Quran is performed a *maulavi*. In *chaliswa* a feast is observed. Some gifts along with money are given to *maulvi* for his job. Foods are distributed to the poor.

## 6.4: Cultural Attributes of *Bhote/Bhutia* or Tibetan Muslims

The Tibetan Muslims are more culturally identical with their Buddhists coreligionists. They are also treated as a refugee community from Tibet though all of them got Indian citizenship after migration to India. Their social cultural assimilation with the greater Tibetans make them isolated with the greater Muslim society of the town. They are a very small community and in the jargon of globalization or westernization they gradually loss their traditional cultural practices.

### 6.4.1: Dress and Ornaments

Traditionally Tibetan Muslims wore '*chupa*' alike the Buddhist inhabitants which was protected at the waist by a silk thread. The dress could cover the whole body from neck to feet and secured them from extreme cold. The women wore a blouse called *anju* and *boku* over it. Previously both male and female wore *boku* together but due to the influence of west this typical dress pattern was vanished from them. Still some aged women continue to wear *boku* as their primary dress and the married hang a stripped coloured piece of cloth in the front of her waist as the symbol of marriage alike their Buddhist coreligionists. However, cotton trousers, jeans, t-shirts and shirts are most favourable dress among the male, now a days. Aged along with some modern youths only put Turkish *fez topi* on their scalp as a symbol of their adherence to Islam. Females prefer to wear *salwar* and *kurta* or *kamiz* and some times a white *urna* or scarf covered their head as a veil. They do not put *burkha*.

Tibetan Muslim women wear s special type of necklace made of precious coloured stone which is known as *khu*. They never wear nose rings. Light year rings are common. Boys never put chain on their neck but wear *tabiz*. Armlets and bracelets are also popular.

### 6.4.2: Food and Drinks

From the historic periods, Tibetan Muslims adopt the Tibetan food culture which is not replaced even after their migration to India. Still their regular meal is occupied by major Tibetan dishes. As vegetables were scanty at Tibet, their food item was mainly full of meat items. Traditionally barley made *tsampa* was the staple food of Tibet. And the Tibetan Muslims also adopt this as their staple food. But due to the changed climatic condition and also the availability of food grains, their staple food at Darjeeling is rice and wheat made roti or chapatti. They consume both these two items either day or at night. *Thukp* (boiled noodles with soup and vegetables) and *momo* (boiled

half moon shaped with meat or vegetables) is also prepared as breakfast or evening snacks. Traditionally they take Tibetan bread *coqu* or *korkun* as breakfast which is replaced by modern wheat made bread. Meat dishes are likely to be made of beef, mutton and chicken. *Salan* is a special dish of mutton or beef which is similar to curry.

Tibetan Muslims take tea with salt but never sugar. Butter tea is also popular. They never consume alcohol.

### 6.4.3: Life Cycle Rituals

#### 6.4.3.1: Birth

At the time of pregnancy several restrictions regarding food and physical activities are imposed by the elder members to the mother. Birth is considered as a gift of God to them. All the traditional systems in delivery are now abolished. After labour pain, usually the mother is shifted to the hospital for delivery. After the birth of a child the mother has to observe pollution for seven days. After 7 days, a feast is organized and all the kinsmen are invited. In the name giving ceremony and *akika*, a goat is sacrificed. If the child is a boy, then one goat is slaughtered. But if the child is a girl, two goats are slaughtered and the meat is distributed among the kinsmen, neighbours and fakirs. *Sunnat* is performed for the boys at the age of 5-6 years. But presently most of the families do the job at hospitals.

#### 6.4.3.2: Marriage

Weeding ceremony is the blend of two traditions. Both the Tibetan and Muslim customs are followed. As they are the descendants from Kashmir, their rituals are to some extent match with Kashmiri weeding. Previously both the groom and bride wore traditional Tibetan dresses. But in Darjeeling this tradition is vanished. Both the boy and girl wear modern weeding dresses. Both the parties also wear modern dresses. The weeding ceremony is observed as a picnic for 2-3 days. No such *mehendi* or *haldi* day is observed. In the weeding day the boy with his parents and other members come to the

girl's house. *Nikah* is performed by the *kazi* by chanting three times *Kabul* in the presence of witnesses to solemnize the marriage. After that wedding feast is attended by all the members of both the parties. They usually prefer to fix marriage dates at winter.

#### 6.4.3.3: Death

In Darjeeling town, they burry the bodies at the ground selected as a burial ground for the Muslims. There is no separate burial ground for Tibetan Muslims. They burry the bodies as per Islamic norms and rituals. *Namaz-e-Zanaza* is performed by all the community members and kinsmen either at the house or at the burial ground. A period of mourning is observed like other Muslim communities in India. Besides all the ceremonies and rituals are identical to the other Muslim communities. They always try to follow the customs and traditions made by *asraf* group of people. In *chalisa*, all the community members along with other Muslim families are invited to attend a feast. The day is observed by reading of the Holy *Quran* and giving alms to poor.

