

CHAPTER - 6

THE PARDA AND STATUS OF WOMEN

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The Concept of Parda:

Islam does not forbid women from going outside their houses for business under necessity. But while going out it is essential for women to cover themselves with a large cloth. It covers their faces also. This is called Parda. In Islam the Prophet says that women must cover their faces. So their faces are kept veiled.

Another order of the prophet is that women should carry themselves with modesty and not in a manner that would attract unnecessary attention from men. Islam does not encourage free mixing of men and women, but it permits women to go outside their houses only under necessity. The system of parda custom varies from time to time and from country to country.

The religious books like the Quran and the Hadish and the religious heads like maulanas and kazis give the following view points about parda. Following is a passage from Maududi (1973) "tell Muslim women to cast their eyes down and to protect their chastity. They should not expose their beauty. They should cover themselves properly. The people or men before whom a woman can come are her husband, father, father-in-law, son, step son, brother and nephew. While they walk they should not strike the ground so hard with their feet so that the beauty they possess may

get exposed by the noise of their walk. They should talk softly and they should cover themselves with a chadar before going out". This passage indicates the number of prohibitions put on the Muslim women. On the same issue the quran (Pickthall, 1930:435-436) says, "O prophet ! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, that so they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is ever forgiving, Merciful".

The parda observance is the basic characteristic of the Muslim women. The rules of Parda govern their dress, behaviour patterns and activities. The concept of modesty, i.e., Saram is the central object to the ideology of parda. The main purpose of parda is to prevent women from interaction with men, and in some circumstances from certain outside affairs. Such feminine veiling and seclusion are referred to as Parda (Mondal : 1979).

A large number of Muslim women still use parda or veil and they accept the seclusion with a kind of fatal recognition and rationalise it on the basis of social custom and tradition (Jones, 1941 : 50).

The system of female seclusion undoubtedly possesses many advantages in the social well-being of unsettled and unorganised communities. Even in countries, where the diversity of culture and moral conceptions are great, a modified form of seclusion is not absolutely to be deprecated. Muslim women observe parda in a wide variety of ways within South Asia and throughout the world,

though some Muslim women do not observe it at all as it is found in the Luccadive Islands (Dube, 1969 : 24). Parda and Parda like behaviour are not restricted to Muslim women alone. There is evidence that women were veiled and secluded among various pre-Islamic Mediterranean, Arab and Persian communities. In recent centuries many women of Hindu, Christian and Buddhist communities have traditional practice of parda system which closely resembled to that of Muslims. In China and Korea the women are also secluded and parda is still observed among them.

The system of parda serves important functions in the family and the larger kin group. Parda plays a vital role in social organization of the groups whose women practise it, and is important to the acquisition, and consolidation of property and prestige by their kinsmen. Parda or seclusion is thus a sign of respect and nobility.

The Parda is sanctioned by Islam. The prophet said that parda was compulsory for women under all circumstances though he granted to the women the liberty to face the world without a veil, when needed.

Ojha (1961) has noted that among the Mohammedans it is a great dishonour for a family when a wife is compelled to uncover herself.

It is noted in the Encyclopaedia Britannica that:

"The seclusion of women in the household is fundamental to the oriental conception of the sex relation, and its origin must, therefore, be sought for earlier than the precept of Islam as set forth by the Quran, which merely regulates a practically universal Eastern custom".

Seclusion of women is a universal custom and the conception is that women are sacred therefore they must be guarded. The notable feature is that the more respectable the family was, the more secluded the women. Professor Lecky in his "History of European Morals, from Augustus to Charlemagne", says that under Grecian law a woman had to live a strictly indoor life, and was not permitted to go out unless under any particular necessity (Quoted by Kidwai : 1976, p. 131).

A recent study by Jahan Raunaq (1973) indicates that, the vast majority of women in Bangladesh still live in parda or social seclusion. Bangladesh women, both rural and urban, traditional and modern, live in a social system regulated by parda.

In Chakmodhu and Kochutia the women observe parda by remaining inside their houses, and by veiling their faces with sarees or ornas when they go outside their homes. Parda rules vary in different families of different socio-economic categories. Parda has become an indispensable part of the Muslim social structure. Seclusion is considered as a sign of status, prestige and honour.

