

CHAPTER - 7

GENERAL OBSERVATION
AND
CONCLUSION

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In the foregoing chapters I have analysed the position of Women in Muslim Society. Before drawing any conclusion it is necessary to reiterate some of the main points of this study. Our objectives were to see the status of women in Islam as it is ideally thought in the religious text, and practiced by the Muslims in empirical context. Islam has given women the rights and privileges which are in many respects differ as well as similar to those of their male counterpart. The position of women in Islam is something unique, novel and distinct. But in practical situation their position has been found different. We have tried to see what role the women plays in the society and how their position determines those roles? The women faces number of problems in the society and which have been the main barriers for their social development. In contemporary times how far their status has been gradually changing towards improving their social position has also been observed. In this study I have tried to examine some aspects of status and roles of the Muslim women along with **their** changing social position in contemporary times.

I

Looking back to the history of development of Islam we find that, the new monotheistic religion of Islam arose in Arabia

in the seventh century. The message of the God (Allah) as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was noted in the Holy Book called the Quran. The ideal society in Islam is called Ummiah i.e. the human agglomeration possessing a common faith and belief. It's social system is based on equality and justice. Islam is egalitarian in principle and based on brotherhood, sympathy, sacrifice and co-operation.

The analysis of Islamic prescriptions reveal that, Islam has given women their rights and privileges. The rights and responsibilities of women are equal to those of men. Islam contributes to the status of women in the following way:

(a) by stressing the need to respect and to give good treatment to the woman. The Prophet proclaimed that "the paradise is at the feet of the mother", (b) by making woman the mistress of her own property, (c) by giving her the right to claim divorce on certain ground, (d) by allowing her to hold any public office, head of an empire, minister or judge, etc, (e) by giving her freedom to remarry after legal divorce, and (f) by encouraging her to study and to acquire knowledge.

The position of Muslim Woman varies from country to country. In Arabian countries, particularly in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq etc. the status of women is largely determined by certain traditional norms. But in recent times considerable changes have been noticed among the women of these countries due to the spread

of education and modernity. In Turkey, the women enjoying high social status. More than one sixth of the students in Turkish Universities are women. They are also engaged in various professions and enjoying full political rights. The women of Iran are under the control of several traditional norms and social customs. Their role in politics is not very significant. But the system of Parda is gradually slackening among them due to progress in education. In Afghanistan the women are still under the control of certain rigid traditional customs. The women of Indonesia are quite free from traditional customs and they enjoying equal status with the men. In Pakistan the status of women is not better than that of the Muslim Women of other neighbouring countries. Education of girls has been a serious problem there even in contemporary times, particularly in rural areas. Only in urban areas there has been a marked increase in the number of girls schools and colleges. The system of Parda has also been slackened due to spread of education and modernization. In Bangladesh early marriage, divorce and poygamy are still prevalent in rural areas. The education of girls has also been a very serious problem in this country too. Only some changes have been occurred in the status and roles of women in upper and middle class families of this country.

The first Muslim invasion in India dates back to 650 A.D., when the Arab navy made certain raids on the coastal areas of Bombay

and Sind. The most organized Muslim invasion took place in India during 711 A.D., where the Arab armies under the leadership of an Umayyad general, Muhammad-Bin-Qasim captured the whole of the lower Indus Valley. The conquest of Mohammed Ghuri (1191 A.D.) was very significant as it was the beginning of the continuous Muslim rule in this country.

The commercial relations between central Asia and India, the various Muslim invasion followed by continuous Muslim rule in the country, the immigration of people from various parts of middle east to this sub-continent, and finally the conversion of local people into the fold of Islam had facilitated much about the spread of Islam and emergence of Muslim society in India.

In Bengal Islam expanded mostly in rural areas due to various social, religious and political causes. Those who embraced Islam came from various ranks of the society. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were considered to be glorious days for the sufi missionaries to spread Islam in Bengal. Most of the Sufis were of foreign origin.

In India there are several religious sects among the Muslims, these are: Sunni, Shia, Wahabi and Ahamedia. Among these Muslims sects, the Sunnis are the most dominant in this country. The Muslims are differentiated among themselves on the basis of their place of origin, ethnic identifies and social status. These are Asrafs, Ajlafs and Arzals. Asrafs are the landed gentry, usually held to be the descendants of the distinguished foreign ancestors.