### 6.5: Cultural Attributes of Kashmiri Muslims

Kashmiris are a very small Muslim community in Darjeeling town. They are very religious in their daily lives. They have very rich unique cultural traditions which reflected in various social and religious festivals. In Darjeeling town except the great Habib Mallick's family, all belongs to a same ancestry and hence, continuing a same cultural traditions. The indigenous influence is almost nil among this Muslim community.

#### 6.5.1: Dress and Ornaments

Traditionally Kashmiri Muslims (both men and women) used to wear the *pheran*, a long loose gown hanging down below the knees, for a long time. The garments are made of cotton, wool or embroidered silk with the necks closed by a gaily coloured string or jeweled button. A *Pashmina* belt goes around the waist. A *Mughal* type turban

completes the costume for men. The women's *pheran* are brightly coloured and embroidered in front. The headdress of a Kashmiri woman is a brightly coloured scarf. However, due to the contact with the west there is an abrupt change in the dress patterns. In the town Darjeeling the Kashmiri men wear trousers of jeans, shirts and jackets. Only they wear *pheran* and *poots* in their occasions and festivals. With the passage of time, a significant change has come about in the dress pattern of the Kashmiri women. Saris, *shalwar-kameez* or *kurta, churidars* are becoming popular.

The Kashmiri Muslim women are very much fond of wearing coloured ornaments of gold and silver and brass with precious and semi-precious stones, shades such as jade, agate, turquoise, rubies and the gold stone. The various kinds of ornaments worn by them include anklets, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, ornaments of head etc. The ornaments of the head include *jiggni* and *tikka*, which are worn on the forehead. All these traditional ornaments are now only seen to wear in the festivals and occasions.

### 6.5.2: Food and Drinks

Rice is the staple food of these Kashmiri families along with cooked meat in various varieties. But during the winter times, they used to prefer to eat wheat made roti or chapatti or paratha as staple food. They are very much fond of beef and mutton. The use of a wide variety of spices, e.g., aniseed powder, turmeric powder, chilly powder, ginger powder, black pepper, cardamom, saffron etc., is very common among Kashmiris. They prepare vegetable soup with tomato, salt, ginger and some other fresh vegetables which they take almost every day. The special festive dishes are all meat based. Wazwan is a multi course traditional meal among the Kashmiri Muslim families which is prepared and served in very special occasions like marriage ceremonies. Some essential wazwan dishes are -

- *Safed kokur* or *zafraan kokur*.
- *Tabak maaz* or fried lamb ribs.
- *Daniwal korma*: lamb in a yogurt based gravy.
- *Aab gosht*: Lamb curry cooked in milk.
- *Sheekh kabab*: Barbecued spicy ground lamb on iron road.
- *Gushtaab*: Chopped lamb with spices cooked in oil, milk and curds.

Kashmiris are very much fond of tea. They usually take tea with salt which is popularly known as noon *chai* or noon *chia*. Alcohol is restricted among them.

### 6.5.3: Life Cycle Rituals

#### 6.5.3.1: Birth

Birth rituals of the *kashmiri* Muslims are almost same as like as the other Muslim communities of Darjeeling. But some special events are observed. Singing folk songs are a very common and popular practice in various ceremonies among them. Visiting shrines, calling the aid of saints and *pirs*, fasting etc, are very common and popular practice. Prior to the delivery, usually the pregnant women go to her father's house or her husband's house in Kashmir to give birth the child. After delivery, welcoming *azan* is shouted and *takbir* is whispered into the left ear of the child that god is great and death is the end of all things. On the seventh day, mother bathes and a barber is called to shave the head of the child. A name is given to the child according to the month in which he is born. This is a common practice. All the neighbours and relatives are invited to join the ceremony and a feast is celebrated. After 6-8 month, the mother returns back to Darjeeling, her husband's house. At the age of 4-5 years, the male child will be circumcised and the day is celebrated like a festival. Previously a barber or *Mollah* was called to do this but presently *sunnat* is done by the doctors after the birth of a male child.

Usually all these ceremonies are celebrated at their own villages at Kashmir with their relatives.

