

CHAPTER – 9

MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUDING REMARKS, PROBLEMS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE MUSLIMS

The present study is an ethnographic and exploratory study of the Muslims, an obscure community of Darjeeling Himalaya. In the foregoing chapters an effort has been made to sketch an account of the economy, society, culture and identity of the Muslims through an extensive field work in the Himalayan town Darjeeling, West Bengal. In this chapter the major findings of the entire study or rather say the summery of major chapters of the present thesis as well concluding remarks and some hopes and aspirations regarding their socio-economic crisis are described in the succeeding paragraphs.

I

Major Findings

The formation of the Muslim population in Darjeeling hills is the result of historical process and the majority of Muslims consists of second and third generation migrants from the plains. The region has an inadequate history of Muslims and was exposed to the outer world only after the annexation of the tract by the British East India Company during middle of the nineteenth century. The history reveals the fact that the development of Darjeeling town as a sanatorium and health resort by the colonial administers during 1835 to 1850 attracted many Muslim marginal communities to migrate here to serve the increasing urban necessities of the dwellers. Among them most non familial male individuals settled permanently after marriage with the native girls and some settled with their families gradually in later. There is a popular myth regarding the origin of the Muslim habitation in Darjeeling town. The Muslim inhabitants of the town believed that they are decedents of the Muslim invaders to Tibet during the early

sultanate and *Mughal* regime. But this above said story has no authentic historical evidences. The migratory history of the Muslims in Darjeeling town only can traceable from the colonial periods and we can only speculate that the political intrusion of Mirju-Mullah and Hussain Shah into the *terai* and *dooars* region might brought some Muslim *subedars*, *faujders*, *lascars*, officials, intellectuals, artisans and other occupational groups to migrate the hill regions of present day Darjeeling district.

After the annexation by the British, the area Darjeeling was upgraded to a well established sanatorium for the Europeans and their troops. Dr. Campbell devoted himself to the task of developing the station, attracting immigrants and other specialized occupational groups for their specialized services. The most common occupational pursuits of the Muslims are small scale marginal businesses, lather works, craftworks, wage labour, *baburchi/khansama* (cook), *hajam* (barber), *kashai* (butcher), and various lower grade services at organized and unorganized sectors. Some of these peoples had agrarian background but after migration they adopted these above said various urban occupations as these specialized services have always been a great necessity to the city dwellers. Some Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslim business families were frequently visited this urban centre very early but not settled permanently in this soil with their whole business or families

Muslims of Darjeeling town are a heterogeneous community. The present study is limited only 151 Muslim families who have been residing permanently at least three generations in the town. More than half of the Muslims of Darjeeling town (58.94%) is found living in Butcher *basti* and the rest are found scattered in various places of the town like *Lebong*, *Kakjhora*, *Tungsung basti* and etc. It is calculated from the studied households that only 32.45 percent Muslims have their own accommodation or houses or flats. Where as 67.54 percent of Muslims are living in rented houses from generation after

generation. Muslims of the town are largely divided into four broad categories viz. Nepali Muslims, Bihari Muslims, *Bhote* or Tibetan Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims. Nepali and Bihari Muslims are the decedents of the Muslim migrants migrated from various districts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The Kashmiri Muslims are all from Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir and the Tibrtan Muslims are from Tibet. There are total 737 individuals under study and among them 382 are males and 355 are females and the sex ratio of the Muslims of Darjeeling is 929.31 females per 1000 males.

Out of total 737 individuals 51.01 percent are married, 43.55 percent are unmarried, 2.57 percent are widow, 2.03 percent are widower and only 0.81 percent divorced or separated. Divorce or separation is not a common practice found among the Muslims in Darjeeling. This is again against another stereotype that the frequency of *talak* or separation is high among the Muslims. Monogamy is the usual practice among the Muslim communities of Darjeeling town. 95.74 percent Muslims are practiced monogamy. Only 4.25 percent are found polygamous but all of them got married twice after the death of their first wife or husband. Negotiation marriage is the common practice among the Muslims though love marriage is also practiced among them. 86.17 percent are found married by negotiation and only 13.82 percent found married by love. Among the Nepali Muslim families the prevalence of love marriage is better in comparison to other Muslim groups and this is because of their acculturation and marital alliance since historical past with the Nepali Hindus.