They form the elite section among the Muslims. Among the Asrafs, there are four distinct social (ethnic) categories, namely, the Sayyad, the Shaikh, the Mughal and the Pathan. Ajlafs are the toiling masses and peasants. Therefore, they could not lay such a claim of the noble ancestry. At the bottom of the hierarchy there are those Muslims who are called by the others (Asrafs and Ajlafs) as Arzals.

Majority of the Muslims in West Bengal belongs to Sunni sect. The Sunnis are again sub-divided into three sub-sects, such as, Barelvies, Deobandis and Ahelehadis. The Muslims in West Bengal are further divided into two categories on the basis of their social standing, these are: Sharif or Khas and non-Sharif or Aam. The Khas includes the groups like : Sayyad, Shaikh, Mughal or Mirza and Pathan or Khan. While the Aam consist of peasants and various other occupational groups like : Julaha, Dhunia, Hajjam, Fakir, Kayal, Kasai, Gharami, Gayan, etc. A system of social stratification is also prevalent amongst these groups on the basis of their traditional ethnic characteristics and status or class position in emerging context.

India has the second largest Muslim population in the world, but the economic and political roles of the Muslim women are not at all very significant. The literacy rate of the Muslim women is very low. The practice of Parda is prevalent among them irrespective of their social status. Only in contemporary times there has been a superfluous change in the life style of the Muslim Women due to impact of various economic, social and

and political forces which have emerged today.

II

Two villages, namely, Chakmodhu and Kochutia were selected for the present study. Though Chakmodhu is located in rural area, yet it possesses certain urban and industrial characteristics due to existence of number of industries and associated township in and around its locality. It is also situated by the side of Hooghly industrial zone and located about 25 kilometres away from the city of Calcutta. Due to higher density of population, the Census of India declared this locality as a fringe area. Bulk of the population of Chakmodhu depend upon industry for their livelihood. While Kochutia is a interior village of Burdwan district. It is about 175 kilometres from the city of Calcutta. The people of this village exclusively depend on agriculture for their subsistence.

These two villages have been studied to have a comparative perspective on dynamics of social position of the women in Muslim society.

The joint and extended families are regarded as ideal and traditional type among the Muslims, but the nuclear families are more prevalent in both the villages. The women of these villages have the idea that sons are more valuable than the daughters. It is noted that, there has been a clear unequal

treatment and disparity between the boys and the girls in various spheres of life activities. Born and reared under such a social environment the girls are socialized and moulded into a submissive self sacrificing daughters and wives. From the day of birth the girls are considered as burden and liability of a family, thus they get less attention. In both the villages the mortality rate of the girls is higher than that of the boys.

It has been found that in fringe as well as interior villages, the widows in most cases are not living in their in-law's families. As a consequence they either come back to their natal home or live separately by receiving a share from the parental property. Further in such cases their affinal and sometimes the consanguinal kins do not take proper care for them. The social isolation of the widows sometimes forced them to remarry or to go out for begging for maintaining their livelihood. The traditional domestic roles of the daughter-in-laws still determine their married and family life. Traditional customs and practices are still continuing in both the villages. Lack of freedom in the choice of partners, inferior status of the widows and rigidity of parda rules relating to women behaviour etc. are all creating serious obstacles towards improvement of status and consequent roles of women in both the villages.

In contemporary times for various reasons the traditional concept of women's role has been gradually changing. This is more marked in the fringe village than that of the interior village.

Marriage is an important institution of a society where position of a woman can easily be assessed. Various customs and marriage rules of the Muslims have shown the differential attitudes and treatments for men and women. Some significant changes have taken place in marriage practices among the Muslims of both the fringe as well as the interior villages. Child marriage was common in early days, but today it is completely absent in both the villages. Only in a few cases, some girls have got married on the brink of their puberty. Marriage by negotiation is still a common practice among the Muslim villagers, except in a few cases where some educated girls have been indulged in love marriage.

The cousin marriage and the marriage to near kins are followed by the people of both the villages. Divorce is permitted in serious cases when both the parties faced the worse situation. There are only a few cases of divorce in the fringe village, while in the interior village it is totally absent. Changes in the value system due to impact of industrialization, urbanization and modernization is primarily responsible for the cases of divorce in the fringe village. Even in the changing circumstances the Muslims in general of both the villages consider that divorce is an instrument of harassment to the women.