### 6.5.3.2: Marriage

Kashmiri families of the town Darjeeling selects mate only from their native land Kashmir and the marriage ceremony is celebrated also in Kashmir. Generally negotiation marriage is generally accepted rule of marriage. After negotiation and initial talking, a date is fixed if both the elder members accept each other. In the next few days, all the members of the wedding party go to Kashmir to attend and perform the marriage ceremony. After fixing the wedding date or sometimes before, the girl's family sends '*wazwan*' food to the boy's house. *Wazwan* is a special meal prepared with exclusive spices which consists 40-50 dishes of mutton, chicken, lamb and *biryani*. The *wazwan* are then distributed to the close relatives by the boy's family. The arrival of *wazwan* to the near relatives announces the engagement of the boy.

*Nikah* is celebrated on a grand scale which takes over sometimes a period of 4-5 days which is celebrated at the house of bride. Singing in festivals and occasions is a very common practice among the Kashmiris. In the next few days before *nikah*, the married women come to the bridegroom's house for singing and make fun. Young girls and friends of the bride apply cosmetics and oil to bride and the day is accompanied by good amount of fun and teasing. Before the wedding day, a quantity of *heena* dye or *mehendi* is sent to the bride's house by the boy's family. The bride bathes with turmeric paste applied to her whole body and dressed traditional yellow dresses. The day is celebrated with joy by singing marriage songs by the married women. In the wedding day, *barat* or the wedding procession along with groom comes to the bride's house. All the *baraties* are served food and beverages by the girl's family. The amount of *denmohar* is fixed by the elders at that time. The *nikah* is conducted by a *Maulavi*. Men and the

women are seated separately with their close relatives and friends. The *Maulvi* reads certain verses from the Holy Quran. Thereafter, '*liab-e-Qubul*' that is proposal and acceptance takes place. For the legality of the marriage, the mutual consent becomes essential and important in *Nikaah*. The legal document i.e. *nikahanama* is signed by the bride and the groom for the marriage to become legalized which consists a set of terms and conditions that must be accepted by both the parties. After the lavish wedding dinner the bride come to the groom's house. After the fourth day of wedding, which is known as *chouthi*, the bride visits her father's house along with groom which is customary. The groom's party is also welcomed by a lavish reception.

### 6.5.3.3: Death

The ceremonies concerned with death are simple and observed as per Islamic norms which are similar to other Muslim communities. After death, the body is laid on with the head towards the north or east. *Kalma* and some other verses from the Quran are pronounced. The neighbours and relatives are come to see the body. Some times other community members come with *khada* which is wrapped over the deceased neck. The corpse is bathed and wrapped by a white cloth or *kafan*. The body then carried to the graveyard and graded. The mourners then return back to the house and a period of mourning is observed. *Dashma* and *chalisa* is observed according to the norms and alms are given to the fakirs on the name of departed.

## 6.6: Major Religious Practices and Festivals

The Muslim inhabitants of Darjeeling observed their religious practices as per their sacred religious text or traditions but varied to some extent community to community yet the basic religious practices are similar. Orthodox religious traditions are strictly observed by only the Bihari and Kashmiri Muslim families. They are very much orthodox in their religious matters. They prefer to wear dresses as per *shariat* and also prefer to keep beard. As there is no religious obligation from

their Hindu Nepali neighbours, they freely observed all these traditions easily. On the other hand the Tibetan Muslims are also religious and observe all the standard religious practices like taking five times *namaz*, observation of Id and other religious festivals. Almost all the elderly persons spent their leisure time in counting bids or *tasbi* which is very common practice among them. But the practices among the Nepali Muslim communities are very interesting. As all the families of this category are the decedents of the mixture of early Muslim migrants and indigenous Nepali caste or tribes, a degree of non or un-Islamic traditions or practices are observed among them. They are less Islamic according to other Muslim groups. Even some males have not yet circumcision or *khatna* which is must for a male as per *shariat*. The frequency of taking *namaz* is also very low among them. However, since the last ten year a Sunni Muslim religious organization named *Dawat-E-Islami* is taking a major role to spread standard Islamic religious practices among them. For the last 7-8 years the organization successfully converts 7 Nepali Hindu and Christians into Muslim. According to their opinion, before their arrival to Darjeeling the *choti masjid* at Butcher *Basti* was almost vacant as a majority of them were unaware to know how to take *namaz*. They don't have any clear cut idea about the writings of *Quran*, *Hadish* and *Shariat*. And it is the *Dawat-E-Islami* who successfully spread the voices of Islam among the Nepali Muslim families and pulls them into the greater Muslim society. The organization organizes seminars or *majlish* weekly, popularly known as '*madina mahal*', for both males and females where Islamic values and individual roles are discussed. The members weekly visit door to door and try to understand the Muslim-folk not to drink alcohol, do not quarrel with neighbours, observance of *pardah* and so on.