The number of nuclear type families (54.30%) is high among the Muslims of Darjeeling town. Economic condition and scarcity of space for newly constructed rooms is no doubt the main reason for the increasing number of nuclear families. The popular myth of large sized families is not a reality in Darjeeling Muslim society as only 11.92 percent are big families which comprises 7-9 family members

and 5.96 percent very big families where 10 and more that 10 number of members are found.

There are only 9.02 percent illiterate found among the Muslims and the literacy rate is high as against the state and national level which is 90.97 percent. Among the literates 2.79 percent population having without any standard of education. 10.54 percent population have primary education (class I-IV) that means they received elementary education from government recognized primary schools or educational institutions and here very significantly the females are much in percent in comparison to the males. There are 13.76 percent females and 8.13 percent males who have primary education. 42.48 percent population has the education of middle standard (class V-VIII). There are only 6.82 percent population having *madrassa* education and among the males they are 8.67 percent and 4.34 percent among the females. There are 12.09 percent HS passed populations and among the males there are 13.82 percent HS where as it is 9.78 percent in case of females. There are total 6.97 percent graduates and among the males it is 8.13 percent and 5.43 percent among the females. There are only 1.08 percent professionals who either passed MBBS, Engineering, MCA/MBA or other professional carrier oriented courses.

It is to be said that The Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya are a mosaic of diverse ethnic groups and the 'Muslim Society' is made up of various elements drawn from diverse origins There were no official statistics about the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the Muslims living in Darjeeling town. But some early writers of gazetteers and memoirs mentioned a few words about the Muslims. Hari Mohan Sanyal, an overseer of the early (1835) Colonial PWD department, wrote a memoir of Darjeeling where he contributed some few words for the Muslims living in Darjeeling town. Dozey (1916) also wrote about the *haat* or weekly bazaar of Darjeeling town where *Peswari* businessmen were participate. 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 - *Berevi* and *Dobandi* which are nothing but the two different schools of Islamic theology. The *Berevis* 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.

Their social diversity is perhaps the most powerful manifestation of their economic structure. The occupational activities of the Muslims of Darjeeling are categories into three broad categories viz. business or trading, self employment and wage labour. The businesses are all small scale marginal type except Tibetan and Kashmiri Muslim families along with few Bihari Muslim families. The majorities of Nepali Muslims are in the occupation of self employment and wage labour in beef or fish market. They are the most marginal section among the Muslim community in Darjeeling town. Their economic condition is considered them as a low income group. The next Bihari Muslims are in small scale petty business activities of self employed category. Majority of them have grocer shops, utensil shops tailoring shops and repair shops. Small portions have some large and expended businesses of order supply and building construction. They are considered as an economically moderate group although some wage labours also found among themselves. The Tibetan Muslims are considered as a trading community as traditionally they are all businessmen from present Tibet (after the Chinese occupation there). In the town they have hotels, cloth shops and shoe shops. Economically they are considered as a high income group. The small Kashmiri Muslims are all in the business of curio and handicrafts. Actually, they are the sellers of precious ancient items and handicrafts of Tibet and Kashmir. They are economically well off and considered as high income group. However, it can thus be said that the occupational diversification of the Muslims of Darjeeling town is the only reason of social assimilation in broader sense. The economic conditions of Nepali Muslims are the worse in comparison to other communities. 44.66 percent families of Nepali Muslims have a monthly income of Rs.2000-Rs.5000 which is not sufficient for their survival in a hill station like Darjeeling. And thus the community is considered a

low income group. The Bihari Muslims considered a medium income group as there is no family whose monthly income is Rs.2000 and it's below. The Tibetan and Kashmiri Muslim groups are considered as a high income group as all of these families monthly income starts from Rs.5000 to Rs.10000 and it's above.

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*.