The practice of dowry is a very common feature among the Muslims of the villages under study. However, the system of mehar i.e., commitment to pay alimony to the bride by the groom is also

noticed among them. It is the most significant aspect of women's status among the Muslims. The Mehar money provides security to the divorced women. Polygynous marriage is significantly low among the Muslims of both the fringe as well as the interior villages. It has been noticed that the maintenance cost of the divorced women and even the payment of mehar to them are virtually absent in both the villages. In recent times the system of dowry hinders the social position of women both at their natal as well as at in-law's home. This system has largely affected not only their mentality but also their behaviour pattern to a great extent.

Ideally Islam has granted equal status to both men and women. But in practice the women have been accorded a lower social status in comparison to men. According to Islamic principles, it is essential for every Muslim male and female to practice and perform the five basic norms, i.e. Kolema, roja, namaj, Hoj and jakat. Daily prayer is also compulsory to all the Muslims irrespective of their sex. But it has been observed that in every religious rites and rituals the women plays the more important role. Usually the women folk read the Quran and pray as usual in all the occasions. The most notable feature is that, women of both the fringe and the interior villages spend their leasure time by reading the Quran. Daily prayer is also a very common feature to the women of both the villages. It is to be mentioned here that, in the context of religious practices women are much more regular and punctual than that of men. Following the age old tradition, the women of both the villages have never visited

mosques of their locality. However they offer namaj at their respective homes. They also observe all the religious rites and ceremonies according to traditional norms. In contemporary times due to spread of education the women of younger generation do not necessarily follow the religious rituals blindly. This is more marked in the fringe village than that of the interior village.

In the fringe village the people are engaged in various occupations, viz. tailoring, embroidery, rickshaw pulling, industrial works, petty business and white colour jobs. While in the interior village most of the people are poor peasants, craftsmen and day labourers. Economic participation of the women in both the villages is very insignificant. Not much differences have been noticed in this respect between the fringe and the interior villages. There are only a very few women in these two villages who have engaged themselves in earning for the maintenance of their family. The women of both the villages are generally found to be engaged in the occupations of marginal nature, and thereby enables them to satisfy with the low income.

In economic sphere the position of women is definitely subordinate to men. Though Islam has sanctioned the share of property rights to the women and allow them to earn in a most ^{de} way, yet the system of parda and their conventional domestic and social roles make them dependant on their male relatives. As a result, it is practically difficult for the women to handle their own

property if they at all have it in their own names.

The **economic** participation of women has a bearing on their psychological and social conditions. Economic independence not only improve their social position but also gives them a sense of self-reliance. Now-a-days a section of women have realized that they can also contribute to the family income.

In both the villages animal husbandry and poultry farming are the most common sources of income through which the women earn. Most of the women of fringe and interior villages are found to be earning through these economic pursuits and thereby contribute something to their family income. Even in recent times the women's attitude towards participation in various outside occupations have not been changed much. They consider that it is the duty of the men to work at outside for maintaining the family, and it is the responsibility of the women to look after the domestic and other family activities. Nearly fortyeight percent of the women of fringe village are of opinion that, today employment of the women has become essential for maintaining the families. While in the interior village only thirty percent of the women possesses such a dynamic opinion. It is noted from the present study that, the roles which are usually performed by the women of modern society, are not exactly followed by the Muslim Women of the villages under investigation. They also deny to engage themselves in extra-familial activities of modern times, because they do not like to expose themselves in front of the public due

to practice of parda, conservatism and other social reasons. As a consequence the Muslim women are secluded and isolated from the dynamics of greater society which exists outside of their home.

The seclusion of women is a traditional custom in Muslim Society. This plays a vital role in social control of the Muslim Community. The concept of modesty, i.e., Saram is central to the ideology of the parda. The parda has become an indispensable part of social behaviour of the Muslim Women. In the fringe as well as in the interior villages women observe parda by remaining inside their home and by veiling their faces with sari or chadar. But the use of burkha is negligible in both the villages. The well-to-do Muslim families are found to be strictly abided by the Parda system. Most of them belongs to upper stratum of the society and considers the Parda as a social honour and religious necessity. In both the villages the women of lower social stratum barely observe parda rules due to some economic reasons. They involve themselves in varieties of activities for earning, and thus they cannot maintain the parda rules properly. But they also consider the system of parda as a mark of prestige and religious necessity. Thus they veil themselves when they go out.