However, due to the collective effective effort of both the *Dawat-E-Islami* and *Tabligi jamat*, a sense of religious consciousness is emerged in the mind of the Muslims. During my field stay at

Darjeeling I saw a large number of Muslims are going to *bari masjid* and *choti masjid* of *Darogabazar* and *Butcher basti* respectively to pray their prayers or *namaz*. I have seen a large number of Muslim youths participated to take *namaz*. Particularly after the *magrib namaz* some of them share their understanding regarding Islam. Even they circulate some translated book on Nepali among themselves for proper understanding of Islam. However, the daily prayer schedule of the Muslims of Darjeeling town is given below in a tabular form -

Table: 6.1

## Prayer Schedule of the Muslims of Darjeeling Town

Time	Description
5.00 am	1 <sup>st</sup> time "Namaz" or <i>Fajar</i>
12.00 pm	2 <sup>nd</sup> time "Namaz" or <i>Zohar</i> .
4.00 pm	3 <sup>rd</sup> time "Namaz" or <i>Aasar</i> .
6.30 pm	4 <sup>th</sup> time "Namaz" or <i>Magrib</i> .
Late night (Before sleeping)	5 <sup>th</sup> or last time "Namaz" or <i>Isha</i> .

Muslims of Darjeeling celebrate a number of festivals all round the year. All the prominent Muslim festivals are celebrated with great religious fervor. The important festivals are *Ramadan*, *Eid-ul-Fitr*, *Eid-ul-Zoha* or *Bakri Eid*, *Shab-e-Barat*, *Milad-un-Nabi* and *Muharram*. In addition to the festivals, the days commemorating shrines in India and death anniversaries of saints, are also observed with religious fervor. The celebrations of the auspicious occasions are marked by special prayers offered in mosques and grave yards, fasting, feasting and exchange of wishes. The Nepali and Bhutia neighbours are invited to participate as guest. Special foods are prepared and exchanged to the kinsmen.

6.6.1: *Ramadan*

The most important Muslim festival is *Ramadan*, which extends through the Islamic month of the same name. It finds special place in the calendar of events. It is the nine month of the Islamic lunar

calendar. The third pillar of Islam, which is fasting, is practiced during the month of Ramadan. Every day during this month the Muslims of the town spend the daylight hours in a complete fast. They abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs during the daylight hours. Only before sunrise and after sunset they take any food. They believe that every part of the body must be restrained during the month *Ramadan*. The tongue must be restrained from backbiting and gossip. The eyes must restrain themselves from looking at unlawful things. The hand must not touch or take anything that does not belong to it. The ears must refrain from listening to idle talk or obscene words. The feet must refrain from going to sinful places. In such a way, every part of the body observes the fast. Therefore, fasting is not merely physical, but is rather the total commitment of the person's body and soul to the spirit of the fast. Ramadan is a time to practice self-restraint; a time to cleanse the body and soul from impurities and re-focus one's self on the worship of God.

For the morning "*Sehri*", generally they take cooked food like *roti*, *sabji* or vegetables and *gost* or beef. Then the call for prayer is heard from the mosques, and the children and men set to their mosques to offer *namaz*. Women stay at their houses and recite the Koran. As the sun sets, the call for the *Magrib* prayers are heard from the mosques and the fast is broken. It is called "*Iftar*" and the fast is broken with a sip of water, a piece of bread and some fruits. The food taken in *Iftar* is called *Iftari* and most popular special food items are *ghugni*, sweet bread, *paratha* and *kababs* are taken.

### 6.6.2: *Eid-ul-Fitr*

*Eid-ul-Fitr* or the 'festival of fast breaking' is the most celebratory of all Muslim festivals in Darjeeling. It is celebrated after the long fasting month of Ramadan. This is the day following the appearance of the new moon. On the day of the festival Muslims dressed in new attire gather in large groups at *Eid Gah* at Butcher *basti*

just below the *choti masjid*, and offer their prayers or *namaz* collectively. *Bari masjid* yard at *Anjuman* is also act as *Eid Gah* and people offer their *namaz* there. The prayer lasts for a while followed by a sermon. After the prayer the Imam embraces and wishes *Eid Mubarak* to one another. After coming from the prayer halls of the mosque it is a general custom to visit the houses of the family members, friends and relatives. Wish each other *Eid Mubarak* the delightful 'sewai' (a sweet dish) and several varieties of delicious dishes made of beef is exchanged with neighbours. People also do a lot of charity on this auspicious day as a part of the festive rituals. Each and every family gives gifts in kind or cash to the needy and poor families as per their capacity.

The occasion of *Eid-ul-Fitr* is incomplete without the famous dishes, which Muslims cook on the *Eid* day particularly sweet dishes. Females cook all the *Eid* dishes in bulk as many friends and relatives visit home on the *Eid* day to greet. All the females decide the preparations and the menu for the *Eid* beforehand. Some of the most famous and common dishes made at all the Muslim houses are *sewai*, *chana halua*, *biryani*, *bhuna*, *kabab*, *korma* and *paratha*.

