WOMEN IN MUSLIM SOCIETY OF RURAL WEST BENGAL

(A Study in Aspects of their Status and Roles)

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Dedicated to the

Sacred Memory

of

My Grand Parents

P R E F A C E

Anthropological and Sociological researches on Muslim Women in India, particularly in West Bengal are very scanty. There are a few studies on status of Muslim Women of urban centres, but very little is known about the dynamics of their social position in rural areas.

The Muslims are the largest minority in India. According to 1981 Census they constituted 11.35% of India's total population and in West Bengal they were 21.51%. The total Muslim population in India were 75,512,439, of which 38,989,763 were male and 36,522,676 were female. The socio-economic and educational backwardness of the Muslims are well known. It is generally assumed that modernization in Muslim Society has sustained a set-back due to various factors, of which the insignificant roles played by its women is most important. Though Islam has given women as beings of their own right and given them an impressive array of claims, but in reality the women are the worst sufferer from several social disabilities. The Muslim social system has prevented easy access of women to avail various opportunities for their self development.

The present study is an attempt to analyse the socio-cultural aspects of women in Muslim Society. The position of Muslim Women has been examined on the basis of their status and

roles in different social context. Emphasis has also been given to find out the various problems faced by the Muslim Women and the socio-cultural constraints to their status upliftment. The study was conducted in two villages of West Bengal. Of the two villages one is located in the interior (remote) area of the district of Burdwan, while the other is situated near the urban (fringe) area of the district of Howrah. In this dissertation these two villages shall also be referred as interior and urban villages respectively.

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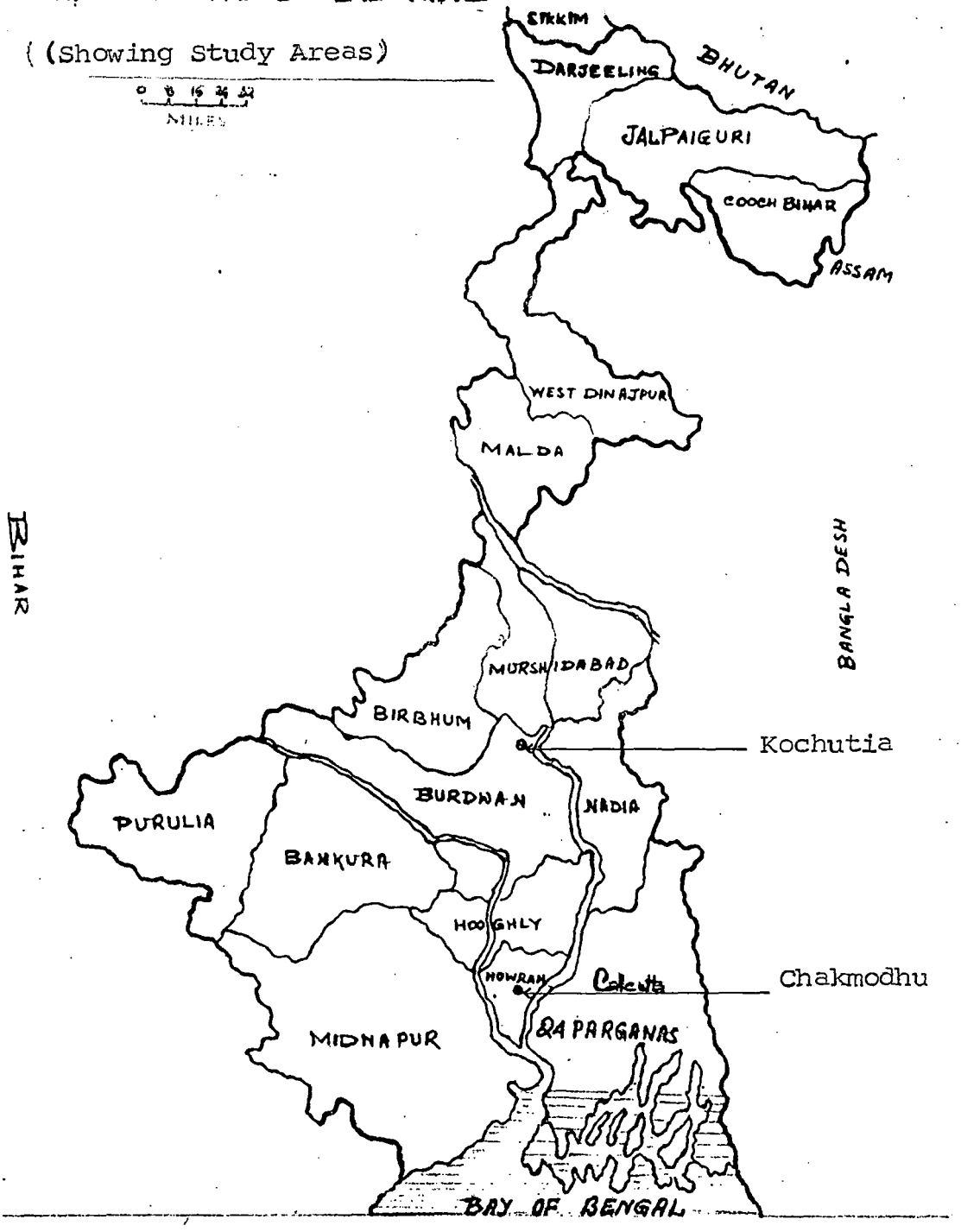

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

Background:

All over the world women are denied equal access with men to enjoy to opportunities for their personal growth and social development. This is mainly reflected in the field of education, employment, marriage, family, professional and political life. In every community women constitutes an important segment in respect to their position in the society.

In India anthropologists and sociologists have not devoted much attention to the systematic study of women. It is only since the last sixties a number of studies have been done on women. The "Women Liberation Year" in 1975 has attracted the attention of a number of sociologists and social anthropologists to study women in various perspective.

The status of Indian women had never been at per with that of women of the developed countries. Low standard of living, low level of literacy, economic dependence, ignorance of their fundamental rights, low inter-spouse communication and stronghold of tradition are some of the factors which stand in the way of improving the status of Indian women. Of these factors, literacy and level of education play an important role.

The term "status" signifies the sum total of the various culturally ascribed roles one has to play and rights and duties

inherent in a social position. Beside the ascribed status, there is also the 'achieved' status which results from one's efforts and personal achievements. The concept of status is needed to indicate the ordering of individuals in terms of attributes as level of education, occupation, income, perception of one's status within the home and in the community, decision-making role, number of restrictions imposed on one's activities, freedom and so on. The level of status of women varies from country to country and from time to time.

By 'status' Linton (1936) means a position in a social system occupied by designated individuals, and by 'role', the behavioural enacting of the patterned expectations attributed to that position. Status and role, in these terms, are concepts serving to connect the culturally defined expectations with the patterned behaviour and relationship which comprises social structure.

Parsons (1951 : 25) defines 'role' as the organized sector of an actor's orientation which constitutes and defines his participation in an interactive process. Status on the other hand refers to the actor's position within an institution, i.e., within a system of roles. Roles is thus the 'Processual aspect' and status the 'positional aspect' of an actor's participation in a social system.

Morris (1971:397) defines 'status' as the location of an actor in a system of social relationships and 'role' as the set

of expectations applied to the incumbents of the particular status.

According to Merton (1957:369-7) social status of an individual is his 'status-set', each of the statuses in turn having its distinctive 'role-set'. Role-set according to him is the complement of role relationships which persons have by virtue of occupying a particular social status.

Mukherjee's (1972: iii) study of "Social status of North Indian Women" has defined social status as the place that a woman occupies and the dignity as well as privileges she enjoys in society.

Thus for the purpose of our study, we may define social status as the position an individual has in society by virtue of having to perform certain roles. His or her social position includes position in the family, occupational hierarchy, politics and religion.

Women constitute half of the world population. The role of women differs from society to society and from time to time. Social structure, cultural norms and value system are important determinants of women's role and their position in a society.

Westermark (1914:408) in his article 'The position of Women in Early civilization', observes that "the position of women is exceptionally good in tribe that live upon fish and roots, which the women procure with a degree of expertness equal

to that of the men. Whereas it was among tribes that live by the chase or by other means in which women can be of little service, that we find the sex most oppressed. Again, women among hunters and pastoral tribes had low status but among the agricultural peoples, the position of female is generally higher".

Prior to the spread of Islam the inhabitants of Arab looked upon women as their chattel. They did not any position either amongst their kin or in their society. Marriage was contracted on payment of a bride price" (Kapadaia, 1959:38).

In the Vedic period women enjoyed equal status and high position with men. They had full freedom for spiritual pursuits and intellectual development (Asthana, 1974:1). The daughters was given all privileges enjoyed by the son. In the case of education a daughter was not discriminated from the son. Widow remarriage was allowed during this period, So, we find that in the Vedic age women held a most glorious position and had equal rights to properties.

In Epic age we find many rules regarding women. It was a glorious age for women. A large number of women excelled themselves in all spheres as queens, house wives and ascetics and their contribution to the various field of education and culture were of a high order, and they enriched their homes, societies, states and countries.

In Puranic Hindu Society the position of women was inferior in nature. Women were considered as a slave of their

husbands. Child marriage was very common and widow remarriage was prohibited. Girl's education tended to be nil. Desai (1957: 21) observed that "the religious life of women was restricted to the observance of some Vratas which more or less demanded blind faith from her". Polygamy and the practice of Sati was also prevalent which deteriorated the position of women in the society.

The Hindu law given by Manu had made woman entirely dependent on man and subjected her to the authority of a father, husband and son in the different period of her life as daughter, wife and mother. Such a position of women continued throughout the Hindu period.

During the age of Jainism and Buddhism the position of women was glorious. The women of those days proved that they had honourable place in society and enjoyed equal rights with men.

The coming of Islam to India did not alter the position of its women. The Muslims brought with them the institution of parda. Moreover the parda had brought some significant changes in the status of women among the Hindu women of northern, western and eastern regions of India. The position of Muslim women was considerably better than that of the Hindus as the former enjoyed possession of the family property and alimony relating to divorce. The Muslim women had special privilege to remarry after divorce.

The coming of British in India did not change the position of Indian women out right. The work of reform and upliftment

of the status of Indian women was done by Raja Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan and Annie Basant. Raja Rammohan and Vidyasagar had to their credit for the abolition of Sati pratha and introduction of widow remarriage in the Hindu society. Raja Rammohan founded the society of Brahma Samaj. At that time Dayanand Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj and this group emphasized the education for women. Ranade and Sir Sayyed tried to change public opinion regarding child marriage and education for women in Hindu as well as in Muslim Societies. Annie Basant and Sarojoni Naidu were the women who made the Indian woman to come in the forefront and to fight for India's freedom. The political movement acted as a primary factor for the improvement of the status of women in India. During 1874 many Acts were passed in the legislative council in favour of women.

At the beginning of 20th century a section of Indian women inclined to take higher education and professional studies. During the second world war the women took up jobs in various fields. The most significant years were 1955 and 1956 when equal rights for inheritance was introduced and Hindu marriage, divorce, adoption and succession bills were passed.

Statement of Problems:

Muslims constitute the largest minority group in India. They are not only a minority, but also the most orthodox, tradition bound and socio-economically backward community of this

country. It is generally assumed that the modernization in Muslim society has sustained a setback due to various factors, of which the insignificant role of women in the dynamics of their social system is the most important one.

It has also been observed that though Islam admits the equality of men and women, in practice there are inequalities between them in many areas of social life for various reasons. Consequently, women in Muslim Society have been suffering from several social disabilities such as, education, employment, social life and mental growth. They are economically dependant and backward and also educationally lagging behind. The female literacy among the Muslims is significantly very low and this is one of the important reason of perpetuating ignorance and illiteracy among them. It has been estimated that the literacy rate of the Muslims in India was only 34% (male 45% and female 19%) (Hamid 1989). Muslim women are mostly confined to their homes and mainly engaged in domestic activities. They are isolated and secluded thus their participation in economic, social and political matters are very negligible. Due to illiteracy, ignorance, isolation and male domination they are very conservative and tradition-bound. There are various systems prevalent in Muslim society those retarded the equal access of women with men to avail the opportunities of self development through education, employment, social and political participation. Owing to all these factors the Muslim Women seriously refuse to creative response to the changing reality. The Muslim women are also suffering from various health problems.

Traditional Muslim Society has given the women a very limited roles. As a matter of fact the only role that a woman was expected to play was that of a faithful and dutiful wife and an affectionate mother. In modern industrial societies, these domestic roles are supplemented and in some cases superseded by her role as a working woman.

The social status of a Muslim Woman is measured in terms of different roles she performs in the family and society. In operational terms, her social status can be measured by the degree of freedom she enjoyes in the following spheres:

(1) to get education,

(2) to choose and hold a job,

(3) to have say in spouse selection,

(4) to participate in family decision-making including family budget, education and marriage of children, acquisition and disposal of consumer durables, real estates, etc.

(5) to use one's income in her own way,

(6) to participate in extra familial activities (religious, cultural and political),

(7) to go out of home without male escort.

Importance of the Study:

In every community women constitute an important segment in respect to their position in the society. They are distinct from men not only for their biological differences but also for their differential status and roles in the society. The position

of women varies from society to society and religion to religion. The women's position and changes in their status and roles in the society provide us an important area of Anthropological and Sociological research. Till now the Indian Anthropologists and Sociologists have not devoted much attention to the systematic study of women. However, since the last sixties a good number of studies have been done on women by Sociologists and Social Anthropologists through various perspectives.

In India the position of women is not same among the Hindu; Muslim, Christian, Tribal and other communities. In the field of women studies in India, much is known about the position of women in Tribal societies. The special volume published by the Indian Anthropological Society entitled "Tribal Women in India (1978)", deals with various topics on problems and prospects of tribal women in India, while a very few studies are available on the position of women in non-tribal societies.

The Muslims occupy an important position in Indian Society. They are a minority community in this country. According to 1981 Census, the Muslim population in India was nearly 12% of India's total population and in West Bengal they constituted about 23% of its total population strength. In India the socio-cultural life of the Muslims has a distinct character as it bears the traits of both the Islamic and local traditions. A cultural synthesis with respect to great classical tradition of Islam and local cultures of India is noticed among them. This synthesis of tradition and culture has emerged as an unique pattern of society

and culture among the Muslims. Factually Muslims are not only a minority community, but also a most orthodox, tradition bound, conservative and backward community. Under the constitution of India, backward communties are those who are not adequately represented in public offices according to the strength of their population [Vide Art. 16(4)] (Masad : 1984).

The orthodoxy and backwardness of the Muslim community and their problems of modernization have been pointed out by various scholars. There is an opinion among a section of scholars that, the modernization in Muslim society has sustained a setback due to various factors, of which the insignificant role of women in dynamics of their social system is the most important. In Muslim Society inequalities between men and women is very pronounced due to various socio-economico-cultural reasons. There are systems prevalent in the society that divided equal access of women with men to opportunities of self development through education, employment, social and political life. The Muslim women are mostly confined in their homes and are more likely to be engaged in female's occupation, i.e. domestic works. Observance of Parda is a prevalent practice among them. Though there is a definite position of women in the social system of Islam, yet in actual life situation the position of women is something different. It has been observed that the women in Muslim society are the worst sufferer from several social disabilities viz. in mental growth, lack of education, employment, social and political

participation etc. The various social problems of Muslim women viz. ignorance, illiteracy, unilateral form of divorce (talak) and polygamy of the husband, etc. are now-a-days the most debatable issues among the intellectuals. There is a general stereotype that the principles of Islam are responsible for the backwardness of the Muslim women. But there is no empirical basis of such a stereotype.

Researches on Muslims in India are rather inadequate. Some scholars have noted the inadequacy of anthropological and sociological studies on Muslim communities in India (Answari : 1960, Ahmed: 1976, Mondal : 1983 etc.) Ahmed (1976 : 172) has pointed out that it is however, one of the characteristics of the discipline today that it has tended to emphasize the study of Hindus and their religious tradition, the study of non-Hindus and their tradition has been sadly neglected by both Indians and foreigners. In the field of Sociological researches on Muslims in India there are some studies on social organization, social stratification, religious life, political behaviour, social change and problems of modernization (Ahmed: 1973, 1976, 1983, 1984; Answari : 1960, Bhattacharya : 1973; Hasan : 1975; Imam : 1975; Krishna : 1976; Madan : 1976; Misra : 1964; Marriott : 1960; Mondal : 1985; Siddiqui : 1974, 1984; Singh : 1973 etc). But very little is known about the position of women in Muslim society. Hence, there seems to be a big gap in sociological research in this field of study.

Review of Literatures:

Sociological and anthropological studies on women in India was very much neglected before 1960's. After 1970's most of the studies on women have been done to examine the changing roles and attitudes of women, particularly the middle class, educated and urban dwellers. The studies on women in India are basically focus ed on their status and roles in the family. While some studies clearly indicate the integral relationship between roles and status of women vis-a-vis the nature of their social position.

In the field of women studies in India, much is known about the position of women in tribal societies. While a very little material is available on the position of women in non-tribal societies. In the field of women studies among the Hindus mention can be made of some works.

Beteille (1975) points out that the caste background affects women's self image and influences selection of a role model or reference group. He also says that there are a number of caste related factors which clearly affect the position of women in Indian society. Beteille also observes that among the poor and low castes the relationship between men and women is more egalitarian than among the higher castes.

Jain (1975) points out that in all societies there are certain abilities and aptitudes which are typically male and

others are typically female. She argues that research formulations will depend upon whether women are considered similar to or different from men.

In the edited volume of Roy (1978) there are some studies of dynamics of status and roles of women among various communities. In this volume there are a few studies on changing position of women due to impact of education, modernization, family planning and development programmes.

Marriage and kinship have been studied in relation to status of women in a society. Scholars like Desai (1959), Dube (1963), Hate (1969), Kapadia (1959) have taken interests in studying position of women, their changing roles, status and attitudes.

According to Karve (1965), the system of caste, family structure, kinship and marriage affects the status of women in a fundamental way. There are a number of factors related to caste in India which clearly affect the position of women in Indian society.

Kapur (1974) has studied the middle class educated urban working women for understanding their changing status, attitudes, marital and familial relationships. It is found that educated women workers are not only more tolerated and accepted in society than before, but are even more respected and admired. Old prejudices against work in offices and shops are gradually declining, unmarried and married women of middle and upper classes are increasingly entering into all types of office jobs both in public and private sectors. Women are getting into jobs and

professions and continues even after their marriage not only of economic necessity but also out of various other socio-psycho-situational factors and motivations. Kapur explores the various factors studied on objective and subjective perspectives. The objective factors are the family composition, husband's income, number of dependants, types of wife's service and husband's occupation. The subjective factors are the agreement and disagreement between husband and wife on values of life, each others role and status, sharing of household responsibilities etc.

The traditional attitudes and practices related to the position of women vary from region to region and also from caste to caste and community to community. The regional variation is more important than caste variation. As Kolenda (1976) points out that the incidence of bride price, divorce and remarriage varies in practices from region to region, despite the differences in ideals among caste within one region.

Khanna and Varghese (1978) in their studies on women in various parts of India deals with the position of women in modern India. In this book they have discussed about the various aspects of women, mainly marriage, conjugal life, sex and family planning, socio-economic and cultural aspects, fashion, social issues, role and ideals, and finally the employment of women and their changing socio-economic life. The changes occur in various aspects due to education, employment opportunities, social awareness etc. According to them the change in outlook should come in men also if women have to contribute more to the

society. The changes of the position of women are also discussed in details.

In the edited volume of De Souza (1975) there are various studies on women of contemporary India with special reference to their traditional images and changing roles at present situation. In this volume there are studies on women of various parts of India both rural as well as urban. In this volume there are also studies on women of various community living in India. This book covers different aspects of women, viz., socio-economic status, social mobility, family status, the image of women and their changing roles.

Srinivas (1978) has studied a number of factors related to the caste system which clearly affect the position of women in Hindu society. Among the low castes the relationship between men and women are more egalitarian than that of the higher castes. Now a days the lower castes are found to try to raise their caste status through Sanskritization, the consequence of which is the lowering of the status of women and making them subordinate to men in the society, particularly in economic and ritual spheres.

According to Srivastava (1978) the educated urban women work mainly for certain non-economic advantage. Employment has raised the status of educated middle class women and they have become more conscious and independent. As both husband and wife co-operate and share domestic responsibilities there is not much problems in functioning on the family. Therefore women's participation in work does not adversely affect the interpersonal

relationship between husband and wife, and also the authority structure of the family. It is observed that working women belonging to the lower class groups, however, are not much in favour of women's employment, as they face much difficulties to work both in home and outside. The educated employed women are favourably oriented towards freedom from traditionality. It is found that education and employment acting as determinants of modernity.

Apart from the above studies on Hindu women there are a few studies on Muslim women in India. Detail study on Muslim women is quite a few in number, while there are number of sketchy and partial studies on them. Review of some of these studies will help us in evaluating this neglected area, which will become the main basis of objects of the present study.

Brijbhusan (1980) has studied Parda practices and status and roles of Muslim Women. For understanding their position in society she has discussed in detail the effect of parda system on women and its consequence to the Muslim society.

In this study she has shown how a few Muslim women viz., Lady Wazir Hasan, Lady Abdul Qadir, Lady Muhammad Shafi, Begum Shah Nawaz, Lady Iman, the ladies of the Tyabji, Rahimtoola and Chinoy families and others discarded parda and participated in the women's movement during the British period in spite of traditional seclusion imposed on them.

She has stated that education has a vital role to change all aspects of women's life. She has also pointed out that

according to Quran — "it is essential for every Muslim man and woman to acquire knowledge". To her education has given superior position to the Muslim women in the modern society. She has shown how traditional parda practices have been gradually changing due to the impact of education and forces of modernization. She observed that the Muslim women have been gradually entering into various professional streams of broadcasting, engineering, diplomacy, designing, modelling, acting etc.

This book examines various aspects of Muslim Women and is based on interviews with women from all regions of the country and belonging to all levels of society. All aspects of personal law, marriage, polygamy, divorce, inheritance, adoption and education are discussed here.

The book is based on theoretical discussion about the status of women in Islamic society. Only in some cases the facts from Indian Census have been incorporated in her study. The book lacks the empirical facts about the status of women among the Muslims of contemporary times.

Bhatty (1975) examines the pattern of social stratification of a Muslim village in Uttar Pradesh to study the institutionalised differentiation in status and life styles of Ashraf and Ajlaf (non Ashraf) women. The life style of Ashraf women, who belong to the upper social strata, were determined by the characteristic of a parda society, confinement to the home, subordination to male authority and no alternatives to the role

of wife and mother. On the other hand the Ajlaf (non-Ashraf) women do not observe parda, enjoy relatively more freedom in role performance, and work outside the home with their husbands. A division of labour based on sex is commonly practiced.

In her article she has stated that education and urbanization of the Ashraf women. She observed that there is a tendency to come out of parda and to seek employment outside of home. She has also stated that though a process of "emulation" non-Ashraf women are retiring into parda, withdrawing from the family work force and regressing towards less egalitarian relations in the family.

Dube (1969) in her study on the Muslims of Laccadives has an account of a matriliny in that Island society. The society being matrilined, female oriented and does not have parda. Except the Tangals of Laccadives who insist upon their own women for observing parda mainly because here it is the question of prestige of the priestly family. It may be mentioned here that observance of parda is not practiced in the Island. The common dress for women is a cloth going down from waist to a few inches below the knees, a high neck and sleeves reaching upto the wrists but often backed up to the elbows. They carry a piece of cloth as an outer covering for shoulders which is often used to cover also the head. According to her, this society, inspite of following the Islamic norms is matrilineal and has female favouring residence, property and divorce rules. She has shown that the authority pattern of the society and seclusion of women are interdependent.

Thus she concludes that among the Laccadive Islanders there is no parda since the legal rights are oriented towards women.

The edited volume entitled "status of women in Islam" by Engineer (1987) is a significant contribution in understanding the status of women in Islam and also in Muslim society with particular reference to India. There are four articles in the volume.

Lokhandwala (1987) in his article "the position of women under Islam has pointed out four causes of educational backwardness of the Muslim women viz., political traditions, social custom, religious belief and poverty.

Engineer (1987) has examined in detail the position of Muslim women from the theological point of view and argues in favour of enhancing status of women within the framework of Islam.

Puri (1987) has examined the case of Muslim personal law as it operates in India and has discussed its implication in Muslim society and culture.

Shakir (1987) has also examined the case of Muslim Personal Law in India and argues in favour of change. He has examined the problems from the historical point of view. To put the problems in perspective he relates it to the social structure which is basically as inequitous as it is capitalistic.

/Jain (1986), in her study of Muslims in the city of Jaipur has critically, has examined the position of Muslim women and discussed about their various social problems. She has observed that

though Islam has an egalitarian attitude towards men and women, yet in actual behaviour, there are enough differences between them. She has tried to highlight the extent and quality of changes that have taken place in the Muslim families and consequent impact on the status and role of women. It also proves into their value system and aspirations in the light of their educational, economic and social development. Various factors viz., educational, economic, mass media influence, degree of secularization and political modernization on the status of women and their political awareness, have been separately discussed. It also suggests the prospects and possible directions for further change.

She has observed that Muslim women are suffering from various social disabilities, such as, early marriage, unilaterial form of divorce, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of confidence, insignificant role in family and social matters, problems in decision making and lack of participation in political and social matters etc.

Jacobson (1976) has studied observance of parda by Muslim Women and their family organization in Bhopal. She finds parda serving important functions in the family and among the larger kin group. It also plays a vital role for social integration amongst the groups whose women practice it as per social rules. It is also a symbol of prestige to them.

The study reveals that the wealthy Muslims of Bhopal ideally do not allow their women to be seen by men who are not

their kinsmen. Observance of parda is a mark of social honour to them. There are some differences in the parda observance of the high and low socio-economic groups. The practices of parda by the low socio-economic status is similar in many respects to that of high status Muslims and also to the Hindus of the region. The women of high status use burkha for covering their head. In her study she has clearly shown how the traditional parda practices of Muslim Women has been gradually changing due to the impact of education and modernization in Muslim society.

Khwaja (1965) in her study of Muslim Women of Kanpur critically analyses their attitude towards parda practices.

Kutty (1972) in her study on Laccadive Islanders has shown how a husband does not have economic rights over his wife and can not demand her productive labour.

Khan (1984) has critically examined the economic condition, educational problems and status of women among the Muslims of Karnataka. He has pointed out various factors responsible for their relative backwardness. He examined the extent of participation of Muslim Women in various development programmes of the regions.

Lateef (1983) in her study on modernization in India and the status of Muslim Women has analytically discussed the changing position of Muslim Women in recent years. Her study consists of four parts. Part one attempts to identify historical factors which has made the modernizing process in Muslim Community. She also examines the effect of historical process on Muslim women and their

development before Independence.

The second part deals with the period after Independence of India which is characterized by the national focus on the economic development and modernization of the country. It examines whether this national drive for modernization stimulated the desire of the Muslims for social and economic progress which might improve the role and status of the Muslim Women.

Part three is her emperical study based on survey among Muslim women regarding their ascribed and achieved status both in family and society. Her enquiry is directed in assessing the extent to which Muslim Women are limited by the Community's adherence to the Shariah or Muslim personal law. In her analysis she has shown how the ascribed status of the Muslim Women has affected their achieved status and to what extent the process of modernization has an impact on the position of women in Muslim Society.

Part four deals with the prospects and possible direction of changes in social status of women of the Muslim Community.

Mondal (1979) has given an account of Para observance among the Muslim Women of a village in West Bengal and has examined the consequences of such practices in social and cultural life of the Muslims. According to him, the concept of modesty, i.e. Saram is central to the ideology of parda. The central object of parda is to prevent women from interaction with men, and in some circumstances from certain outside affairs.

In his article he has observed that the Muslim families of Chakbanakha village do not allow their women to be seen by men who are not their kinsmen. The Parda system is strictly followed by women belonging to the upper social status. While the women of lower social status barely observe parda rules due to some economic reasons. The women of this category are involved in great variety of activities - they sell rice, paddy husks, pottery jars etc, to the villagers and thus they cannot afford to seclude themselves properly. They however consider that parda is a mark of prestige and a social prescription.

The various consequences of parda observance of the Muslim Women and their impact on the society has also been discussed in details. The study noted 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. To them parda is still a mark of status in Muslim Society.

Menon (1981) in her study of "status of Muslim Women in India" has noted the position of women and their various problems. She has also attempted to find out the impact of modernization on the traditionally ascribed status of Muslim Women. She has observed the role of education to improve their social status. According to her the factors like, early marriage, Parda etc. acting as barrier in the way of their educational attainment. Though Islam is not against of education of women, yet they are unaware of it due to their lack of knowledge in Islam. The Muslims in general consider Women's education as unnecessary. She mentions

that parda system is looked as a symbol of respectability. But today some women have come out of parda under economic pressure. She observes that the educated women have taken part in different economic activities.

The study noted that a large number of women still use veil. Today they perform variety of roles and engage themselves in political and social work. Thus the women are gradually improving their traditional status. In contemporary times the spread of education, economic and political participation have increased among the Muslim Women, and these have brought considerable changes in the attitude and practice of Parda. Educated Muslim Women are now found to move outside of their home for various activities related to modern life. The most significant changes are noticed in the areas like age at marriage, selection of spouse, dowry, decision-making in the family, choice of occupation, family planning and political participation. But the Muslim Personal Law, absence of socially-defined occupational roles of women and the practices of parda are creating serious obstacles towards rapid change of status of women in Muslim Society.