In the fringe as well as in the interior villages only a few educated women are of the opinion that, the rigid system of parda observance has some negative effect and that has retarded the social progress not only of women but also of the Muslim Society as a whole. But they also admit that Parda is a mark of

social prestige and thus observe it in a liberal way. Today men have more liberal attitudes towards the observance of Parda by the women members of their families. Even in this changing circumstance the system of Parda is found to be practiced by the women of both the villages, but it is not the same kind of parda practices as observed by their grandmother in early days. These changes are more marked in the fringe village due to the spread of modern education, industrialization, urbanization and growth of awareness among the people.

Islam does not oppose in acquisition of knowledge and education by the women. But in empirical context the educational status of the Muslim women is very depressing and disheartening. The rate of literacy and educational **status** of the Muslim women is slightly better in the fringe village than that of the interior village. It is assumed that only education can fulfil the economic, political and cultural needs, and thereby improve the status of the women. Unfortunately for various reasons the Muslim Women are still very far from achieving the benefits of modern education and there by fail to improve their social position under present changing situation. Now-a-days the people have conceded the value of women's education, but they do not accept it quite readily due to the various socio-cultural reasons.

Not only the women of the villages under study, but also the Muslim Women as a whole of the country are educationally

backward. The Muslim Community is far behind its basic goal of cent percent literacy and education for every male and female as and when the importance of education was recognized by the Quran and even suggested by the Prophet. Thus it has been seen that there is a gulf of differences between the text and the context. Now the question arises: (a) Why the Muslim Women are educationally backward? and (b) What are the possible reasons of their educational backwardness, It has been observed that the contributory factors for educational backwardness of the Muslim Women comprise an intricate picture. The following factors are the most important.

The educational backwardness of the Muslim Women is a historical development. They were far off from modern education during the British rule, a period when necessity of education was felt with due importance.

The educational backwardness of the Muslim women is to a large extent perpetuated by the socio-cultural environment of their society.

A minority group's attitude towards education depends greatly on perception of its own status. The perception depends on the elements of history, way of life, language, culture and religion. Again the perception is affected by the frame of reference, i.e. neighbourhood, regional and national. The main problem in education of a cultural minority arises when the minority lacks the resources and needs help from the majority. All these are partly true in the case of Muslims of the fringe and also of the interior villages, where they are a minority, both numerically and culturally.

The educational facilities available in the two villages under study are not well extended and fairly equipped, as a matter of fact the Muslim people have not been able to utilize them properly.

Poor economic condition is one of the most vital reason of educational backwardness of the Muslim masses, specially of the women. The poverty of the vast bulk of the Muslim people is basically due to their low income and high expenditure owing to various socio-cultural reasons.

Education of a mother is very important for providing guidance and assistance to her children. Children read better when a mother helps them. But unfortunately, as majority of the Muslim students are first generation learners, so they fail to get such help from their illiterate and ignorant mothers. Therefore, the Muslim society is lacking the cultural environment for the growth of education among them.

The Muslim women is generally possess the most traditional views which are basically pessimistic and conservative with regard to acceptance of modern education and other opportunities available to them. It is very often stated by them that, the modern education is not their goal and thus it is less important to them.

According to Islamic philosophy din (essence of religion) is very important as much as dunya (practical life). As a matter of fact the religious elites i.e., maulanas and Mullahs motivate the masses to cultivate religious and traditional habits through sacred learning (of course without understanding the real meaning). Consequently the system of secular (modern) learning for solving their practical problems is receiving less importance in the Muslim community.

There has been a prevailing stereotype that, the principles of Islam stood against the modern education. But this notion has neither a theoretical or ideological base nor an empirical reality. According to Islam acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all Muslim men and women. About fourteen centuries ago. Prophet Muhammad declared that, "the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female".. He also stated that, "go in quest for knowledge to as distant a place as China". Therefore, the values of Islam would not appear to pose any significant obstacle for the spread of modern education among the Muslim women.

The misinterpretation of Islamic prescriptions by the less educated religious leaders is primarily responsible for developing a conservative and negative attitude towards modern education among the Muslim women.

The rational elites and social reformers of a community play the most vital role in spreading modern education among its community members. But unfortunately the elite structure in Muslim society is authoritarian, to which the so called religious personalities (mullahs and maulanas) play the most significant roles. Thus for obvious reason, the roles of these leaders in motivating their followers toward modern education are very insignificant.