### 6.6.3: *Eid-ul-Zoha*

It is one of the grandest festivals of the Muslims of Darjeeling town and it is also called *Bakri Eid*. It is celebrated from the tenth to the twelfth day of *Zil Hijja*. On this day Muslims sacrifice a goat or *Bakr* (Urdu) to commemorate the sacrifice of Prophet *Ibrahim*, who willingly agreed to kill his son at the behest of God. Prayers are offered in the mosques and the sacrificial meat is then distributed. In Darjeeling the day normally starts with men and women dressing in the best outfits and approaches to the *Eid Gah Maidan* just below *choti masjid* or *Anjuman* for collective prayer. Special 'Dua' (prayer) is recited for peace and prosperity of their families. It is mandatory to sacrifice either individually or collectively if one cannot afford the full

price of the animal. The wealthy are expected to sacrifice one animal per family and distribute two thirds of the meat among poor. Those who cannot afford it, one animal per family can be offered. Very poor, seven or seventy families together offer one animal. Followed with the food sacrifice and charity to poor Muslims greet each other with “*Eid Mubarak*” and visit the houses of relatives and friends. Special delicacies are prepared and served among family and friends on the occasion. Gifts are also exchanged on this auspicious day. Children are given *Eidi* (gifts and cash money).

Eid-ul-Zoha food items mainly contain of beef and mutton as it is a day of animal sacrifice. The festival is also known as *Bakri Eid* and *Bakar* or *Bakri* is a local Urdu term for goat. The food are always very rich, colorful and high in calories and extremely delicious. The most favourite and common dish is *polau* made of colourful flavoured rice. Meat is cooked in many different ways. A lot of spices are added to the meat which gives it an aroma that can be smelled even from a far of distance. The meat is cut in a special way which is known as *Halal* and this increases the taste of the meat further. The most popular and common meat dishes are *murgh mussallam*, various *kababs*, *korma*, *haleem*, *nehari*, *kima puri* etc. The *kheer* is a sweet dish made with a lot of dry fruits added to it with milk. This makes the dish high in calories and stomach filling. A lot of dates and cashew nuts are used in the preparation of many dishes.

#### 6.6.4: *Shab-e-Barat*

The festival of *Shab-e-Barat* is celebrated with great prompt and enthusiasm by Darjeeling Muslims. It is a night of worship and prayers for all Muslims irrespective of their sect, sub-sect, ethnic and regional variation. According to mythology, *Shab-e-Barat* festival is celebrated either on the thirteenth or on the fourteenth day of *Shaban*, the eighth month of the Muslim year. This happens to be fifteen days before the beginning of Ramadan. On *Shab-e-Barat* Allah writes the destinies of

all men for the coming year by taking into account the deeds committed by them in the past. Skies light up on the night of *Shab-e-Barat* as the festival is celebrated in the night. Houses and streets are also illuminated by candles and strands of electric bulbs to provide a joyful ambiance to the festival. *Fatiha* or the blessings are recited over the meal in the name of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The Holy Book of *Quran* is also read to mark the day.

Sweets are distributed to the neighbours. A special dish is prepared among them during this festive celebration which is known as *dusti roti*. The item is like a *paratha* or *puri* with two pieces joined and after fried in ghee or vegetable oil remove each other and takes it with beef preparation like *kabab* and *bhuna* or curry.

#### 6.6.5: *Milad-un-Nabi*

*Milad-un-Nabi* is the birth day celebration of Prophet Muhammad and celebrated as *Eid-e-Milad*. The birth anniversary of the Holy Prophet is remembered on 12th *Rabi-ul-Awwal* of the Islamic lunar calendar. On the day of *milad*, the Prophet's teachings are repeated, the *Quran* is read and religious discourses are arranged in the mosques. The Muslims invite their friends and relatives for a grand feast on this day. Festive dishes like *biryani*, *kofta*, *haleem* etc are prepared and guests are invited. Sweets are also distributed among the children and neighbours.

#### 6.6.6: *Muharram*

This is a festival of mourning. Muharram is observed in the first month of the *Hijri* year. The Muslim community in the town celebrates this festival with great enthusiasm but their participation is varied from community to community. Only the Nepali Muslim community along with some Bihari Muslim families celebrates the day. And the Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslim families never participates the processions or rallies or *tazias* as only the celebration is common among the *Shias*. *Muharram* commemorates the martyrdom of

Hussain, the younger grandson of Prophet Mohammed. Communal harmony exhibited on the occasion. On this particular day Muslims from various locality or *basti* come to Darjeeling *chack bazaar* old taxi stand with their effigy looks like a mosque and kept them for the next days. The place is turned to *karbala maidan* and Muslim youth started mock war with sword and knife remembering the sad day of Imam Hussain's killing. Darjeeling has the unique tradition where many Hindu and Buddhist Nepali families join their Muslim brethren in observing fast during Muharram and pray their offerings by lighting candle and smoke sticks. At the evening peoples from different creed come to the place and pray their offerings to each and every effigy carried by different localities. They offered sweets and take those sweets as *Prasad*. The next day a procession called *tazia* with huge arms and other instruments along with drums and pipes started to round the town altogether shouting "*hay Hussain*" and terminate at *kakjhora* to emerge the effigy.