Roy (1979) in her study on Muslim Women of Delhi and Lucknow cities has highlighted the extent and quality of changes, that have taken place in Muslim families within three generations and its effect on the status of women. She also examined how the placement of women in the society. Shifted along with the shift in basic attitude of the people towards traditionality and

modernity. The study also deals with the aspects of social structure of Indian Muslims and also about the historical sketch of women. The system of parda observance of the Muslim Women are also discussed in details. According to her the system of parda gives the women safety and security and detach them from many kinds of public participation. The Parda functions as an essential part of social system in Muslim Community. She has shown that there is a significant difference between the pre-marital and post marital status of women due to their role differentiation. Now-a-days changes have taken place in socio-economic and educational status of the women and that had altered the entire atmosphere of the Muslim home. Participation of women in various employment has been increasing due to spread of education among them. The importance of Parda and burkha have been slackening due to the impact of modern outlook and education. In Delhi and Lucknow the burkha has very little meaning in contemporary times. In discussing the impact of education among the Muslim women she has traced the factors like attidue, aspiration and achievement in life. She noted that the educated women have realised that Mehar money is one of the strongest defence of them against the easy divorce. In the past the girl remained under male authority after marriage. Women of new generation do not follow the rituals blindly but try to understand the Holy book of Quran. The young women are attentive to their religious rituals but they are more knowledgeable about Islam as compared to aged women. Education is making them more religiously conscious, but at the same time reducing their blind faith in ritualistic beliefs.

She concludes that the placement of women in the society shifts along with the shift in the basic attitude of the people. In Indian context the Muslims, inspite of their rigorous and effective traditional social pattern, have changed their behaviour in changing circumstances. She observes that how and what types of changes have taken place among the Muslim women within three generation. She also highlighted the various aspects of change which gives them superior status in the family and society. Lastly, she has discussed the changing position of women due to various external and internal influences. She concludes that due to increase of literacy and education the women led to economic power along with the marginal change in the spheres of Parda, marriage and religious life.

In his study Saiyed (1976) has mentioned that seclusion and isolation have forced the Muslim Women into a limited circle of interaction. Due to the system of parda the Muslim Women has been suffering from various social disabilities viz, early marriage, divorce, illiteracy, ignorance and other social and political problems. He observes that the Jamaati Women in a village of Maharashtra are free from Parda rules and enjoy considerable freedom in education and social movement. The non-observance of parda and independence of Jamaati women are not an example of lower class behaviour. This non-observance of parda is not a result of either westernization or modernization but a practice developed out of social needs.

Vreede-de-Stuers (1969) in her study of parda among the Muslim Women in Northern India has shown that practice of Parda has become a part of women's life and it is carried on even after her marriage. She finds that in contemporary times there is neither total preservation of the traditional parda system nor its total elimination which she refers to as a process implicity generates frustration of girl students between the two worlds of their home and their college. However, it needs to be mentioned that it is not women alone who consciously or unconsciously want to emancipate themselves. The Muslim women is motivated to change not only because of her own desire but also because of the change in the attitude of the males. The Muslim men are aware of the fact that the non-Muslim Women in India have moved faster to accept modernization during the last few decades. This has been possible for them due to the acceptance of modern education by their women.

The review of the above literatures suggest the facts that the sociological studies on Muslim women are a very few. The materials, which are available are basically conducted at some regions of northern, western and southern parts of the country. The study of Muslim Women of East and North-East India, particularly of West Bengal is totally negligible. The above studies also reveal that the position of women in Muslim society is very ambiguous. There is again a gulf of difference between the text (ideal Islamic norms) and the context (the behaviours in practice) so far the status and roles of Muslim Women are concerned.

Objectives of the Present Study:

On the basis of above observations following questions can be formulated for the present study. These are as follows:

(1) What is exactly the position of women in Islam as suggested by Islamic great tradition i.e. Quran and Hadish.

(2) What is the real position of women in Muslim Society?

(3) What are their roles in the Society?

(4) How does their position determine those roles and vice versa?

(5) What are the guiding principles behind the position of women and allocation of their roles?

(6) What is the notion of Islam towards status and roles of women in the Society?

(7) Is that notion congenial to social progress (status upliftment) among the Muslim Women?

(8) How does that notion interpret and characterise the Muslim Society in India?

(9) What are the problems faced by women in Muslim Sommunity and what are the constraints towards their status development?

(10) What have been thought by the Muslims regarding the status and roles of women in their society at the contemporary changing social context?

With the above aims in mind, the basic objectives of this study are to examine and to analyse the position of women in Muslim Society. The position of women in Muslim community will

be examined on the basis of their status and roles in the society. A special emphasis will also be given to find out the various problems faced by the Muslim Women and the constraints behind their status upliftment as well as modernization in the contemporary situation.

The purpose of this study is of three folds. Firstly, the investigation on women in Muslim Society will help us to understand the nature of their position as well as activities in the society and so also their various problems in social life. Secondly, it will throw some light to identify the various factors that are acting as barriers toward status upliftment and modernization of the Muslim Women. Finally, the results of the study will give some ideas to formulate a way through which the emancipation of the Muslim Women by way of their status upliftment can be achieved.

In the present research it is intended to examine the position of Muslim women of two villages in West Bengal. The study confines to the Muslim women of Bengali origin only.

To substantiate the above objectives firstly, I shall try to find out the main factors those determining the status and roles of Muslim women. To deal with this, I shall analyse the concepts in relation to the status and roles of women in ideal Islamic Society, and the interpretations of those principles as viewed by the Muslims since historical times. Secondly, empirical study will be conducted among the Muslims of two villages in West Bengal to examine the position of women in their society.

To prosecute this study only the major areas of their participation in social organization will be analysed. To understand the position of Muslim Women the variables like - cultural values, self image of women, womenhood and women's role in economy, authority, social, educational and religious spheres of life shall be examined. Finally, the changes in the position of Muslim Women will be analysed by comparing their present situation with the recent past. And the problems of social life as well as the modernization of Muslim Women will be examined in the background of social organization of Muslim Community and the codified roles of women as embodied in Islam.

Methodology:

(i) Research Design

The design of this study has been formulated on the basis of aims and objectives of the research. The study area, the people, the tools and techniques of data collection have been chosen on the basis of the nature of the study. The main purpose of this study is to gain insight of the life of the Muslim women and their various problems.

These data have been analysed with the structure-functional approach. It is purely an exploratory study with diagnostic outlook in some cases. The approach is purely descriptive with an analytical base whereever necessary.

The data for this research have been gathered both from primary as well as from secondary sources. The facts on ideal Islamic notion about women's social position have been gathered through analysing the textual materials. Published and unpublished materials from various sources had also been consulted for having data on women of various areas in the past. While the empirical facts are collected through field work in two villages.

(ii) Locales of the study

The study has grown out of field work in two Muslim villages situated in two different districts of West Bengal. The name of the villages are Chakmodhu and Kochutia. Chakmodhu is a village of Howrah district, which is located in the South of West Bengal. While Kochutia is a village of Burdwan district, located almost in the central part of West Benga. In terms of location Chakmodhu is a fringe village, proximate to an industrial urban estate named Fort Gloster Industrial Limited. But Kochutia is a interior village, which is typical rural in character.

These villages are selected purposively taking into consideration of the size of Muslim population, presence of various muslim social groups, nature of economy and availability of educational facilities in them. The villages from industrial-urban, and rural settings were selected for getting a differential social position of muslim women.

(iii) Field work

The duration of field work was of twenty months. I started this research work since the beginning of 1989. During January to February, 1989, I made a basic enquiry in the village to get some preliminary information on the people. The census and interview schedule were prepared. The first intensive field work was conducted from June 1989. During June 1989 to December 1989, I did field work in Chakmodhu village and from January 1990 to June 1990 field work was done in Kochutia village. The villages were revisited for some subsidiary information and also for verification of some data from October to December 1990 and again from May to July 1991. The total period of regular field work thus covered twenty months. During the period of the field enquiry I observed the daily life of the village women. They took me either as their friend or daughter, or sister. All these helped me to collect more data and experience the field situation closely.

(iv) Selection of the Informants

It was pre-determined to conduct holistic study on every muslim household of the two villages. To gather necessary basic information the census was conducted in the two villages. The data were gathered from every household of the selected villages.

There are various social groups among the Muslims living in both the villages. The study is primarily focused on the women as a whole living in Chakmodhu and Kochutia, but an emphasis has been given to highlight the women of Shaikh category as it is

the numerically dominant social group in both the villages. It is to be mentioned here that, the Shaikh households in Chakmodhu and Kochutia were 163 and 209 respectively. All the Shaikh households of both the villages were interviewed from which bulk of the data were gathered. Out of the total households of the two villages a sample of fifty were selected for case studies. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select the households as well as the informants to represent the every section of village population with particular reference to their socio-economic strata in village society. The samples were drawn through categorization of the households on the basis of employed, unemployed, educated and uneducated. Further in course of categorization the marital status of the women, i.e. unmarried, married, widow etc. were also taken into account.

During the house to house census interview the head of the household was taken as informant in most of the cases. In a few cases in the absence of the head the next persons in rank of the family were chosen. In this context the help of senior women of the household were also taken into account.

To obtain relevant information both female and male informants were selected from both the villages. To select the informant it was decided to depend on their sincerity and reliability for giving correct information. Informants were selected from every section of village population. They were of two types, viz. key informants and occasional helpers. The mullahas, maulvis, teachers, panchayat members, political leaders

and most respectable senior members were considered as key informants. The key informants were asked to furnish most of the data on the basis of set questions framed for this research. While the occasional helpers were mostly used for checking and verification of the collected data.

(v) Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

To collect primary data a long term field work was conducted. The data were collected through conventional anthropological tools and techniques, viz. census survey, interview, case study, collection of genealogy, group discussion and observation.

To obtain preliminary and comprehensive data standard census and interview schedules were prepared. The interview was with the heads of the families, and the senior women of the households. The required data were also obtained from the girl students, their parents and teachers through interview with the help of closed and opened questions. Information were also obtained through informal discussion with the women and girls who voluntarily took part in discussion in several occasions. Formal group discussions were also arranged for data collection, particularly from the girl students. The techniques of genealogy and case study were also used for collection of data. The data collected through various techniques were supplemented by participant and non-participant observation. At the initial stage bulk of the quantitative data on the demographic and socio-economic life of the people were obtained through census survey.

At the second stage data were collected through intensive study by interview schedule and case study. The case studies on some marriage, divorce, economy, education and Parda practices have been taken into consideration. A total of fifty case studies covering various aspects of women's life were conducted. In this context unique and un-usual cases were also taken into account.

For collection of concrete case studies I also sought the help of geneâlogical technique for ascertaining family composition, extension of kinties and marriage distance of the people. Geneâlogical technique was also used for accumulating the historical facts of past social events of the village people. This was basically adopted for understanding the intergenerational changes in status and roles of women in Muslim families. Five such geneâlogical charts of each villages were prepared with the help of age-old men and women of the village. Bulk of the data on economic activities, behaviour patterns, social relations and cultural expressions were collected through observational techniques.

(vi) Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation

The data collected from the field were processed after necessary checking and editing. To process the data the completeness and accuracy of the facts were looked carefully. Tabulation was done manually. The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Simple statistical methods consisting mostly

of percentages were calculated. The analysis of qualitative data were made through systematic but analytical description of the facts. In course of analysis method of comparison has been used. The data were finally organized and has been presented into seven chapters.

(vii) The Problems and Limitations

At the beginning of field study I encountered some difficulties. The main difficulty which I faced was to convince the people about the purpose of this research. To tackle the problem I had to convince the people by stating the fact that, the data obtained from them will not be disclosed to anybody and their secrecy shall be strictly maintained. They were also convinced that the objectives of this study were not to submit any report to the Government and political bodies but for the purpose of my own academic interest. With these assurance the people's resistance was diluted to a considerable extent and whole hearted co-operation was received from them.

The study has certain major limitations. Since the empirical studies on Muslim women in West Bengal is very negligible so benefits of earlier research studies were not much available. Hence as an initial study it has its own limitation. Secondly, the study was undertaken in two villages of two districts in West Bengal. Hence the observations drawn from this study can not be generalized too far covering the whole of the State, even though the study provides broad clues about the conditions of the Muslim women in the State and the country as well.

Research Setting:

Two Muslim villages of West Bengal, namely - Chakmodhu and Kochutia are selected for the present study. Chakmodhu is a village of Howrah district, while Kochutia is of Burdwan district. The two villages are selected purposively taking into consideration - the size of Muslim population, nature of the village and availability of social groups in them.

Chakmodhu is a village proximate to an industrial and urban complex. It is situated just by the side of Fort Closter Industrial complex and its township. The village is under the jurisdiction of the Bauria Police Station of Howrah district. It is one of the village of Rameswarnagar gram panchayat in Uluberia block (II) under Chakmodhu mouza. The village is about 3 kilometres from railway station of Bauria and which is only 25 kilometres away from the city of Calcutta. While Kochutia is an interior village situated under the jurisdiction of Ketugram Police Station of Burdwan district. It is under Agardanga Gram Panchayat of Kandra Block (I). The village is about 10 kilometres from the railway station of Salar and which is about 175 kilometres from the city of Calcutta.

Chakmodhu has three distinct wards or Para namely Shaikh Para, Mollick Para and Khan Para. The seltlement of Kochutia is divided into four wards. These are Shah Para, Mullah para, Shaikh para and Hindu para. The para division clearly shows the social categorization of the members residing in the village. Within the two villages the paras represent closely related families.

The paras of the two villages are separated from one another by agricultural cannels, muddy paths, harrow drains, clusters of bamboo grooves etc. The houses are linearly arrnaged and the village settlement as a whole is of compact type.

Chakmodhu is a nucleated village, inhabited by Muslims only, who speak in Bengali. Thus the village is a homogeneous one and has a traditional agrarian background, but in recent years the people have been influenced by industrialization and urbanization. Where as Kochutia is regarded as a very traditional village of the locality. It is a multi-ethnic village, inhabited by both the Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus have several caste groups. The people speak in Bengali with a mixture of some urdu terms.

Within the two villages the dwellings can be classified into two main groups, such as matir-ghar or the mud built houses and pucca-ghar or the brick built houses. In the two villages, houses are linearly arranged and these do not face the street. This is due to the fact that the Muslims follow the rules of Parda system. The windows of their houses are situated on the high of walls, the doors are covered by jute or cloth parda. The houses are compact in nature and are enclosed by an another wall fencing. Whereas the houses of the Hindus at Kochutia are free and separate from one another. Their courtyard are open due to the fact that the parda system is not so rigid among them. Each of the Hindu houses contain tulshi mandap.

The village land is covered by palm (Barassus flabelliger), Mango (Mangifera-indica), Bel (Aegle marmelos), Neem (Melia azadirachta), Kul (Zizyphus jujuba), bamboo (bambusa arundinica), Babla (Acacia-arabica) and other common big trees.

Within the two villages there is no proper sanitation, so villagers used paddy field for excretion. But the well-to-do families having their own latrine. Absence of proper drainage system is also noticed in both the villages.

There are no sufficient water sources at Chakmodhu and Kochutia. The villagers depend on ponds for clean water which is used for cooking and bathing. In Chakmodhu there are six tube-wells and these serves the needs of drinking water of the villagers. While in Kochutia there are nin tube-wells for providing drinking water to the village people.

In Chakmodhu there are two burial grounds or Kabarsthan and in Kochutia there are four burial grounds for the Muslims. The burial grounds are locally known as Kabursthan in both the villages.

In Chakmodhu there is only one primary school named Chakmodhu Free Primary School. For secondary education the boys and girls usually take admission in high schools of the locality. The name of these schools are: Rughudev bati Sadharaner Vidyalay (2 miles north), Burikhali Khetramohan Institution (1 and ½ miles west) and Khajuri High School. But girls students prefer to take admission in Bauria Girls High School. For the sake of higher

education the students of the village normally goes to Uluberia College, Andul College and the colleges around Howrah and Calcutta. In Kochutia there is only one primary school called Kochutia Primary School. Due to the poor economic condition most of the families do not send their children to this school. For secondary education the students of well to do families go to the high schools of Simulia, Agardanga and Salar. For further studies the students usually move to the colleges situated at Katwa, Burdwan and Calcutta.

There are few associations and public places in Chakmodhu and Kochutia. In Chakmodhu there are two clubs, namely- Madhursree Sangha and Chetnavikash Kendra. These clubs are organized by the village youths and mainly functioning the recreational activities. Sometimes these clubs are also extending some social and political services to the villagers. There are a few grocery shops, tea stalls, and ration shops from where the villagers purchase their necessary commodities. There is no library in the village. In Kochutia on the other hand there are two clubs constituted by the Hindu and the Muslim youths respectively.

In Chakmodhu there are two mosques or masjids, where daily and occasional prayers as well as other religious activities are performed. There is a large open ground in the village which is known as Idd-gaha, where Idd prayers are held. The villagers jointly bear the maintenance cost of these religious places. By

contrast in Kochutia there are two mosques or masjid (one in Mullah para and the other in Shaikh para). There are also two Idd gahas in the village. There are some Shrines (astana) , where the villagers perform occasional prayers and rituals during their necessities. In Kochutia two temples are there for the Hindus.

There is only a single dispensary at Chakmodhu. Only two quack doctors live in the village and the villagers depend on them for their treatment. The village has a health centre but which has not yet started to function. The patients suffering from complicated diseases are admitted to Uluberia Sub-divisional hospital or to any other hospital of Howrah or Calcutta. The factory workers living in the village receiving help from physicians of Employees' State Insurance Medical Benefit Scheme. They also get free treatment from the medical unit of Fort Gloster Industries Ltd. The other village, i.e. Kochutia is still backward with regard to the modern medical facilities. There are only two quack medical practitioners in the village. Due to lack of health centre the villagers depend on Ketugram Health Clinic which is about six kilometres away from the village. In serious cases the patients are admitted to the neighbouring hospital of Salar, Katwa, Burdwan and Calcutta.

The panchayat of Chakmodhu has three members including the Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan. The entire village is divided into three wards (Para) and the election of the panchayat is held wardwise. All members of the present Panchayat are Muslims, as

the village is inhabited by the Muslims only. In contrast the panchayat of Kochutia has ten members including Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan. The members of the Panchayat are both the Muslims and the Hindus because the village is inhabited by both the Muslim and the Hindu communities.

The village of Chakmodhu is governed both by the statutory panchayat as well as by the informal Council of village elders called malat-majlis or Soloana majlis. At Kochutia the elders Council is commonly called as Grami-majlis. It has been enjoying a long tradition in the village. The villagers depend on elder's council for various social reasons, particularly for marriage , funeral and other socio-religious ceremonies. The headman or moral of the majlis controls the overall social matters of the villagers. The Soloana majlis or Grami majlis is not only a village Council, but it also has a larger organization when Soloana or Grami constituted a bigger Council for settling the inter-village disputes.

In Chakmodhu internal communication is mainly maintained by rickshaw and bicycle. Outward communication is maintained by train, bus and ferry boat services. These are easily available to the villagers. While at Kochutia the inward and outward communication is maintained by bicycle, rickshaw, bullock cart, train and bus services.

The People:

Chakmodhu is a nucleated village, inhabited only by the Muslims. Thus the village is homogeneous in nature. Whereas Kochutia is a multi-ethnic village inhabited both by the people of Muslim and Hindu communities. All the Muslims of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are the followers of Hanafi school and belonging to Sunni sect.

Census data reveals that Chakmodhu has a total population of 1159, distributed in 185 households. There are 612 (52.81%) males and 547 (47.19%) females in the village. The total Muslim population of Kochutia is 1226, of which 652 (53.18%) are males and 574 (46.82%) are females. The total number of households in Kochutia is 227. The most notable demographic feature is that, in the two villages the male population is higher than that of the female population.

The population has been divided into 17th standard age groups. The first age group starts from the day of birth upto the termination of the 5th year and the last age group holds individuals of ages above 85 years. The age grouping has been made for both the sexes. The age and sex distribution of the villagers is shown in the table 1.

Table - 1

The Male and Female Population of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Age group	Chakmodhu						Kochutia					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
1-5	108	17.65	90	16.45	198	17.08	102	8.32	109	8.90	211	17.21
5-10	85	13.89	97	17.73	182	15.70	99	8.08	83	6.77	182	14.85
11-15	77	12.58	73	13.35	150	12.94	71	5.79	57	4.65	128	10.44
16-20	71	11.60	59	10.79	130	11.22	66	5.38	55	4.49	121	9.87
21-25	55	8.99	39	7.13	94	8.11	63	5.14	66	5.38	129	10.52
26-30	57	9.31	48	8.78	105	9.06	65	5.30	42	3.43	107	8.73
31-35	29	4.74	35	6.40	64	5.52	45	3.67	28	2.28	73	5.95
36-40	35	5.73	24	4.38	59	5.10	34	2.77	28	2.28	62	5.06
41-45	23	3.76	16	2.93	39	3.37	18	1.47	35	2.85	53	4.32
46-50	19	3.10	26	2.93	45	3.89	29	2.37	27	2.20	56	4.57
51-55	20	3.27	14	2.56	34	2.93	25	2.04	7	0.57	32	2.61
56-60	14	2.28	13	2.38	27	2.33	15	1.22	16	1.32	31	2.54
61-65	6	0.98	7	1.28	13	1.12	13	1.06	7	0.57	20	1.63

Contd..

Table - 1 (Contd..)

66-70	6	0.98	2	0.37	8	0.69	4	0.33	8	0.65	12	0.98
71-75	6	0.98	2	0.37	8	0.69	1	0.08	3	0.24	4	0.32
76-85	-		2	0.37	2	0.17	1	0.08	2	0.16	3	0.24
86 and above	1	0.16			1	0.08	1	0.08	1	0.08	2	0.16
Total	612		547		1159	100.00	652		574		1226	100.00
%	52.81		47.19				53.18		46.82			

In the two villages there are certain hierarchical arrangements among the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia in terms of their so called ethnic identity and social status. Firstly, in Chakmodhu they are differentiated into five distinct social groups called jats viz. Shaikh, Khan, Mollick, Jamadar and Purkait. Further the village population is broadly divided into three segments (status groups), viz. Boroloke, Goribloke and Chhotoloke or Itar, in terms of their economic, social and ritual status in the village. The people who are economically well to do and socially recognized as superior belong to Boroloke category, while the poor and socio-educationally backward people are known as Garibloke. The Chhotoloke or Itar are the people who have lowest social status in the village due to some of their un-Islamic behaviours, viz., habit of gambling, drinking of wine, money lending, and breaking of essential parda rules by the women of the family.

In Kochutia there are three categories of social groups viz, Shah, Mollah Shaikh. Moreover they can be broadly divided into three groups namely, Miya, Chhasa and Itar. The people of Miya category are also called as Bhadralok i.e. the respectable and honourable persons. They belonging to the traditional Asraf or Sharif or Khas section. Miyas are mostly land owners, educated and economically well-to-do. They do not till their land personally but cultivate it by employing share-croppers and day labourers. They control most of the village lands and thus they dominate in

village politics. As a result the Miyas enjoying a superior position in social hierarchy even in contemporary situation. The category of Chhasa are constituted by the persons who are directly involved with the tilling and cultivation of land. They are mostly illiterate or having low education. They are totally depending on the Miyas for their livelihood. The Miyas and the Chhasas are functionally related with each other. Thus the Chhasas are enjoying an intermediate position in the status hierarchy. Itars are commonly called chhotolok, i.e., the degraded persons due to their un-Islamic activities. They are placed at the bottom of status hierarchy among the Muslims of this place.

The distribution of social groups of Chakmodhu and Kochutia villages are shown in the table-2.

Table - 2

Distribution of social groups in Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Ethnic groups	Religious Sects	Name of the village			
		A Chakmodhu		B Kochutia	
		No. of households	%	No. of households	%
Shaikh	Hanifi	163	88.11	209	92.07
Khan	"	5	2.70	-	-
Mollick	"	11	5.95	-	-
Shah	"	-	-	11	4.85
Mollah	"	-	-	7	3.08
Jamadar	"	4	2.16	-	-
Purkait	"	2	1.08	-	-

The economic condition of the inhabitants of Chakmodhu reveal that there are 310 (26.75%) earners, 97 (8.37%) partial earners, and 849 (73.25%) dependants. Only the men folk of the village were engaged in earning. While women, with a few exceptions are engaged in various domestic works. The economic activities of the male folk of the village shows that most of them are engaged in factory work, because the village is adjacent to an industrial and urban complex. While the economic condition of Kochutia reveals that there are 413 (33.69%) earners and 713 (58.16%) dependants . The people of Kochutia mostly engaged themselves in cultivation. In this village the proportion of total earners as well as male earners is slightly higher than that of the Chakmodhu village. This is mainly due to the fact that due to poor economic condition of the interior village the people generally prefer to engage their sons as agricultural labourers and in other occupations at their early age. Table 3 represents the economic condition of the two villages. For calculating the percentage of earner and non-earner i.e. dependant, the total population has been taken into account.

Table - 3

Economic Status of the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

	Name of the villages			
	A Chakmodhu		B Kochutia	
	No.	%	No.	%
(a) Total Earner	310	26.75	413	33.69
(i) Total male Earner	274	44.77	376	57.67
(ii) Total female Earner	36	6.58	37	6.45
(b) Total Dependant	849	73.25	713	58.16
(i) Total male dependant	338	55.22	276	42.33
(ii) Total female dependant	511	93.42	437	76.13

The majority of the Chakmodhu villagers primarily engaged themselves as skilled or semi-skilled labourers in large scale industries. While in Kochutia the majority of the villagers are mainly engaged themselves in agricultural activities either as self-cultivators, or as share-croppers and day labourers because it is an agrarian village. The occupational patterns of the two villages has been shown in table 4.

The data on state of education of the people of Chakmodhu reveals that there are 32.68% illiterate, 6.45% literate, 32.57% primary, 25.08% middle, 2.39% School Final and 0.83% Graduate and Master degree holders. But in Kochutia the corresponding figures are 61.28% illiterate, 8.77% literate, 12.02% primary, 12.32% middle, 4.24% school final and 1.37% high degree holders.

Table - 4

Occupational pattern of the People of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

	Name of the villages			
	Chakmodhu		Kochutia	
	No.	%	No.	%
(A) Male				
(i) Primarily engaged in factory industry	127	46.35	-	-
(ii) Engaged as daily labourer in various occupation (other than industry)	26	9.49	119	31.65
(iii) Engaged in petty business	27	9.85	24	6.38
(iv) Engaged in craft making (embroidary)	82	29.93	-	-
(v) Engaged in white colour occupation	12	4.38	16	4.26
(vi) Engaged in tailoring	-	-	2	0.53
(vii.) Engaged in cultivation	-	-	170	45.21
(viii) Engaged as cow harder	-	-	43	11.44
(ix) Engaged in begging	-	-	2	0.53
(B) Female				
(i) Engaged in making craft (embroidary)	33	91.67	-	-
(ii) Engaged in begging	1	2.78	-	-
(iii) Engaged in tailoring	-	-	1	2.70
(iv) Engaged in rice and paddy processing	-	-	11	29.73
(v) Engaged as maid servant	-	-	24	64.87
(vi) Engaged in white colour job	2	5.56	1	2.70

The details of educational status of the two villages shall be discussed in a separate chapter.

The conomic structure of the people of Chakmodhu reveals that the majority of the village population depend on industry and urban market for their livelihood. Thus the practice of agriculture is negligible in the village. White in Kochutia the village population is exclusively depend on agriculture as the means of their subsistence.

Chakmodhu is a fringe village situated under Bauria police station of the district of Howrah in West Bengal. It is only 25 kms away from the city of Calcutta. There are 185 households in the village and comprising of 1159 population. It is an uniethnic village in the sense that the village is populated by one religious group i.e. the Muslims. In this sense it is homogeneous in nature. But Kochutia is an interior village. It is situated under the jurisdiction of Ketugram police station of Burdwan district in West Bengal. It is a multi-ethnic village as it populated by Hindu castes and the Muslims. Thus Kochutia is heterogeneous in nature. In Kochutia there are 227 Muslim households with 1226 population.

In both the villages the households are arranged according to the physical division of the village occupied by particular khandan or lineage groups. The people who are close to each other in the social system or kin ties tend to live side by side but the people whose social position and kin ties are different live apart. The village Chakmodhu have traditional agrarian background marked

by the impact of subsequent industrial and urban feature. Most of the people of Chakmodhu are depends on industry, though there are also a good number of people who engaged in business, service and other occupations. Majority of the Chakmodhu women are engaged in domestic works and only a few are engaged in craft making i.e. in jori work. Only a single lady of Chakmodhu is attached in teaching profession. By contrust Kochutia is an agrarian village and exclusively depends on agriculture. Only a few women of this village are engaged in paddy processing, business, service and other occupations. As like as Chakmodhu only a single lady is engaged in teaching profession. The data reveals that the economic condition of Chakmodhu is better than Kochutia. Chakmodhu has facilities of electricity, urban market, and better systems of communication with the external world. But Kochutia lacks the mentioned privileges and facilities.

