

## CHAPTER – 2

### MUSLIMS OF DARJEELING HIMALAYA – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### 2.1: Introduction

This chapter provides the historical process of the Muslims in India in general and Darjeeling hill in particular. The spread and development of the Muslim communities in Darjeeling town is particularly described in the following lines. There are five broad subheadings in this chapter and the first one is the introduction of the chapter. In the second one, the development of the religion Islam and the community Muslims in India is systematically described. In the third, the spread of the religion Islam and the development of the community Muslim in Bengal are represented in words especially with sharpness and detail. The fourth one is the note of the Muslim communities in Darjeeling Himalayan region and or more particularly the town Darjeeling where in three successive sections the development of the Muslim communities from pre-colonial and post colonial to contemporary times are accounted. The last one is the findings of the chapter which is the capsule of the whole chapter in an explanatory manner.

Islam, a new monotheistic religion was emerged in Arabia by the propagation of Prophet Muhammad during the early part of the seventh century A.D. Before his birth, the Arabian world was the land of idolaters. The peoples were divided into tribes within nomadic state of life having no organized government and the tribes were very hostile to each other. Among these tribes Muhammad was born in the tribe *Quresh* (Ansari, 1959; Gill, 2008). He was successful to preach his new faith publicly during the course of time. The conception of one God and the abolition of all social ranks and inequalities created an atmosphere of enthusiasm among the followers of his new faith of

Islam (Mondal, 1994). Within a short period of time the religious zeal of Islam led the followers to preach and profess the message into distant lands. During the lifetime of the prophet battles fought in the name of Islam were confined to the boundaries of the deserts of Arabia. And after his death the Muslim armies of Umar and Uthman were spreading Islam towards the north, west and east and less than a century after its inception, its presence was felt throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, Iran, and Central Asia (Ansari, 1959; Mondal, 1994; Sharif, 1921 and Titus, 1959).

In India, Islam was spread by other means rather by the sword and the conversion to the faith (Islam) was not a sudden switchover of faith. It was a process of two ways. In one way, Islam itself undergoes a change in the process of converting the Hindus or others and on the other the former may change to suit the latter (Eaton, 2000). When Islam came in India, it itself underwent constant changes due to the interaction with Indian great tradition and little traditions and influenced each other (Mujib, 1972).

## **2.2: The Spread of Islam and Muslims in India**

India, from the ancient periods with its hart shaped peninsula is compassed by two great natural barriers, the mountain wall of the Himalayas and the sea. But these could not keep her completely isolated from the rest of the worlds. The Khyber and other mountain passes in the northwest and sea routes in the south have come the armed conquerors, restless tribes, merchants and travelers who did much to shape India's turbulent history. Long before the coming of the Muslims, there were the Aryans from Central Asia, Huns, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans and other groups and communities who not only invaded but also merged themselves with the local people with their rich cultural heritage and form the composite structure of Indian civilization irrespective of their social and cultural dissimilarities.

During the early times Muslims entered into the gigantic triangle of India by three main entrances. First, there is the sea and by this open door only peaceful penetration of Islam was done by the Arab merchants from Hadramawt and Iraq. Secondly, there is the land entrance from Mesopotamia and South Persia through Baluchistan, south of the mountains of Makran into Sindh. Arab armies only once succeed in effecting a successful entry by it into India. And the third entrance is through the Khyber Pass on the North West Frontier through which thousands of groups from various origins and backgrounds have passed down (Titus, 1959).

Muhammad bin Quasim was considered the first Muslim invader of India but the real credit for establishing a Muslim rule in India was goes to Muhammad Ghori who invaded India in 1191. There followed a succession of dynasties extending to the end of the Mughal era in 1857, a span of nearly 666 years (Gill, 2008).

However, Muslim interaction with India had begun much earlier. According to some of the historians, Muslim expeditions were sent to the West Coast of India during the caliphate of Umar (A.D. 634-644). It is also said that the then governor of Oman, Ath-Thaqafi, sent a naval expedition to Thane near present day Mumbai in the year A.D. 637. According to Al-Baladhuri, Uthman was the first caliph who planned to invade India as the early caliphs considered such an invasion a solemn religious duty (Gill, 2008; Titus, 1959). However, it is not an actual truth that Islam was spread in India by the sword or military occupation. The spread of Islam was a multilayered phenomenon and followed different patterns in different regions. We shall have also considered the peaceful penetration of Islam in India by the Arab traders, religious devotees, preachers and Sufi gurus. With the strong appeal of the democratic social system of Islam, the downtrodden peoples of the depressed caste of Hinduism gradually accepted the new faith. And it is to be believed that the present day Muslim populations of India are the result of the methods of peaceful

penetration and constant efforts from Muslim missionaries (Titus, 1959).