Quite a good number of services rendered to the town dwellers are mainly by the Muslim groups. The presence of a *Dhunia* (cotton carder), baker, watch repair and very often of a butcher is a necessity of the every days life of the town. The tailors of daroga bazaar, bakery shop at chack bazaar, utensils repairing shops, fish market etc., have all largely been occupied by the diverse Muslim groups though considerable changes have recently occurred which affecting the virtual monopoly of the Muslims in these occupations. The functions of a few Muslim groups like the Tibetan Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims deserve special consideration as their traditional occupations

of curio, Hotel and handicrafts trade linked the development of tourism industry of Darjeeling. Despite the religious and ethnic differences with the ethnic Nepalis and other hill dwellers, a sense of belonging and functional interdependence has emerged due to acculturation and vice versa. The Muslim are now habituated with the customs and traditions of the dominant Nepalis and other hill communities. Even the Nepali is considered as mother tongue to some Muslim families exclusively in case of Nepali Muslims and in many Muslim occasions or festivals a functional interdependence between Hindu-Buddhist-Christian ethnic groups and Muslims are seen which is an example of social-cultural integration.

In defining the status and role of Muslim women in Darjeeling the Socio-economic conditions of their families along with their ethnic or regional background has a significant role. It was very difficult to analyze the position without making reference to the status given to them by the Islamic great traditions manifested in religious texts like Quran and *Hadith*. Out of total 737 Muslims there are 355 females comprising 48.16 percent of the total Muslim population and the sex ratio of the Muslims is 929.31 females per 1000 males. The sex ratio is better among the Nepali Muslim groups compared with the three other Muslim communities. The popular believe of high fertility is not evidenced among the Muslim women of Darjeeling. The literacy rate among the Muslim females is 42.79 percent which is below the state and national level and a big chunk of this percentage have received only the elementary education in the girls *maktab* situated at the butcher basti. The dropout rate is high among the poor Nepali and Bihari Muslims because sending a girl child to school is a double loss to their family as it causes additional expenses for her and the family is deprived from her physical contribution (labour) to family. However, whatever education or schooling level the women received seems to have an impact on their role and status. Education influenced their willingness to opt for empowerment. The economic participation or

contribution in formal sense of Muslim women in Darjeeling is meager. The work pattern among the Muslims in Darjeeling is marked by gender based division of labour but varies between different Muslim groups. The women perform almost all the household works like cooking, child rearing and caring. Veiling through *burkah* is not popular among the Muslims of Darjeeling. Veiling in common sense is not popular among them but due to the influence of *Islamization* process, the females are now using *urna* or *dupatta*, to cover their head and neck as *pardah* which is a recent change among them.

The Muslims of Darjeeling do not confine themselves to the orbit of their own society; rather they have contact with the other hill communities. They incorporated the elements of different systems and beliefs of Hindu/Nepali philosophy and mythology which later gradually syncretized in their indigenization. The Muslim society thus developed gradually and after a period of more than hundred and half years, Muslims became a part and parcel of Darjeeling hill society and politic. The facts that they learned the local languages, lived in harmony with local people, accepted local wives and adopted various professions suited to their genius, and that in their dietary system they dependent on materials or foods locally available, bear out that they considered Darjeeling as their homeland. Today, the mosques at the town, *madrasas*, Muslim shops and beard man with *fez topi* in public places are all a part of Darjeeling hill society. Their economic and social organization and religious activities are the clearest indicators of Muslim identity at the town.

Due to close association with the hill society and culture, the Muslims share many cultural traits of their neighbours. The Muslim society and culture of Darjeeling hills has been shaped by the interacting forces of several set of traditions viz. Islamic, Nepali caste and tribe, Tibetan and etc. which led to propagate a meaningful coexistence of Muslims and non Muslims in the town. The major concentrations of the Muslims in Darjeeling are in butcher *basti* which

is a multi ethnic in character. Nepalis and Bhutias are the next door neighbours presently. Though they are different in religious faith, yet the participation of Muslims in their socio-religious programme and vice versa are very usual. Marriage alliance is often occurred. Some members of these non Muslim families recent past embraced Islam. But communal harmony never breaks in their locality for the occurrences. This harmonial coexistence has often enriched the secular environment which helped the Muslims in adaptation to the social environment of their habitat.