The state of education is very poor in both the villages. Most of the women are illiterate or simply literate. In respect to literacy and education females are more backward than males. Educational facilities of both the villages are also not so adequate.

CHAPTER - 2

ISLAM, MUSLIM SOCIETY AND WOMEN

CHAPTER - 2

ISLAM, MUSLIM SOCIETY AND WOMEN

Islam: Principles and History

Emergence and Expansion of Islam:

During the early part of seventh century A.D. the new monotheistic religion of Islam arose in Arabia. Prophet Muhammad was the founder of this religion. The message of the God as revealed to Muhammad was noted in the Holy book, called Quran. The entire life, words and deed of Muhammad are recorded by his followers in a book known as Hadish. Islam arose as a reaction against the polytheism and exploitation in West Asia. In this section I shall give an outline of the social conditions under which Prophet Muhammad appeared in Arabia along with the religion of Islam and how it spread to other countries in course of its history.

Before the birth of prophet Muhammad, Arabia was a country of idolators. They had no faith in resurrection and looked upon death as an end of life. They were divided into tribes, who live in a nomadic state of life. They had no organized Government amongst them. The only authority which they respected was that of the tribal chief, to whom they paid homage. They were addicted to drinking and gambling and practiced polygamy. Among these tribes, there was the Qurash who had a noble pedigree and were the custodians of the shrine of Kabaat at Mocca. The Prophet's father Abdullah came from this stock. He married a lady of the Zuharachan, belonging to the same tribe as himself. The offspring of this union was Muhammad who was born in 570 A.D. Muhammad was born

after his father's death and his mother died when he was only six years old. He was brought up by his uncle Abu Talib.

From his early life Muhammad hated idolatory. He used to go to Mount Hera near the city of Mocca to pass his time in mediatation and prayer. Later he was successful in receiving the message of the God (Allah) and to develop his mission. Gradually he began to preach his religion (Islam) publicly. In doing this he faced serious objection from his opponents. When his position became untenable at Mocca, he left for Modina and there he found a favourable situation for his religious teaching. This is known as Hijarat i.e. migration. He also faced trouble in preaching his religious teaching at Modina, but due to his devotion and sincerity he was successful in establishing his mission. Gradually he acquired power and influence at Modina. In 630 A.D. he destroyed the power of his opponent Quresh at Mocca and captured the city. He told the people to give up idol-worship and to recognize Allah as the only (one) God. He also suggested them to give up their evil social customs and to accept his faith of equality. The people did so in large numbers. Thus Islam started to spread among the masses of Arabia. Prophet felt ill and died on the eighth of June 632 A.D. The prophet's death was a terrible blow to his followers. The question of succession began to emerge. The prophet had named no successor and hence the difficulty was a real one.

By birth Muhammad belonged to the powerful Moccan clan the Quresh, who had important trade in Arabia. In his early life

he engaged in trade as an employee of Khadija, who later became his wife. When his interest shifted to religion he devoted his life for the sake of Islam and emancipation of the distressed by organizing the impoverished agricultural workers around Mocca. Now the question arises, what circumstances helped the prophet to organize the lower (oppressed) class? Researches have been made on the social organization of Mocca at the time of emergence of Islam. Wolf (1955:335) says that "although the Quresh of the centre and the Quresh of the outskirts of the city of Mocca were the most important clans, yet the real functional units of pre-Islamic Mocca were no longer clans as such and no localised groups of kins, but clusters of rich merchants and their dependants. The dependant population was made up of several groups, of whom the slaves were the most important. The groups were the mercenaries of slave origin, the personnel for merchant caravans, the middle-men, the debtor class, the wage-earners and the clients. Due to commercial orientation of the Mocca society, the patron-client ties which was formerly based on fictional relationship of kin, took more and more the exploitative relation between the members of different class groups. This relation was reinforced by the prevalence of wage payment and the institution of debt slavery. Wolf (1955:336) points out that, the bulk of Muhammad's first converts were came from the group of clients and from the slaves of the city. Thus the social organization of Mocca before the rise of Islam was based upon kinship structure real or fictional. But the commercial development led to the emergence of class groups and exploitative relations among them. The kinship ties

therefore became disruptive. On the other hand, the neglect of agriculture led to the creation of an impoverished agricultural proletariat around Mocca. In such a situation Islam emerged and thus was in a position to rally to its banner among the lower and oppressed classes. The revolt of Islam in the initial stage was basically agrarian in nature, directed against the feudal and commercial aristocracy in Mocca. In this way, the prophet Muhammad built up his new Islamic state upon the ruins of the old Arab clan structure. Thus Islam transferred the allegiance of the individual from the level of clan to the level of the state and religion.

Islam not only arose to eradicate the exploitative character of the classes, but also as a reaction against the polytheism and several social disabilities of West Asia. Initially the prophet was violently opposed by the rich merchants and the old priests of Mocca. But he strictly forbade idolatory, sorcery, gambling, drinking and gave women the right status in the society. During the prophet's time function of the church and the state were exercised by the same authority. Thus the prophet was the ruller and also the religious preacher.

The Islamic conception of single God (Allah), and the abolition of all social ranks and distinctions within the community (Umma) created an atmosphere of enthusiasm among its followers. This enthusiasm naturally led the believers to p reach and to profess their religion and also to carry the message of Islam far wide. Consequently within a short period Islam spread to distant lands.

During the life time of prophet Muhammad most of the battles fought in the name of Islam were confined to the boundaries of Arabia. But after his death numerous attacks were launched outside the Arabian soil. The period immediately after the death of prophet, the Khalifas took over the management of the religion and state. There were four main Khalifas in Islam, namely : Abu-Bakar, Omar, Osman and Ali. During the period of the first elected Khalifa Abu Bakar (632-634 A.D.), a large number of battles were fought in the name of God, resulting in the spread of Islam in several West Asian countries. Abu-Bakar was the father in law and representative of the prophet. He followed the old patriarchal ways in administration and followed a simple and religious life. During his Khaliphet Islam penetrated into Mesopotamia and Syria. The second Khalifa Omar (634-644 A.D.) marked the era of expansion of the Muslim Empire. He made the Khalifate a powerful institution by his activities and achievements. Actually he was the founder of the greatness of the Khalifate.

He extended the Empire of Islam towards Afganistan in the East and Tripoli in the West. Omar's successor in the Khalifate was Osman (644-656 A.D.). He was the first Khalifa who amassed wealth for himself and did impolitic acts which greatly offended his opponents. Osman was followed by Ali (656-661 A.D) the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet.

The first three Khalifas i.e. Abu-Bakar, Omar and Osman advocated a democratic procedure for the selection of Khalifa,

without the office being restricted to the Quresh group i.e. the group from which the prophet came. The followers of this School are called Sunni or the traditionalists. While the fourth Khalifa Ali, who was also the son-in-law as well as the cousin of the prophet, advocated for hereditary nature of Khalifate. The supporters of Ali are commonly known as Shia, which signifies party. There were constant opposition amongst the followers of the two groups. The difference between them resulted into war. The members of the prophet's kin, who claimed the leadership, suffered a great loss in the battles. Due to circumstances they had to take refuge in Iran, settled there permanently, propagated many followers amongst the people of Iran and resented the supremacy of the Arabs.

During the rise of Islam there were two strong empires, the Byzantine in Near East and the Persia in the Middle East. There were constant conflicts between the two empires. Owing to this old rivalry both these empires were weak in their strength. The Arabs took advantage of the rivalry between the two empires, thus occupied major part of their territories without much trouble. For political reason it was essential to have a strong Khalifate to administer and to control this expanded Muslim Empire. After the death of the Second Khalifa the traditional rivalry between the two Quresh clans - Banu Hasim (to which the prophet belonged) and Banu-Umayya (which hitherto had been gaining the political power) arose into an open conflict to hold the power and to govern the empire. After the death of the fourth

Khalifa, Ali, the Umayyads gained much political influence. The Umayyad Khalif Muawiya (661-680 A.D) brought about a drastic change within the administrative and political organization of Islam by changing the character of the government from religious to secular procedure. He abolished the popular Khalifate system and in its place established the monarchy or kingship. There after the Republican Khalifate was never returned to rule for any length of time. Throughout the Umayyad rule (661-750 A.D.) the whole Muslim empire was governed by one central authority i.e. the Umayyad rulers. The Umayyad rule was followed by the Abbasids (750-1258 A.D.). During this time the central authority of the Khalif gradually ceased to control the empire. Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasids. Throughout the Abbasids regim Baghdad flourished as a centre of learning and science. The place was also developed as a town of glory and prosperity.

The Arab force had conquered Persia during 650 A.D. Thus the whole of Persian territory was under the domain of the Khalifate. The early Abbasid Khalifs administered the whole empire, but the later Khalif of the same lineage failed to govern their entire domain. Gradually the Abbasids lost their power and authority of their state. By the year 820 A.D. the Khalifate as a centralised power had begun to collapse. Consequently the independent kingdoms began to emerge in Persia and other central Asian territories. Although a majority of the Persians and other central Asians had embraced Islam as their religion, yet they continued their struggle to retain their past political power. Within a

short period the Persians became the masters of their own destiny. This brought about the fall of Khalif's power. By the end of tenth century the whole of Persia and Turkisthan was out of Khalif's political authority. Consequently the Persians and Turks emerged as a powerful military force in Central Asia. Towards the end of the tenth century, there established a powerful kingdom at Ghazni, that later led a series of attacks on Indian territories (Ansari: 1960, Ishwari Prasad: 1965, Lewis: 1956, Karim: 1953 and Roy: 1979).

Islam: Doctrine and concepts of Society

The followers of Islam are commonly called as Muslims. About 1/7th of the world population comprises of the believers of Islam. Islam advocates for peace and the quest for a right way of life.

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root 'SLM' which means peace, submission and obedience. In the religious sense the word "Islam" means submission to the will of Allah (God) and the obedience to His laws. According to it Muslim is one who submits to the Divine Injunctions and does not deviate from them.

The philosophy of Islam clearly centres around two basic principles : (1) openness of God and (2) brotherhood among all the believers.

Allah (God) according to Islam is believed to be the One and the Only creator of the universe, and there is no one else

to share His glory. The implied emphasis of the preaching of Quran is laid down in the direct and immediate relations between man and Allah. There is no intermediary agent between man and God. Islam does not admit of any institutionalised role of the priest.

The ideological conception of a direct linkage between man/woman and his/her Creator provides a substantial basis for equality. Every person is equal to every other in the sight of God and on the day of Resurrection (Yawm 'ul Oiyama) every one will be judged by Allah according to the needs.

The Islamic world view is based around the concept of tauhid. This not only means the oneness of God (Allah), but also admits the whole universe as an unity (Abdalati: 1975, Shariati: 1979).

The cult in Islam is fairly simple, understandable and within the power of every person who are its follower. Islam is established on five fundamental principles. These are as follows:

1) professing of faith (Kaleme) that there is no other God but Allah and Muhammad is his last prophet.
2) performance of prayers.
3) fasting during the Ramjan moth.
4) payment of zakat
5) pilgrimages to holy Mocca for those who are able to do so (Abdalati: 1975, Islahi: 1978).

The dogma of Islam rests on the following seven basic convictions. These are as follows:

1) Belief in Allah
2) Belief in his angels

3) Belief in all his books

4) Belief in all his Apostles

5) Belief that there will be an end of his world

6) Belief in the resurrection of the dead

7) Belief that good and evil occur through predestination by Allah.

According to Islam there is no God except Allah. God is all knowing, supreme, powerful and Almighty. He creates everything which exists in this world.

The angels (faresta), including the four great ones i.e. Jibrail, Mikail, Asrail, Israfil are the creatures of Allah. They are his servants and intermediaries between Him and men.

Islam recognizes all the holy books of divine origin. They have the same basis as Quran.

Islam recognizes all the prophets of Allah and holds that the last one was Muhammad - peace be upon him.

Islam has an extensively elaborate doctrine on the end of the world, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgement (Kiamat) the hell (dujak) and the paradise (behast).

One of the basic dogmas of Islam is the doctrine of predestination. According to this doctrine, everything which occurs does so through predestination by Allah (Abdalati: 1975).

The ideal society of Islam is called Umma. It designates a human agglomaration i.e. society. The word Umma imbued with

a progressive spirit and implying a dynamic, committed and ideological social vision. The Umma is, therefore, a society in which a number of individuals, possessing a common faith and goal live together. The social system is based on equality and justice. It enables the society of human equality and of brotherhood i.e. the classless society. The basic element of Islamic value system is equality and brotherhood.

The great tradition of Islam is founded on a world view which is apparently non-hierarchical and historical in ethos. Islam is oriented towards holistic principle in its conception of social order. Islamic holism is based on the unity of Muslim Umma i.e. the collectivity of the faithful.

The ideal social life in Islam is based upon supreme principles and designed to secure happiness with prosperity for the individual as well as for the society. Class warfare, social castes and the domination of the individual over society or vice versa are alien to the social life of Islam.

In Islam the unity of mankind is conceived in the light of the common parentage of Adam and Eve. The unity of humanity is not only in its origin but also in its ultimate aims i.e. God. On this unity of origin and ultimate goal as the background of the social life in Islam, the relations between the individual and society are bases. The role of the individual is complementary to that of society. Between the two there are social solidarity and mutual responsibility. Islam permits a constructive interaction

between the individual and the society. The social life of Islam is characterised by co-operation in goodness and peity.

The structure of social life in Islam is lofty, sound and comprehensive. Among the substantial elements of this structure are a sincere love for one's fellow human beings, respect for the elders, mercy for the younger, comfort and consolation for the distressed, feeling of brotherhood and social solidarity, etc.

Islam admits the vast collective social life of man as society. According to Islam the multitude of people, who collectively form a society are related to each other, at least in terms of faith. As per the Islamic social system they are all equal by birth. There is neither a difference of high and low, nor a pure and impure. There can not be any distinction among them because of any peculiarity of colour, race, language and country. Islam enables mutual relations among Muslims, based on brotherhood, sympathy, sacrifice and co-operation. Every Muslim has six obligations towards another fellow Muslim. These are: (1) when a Muslim meets another he should salute him in prescribed manner i.e. by saying "Aa-Salamo-alikum" and in return another should reply "O-alikum-aa-salam". (2) When a Muslim desires for help from another he should assist him. (3) When a Muslim seeks advice from another he should give him, (4) when a Muslim falls sick his fellow members should visit and enquire about him, (5) when a Muslim dies others should attend his funerals, and (6) when a Muslim sheezes and says: Al-Homdu-Lillah (Allah be praised), the other Muslims should follow his prayer and must say Yarhamaka-Allah

(Allah have mercy on you).

Islam does not recognize any social distinction or discrimination based upon ethnicity, lineage and occupation. Th idea of equality and brotherhood was established during the early days of Islam by its democratic form of political organization. The early Khalifs were elected by the community. Only the Khalifs, as the successor of the prophet, was competent to settle the political disputes and also to give his verdicts on religious matters in the light of the teaching of Quran and Hadish (tradition of the prophet).

Islam is not only a religion, but also dictates the perfect way of life. As a way of life, Islam envisages a definite pattern of society that has its own mode of social interaction. The principles which Islam lays down are basically egalitarian. Inequality based on birth and descent are supposed to have no relevance in Islamic theology. All ranking and divisions of society, based on heredity, occupation etc. have no place in the ideal pattern of Islamic society.

The Quran (words of God) and the Hadish (things the prophet said and did), are the two primary sources of Islamic laws and the ultimate guide to the believers. The law of Quran and Hadish are at broad called Shariat. The principles of Shariat largely determines the social organization of the Muslims. Beside the two main sources of Islamic laws, viz, Quran and Hadish, there are three other sources i.e. Ijma (consensus of opinion of the jurists), Qiyas (analogical deductions of the above three sources) and Ijtehad (The work of theologians consisting of the interpretations of the Quran and Hadish in arriving at decisions in a new situation) [Abdalati: 1975, Ali n.d., Islahi : 1978, Singh : 1973].

Islam and Muslim Society in India

Spread of Islam in India:

Works on political history provide us an interesting picture about the spread of Islam in India. It reveals that since early time the Arabian preachers, Central Asian traders and rulers were interested in spreading Islam in Indian sub-continent. The commercila 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 the middle east (Central Asia, West Asia, Afganisthan, Iran etc) to this sub-continent and finally the conversion of the local people into Islam facilitated the spread of this religion in India.

The first Muslim invasion on India date 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 in Sind 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. During the later half of tenth century, a series of attacks were launched against Indian territories by the Turk rulers of Ghazni. Muhammad of Ghazni attacked India several times. His expeditions were of plundering nature, rather than the establishment of kingdom in Indian territory. Finally the conquest of Mohammed Ghauri (1191 A.D.) was very significant as it was the beginning of continuous Muslim rule in India. To rule this newly captured territory in India, Ghauri appointed his Turk Slave Qutab-Uddin Aibak as his governor. The

slave rulers afterward conquered Delhi and made it their capital.

The Turk slaves expanded their rule as far as Northern India. The Ghaurian conquest and the subsequent establishment of the Muslim dynasty along with the further advent of slave rule opened a new chapter in Indian Islamic history. Since then until the coming of British the greater part of India remained as a Muslim kingdom and this facilitated the expansion of Islam in this sub-continent. All these facts clearly revealed that in India the spread of Islam took place through several agencies of foreign origin i.e. Turk, Afghan and Mughal etc (Ansari : 1960, Roy : 1979).

Islam in Bengal:

Bengal's contact with Islam and the foreign Muslims, especially in the field of trade and missionary work, began much earlier than its conquest in the thirteenth century. Many Muslim scholars and Saints (Sufi) are believed to have come even before the conquerors. To spread Islam in Bengal the activities of the former was no less significant than that of the latter. In Bengal Islam expanded mostly in the rural areas.

Various social, religious and political causes are responsible for the growth and spread of Islam in Bengal. The Muslim nobles, rulers and officials played the most vital role to propagate Islam and to constitute the Muslim society in Bengal either by establishing marriage alliances with local people or by mass conversion of the indigenous communities. For promoting Islamic spirit among the masses they also established mosques and madrashas

(centre for Islamic learning). The missionary and the benevolent services offered by the Muslim saints also helped to spread Islam in rural areas of Bengal. All these together carried out a vigorous propaganda for Islam in Bengal, particularly in the eastern and northern districts of the state.Islam experienced a new outlook in Bengal especially during the Mughal rule. Therefore, it is clear that the spread of Islam in Bengal at initial stage was by foreign and immigrant Muslims.

In course of the propagation of Islam in Bengal, a mass conversion of the Hindus took place, due to social reasons. Those who embraced Islam came from various ranks of the society. In this phase of conversion the lower castes came in a large number than the higher castes. The lower castes adopted Islam for various social ostracism in traditional Hindu society. Islam attracted them by virtue of its principles of monotheism and equality. It is noted that, some higher caste Hindus also adopted Islam for material advantage and also for obtaining political power under Muslim administration.

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. A large number of Sufis belonging to various schools of thought came to Bengal at different times. Of these Sufi school of thought the Chistia, Qadiria and Nakshbandia were the most important. All these Sufi school of thoughts had a considerable number of followers who preached the principles of their respective order to the people

of various fatihs. The activities of these saints (Sufi) were not basically confined to their respective Khanquahs (centre for doing meditation), but they exerted great influence over the masses of outside also. Through their missionary activities, mysticism and spiritual power they exerted their influence upon the masses. Consequently it raised the number of Bengal Muslims and this also influenced their socio-religious life.

At the initial stage, the propagation of Islam in Bengal had not been followed by a corresponding widening of knowledge of the Islamic religion amongst the people. The Islamic scriptures were in Arabic, which were not translated into Bengali. The masses did not know Arabic or even Persian. Thus they failed to accumulate the Islamic knowledge. Moreover, Islamic views were wrongly interpreted and that influenced their socio-religious life. This was the stumbling block before the Bengali Muslims in understanding Islam. This general ignorance of Islam along with the continuation of pre-Islamic past among the Muslim people constituted a complex culture pattern among them. The Bengali Muslims knew Bengali only, practiced local customs and participated in the Hindu festivals. Thus the mental background of the Bengali Muslims was more traditional in nature.

With the gradual expansion of Muslim rule, a large number of educated and upper class Muslims from North and Western India came to Bengal as officials, teachers, physicians and traders. They gradually settled down in this province and thereby introduced

a new culture pattern into the local Muslim society. The immigrants enriched the Muslim society in Bengal in various ways. As a matter of fact after years of stagnation Islam received a faithful ground to propagate its principles among the converted masses.

History reveals that, in Bengal Islam had a peaceful penetration. Therefore, the nature of the progress of Islam in this province was quite different from that of North and Western India. In North, Central and Western India, the spread of Islam was largely confined to cities and urban areas. The penetration of Islam in the rural areas of those regions was very insignificant, while in Bengal Islam spread mostly in rural areas (Roy : 1968, Sarkar : 1972).

Religious Sects Among the Muslims in India:

In India there are several religious sects among the Muslims. These are : Sunni (Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamat), Shia (Ahl-e-Tasha), Waahabi (Ahl-e-Hadith) and Ahamedia etc. Each of the sects have their own individual characteristics by incorporating different values and customs to the basic Islamic philosophy. These sects have originated from the same source, but they have differences in their rites and customs. Of the four main Islamic sects in India, Sunnis are the most dominant and it is followed by the Shias, Waahabis and Ahamedias. The sects in Islam are not for instinct differentiation. They are either puritanical or pietistic. The differential characteristics of each of the above sects are as follows.

Sunni (Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamat).

Sunnis are by far the largest of all the Muslim sects in India and also in Bengal. They believe in the elected Khalifate as against the theory of hereditary or nominated successorship of the prophet as held by the Shias. The history of this bifurcation goes back to the time of prophet's death. The Sunnis accept Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet as the fourth Khalifa. The Sunnis believe in mass conversion. They do not recognize the "Mushtahids" i.e. enlightened doctors of law but follow the tradition of orthodox Islamic principles. For this reason the Sunnis are commonly called traditionalists. The Sunnis build their mosques like the mosques of Mocca and Madina. The mode of ritual purification i.e. Wuju or ablution is quite typical among the Sunnis. The Sunnis wash their arms from the wrist to the elbow. In doing this they actually wash them in a proper way. The Sunnis pray five times a day. During prayer the Sunnis pray with folded hands. Among the Sunnis, going to Mocca and Modina in person is a pre-requisite to perform the Haaj. To the Sunnis the celebration of Muharram signifies their belief in the completion of the creation by the appearance of Adam (father) and Hawwa (mother). To them the tenth of the Muharram month is the day of dedication and prayer.

The Sunnis are again sub-divided into two main sub-sects, called Barelvi and Deobandi.

The Barelvis derived their name from the school of theology at Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. The followers of Barelvi school tend to accept without much criticism the traditional social and

religious customs of the people. Thus they follow the tradition which has passed to them from previous generations. Owing to this fact, presence of a vast amount of elements of little tradition is noticed among this group of people. The elements of "caste-like" social stratification is highly noticed among this section of Muslims. Ijtehad either through Ijma and Qiyas is generally not acceptable to the great majority of this group of people. Owing to non-acceptance of Ijma and Qiyas the followers of this school failed to arrive at decisions in a new situation. Therefore, in this sense they are more traditional in nature. A quite a large number of customary practices and rituals relating to life-cycle rites which are considered as extra-Islamic remain in practice among them without much questioning. Similarly a number of socio-religious ceremonies viz. milad, fateha, tazia, Sab-e-barat etc. are performed in detail, though these actually show the Islamic version of the pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. Clientship of the saint or Pir is an another important character of this group and they believe in its hereditary form. The organization of the Barelvis are less, elaborate and less active. The Barelvi Madrasha of Uttar Pradesh occupies the central position in organizing the Barelvis. The Barelvis have a missionary wing which function only through madrashas and Moktabs' of this tradition. The school mostly follows the Hanafi jurisprudence. In India most of the Muslims, particularly the peasants belong to this category.

The Deobandis derived their name from the school of theology at Deoband in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. The basic

objective of this theological school is to purify the Sunni Hanafis from a number of practices that they have retained in their little tradition. According to the opinion of this school the rites, customs and practices those have no sanction in Quran and Hadish i.e. Sunna are not relevant and thus requested to be abandoned. The Islamic version of the pre-Islamic past are denounced and condemned by this school. Saints or Pirs are acceptable to the Deobandis only by considering their capability and thus the hereditary nature of Pirism and superstitious beliefs around their personality are considered as unacceptable to them. Islamization in its pure form is the basic objective of this school. They activate these objectives by performing the religious rites as suggested by the Quran. One of the interesting feature of this school is that inspite of its orthodox character it tries to introduce logic in the interpretation of Shariat and thus accepts Ijma and Qiyas. Owing to its introduction of logic in the re-interpretation of Shariat i.e. Ijtehad, it leads to develop a liberal tendency. Thus this group shows a modernist attitude inspite of its orthodox base. Their activities are mostly concerned with the religious activities of the Muslims and which they fulfil through their organization called tabligue. In comparison to the Barelvis the organizational set up of the Deobandis is more elaborate and active. It has both the socio-political and religious wings in the name of Jamat-ul-ulamae-Hind (having tradition of the Indian National Congress) and Tabligue-jamat. It also follows the Hanafi jurisprudence. In India the followers of Deobandi school among the Sunnis are called themselves the Deobandi-Sect.

It is noticed among the middle class Muslims and confined largely to the upper and middle strata of the Muslim society. This is also noticed among Muslim families of feudal aristocracy. For achieving higher status in Muslim society this group since the early time has been Islamizing its socio-religious practices.

Shia (Ahle-e-Tasha)

The Shias believe in the hereditary nature of religious leadership i.e. Khalifate. They accept Imamat to be within the descendants of the prophet through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The Shias have profound veneration for Ali and regard him as an incurnation of divinity. The Shias believe that the last Imam has yet to arrive. They believe in mustahids i.e. law specialists and accepted their word as final with regard to Islamic doctrine. Architecturally the Shia mosques resembles the mausoleum of Karbala. With regard to ritual purification or Wuju the Shias usually rub or wipe their hands and feet prior to prayers. In the context of day prayers the Shias pray only three times. Of the five day prayers (Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha) the Shias combine Zuhr and Asr for their afternoon namaj. While the maghrib and Isha are merged to form the post sun-set prayer. During prayer the Shias pray with open out stretched hands. Instead of mass conversion of Sunnis, the Shias believe in voluntary conversion. To Shias Haaj can be performed by proxy 1.e.a Shia can call himself a Haaji even if he finances the trip for another man. The difference between the Shias and Sunnis is greatly expressed in the celebration of the Muharram. To Shias the tenth day of the month of Muharram is the

day of Jem-e-Shahadat i.e. the day of martyrdom, when many Shias were massacred at the battle of Karbala. In the first ten days of this month the Shias wear the black dress and mourn the death of their imams i.e. Hasan and Hussain, the Sons of Ali, who were killed in the battle of Karbala. During these ten days Shias arrange majlis-e-aza where discourses narrate the situation of ten days battle of Karbala followed by matam, an expression of grief for the grandsons (Hasan and Hussain) of the prophet. The Shias are again divided among themselves into various sub-sects. The most important of these sub sects are: Asna-Ashriya and Zaidis. Each of these Shia sub sects have their respective laws of jurisprudence called Asna-Ashriya-law, Ismaili law and Zaidi law respectively.

Waahabi (Ahl-e-Hadish)

The followers of Ahl-e-Hadish are popularly known as Waahabi. They are a fundamentalist sect, which advocates for strictly following of Shariat as embodied in the Quran and the Hadish. They strongly denounce all intermediaries between man and the God. They considered the Quran and Hadish as perfect sources of guidance to the Muslims. Pirism of any form is not accepted by them. Like the Sunnis the Waahabis also believe in the democratic nature of the Khalifate on the issue of succession to the prophet. But the Waahabis strongly denounced the continuation of the pre-Islamic or extra Islamic practices of the Sunni Barelvis, particularly with respect to the little traditions of the latter. The

bidat or innovation in the sphere of religion (Islam) is strongly condemned and censored according to the ideology of this school. The Waahabis are also called Mohammadias as they strictly follows the dictates of the prophet. The followers of this sect are orthodox and fundamentalist in character. Their basic objective is to remove all elements of little tradition (pre-Islamic and extra-Islamic) from the Muslim society with a view to cultivate the Islamic tradition in its purer form. This sect originated out of an orthodox religious movement among the Muslims during the early nineteenth century. This theological school reveals the character of extremism and thus it is extra-puritan in nature. The members of this sect are organized under a formal association named, Jamiat-e-Ahl-e-Hadish. It generally follows the Hambali school of jurisprudence. The Waahabi ideology is followed by a section of Muslims having feudal and agrarian backgrounds.

Ahmadia (Qadiani)

This sect has its origin in a protest against the proselytising missions of christianity in India under the influence of the British rule, and also against Sir Syed's movement for westernization among the Muslims in India. This movement later developed as a sect among a section of the Muslims. It owes its name to its leader Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. To start his movement as a unique one he combined a spirit of orthodoxy, a sense of dedication for the preservation of traditional values and a tendency towards some sort of new liberalism. His aim was to unite Islam with the Christianity

under one banner. The position of the Ahmadia sect in Islamic religion is highly controversial since its leader proclaims himself as a Prophet. So the other Muslims consider the Ahmadias as outside the fold of Islam. Thus they are avoided by the other Muslim sects in all levels of social interaction. The centre of the Ahmadias is at Qadian situated in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab. The leadership of this sect is still in the lineage of Mirza Ahmad. In India the Ahmadias are basically engaged in trade and commerce.