Many of the present day historians believed that Islam first came into India in the Western coast of Kerala during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed himself. And Prophet Mohammed is said to have sent messengers to the Roman (Byzantine) Emperor, the Persian Emperors and to the Kings of China and Kerala. In this phase of history of Islam, it was still a missionary religion. And the *Jihad* or the religious obligation to convert was started off a few decades later (Miller, 1976; Engineer, 2000 & Titus, 1959).

Islam was introduced to some parts of western coast of India and Sindh by the Arab traders because trade relations between Arabia and Indian sub-continent were very ancient. The Arabs were the people who, in these regions long before the advent of Islam and in the wake of an Arabian invasion of Sindh led by Muhammad bin Quasim in A.D. 711, maintained the commercial routes between India and Europe. Many of these early Muslim Arabian traders married the local women and their offspring spread in different parts of that region. A number of local peoples living in the coastal areas of Kerala were moved by the principles of Islam and got converted. These traders had a great influence in the establishment of Muslim settlements and spread of the new faith on the Western coast of India (Titus, 1959; Miller 1976).

However, the peaceful spread of Islam was suddenly changed when the *Jihad* started off and the army of Islam secured victory after victory over all the prominent empires of those days. The Arab occupation of Sindh was properly started in the year A.D. 711, only seventy nine years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. *Hajjaj bins Yusuf*, the governor of Basrah sends his armies under the leadership of a young Umayyad General *Imaduddin Muhammad bin Quasim* to affect an occupation of Sindh. He captured the whole of the lower Indus valley and established a powerful kingdom which became the

easternmost province of Umayyad caliphate. During the later half of the tenth century, a series of strong attacks were launched by the Mahamud of Ghazni (971-1031), who swept across Northern India down to Gujrat. Mahamud in his twelve or more successive attacks between 1001-1027, only ransacked and plundered the country and forcibly converted the peoples into Islam. After the death of Mahamud, Muhammad Ghori succeeded him. Nearly after a gap of 160 years, Ghori invaded India with a massive army. His occupation is significant as it was the beginning of the continuous Muslim rule in India on a durable basis. He extended his reign up to Bengal. He appointed a Turk slave Qutub-uddin-Aibok as the governor of his newly captured Indian territory and established first Muslim Dynasty in India (Eaton, 2000.; Gill, 2008; Titus, 1959). This eventually led to the formation of the Delhi Sultanate. The sultanate was in constant flux as five dynasties rose and fell namely Mamluk or Slave (1206-90), Khalji (1290-1320), Tughluq (1320-1413), Sayyed (1414-51), and Lodi (1451-1526). Thus by the beginning of the thirteenth century, there was the emergence of Muslim community in India. By the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Delhi Sultanate was replaced by the Mughals. Since then until the coming of the British, India remained a Muslim kingdom.

All the above historical facts clearly revealed that the Muslim rulers in India taken both the militant method and peaceful proselytize for conversion of the people to the Muslim faith (Miller, 1976 and Titus, 1959). During the total period of Islamic rule, thousands of Muslim immigrants settled all over the India and their numbers were swelled by local converts. Trade served an important passage for the spread of Islam in Indian peninsula as much before the era of Muslim rules West Asian merchants came to Maladar and other Indian coastal parts to purchase spice and aromatic woods. They were not only enterprising merchants but also a keen devotion or obligation to spread the message of Islam in India (Gill, 2008). However, the movement that did play an important role in spreading of Islam was

Sufism. It is neither a separate religion nor a sect. It is a particular and distinctive Muslim way of life born of the human heart against the ritualism of the Muslim orthodoxy (Ghosh, 1984). The Sufi movement also attracted followers from the artisan and untouchable communities of India. They played a crucial role in bridging the distance between Islam and the indigenous traditions.