The Muslims particularly the Nepali Muslim community prepares a special food of flour, *dalda* or *ghee* and sugar which is popularly called as *malida*. After preparing this food they offer special prayers or *fatiha* and take some *malida* and *sarbat* or sweetened water to break fast. *Malida* and *sarbat* is also offered to guests and distributed to the neighbours.

### **6.7: Identity Dynamics and Social Boundaries of the Muslim Groups**

The issue of identity is a very complex one. It is because identities are not singular but multiple and varied from region to region within the community for all time. It changes over time as the actions and relationships between groups or individuals change. Identity has fascinated intellectuals for centuries and since the beginning of the nineteenth century, pioneers such as Charles Horton Cooley (1909), George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969) have been

exploring the relationship between individual, identity and society. Holland (1997), has presented the debate in terms of universalists (those who maintain the prominence of nature) versus culturalists (those who maintain the prominence of culture). The 'universalists' argued that, although in the formation of identity culture might have some role, it is subordinated to universal biological and natural psychological structures. However, the 'culturalists' argued the opposite, making identity an exclusive domain of culture. Culture, according to the latter shapes a person's identity as a bottle shapes the water it contains. Although the main anthropological focus in studying identity has been on culture, the majority of anthropologists have avoided the universalists and culturalists extreme viewpoints. Yet in doing so, they have ignored the relevance that individual identity has within societies and the formation of social groups and communities (Cohen, 1985).

Identity is associated mainly with how a group thinks about themselves as people and how this group thinks about other people around them. The notion of 'we' and 'they' are very much crucial in the context of construction of identity of a group. Sociologist and anthropologist examine the identity of a group from three major perspectives. Firstly, the individual identity i.e. created through people with whom they interact. Secondly the social identity which is viewed by individuals as having similar characteristics. Thirdly, cultural identity that indicates a sense of belonging to a certain ethnic group and its culture or sub culture (Mondal, 1988). Scholars from many different academic disciplines have generally categorized ethnic identity formation along two main theoretical frameworks - primordial versus situational. The primordial perspective argues that people have an innate sense of ethnic identity. It is something that people are born with, is instinctive and natural, and is difficult if not impossible to change. On the other hand, the situational perspective (also known as the constructionist or instrumentalist) states that ethnic identities are

socially defined phenomena. That is, the meaning and boundaries of ethnic identity are constantly being renegotiated, revised, and redefined, depending on specific situations and set of circumstances that each individual or ethnic group encounters. However, these two categories ultimately represent to characterize processes of ethnic identity formation among the Muslim communities in Darjeeling hill and are still very useful in framing our analysis of ethnic identity among them

Muslims in Darjeeling hill is mainly a community migrated from the plains. For historical, political, cultural and many other reasons identities of the Muslims have been constructed into varied forms both by Muslim themselves and also by the non Muslim Nepali speaking neighbours. Here culture is taken as a major component in constructing identities and looked as a dynamic thing. But the problem here is what definition we give to being a “Muslim”— ethnic, cultural, religious, or political as some Muslim groups of Darjeeling are quite similar to *Pahadis* (people of Darjeeling hills) in terms of language, appearance, and costumes. They claim that their culture is very much mixed with *Pahadi* ambience. Over time, they adopted typical *Pahadi* norms in clothes, language and cultural patterns, though not leaving their religious customs. Even in the faith that they profess, their knowledge of Islamic principles and culture is meager to some extent among some groups, and they do need guidance and direction in this respect. Many of them are Muslims in name only, but hardly know anything else about Islam as well as society. On the other, some groups are still maintain their traditions following orthodox religious traditions and considered other those Muslims as culturally impure.

However, the understanding of acculturation and diffusion here allows us to better understand what is happening to the Muslim society of Darjeeling Himalaya. The indigenous or local influences on early migrant families are strong and reflected in many aspects of their culture. Yet it was not unilateral and the influence of the

particular experience, intensely affected the cultural development and political identities of the Muslims living in Darjeeling hills. The emergent ethnic identity on the other hand, involves the creation of a new form of group identity due to the convergence of some particular circumstances among themselves. More specifically, because of demographic changes or competition and conflict in Darjeeling hills, a new ethnic identity based on common group solidarity and similarity of experiences formed.