In addition to the above sectarian divisions and their discipline there is another unorganized section among the Muslims whose life style is determined both by the sacred and secular thoughts. This group emerged out of Aligarh movement and the rationalistic thought of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and his associates. This group of people did not put much importance to sectarian divisions in terms of theological differentiation but followed the religious principles by compartmentalizing their life activities. Belief in Pir, innovation in the religious sphere are not questioned by them. This is noticed among a small section of upper and middle class Muslims, particularly among the professionalists. This group of Muslim is commonly called as "Ferengi Mahal".

Social Groups Among the Muslims in India:

Works on social history as well as various Anthropological and sociological researches provide us an interesting picture of the background of Indian Muslims and their social life. Historians like Ahmad (1964), Qureshi (1962) and Smith (1947) etc. in giving

accounts of the Muslims in the Indian sub continent are basically in agreement about the diversity of their origin. Indian Muslims, have been sen on the one hand as composed of 'foreigners' or comparatively later immigrants from various regions of Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Afganistan, speaking different languages and differing in many aspect of their culture. And indigenous converts drawn from widely differing background on the other. Anthropologists have also quite often expressed similar views. Bose (1957), observed that the converts are unemployed sections of the Hindu caste framework. Srinivas (1968) sees them as drawn from the so called low-castes.

History reveals that since early times the Arabian preachers, middle eastern rulers and traders were interested to spread Islam to the Indian sub-continent. As a result, in India conversion from Hinduism to Islam happened through several agencies of foreign origin. Thus we have seen that the Indian Muslims are a heterogeneous group of various ethno-social background of foreign origin and indigenous converts of diverse social background. These two basic groups in Muslim population of India have peculiar cultural and behavioural differences.

Administrators, Anthropologists and Sociologists through their various writings have mentioned the existence of number of Muslim groups of various background almost analogous to <u>jatis</u> or Hindu castes (Ahmad : 1973, Ansari : 1960, Berth : 1960, Bhattacharya : 1973, Guha : 1965, Khan : 1968, Leach : 1960, Misra : 1964, Risley : 1982 and Siddiqui : 1974, etc).

In India the Muslims are differentiated among themselves on the basis of sectarian division. The existence of different social groups among the Muslims forms a very debatable and controversial topic.

The differentiation that emerged among the Muslims at first is between the foreigners, who called themselves Asrafs and the indigenous elements who are referred by the former as Ajlafs or Atrafs and Arzals. This three-fold classification is on the basis of their social status.

The Asrafs as well as the Ajlafs or Atrafs are again divided among themselves on the basis of their ethnicity and social (caste) background. Owing to the impact of the notion of nobility (in terms of ethnic and social background) among the Asrafs and Hindu caste backgrounds among the Ajlafs the segments in Muslim society are roughly arranged in hierarchical order.

Those who called themselves Asraf are the landed gentry. Usually held to be descendants of distinguished foreign ancestors. They are the land owners, the civic and religious leaders and wealthier. This Asraf is the elite class among the Muslims. Among the Asrafs there are four distinct social (or ethnic) categories, viz. Sayyad, Shaik, Mughal and Pathan. Sayyads (Prince) claimed the highest rank as they believed to have come from the daughter of prophet and her husband Ali, the fourth Khalifa of Islam. Next are the Shaiks (chief or leader) who are believed to have descended from the Arab ancestors and who were among the first followers of

the prophet. Mughal and Pathan constituted the third and fourth ranks respectively, who claimed to have descended from Mughal and Afgan conquerors in India (Ansari : 1960). The Ajlafs are the toiling masses and peasants and therefore could not lay any such claim of noble ancestry. The social gradation among the Ajlafs or the indigenous converts are mostly determined by their past caste backgrounds. At the bottom of the hierarchy there are those Muslims who did scavening, sweeping and such other unclean jobs and they are called by the other Muslims (Asrafs and Ajlafs) as Arzals (Karim : 1980).

In the field of sociological studies on social structure among Muslims in India mention can be made of the works of following scholars:

Ansari (1960) who had initiated the topic of categorization of Indian Muslims is of the view that caste like divisions exist among them. He categorised the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh into four major groups i.e. Priest, warrior, commoner and serf. He tried to co relate these four groups with the four Varnas of the Hindus. Further he categorised the Muslims into two major status groups viz. Asrafs and Ajlafs and admitted that each of these has its own sub-categories. Asrafs or the noble section tracing their descent from foreign immigrants. The Ajlafs are commoners mostly of indigenous stock carrying out the traditional skills and trades. According to him Asrafs are again differentiated among themselves in terms of ethnicity and culture into four groups i.e. Sayyad, Shaik, Mughal and Pathan. These four groups i.e. Asrafs constitute the Muslim elite class. While the non-Asrafs or the Ajlafs along

with its various sub-groups constituted the non-elite or the serving section. And it is within itself divided into several occupational groups and untouchables. He stated that for various reasons traditionally each of the various Muslim groups are endogamous. Ansari's categorization of the Muslims into different occupational and status groups clearly indicate that he had followed the Hindu varna-jati model for the classification of Muslim groups in India.

Ahmed (1973, 1976, 1983, 1984) has published a series of four edited volumes dealing with the various aspects of social and cultural life of the Muslims in India. His first volume of this series was concerned with caste and social stratification among the Muslims of various parts of India viz. Khajas of Bombay, Meos or Rajasthan and Haryana, Moplahs of the South-West Coast of India, Tamiliad Muslims and the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Laccadives, etc. The focus of this papers is on various aspects of caste like groupings in the Muslim community. The interactional pattern with the different Muslim groups have also been observed by the scholars in their respective community studies. His second volume is on Family, Marriage and kinship among Muslims in India. This volume deals with the significant aspects of the social structure of Muslims in India. The third volume dealt with the Rituals and Religion among Muslims in India. In this book there are essays on religious beliefs and ritual practices of Muslims of different regions of the country. The fourth volume is the collection of essays on Modernization and social change among the Muslims. This volume provides information and offers insights for an appraisal

of the responses of the Muslim community to the recent phenomenon of modernization and social change in India.

Alvi (1972) holds the view that, the kinship system rather than the caste is the basis of social organization of the Muslims. He observes several distinctive characteristics of biradari, and points out that the biradari is restricted to a number of households having fraternal solidarity and participating in ritual exchange of presentations.

Berth (1960) says inspite of Hindu influence the Swat Pathans show the formation of groups based on economic and social distinction.

Dumont (1971) observes that the Ashraf of Uttar Pradesh are contaminated by caste spirit although they have not completely succumbed to it. He also gives an interesting remark on the basic framework of the Muslim social structure which he says is based on biahdari (i.e. the marriage circle), that mainly originate from the system of marriage among the Muslims. Thus the sub-groups of Ashraf category are not necessarily bound by economic dependence, but endogamy being the practice in the kinship system and that enables the sub-groups to retain their separate identity. There is no bar on their commonsality ideally, but the rules of endogamy are quite flexible on condition where mates are not available within kin groups. Islamic marriage rules allow marriages amongst cousins of different categories. It is believed that the chief reasons for following this sanction was to retain the purity of

blood which the Muslims believe can be achieved by marrying within their own clan (group). Since the Muslim women are entitled to their father's property their marriage within the family or kin group save the family property from being shared with another family or unknown group. Hence the inter marriage amongst the four groups of upper stratum among the Muslims occurred only when suitable spouses were not available from their own clan or kin groups. The contemporary Muslims still hold these views and try to abide by them.

Roy (1979) states that the basic grouping of the Muslim society is of Khandan. The Khandan is the word popularly used by the Muslims. Khandan can be defined as "lineage of recognition" i.e. where the persons are traceable and recognized. She has used the term Khandan to distinguish one group from another. The terms of Sayyed, Shaik, Mughal and Pathans are the named categories. Here use of the term Khandan is quite equivalent to the Alavi's concept of biradari.

Rizviand Roy (1984) dichotomize the Muslims in India into two categories. Firstly, those who came and settled in India during the various invasions and historical migrations. This constituted one group. While the other group was believed to be formed by mass conversion of the local population (Hindu or non-Hindu) of a comparatively lower order in the caste hierarchy. On the basis of this difference, a clear line of distinction was drawn between Shurfa and neu-Muslim. They stated that the Shurfa or Sharif was believed to comprise Shaiks of Arabia, Sayyads of Persia, Mughals

and Pathans of the Persian Gulf and north-western frontiers, while nau-Muslims were accepted to have been drawn from innumerable occupational groups of Hindu caste background. They also noted the existence of about one hundred and thirtyeight Muslim groups in the Indian sub-continent.

Siddiqui (1974) has noted the existence of about sixty Muslim groups at Calcutta on the basis of nationality, linguistic, ethnicity and regional characteristics. He also classified the Muslim groups on the basis of their sects, sub-sects, Khandan and Silsila affiliations. His classification of Muslim groups is also on the basis of their occupational specialization and division of labour. This study analyses the interaction of the 'cultural ideals of Islam' with the 'social ideals of caste' within the framework of the Muslim society.

Social Groups Among the Muslims of Bengal

The Census of India (1911) has categorised of the Muslim communities of Bengal into Sharif/Ashraf/Rais (having noble birth, chief or leader of the community), Atraf/Ajlaf (wretches or mean people), Raizal/Razil (worthless), Arzal (lowest), Kamina/Itar (mean base) or chhotozat. In this census of India Gait (1911) has tried to explain the social precedence among the Bengali Muslims in terms of their hereditary title and traditional occupations. The above classification of Muslim groups according to Hindu caste categories received strong protest from several corners.

Levy (1957) classified the Bengali Muslims of the nineteenth century into three distinct categories. These are: Ashraf, Ajlat and Arzal. Amongst the Bengali Muhammadans the Ashraf or upper class

includes all undoubted descendants of foreign Muslims (Arabs, Persians, Afgans and so on) and converts from the higher castes of the Hindus; while the Ajlaf includes various functional groups, such as weavers (Julaha), cotton carders, oil pressers, barbars, tailors etc. as well as all converts of originally functional Hindu castes. And the Arzal (Arabic Ardhal) are those who have been converted from the very lowest castes viz. Halalkar, Lalbegi, Abdal, Bediyaa etc.

Titu (1959) divided the Muslims in India into four groups. These are Sayyid, Shaikh, Moghal and Pathan.

The Bengali Muslims of nineteenth century were classified into two categories, viz., Ashraf or Sharif and Atraf or Ajlaf by Wali (n.d.). Generally the Ashraf or the landed gentry claimed noble ancestry, while the Atraf or the toiling massesand peasants could not lay any such claim to noble ancestry.

Karim (1980) has simply grouped the Muslims of Bengal into the following order on the basis of their class system. These are : (1) Upper Sharif, (2) Poor Sharifs, (3) Mixed category of Asraf Bhalamanus or the rising Muslim middle class, (4) Atrafs or non-Sharifs and (5) Arzal or the lowest of all.

Bhattacharya (1973) in his recent study analyses the social system of the Muslims of Birbhum in terms of their inter-ethnic stratification. He has used the term 'ethnic group' like Marriott (1960) to designate the various social groups among the Muslims of his field situation.

Mondal (1988) has noted that, the traditional pattern of social stratification among the Muslims of rural West Bengal is the status distinction between the three categories of people. viz. Khas or Borjat, Aam or Nichujat and Tarafsrani of chhotojat. With the each of these status categories there are several social and occupational groups. The status categories as well as the social and occupational groups of the Muslims are loosely arranged in statified order. He also noted that in contemporary changing situation some other status groups, like Miya or Boroloke, Chhasa or garibloke and Itar or Chhotoloke have emerged among the Muslims.

Women in Islam and in Muslim Society

Women in Islam:

The status of women in Islam is very clear. The attitude of the Quran and Hadish bear witness to the fact that a woman is at least, as vital to life and society as man himself and that she is not inferior to him nor is she one of the lower species. The status of women was taken for granted to be equal to that of man.

Islam has given women rights and privileges. The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man, but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and sameness are two quite different things. This difference is understandable because man and woman are not identical but they are created equals.

With this distinction in mind, there is no room to imagine that woman is inferior to man. There is no ground to assume that woman is less important than man just because her status, roles and rights are not identically the same as his. But the fact is that Islam gives her equal right, but not identical, thus show her that she is taken into due consideration, acknowledges her, and recognizes her independent personality.

The status of woman in Islam is something unique, something novel and something distinct and thus has no similarity in any other cultural system. At a glance the attitude of Islam with regard to woman is as follows:

Woman is recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner of man in the procreation of mankind. He is a father and she is a mother and both are essential for life, family and society. By this partnership she has an equal share, equal right and equal responsibility. Islam admits the division of labour of man and woman and thus place their rights and duties in functional relationship on the basis of interdependence and mutuality.

She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. She is acknowledged as an independent personality, in possession of human qualities and worthy of spiritual aspirations. Her human nature is neither inferior nor deviant from that of man.

She is equal to man in the pursuit of education and knowledge. When Islam enjoins the seeking of knowledge upon Muslims,

it makes no distinction between man and woman. Almost fourteen centuries ago, prophet Muhammad declared that the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every muslim male and female.

She is entitled to freedom of expression as much as man. Her sound opinions are taken into consideration and cannot disregarded just because she happens to be of the female sex. It is noted in the Quran and Hadish that woman has the right to express her constructive opinion freely. It is also reported that women participated in serious discussions with the prophet as well as with other khalifs. Besides, there were occasions when Muslim women expressed their views on legislative matters of public interest and stood in opposition to the khalifs, who then accepted the sound argument of these women. A specific example took place during the khalifate of Umar Ibnal Khattab.

Islamic history shows that during emergencies all Muslim women were not confined to their homes but many of them participated in public life. They used to accompany the armies, engaged in battles, to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies, serve the warriors and so on. Since the day of Mohammad Muslim women have taken part in public life. The names of women like Khadija, Fatima, Zainab are quite familiar.

Islam grants woman equal rights to contact, to enterprise, to earn and possess independently. Her life, property and honour are as sacred as those of man. If she commits any offence, her penalty is no less than that of a man.

Islam has taken all measures to safeguard the interest of women and put them into practice as integral articles of Faith. It never tolerates those who are inclined to be prejudiced against women or discrimination between men and women.

Apart from recognition of woman as an independent human being, Islam has given her a share of inheritance. As a wife or mother or daughter or sister, a woman receives a certain share of the deceased kin's property, a share which depends on her degree of relationship to the deceased and the number of heirs.

In the case of inheritance, the question of equality and sameness is fully applicable. In principle, both man and woman are equally entitled to inherit the property of the deceased relations, but the portions they get may vary. In some instances man receives two (double) shares whereas woman gets only one (single). This is not the case of giving preference or supremacy to man over woman. This is due to the fact that man is the person solely responsible for the complete maintenance of his wife, family and any other needy relations, while woman has no financial responsibilities what so ever except very little of her personal expenses according to the norms of a patrilineal society.

Islam recognizes the consent of the bride before arranging her marriage. In civil contacts both men and women are recognized as witness to solemnize the marriage.

In Islam woman enjoys certain privileges of which man is deprived. She is exempted from some religious duties, i.e. prayers

and fasting during her regular periods, and at the time of confinement. She is also exempted from attending the obligatory congregation prayer of Friday. She is free from all financial liabilities when living under male guardians.

In Islam there exists a conspicuous concern for feminine modesty which is associated with a practice called veil or Parda. The concept of modesty i.e. Saram is central to the ideology of Parda. The rules of Parda govern the women's dress and behaviour. Consequently it limits their public activities. The central objective of Parda is to prevent women from interacting with men and in some circumstances from certain outside affairs.

According to Islam the woman should beautify herself with the veil of honour, dignity, chastity, purity and integrity. She should refrain from all deeds and gestures that might stir the passions of people other than her husband or cause evil suspicion of her morality. She is warned not to display her charms or expose her physical attractions before strangers. Veil is one that can save her soul from weakness, her mind from indulgence, her eyes from bad looks, and her personality from demoralization.

Islam views marriage as a strong bond and a serious commitment in the fullest sense. It is a kind of commitment in which a man (husband) and a woman (wife) find mutual fulfilment and self realization, love and peace, comfort and hope. All this is because marriage in Islam is regarded as first and foremost as a righteous act.

Islam consider woman as a social entity thus specifically constitutes rules and regulations with regard to marriage, divorce, patrimony and alimony etc.

Islam contributes to the status improvement of woman in the following ways:

(a) by stressing the need to respect and to give good treatment to the woman. The prophet proclaimed that "Paradise is at the feet of the mother".

(b) by making woman the mistress of her own property

(c) by giving her the right of claiming divorce on certain ground and particularly in the context of marital bond of non-functional nature.

(d) by allowing her to hold any public office, head of an empire or minister or judge etc.

(e) by giving her freedom to remarry after legal divorce.

(f) by encouraging her to study and acquire knowledge (Abdalati : 1975, Islahi : 1978).

Muslim Women in Different Islamic Countries:

In this section I shall briefly discuss the position of Muslim women in other countries, specially in Islamic countries.

In the Arabian countries, particularly in Egypt, Syria, Lebanan and Irag the status of women is largely determined by traditional norms. The Arab society places highest value on chastity of women. In Arabia young men and women are not free to mix with one another before marriage due to traditional values on female chastity which is enforced through the system of Parda. Traditional

Arabian society was of extended type but due to spread of education and forces of modernization the society is gradually changing and it is noted that now-a-days the urban youths of Arabia prefer nuclear families. Arab women are gradually taking education. Many Arab women take up several service for the financial security of their family. They also enjoy some freedom in the choice of their marriage partners. In these countries women hold important positions in different government and non-government positions. The women's movement is gradually emerging in Arabia for ascertaining women's right, justice and equality in social life. In the political front they are playing significant roles and a good number of women are now participating in political activities. Due to spread of education the traditional status and roles of Arab women are gradually changing.

The women of Turkey are in a very advantageous position. More than one sixth of the students in Turkish Universities are women. They are actively participating in the economy of their country and are engaged in various professions. As the Turkish Parliament recognizes their full political equality, they are enjoying political rights equal to men since 1935. The disparity between men and women in Turkish society is gradually decreasing, yet the age old practice of polygamy and system of veiling still persisting, particularly in the rural areas.

The women of Iran are under the control of several traditional norms and social customs. Polygamy is still practised particularly by the lower class of this country. The political

participation of the Irarian women is not very significant. But the Parda system has somewhat slackened due to educational progress and the women are allowed to move outside for education and also for their profession.

In Afghanistan the women are under control of traditional social customs. The practices of child marriage and polygamy are also prevalent. Recently, there has been a development in the life style of Afghan women particularly among the upper class people of urban areas.

The women in Indonesia are quite free from the traditional customs of veiling and segregation. Co-education is allowed and accepted by the Indonesian Muslim society. As a matter of fact there has been a remarkable change in education and the women are actively participating in economic life at all levels. In rural areas they are engaged in agriculture and cottage industries. The women of Indonesia are enjoying equal rights with men to vote and to hold public office. However, even in changed circumstances polygamy, divorce and child marriage are still prevalent in this country.

In Pakistan, the observance of parda, child marriage and polygamy is still prevalent. Education of girls has been a serious problem even in contemporary times, particularly in rural areas. The women of upper and middle class are today attending schools, colleges and universities. Due to the effect of urbanisation there has been a marked increase in the number of girls' schools and women's colleges. The practice of parda has also been slackened

and they have entered into many professions. They enjoyed political rights and have the freedom to stand for election. Today, education and urbanization have affected the size of the family and the roles and attitudes of the members of the family. But, in spite of all changing trends tradition still having a great hold on the rural women of this country.

The women of Bangladesh are living in a typical social environment where many restrictions are imposed regarding the pattern of behaviour and activities of the women. The girls are married at a very early age. Unilateral form of divorce and polygamy are also prevalent. Education of girls has been a very serious problem in this country. Only in recent times there has been a change in the status and roles of women belonging to the upper and middle classes. As a result their educational, political and economic status are gradually changing. Now-a-days there are many women in Bangladesh who are engaged in honourable professions and also involved in politics. Women's liberation movements are also emerging in this country. The recent changes in the status of women in Bangladesh is more marked in urban areas than in rural regions (Faruqui : 1982; Menon : 1981; Karim : 1963, Siddiqui : 1987).

Muslim Women in India:

In India Muslims constituted the largest minority group.

According to 1981 Census, the Muslims were 11.35% of India's total population and in West Bengal they were 21.51% of the total population of this State. As per 1981 Census, the total Muslim population in India were 75, 512, 439 of which 38,989,763 were male and 36,522,576 were female. It was estimated that among the Muslim population there were 937 female per 1000 males. India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. But the economic and political roles of the Muslim women are not at all significant. A great majority of the Muslim women are confined to their homes and engaged in domestic works . There is no definite statistical data available to ascertain the economic condition of the Muslim women. The educational status of the women in Muslim community is highly disheartening. According to 1981 Census the female literacy rate in India was 25%, though perfect data is not available, it has been estimated that the literacy rate of Muslim women in India was only 19% (Hamid, 1989).

Due to certain traditional norms the birth of a girl is considered as an unfortunate and unpleasant event in the Muslim family. Early marriage of the girls is a common practice among them. Widow marriage and marriage of a divorced lady are prevalent in the Muslim society. For various reasons the women are not generally considered as full persons and thus their opinion and advice are not taken into consideration in the matters of family and also of society. Polygamy is also prevalent but it is not so high as it is thought to be.

The practice of parda is an unique custom for the Muslim women particularly among well-to-do families. Due to spread of education and modernization the postion and roles of women have been changing. In the recent past, a number of laws were passed like the child marriage Restraint Act (common to all), the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act 1939, Muslim Women Bill (Protection of Rights on divorce) 1986, etc.to improve the position of women and to safeguard them from the prevailing practices. Various religious reform movements of 20th century on the issues like abolition of child marriage, protest against the custom of dowry etc. have also caused a change in the traditional status of women in Muslim society.

Observation

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root 'SLM', which means peace, submission and obedience. The followers of Islam are commonly called as Muslims. During early part of the seventh century A.D. Islam arose in Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad was the founder of this religion. The message of Allah (God) as revealed to Muhammad was noted in the holy book called Quran. While the entire life, works and deeds of the prophet were recorded by his followers in the book called Hadish.

The ideal society in Islam is called Umma, which is egalitarian in principal and based on equality and justice. The status of women in Islam is very clear. According to the Quran and the Hadish woman is, at least, as vital to life and society as man

himself, and she is not inferior to man. Islam has given man the rights and privileges. The rights and responsibilities of a woman is equal to those of man, but not identical in many respects. By nature man and woman are not identical, but they are created equals in Islam. The position of woman in Islam is something unique, something novel and something distinct. Islam contributed to the status of woman in the following ways: (1) by stressing the need to respect and to give good treatment to the woman, (2) by making woman the mistress of her own property, (3) by allowing her to hold the office, (4) by encouraging her to study and acquire knowledge, (5) by equalizing the status of woman with the man, (6) by recognizing the constructive roles of woman, (7) by giving her the right of claiming divorce on reasonable ground, (8) by implementing the practice of feminine modesty (parda), (9) by giving her freedom to remarry (widow re-marriage) after legal divorce, and (10) by creating laws of marriage in favour of woman.

Inspite of all these ideal Islamic prescriptions, in empirical context the Muslim Women are under control of various traditional (pre-Islamic or extra-Islamic) rules and restrictions. These regulations greatly retarded the improvement of social position of the women in Muslim society. Consequently the social position of the Muslim Women varies from place to place and country to country. It has been noted that, the Muslim Women of different countries have been suffering from various social disabilities.

The emergence of Islam in India dated back to 650 A.D. The commercial relations between Central Asia and India, the various

Muslim invasions in India followed by continuous Muslim rule in the country, the immigration of Muslim people from various parts of middle east and Afganishtan to Indian sub continent, the activities of religious missionaries i.e. Sufis, and finally the conversion of local people into Islam facilitated much to the spread of Islam and growth of the Muslim Community in India. Various social, religious and political causes are responsible for the growth and spread of Islam in India and in Bengal.

The Muslims in India are divided among themselves into various categories on the basis of their sect, ethnicity and social status. India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. According to 1981 Census the Muslims constitute 11.35% of total population of this country. Though theoretically Islamic society is egalitarian in nature, yet emprically the Muslims are segmented into various orders at the macro and micro levels. The ordering of social relations in the formation of groups and sub groups reveal that there are tremendous social divergence among them. They are divided among themselves on the basis of sects, subsects, ethnicity and social status.

The social structure of the Bengali Muslim Society reveals that majority of them are of Sunni sect. The Sunni Muslims are again divided into three sub-sects viz, Barelvis, Deobandis and Ahel-e-hadis. Muslims of Bengal are further sub-divided into two categories on the basis of their social standing. These are Khas or Sharif and Aam or non-Sharif. The Khas includes the groups

like Sayyed, Shaik, Mughal and Pathan; while the Aam consists of peasants and various other occupational groups. 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.

The economic and social roles of Muslim Woman in India are not at all significant. The literacy rate of women in Muslim Community is very low. The practice of parda is prevalent among the Muslim Woman irrespective of their social status. Only in contemporary times there has been a slight change in the life-style of the Muslim Woman due to the impact of various economic, social, educational and political forces.

CHAPTER - 3

FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES : STATUS OF WOMEN

CHAPTER - 3

FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES: STATUS OF WOMEN

Family and the Position of Women

Muslim family is patrilineal and patrilocal. Authority is a subject absolutely central to any analysis of the organization of family. The family is a part of the Islamic social order.

The family occupies by far the most important position in the social structure of Indian communities. It derives its significance not merely from its economic function and its role in socialization, but its authoritative and ritual importance is also great. In this chapter I shall deal with the structure and composition of family and inter-personal relations among the family members of Chakmodhu and Kochutia.

To the Muslims a family is a ghar or paribar which means a group of people living under the same shelter and stand in face to face relationship and take meal from the same hearth. To them a family is such an unit in which an individual is born, grown up, procreates and finally dies out. Within the family a child learns the social customs and norms of the society through socialization process mainly with the help of primary relatives with whom he/she meets in a face to face relationship.

Family Size:

The family size of the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia having significant variation. The data on family size of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are given in the table 5 and 6.

The tables show that, in Chakmodhu there is only one family having one person. Thus the smallest family unit consists of 1 person and the largest of 19 persons. Hence the family size ranges from 1 to 19 individuals. At Chakmodhu the mean family size is calculated to be of 6.26 persons. While at Kochutia the smallest family unit consists of 1 person and the largest of 14 persons. So, the family size here ranges from 1 to 14 individuals. In Kochutia the mean family size is found to be of 5.41 persons. Thus the average family size of Chakmodhu is slightly higher than that of Kochutia.

Table - 5

Family Size of Chakmodhu

Family size (X)	Frequency (F)	Family size and frequency (fX)
1	1	1
2	12	24
3	16	48
4	23	92
5	27	135
6	27	162
7	21	147
8	23	184
9	12	108
10	11	110
11	6	66
12	4	48
15	1	15
19	1	19
TOTAL	185	1159

Mean family size $\frac{1159}{185}$ = 6.26 individuals

Table - 6

Family Size of Kochutia

Family size (X)	Frequency (F)	Family size and Frequency (FX)
1	1	1
2	20	40
3	34	102
4	30	120
5	47	235
6	31	186
7	24	168
8	17	136
9	10	90
10	6	60
11	2	22
12	2	24
14	3	42
TOTAL	227	1226

Mean Family size : $\frac{1226}{227}$ = 5.41 individuals

On the basis of figures given in the table-7 it is indicated that in Chakmodhu 79 (42.70%) families are composed of 1-5 persons i.e. small sized family; 94 (50.81%) families are composed of 6-10 persons i.e. medium sized family; 11 (5.95%) families are composed of 11-15 persons i.e. large sized family and only 1 (0.54%) family is composed of more than 15 persons i.e. very large size family. Hence it is seen that the families of Chakmodhu (fringe village) are mostly medium in size in order of pre-dominance and the small sized families occupy the second position. By contrast, in Kochutia there are 132 (58.15%) families composed of 1-5 persons i.e. the small sized family; 88 (38.77%) families are composed of 6-10 persons i.e. medium sized family; and 7 (3.08%) families composed of 11-15 persons i.e. the large sized families. Hence it can be said that the families of Kochutia (interior village) are mostly small in size in order of predominance and the medium families occupy the second position. Thus is is observed that, in rural village (Kochutia) the family size is comparatively smaller than that of urban village (Chakmodhu). The reasons behind the smallness of family size in the rural village may probably be due to poor economic condition, uncertainty of jobs, land litigation and higher rate of infant mortality etc. The unstable economic condition of most of the people of interior village have created a socio-economic atmosphere that leads to structural breakdown of the medium or large sized family to a smaller one. On the contrary in the urban village (Chakmodhu) the family size is slightly larger due to comparatively better economic condition, job opportunities, problems of space and dwelling etc. Incorporation

of additional members of different kinship ties within the family unit due to urban-industrial facilities may again an important reason for enlargement of family size in the fringe village.