### **2.3: The Spread of Islam and Muslims in Bengal**

The building up of Muslim society in Bengal was a long process of gradual growth. The composition of the society quite naturally differed from century to century with the immigration of foreign Muslims and the conversion of local people (Eaton, 2000). Islam entered in Bengal both by land and water. By land the Turkish conquerors came with their religion and culture, while the Arab traders came through waterway. Islam came to Bengal comparative in a later period. But the missionary activities of the Muslim traders and Sufi saints began much earlier than its conquest in the thirteenth century. The Delhi Sultan Kutubuddin Aibok sent a Turki general, Ikhtiyaruddin Mohammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji to the eastern part of India i.e. towards present day Bengal. Bakhtiyar Khalji's military exploits in the east also resulted in conversions to Islam. About the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century, he marched into Bihar and Bengal. During that time the whole of the eastern tract was dominated by the followers of Buddhism. . Bakhtiyar Khalji converted Buddhists and its lost followers into Islam. He defeated Lakshman Sen of the Sen Dynasty and conquered large parts of Bengal. With the military occupation of Delhi by the Mughals, a fresh wave of Muslim migration to Bengal started. Mughal supremacy in Bengal lasted for several hundred years (Mondal, 1994, 1997). The Turks conquered Bengal in 1204 and thereafter, stream of Muslim invaders from various corners led expeditions and converted the common masses as well some Hindu *Rajas* respectively (Gill, 2008). These newly converted Muslim rulers and other officials played one of

the most vital roles to propagate Islam and to constitute Muslim society in Bengal either by establishing marriage alliances or by the mass conversions of the indigenous peoples (Mondal, 1997).

At the initial period, the propagation of Islam was not strictly guided by the principles of Islamic rules in Bengal and some wrong interpretations influenced the socio-religious life of the Muslim to a great extent. The general ignorance of Islam and the pre-Islamic cultural traditions constituted a complex cultural pattern among the Muslim of Bengal and moreover, the traditions of the immigrant Muslim groups enriched the Muslim society of Bengal during the course of time (Mondal, 1997).

Islam, which came in the wake of the Turkish conquest, changed the socio-religious pattern of Bengal. Politically, it sowed the seeds of Muslim rule, but socially it planted a Muslim society, opening the gate of Bengal to numerous immigrants from the then Muslim world. The Muslim rulers and officials played a great role to propagate Islam and to constitute the Muslim society either by establishing marriage alliances with local people or by mass conversion of the indigenous communities (Mondal, 1994, 1997). At the time of the Muslim conquest, Bengal was predominantly a Hindu-Buddhist country. The proportion of Hindus and Buddhists cannot be ascertained, but it is a fact that Buddhists ruled Bengal for several centuries. Moreover, non-Aryan elements were always present in Bengal, particularly outside the urban centers and Buddhism which was uprooted from the land of its birth, i.e. North India, had been a great competitor of Hinduism on the eve of the Muslim conquest. The non-Aryan elements had somehow identified themselves with the Buddhists and thus when Hindu-Buddhist rivalry was very much present in the society, Islam came as a relieving force, in which many found an easy opening to salvation and success. This probably led to the conversion of local people to Islam.

The portion of West Bengal, which stretches from Ganges on the south and the Himalayas on the north, is physically known as North Bengal. The region covers the Himalayan and sub-Himalayan areas as well as the plains stretching over 21332 sq. km. and surrounded by Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan to the North; Bihar to west; Assam to east and Bangladesh and rest of the West Bengal to south. It consist six districts viz. Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. Due to lack of research studies and historical documents, the historical back grounds of the Muslims of North Bengal are unknown. However, the only available information's are from the reviews of some early works done by some scholars. Muslim occupation into this region was dated back much earlier. Bakhtiyar Khalji's invasion to *Kamrup* had initiated the penetration of Muslim political forces into this region. During the year 1661 with the help of Vishnunarayan, the eldest son of Prananarayan who had embraced Islam, Mir-Jumla occupied the then Cooch Behar and changed the name into Alamgir Nagar. The political intrusion of these early Muslim invaders and leaders brought many Muslims in these areas to domicile. Establishment of political relations with the local kings had also facilitated many Muslim officials, intellectuals, army personnel, traders, artisans and various occupational groups to immigrate into these regions. Many Muslim saints and Sufi's had also come to these regions and established their Khanquahs or Mazars to preach their religious and spiritual teachings. These Sufi saints had played a great role in proselytize the local peoples into Islam. Some converted influential local people later influenced many others to embrace Islam. Ali Mech and Kala Pahar were the most famous among them. Their roles in propagation and expansion of Islam were very significant (Mondal, 1994, 1997).