II

Concluding Remarks

The present study is an ethnographic study of the Muslims of Darjeeling town where a humble attempt has taken to explore the history of origin of the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya in general and Darjeeling town in particular. It is an in depth study of the economy, society, and culture as well as identity dynamics of the Muslims of Darjeeling town. The Muslims in Darjeeling Himalayan region is an urban population as like as the other parts of India and majority of these Muslims are concentrated in Darjeeling town and hence, the present study is confined only in Darjeeling town. The Muslims have a very small population in the town and residing most in a *basti* named Butcher *basti* which is turned as Dr. Zakir Hussain Basti just a couple of years back. Besides they are residing *Kakjhora*, *Lebong*, *Darogabazar* and *Tunsung basit* since very early of time. The Muslims of the town is highly diverse in terms of sect, sub-sect, spiritual affiliation and ethnic or *jat* characteristics. There are four broad established Muslim groups in the town namely Nepali Muslims, Bihari Muslims, Bhote or Tibetan Muslims and Kashmiri Muslims though the rest two groups are very small in numbers. The Nepali Muslims are the decedents of those Muslims who settled earlier in this mountain town migrated from various districts of Bihar and UP. They mixed up with

the local people after marriage with native girls. They don't have any linkage or social connection with their forefather's birth place. Whereas the Bihari Muslims are also a migrated group from Bihar and UP but they still have close linkage with their place of migration. The Tibenat Muslims are popularly known as Bhote Muslims and they are in the town since 1952. The Kasmiri Muslims are very few in number and they are in the town since the very formation of the town as a business centre of the then British India.

Muslims in this pluricultural environment of Himalaya are not much different from their non Muslim neighbours in respect of language, dress, material aspects, food habits, behaviours, customs and family organizations. They even observe the major and popular festivals of the hill and the neighbouring communities of different creeds also observe various Muslim festivals and occasions with great respect. Even during the Muharram, the neighbouring Buddhists and Hindus offer sweets, flowers and *khada* to the martyrdom and light candle as a symbol of worship. In birth, marriage and death ceremonies, the offering of *khada* is almost customary now a day among the Muslim groups of the town which was exclusively a popular practice by the Nepalis and Bhutias to pay respect. The process of cultural integration has been taken place due to the process of acculturation among the Muslims and two or more traditions are synchronized gradually. And due to this syncretism, the Muslims of the town feel an inclination towards the greater hill society and thus are largely integrated with the greater Darjeeling Himalayan society. Under such a circumstances, the Muslims constructed a new identity based on their situational demand. However, they raised their voices to incorporate them into the cluster of 'Gorkha' identity which is the result of structural and behavioural acculturation. Their Ethnic identity is inevitably tied to the process of acculturation. The different forms of acculturation and the different factors affect acculturation outcomes are recognize among themselves 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.

However, as an obscure distinct Muslim community or amalgamation of diverse Muslim groups, the Muslims of Darjeeling town interacts with each other through common bond of Islamic

brotherhood. The socio-religious institutions like *Anjuman*, *madrassa*, mosque and religious movement like *Dawat-E-Islami* are operating as medium to increase religious as well as universal brotherhood among the Muslim *ummah*. The process of Islamization among various Muslim groups is the most important process of cultural change which strengthens the universal brotherhood and creates religious interests among themselves. This also helps them to preserve and maintain their identity as a religious group in the mountain town of Darjeeling Himalaya.

III

Problems and Aspirations of the Muslims

The present study identified some problems and crisis of the Muslims of Darjeeling town. During the field work among the Muslims of the town, it was observed that there is a considerable variation in the conditions of Muslims and the Community exhibits deficits and deprivation in practically all dimensions of development. The problems of Muslims are increasing day by day, because during the past few years the authority of the autonomous Hill Council is being wielded by certain political forces whose sphere of influence has increased because of adoption and propagation of such plans and policies under which the Muslims of the town have been, and are being deprived. The future of Muslim professionals and working class, traders etc has been very greatly affected as a large number of non Muslims are today encountering in the professional fields which were exclusively operated by the Muslims since the history past. However, in course of the study the people expressed some of their aspirations and hope to overcome such deprivation and crisis. The most important of them are given below.