Thus Muslim women do not allow themselves to be seen by men who are not their kinsmen.

The structure of a typical Muslim house is linearly arranged and does not face the street. The house has only one entrance facing the main road which is referred to as Sadar-dorwaza. The sadar-darwaza is left open during the day but a curtain is hung on the door to ensure the privacy of the interior. This is due to the fact that the Muslims follow the rules of parda system (practices of seclusion). The windows of the houses are situated high up on the walls and are covered by cotton parda. Due to parda observance the houses are constructed in such a way as to have two separate apartment, the front portion is used by the men folk, and the backyard or khirkis used by the women.

Due to the system of parda rules the girls who cross the age of 12-13 years are discouraged from playing with the boys of the neighbourhood and also from visiting their neighbours' houses. Thus their childhood friendships break up and increased interactions with the siblings alone. The restriction of movement is imposed more from the age of 14 years upwards. Thus when they go out they cover their faces by veiling with the orna or dupatta because the use of the burkha is entirely absent in Chakmodhu and Kochutia.

Muslim Women in Parda:

For understanding the actual position of women in Muslim society Brijbhusan (1980) has broadly discussed the impact of parda

practices on their society with particular reference to India.

She has viewed that the practices of parda or veiling have been found in ancient Greece, Persia and other countries. So it is not a new system. The Parda is a symbol of upward social mobility. She observed that even the petty shopkeepers keep their women much more segregated than the upper classes. Due to parda system the Muslim women always cover their heads by dupatta or sari or Burkha. According to her Parda is a mark of social prestige and status. But this system limits the liberalism and hinders women's education. Parda deprives Muslim women from mental and moral nourishment.

In this study she has mentioned that how a few Muslim women such as Lady Wazir H^asan, Lady Abul Qadir, Lady Muhammad Shafi, Begum Shah Nawaz, Lady Imam, the Ladies of the Tyabji, Rahimtoola and Chinoy families and others have discarded Parda and participated in the women's movement during the British period.

She has shown that even today observance of Parda among the Muslim women is continuing. But the use of burkha is declining day by day. She has also mentioned that the rigidity of Parda practices is gradually slackening due to various reasons.

The Parda practices among the Muslim women of Uttar Pradesh has been discussed by Bhatti (1975). She has examined the Parda observances of Ashraf and non-Ashraf women. She has shown that the rigid custom of Parda has been enjoined by the upper class Muslim women but the non-Ashraf women do not observe the Parda in the

strict sense. Thus they enjoy more freedom and worked outside of their home.

She has also observed that there is a tendency among the educated Ashraf women to come out of parda and to seek employment at outside of their home. Though the Parda system is still continuing, yet traditional Parda rules have been gradually declining due to the influence of modern education and urbanization. Thus there is a tendency towards change in this traditional custom.

In her study Dube (1969) has given an account of the women of matrilineal society of Luccadive Islands. She has observed that the female-oriented Muslim society do not have the system of Parda. But the women in Tangals of Luccadives observe Parda as they believe that this system has a vital function and is a symbol of prestige.

The observance of parda is not strictly followed in the island, but a piece of cloth is used for covering their shoulder and heads. Though the society follows the Islamic norms, yet there is a tendency towards matriliney.

Menon (1981) in her study of "Status of Muslim Women in India", has observed the practices of parda or seclusion among the Muslim women of Kerala, particularly of the high and well-to-do families. The parda practice is looked upon as a symbol of respectability. The women of poor classes have to work outside of their homes for their livelihood, thus they can not observe the Parda rules strictly as like as women of upper classes. She says Parda

system has isolated the women from the external world and confined them inside their home.

It is noted that even during British rule the practice of parda was widely observed. But in contemporary times for economic reasons many families make it necessary for women to go out of their homes for earning. As a result they cannot observe the seclusion or parda as per traditional norms. Today due to the spread of education many women gradually leaving Parda and taking active part in many national affairs .