#### **2.4: A Note on Islam and Muslims of Darjeeling**

Islam has a distinct presence in the Himalayas particularly in the Indian Himalayas. The social and cultural life of the Muslims in the



poly-ethnic environment of Himalayas shows a very distinctive character as it bears both the Islamic great tradition as well as the local or little traditions. There are no authentic or concrete historical records regarding the spread of Islam and Muslims in Indian Himalayas particularly in the Himalayan region of Darjeeling hills. However, we can only speculate and construct the history of Islam and Muslims in the Himalayas from some scattered inventions by then Delhi Sultans during the early medieval periods (Mondal, 1994). Medieval history told that the Delhi Sultan Qutubuddin Aibak attempted an invasion of Tibet but could not advance beyond the foothills. And Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the famous king of Delhi sultanate, also failed in a similar attempt. The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in his time authorized his men in Bengal to invade Assam. These invasions require a huge number of soldiers of diverse ethnic origins. Many of the Muslim soldiers of their regular army in their return journey may get married the local native women and settled permanently in the subsequent foothill regions of *Terai* and *Dooars*. Their new affinal kin groups later helped these immigrant Muslims to domicile there and as a result the new faith of Islam became rooted in this soil.

It is very difficult to say when the Muslims first entered in this mountainous Darjeeling hill town as there are no proper documents regarding this matter. The town Darjeeling as a district head quarter acted as the centre of all type of activities during the early British periods. As a summer capital it was also attracted by various trading communities and occupational groups for better opportunities. A considerable number of marginal Muslim occupational groups from inside and outside India frequently visit the place for their business purpose. These non familial single male individuals got married the native women and domiciled as a permanent resident in Darjeeling.

### 2.4.1 Muslims of Pre-Colonial Darjeeling

There is lack of authentic historical data regarding the historical background of the Muslim communities in the Darjeeling town as the history of this town itself has a colonial background. Prior to British annexation, the whole tract of present Darjeeling Himalaya, excluding Kalimpong, was a creation of nineteenth century by an accidental involvement of British East India Company in the affairs of neighbouring Himalayan states. During that time the town Darjeeling and its adjoining hilly regions were the tract full of forests and jungles and originally a tract of Sikkim Raj which was captured by the aggressive *Gurkha* Kingdom of Nepal. Only a number of Lepcha habitations were noticed by Captain Lloyd and Mr. Grant, British officers to solve the disputes between Sikkim and Nepal (O'Malley, 1907). Population was scanty and of Lepchas. Names of streams (*jhora*) and some locality authenticate this fact as of their Lepcha nomenclature. The available documents hardly indicate any Muslim inhabitants in Darjeeling Himalayan tract. But it is speculated that Kurseong was a small business centre during the pre colonial times and a weekly hut was run by the petty business men for the sake of inhabitants and may be some among them were small marginal Muslim businessmen from neighbouring *Terai* plains or Bihar. They may be built temporary settlements for their temporary stay there. Various survey reports of early colonial time's exhibits that the Muslim population of Darjeeling town and its adjoining rural and urban areas had a tremendously low female population because of them mostly came without family. The communication was also very poor as there was no well constructed road to Darjeeling. But there were some Muslim trading personnel in the hill station of Kurseong and Kalimpong as this two station was very old trading centre for both the plains and hill peoples before the colonial annexation. The trading communities of Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslims were visited these two towns frequently. They had mainly the business of woolen garments,

silk, animal skins and jewels. There is a popular myth regarding the origin of the Muslim habitation in Darjeeling town. The Muslim inhabitants of the town believed that there were a considerable number of Muslim populations during the sultanate period in the hill town. The Delhi Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq and the Bengal invader Ikhtiyaruddin Mohammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji send their armies to invade Tibet through Kurseong and Darjeeling. But due to winter their army collapsed near the present day Darjeeling town as the soldiers had meager number of garments to protect from winter. So, they made temporary settlements near the present day *Jamamasjid* locality. They also prepared a temporary mosque in the present day area near Bramha Samaj building which previous name was Laldighi. The area was just below the present day Darjeeling *Jama Masjid*. Some of these soldiers return back to plains, some were died of the cold weather and some got married the native women and domiciled in the social. 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. The political intrusion of Mirju-Mullah and Hussain Shah into the *terai* and *dooars* region brought many Muslim *subedars*, *faujdars* and *laskars*. Their political relationship with the local kings and *jotdars* later facilitated many Muslim officials, intellectuals, artisans and other occupational groups to migrate.