Table - 7

Categories of family size	Frequency of occurrence of family			
	Chakmodhu	%	Kochutia	%
(A) Small family (1-5 persons)	79	42.70	132	58.15
(B) Medium family (6-10 persons)	94	50.81	88	38.77
(C) Large family (11-15 persons)	11	5.95	7	3.08
(D) Very large family (More than 15 persons)	1	0.54	-	-
TOTAL	185	100.00	227	100.00

Family Types:

The traditional Muslim family can be characterized as highly patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal and extended or joint types.

Dube (1955) has stated about three types of families. First one is 'elementary family' or the 'house' consists only of the husband and wife, their sons and unmarried daughters. In other case one or both parents, unmarried brothers and unmarried sisters may also belong to this unit. It is actually not a nuclear family because it includes members more than that of the nuclear family. But he does not include this type in the joint family or in another

category. His second type of social unit is 'extended or allied family' and third one is still larger group comprising of near kins on the paternal side.

Among the people of Chakmodhu four types of families are found, such as nuclear or simple family, intermediate family, joint or extended family and incomplete family. Table 8 shows detail of such family types of Chakmodhu and Kochutia. In Kochutia, there are four types of families such as, nuclear family, intermediate family, joint or extended family and incomplete or broken family.

Table - 8

Family Types of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Types of families	Number of families			
	Chakmodhu		Kochutia	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nuclear or simple family*	124	67.03	155	68.28
Intermediate family**	26	14.05	21	9.25
Joint or extended family***	22	11.89	40	17.62
Incomplete family**** or Broken family	12	6.49	11	4.85

Note: There is only a single case of Polygynous family in Chakmodhu.

Nuclear family- This type of family consists typically of a married man and a woman with their unmarried offsprings, although in individual cases one or more additional persons may reside with them.
(Murdock, 1960).

Joint or extended family - A joint or extended family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and related to each other as some particular type of kindred (Karve, 1965).

Intermediate family - When an extended or joint family breaks down due to death of certain component members, elements of an intermediate type of family may remain behind, often it consists of a simple family with some members of the earlier groups. In such a unit, the main component is that simple family the other elements merely adhere with secondary roles (Chattopadhyay, 1961).

Incomplete or broken family : This is usually a simple family. By the term broken family means when either the husband or the wife dies and the alive partner of the family lives alone with dependant children.

The data furnished above revealed that at Chakmodhu the frequency of nuclear family is the highest (67.03%), while the intermediate and extended families are found in appreciable percentages of 14.05% and 11.89% respectively. There are 12 (6.49%) incomplete families and only 1 (0.54%) polygynous family in the village.

Likewise in Kochutia nuclear families (68.28%) are highest in number. While the extended families are found 17.62% and intermediate families are considerably lower i.e. 9.25% only. The incomplete families are only 1.85% in the village.

So, it can be said that families among the Muslims under study are undergoing a change i.e. from joint to nuclear family type. Similar observation have been made by the scholars like Kapadia (1966), Ross (1961) and Singer (1968) in the context of Hindu family; and Ahmed (1976), Conklin (1973), Khan (1968) and Karim (1965) in the context of Muslim family.

Family Structure:

The patrilineal and patrilocal family unit is the basic feature of the Muslim Society. Muslim family practices are quite similar to those of Hindu in day to day life.

The structure of the Muslim family is of three folds. The first and the closest consists of the husband, the wife, their children, their parents who live with them and servants, if any. The next group, the central fold of the family, consists of a number of close relatives, whether they live together or not, who have special claims upon each other, who move freely inside the family, with whom marriage is forbidden and between whom there is no hijab (veil). These are the people who also have prior claim on the wealth and resources of a person, in life as well as in death. The crucial thing in this respect is that they are regarded as Mahram, those with whom marriage is prohibited. This constitutes the real core of the family, sharing each other's joy, sorrow, hopes and fears. This relationship emerges from consanguinity, affinity and foster nursing. Relations based on consanguinity include (a) father, mother, grand father, grand mother and others direct ascendants, (b) direct descendants that is, son, daughter, grand sons, grand daughters etc. (c) relations of the second degree (such as brothers, sisters and their descendants) (d) father's or mother's sister (not their daughter or other descendants). Those based on affinity include (i) mother-in-law, father-in-law grand mother-in-law, grand father-in -law, (ii) wive's, daughter's husband's sons or their grandor great grand daughter or sons

respectively. (iii) Son's wife, son's son's wife, daughter's husband and (iv) step mother (step father). With some exceptions the same relations are forbidden through foster nursing. This is the real extended family and the nucleus of relationships (Alam : 1982).

Traditionally the extended family is the ideal pattern of the Muslim society, which is composed of parents, married and unmarried sons, grand sons, great grand sons and a few other kins. This type of family has particular type of organization in which economic, social, authoritative and religious ideologies are acting together. It maintain a perfect equilibrium within the society by allocating economic, social, authoritative and religious roles to all its members through kinship obligation. Strong kin ties was the main basis of this type of family organization as it existed on the basis of joint estates, joint investment and co-operation due to agricultural economy. It is to be mentioned here that there is no joint family system of typical type found in traditional Hindu society, wherein the economic resources of the family are joined together into one common business unit and the head of the family (usually male) exerts real control over them. There is economic cooperation in a Muslim family but no joint and common economic organization and control except where arranged mutually. In a Muslim family both male and female have the share in family resources (Ahmad : 1982).

Today most of the Muslim households of Chakmodhu (67.03%) and Kochutia (68.28%) are of elementary type, consisting of a man,

his wife and their unmarried offsprings. Though extended family is still exists to be found among the villages yet its number is significantly low, ie. 11.89% and 17.62% respectively.

Extended family is an ideal type and traditional one. Today at the wake of industrialization and urbanization it is very common for the sons to be separated from their parents after a few years of their marriage. Further, brothers are separated themselves from each other after a few years of their father's death. These facts enable the preponderance of nuclearization of the families among the people of Chakmodhu. While at Kochutia the nuclearization of the family is due to economic crisis. The precarious economic condition of the people of Kochutia due to shortage of land, unemployment etc. creating a socio-economic situation which forced them to break their traditional extended family system.

Among the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia the intermediate families are noticed in appreciable number i e. 14.05% and 9.25% respectively. The intermediate families are the outcome of breakdown of extended families due to death of its some important members. These type of families in most of the cases consist of a simple family with some members of the earlier group, like either widower father or widowed mother. The notable feature of this type of family is that, there the earning sons have became the supreme authority of the family though their father or mother lives with them.

Polygynous marriage is not an ideal pattern among the Muslims but in Chakmodhu, however, there is only 1 (0.54%) case of

polygynous marriage. While it is entirely absent in Kochutia.

Authority Structure:

Authority is the power that is legitimised and institutionalised in a society or a social system. This form of power is attached to a social status and accepted as proper and legitimate by all members of the social system. Authority is a power that enjoys respect and receive allegiance. There are three types of authority system in the family. These are (1) Husband dominated or "patriarchal" families, (2) Wife dominated or "matriarchal" families and (3) children dominated or "filiocentric" families. Most of the Muslim families in two villages under study are patriarchal or husband or father dominated system. The eldest male has the most say in all family affairs, i.e. children's marriage, schooling, family budget, and so on. In majority of the cases the men always took the final decisions regarding various family responsibilities, where the female's role is very negligible.

Family Composition:

The range of kin composition is much wider in the Muslim families. Most of the families are either typical nuclear units, consisting of a man, his wife and unmarried children. The family composition of Chakmodhu and Kochutia is presented in the table 9 and 10.

Table - 9

Composition of Family Among The People of Chakmodhu

Under Male Headship	No. of families	
	No.	%
1. Father and married son	1	0.54
2. Father with unmarried children	2	1.08
3. Father with daughter-in-law and grand children	1	0.54
4. Couple without any issue	7	3.78
5. Couple with their unmarried children	110	59.46
6. Couple with married son and unmarried children	20	10.81
7. Couple with husband's brother and widow mother	2	1.08
8. Couple with their children and husband's sister and widow mother	1	0.54
9. Husband with two wives and their married son and unmarried children	1	0.54
10. Couple with their children and wife's grand mother	1	0.54
11. Couple with their children and wife's parents	1	0.54
12. Couple with their children and husband's uncle and Aunt	1	0.54
13. Couple with their children and widow mother	15	8.12
14. Couple with their children and husband's brother	2	1.08
15. Couple with their children and husband's divorced sister	2	1.08
Under Female Headship		
1. Mother with her unmarried children	8	4.32
2. Mother with her married son and unmarried daughter	4	2.16
3. Mother and son	3	1.63
4. Grand mother and grand son	2	1.08
5. Widow (Beggar)	1	0.54
Total	185	100.00

Table - 10

Composition of Family Among The People of Kochutia

Under Male Headship	No. of families	
	No.	%
1. Father with married son and widow grand mother	2	0.88
2. Father with married son and umarried daughter	2	0.88
3. Couple without any issue	20	8.82
4. Couple with their unmarried children	135	59.48
5. Couple with married son and unmarried children	26	11.45
6. Couple with married son	3	1.32
7. Couple with married son , ummarried children and widow mother	7	3.08
8. Couple with their children and widow mother	14	6.17
9. Couple with widow mother	8	3.52
10. Couple with children and husband's widow sister	1	0.44
11. Couple with husband's brother and widow mother	4	1.76
12. Couple with children and husband's widow mother and husband's grand mother	1	0.44
13. Couple with children plus husband's brother	2	0.88
14. Widower (Head)	1	0.44
Under Female Headship		
1. Mother plus unmarried son	1	0.44
Total	227	100.00

The data reveal that 167 (90.27%) families of Chakmodhu are headed by males and 18 (9.73%) families are headed by females. While at Kochutia 226 (99.56%) families are headed by males and only 1 (0.44%) family is headed by female.

Families Under Male Headship:

Muslim family is patrilineal and patrilocal. Except in a few cases almost all the families of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are under the male headship.

In the present study it has been noted that male members of the family control the whole family. His position is superior thus all the members obey his orders. A man's major responsibilities lie outside the family. He is to support the family economically and materially, he has also to look after his close relations of the family.

Though the male enjoys the position of head of a family, yet the key role in proper development of the family is played by the women. The management of the domestic front is the duty of the woman, though the male usually takes the final decision on various family responsibilities. A woman's major responsibilities lie on the domestic activities, and she also maintains all the social relations with the kith and kins of outside. Thus her position is also very important in the family.

Now a days some educated women are coming forward to participate in various family responsibilities like that of men. But their number is very insignificant in both the villages under investigation.

In some cases both men and women are found to participate equally in various family matters, such as schooling of children, mate selection, family budget and finance etc.

Families Under Female Headship:

It is important to note here that in Chakmodhu and Kochutia the females who control the family are only a very few in number. Generally in absence of male members in the family, females are found to be the responsibility of looking after their children and other dependants, and other important matters of the family. The question of superiority and inferiority based on sex does not arise under such a family headship.

Inter Family Relations:

The people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia belonging to both extended and nuclear families are of the opinion that now-a-days outwardly a nuclear family is more or less an independent unit. The senior most member of the paternal or ego's generation does not always continue to exert his/her influence over the others unless someone asked to do so. It is observed that, a young man who is separated from his parents do not maintain a very close connection with his paternal family in day to day life. But in critical situation and on all social occasions he seeks help of his parents and other senior members of the natal family. The study reveals that, except a few, in most of the cases the relation between main family and the allied families are very cordial and the nature of solidarity within the allied families is highly

emphasized. The decision of the senior members of the allied families are considered in all major social events. The co-operation between the allied families takes place on all social occasions, particularly in rites and rituals connected with the socio-religious ceremonies, feasts and festivals, as these bring them all together.

The eldest male in a joint or allied families is called murubbi. Generally all members of the family and extended households obey his instructions. As long as the parents are alive the household management and all socio-ritual performances basically depend on their prior decision. In this context it is to be noted here that, after father's death mother generally retreats to the background though she became the head (ginni) of the family. This is rather an emotional attribute instead of status question.

Interpersonal Relationship Among the Family Memembers:

The interpersonal relations among the members of the Muslim family have been noticed through various reciprocal duties and obligations. An outline of the general pattern of behaviour prevailing among the family members is presented here.

Husband and Wife:

The role of husband evolves around the moral principle that it is his solemn duty to God to treat his wife with kindness, honour and patience; to keep her honorably or free her from the marital bond honorably; and to cause her no harm or grief (Quran, 2: 229-232; 4:19). Husband plays an important role in the family by providing security to all its members and taking primary

responsibility for the education of his children.

Their relationship is deep and emotional. The intensity of love is very deep, thus enjoying a good-conjugal life. The prophet declare that the best Muslim is the one who is best to his family, and the greatest most blessed joy in life is a good righteous wife. The role of wife is summarized in the verse that women have right even as they have duties, according to what is equitable, but men have a degree over them (Quran, 2: 228).

The wife's right : The Husband's obligation

The Quran and Sunnah of the prophet have commanded kindness to women, it is the husband's duty to consort with his wife in an equitable and kind manner. His role is an authoritarian in nature. The husband occupies himself mainly with duties of earning and livelihood for the family. If he has no love or sympathy for her, she has the right to demand freedom from the marital bond and no one can stand in her way to a new life.

The Wife's Obligation: The Husband's Rights

The main obligation of a wife as a partner in a marital relationship is to contribute to the success and blessfulness of the marriage as much as possible. She must be attentive to the comfort and well-being of her mate. She must be faithful, trustworthy and honest. She never accept the gifts without his approval, she may not lend or dispose of any of his belongings without his permission.

A wife may not deny herself to her husband. Quran speaks of them for extending comfort to each other. She is not permitted to do anything that may render her companionship less desirable or less gratifying. She must look after the comfort of her husband and other family members.

Traditionally husband's economic and social roles automatically gave him pre-eminence in the family affairs. But today this roles has been undergoing rapid changes. His behaviours, interpersonal relations etc. are not so as they were even a generation ago. Now a days a husband share many household duties. Though the absolute authority of a family is vested on the husband, yet in domestic front the roles of a wife is most significant.

The Parent-Child Relationship:

The Child's Right : The Parent's Duties —

Islam's general approach to children may be summarized in the following way. Firstly, it is a divine injunction that no child may become the cause of harm to the parents (Quran, 2 : 233). Secondly, by implication the parents should reciprocate and cause the child no harm either. The Quran recognizes very clearly that parents are not always immune from negligence. Thirdly, it points out that children are joys of life as well as source of pride, seeds of vanity and false security, fountains of distress and temptation. Finally, Islam is strongly sensitive to the crucial dependence of the child on the parents. Their decisive role in forming the child's personality is clearly recognized in Islam.

To take good care of children by the parent is one of the most commendable deeds in Islam. The prophet was very fond of children and he expressed his conviction that the Muslims would be noted among other communities for its kindness to children. Responsibility toward the child is a matter of religious importance as well as social concern.

During later childhood of adolescence the girls draw themselves closer and closer to the mother and occupy themselves mainly with feminine pursuits. The mother seeks to train her daughter to be a good wife in future.

The Child's Duties : The Parent's Rights —

The parent-child relationship is complementary. Parent and child in Islam are bound together by mutual obligations and reciprocal commitments. The Quran cites instances where the parents were proven wrong in their encounter with their children and also where children misjudged the position of their parents (Quran 6 : 74; 11: 42-46; 19: 42-48). Parents have the right to expect respect and obedience from their children. The children always obey their parents and they are responsible for the support and maintenance of parents. It is an absolute religious duty to help the parents and to make their lives as comfortable as possible.

In Chakmodhu and Kochutia it has been observed that father is the authority of the family and he always insists his sons and daughters regarding hard-working for success in life. On the other hand mother holds the sole authority of domestic works. The relationship of mother with children is much more intimate and affectionate.

The children are more free to their mother. The parents are primarily responsible for the children's training, viz., school education, religious education etc. It is observed that the parent-child relationship changes with the passage of time, i.e. with the advancement of the age and status of the children. When sons and daughters enter the phases of youthhood and subsequently adulthood, the tone of parent-child relationship undergoes a significant modification.

Between Siblings —

Social ideals demand that there should be solidarity between siblings. It has been observed that in Chakmodhu and Kochutia there is solidarity between the siblings i.e. between brothers and sisters. They love and help each other. The elder brother and sister shows the responsibility of looking after the younger ones. The interpersonal relationship between siblings are more close in their early age, but later when they reach the adulthood they develop on their own lines and think about their own interests. A man's ties with his sister is also very close. There are considerable attachment between sisters before they are married, but it gradually wears off after their marriage.

Relation between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law —

The daughter-in-law coming from an alien family, thus finds herself isolated in a totally new surrounding at her husband's home. She does expect love and co-operation from her mother-in-law. It is the duty of a mother-in-law to be affectionate to her daughter-

in-law. She must behave with her daughter-in-law just as she behave with her own daughter. It is the prime duty of a mother-in-law to teach and acquaintance her with the norms of the family. On the contrary daughter-in-law must respect and obey the advice of her mother-in-law.

But the case studies reveal that the relationship between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws are not very cordial in Chakmodhu and Chochutia. When daughter-in-laws entered their new home everything goes well for the first few months and then the trouble starts. Daughter-in-laws rarely wins the affection of their mother-in-laws. Quarrels between mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws lead to separation of the joint and extended households. The mother-in-laws have the tendency to dominate over their daughter-in-laws, as a result the joint and extended families are breaking down. In contemporary times due to individualistic attitude, the avoidance and negligence of the mother-in-laws by their daughter-in-laws is also an emerging trend.

Relation between Father-in-law and daughter-in-law ——

Father-in-law must behave with his daughter-in-law as like as he behaves with his own dauthers. On the contrary daughter-in law must respect and obey his father-in-law as like her own father. But there is an avoidance in relationship and interaction between them. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia it has been observed that the daughter-in-laws always keep their face vailed at the front of their father-in-laws. The relationship between father-in-laws

and daughter-in-laws are usually very affectionate. In urgent cases both of them talk with each other to solve the family problems. The daughter-in-laws are also taking full care of their father-in-laws in necessities. Only in a few cases the father-in-laws complained about the ill treatment of their daughter-in-laws.

Between elder brother's wife and husband's younger brother —

The elder brother's wife (bhabi) behaves with her husband's younger brother (devar) as like as she behaves with her own brother. Similarly the husband's younger brother (devar) behaves with his elder brother's wife (bhabi as like his elder sister. But at the same time both of them joke with each other. The relationship between them is usually very friendly.

Between husband's elder brother (vasur) and younger brother's wife (bhadro-bou)—

The relationship between vasur and bhadro-bou is of avoidance in nature. A house wife usually keep her face vailed at the front of her husband's elder brother (Vasur). But she also respect her vasur as like her elder brother. Generally no conversation is allowed in between them. If needed both of them can talk with each other by maintaining a distance between them. In field situation the co-operation between Vasur and bhadra-bou is also noticed in their day to day family life.

Disparity between boys and girls:

When a child learns to speak the mother tries to acquaint the child with certain norms and behaviours. At first a child learns from mother the word "Bismillah", meaning the name of Allah (god) and "toba" , meaning repentance if he or she says something bad.

The boys are allowed to go to mosque with his father or grand-father especially during jumma namaz (Friday prayer). Children of Chakmodhu and Kochutia learn namaz and Khodba (Scriptures in Arabic) from their elders. Children of both the villages are often sent to the village 'maktab' to learn Arabic. The students in the maktab are taught to read the Quran, they are also taught to read namaz. Girls are often taught namaz within their families by the senior ladies. The elders usually take care in teaching the youngers for correct way of performing the various rites and duties. At early age the girls learn various Islamic rites and rituals from their family members.

In Muslim society the cultural environment welcomes the boys and fears the birth of the girls. The girls live and grow in an environment which denies them equal access to food, health care, education and so on. From the day of her birth, a girl is viewed as a burden and a liability. The universal desire for sons, determines both the quantity and quality of the investment that parents make for their female children. Sons, then should provide "comfort for their parents old age". In Chakmodhu and Kochutia the sons

are considered as economically, socially and ritually desirable. They are considered as essential for funeral rites, succession of property, economic support of parents and continuation of khandan i.e. lineage. This contrasts sharply with the view of the girl as a burden on the family. Precious resources must be expanded on her with no hope of any return. Further, when she gets married her father has to collect a sizeable dowry which symbolically marks the transfer of the burden from one family to others. All these deeply entrenched the views that, the girl is a liability, and the son is a valuable resource. The low status of the girl child is inextricably linked to the low status of the women. Most of the cases the girls are considered as a burden and receives less attention from the family. But in the case of birth of a boy the family members observe fast, pray, and attend the pilgrimage to visit the peers etc. They give 'Azan' (Summon to prayer) only on the occasion of the birth of a male child. The child's father, grand father, and uncle usually does the proclaiming.

A girl is likely to be breast feed less after and for shorter period than that of a boy. The desire for a son after a daughter's birth may prompt a mother to discontinue breast feeding, so that she may ovulate and conceive quickly. When the second child is born and if it is a son, the elder girl child gets even less of her mother's attention. It has been seen in Chakmodhu and Kochutia that, under the age of five girls usually suffering from malnutrition more after than boys. It is also observed that in a family a

boy eats better than a girl. Eating less than a boy, a girl nevertheless does twice as much work at home. The reasons behind this is not only the poverty and lack of food but also the less attention for the girl child. For poor nutrition the girls lead to anaemia and other diseases. In both the village it has been found that the mortality rate of the girls is higher than the boys.

The aqiqa is the ceremony recommended to be performed on the 7th day of the birth of a child. In this ceremony we also noticed the inequality between son and daughter. Aqiqa consists of sacrifice of animal to God in the name of a child. Usually two goats are sacrificed for a boy and only one for a girl.

Role of Women in the Family:

The role of a woman is always changing according to her status, for e g. from daughter to daughter-in-law. According to traditional value system, a daughter is regard as a liability and a son as an asset. Care of a daughter is regarded as 'watering a neighbour's tree'; i.e. you take all the trouble with it but its fruits goes to someone else.

From the very young age a daughter has to share many responsibilities of her family. She has to help her mother in household work and she has to look after her younger siblings etc. A daughter may go to school for study, but her most important duty is to train herself to be a good wife. For this she has to learn all types of household work from her mother so that she must not face any problem in her in-laws house.

Women's Role As A Wife —

A wife should regard her husband as master and should serve him faithfully. If her husband abuse her or beat her, a good wife is not expected to answer him back even if her husband is wrong. She has to do entire work connected with the running of the household. But if she lives with her mother-in-law then she has to do all things under the authority of her mother-in-law. In a joint family, the daughter-in-law does not have any liberty unless she becomes the mother of two or three children. Until then, she should not be found even speaking to her husband. Of course in nuclear families the wives get much more freedom at least in the domestic field. It is the husband who take all major decisions about the family. Rarely a husband consults with his wife before taking any decision about his family. But in every steps a wife should take the permission of her husband about what to do and when to do.

After finishing the cooking a wife should serve the food to her husband and children and after that she should take her own food. If she lives in a joint and extended family at first she should serve all the elders and earning male members of the house. In joint and extended household the food is usually served to the children at first and then it goes to senior male and female members of the family. As a norm a daughter-in-law is expected to take her meal as the last member of the home.

Women's Role As A Mother —

In a family mother has a very important role. She has to look after her children. No body can understanding the problem of a child as his/her mother can. While she is doing her normal household work, she is expected to keep an eye on the children and to ensure that they are kept away from the mischief. Until they are about 5 years old, the life of the children centres around the mothers. It is to her that they look for protection and help. Even if mother is engaged in any employment at outside, then she is also expected to give proper attention and care to the children. But all the major decisions about the children is taken by their father and not by the mother. Again when a mother becomes old she depends both physically and mentally very much on her sons (by that time all her girls get married).

Women's Role As A Mother-in-Law —

In Muslim society a mother-in-law has a superior authority over her daughter-in-law. She should teach her daughter-in-law the different types of domestic work and about the rules and regulations of her house. Only as a mother-in-law she can take some decision about her daughter-in-law. A daughter-in-law can not do anything in the family without the consent of her mother-in-law.

Therefore, from the above discussion it is clear that in most of the cases women are always dominated by men. As a daughter she is dominated by her elder brothers, father, and other male members of the house. As a wife she is dominated by her husband.

As a mother, if she has the adult sons then she is dominated by her sons. Most of the cases the major decisions were taken by the male members of the house and do not care about women's opinion. Most of the women of the villages under study thinks that husband is the owner of the house so he has the right to do what he wants to do.

Position of Women in the Family:

In Muslim community the husband is enjoying a supeior position in the family. The husband is superior not only by his status but also by position as an authority of the family activities.

A study on position of women in the family in both Cahkmodhu and Kochutia reveals that, the majority of the Muslim women stay at hom and do not go out for work due to observance of Parda rules. The respondents are of opinion that, "women should stay at home and must perform the roles as wife and mother". In Chakmodhu 55.22% has approved the above argument and in Kochutia 68.32% has the similar argument.

Islam has prescribed certain duties for a wife to perform. These are : to reside in the house of her husband, obedience to him in his reasonable orders and performing her marital functions whenever required by the husband at reasonable times and places with due regard to health and decency and observing strict conjugal fidelity and refraining from undue familiarity with strangers and all unnecessary appearance in public (Thomas: 1964, 245).

The Muslim family is dominated by male, but the women's position in the family is not inferior because wife is the centre of the domestic life. She also maintains all social relations with the kith and kins. She attends the ceremonies with regards to birth, marriage and death. She also controls the management of domestic front, though the final decision is taken by the male members of the family.

Decision Making:

In field situation there is a sharp differentiation between the educated and non-educated women regarding their decision-making process in the family matters. The illiterate and non educated women are generally not very enthusiastic in decision making process of their families, thus depend on husbands and other male relatives for their opinion to obey. While the majority of the educated Muslim women are enjoying the decision making power. The vast majority of them want to voice in decision making process of their family. It is to be noted here that the educational level of the women increases the habit of consultation with their husbands and other male members of the family to take any decision regarding family budget, children's schooling, career, marriage etc. The education of the respondents and the role in decision making process of the family is presented in the table 11.

Table - 11

Education and Role in Decision Making Concerning Family budget, children-schooling, career and Marriage.

Education	Head of the family		Joint		Self		Total	
	Chakmodhu	Kochutia	Chakmodhu	Kochutia	Chakmodhu	Kochutia	Chakmodhu	Kochutia
Illiterate	47 (28.83%)	127 (60.77%)	25 (15.34%)	30 (14.35%)	1 (0.61%)	6 (2.87%)	73 (44.78%)	163 (77.99%)
Literate	3 (1.84%)	3 (1.44%)	2 (1.23%)	5 (2.39%)	1 (0.61%)	1 (0.48%)	6 (3.68%)	9 (4.31%)
Primary	22 (13.50%)	14 (6.70%)	24 (14.72%)	9 (4.31%)	-	-	46 (28.23%)	23 (11.00%)
Secondary/middle	9 (5.52)	4 (1.91%)	26 (15.95%)	9 (4.31%)	-	-	35 (21.47%)	13 (6.22%)
High	-	-	3 (1.84%)	1 (0.48%)	-	-	3 (1.84%)	1 (0.48%)
Total	81 (49.69%)	148 (70.81%)	80 (49.08%)	54 (25.84%)	2 (1.23%)	7 (3.35%)	163 (100.00%)	209 (100.00%)

Family Welfare:

The majority of the Muslims have the notion that the Quran prohibits birth control. But the Quran and the Hadish have not mentioned anything against of birth control. Mohammed Ali (1936 : 653-654) points out that birth control was considered by the Prophet. He further states that, one form of birth control called 'axl' is spoken of in certain Hadish as not being forbidden by the Prophet. Many Ulemas today are agreed that family planning has a sanction in Islam and Muslim countries like Turkey, Malaysia, Iran and Tunisia are very active in family planning.

So, it can be said that the basic principle of Islam is not against of birth control. Moreover it has placed a great emphasis on the proper care and welfare of the children. Many religious leaders of both Arab and non-Arab countries have supported the family planning movements and issued 'fatwas' (religious verdict) to testifying that family planning is in conformity with the tenets of Islam (Sirajuddin, 1970 : 27).

In the present study when the respondents were asked 'do you think it right for a couple to limit the number of children'? In Chakmodhu and Kochutia 40·07% and 50·46% respectively have said 'no' and the rest said it is 'right'. The education of the respondents has a very good influence on their attitudes towards limiting the family size.

Age has also played an important role in attitude towards family planning. The people of higher age group are of opinion that it is not right to limit the family size. While the younger

generation is of opinion that it is right to limit the family size in contemporary situation. The younger generation has favour to limit the family size as they want to offer more opportunities to their children and to give them better care. Table 12 represents the education and attitude towards limiting the family size.

Marriage and the Status of Women

Marriage is a very important event in the life of a woman. Unlike the Hindus, marriage among the Muslims is a contract and not a sacrament. Marriage is known by the Arabic word nikah. Marriage constitutes an important basis through which kinship relations grow and sustained. In Islam, marriage is looked upon as essential for both men and women. Parents are said to be "not free" unless they see their daughters and sons are happily married. Marriage is also looked upon as a Sunnah (essential) and therefore, it is regarded as an obligation which must be fulfilled. The marital status of the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia is presented in the Table 13 and 14.