Ethnic identity of the Muslims living in Darjeeling hill is inevitably tied to the process of acculturation. The different forms of acculturation and the different factors affect acculturation outcomes are recognize and these are the distinction between behavioral and structural or socioeconomic acculturation. Behavioral acculturation occurred after the migration of the Muslim groups into this distant land and later gradually absorption of the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the then "host" society or hill society or rather say the greater society of the Nepali speaking communities. This may also involve learning common lingua franca of the ethnic Nepalis and within this process, Muslims choose to retain much of their traditional culture, norms, and behaviors while still acquired those of mainstream hill society. The structural or socioeconomic acculturation however, refers to when the Muslims entered and become integrated into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the Darjeeling hill society i.e., when they begin to participate as full members of greater Darjeeling hills (usually in the form of income, occupation, residential integration, etc.). However, these processes of undergoing either behavioral or structural/socioeconomic acculturation usually occurred in a linear or "straight line" manner among some Muslim groups in which the passage of time and the succession of generations lead to increasing economic, cultural, political, and residential integration into Darjeeling hill society. Or it can also be occurred among some other

Muslim groups in a non-linear or circular manner in which Muslims revive or retain old cultural traditions, norms, and behaviors and choose to remain somewhat isolated from mainstream society or alternatively, to combine elements of both traditional Muslim (although they may modify old traditions and values to fit their contemporary circumstances) and mainstream popular hill culture. The former process is happened exclusively among the Nepali Muslim groups as because of their bio-cultural/social integration with the Nepali speaking communities.

One of the most important instance of identity among the Muslims of Darjeeling is the identity at the level of regional background from where they took migrates and the second is at the level of their caste and *jati* or *zaat* arrangement which is considered constructional and primordial in character respectively. The peculiarity among these identities among the Darjeeling Muslims is that these two are overlapping to each other with strong social boundaries. The former identity is mostly assimilated on the basis of a group's racial affinity or biological admixture with the local habitat and the frequency of contact with their native places. On the other hand the identity on *jati* or *zaat* is mostly on the basis of their hereditary occupation. The Muslims of Darjeeling is divided into four broad groups on the basis of their regional background and biological affinity with the local habitat. These are Nepali Muslims, Bihari Muslims, Tibetan Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims. These groups are created and defined both by their members and by how others perceive them. Those attitudes, from within and without, influence the identities of both the group and its individual members. Except Tibetan and Kashmiri Muslims, the Nepali and Bihari Muslims are divided into diverse *jati* or *zaat* which is considered primordial character and reflected in their social traditions and customs. Identity among all these groups also varied. Nepali Muslims, a hybrid of the native women and migrated Muslims are the most peculiar group in

comparison to the other Muslims groups in terms of their identity. They along with the Tibetan Muslims constitute a uniform cultural identity intermingled with the popular hill cultures by adopting their life ways. Culture is always wrongly interpreted as a static thing. People have a popular monolithic believe that the Muslims have a low exposure to the outer world or culture and thus less tolerate to the alien traditions. But since last 200 years, Darjeeling Muslims are predominantly living with the dominant Hindu and Buddhist environment and thereby largely got integrated with them both socially and culturally.

We know Islam is a religion of equality, but the Muslim society is ridden with caste like stratifications where they do not marry outside their caste. However, the four Muslim groups of Darjeeling are usually placed into three broad categories viz. *Ashraf (khas)*, *Ajlaf (aam)* and *Arzal (raizals)* where *Asraf* includes the Upper class Bihari Muslims, Tibetan Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims; *Ajlaf* includes clean occupational groups of Bihari Muslim category and the *Arzal* includes unclean occupational groups or more particularly the Nepali Muslims. A wide consensus of relative positions of each social group or segments emerges though it is a conflicting claim of both. Among these Muslim groups there has developed a two tier hierarchy on the basis of their social identity and inherited familial traditions. The *Asrafs*, called themselves *sharif Jat* or *ucha jat*, includes Muslims who belonged to the higher levels in social hierarchy and also Muslims who preserved their traditions by adopting orthodox religious practices. The lower class, called *nicha jat*, includes Nepali Muslims from lower occupational categories. As in the society, the upper classes do not have close social relations with lower classes, the same way the *ucha jat* do not normally have close social relations with *nicha jat* and strictly maintain the social boundaries by adopting endogamy. Inter *jati* marriage is possible only within the groups of same social or economic status but only among the Bihari & Nepali Muslims.