#### **2.4.2: Muslims of Colonial Darjeeling**

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. During the colonial periods the regular army of the British East India Company was dominated by the native Muslim soldiers (Sharif, 1921). This soldiers often intermarriage with the native women and settled permanently to Darjeeling. 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.

**Table: 2.1**

**Religious Distribution of Darjeeling Town (1891)**

Sex	Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Buddhist	Jain	Others
Male	5535	363	1030	1937	28	Sikh 27
Female	3073	161	268	1720	-	Parsi 3

(Source: Census of India 1891, Vol. IV, pp. 28)

Table 2.1 shows the religious distribution of Darjeeling town in 1891. From this table it is clear that the number of Muslims were not meager. Owing to its commercial importance a large number of Muslims from the state of Uttarpradesh and Bihar came in the town in search of occupational opportunities and later settled permanently with their families or intermarriage with the native women. That is why majority of the Darjeeling Muslims are of U.P. and Bihar origin. Besides, there was a good number of *Afgan* and *Peswari* Muslims in the Darjeeling town before the partition. They had a representation almost all the sectors of both private and public sectors. But they never settled permanently. All of these *Afgan* and *Peswari* Muslims returned back to their places when India got her independence. Because of its importance as a summer head quarter of India and then Bengal Government, a large number of Princely States installed their summer quarters at the town. And the settlement pattern of the town was divided into three parts during the colonial period. The upper

portion of the town i.e. the mall and *chourasta* locality was strictly reserved for high ranking European officials. The middle portion i.e. the present day *chackbazar* and its adjoining areas were of mixed settlement of both European and Indian *zamindars* and small states. And the lower portion was for the native common peoples particularly for the serve classes.

After the formation of Darjeeling Municipality trade and commerce was rolling rapidly in this Himalayan town. And the marginal Muslim families migrate to serve the increasing urban necessities of the dwellers. The colonial government of the town installed a slaughter house at the bottom line of the town as the daily menu of the Europeans occupied a large amount of animal protein. But the supply of the animal flesh was continued by the Muslim butchers prior to the very formation of this butcher house. However, the exact date of the establishment of this butcher house was undiscovered as the old municipality building was burnt along with old records in 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1996. But it is to be believed that the butcher house was established just after the formation of Darjeeling Municipality i.e. after the year 1850. It was the Muslim caste group or *jat Kureshi*, who were traditionally engaged in the profession of animal chopping particularly of beef and mutton, came to the town and settled just above the slaughter house region. From that time, the settlement of these butchers was termed as butcher *basti*. The *basti* is now in between *Mantulal jhora* and *Jiten jhora*. After that, majority of the Muslim migrants made their settlements in this *basti*. It was then the only Muslim concentrated area or habitation of British Darjeeling as historically Muslims have a general sense of malaise with the Hindus or rather to say other socio-religious groups. During the early nineties, a good number of Muslim aristocrat families made their cottage in this *basti*. *Zumratan* cottage still now shows the truth which was build by one Muslim *zamindar* from Bihar as his house for summer

entertainment. The *basti* is now named as Dr. Zakir Hussain basti, a former President of India.

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.

Darjeeling Municipality was established in the 1<sup>st</sup> July of 1850 in order to provide basic services to the people. It was one of the oldest formal administrative bodies of India which starts its work just after its very formation. Before 1880, the Municipality of the town was building various public buildings and market places near present day *chack bazaar* and railway station region. *Zudge Bazar* was also build during that time. The market was then made of wooden frames. The Kashmiri Muslims, who were basically the traders of *shawl* and *pashmina*, took lease the shops at *Zudge bazaar*. The famous Habib Mallick's curior shop was also started from *zudge bazaar*. Most of the shop owners were from Kashmir and were of handicraft sellers. But the glory of *zudge bazaar* was gradually diluted as most of the shops were shut down because of partition. The famous Habib Mallick shop later shifted to *chourasta*.