The system of Parda among the Muslim women and so also the practice of their early marriage hinders them from availing of educational opportunities offered to them by the large society.

The socio-economic backwardness of the Muslim women and of the Muslim community as a whole does not allow them to develop a style of life which is receptive of modern education.

Owing to the parda rules the Muslim people usually prefer separate educational institutions for the girls. But unfortunately there does not exist any girls' school in the villages under study. This has seriously retarded the growth of education among the village girls.

The overall backwardness of the Muslim community and lack of education of the Muslim women creates loss of nerve, frustration and low levels of aspiration. These persisting cultural elements in Muslim society infusing among them a world view characterised by passivity, fatalism and tend to make them tradition bound. All these in turn are supposed to work as hindrances

toward educational and social upliftment of the Muslim Women.

III

Society and culture is the dynamic system, which undergo changes due to the impact of certain internal and external forces. In this study we have tried to see how far the status of Muslim women has been changing due to the effect of modern education, urbanization, industrialization and various other social forces of contemporary times. To understand the changes in status of Muslim women of the fringe and the interior villages a comparison has been made between the features of contemporary times with those of the recent past. It is to be mentioned here that, both the villages are affected by the currents of economic, political, educational and other social forces of contemporary times in the wake of modernization, urbanization and industrialization of the areas for over half a century. The salient features of these changes are discussed below.

It has been observed that in recent past both the villages were thinly populated and the dwellings were mud-built with thatched roof. The village roads were narrow. There were no tube-wells as well as ring wells. School, club and shop of various kinds were also lacking. But today the fringe village has shown the remarkable changes than that of the interior village due to the effect of industrialization. Along with the ever increasing

population of both the villages the available fallow land has been used for constructing the residential houses.

In the fringe village roads and water supply have been developed to a considerable extent. New schools, clubs, shops and modern type of buildings have come up. These brought some changes in the village life.

Now-a-days communications too have also improved much in the fringe village than that of the interior village. The people take advantages of train; bus and ferry services to move outside of their locality. In the past the medical facilities were not so easily available, but now a days the people of the fringe village are enjoying much more medical facilities than that of the rural village. Consequently the women folk and the children are not suffering from several acute diseases.

There has been some changes in the Muslim family. Now-a-days family has undergone changes in many respects. The women's role in the family has also been gradually changing due to the effect of industrialization, urbanization, growth of awareness and modern education. Traditionally the women confined themselves exclusively at their own home for doing household works. Child-bearing, child rearing and household works were their main pre-occupation. They were not allowed to express their opinion on important and serious family matters. But the traditional concept of women's role has been gradually changing, particularly among those who are working outside of their home. Today the educated

women take a very important rôle in the family and also in the other spheres of social life. The girls who received formal education, have developed a new personality and that helped them in various ways in constituting their day to day social life.

In traditional Muslim society girls were used to learn the social behaviour from their mothers and other elderly women of the family. This helped them to adjustment in every spheres of their domestic and social life. But owing to the spread of education and the forces of modernization their traditional attitudes toward life and works have been gradually changing.

Marriage by negotiation is an ideal type of the Muslim society. But a few changes have been noticed in the spheres of marriage rules and practices. The cases of love marriage are increasing today but which was almost absent in early days.

The system of dowry is not an ideal Islamic practice. But now-a-days the system of dowry payment is widely spreading among the Muslims. However, even a few decades ago it was a rare practice among them. The system of dowry has adversely affected the all sections of village population, irrespective of their social and economic status. The emergence of dowry payment greatly affected the position of women both in their natal as well as in their in laws' home.

The Mehar plays an important role in the life of the Muslim wives as this gives them honour and security. In the past the women were not very conscious about their mehar money. But

now-a-days the educated women of both the villages under study understand the importance of mehar money, particularly when they face any difficulty in conjugal life.

Pre-puberty or child marriage was common in the past, but today it is not in vogue in both the villages. Now-a-days post puberty marriage is common among the Muslims of both the villages. In early days, the Muslim marriages were usually restricted within the circle of kin groups or within the village and locality. Cross-cousin and parallel cousin marriages were common among them. But today most of the marriages are found to be occurred beyond the kin groups. The marriage alliances between the people of wider areas has also been gradually increasing. All these have a very important effect on the life of the Muslim women.