Menon has shown that a large group of Muslim women still use parda or veil as a traditional custom. In Kerala when women go outside, they usually veil themselves. They believe that the women's real place is at home. Sometimes Burkha is also used for covering their body especially elderly ladies of the upper income groups. In Kerala the men do not allow their women to go out of home without necessity. In Kerala the low level of education among the Muslim women is due to the practice of Parda system. She has shown that traditional Parda practices of Muslim Women have been gradually changing due to the impact of modern education and modernization.

According to Jacobson (1976) Parda serves an important function in the family and in the larger kin group. It may be considered as a prestige and social honour. In her study "Parda and the Muslim Family in the Bhopal region of Central India" she has

shown that parda is considered as a mark of feminine modesty. In the Islamic regions the women have always been veiled and remained reticent in public. Such feminine veiling and seclusion are referred to as Parda. In this study she has tried to examine the Parda practices of the women of the Bhopal area of Madhya Pradesh. She has shown that parda has served an important function for the whole society and played a vital role in the process of social integration. Bhopal girls above the age of seven or eight years wear clothes covering them from shoulder to ankle. Women keeps their heads covered with the dupatta or sari in public. Women observe parda by remaining inside their homes and veiling their faces with dupattas. The parda practices vary from families to families depending upon their socio-economic status. The practices of Parda among the high status Pathans are different from those of the Muslims of lower socio-economic groups.

Jacobson has seen that the wealthy Muslims of Bhopal do not allow their women to be seen by men who are not their kinsmen. A girl does not seclude herself from males of her own household or from other close relatives. The women of higher status use burkha for covering their whole body and the Parda is considered as a mark of social prestige. It has been found that a woman continues to remain in parda even after her death. She has clearly shown how the traditional Parda practices of Muslim Women have been gradually changing due to the impact of modern education and modernization in Muslim Society. Some city dwellers regard parda

as a slightly "backward" or "old-fashioned" custom. Among high status Muslims, parda is being modified for the modern age, but the veiling and seclusion of women is still continuing due to some of its important functions in the society.

The practice of Parda among the Muslim Women of an industrial setting of West Bengal has been discussed by Mondal (1979), where consequences of parda practices in the social and cultural life of the Muslims has been examined. The rules of parda govern their dress, behaviour pattern and social activities. It has some important functions in Muslim society too.

He says that the concept of modesty i.e. Saram is central to the ideology of parda. The system of parda has caused the women to limit their public activities and has restricted them from interacting with men, and in some circumstances from participating in certain outside affairs. According to him parda and parda-like behaviour are not restricted to the Muslim Society, as the practice is familiar to the traditional Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other communities. But the Muslims adhere to it with rigidity. He has noted that Parda system is closely observed by the women of upper social status, while the women of lower social status barely observe parda rules due to some economic reasons. According to him the use of burkha is negligible among the Muslim women in West Bengal. He has also shown that due to the impact of urbanization and modernization the well-to-do Muslims have induced certain changes in parda observance, but they are not willing to give it up

totally. Even today they practice parda at home and also observe it when they go outside. Muslim Women consider parda as a mark of traditional and religious status, but the system of parda is gradually slackening due to the influence of industrialization, urbanization and modernization.

Roy (1979) in her study on Muslim women of Delhi and Lucknow cities highlighted the system of Parda which gives women safety and security. Parda customs have varied from time to time, society to society and from country to country. Parda has become an indispensable part of the Muslim social structure and an essential part of the Muslim social system. She has observed that the girls who cross the age range of 5 to 9 years are discouraged from playing with the boys and this increased interactions with the siblings due to parda system. The girls must maintain parda at the age of 9 to 13 years and also use burkha while going out. She noted that only 8.97% of the Muslim families were against of the use of Parda. According to her Parda is to be viewed from both its positive and negative sides. The mothers are sanguine about their daughters who always continue parda. The changing attitude towards Parda is reflected among the men at a large number than that of the women.

In Delhi and Lucknow she has shown how the employed women are also using burkha and observes parda; even at the place of work. The women of both cities feels that Parda has social functions and

a religious obligation which every Muslim women should follow it. They viewed that the main function of Parda is secluding the women from men and men from the women. So Parda has played an important function in the Muslim society. It is also a symbol of prestige and honour and thus it is an important aspect of culture. Now-a-days the Muslims are modifying the traditional norms and values associated with the Parda Practices. Thus the uses of burkha and parda are gradually slackening due to the influence of modern outlook, education and other factors.