Table: 2.2

**Muslims in Towns of District Darjeeling - 1941**

Name of the Towns	1941
Darjeeling	1041
Kurseong	246
Kalimpong	332
Siliguri	1961

(Source: Dash, 1947)

The rapid urbanization of the town Darjeeling increased the Muslim population at Darjeeling and other hill towns. The last colonial census in 1941 counted 1041 Muslim lives at Darjeeling town where as it was 1298 in the year 1891.

*Anjuman-E-Islamia*, a religious institution for the Muslims, is the supreme institute for Darjeeling Muslims to maintain the mosques and other *Waqaf* properties. It was established in 1850 with the establishment of the *Jama Masjid*. It was registered under company act on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1909. This century old instate have had a great role in the Muslim communities of the town. Muslims believed that the *Jama Masjid* or *Bari Masjid* was established in the year 1785 by the then immigrant Muslims. But this popular belief has no empirical basis. During the British period, all the developmental activities for the Muslims were controlled from the *Anjuman* as there were a good number of Muslim government officials in the town who were active members of *Anjuman*. They did a lot for the betterment of the Muslims living in the town. Khan Bahadur Abdul Aziz was one of them. He was a government vetnary surgeon and later a Darjeeling municipality commissioner. He did tremendous job for upgrading the butcher *basti* in to a well maintained habitation for Muslims. Drains and roads were built and all the civic facilities were installed. Khanbahadur also established two *madrasa* for boys and girls at butcher *basti*. The girl's *maktab* was established in 1910 for up to class IV to provide elementary knowledge to the womenfolk. Still now the *maktab* is running as a government *maktab* by DGHC. The *madrasa* for the bays was established in 1909 at the yard of *Anjuman E Islamia*. Since then, it was the only institute for the Muslims for elementary education. Still it is running but the drop out rate is very high and only the poor families send their children there. For his great contribution to the overall development of the town the main road of this *basti* was named as Dr. K B Abdul Aziz Road as an honour.

### 2.4.3: Muslims of Contemporary Darjeeling

After the independence of India, a considerable number of Muslim population were took refugee shelter either in the East or West Pakistan. There were so many Muslim families in the Darjeeling town which fragmented into several parts and spreads the then newly constructed two countries. But need of their specialized services could not be decreased. A large number of Muslims from Islampur sub division of Uttar Dinajpore, who are popularly known as *Islampuris*, fill the vacuum. But most of these peoples are seasonal migrants. These *Islampuris* are specialized in meson work, wage labour, religious priest hood or Imam, shop keepers and house hold servant. But they are not a permanent resident of the town.

Today majority of the Muslims in the town are the decedents of early migrant families and a large portion of them intermingled with the *Paharis* by marriages. A large portion of the Muslims of Darjeeling is quite similar to *Paharis* in terms of language, appearance, and food habits. They claim that their culture is very much mixed with Pahari ambience. Over time, they adopted typical *Pahari* norms in clothes, language and cultural patterns, though not leaving their religious customs.

In the year 1960, 124 Muslim families from Tibet took refugee shelter in Kalimpong due to the Chinese occupation in Tibet. These Tibetan Muslims have an Indian origin of Ladakh, Kashmir and settled permanently to Tibet long ago for the purpose of business. Some of these families later migrated to Darjeeling from their refugee settlement at Kalimpong and settled permanently. Because of their Indian origin, these Tibetan Muslims got Indian citizenship immediately after their migration from Tibet. In Darjeeling there are only a few Tibetan Muslim families and concentrated mostly in a place named *Kakjhora* near Darjeeling railway station.



Since the very beginning, A few Kashmiri Muslim businessmen opened their shops at the town but very few are now continuing their businesses. Some of them settled permanently in the town but maintained strong connection with their mother land. Except the famous Habib Mallick's family, all other are of the same lineage. Kashmiris are all engaged in the business of curio and traditional handicrafts in Darjeeling. Shopping in Darjeeling is one of the favourite recreational activities for the tourists. Curios like *thangkas*, fabrics, brass statues, woodcarvings, jewelry, carpets and the famous Darjeeling tea are the prime items for sale. Shopping in Darjeeling is incomplete without a visit to these curio corners. Most curio shops are on Chowrasta lying along Nehru Road. And the tourists find a vast array of handicrafts and curios, ideal gifts to take as souvenirs from Darjeeling. Previously there were 5 curio shops owned by the Kashmiri Muslims and the famous Habib Mallick's shop is the first but presently some new shops are opened by both the Kashmiris and other communities. *Chourasta* or the roads near to Darjeeling mall is the hub of all antique shops owned by Kashmiri and Tibetan Muslims selling handlooms, handicrafts, Tibetan artifacts, precious and semi-precious stones.