Major Problems and Crisis:

- ◆ The great problem and handicap for Muslims of the town is their religious and mutual differences which are eating into their

progress. The truth is that there are great differences among themselves on the basis of their social, economic, educational, cultural, linguistic, regional, sectarian and other factors. These differences are to a great extent responsible for their decline and backwardness.

- ◆ They are living in the less focused places of the town where modest and basic civic amenities are meager. The communication system is also very poor even sometimes their houses are deprived from basic infrastructural municipal facilities as because of the popular anti-minority feelings by the dominant Nepalis. The houses of the Muslim localities are facing serious water crisis.
- ◆ The Muslims of the town are facing economic crisis and this situation compelled them to go for earning at a very early age which ultimately increased the dropout rate among themselves.
- ◆ In the educational field also Muslims are very backward whereas the building and development of any community or society depends upon its educational status and standard. The condition of religious *madrasas* is also pitiable in Darjeeling though there are two very old modern *madrasa* operating since the British periods. After completing their education from these *madrasas*, the students do not find themselves fit for any jobs nor are they acceptable anywhere else because they are not trained for the requirements of modern times like computers, engineering, medical courses, information technology, accountancy, shorthand, typing etc. As a result of which the Muslim students are found utter misfits elsewhere in this competitive world.
- ◆ The Muslims of the Darjeeling hill regions are now identified as *Paharia* Muslims by the Government of West Bengal as an OBC Muslim group but the issue of OBC certificate is not properly

started in the town. The educated youths of the community are facing harassment by the government officials when they are demanding OBC certificates.

Aspirations and Hopes:

- ◆ Considering the issues relating to the Muslim situation in Darjeeling town the Muslims themselves are arguing to day that the situation calls for adoption of a wide range affirmative action programmes including the reservation of Muslims as a backward or weaker section (minority) or as backward class whose members mostly comprise historically backward occupational groups. They feel that this is the way of inclusion of the excluded Muslims who have the development deficit in a fast developing state like West Bengal. To them it is the high time to take remedial action, at least, partially to minimize the inequalities and injustices. Therefore, they are actively supported and participates the separate state hood demand of Gorkhaland by the dominant Nepali communities.
- ◆ They believe that economic empowerment can be a tool for betterment of the Muslim community and specific programmes for self-employed or home-based workers to provide skill, credit, technology and market support will ultimately bring social change among them. These programmes should effectively combine modern managerial, technical and design skills with artisanal skills to create effective intervention strategies.
- ◆ ITIs, polytechnics and other institutions that provide skill training to non-matriculates need to be constructed where reservations for Muslims may be secured.
- ◆ Alternative mechanisms, including but not confined to micro financing bodies, should be identified and charged with the task of providing institutional support like market linkages, skill up-

gradation and funding of trades being run by the Muslim artisans.

But irrespective of all these the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya have to introspect themselves. They will have to seriously review and judge the performances of their educational and other institutions like *Anjuman-E-Islamia* and its properties, social and economic organizations, welfare associations and many others operating in the periphery of Darjeeling Muslim society. They should also judge as to how far their political, religious leaders and intellectual have solved their problems and creates favourable conditions conducive to the growth of peoples self esteem. It has been examined that the Muslims are systematically blocked from the opportunities and resources provided by the society and the government bodies at the town. The Muslims under study are of the opinion that recent political processes of Darjeeling certainly consider the Muslim issues and problems in framing their policy programmes for development of this hill town. Simultaneously it may also not be true that the Muslims are always deliberately discriminated by the other hill communities but at the same time the responsibility of government bodies or dominant communities in Darjeeling hill society to assume the rights of this backward community can not be ruled out. Under such a context it is the high time on the part of the government and non government agencies to expedite the process for promoting inclusive developmental programmes or policies on the basis of research findings on the Muslims of Darjeeling Himalaya to ensure equal opportunities to Muslims living in Darjeeling.