According to her in the early days the women were taken out of school before they could complete their primary and middle education due to the Parda practices. But now the girls get a chance to complete their school education and try to build up their career. The age of marriage has also been increased due to the emergence of modern outlook. She concluded that even today the women continue Parda though the use of burkhas has very little relevance in Delhi and Lucknow. Therefore, the women of today are in parda but not the same kind of parda as practiced by their grand-mothers.

A. R. Saiyed (1970) in his study has mentioned that parda practices forced the woman into a limited circle of interaction, which has denied her greater opportunity. He also pointed out that parda has hindered the various activities which are eminently suited to her interests and talents. This system has affected the social progress of Indian Muslims. Due to parda system the Muslim Women have been suffering from various social disabilities, viz., early marriage, divorce, illiteracy, ignorance and other social and

political matters.

He viewed that due to Parda the Muslim women are failing to make any significant economic contribution, either for their own independence or towards the economic viability of their families. For this reasons when they falls into difficult circumstance they never improve their economic condition and their family is forced to sink into poverty. He has shown that due to lack of education, the mothers generally fail to motivate their children towards higher level of educational aspirations and achievements due to Parda practices.

In his study Saiyed has presented an interesting picture, i.e. non-observance of parda. He has also discussed about the jamaati women and their non-observance of parda. He examined how the non-observance of Parda has helped these women. Non-observance Parda gave them a more favourable status than other Muslim Women of different regions of the same State. It gave them freedom of movement, education and independence. The Jamaati men have encouraged their women to go outside for various activities and the men also depend on their women to manage different intra and extra-familial matters. He has pointed out that non-observance of parda is not a case of lower class behaviour. The women of the village frequently go to a nearby town for their shopping and recreational needs. But the jamaati women do not utilize their freedom merely for their personal enjoyment. They co-operate and participate in common activities. This system gave them freedom of movement and jamaati girls have thus acquired higher education. The author has

also pointed out that the non-observance of parda in this case has not been the result of either westernization or modernization or modern higher education, but a practice developed for social needs of the community. Thus the author has presented a new picture which is truly an unique case among Indian Muslims.

Jain (1986) examined the parda practices of the women of the city of Jaipur. She observed that the using of a veil or a burkha at public places was not the only form of observing parda. The women did not come out in front of men and they always covered their faces with dupatta. The women who were educated and employed outside their homes were never subjected to parda. The educated parents were also helpful to them because of their relaxation in parda practices. According to her only a section of Muslim Women who are coming out from parda belong to the upper income group, but gradually it is being followed by many women belonging to different income groups. She has stated that the people who were against of parda system gave many reasons for their objection to it. They viewed the parda practices as a religious custom which forced the women to a limited circle of interaction. Due to this system the educational level of the Muslim girls are very low and consequently the Muslim Women are of negligible number in out world activities.

Jain has shown that the majority of the people who support Parda system viewed it as a symbol of social honour. It has given them some privileges, such as separate apartments and withdrawing

women from outside activities. In her view the practices of parda and use of burkha are gradually slackening due to the influence of new outlook, and modern education. But the old value system of parda practices are still continuing. Thus the women of Jaipur believed that feminine modesty is maintained through the system of parda.

The above reviews on the study of parda system clearly reveal that those were mostly conducted on the Muslim society of western, northern and central parts of the country. But such studies are very few in the eastern and north-eastern parts of India. Again the scholars basically emphasized the mode of parda observance among various Muslim groups particularly on aspects of their social and cultural behaviour. Thus the dynamic nature of such a system under the present situation and also the consequences of parda observance in the life and the work of the Muslim Women as well as on the nature and system of the Muslim society has not been clearly explained by them. The present study is a thorough enquiry on the nature and system of parda as observed by the Muslim Women of two West Bengal villages. The consequences of parda observance and the gradual change in parda practices are also been examined in empirical context.