Identity may often seem to be a very personal and individual decision and there can be many historical, socioeconomic, and sociological factors that can directly or indirectly influence this decision. The Muslim communities realize their “different-ness” in various social contexts and relate to the natives by rethinking their own identities and debating and negotiating the meanings of their cultural and past experiences. In this case, ethnic identification arises from specific patterns of their social interaction and their strategies to adjust with their habitat. The feeling of being “*pahari*” for all of the Muslims was unified and clear in its significance, in certain cases, where their *pahari* ambience seems to be more akin to the dominant Nepali speaking ethnic Nepalis. It is precisely the field of conceptual and symbolic ethnicity of the Muslims that enables them constantly to reinterpret their symbolic capital and transform themselves continually as a result of changes in the cultural domain of the greater Darjeeling hill society. Within this context, the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya act as an “organizational type” that allows its members improved performance within the wider context in which they interact directly where their “*pahari*” identity is to be situational, determined partly by interest and partly by embodiment and cultural association.

Since 1972-1973, the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya are raising their voices for their constitutional reservation as OBC by the leadership of Abul Fazal, the then chairman of Kalimpong *Anjuman-E-Islamia*. They have their opinion that the Muslims are now an integral part of the greater Darjeeling society and their children are educated and aware of their rights and privileges as they are all born and brought up in Darjeeling hills. They began to demand equal rights and equal job opportunities, though not equal share in power as they were mostly tiny minorities. Their movement gradually spread all the three hill subdivisions of the district Darjeeling and ultimately established a strong network with the Muslim inhabitants of the hills. In the

meanwhile, in 1994 the government of West Bengal prepared a list of backward classes on the basis of occupation with which social and economic backwardness is associated and out of 60 OBCs in the state there are eight communities which have been identified as Muslim OBCs and the community *paharia* is enlisted after the successive struggle by the Muslims of Darjeeling hills and ultimately in 1999 the category *paharia* is declared as a Muslim OBC group by the Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal (notification no. 84-BCW/RC dated. 01.03.1999) where all the Muslims born and brought up in Darjeeling hills are recognized as *paharia* Muslims irrespective of their caste and regional backgrounds. Only the Tibetan Muslims are excluded from this fold as they were already enlisted as a scheduled tribe community by the Government of India.

However, the developments of Muslim organizations have evolved remarkably over the past few years in Darjeeling town. Since 1907, the Nepali speaking ethnic groups of Darjeeling hills were agitating politically for a separate administrative setup and after independence the demand for separate statehood within the Indian Federation by the hill peoples of Darjeeling emerged gradually, from 1986-1988 under the leadership of Subhash Ghising and his Gorkha National Liberation Front and later by Bimal Gurung and his Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM) in the later phase of the year 2007. The Darjeeling Muslims in both of these two movements blindly supported their Nepali coreligionists as because of the prejudice discrimination, economic stagnation and deprivation along with negligence over them and developed a united cultural identity organized from the sophistication of organizational collectivity where the mentality of the perception 'our' culture or 'their' culture never leads to clashes.

## 6.8: Findings

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

their cultural life. Muslims of the town are divided into four broad groups and each group bears some specific cultural attributes associated with them which are the typical marker of their social identification. These cultural markers often played a great role in maintaining their ethnic identity.

The Muslims of Darjeeling as because of their diverse traditional occupations and ethnic backgrounds exhibits a mosaic of diverse cultural traditions of both Islamic and local traditions where to some extent local influences are strong. Local culture or traditions have effects a great in their food habit and other social and cultural practices of birth, marriage and death rituals which are considered to some extent against the text though the primary or basic rituals are identical with the greater Muslim *ummah*. The cordial relationship with neighbouring hill communities helped the subsequent generations of the Darjeeling Muslims adjust better with their habitat in contemporary times but varies across the Muslim communities living permanently in Darjeeling town. Due to the enculturation across their physical and social background, the children of some Muslim group have the larger scope of adjustment which is reflected in their cultural life like wearing or offering *khada* in all social or cultural ceremonies, preparation of typical hill food items of *momo* and *thukpa*.

The Muslims observed their socio-religious religious festivals as per their sacred religious text but varied from community to community in practices yet the basic religious concepts are similar. Orthodox religious traditions are strictly observed by only the Bihari and Kashmiri Muslim families and they are very much orthodox in their religious matters. But the practices among the Nepali Muslim communities are very interesting. As all the families of this category are the decedents of the mixture of early Muslim migrants and indigenous Nepali caste or tribes, a degree of non or un-Islamic traditions or practices are observed among them. The understanding

of acculturation and diffusion allows us to better understand what is happening to the Muslim society of Darjeeling Himalaya. The indigenous or local influences on early migrant families are strong and reflected in many aspects of their culture. Yet it was not unilateral and the influence of the particular experience, intensely affected the cultural development and political identities of the Muslims living in Darjeeling hills.