The census data reveal that, at Chakmodhu in male population there are 65.85% unmarried, 33.66% married and 0.49% widower. While in female population there are 54.11% unmarried, 38.57% married, 6.40% widow and 0.92% divorced and separated women. By contrast in Kochutia the marital status of male population reveal that, there are 58.44% unmarried, 40.49% married and 1.07% widower.

Table - 12

Informants Attitude Towards Limiting Family Size

Age category		Chakmodhu			Kochutia		
		Favourable	Unfavourable	Total	Favourable	Unfavourable	Total
16-30		94(32.75%)	52(18.12%)	146(50.87%)	88(27.08%)	75(23.08%)	163(50.10%)
31-50		44(15.33%)	31(10.80%)	75(26.13%)	39(12.00%)	52(16.00%)	91(28.00%)
46-55		30(10.45%)	23(8.02%)	53(18.47%)	29(8.92%)	21(6.46%)	50(15.38%)
56 & above		4(1.39%)	9(3.14%)	13(4.53%)	5(1.54%)	16(4.92%)	21(6.46%)
TOTAL	N	172	115	287	161	164	325
	%	59.93	40.07		49.54	50.46	

Table - 13

Marital status of the people of Chakmodhu

Age group	Male					Female				
	Unmar.	Mar.	Widower	Separ./ Divo.	Total	Unmar.	Mar.	Widow	Separ./ Divo.	Total
-5	108	-	-		108	90	-	-		90
6-10	85	-	-		85	97	-	-		97
11-15	77	-	-		77	73	-	-		73
16-20	68	3	-		71	35	24	-		59
21-25	40	15	-		55	1	35	-	3	39
26-30	21	36	-		57		45	2	1	48
31-35	4	25	-		29		33	1	1	35
36-40	-	35	-		35		22	2		24
41-45	-	22	1		23		15	1		16
46-50	-	19	-		19		17	9		26
51-55	-	20	-		20		8	6		14
56-60	-	14	-		14		8	5		13
61-65	-	6	-		6		2	5		7
66-70	-	4	2		6		1	1		2
71-75	-	6	-		6		1	1		2
76-80	-	-	-		-		-	2		2
85-	-	1	-		1		-	-		-
Total	403	206	3		612	296	211	35	5	547
%	65.85	33.66	0.49		100.00	54.11	38.57	6.40	0.92	100.00

Contd..

Table - 13 (Contd..)

Unmarried	Married	Total Widower/widow	Sep. or Divo.	Total
198	-	-	-	198
182	-	-	-	182
150	-	-	-	150
103	27	-	-	130
41	50	-	3	94
21	81	2	1	105
4	58	1	1	64
-	57	2		59
-	37	2		39
-	36	9		45
-	28	6		34
-	22	5		27
-	8	5		13
-	5	3		8
-	7	1		8
-	-	2		2
-	1	-		1
699	417	38	5	1159
60.31	35.98	3.28	0.43	100.00

Table - 14

Marital status of the people of Kochutia

Age group	Male Unmar.	Male Mar.	Male Widower	Male Total	Female Unmar.	Female Mar.	Female Widow	Female Total	Total Unmar.	Total Mar.	Total Widower/ widow	Total
-5	102			102	109			109	211	-	-	211
6-10	99			99	83			83	182			182
11-15	71			71	54	3		57	125	3		128
16-20	63	3		66	13	42		55	76	45		121
21-25	32	31		63	3	63		66	35	94		129
26-30	11	54		65	-	41	1	42	11	95	1	107
31-35	1	44		45	2	24	2	28	3	68	2	73
36-40	-	34		34		26	2	28	-	60	2	62
41-45	1	17		18		32	3	35	1	49	3	53
46-50	-	27	2	29		22	5	27	-	49	7	56
51-55	-	22	3	25		3	4	7	-	25	7	32
56-60	-	15	-	15		7	9	16	-	22	9	31
61-65	1	12	-	13		-	7	7	1	12	7	20
66-70	-	4	-	4		-	8	8		4	8	12
71-75	-	-	1	1		1	2	3		1	3	4
76-80	-	1	-	1		-	2	2		1	2	3
-85	-	-	1	1		-	1	1		-	2	2
Total N	381	264	7	652	264	264	46	574	645	528	53	1226
%	58.44	40.49	1.07	100.00	45.99	45.99	8.02	100.00	52.61	43.07	4.32	100.00

And in female population there are 45.99% unmarried, 45.99% married and 8.02% widow women. The most notable feature is that in the village Kochutia there is no divorcedlady.

Age at Marriage:

Though child marriage is not the ideal pattern among the Muslims, even a few decades ago the age at marriage was extremely low. But today most of the marriages are held some years after puberty of the girls or when they begin to show the physical maturity. All daughters are said to be Par-gharwali, literally meaning "for some one else's house". This belief compels parents to get their daughters married as soon as they reach marriageable age and a suitable match can be found for them. Even today sometimes early marriages are also arranged to please elderly grand parents who insist on their grand children's marriage before their death. The table 15 gives a picture of age at marriage among the people of Chakmodhu. The Census data reveal that the age at marriage for male is found to be between 14-40 years, while that for female between 8 to 29 years of age. In case of male the highest frequency of age at marriage is found to be at the age of 22 years and that for fremale is at the age of 16 years. The mean age at marriage of the male is 24.11 years and that of the female is 16.33 years. Thus the mean age at marriage of the male is high by 7.78 years than that of female.

While in Kochutia the age at marriage of male is between 15 to 38 years and for female between 7 to 25 years. The highest frequency of age at marriage of male is found at the age of 25

years and that of female is at the age of 15 years. The mean age at marriage of the male is 23.65 years and that for female is 16.66 years. Thus the mean age at marriage of the male is high by 6.99 years than that of female. Table 16 represents the age at marriage among the people's of Kochutia village.

The data reveal that at Chakmodhu until 1920's the Muslim girls were married between 9 years to 14 years. But in contemporary times the marriage age of the girls being slightly increased. This change is probably due to rapid industrialization and urbanization of the area after 1920's. A slight change in early age at marriage of girls at Kochutia is also noticed.

Rules of marriage:

The traditional way of getting a wife among the Muslims is the marriage by negotiation. In most cases marriages have been arranged by the parents or close Khandan (lineage) kins of both the parties. But in absence of father and close Khandan members (elder brother, father's brother, grand father etc) the maternal uncle and the close kins of maternal side (mother's father, mother's sisters husband) also take the initiative. Love marriages are slightly increasing among the educated youths. Even in such cases, parents and other relatives are expressed to arrange the match formally if the couples are of the same community i.e. Islam by religion.

Table - 15

Age at Marriage among men and women of Chakmodhu

Age (X)	Male Frequency (F)	Male (FX)	Female Age (X)	Female Frequency (F)	Female (FX)
14	1	14	8	1	8
16	4	64	10	2	20
17	4	68	11	1	11
18	12	216	12	17	204
19	7	133	13	14	182
20	14	280	14	33	462
21	16	336	15	38	570
22	29	660	16	53	848
23	18	414	17	23	391
24	20	504	18	21	378
25	26	675	19	16	190
26	18	468	20	14	280
27	6	162	21	8	168
28	10	280	22	6	132
29	7	203	23	2	46
30	7	210	24	2	48
31	1	31	25	2	50
32	2	64	26	1	26
35	3	105	28	1	28
36	1	36	29	2	58
37	1	37			
39	1	39			
40	1	40			
Total	209	5039	Total	251	4100

Mean age at marriage for Chakmodhu male:

$$\text{Mean} \quad \frac{fx}{n} = \frac{5039}{209} = 24.11$$

Mean age at marriage for Chakmodhu female:

$$\frac{4100}{251} = 16.33$$

Table - 16

Age at Marriage among the men and women of Kochutia

Male			Female		
Age (X)	Frequency (f)	(fx)	Age (X)	Frequency (f)	(fx)
15	1	15	7	1	7
16	2	32	8	1	8
17	1	17	9	1	9
18	6	108	10	2	20
19	2	38	12	6	72
20	31	620	13	10	130
21	12	252	14	13	182
22	47	1034	15	88	1320
23	17	391	16	43	688
24	14	336	17	34	578
25	107	2675	18	38	684
26	6	156	19	19	361
27	3	81	20	45	900
28	9	252	21	1	21
29	3	87	22	5	110
30	6	180	23	1	23
31	2	62	25	2	50
34	1	34			
38	1	38			
Total	271	6408	Total	310	5163

Mean age at Marriage for Kochutia Male :

$$\text{Mean } \frac{fx}{n} = \frac{6408}{271} = 23.65$$

Mean age at Marriage for Kochutia Female:

$$\frac{5163}{310} = 16.66$$

According to the Quranic rules (Sura : 4 ayat:3) a Muslim male, if he can afford, is allowed to have upto four legal wives at a time. However, plural marriage is not an ideal pattern, thus it is not usual today. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia monogamy is commonly practiced and favoured. In Chakmodhu, there is only a single case of polygynous marriage. While at Kochutia the incidence of polygynous marriage is almost nil.

Among the Muslims both kin and non-kin marriages are allowed. As a rule they have marriage preference between the kinsmen i.e. both parallel cousin, cross cousin and other relatives. To them, marriage with the father's brother's daughter or the mother's brother's daughter, or the father's sister's daughter, or the mother's sister's daughter is more or less obligatory due to economic and social reasons.

Muslim women inherits some property from their parents over which they have the real right. But on their marriage outside of the kin group, the property passes to the another family. If marriages are held within the kin group the property remains in the hand of the kinsmen. Thus mainly for this reason parallel and cross cousin marriages are practiced by the Muslims, particularly those who holds the land.

Types and Forms of marriage:

The accepted pattern of marital arrangement among the Muslims is monogamy. As a Quranic rule a Muslim man can also enter into polygynous union if he can do justice and equal treatment to all. But such cases are usually rare. It happens that,

when the first wife is unable to bear children or of non-co-operative types insuch cases the husband takes a second wife without dissolving the first marriage. Usually when a man takes a second wife or decides for a second marriage, the first wife asks for formal divorce.

The census data reveal that in Chakmodhu out of the 209 marriage cases, only 5 (2.39%) were love marriages and the rest 204 (97.61%) being negotiated. While at Kochutia out of 271 marriage cases only 5 (1.85%) were marriage by elopement and the rest 266 (98.15%) were negotiated marriages (see table-17). There are two cases of inter-community marriage at Chakmodhu where two Muslim boys married to Hindu girls. Among these two Hindu brides, one has converted herself to the fold of Islam, while the other is still following her own (Hindu) religion. Of the 209 existing marriages in Chakmodhu, only 1 (0.48%) has the polygynous marital union (see Table 18). The census data also indicate that the incidence of polygyny among the Muslims is not as high as it is believed to be. There is no doubt that the prevalence of legal sanction behind polygyny for the Muslims have caused the wide spread notion of this stereotype (Report on National Commission, on Women 1974).

In Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia the cross cousin and parallel cousin marriages are also noticed. The incidence of cross cousin and parallel cousin marriages at Chakmodhu were 21% and 5% respectively. While at Kochutia there were 35% cross cousin and 11% parallel cousin marriages. In the past the cousin marriage as well as marriage to near kins were very common for

various economic and social reasons. But now-a-days, it is diminishing due to loss of land, effect of modern education, growing impact of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. Among the Muslims the accepted mode of residence at marriage is verilocal but uxorilocal residence is also noticed among a few of them due to their complicated rules of property inheritance and also for other social obligations. There were three cases of uxorilocal residence in Chakmodhu.

Widow Remarriage:

The most distinctive feature of the Muslim marriage is the system of widow remarriage. The widow remarriage has been sanctioned by Islam. According to Islam, it is the responsibility of a widow's parents to arrange her another marriage just like the marriage of a virgin daughter. But in practice it is very rare due to various reasons. "The law permitting widows to remarry was too clear to be overlooked; yet until recent times, such marriages were effectively prevented, specially among upper classes, by the cultivation of the sentiment that widowhood being the will of God, it was reprehensible for the widow and a disgrace for the family that she should marry again" (Government of India, 1965:447).

Among the Muslims no stigma is attached to marry a widow or a divorced woman, but in practice it is still a very rare events among them. In Chakmodhu there were 15 (7.18%) cases of widow remarriage. While at Kochutia the incidence of widow

remarriage was 23 (8.49%) only. In the case of widow remarriage usually a widower married a widow. Marriage between a widower and a widow even having their children of previous union are also found.

The case studies of Chakmodhu reveal that 48.64% of the respondents approved the widow remarriage, but the rest disapproved it under any circumstances. By contrast the corresponding figure is nearly 34.00% in Kochutia. The women those who favour widow remarriage normally prefer it when the widow has no issue and there is no other to look after her. The influence of education of the respondents on their attitudes toward widow remarriage is not very significant.

Table - 17

Types of Marriage among the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia.

Types of marriage	Chakmodhu		Kochutia	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Marriage by negotiation	204	97.61	266	98.15
Marriage by elopement and love marriage	5	2.39	5	1.85
Total	209	100.00	271	100.00

Table - 18

Forms of Marriage among the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Forms of Marriage	Chakmodhu		Kochutia	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Monogamy	208	99.52	271	100.00
Polygyny	1	0.48	Nil	
Total	209	100.00	271	100.00

Payment of dowry:

The payment of dowry (dan-dehaj) by the brides party to the groom's party is noted among the Muslims. But even a few decades ago it was rare among them. The system of dowry payment has adversely affected the every section of the village population irrespective of their socio-economic status. In the two villages under study the system of dowry has extremely affected the middle and low income groups to get their girls married to promising grooms because every thing depends on the amount of dowry to be given. It has been noted that in two villages the rate of dowry varies between Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 50,000/- . The amount of dowry was high among the Muslims of higher socio-economic status. The Muslims of lower social status pay dowry of lesser amount.

Beside dowry, the overall expenses of wedding ceremony were also high among the Muslims of Chakmodhu and Kochutia. It has caused considerable indebtedness among them. The data revealed

that the indebtedness due to wedding expenses was 40.00% in case of Chakmodhu and 35.00% in case of Kochutia.

The payment of dowry by the bride's party to the groom's party is definitely a Hindu influence as it is not an ideal Islamic practice. Today all Muslim brides are expected to bring dowries to their conjugal homes and as a result this practice is prevalent among all section of the village people. The amount of dowry varies according to groom's economic position and educational qualification. White collar occupation, skilled works and business are preferred mostly by the bride's family for which rate of dowry is comparatively high.

In Chakmodhu out of 287 respondents only 98 (34.15%) had approved the system of dowry and the rest 189 (65.85%) disapproved it. While in Kochutia out of 325 respondents only 132 (40.62%) approved it and rest 193 (59.38%) disapproved the system. The variations in attitude towards dowry system is due to illiteracy or ignorance of one group, and education or increasing aspiration of the others.

Marriage Rites and Ceremonies:

Marriage is usually marked by a number of rites and ceremonies. When marriage is settled, the cycle of these rites and ceremonies starts and continues until the actual performance of the marriage itself. In the following lines I shall briefly describe the rites and rituals of Muslim marriage.

Fixation of the date of marriage —

The marriage or sadhi is a more social and religious event as it is regulated by kinship through certain Islamic and local practices. Generally negotiation takes place through the kins of either sides. They may be the closest relatives or remote ones. After getting detail information the parents of the groom along with a few close consanguinal or affinal relative (both male and female) go to see the girl finally. They are welcomed formally by the senior members of the bride's family. Then a glass of sweet drink (sarbat) and delicious food items are offered to all the guests. After a while the girl is taken by her elder sister or brother's wife in front of the guests. She at first kisses the feet of her would be parent-in-law and repeats the same to the others according to the seniority of their age and relation. In return they give some presentation to her. On coming back senior relatives of the groom invites father and other relatives of the bride to see the groom. On scheduled date the bride's father along with a few of his relatives visits the groom's house and they are also welcomed in the same manner. After agreement of both the parties, a date is fixed for consultation regarding the date of marriage, transaction of dowry (dan-dehaj) and payment of gifts etc.

Engagement of Paka-dakha —

After agreement of both the parties, a date is fixed for betrothal (paka-dakha) ceremony of the bride and the groom. On the proposed date the father and other close kinsmen of both the

parties offer valuable presentations to the bride and the groom as a mark of their engagement. On these days a heavy feast is given to the visitors (mehoman) where the date of marriage is also finalised. In this way the negotiations are sealed with the presentation of the engagement rings to both the bride and the groom.

Lagan —

Lagan is usually send to the bride in a new suitcase. It is send a few days before the marriage. It includes a complete set of clothings i.e. sarees, bluses, petticoats, handkerchiefs, chappals, cosmetics, ornaments and so forth. The most important thing which is to be noted here that lagan is only send to the bride from groom's side. Beautification of the bride is usually done by these lagan materials, which are send by her in-law family for the purpose.

Turmeric ceremony —

Three days before the wedding, a ceremony called haldi makhani is held. On this day the women folk of the two sides grind turmeric in their respective homes, and play fully through turmeric and coloured water on each other in their separate groups. On the second day some of the groom's people goes to the bride's home with gifts (lagan) and turmeric for her beautification. The gifts and turmeric for bride are handed over. The gifts include jewellary, clothings and glass bangles. Later on turmeric paste is smeared to the bride and she wore her bridal clothes (halud-makha-sari).

The Mehndi —

Mehndi (henna paste) plays a vital role in Muslim marriage ceremony. On the day before marriage the mehndi ceremony is held at girl's house to decorate the palm of the bride with the help of mehndi (henna paste). Generally the young girls who have close relations with the bride participate in this ceremony.

The wedding party:

Wedding takes place in the bride's home at noon on the auspicious day fixed by two parties in consultation with the Muslim priest or Mullah. The party which accompanied with the groom is known as barat. The barat is consisted of kins folk, neighbours and personal friends arrived the brides' home at noon on the date of marriage. On arrival, the groom's party received cordially by bride's nearest kins and the groom is welcomed by bride's sister's husband. On entering the marriage booth the groom finds the main entrance closed, but it is opened by the bride's brother when gifts are offered to them. The actual marriage rite (sadhi or nikah) is usually performed after lunch has been served to the groom's party. The Mullah or Muluvi (Muslim priest) solemnizes the marriage by reading the prescribed words of nikah from the Quran. At the time of nikah, the proposal and acceptance of marriage including the mehar (bride's financial security) is made and discussed in the presence of all. During this stage two adult male (who stand in close kinship relation) hearers (Ukil) are taken as witnesses. When these are done the

bride remains at inside. Two responsible elders of either side, known as ukil then asked the bride and the groom for their consent to the marriage in the way like - "you are being married to "X" with a mehar of fixed amount, are you willing to marry?" Their consent is necessary in case of marriage. As soon as the consent is obtained, the Mullah or Moluvi recite the verses from Quran. Following this, the Mouluvi leads a supplication in which all persons present also joined. Then a glass of Sarbat is offered to the groom to take some quantity, then the same glass is also offered to the bride. After that marriage formality is completed.

In the evening, the bride goes to her in-law's home with her husband and a few of her close relatives. When the bride and the groom along with the party return home they are received by the groom's mother, elder sisters, and brother's wifes. When the bride and the groom enters into the house, a few ceremonies are performed. These include kissing of feet of the elder relatives, feast and the giving of presentations by the relatives. On the next day father, brothers, maternal and paternal uncles and a few other kins of the bride visits the groom's house and carry a few presentations for both the bride and the groom. On this day feasting is also goes on, to which friends and relatives are invited. The bride does not stay at her husband's home overnight, thus returns to her parental home on the next day evening along with her husband and relatives for a short or long stay.

The Muslims usually arrange their marriage ceremony in all the seasons except some Bengali months, viz. Bhadro (August/

September) and Kartik (October/November). This may be due to Hindu influence upon them.

Muslims do not arrange their marriage during Ramjan month because it is the month when they observe fasting (roja).

Mehar —

Mehar is a sum of money which a wife is entitled to receive from her husband in consideration of marriage. Mehar has became one of the essential customs in Muslim marriage. In Muslim marriage the groom must pay mehar to the bride. It is a sort of bride price as per the Quranic injunction.

Historically mehar has played an important role in the process of mate selection in all Muslim Societies. The amount of mehar varies from region to region and from country to country. Beside being a mark of respect, the payment of mehar imposes certain restrictions concerning divorce. According to Ram (1968:130) "it is generally supposed that the main object of mehar under Mohammedan Law is to offer protection to the wife against the arbitrary power of the husband in exercising the right of divorce".

All Muslim marriages involve the signing of marriage contact (nikaha-nama) by both the bride and the groom, indicating approval of the union. The marriage takes place after statement of the amount of alimony (mehar). The most significant aspect of women-status in Muslim Society is the commitment to the payment of alimony (den-mehar or mehar) to the bride by the groom. Mehar may be paid at the time of wedding or after the wedding. Mehar

is usually given in cash or in kind. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia, the villagers have stated that a good wife generally never demands mehar from her husband. But when a man divorced his wife without any proper reason, she may demand immediate payment of her mehar.

The amount of mehar is not a fixed one. It depends on the social and economic status of the parties concerned. The case studies reveal that in Chakmodhu and Kochutia, the people of upper socio-economic strata fixed the mehar amount varies from Rs.11,111/- to 35,111/-; among the intermediate strata from Rs. 5,111/- to Rs. 9,111/- and among the lower strata from Rs. 501/- to 3,111/- only. Thus the amount of mehar varies depending upon the socio-economic status of the people.

The system of mehar supports the statement that "Islamic marriage .... safeguards the right of a wife and attempts to ensure her an economic status commensurate with her social standing" (Fyzee: 1964: 85). Similar custom has also been observed by Roy (1979:83) in her study of the Muslim women in Delhi and Lucknow. She writes, "the families which are religiously oriented, like that of Kazi and maulana, always fix a 'Sharai mehar'. In other cases the amount of mehar fixed for a girl reflects upon the girl's family status". She also stated that usually, each family has a fixed mount like Rs. 75,000/-Rs50,000/-or Rs. 25,000/- and in any marriage from that family the same amount is fixed. This is almost like a traditional feature carried down through generations. On the other hand the groom's party are in a dilemma, specially the groom who always wants an amount which ought to be

within his economic means. By asking to lower the mehar money he also lowers his esteem since the entire gathering comes to know of it".

It is usually argued that the 'mehar' money is a good security for the women in case of any difficulties in her marital life. When she is divorced the mehar money has to be given to her (but in case the divorce has taken place due to her own fault she is not given any money). More so, the woman is also entitled to her 'mehar' money after her husband's death, the sons have to pay her the 'mehar' money. In case the woman dies, then her father and brother can demand the mehar money from her husband. This account gives a very bright picture of a woman's financial assets. So, it can be said that 'mehar' is one of the causes of the marital stability, and a factor favouring the woman even if slightly. as an inhibiting factor against easy divorce. 'Mehar' under Islamic system, becomes a very beneficial check on divorce or dissolution of marriage.

In empirical context it was noted that though there is a system of mehar money to be paid to the wife from the side of her husband, in reality the payment of such a money to the wife is very rare. Even the payment of mehar to the divorced lady is also not noticed in Chakmodhu and Kochutia. Thus is is noted that even there exists a religious and social sanction behind mehar, Yet the practice of such payment was rare among the Muslim villagers. Most of the Muslim people stated that a good wife generally never demands mehar from her husband. But when a man

divorced his wife without any proper reason, she may demand immediate payment of her mehar. It has observed that usually the women who have enjoyed the love from their husbands frequently excuse them from the payment of mehar when they became old or on their death bed.

Divorce:

Divorce or talak is the most debatable and controversial topic among the Muslims specially, because Muslim personal law legally sanctions divorce. Every Muslim knows that talak or divorce was extreemely disliked by the Prophet. The Quran says that, " 'O thou Prophet' When we divorce women, divorce them at their term and compute the term (exactly) and fear God your lord. Turn them not out of their houses, not let them go out, unless they have come in for a plain filthy action. And these are the bounds of God, and whose transgraces the bounds of God, he has wronged himself. Thou knowest not whether haply God will make something new to happen after that" (Abul Fazl, 1916 : 590). According to Islam, divorce, cannot be given during the period of menstruation and pregnancy.

Islam has given limited freedom to the man but it is not in favour of free divorce, as its aim is the stability of family. In the view of Prophet talak is the most debatable of all permitted things before God; as it prevent conjugal happiness and interferes with the proper bringing up of children (Ali, 1922 : 244).

Even today divorce is looked down upon by the Muslims. Only in extreme cases of maladjustment divorce is allowed. Under the dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act of 1939, a woman married under Muslim Law is entitled to obtain a degree for the dissolution of her marriage on any one or more of the following grounds:

i) the where about of the husband has not been known for a period of four years.

ii) failure of the husband to provide her maintenance (wilfully or due to his inability for a period of two years.)

iii) sentence of imprisonment of the husband for a period of seven years or upwards.

iv) failure without reasonable cause to perform his marital obligations for a period of three years.

v) impotence of the husband since the time of marriage.

vi) insanity of the husband for a period of two years of his suffering from leprosy or a virulent veneral disease,

vii) option of puberty before the wife attains the age of eighteen, provided the marriage has not been consumated.

viii) cruelty of the husband [as amplified in clauses (a) to (c) of Section 2(viii) of the Act].

ix) any other grounds recognised by the Muslim Law (Kapadia, 1959:192-93).

In Chakmodhu there were only 5 (0.92%) cases of divorce, while in Kochutia the cases of divorce was almost nil. Although divorce is permitted among the Muslims in appropriate cases, yet it is very infrequent and generally disapproved by the women of both the villages. It was noted that only 1 (0.61%) respondent of Chakmodhu approved the system of divorce, while the rest disapproved it boldly. It has also been observed that the divorced women enjoyed a very low status in the society. Moreover, the divorced women were getting ill treatments in matters of their participation in any social events. The study reveals that in the empirical context divorce or talak is very rare among the Muslims. But due to urban and industrial influences now-a-days a tendency towards divorce has been marked among a few of them.

Polygamy:

There is a popular stereotype about polygynous character of the Muslims, but this notion has no empirical base. The 1961 census revealed that the percentage of polygynous marriage among the Muslim was very low (4.31%) as compared to other four communities, namely, Hindus (5.06%), the Jains (6.72%), Buddhist (7.97%) and tribals (17.98%).

Polygyny is in no sense an essential or special feature of the Muslims and it is not even encouraged by Islam. In fact, Islam is the religion which has recommended monogamy as the most suitable form of marriage system.

In Muslim society polygyny is prevalent, but not so high as it believed to be. The census data reveal that there is only a single case of polygyny in Chakmodhu, while it is totally absent in Kochutia.

Polygyny is specifically related to the material prosperity. Reform movements, legislative action, spread of education, and decline of material prosperity gradually reducing the incidence of polygyny among the Muslims. It is generally considered as an indignity and offensive to the status of women.

The survey reveals that only 3 (1.84%) respondents of Chakmodhu have approved the system of poygyny only under certain circumstances. While at Kochutia nobody has approved this practice. The Muslim villagers in general are of opinion that the system of polygyny reduces the status and roles of women. Thus it can be said that polygamy is in no sense a particular Islamic institution or a Muslim custom. Monogamy is a characteristic feature in Muslim society and it is also an ideal practice in the view of Islam.

Religious Practices and the Position of Women

The focus of this section is on religion as it is practiced among Muslim Community, rather than on the theological and philosophical principles and the accompanying social system as laid down in Islamic scriptures. According to Islam "Verily, the Muslim men and women and the faithful men and women, and the devout

men and women, and the truthful men and women, and the patiently persevering men and women, and the humble men and women, and the charitable men and women, and the fasting men and women, and the men and women who preserve their modesty, and the men and women who remember God much; God has prepared for them pardon and a great reward" (Quran S. 33:35). This passage from Quran reveals that the faithful followers of Islam were treated equally irrespective of their sex. After the prophet's death different kinds of interpretations were given on this issue by different authorities, who incorporated their individual ideas. This leads to the emergence of various views which are different from the original orthodox notion of Islam regarding the position of women in religious domain. So far the ideal pattern is concerned within the sphere of religion equal status is granted to men and women, but in actual practice the situation is entirely different.

To evaluate the position of women in religious domain, their roles in various religious activities have been specifically investigated. A survey was conducted to find out (i) whether women are allowed to enter inside the mosque, (ii) whether men and women are equally obliged to pray, and (iii) whether participation of the women in milad and majlis is permitted. "The mosque is meant primarily for Divine worship. To the Muslims however, the mosque means much more than a mere house of Divine. Worship which could, in fact, be offered anywhere, it is the real centre for the society of Islam in a certain locality, as the Kaba is the centre for the Muslims of the whole world. The Mosque is also the cultural centre

of Islam..... in fact, the mosque is plainly stated to be a place to which one should go to learn or teach some Good" (Ali, 1950: 69).

Islam as a Religion:

Islam is a simple religion. Thus the festivals and ceremonies around religious rites are not essential to the Islamic injunction. As a consequence, to Muslims the festivals and ceremonies are only the observance of anniversaries of some of the most important events of early history in Islam.