Parda Practices in Chakmodhu and Kochutia:

According to the Parda rules, Muslim women are expected to avoid wearing scanty apparel and to limit their public activities i.e. women are prevented from interaction with, or being seen by certain men and in a certain circumstance by some women to maintain their modesty. Women must observe parda.

by remaining inside their houses, by veiling their faces, and by wearing the all-covering garment whenever they go out. Proper observance of parda requires certain architectural features of the houses, such as walled courtyards, private latrines, bath-rooms and other secluded areas marked for the women. It is derogatory on the part of the adult girls and women to chatter with men, and even with close kinsmen. Muslim women remain in parda even after their death, while everyone can see the face of a deceased man, a deceased woman's face can be seen only by the close members of her family who used to see her in her life time.

There are certain hierarchical arrangements among the Muslims of the two villages in terms of their socio-economic status. The observance of parda varies among different families according to their social position. Parda has become an indispensable part of the Muslim social structure. A high status is attributed to the families which observe parda according to traditional rules.

In both the villages the aged women use wrappers or chadar for covering their body when they go outside. Almost all Muslim women keep their faces veiled before the public and in the presence of their respectable elders. In wedding and other socio-religious ceremonies women gather inside the house while the men remain outside. At feasts men and women seat separately due to the system of parda. The women have some interactional restrictions even with those kinsmen with whom they are expected to have informal and friendly relations. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia the observance

of parda varies among different families according to the socio-economic status of the households. The well-to-do families of both the villages are strictly following the system of parda as per traditional norms.

Parda among Muslims of High Socio-Economic Status —

Traditionally the well-to-do (Sharif or Boroloke) families of Chakmodhu and Kochutia of upper social stratum do not allow their women to be seen by men who are not their kinsmen. Women of wealthy families usually interact with their close male consanguinal kins, viz. father, brothers, uncles and younger cousins, but even so they maintain a certain degree of distance in dealing with their grown-up cousins and affines. The women do not observe strict parda before their husband's younger brother (deor), the elder sister's husband (bonai or dulabhai), and the husband's sister's husband (nandai) as they have joking and informal relationship with them. Among the higher status Muslims, it is essential that a girl should remain a virgin until she is married. For this, as soon as she reaches puberty, her parents and other kinsmen may insist that she observes parda and confines her social contacts to the females only. Husbands and wives can not talk in the presence of other elderly kins. The women generally veil their face before their elderly relatives and usually disappear into the backrooms of the houses during the presence or appearance of male visitors.

They are allowed to go out only to attend a wedding ceremony, to participate in a condolence and for such other life-cycle functions and socio-religious occasions. Age is important in the observance of parda. Though unmarried young girls do not strictly observe the parda rules, yet are supposed to maintain their modesty by following the essential pattern of behaviour. The married women strictly abide by the Parda rules, particularly when they reside at their affinal homes (Sasurbari). Only occasionally the Muslim women of high social status visit cinema and market places with their male relatives. Excepting some newly married girls, only a few of the women of Chakmodhu village have ever visited cinema and the town of Fort Gloster, but none without their close kinsmen. As Kochutia is a remote village, there is no cinema hall in the locality. Thus going to movies at distance places is a trouble-some affair. However, among the young women there is an interest to see the movies at nearby town. This is especially noticed among the unmarried girls and newly married women of both the upper and lower social stratum.

Parda among Muslims of Low Socio-Economic Status —

The women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia who belong to intermediate social category, i.e. of Gariblok, following in many respects the system of parda observance similar to the Boroloke i.e. of higher social status. They consider parda as a mark of social honour and a religious necessity. But due to poor economic condition they can not afford proper clothing and curtains to their women as a mark of parda observance. They also can not

provide the separate bath rooms and toilets for their women as the rules of parda.

The women of lower social status (Ajlaf loke) barely observe the parda rules, mainly due to some economic reasons. The women of this category are involved in a great variety of activities; they sell rice, paddy husks, pottery jars etc. to the villagers or engaged in jari or embroidery works. Thus they can not maintain the parda rules in a strict manner. However, within the limitation of resources and compelling forces they also veil themselves with their saree or chadar when they go out. They also veil their face and limits their behaviour in front of their affines and respectable kins. They also consider that parda is a mark of prestige and religious prescription. They always say that Parda is an honorable custom for the Muslim women.