Till now there is no exact population figure of the Muslims in Darjeeling town. But it is to be speculated that there are more that 500 permanent families in the Darjeeling town of diverse ethnic backgrounds and concentrated mainly in Zakir Husain Basti which previous name was butcher *basti*, *Doroga bazaar*, *Kakjhora*, *Lebong* and *Tungsung basti*.

**Table: 2.3**

**Post-Colonial Darjeeling District Muslim Population from 1921 - 1941 Census**

Year	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
<b>Population</b>	6393	19214	23523	37299	59140	85378

(Source: Dash, 1947 & Census reports)

Table 2.3 shows the evolution of Muslim population of the district Darjeeling from 1921 to 2001. It is to be clear from the table that the Muslim population of the town increased rapidly after 1951 or better to say after partition of India during 1947. Prior to partition the Population was almost stagnant in nature. But the overall population figure of Muslims in Darjeeling district occupied by the Muslims living in siliguri sub-division of plains. However, because of unavailability of census records, the population figure of the Muslims in Darjeeling town was largely hidden. Where as 1961 census and 1971 census counted 1075 and 1117 Muslims in the town.

**Table: 2.4**

**Urdu Speaking People of Darjeeling Hills (Census 1971)**

<b>Police Station/Town</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>A. Sadar Sub-division</b>	4718	2985	1733
Sukhiapokhri	1175	791	384
Pulbazar	35	34	01
Darjeeling (R+U)	1057	689	368
Darjeeling (M)	1019	666	353
Rangli Rangliot	21	18	03
Jore Bunglow	27	21	06
<b>B. Kalimpong Sub-division</b>	397	269	128
Kalimpong (R+U)	362	246	116
Kalimpong (M)	276	183	93
Garubathan	35	23	12
<b>C. Kurseong Sub-division</b>	632	428	204
Kurseong (R+U)	589	398	191
Kurseong (M)	481	313	168
Mirik	43	30	13

(Source: Darjeeling District Gazetteer, 1971)

1971 census counted Urdu speaking people of the three hill sub-divisions of the district Darjeeling which shows that only 397 and 632 persons from Kalimpong and Kurseong were speaking Urdu respectively. Whereas, there were 1019 Urdu speaking persons at the

town Darjeeling though Muslims in Darjeeling hills are also a multi lingual community. Urdu is not only a mother tongue of Darjeeling Muslims. On the basis of their mother tongue they can be categorized as Nepali speaking, Urdu speaking, *Bhojpuri* speaking and Hindi speaking.

## 2.5: Findings

Islam, a new monotheistic religion, came into India during the seventh century AD and with its strong appeal of the democratic social system, the downtrodden peoples of the depressed caste of Hinduism and Buddhists accepted the new faith gradually. But its presence was felt even during the early days of the propagation of Islam in India. The Muslim society in India was developed mainly on three important supports - the Muslim ruling class, the Muslim scholars or nobles and the Muslim *Sufis*. The most important contribution of the ruling class was to expand the political power for the sake of the religious obligation to spread Islam. The scholars or the Muslim nobles helped the growth of distinct Muslim society by establishing mosque, *madrassa* and *khanquah*. The contribution of the Sufis covered the vast range. They not only attracted the masses to convert but influenced the rulers and nobles in moulding the state policy on Islamic lines. The Himalayan region particularly the Darjeeling Himalayan region has an inadequate history of Muslims though various invasions during early sultanate periods occurred to capture this tract occasionally. However, the Himalayan town Darjeeling has a colonial history and the Muslims living there are all migrants from various corners of India and outside. The social and cultural life of the Muslims in this poly-ethnic environment of Himalayas shows a very distinctive character as it bears both the Islamic great tradition as well as the local or little traditions. There is no historical records regarding the presence of the Muslim communities in pre-colonial Darjeeling yet the Muslim folk of the town believe that they are living since the early sultanate periods. However, the development of Darjeeling as a sanatorium and health

resort by the East India Company in 1835 attracted many Muslim marginal communities to migrate here. To serve the increasing urban necessities of the dwellers some of the non familial male Muslims settled permanently after marriage with the native girls and some settled with their families. 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.