According to Islamic principle, it is customary for each of the Muslim (male and female) to perform the five basic principles such as : (i) to know the kalema (the words of the Quran), (ii) to observe roja (fast) on Ramjan month, (iii) to perform namaj (prayer), (iv) to celebrate the Hoj (visit to the pilgrimages of Macca and Madina) and (v) to give jakat (disposal of wealth) to the poors. Of these five basic principles, the first three, i.e. the kalema, the roja and the namaj are the most essential.

Muslim Festivals:

The muslims pray to the single God (Allah) and observe only the community festivals as the matter of their religious custom. Among these festivals and ceremonies, some are held in the family and some other in the village, where interactions with the community members other than family is met with. The festivals and

ceremonies of the Muslims of Chakmodhu and Kochutia is presented in the table 19 and 20.

Table - 19

Classification of the Muslim Festivals

Festivals

- (a) In the household
  - Daily: Five times daily prayer in home such as Fajar (at morning), johar (at noon), Ashar (at afternoon), Mokrob (at evening), Esha (at night)
  - Occasional: Shabe-Barat, Roja, Kurbani.
- (b) In the village
  - Daily: Five times daily prayer in the village Mosque
  - Weekly: Friday-prayer or Jummah-namaj in the village mosque
  - Occasional: Muharram, Akhri-char-Shanbah, Fathihah-i-duwaz-daham, Fathihahi-ya-j-Dahum, Id-Ul-Fitar, Id-ud-juha

Table -20

Major Festivals of the Muslims

Name of the festivals	Date and Month of the Festivals (according to Hijrah year)	Religious significance
1. Muharram	In the month of Muharram	Commemoration of Martyrdom of Hussain and Hassan, grand sons of the Prophet Mohammad.
2. Akhiri-char-Shanbah	In the last Wednesday of Safar	Prayer, fasting
3. Fatihahi-duwaz--dahum	Twelvth of Robiulawal	Prayer, fasting
4. Fathihahi-yaj--dahum	Eleventh of Robiul-Soni	Prayer, fasting
5. Shabe-barat	Fourteenth of Shaban	Believe that the God (Allah) records the duties of his believers for the ensuing year on this night.
6. Roja	The whole month of Ramjan	The month of the Ramjan fast. During this month the holy Quran was revealed
7. Id-ul-fiter	First day of Shawal	Completion of the month-long fast of Ramjan, i.e. Roja
8. Id-ud-juha	Tenth of Zelhoj	Commemoration of the Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to offer his only son Ismail as a sacrifice in obedience to God's command.

The Muslims of Chakmodhu and Kochutia observe various rites and rituals. The most important of them are Muharram, Fatihahi-duwaz-dahum, Fathihahi-yaj dadum, Shabe-barat, Ramjan (Roja), Id-ul-Fiter and Id-ud-juha or Bakraid. The dates of these festivals are calculated according to the lunar months, so the occasions occur on different dates in different years.

There are twelve lunar months in Islamic Calendar. These are:

1) Muharram,
2) Safar
3) Rabi-ulAwal
4) Rabi-ul-Soni
5) Jamadi-ul-Awal
6) Jamadi-ul-Soni
7) Rajab,
8) Shaban,
9) Ramjan
(10) Shawal,
(11) Zel-Kod, and
(12) Zel-Hoj.

Of these twelve months in Islamic Calendar, the month Robiul-awal is the most important, because Prophet Muhammad was born on this month. Soseveral social rites and ceremonies are organized in this month. The month Ramjan is also very sacred to the Muslims.

Daily prayer is common to almost all the muslim households of Chakmodhu and Kochutia. Besides daily prayer, most the males of the villages also participate in weekly prayers (Jumma) on Friday. Occasional yearly prayers viz., Id-ul-Fiter and Id-ud-juha are attended by almost all the males of both villages. Offering of food to the beggars during all religious festivals is a common feature of the Muslim households, where the role of women is the most significant.

Along with the daily prayers, each of the household also observed a few of their religious festivals at their homes too, the important of which being Shabe-barat and roja. The Kurbani or the sacrifice of animal on the Id-ud-juha day has also been observed by some well-to-do households in both the villages. In addition to these, all the important religious festivals are observed and celebrated in the respective village by the people together. These are Muharram, Akhri-char-Shanbah, Fatihai-duwaz-dahum, Fathihahi-yaj-dahum, Id-ul-Fitar and Id-ud-juha. These festivals are organized and celebrated by the mosque or masjid committee of each of the village with the help of Soloana i.e. all the villagers.

The religious festivals and their respective rites to which the women play a very significant role has been discussed here in the following manners.

Muharram:

This festival is celebrated on the tenth day of lunar month Muharram. It is given the name of the day of mourning by the Muslims. Muharram is the first month in Muslim (Islamic) Calendar. On the tenth day in the month of Muharram, Imam Hussain and Hassan, the grand son s of Prophet Muhammad, was put to death in the plains of Karbala after being denied food and water for three days. Muharram is observed in honour of this Martyr and his associates.

On this month most of the adult Muslims both male and female pray namaj to Allah for rest and peace of the departed souls of Hussain and Hassan. During this month the Muslim villagers in general avoid to wear new garments and to eat fish, egg and flesh as a mark of mourning for the said departed souls. In comparison to men, women are most sincere to observe this rites and restrictions.

Akhri-char-Shanbah:

This festival is observed on the last Wednesday of the month of Safar. It is observed as a festival in commemoration of the fact that, on this day Prophet Muhammed experienced some mitigation of the fever which in the next month proved fatal. On this day the masjid committee of both the villages organized meelad sharif in their respective village at the evening. It has also been observed that the villagers particularly the male folk of both the villages participated in meelad sharif, where the moulivi narrated the life of Prophet Muhammed and his role in Islamic religion. The women of the households usually observe roja, read Quran, and pray namaj as usual on this occasion. They also attended the religious jalsa (meelad sharif) in the village and gathered at a separate placement for them for the purpose.

Fatihahi-duwaz-dahum:

This day is observed on the twelvth of the lunar month Robiul awal. On this day meelad sharif is held at the mosque of Chakmodhu and Kochutia, at which the story of the birth, miracles and death of the Prophet has recited. On this day the Masjid

Committee of both the villages arranged a feast with the help of the villagers to distribute it among the poorers. On this day some aged males of Chakmodhu and Kochutia observed fast or roja. But the women of both the villages observed it very strictly. During this occasion the female members of the families took the most active part to clean their houses for praying namaj. At night the lighting of candle and agarbati, and reading of Quran are the most typical functions of the women of both the villages.

Fathihahi-yaj-dahum:

This day is celebrated on the eleventh of the month of Robiul-Soni. It is observed in the honour of the Saint-Shaik Abul Kadir Jilani, commonly called Pir-i-dastgir or Boro Pir. On this night the women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia prepared a special kind of sweet dish called Khir at their respective home for offering it to the poorers. During this occasion most of the village women of both the villages spend the whole night to recite Quran and to pray namaj.

Shabe-barat:

This festival is celebrated on fourteenth of the lunar month Shaban. All adult Muslim male and female observed Roja on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of this month. They also pray namaj regularly for first fifteenth days of this month for the rest and peace of their lineage (Khandan) ancestors. The Muslims believed that on the occasion of Shabe-barat God records the duties of both men and women for the ensuing year. In

Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia the women folk of their respective home prepared bread and khir and distributed it among the beggars and other needy families of their villages. On this particular day (Shabe-barat) mostly the aged men and women of the villages read holy Quran.

During this festival female folk of the families took the most initiative roles. They observed fast, cleaned the houses, prepared bread and sweet dishes and served these food items to family members and guests. At evening candles and agarbati are lighted in all the rooms including at the side of graves of the departed ancestors. This is usually done by the men instead of women. The devout Muslims of both sexes regard this as an important occasion and honour it by sitting up all night for reading the Quran. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia I have noted that only a few women have spent the whole night in reciting the Quran.

Ramjan or Roja :

Ramjan is the most important month in religious calendar of the Muslims. As far as possible, every adult Muslims, male and female, observe fast throughout the whole Ramjan month. They can have food before dawn and after dusk, but in between even a drop of water is not permitted during these days. They also devote as much time as possible in meditation and prayer. It is the duty of all the religious minded Muslims to read Quran and to perform Zikir throughout the night, on 27th of the Ramjan month. This night is literally known as the night of power (Sura:87, ayat:3).

The notable feature in this context is that only a few devotee women folk of both the villages under study spend the whole night in reading the Quran.

On this month almost all the families of both Chakmodhu and Kochutia have distributed their family fitara to the beggars and poorers of the respective villages. The fitara was distributed through the women of the respective families. The well to do households of both the villages have also paid their jakat (compulsory tax) on this occasion.

The women folk of both the villages observe the Ramjan month by observing fast (roja) and by praying namaj in a very strict order. During this month they also read the Quran. The women are very particular to observe these rites and rituals of the Ramjan month according to traditional and orthodox manner.

Id-ul-Fiter:

Id-ul-Fiter or breaking of the Ramjan fasts is observed on the first day of the month of Shawal. This is observed with great rejoicing and festivity. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia the male members of the families wear the garments and gathered for the congregation prayer at their respective village idgahs. The namaj is conducted by the village Imams. After namaj, relatives and friends meet with each other. A distinguishing feature of this namaj is that, the rich and poor stands together in the same row for prayers irrespective of their social status and greet each other.

The women of both the villages took the most initiative roles at their homes to observe this festival. At morning they clean their respective houses. After taking bath they wear new garments and lighted the agarbatis. On this occasion women prepare varieties of sweets, like- Seemai, khir, halua and other delicious items. Neighbours, guests and friends are invited for luch and dinner. Family fitara is also distributed among the poorers with the help of the women.

Id-ud-juha (Kurbani):

Id-ud juha is observed all over the Muslim world on the tenth day of the month of Zilhoj. It is also known as Id-e-Qurban or Bakar-id, thus observed it as a day of sacrifice. On this day people got up early in the morning and cleaned themselves properly to observe this festival. The men attend the mosque or Idgah for prayer (namaj) without breakfast. While women engage themselves in decoration of their homes and cooking. After congregation prayer (namaj) the well-to-do families of the villages arrange animal sacrifice. The meat of sacrificed animal is usually distributed to the poors, villagers, friends and to all the kinsmen. In this context men played a very prominent role in distributing the meat to the neighbours, while the women played a very decisive role to distribute it among the beggars, lineage members and other kins.

On the tenth day of the month of Zilhoj, Hojrat Ishmail offered his only son in the name of Allah as a token of love to the Almighty, as he was directed to sacrifice his most beloved

object to Him (Almighty). Since then all the Muslims throughout the world celebrate this festival by sacrificing animals for obtaining the religious merit. On the ninth day of Zilhoj month, Hoj rites and festivals is held at Mocca. Some aged men of Chakmodhu and Kochutia have already visited this holy place and enjoying the status of Haji. But none of the women of both the villages has achieved such religious merit and prestigious social status inspite of religious section behind it.

Religion and Women:

Generally the women of the villages have not visited the mosque for their prayers. But in the Quran it is written that there is no bar on the part of women from entering them in the mosque. According to early tradition, Mohammad himself was not averse from allowing women to pray in his company, and declared that they could go to the mosque regularly if their husbands permitted. The rules of parda is perhaps the most contributory factor which restricts women to attend the mosque at outside.

In the two villages it has been found that not a single woman has ever visited the mosque for prayer. Questioned on this issue, all the women seemed to believe that there exists a restriction on them to enter into the mosque for prayer due to the rules of religion. Thus they pray in their home. The male and female members never pray by standing in the same line, instead women stood seven steps behind the men for their prayer. Another restriction is on the recitation of prayer. The men are spedifically advised to speak out every word at a louder voice of the prayer.

While the women have been asked not to speak the prayer loudly. Though men and women are entitled to go for pilgrimage to Mocca and Modina, yet during the tawaf rituals in Haj ceremony the women are separated from the men. According to the Quran, the women are allowed to visit the mosque for prayers but in empirical situation none of the village women ever attendasuch sacred place.

Prayer constitutes one pillar of Islam and is considered as the foundation of Religion. According to the Quran the offering of prayer is obligatory or fraz upon every Muslim, male or female, who is :

1. Sane and responsible,

2. Relatively mature and in the age of puberty, normally about fourteen. Children should be advised by the parents to start and to practice namaj at the age of seven and strongly urged by the age of ten.

3. Free from serious sickness, in the case of women free from menstruation and confinement due to child birth and nursing. Each prayer is named after particular hour when it is meant to be read. These are as follows:

(a) The early morning prayer (Salatu-I-Fajar) which may be offered any time after the dawn and before sunrise.

(b) The Noon Prayer (Salatu-z-Juhar) this prayer may be offered any time after the sun beings to decline from its zenith until it is about midway on its course to setting.

(c) The Mid-Afternoon Prayer (Salatu-I-Ashar) which beings right after the expiration on the noon prayer time and extends to sun set.

(d) The Sunset Prayer (Salatu-I-Maghrib). The time of this prayer begins after sunsent extends till the red glow in the western horizon disappears.

(e) The Evening Prayer (Salatu-I-Eshal , which begins after the red glow in the western horizon disappears.

Before offering the prayer one must be in good shape and pure condition. It is necessary to wash the parts of the body which are generally exposed to dirt or dust. This performance is called ablution, locally called wuzu.

Majority of the Muslim women, are interestdin offering their daily prayers. The women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia offering namaj at their home. The aged women are very regular to pray namaj five times daily. Prayer per day by informants in both the villages are shown in the table 21. The table shows that 29.27% in Chakmodhu and 34.38% in Kochutia have participated in daily prayers. The respondents who were not regular in daily prayers did not mean that they were less religious or did not believe in the value attached to prayer. In their opinion this irregularity in prayer is due to illness and lack of time owing to heavy pressure on domestic works.

In both the villages it has been noted that in comparison to men, the women are more regular particularly in the context of prayer, reading of the Quran and regard to traditional values and practices. The habit of regular prayer and the reciting of the Quran gives the women higher status in the family as well as in

the society in both the villages. Reading of the Quran by women in both the villages has been shown in the table 22.

The data reveal that most of the women in Chakmodhu and Kochutia observe their religious practices scrupulously. The age olds and a few religious minded middle aged women viewed that daily prayers are compulsory throughout the Ramjan month. The women of both the villages observe the religious practices in a strict order than that of men and observe fast (Roja) throughout the Ramjan month and recite the Quran during day time and night. The differences in religious practices between men and women is due to certain emerging problems, viz.- scheduled time working hours, nature of work, the difficulty in finding time for prayers in course of work, and for difficulty in maintaining cleanliness (Paksaf) upto the standard as prescribed by the religion.

The majority of the women of both the villages observe all the religious rites and ceremonies according to traditional rules. In comparison to men they seriously observe the basic religious practices like daily prayer, Ramjan fast etc. They perform religious practices only for faith in religion, rather than any other reasons.

During Muharram and other religious months the well-to-do Muslim households of both the villages organize a religious discourse with the help of village or local maulanas. This is popularly known as meelad. The men and women of neighbouring families are generally invited to attend this meelad. Meelad is generally arranged within the courtyard of the homes, where women seat apart

and partitioned by a veil. This enable the women to maintain Parda by joining the function as a silent audience. In this religious gathering the relatives and friends assemble together and exchange their views. Sometimes the religious discourse or meelad is also organized in public places, where the women's participation is very negligible due to obvious reasons, the most important of which is the rules of Parda.

Thus it is noted that some limitations are imposed on the women particularly on their entry to the mosque for prayer, and free attendance in religious jalsa etc. The women are mostly observed their religious activities at home, and they are very regular in this regard to perform these according to traditional norms. Due to spread of education, woman of younger generation do not necessarily follow the religious rituals blindly. They try to understand the meaning of the Holy book (Quran). The girls of both the villages are more knowledgeable in this regard. Levy (1957) mentioned that "Islam has throughout its history inevitably borne the mark of its Arabian origin; yet in so fundamental a matter as a position held by women and children in his community Muhammad was able to introduce profound changes".

Table - 21

Prayer per day by Women Informants

Age category		Chakmodhu				Kochutia			
		Regular	Irregular	Never	Total	Regular	Irregular	Never	Total
16-30	n	21	115	10	146	34	108	21	163
	%	7.32	40.06	3.48	50.86	10.46	33.23	6.46	50.15
31-45	n	24	38	13	75	31	44	16	91
	%	8.36	13.24	4.53	26.13	9.54	13.53	4.92	28.09
46-60	n	29	21	3	53	28	16	6	50
	%	10.11	7.32	1.05	18.48	8.62	4.93	1.85	15.40
61 and above	n	10	2	1	13	9	8	4	21
	%	3.48	0.70	0.35	4.53	2.76	2.46	1.23	6.46
Total	n	84	176	27	287	102	176	47	325
	%	29.27	61.32	9.41	100.00	31.38	54.15	14.46	100.00

Table - 22

Reading of the Quran by women Informants

Age category		Chakmodhu						Kochutia					
		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never	Total	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never	Total
A	n	1	6	17	23	99	146	3	7	18	28	107	163
	%	0.35	2.09	5.92	8.01	34.49	50.86	0.92	2.15	5.54	8.62	32.92	50.15
B	n	3	11	15	12	34	75	6	13	14	17	41	91
	%	1.05	3.83	5.23	4.18	11.85	26.13	1.84	4.00	4.31	5.24	12.62	28.01
C	n	3	6	7	14	23	53	1	2	6	5	36	50
	%	1.05	2.09	2.44	4.88	8.01	18.47	0.31	0.62	1.85	1.54	11.08	15.38
D	n	1	2	1	-	9	13	2	1	3	-	15	21
	%	0.35	0.70	0.35		3.14	4.54	0.62	0.31	0.92		4.62	6.46
Total	n	8	25	40	49	165	287	12	23	41	50	199	325
	%	2.79	8.71	13.94	17.07	57.49	100.00	3.69	7.08	12.62	15.39	61.23	100.00

Observation

The foregoing discussion reveals that muslim family is patrilineal and patrilocal. The average family size of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are constituted by 6 and 5 members only. In Chakmodhu there are 124 (67.03%) nuclear families, 20 (14.05%) intermediate families, 22 (11.89%) joint families and 12 (6.49%) incomplete families. While in Kochutia the corresponding figures are 155 (68.28%) 21 (9.25%), 40 (17.62%) and 11 (4.85%) respectively.

In two villages the authority structure is mainly controlled by the male members of the family. The interpersonal relations between the members of the family both in Chakmodhu and Kochutia reflect various reciprocal duties and obligations.

The women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are of the opinion that, sons are more valuable than the daughters. This is clearly noticed in the areas of education and choice of career of the children. It is noted that, there has been a clear disparity between boys and girls. They think that women should stay at home and should not go out for education and employment. The unequal treatments between boys and girls is quite less in educated families.

In traditional society all decisions had been taken by the head of the family, but today in both the villages most of the family decisions are taken by husband and wife jointly. Now-a-days both men and women consult each other and as a result the women's role in the family has been gradually charging. This change is more marked in the fringe village than that of the

interior village. Making of joint decision in family matters has been noticed particularly in the contexts of preparation of family budget, children's schooling and settling of their marriage.

Education plays the most important role in decision making on the issues of child birth and limitation of family size. Less educated women are of the opinion that children are "the gifts of God", so they are quite reluctant on the issues of family planning and family welfare. But the educated women have the rational attitude on these issues.

It has been observed that the muslim women of both the villages are still very tradition bound. They feel that as a traditional convention the women should stay at home and must perform the roles of daughter, wife and mother than to work at outside.

The data reveal that among the males of Chakmodhu there are 65.85% unmarried, 33.66% married and 0.49% widower, while among the females there are 54.11% unmarried, 38.57% married, 6.40% widow and 0.92% divorced persons. In contrust at Kochutia among the males there are 58.44% unmarried, 40.49% married and 1.07% widower, while among the females there are 45.99% unmarried, 45.99% married and 8.02% widow women. There is no divorced lady in Kochutia.

Ideally a muslim male is permitted to have upto four wives at a time but in reality polygyny is not liked by the people of both the villages.

The system of mehar for the bride is also noticed in both the villages. The mehar plays a very important role in Muslim society. The mehar money which is actually meant as a security for the married women is in practice rarely given (except in few) to them for various reasons.

Payment of dowry by the bride's side to the groom is prevalent in Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia. The system of dowry has adversely affected all sections of population in both the villages.

Marriage by negotiation is the common form of marriage in both the villages. The cases of love marriage is still very rare among the villagers.

The mean age at marriage of the boys and girls of Chakmodhu are 24 years and 16 years respectively. While in Kochutia the corresponding figures are 23 years and 16 years respectively.

From the present empirical study it is noted that the frequency of divorce is significantly low in both the villages under study. The data reveal that there are only 5 (0.92%) cases of divorce in Chakmodhu, while in Kochutia there is not a single case of divorce in contemporary period. It is noted that the divorced ladies of Chakmodhu are of ages ranging between 21 years to 35 years.

One of the important aspect of marriage ceremony is the presentation of lagan to the bride by the groom's family before the day of marriage. It is to be noted here that the lagan is essential for beautification of the bride before actual marriage

rites. This gives a typical status to the bride.

The frequency of polygynous marriage is significantly low among the muslim villagers. In Chakmodhu there is only a single case (0.48%) of polygynous marriage, while in Kochutia the case of polygyny is totally absent.

In ideal pattern within the sphere of Islamic religion, equal status has been granted to men and women. But in actual practice the situation is entirely different. According to Islamic principle, kolema, roja, namaj, Haj and Jakat are essential for every muslim men and women.

It has been observed that in every religious rites and rituals women plays the more important roles. It is to be mentioned here that in religious practices women are more regular and serious than that of men. The women of both the villages sincerely observes all the religious rites and ceremonies according to traditional norms.

Due to spread of education women of younger generation do not necessarily follow all religious rituals blindly. Now-a-day there has been a tendency among them to understand the meaning and significance of religious practices including the meaning of the verses of the Quran.

CHAPTER - 4

THE VILLAGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND THE WOMEN

CHAPTER - 4

THE VILLAGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND THE WOMEN

The economic condition of the Muslims of West Bengal is rather unstable. In fringe area the Muslims are basically engaged in tailoring, embroidary, petty trades, rickshaw pulling, mechanical and industrial works etc. But in rural region most of the people are poor peasants, craftmen and unspecified day labourers. Only a microscopic section of the Muslims are "jotedars" (large land owning class) in West Bengal.

The economic condition of the Muslims is very poor. Their earning and expenditure patterns are not balanced. They spend more than what they earn. Most of them are sunk in debt. A case study reveals that 89.00% of the Muslims of a Howrah village are in the grip of one or more forms of loans (Mondal : 1985).

Though there is no statistical data avilable to assess the economic condition of the Bengal Muslims, it can be assumed that a greater percentage of Muslims live below the poverty line. According to one estimate based on sample survey more than 70% Muslims live below the poverty line (Engineer : 1985).

According to the survey conducted by the United Bank of India in Murshidabad in 1988, as a part of the strategy for the welfare of minorities, it is reported that 82% Muslims live below the poverty line (Hussain : 1991).

Household And Economic Status:

The census data reveals that the total population of Chakmodhu village is 1159, of which 310 (26.75%) are earners and the rest 849 (73.25%) are non-earners or dependants. Of the 310 earners, 213 (68.71%) are main earners and 97 (31.29%) are partial earners or earning dependants. In Chakmodhu the working force has been constituted by 26.75% of village population and the rest 73.25% is consisting of non-working force.

While at Kochutia the total population is 1226, of which 406 (33.12%) are earners and the remaining 820 (66.88%) are dependants. Of the 406 earners 300 (73.89%) are main earners and 106 (26.11%) are earning dependants. In Kochutia the working force is constituted by 33.12% of village population and the rest 66.88% is consisting of non-working force.

In Chakmodhu out of a total of 612 males, 205 (33.50%) are main earners, 69 (11.28%) are partial earners or earning dependants and 338 (55.22%) are dependants. But of the 547 females, only 8 (1.46%) are main earners, 28 (5.12%) are partial earners and 511 (93.42%) are non-earners or dependants.

In contrast the economic status of the villagers of Kochutia reveals that out of the total of 652 males, 298 (45.71%) are main earners, 71 (10.89%) are non-earners and 283 (43.40%) are dependants. Of the 574 females, only 2 (0.35%) are earners, 35 (6.10%) are earning dependants and 537 (93.55%) are dependants. Table 23 and 24 show the economic status of the two villages.

Table - 23

Economic status of the people of Chakmodhu

Age	Male				Female				Total			
	Earner	Partial Earner	Depen-dant	Total	Earner	Partial Earner	Depen-dant	Total	Earner	Partial Earner	Dependant	Total
-5	-	-	108	108			90	90			198	198
6-10	-	-	85	85			97	97			182	182
11-15	-	9	68	77	1	6	66	73	1	15	134	150
16-20	9	25	37	71		8	51	59	9	33	88	130
21-25	25	18	12	55	3	7	29	39	28	25	41	94
26-30	42	7	8	57		4	44	48	42	11	52	105
31-35	27	1	1	29	3	1	31	35	30	2	32	64
36-40	34	1	-	35			23	24	34	2	23	59
41-45	23	-	-	23		1	15	16	23	1	15	39
46-50	17	1	1	19			26	26	17	1	27	45
51-55	18	1	1	20			14	14	18	1	15	34
56-60	5	1	8	14			13	13	5	1	21	27
61-65	2	3	1	6			7	7	2	3	8	13
66-70	1	2	3	6			2	2	1	2	5	8
71-75	1		5	6			2	2	1		7	8
76-80			-	-			1	2	1		1	2
85	1		-	1					1			1
Total n	205	69	338	612	8	28	511	547	213	97	849	1159
	33.50	11.28	55.22	100.00	1.46	5.12	93.42	100.00	18.38	8.37	73.25	100.0

Table - 24

Economic status of the people of Kochutia

Age group	Male				Female				Total			
	Earner	Partial Earner	Depen-dant	Total	Earner	Partial Earner	Depen-dant	Total	Earner	Partial Earner	Depen-dant	Total
-5			102	102			109	109			211	211
6-10		2	97	99			83	83		2	180	182
11-15	2	16	53	71		6	51	59	2	22	104	128
16-20	23	23	20	66		-	55	55	23	23	75	121
21-25	38	14	11	63	1	3	62	66	39	17	73	129
26-30	59	6		65		2	40	42	59	8	40	107
31-35	44	1		45		4	24	28	44	5	24	73
36-40	34			34		5	23	28	34	5	23	62
41-45	18			18		2	33	35	18	2	33	53
46-50	28	1		29		6	21	27	28	7	21	56
51-55	24	1		25	1	-	6		25	1	6	32
56-60	15			15		4	12	16	15	4	12	31
61-65	10	3		13		2	5	7	10	5	5	20
66-70	2	2		4		-	8	8	2	2	8	12
71-75	1	-		1		1	2	3	1	1	2	4
76-80		1		1			1	2	-	1	2	3
-85		1		1			1	1	-	1	1	2
Total n	298	71	283	652	2	35	537	574	300	106	820	1226
%	45.71	10.89	43.40	100.00	0.35	6.10	93.55	100.00	24.47	8.65	66.88	100.00

The incomes of the villagers are supplemented both by their primary and secondary sources of earning and as a result most of them are engaged in a variety of primary and secondary occupations. In Chakmodhu village the male earners are engaged in varieties of occupations, such as embroidary (29.93%), factory work (46.35%), Business (9.85%), service (4.37%), daily labour (6.22%) and the other types (3.28%) of occupations. The other types of occupations are priesthood, rickshaw pulling, porterage, etc. The non-earning males are either students or children or old aged people. Like wise the female earners are also engaged in various occupations such as embroidary work (91.66%), service (5.56%) and begging (2.78%). The non-earning females are mainly engaged in domestic works or they are children, students or old aged women. On the other hand, in Kochutia the male earners are also engaged in various occupations for earning, such as cultivation (45.21%), business (6.39%), service (4.26%), tailoring (0.53%), daily labour (31.65%) and begging 0.53% respectively. The female earners of this village are engaged in processing of paddy and rice (29.73%), tailoring (2.70%), service (2.70%) and as maid servants (64.87%). The occupational pattern of the villagers (both male and female) of Chakmodhu and Kochutia is presented in the Tables 25 and 26.