Some women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are engaged in a variety of activities. So when they go out of their homes, they always attempt to seclude themselves properly. The women those who work in the wealthy Muslims' houses usually go out for fetching water and fire wood, thus they are not in a position to live in proper seclusion. But in spite of that they try to maintain their parda as far as possible.

In some families it has been noted that, married daughters are free to walk with uncovered faces, but the daughter-in-laws remain secluded in their in-law homes. So, it can be said that the Parda practiced by the Ajlafloke is similar in many respects to that of the Boroloke and Goribloke of the villages. To them

Parda is still a mark of traditional and religious status. This fact reminds us of the concept of sanskritization of the low caste and the westernization of the high caste Hindus as noted by Srinivas (Srinivas, 1962.).

Consequences of Parda:

The observance of parda has both positive and negative consequences. These are as follows:

(1) The parda serves to restrain girls and women from engaging in unsanctioned social contact, sexual activity and marriage with strangers, those are not approved by their relatives. The parda restricts illicit sexual activity to a some extent, although it does not completely prevent it.

(2) Observance of Parda tends to limit the social contact of the marriageable women and thus it helps in social control.

(3) The Parda serves to maintain feminine modesty in the family and thereby helps to achieve social honour.

(4) The Parda tends to contribute a sense of group identity and co-operation between the kins. It also determined the social status of the family.

(5) The Muslim rules of inheritance further strengthen the parda system through cousin marriages.

(6) In Muslim society parda system helps to prevent some social problems as pre and post-marital sexual affairs, and divorce by women.

(7) The parda system has forced the Muslim woman to a limited circle of interaction, whereby she is denied of many opportunities and privileges available to man. It prevents the woman to function as a mature and confident individual who is aware of her rights and privileges.

(8) Parda is one of the important reason for low socio-economic and educational status of the Muslim women.

(9) Parda has also rendered the Muslim women incapable of contributing and participating in such activities which are eminently suited to her interests and talents. So, the Muslim women's participation in welfare, and other community works is negligible.

(10) The seclusion and lack of education of the women have had an effect upon their economy too. The strict rules of Parda prevent Muslim women from taking up out-door gainful occupations.

(11) In the case of death of the male earners of the family, the women in parda have to face a precarious situation.

(12) A mother in Parda is generally a poor educator of her children. This failure prevents the upward mobility of the family and of the society.

(13) Due to the Parda system women's participation in welfare activities is negligible.

(14) Due to the Parda system it is very difficult for social scientists, and social workers to do any work among the Muslim Women.

It is very interesting to note the women's attitude towards parda. The informants stated that, Parda has a religious sanction and thereby every Muslim women should dutifully follow the instructions of parda as laid down in religious texts. The study reveals that the older women blindly accepted the custom of parda, but the younger women try to justify it on the basis of social necessity.

When the question was asked whether the effect of parda on the Muslim society in general is beneficial, the informants' responses were recorded as follows:

In Chakmodhu only 48.43% of the women viewed that, "the strict parda system is disadvantageous and a social evil in the Muslim society as a whole". By contrast 49.23% of the women of Kochutia viewed that, "parda has a damaging effect on the Muslim community".

The respondents stated that, the main function of parda is secluding the women from men, thus women are forbidden to come out before the male kins and non-kins. The women only interact with their female members and always try to maintain it strictly. The parda is not only a social custom but a strong religious sentiment is attached to it.

The respondents' attitude toward Parda is shown in the table 35.

Changes in Parda Observance:

Among the Muslims, Parda continues to be considered as a mark of prestige. But some educated and progressive women of the well-to-do families of Chakmodhu and Kochutia hold the view that the parda system does not necessarily prevent women from enjoying economic and educational benefits. They send their girls to schools and colleges for education and occasionally go out for shopping with their male relatives. Some of them also take charge of household budget and control domestic servants. The well-to-do Muslims have induced certain changes in parda practices but they are not willing to give it up totally.