Now-a-days marriage is an expensive affair. It involves more money, jewellery and co-operation with different sections of the people. The payment of dowry has also steadily increased. All these have greatly lowered the social position of the Muslim women. The most remarkable changes are noticed in the traditional marriage and ritual practices of the Muslims. These have influenced the roles and status of the women to a considerable extent. The change of values due to impact of various economic, political, social and cultural forces are primary responsible for such changes in the society.

The strong kinship obligations and the cordial relations amongst the kinsmen are traditional features of the Muslim society. But now-a-days changes have occurred in interpersonal relations between the kinsmen. The relationships among the kinsmen are much more formal today rather than traditional obligatory type. The most notable feature in this context is that, even in this changing situation, the co-operation and participation of women in various rituals and social gatherings are still the remarkable features of the Muslim Villagers.

Ideally Islam has granted equal status to both men and women. But the participation of women for prayer in the mosque has been a controversial issue in Islam as well as in Muslim society. The Prophet gave freedom to women for prayer in public with prior consent of their husbands or parents. According to Him, the latter's permission must also to be sought by the women who wish to undertake pilgrimage to Macca and Modina. The empirical study reveals that, the women of both fringe and interior villages are not attending the mosque to participate in congregational prayers, but they pray namaj at their respective homes. The idea behind this is to maintain the modesty and virtue on the part of the women. This is perhaps due to the parda custom imposed on them as a mark of tradition. In both the villages there is not a single women who has attended the pilgrimage of Macca. Here the women are deprived from such an important religious merit not only for the system of Parda, but also for the poor economic condition of the families to which they belong. But this in no way closes

the door of philosophical and spiritual attainments of the women. At the time of social interactions with the public, the women are advised to veil themselves properly for maintaining the distance and seclusion. But in reality the situation is different. It is noted that, the women of the fringe and interior villages are under the control of certain Parda rules. It is to be mentioned here that Islam imposes the system of parda to maintain their modesty, but never advocates to seclude and isolate them from the vital matters of life and activities of the society. Thus we have seen that there is a difference between the ideology and the reality, particularly in the context of Islamic notion of parda and its related customs.

In the past the women of both the fringe and the interior villages strictly followed all the rites and rituals according to traditional norms. They practiced all the conventional rites and rituals blindly. Modern education has played a vital role for changing their traditional attitudes in this regard.

Traditionally women engaged themselves in domestic activities, but today a few of them have been employed outside. In traditional Muslim Society the women were never allowed to go outside for employment. They thought employment as shameful for women. But in contemporary situation the educated women of both the villages are possessing the idea that employment is essential for improving their social position. They are of the opinion that economic independence not only improve the women's position, but also provides them mental satisfaction for contributing to the family income.

The practice of parda is an unique traditional custom of the Muslim Women. The system of Parda is prevalent among all categories of women of both fringe and the interior villages. The village women are mostly illiterate and ignorant. They confined in their homes due to observance of strict parda rules. Only in recent times the spread of modern education and forces of modernization have some effect on the parda observance of the women. In contemporary changing circumstances segregation between the sexes is gradually minimizing and as a result a section of Muslim women is slowly participating in many outside activities. In traditional society the women used to insist their daughters to observe the parda rules in a rigid manner, but now the educated women of both the villages encourage their daughters and sisters to participate in outside activities as per necessities. Today a liberal attitude has also been observed among the Muslim fathers, brothers, and husbands regarding the flexibility of parda observance of their daughters, **sisters and wives** respectively. In changing circumstances the traditional rigidity of the parda rules are gradually slackening. But such changes are more marked in the fringe village than that of the interior village.

In the past the girls were not sent to schools and colleges for higher education. This is true in regard to the girls of two villages. In traditional Muslim Society women were less interested in their children's education, specially for the girls'

education. Education plays an important role to raise the status of women in every society. Today a section of the Muslim parents are aware of the importance of modern education. They are particularly aware of the necessities of modern education for the competitive matrimonial and employment situations of the recent times. Thus they are found to be much more interested to educate their girl children. As a matter of fact the literacy and educational status of the women is gradually increasing in the fringe as well as in the interior villages. This has brought a tremendous change in the life of the Muslim Women. Now-a-days the enlightened section of the village population wants their women to assume new and dynamic roles in the family. The educated women of both the villages have the view that, education helps to develop personality and rationality of the individuals and thereby improve the status of the women. In this changing situation, in fringe village a section of the educated women have cultivated their reading habits through news papers, novels and magazines. While in interior village only a few women have developed the habits of reading books and magazines. Now-a-days the mass medias viz. radio and television are playing a very significant role to change the attitudes and values of the Muslim women through propagating new knowledges and ideas to them.

IV

The present study shows that in every major institutional sphere education has contributed to raise the status of Muslim

women. But we have noted that the factors which still hinder the educational attainment of the village women are also very active, thus able to keep the low position of women in Muslim Society. Though Islam is not against the education of women and when a great majority of the people are aware of the importance of it, yet due to existing social structure and environment of the society only a few women of both the villages have gone for modern education.

The institutions of marriage and family having traditional features have been appeared as unfavourable for the development of women's status in Muslim society. The customs of early marriage, lack of freedom in the choice of husband, inferior social status of the widow are still found to be in vogue in the society. At the same time the system of mehar payment to the divorced lady has been reduced to a ritual only. Further, the practice of dowry has been gaining popularly among the Muslims. All these have a very significant negative impact on the life and activities of the Muslim Women. The traditional roles of the woman as a wife and as a mother is still continue to be practiced in the society. These are helped in continuation of her subordinate position in the family. The traditional customs and practices centreing around marriage and family enable the women to satisfy themselves only with the domestic roles, rather than to develop their personality for participating in the wider socio-cultural context.

In religious and ritual front the women are very regular and serious, but their roles and activities are relegated to the background due to male domination and pattern of social organization of the Muslim society.

In economic and occupational spheres, the position of Muslim women continues to be of subordinate nature. The lack of education and seclusion of women at home made them dependant on their husbands and other male relatives of the family.

Finally, the absence of socially defined occupational roles for the Muslim women enable them to satisfy only with the domestic works. Consequently, they deprived of achieving the occupational skills necessary for their self reliance.

The women of contemporary modern society, perform a variety of roles. But the modern social and cultural roles of the Muslim women are almost absent. In economic and political front the women of the Muslim community stand in an entirely different situation. In field situation it has been observed that majority of the Muslim villagers do not approve the women's participation in politics. An overwhelming majority of the women exercise their votes in the last Panchayat and General Elections, but they did so out of persuasion by their husbands or by other relatives rather than out of a genuine feeling that they exercised their fundamental right as a citizen of the country.

Thus it has been found from the present study that, the roles which are performed by the women in the Muslim society are

out of conformity with the feminine roles of the so-called modern society. Further under prevailing social situation the community itself is not willing to allow their women to play the so called modern roles. It may be pointed out that, the denial of the extra-familial roles was made because Muslim women are not supposed to go out of home to expose themselves in front of the public as a traditional convention.

Thus we have seen that, there are several situational, structural and institutional forces prevalent in the society which have retarded the social progress of the Muslim women. Moreover, the women of the Muslim society are the worse sufferer from several social disabilities, such as : economic insecurity, illiteracy, ignorance, seclusion, isolation, avoidance and subordinate social position.

The study of social status and roles of the Muslim women clearly points out that, there are some areas where reform is necessary if the community feels to improve the present status of women in their society. But unfortunately for various socio-politico-cultural reasons there has been negligence in the context of reform of women's status in the Muslim society. The empirical observation reveal that, there is not even a single personality both in Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia who has raised his voice in favour of social reform in the village society.

The foregoing discussion clearly reveal that, the barriers against status upliftment of the Muslim Women are intricate and

complex in nature, as these are due to some situational factors and cultural characteristics of the people. The situational factors comprises history and socio-political environment within which the people live, while the cultural characteristics are the economic condition, lack of education, social organization, social behaviour, rules of parda, collective decision, personality component and other ideological attributes of the Muslim people. In such a context the Muslim women have developed a value system and pattern of living which are always retarded the growth of their mentality and behaviour pattern. Therefore, it can be argued that the major factors for socio-economic and educational backwardness of the Muslim Women is the Muslim (community) factor, and the socio-cultural milieu of the Muslims discourage them from improving their social position through dynamic roles. Under these circumstances self correction and self-reliance of the Muslim women are necessary if they want to improve their social position in contemporary changing situation. Finally, the role of Muslim community in development of self confidence ^{among} its women can not be ignored.