The women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia practice parda at home and also maintain it when go out by veiling their face and by wearing sober garments. They are now sending their daughters to schools and colleges. The school and college going girls wear sarees or salwar-kameej popularly known as churidar. They also go to the movies with their friends (mainly girls), but this was not allowed to them until a few years ago. In Kochutia we have also noticed that young girls go to schools and colleges though it is a remote village. The women of well-to-do families hold the view that strict seclusion has become less desirable. But they are willing to maintain the essential parda rules for smooth running of the social system.

Table - 35
Attitude Towards Parda

Age category		A T T I T U D E					
		Chakmodhu			Kochutia		
		Favourable	Unfavourable	Total	Favourable	Unfavourable	Total
16-30	No	68	78	146	65	98	163
	%	23.69	27.18	60.87	20.00	30.15	50.15
31-45	No	32	43	75	43	48	91
	%	11.15	14.98	26.13	13.23	14.77	28.00
46-60	No	39	14	53	38	12	50
	%	13.59	4.88	18.47	11.69	3.69	15.39
61 & above	No	9	4	13	19	2	21
	%	3.14	1.39	4.53	5.84	0.62	6.46
TOTAL	No	148	139	287	165	160	325
	%	51.57	48.43	100.00	50.77	49.23	100.00

A change in parda observance among the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia has been observed. Due to the spread of education, changes have occurred in the attitude of value system towards the traditional way of life. The women of both the villages are much more aware of their legal rights. In the past the women only insisted their daughters to observe the traditional parda rules, but today they are encouraging their daughters to go outside in

case of necessities. Now the Muslim fathers, brothers and husbands have a more liberal outlook regarding the behaviour of their daughters, sisters and wives.

Thus it can be said that though parda system has traditional and religious sanction, ^{yet} changes have taken place in the life of the Muslim women. Muslim religious leaders are aware about the present day situation, thus they do not openly voice their aversion to change. Education and forces of modernity have played a vital role in changing the traditional way of life of the Muslim women. These changes are more marked among the women of wealthy and educated families in both the villages.

Therefore, the Muslim women of today who are in seclusion, do not follow the same kind of parda as practised before by their grand mothers. The Muslim people of today consider that the rules of parda which were created for the safeguard of the women of semi-nomadic tribes of Arabia are not applicable to the present situation. In contemporary times, the changes in socio-economic and educational status have altered the entire atmosphere of the Muslim society. Now-a-days even the elder generation has a more liberal outlook towards parda; thus encourages the youngsters to participate in education and in outside affairs for changing their status in the society.

Observation

Seclusion of women is a traditional custom in Muslim society and it is sanctioned by Islam. The prophet laid down very explicit and specific rules regarding the conduct of women, but at the same time he granted some liberty to them to face the world without a veil when needed. Parda has become an indispensable part of Muslim social structure.

Parda plays a vital role in social integration of the groups and in the family. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia women observe parda by remaining inside their home and by veiling their face with saree and chhadar. The use of burkha is negligible in both the villages. The well-to-do families of Chakmodhu and Kochutia strictly follow the system of parda. Mainly they belong to the upper strata of the society and consider the parda practice as a social honour and prestige. On the other hand the women of lower social strata barely observe the parda rules due to some economic reasons. But they also consider the parda as a mark of prestige and religious prescription, so they veil themselves when they go out.

The informants' attitude toward parda varies in two villages due to differential impacts of modern education and forces of industrialization and urbanization in two field situations. The older women blindly accepted the parda custom, while the younger generation try to justify it on social and religious grounds.

Parda rules are usually considered as a mark of prestige, but a few educated and modernized women of both the villages viewed that seclusion has become less desirable as it hinders the social progress. In past the women insisted that their daughters should observe parda rules, but today they encourage their daughters to act outside in necessities. Now the Muslim fathers, brothers and husbands have a more liberal attitudes towards their daughters, sisters and wives. Therefore, Muslim women of today are in Parda, but not the same kind of parda as practiced before by their grand mothers.

From this discussion we may conclude that, though Parda has some positive and negative sides, yet it has undoubtedly added to the grace and beauty of women. It has developed the most valuable virtue (haya) on the part of women. There is no doubt that veil or parda has played a very important part in giving a Muslim Woman that character which is inherent in her nature.