The Muslims of Chakmodhu and Kochutia are engaged in a variety of occupations for their livelihood. The occupational pattern and nature of work done by the male of the two villages referred to are presented in the table 23 & 26. It is noted that in Chakmodhu the main occupations of the villagers are facoty work,

Table -25

Occupational pattern of the people of Chakmodhu

Age group		Male							Female			
		Primary Occupation							Primary Occupation			
		Embroi-dary	Factory work	Business	Service	Daily labour	Others	Total	Embroi-dary	Service	Beggar	Total
11-15		9	-					9	7			7
16-20		22	3	5		3	1	34	8			8
21-25		28	10	5		-	-	43	10			10
26-30		13	25	4	2	4	1	49	3	1		4
31-35		1	14	3	2	6	2	28	3	1		4
36-40		1	23	3	5	2	1	35	2			2
41-45		-	20	1	2	-	-	23				
46-50		-	14	2		1	1	18				
51-55		4	12	1	1	1	-	19				
56-60		-	5	1			-	6				
61-65		2	1	1			1	5				
66-70		1	-	-			2	3				
71-75		1	-	-				1			1	1
76-80		-	-	4				1				
Total	No	82	127	27	12	17	9	274	33	2	1	36
	%	29.93	46.35	9.85	4.37	6.22	3.28	100.00	91.66	5.56	2.78	100.00

Table - 26

Occupational pattern of the people of Kochutia

Age group		MALE								FEMALE				
		Cultivation	Business	Service	Tailoring	Daily labour	Cow harder	Beggar	Total	Tailoring	Service	Paddy & Rice process	Maid servant	Total
11-15						2	16		18				21	21
16-20		6							50				3	3
21-25		29	2	2	2	23	21		63		1			1
26-30		37	8	-		22	6		68					
31-35		26	5	2		23			50			4		4
36-40		22	4	1		17			41	1		7		8
41-45		18	2	1		14			29					
46-50		19	2	2		8			29					
51-55		7	1	3		6			15					
56-60		6		3		4		2	11					
61-65		-		1					1					
66-70		-		1					1					
Total	N	170	24	16	2	119	43	2	376	1	1	11	24	37
	%	45.21	6.38	4.26	0.53	31.65	11.44	0.53	100.00	2.70	2.70	29.73	64.87	100.

embroidary work and business. While in Kochutia the main occupations of the village peoples are cultivation and petty business. The economic condition of the people of both the villages is generally very poor.

About 29.19 percent and 68.28 percent of the village people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia respectively belong to the low income group. The table 27 represents the monthly family income of the people of Chakmodhu and Kochutia.

Table - 27

Monthly Family Income of the People of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Income per month	No. of Household			
	Chakmodhu		Kochutia	
	No.	%	No.	%
1500 and above	27	14.60	30	13.22
750-1500	104	56.21	42	18.50
Below 750	54	29.19	155	68.28
Total Household	185	100.00	227	100.00

The data reveal that there are 36 women earners in Chakmodhu, of them 33 (91.66%) are engaged in embroidary work, 2 (5.56%)each in teaching and health care and 1 (2.78%) in begging profession. By contrast, in Kochutia there are 37 main and partial earners and they are engaged in various occupations, such as 11 (29.73%) in

paddy and rice processing, 1 (2.70%) in teaching, 1 (2.70%) in tailoring and 24 (64.87%) as maid-servants. It is to be noted here that most of the Muslim women earners of both the villages belong to the economically poor category. Due to the parda rules the women are not in a position to work freely outside of their homes, and as a matter of fact the above mentioned economic pursuits to which they are mostly engaged are basically conducted within the home. Through this way they reserve the social customs of parda even by engaging themselves in certain economic activities.

A majority of the women respondents of the present study belong to the low income group. Out of the total of 347 female in Chakmodhu and 574 in Kochutia only 36 (6.58%) and 37 (6.45%) are engaged in earning respectively. Some important cases in the context of occupational pattern of the Muslim women of these two villages have been discussed in the following section.

Jori work or Embroidery work

Jori is a lustrous kind of thread of golden and silver colour. Jori work is a special kind of embroidery work, done with gilded threads on saries, veils, blouse pieces and wrappers. These are specially liked by the Mulism women but are also gaining popularity among others. The craft is said to have originated in Uttar Pradesh under the rules of the ancient king and subsequently spread all over the country. This was a highly patronised art during the Muslim rules and especially liked by the Muslim folk for its gorgeous nature. At present this work is almost confined to the Muslim ustagars or artisans. This profession arrived in

Chakmodhu only ten years ago. This industry is mainly under the control of the Mahajans (entrepreneurs) of Barabazar (Calcutta) who supply the clothes and all the requisite materials to the craftmen who are engaged in this activity. This craft is exclusively noted in Chakmodhu village. The tools used for this craft are five needles, scissors, files, wooden frames etc. Formerly the employment was a seasonal one, but now due to the growing market people engage themselves in jori work throughout the year. The demand of jori work increase to its peak during the festival months and marriage seasons. The wages for this work vary according to the artistic skills and patterns. The wages are fixed by the masters (Ustagar) according to the skill of the employee. Three types of jori workers are found in the village. These are the master-artisans, skilled artisans and the apprentices. There is no fixed wage rate for this occupation. The workers get their wages according to the contract made earlier with the mahajans.

In Chakmodhu village there are 82 (29.93%) males and 33 (91.66%) females engaged in this activity. The jori work is also done by both the boys as well as the girls.

Case Studies:

Case Study 1 —

In the context of jori work mention may be made of the life and works of Salma Khatun. Salma is a young girl, about 18 years of age. Having been educated only upto the primary level. Due to certain family troubles and poor economic condition she has been engaged herself in jori work for last four years. For her self reliance and also for the sake of her family she accepted this

occupation with the help of some of her close kinsmen living in the village. Initially she worked as an apprentice under her own cousin who was one of the master (Ustagar) in this craft making of the locality. Her patience and perseverance have today made her the most efficient jori worker among the girls of this village.

Due to her experience and devotion she is considered one of the specialists of this craft and as a result the other village girls who are also doing jori work usually come to her to seek her advice and guidance for their own work.

It is estimated that Salma Khatun earns about a thousand rupees per month. She has pointed out that all her income is spent for her family members. Looking back she narrates the numerous problems she had to face initially when she first employed herself in this craft. As a girl it was not always possible for her to communicate with others and to gather the technological know how of this craft. Thus she had to depend on her close relations to acquire the skill and processes of jori work. Even now she is facing trouble in communicating with the businessmen for the sake of her craft as she is unable to move to the market freely due to traditional so called parda rules.

Case Study 2 —

Mrs. Rahima, aged 28 years, narrated her own life history. She was born in a poor family. She had two brothers, one elder and one younger. Her parents brought her up in the traditional manner, following all the prescribed rules. Her mother always kept

her at home and taught her to pray namaj. She also attended school upto the primary level. Her mother taught her to stitch and cook and to do embroidery work. She explained, "My father was busy with his own affairs as he was working as a labour in a nearby factory. I saw him for only a few hours in a day. But he always made it a point to have his afternoon or evening meal with me and my other brothers. My father took the same amount of interest in my affairs and in the affairs of my brothers. Due to poor economic condition and for other familial and social reasons I had to leave school at the age of twelve years and engaged myself in domestic activities. Gradually I adjusted myself in domestic chores as per the guidance of my mother and other female members of my family".

Sheadded "when I was fifteen years of age my parents and other kinsmen started to look for a boy to marry me. Since my father was poor he was in search of an employed boy, the nature of the boy and his family were the least of his consideration. Ultimately, a boy of a petty business family was found out who was ready for the marriage. This boy was not much educated and had a bad temper. Her mother was also known to be an intolerant and bad tempered lady. Though my father was poor he arranged my marriage with this boy by taking loans from his factory and from other local (informal) sources. Comparatively elaborate arrangements were made for the marriage. Money was spent for jewellary, clothing and food for the entertainment of the guests. At the time of marriage I had the aspiration that my new family would give me love and security. But unfortunately I realised that my new home

was not the place where my desires would be fulfilled. Quite soon after the marriage I found out the reasons for it. At the time of marriage apart from the jewellary and clothings some amount of cash had been handed over to my husband. All these kept my in-laws quiet for only a short time. But after a year my mother-in-law started to nagging me and demanding more money from my parents. I did not know what to do. My husband was also entirely on his mother's side. Though I was quite aware that my father was not in a position to satisfy the demands of my husband, for my own problems I approached him for my rescue".

She further narrated " My father tried a lot to help me by giving some money to my husband, but the demands continued persistently. By this time I had become a mother and my status in my in-law's house was not much higher than that of a maid servant. At this stage I used to tolerate both the physical and mental tortures that were inflicted upon me. Gradually I lost my patience. Of course my husband wanted to keep my son with him but I managed to bring him with me when I came to my parents' house and started to stay with them. I had brought home nothing of my dowry except a few clothes. My parents and my brothers were very sympathetic but I realised that I had to stand on my own feet both for my own sake as well as for the sake of my son. At this stage my relatives began to plan for arranging my remarriage. But I disagreed as I had lost the emotional state and mentality that would help me to start another married life. Since my husband had not given me a formal divorce I could not think of my remarriage, as I still hoped that

my husband would come to take me home. But gradually I lost my dreams. So, I decided to find a source of earning. My elder brother was an expert in jori work, he adviced me to learn this craft for my reliance. At the initial stage I worked under my brother as a learner in order to acquire the skill. Within six months I became a good worker".

She continued, "My brother helped me to engage in this craft making for my own earning. The orders for my work are usually received by him and handed to me to complete in time. I called some other village girls to work under me as they were interested in doing that for their self earning. Now I am running my craft business successfully and earning sufficiently for our living. I have also got my son admitted to the village primary school and my ambition for him is that I may be able to train him in such a way so that he may join in the industry as a mistry. That is what my father was. At present myself and my son are staying with my parents and my younger brother. My father is now retired and has opened a small tea stall. I and my brother are engaged in embroidery work. Our family is now running out of the money which we earn jointly. Actually my father is depends upon my decision about the family budget and other necessary expenditure. I spend my self-earned money for my son and parents. Now I can safely say that I am quite independent at least in the economic sense. But being a woman I am still facing troubles for interacting with the outsiders, as I have not been trained in such way. This is due to the fact that I have been brought up according to the traditional norms and the values of our society".

Case Study - 3:

Somatun Bifi of 45 years old narrated the background and context which forced her to take paddy husking as a means for her subistance. She was born in a poor peasant family. Her father was a share-cropper and also worked as an agricultural labour. Her mother taught her how to husk paddy for preparation of rice and also taught her to pray namaj. She also taught her to stich, cook and to do other domestic works. Her father was busy with his own affairs but he always made a point of having his day and evening meals with her. Under such a situation her life was simple and uncomplicated. She expressed, "Quite early my parents had started looking out for a prospective husband for me. Their choice fall on my distant cousin. My husband hailed from a poor peasant family and my father promised to finance him for starting a petty business. Naturally the proposal was accepted and my cousin and me were betrothed. I was quite happy of my marriage. I was about 13 years old. I liked my husband and my in-laws because they were very affectionate to me. After marriage my husband went to district Sadar-Burdwan to start his petty business. Initially he started to sell some essential grocery articles and vegetables. During his absence from home I spent my time with domestic works. I was quite happy in my in-law home. I looked forward to the weekend when my husband would come home. I loved the small gifts which he would bring for me and also liked to listen stories of town life. But suddenly there was a change as my husband lost his business capital as he was cheated by his friends and customers. Thus he left business and came to the village. He started

his new occupation by engaging himself in agriculture. As an agricultural labourer we could not maintain our family with the irregular earning and thus we had to face serious financial problems. Thus myself and my mother in-law had decided to start paddy husking for earning something. My husband and father-in-law also helped in this regard by taking the responsibility to establish business contact with the villagers. Myself and my mother-in-law engaged ourself in paddy processing at hom by cleaning, boiling and drying the grains. While the responsibility of husking and carrying were given to my husband. Now my mother-in-law is too old so myself and my daughters are engaged in this occupation. My husband is also helping us when we ask for. Through our hard work we are now able to manage our family budget. During the last year our income from this work of paddy husking was not much less. We save a portion of our earning and purchased three (3) bighas of land. My husband and father-in-law are very happy as they are now cultivating on their own land instead of working on other's land on daily wages".

She further stated, "The work of paddy husking is done jointly with the others. We work together for running our joint family smoothly. The money which we earn is utilised by father-in-law who is the head of our family. We are very much happy to live under his care".

Case Study-4:

Angura Khatun, aged about 25 years, depicted the story of her education and career. She is an educated girl of Kochutia village, and is now attached as an assistant teacher in a primary school of

the locality. She said, "I belong to a farmer's family. We have own land and my father is a well-to-do farmer. My brother is an Undergraduate and is doing his business. I grew up in the village. My father and brother had interest for my higher education and wanted to see me as a graduate. I had completed my primary and secondary education from this village schools. But for graduation I took admission at Katwa College. During my College days I used to live in the family of my maternal uncle. I am the first educated girl from a farmer's family of this village and I had the notion to go out for higher education. I had to face a lot of criticisms and social ostracism. Not only the villagers but also some of my close relatives spoke about me and criticized for my higher ambition. But my father and brother were very serious to save me from all sorts of criticism and through their inspiration I completed my college education. But as soon as I got the B.A. degree many of the village influencials came to my father to appreciate me and my family for this success. As I am the first Muslim Woman graduate from a purely peasant family, One of the local influential (belonging to Hindu Community) advised me to apply for a teaching post which was vacant at that time in a primary school of our locality. Ultimately through his effort I got this post and joined as teacher in the said school". She said, "Our's is a religious family, thus my mother is always meticulous about all religious observances. During my childhood and adolescent she not only taught me to cook but also helped me to develop my religious habits. Even to day along with my busy schedule I read the Quran and pray namaj

and also observe fast during Ramjan month".

She further narrates, "I am an educated and employed girl so I enjoy a very good position not only in my family but also in the village. My family members and other relatives are feeling very proud of me. I feel happy that I am in a position to contribute my income to our family and also in a position to take decision when I wish to buy and to present some thing to others. At present I am of 25 years old. As I am still an unmarried girl my relatives are trying their best to get me married. But they are facing a serious trouble to find out a suitable groom for me. I tell you frankly that it is not easy to find out a boy of their choice as there are only a few educated and well established boys in our society".

Caste Study-5:

Mrs. Mamota an educated and married lady of 36 years of age of Chakmodhu, narrated the story of her married life particularly on the nature of her adjustment in the in-law's family. She states, "I am a Hindu girl belonging to a Brahmin caste. My father was the refugee and migrated from East Bengal which is now known as Bangladesh. We settled at Calcutta and my father is working as a school teacher in a secondary school of North Calcutta. I was the student of a co-educational college in the city of Calcutta, and my husband was my classmate. My husband was a brilliant student and involved with the student politics. Accidentally I was attracted by his political campaign and also by his performance in the classes.

Within a very short time we came close to each other and dedicated ourselves in student politics of the college. After completion of our course we became the graduates and decided to continue our post graduate studies in an University of the city. We took admission in post graduate course and also continued our political interest at the University also. Our relation was so deep that it was very difficult for us to avoid each other. Our's is a educated but very conservative family, while my husband came from a family of comparatively low educational status. After completion of our post graduate course both of us employed as school teachers. After getting service we decided to marry.

There was a serious objection from my parent's side when they came to know that I am going to marry a Muslim boy. But I was quite happy that my husband's family was not very serious on this issue excepting their desire to convert me into Islam before my marriage. But I was totally against of this conversion, obviously objection also came from by husband's family, particularly from his grand parents. Within this critical situation we left home and went to marriage registrar to settle our marriage with the help of some of our close friends. Since both of us were adult, there as no serious trouble to settle the marriage formalities. But as we belonged to two different religion so social avoidance, criticism and pressure were came before us from various corners. Communal tension was also emerged in the areas where we used to live together. Tension was also emerged at the school where we attached. Initially the situation was very worse. To get an escape from all these hazards

we decided to go to my husband's relatives for our protection. Since we were in serious trouble the relatives of my husband and some of his close friends came forward to our rescue. Through their effort and also with the help of political leaders of the locality we were accepted by parent in-laws. I convinced the relatives of my husband that as a matter of emotion it is difficult for me to change my religion but I have a whole hearted regard on the religion of my husband. My in-law relations accepted my appeal but requested me to participate in the rituals which they usually observe in their homes. I accepted their proposal and started to adjust in a different cultural situation. Listening to all these events my parents and other relatives cut all sorts of relations with me".

She further said, "I am already completed my eight years of marriage and we have a daughter of six years age. We constructed a new house in a plot of land presented by the grand parents of my husband. Now we are living separately with my mother-in-law, but maintaining a good relation with my husband's family. I am very happy to say that I am doing puja and my husband praying namaj in the same home. I participate in the Idd and other religious festivals of my husband. Likewise my husband also accompany me when I go to attend the temple. We usually buy new clothes both in Hindu and also in Muslim festivals. I allowed my daughter to participate both in Muslim as well as in Hindu festivals. With the help of my mother-in-law I teach her to narrate Kalema and to read namaj. I am telling her stroy about the Mohabharata and the Ramayana. You see our's is a typical case of social integration and a good example of inter-community relation. Myself and my husband both are employed,

so I am very much depended on my mother-in-law to look after my daughter at my home. I enjoyed a very good position in the village society and also getting a good recognition from the Muslim villagers. I am receiving honour and recognition as I am an educated and employed women and having dedication and love for the Muslims inspite of my own different religious and cultural identity. But I am very sorry to say that I am feel unhappy when I think that I am far away from my parents and other relatives, with whom I have blood relation and emotional attachment".

Economic position and participation of women

The economic position of women has a bearing on their psychological and social conditions. Economic independence not only improves their social status within the family but also at outside. This gives them the mental satisfaction that they are also contributing to their family income. According to Smith (1946:80) "if women are taking part in productive activities of the society, they would soon have that economic independence without which they cannot be truly free and with which they will necessarily find freedom". This study reveals that if women have started to work and earn, they have begun to enjoy a better status in the family and society. The Quran implies that, Islam has an equalitarian attitude towards all.

Islam is not against working of women in such areas which are suitable for them. The number of working women in the Muslim Community is smaller than other communities due to various reasons.

The present study represents a section of the working women in both the villages under study. In Chakmodhu there are only 36 (6.58%) women who are engaged in earning. In contrast there are 37 (6.45%) working women in Kochutia.

In both the villages it has been noted that animal husbandry and live-stock ownership is one of the main source of earning of the women belonging to the lower and middle income group. The most important live stocks are milch cows, goats, fowls and ducks. Usually, cows are kept for milk and dung. In both the villages rearing of cows is essentially a women's activity and the income from milk selling is usually goes to the women. The rearing of goats is also profitable, as goats live on grass alone and thus can be sold at full profit. Poultry keeping i.e. rearing of fowls and ducks is common to the Muslim households. It is noted that every morning traders approach the respective houses and purchase eggs and fowls or ducks to sell in the local as well as in the distant markets. Rearing of cows, goats and poultry farming serves the most important source of income to the women of both the villages and through this way they help their family by cash earning. The incidence of live stock ownership of two villages is presented in table - 28.

Table - 28

Incidence of livestock ownership of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Types of livestock	Chakmodhu		Kochutia	
	No. of households	Percentage	No. of households	Percentage
Cows	22	13.58	46	22.01
Bullocks	2	1.23	10	4.78
Goats	19	11.73	28	13.40
Hens & fowl	103	63.58	107	51.20
Ducks	16	9.88	18	8.61
Total	162	100.00	209	100.00

(Note: There is a single household at Chakmodhu which has no livestock ownership)

Women's place in Family Economy:

"He it is who made the earth even and smooth for you. So traverse through its sides, and eat of His Provision. And unto Him will be the resurrection" (Quran 67 : 15). Thus we can say that Islam grants to all the individuals equal rights to carry on any lawful occupation. On the other hand in Sura 4 :34 the Quran says that "God has made man superior to woman, and man has authority over woman because he spends his wealth to maintain her." These two quotations from the Quran implies that Islam has an equalitarian attitude towards all, but in reality the women are definitely in the lower rung of the status hierarchy.

Basically, the women are given a lower status than men based on the fact that men are the supporters and protectors of the women. In social set up, a great deal of importance is attached to the men's role for their authoritarian position as the bread winners and masters of the households. The women's roles are non-glamourous and have less important, thus resulting in their subordinate status in the family (Jain 1986:159).

Roy (1979) examines that with the coming of industrialization many changes have been brought about in the Muslim family. The economic development of India has brought about certain alterations in the attitude and value system of the people. Today, many parents have started educating their daughters and preparing them to be economically independent in the family. In many homes the brother and sister are given equal opportunity to study. The educated women has gained importance as a significant member of the family as well as of the society. The men initially could not adjust to the idea of women working outside of their family. But now the attitude has been changed and educated women today engage themselves in a variety of jobs.

In respect of the attitude of the respondents towards working women, it has been observed that in Chakmodhu 137 (47.74%) women are of opinion that employment of women is essential and good in the contemporary situation. While the corresponding figure in Kochutia is only 98 (30.15%). Most of the women felt that women should go out to work only in the context of extreme necessity. It

has been noted in both the villages that the majority of the Muslim women do not want to take up occupations at outside and are content with their traditional roles as home makers, child-bearers and child-rearers.

It has been observed that in the fringe village the women are more liberal than the women of the interior village. It is thus evident that as education increases, the percentage of women having liberal attitude also increases. They think that it is the responsibility of women to earn and support the family. They also believe that jobs are helpful in raising women's status in the family as well as in the society.

In the present study the respondents were asked about their opinion whether economic independence gives women a higher status? It was then found that in Chakmodhu out of 287 females, only 150 (52.26%) respondents disagreed with the statement, while in Kochutia out of 325 females, 227 (69.85%) were disagreed on this issue. The respondents' attitude towards employment of woman in both the villages has been presented in the table 29.

Table - 29

Respondents' Attitude Towards Employment of Women in Chakmodhu and Kochutia

Age category		Chakmodhu			Kochutia		
		Favourable	Unfavourable	Total	Favourable	Unfavourable	Total
16-30	No	81	65	146	47	116	163
	%	28.22	22.65	50.87	14.46	35.69	50.15
31-35	No	41	34	75	39	52	91
	%	14.29	11.85	26.13	12.00	16.00	28.00
46-55	No	13	40	53	9	41	50
	%	4.53	13.94	18.47	2.77	12.62	15.39
56 & above	No	2	11	13	3	18	21
	%	0.70	3.83	4.53	0.92	5.54	6.46
Total		137	150	287	98	227	325
		47.74%	52.26%	100.00%	30.15%	69.85%	100.00%

The table 29 indicates that in fringe village there has been a gradual change in the attitude towards women's employment in comparison to interior village. Mrs. Sufia Khatun an informant of Chakmodhu remarked that without education we could not do anything. She explained "In my youth days we were not allowed to go outside due to parda rules and for this reason I had left my school at the primary level, so I admire for the working women who can stand on her own". Mrs. Sakila of Kochutia is of opinion that in the Muslim society most of the guardians did not consider employment as an important factor for improving the social position of girls. She said "I think education is essential for every girls because it gives them social honour and will also be helpful for their future life". However, other traditional minded and old aged women are of the opinion that "women must stay at home and carry on their household duties. Formal education is harmful to women and so also employment is very shameful for them". Table 29 indicates that in fringe village the traditional outlook has changed more than that of interior village due to the influence of industrialization, urbanization and modern education.

Rules of Inheritance

Inheritance of property is one of the chief function of the kinship system as the social life of a community is basically guided by socio-economic relations between the individuals. What roles the system of kinship plays in rules of inheritance among the Muslims and what are its consequences on the family and social organization among them are discussed here in the following lines.

Among the Muslims the division of property involves a large number of kins. The inheritance rules concern both self-acquired property and the share of ancestral property hold by a person. The property, both movable and immovable, is held individullay by a man or a woman. After death of a person it passes on to his/her heirs. It is a customary rule among the Muslims that after the death of a person, the funeral rites of the deceased are performed from his/her property. If the deceased has any loan, the loan should be repaid out of his/her property. After that remaining property is divided among the heirs. A person can divide the property among his/her heirs while still alive or the heirs can divide the property after his/her death.

According to the Muslim law of inheritance, a man's property is divided in the following way. After the death of a person one-eighth of his property is inherited by his wife (if alive) and the rest by the sons and daughters. But the share of the sons is always double than that of the daughters. All brothers have equal share and so also all the sisters. If the wife is not alive at the time of his death the entire property is divided among his sons and daughters. In a polygamous family all the wives as well as their sons and daughters have the right to share in the proportion mentioned above. If the parents of the deceased are alive, then they also have the right to inherit one-fourth of the share from the property of the deceased. In the absence of parents, wife and daughters, the property is equally divided among the sons. When the deceased has no wife and son at all but has brother, sister

and daughter, in that case the latters have the right to inherit the deceased's property. Here, the most important thing which is to be noted that in the absence of brother, sister and daughter their sons can also claim their share. In the absence of parents, son and daughter, one-fourth of the deceased property is inherited by his wife and the rest by his brothers and sisters. Here also the share of the brother is double than that of the sister. When the deceased person has no children but has parents and wife, then half of his property is inherited by his father, one-fourth by his mother and the rest by his wife. In this case none of the deceased brother and sister will inherit the property as their parents are alive. If the deceased has no children, parents, brothers and sisters, his wife inherit half of his property and the rest by his nephews and nieces.

The daughter in-law does not inherit any part of her father-in-law's property if her husband died during the life-time of his father-in-law. Similarly grand children will not inherit their grand-father's property if their father died during the life time of their grand father.

The division of a woman's property is in the following way. After the death of a woman, half of her property goes to her husband and the rest is divided among her sons and daughters. Here also the son's share is double than that of the daughter's. In the absence of husband, sons and daughters inherit the property. When the woman has no daughter then the sons will inherit the property. Similarly when the women has no son the daughter will inherit the property.

If the deceased woman has no children and her husband is not alive, her property is inherited by her nearest parental kins (father, mother, brothers and brothers' son etc).

These rules reveal that the Muslim law of inheritance is very complex. Property is inherited according to a very elaborate code taking fractions into account. Though inheritance is based on patriarchal principles, wife and daughter come very high in the scale of priority (see table - 30).

The case studies reveal that though daughters have their right over their parental property, but in practice in most of the cases they generally do not get any share. Only in a few cases daughters get their due share particularly in cases where their parents have large holdings or they have no brother and other close parental kins. In the majority of cases daughters get only a fraction of their due share. In several cases daughters do not press their claim as they believe the property of a daughter is given in the form of dowry at the time of their marriage. Also during old age one is generally looked after by his/her sons and not by married daughters, as they live in their husband's house. In several cases it is noted that people do not like to give any immovable property to the daughters, because of the fact that daughters reside at their husband's home in far off places and it is very difficult for them to look after the property. In lieu of the immovable property the people generally prefer to give them cash or items having the same money value.

Though each of the sons have equal right to their father's or mother's property, it is noted that, in most of the cases the division is not equal because of the difference in the degree of affection of their parents and sometimes it even amounts to cheating of one brother by another.

When a person dies without issues and has no nearest consanguinal and affinal kins, distant consanguinal and affinal kins can claim the deceased's property according to their relationship and in most cases these end up in litigation.

When a daughter inherits land, her parental kins fear that the property will leave the descent group and never come into the hands of collaterals. This is the main reason for strenuous attempts by father, brother and other collateral kins to retain land within the lineage and not to allow daughters and sisters to inherit it. All these generates the practice of preferential marriages like parallel and cross-cousin marriage and the resident son-in-law's (Ghar jamai) among the Muslims to keep the property within the same group.

Due to these complex rules of inheritance constant division of cultivable land takes place and for this the cultivable land becomes so small that it cannot be cultivated in most cases. This leads to lack of interest in cultivation and sale of land to others. This is the main cause for land alienation among Muslims in both the villages.

Observation

The economic condition of the Muslims of West Bengal is rather unstable. In fringe village of Chakmodhu the Muslims are basically engaged in industrial work, embroidery wor, petty business, rickshaw pulling, and tailoring, etc. While in interior village Kochutia most of the Muslims are poor peasants, craftsmen and unspecified day labourers.

The female of both the villages are mainly engaged in domestic works. In Chakmodhu out of 547 female, only 8 (1.46%) are main earners and 28 (5.12%) are partial earners. The women earners of Chakmodhu are mostly engaged in embroidery works and only two are engaged in service. But in Kochutia out of 574 , 2 (0.35%) are main earners who mostly engaged in paddy processing works and 35 (6.10%) are partial earners. The employment pattern of the women of Kochutia reveals that 1 (2.70%) is associated with teaching, 1 (2.70%) in tailoring, 11 (29.73%) in paddy processing and 24 (64.87%) are engaged as maid servants. It is to be noted here that most of the Muslim women earners of both the villages are belonging to economically poor category. Due to the system of parda the women are not freely work outside of their homes.

The study shows that though Islam is not against of women's employment, yet for various reasons there are only a very few working women in Muslim families of Chakmodhu and Kochutia.

In both the villages animal husbandry and livestock ownership is one of the most important economic resort of the women. Poultry farming and rearing of cows and goats are the important sources of

income to the women and thereby they contribute something to their family economy, and this gives them some social position and mental satisfaction.

Islam has an equalitarian attitude towards all men and women, but in actual social context the women are enjoying low position in the status hierarchy. It is observed that in urban village of Chakmodhu women are more liberal than that of interior village. Nearly 48% of the women of Chakmodhu are of the opinion that jobs are helpful in raising the women's status in the family as well as in the society, while the corresponding figure in Kochutia is only about 30%. In general the economic condition of the Muslim women is very worse as they totally depended to their male relatives. The system of parda and the traditional norms working as major bottleneck towards women employment in Muslim families.

CHAPTER - 5

EDUCATION OF WOMEN
AND
SOCIAL STATUS

CHAPTER - 5

EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND SOCIAL STATUS

Education is the most important cultural trait since it embraces all others. It is indispensable to any society for the transmission of social heritage of traditions and to help others to acquire new knowledge and techniques. The process of diffusion and acculturation can easily takes place through education.

Islam prescribes that "education is essential for men as well as women to acquire knowledge". Education is a necessary condition which helps women to develop their personality. Though Prophet Muhammad favoured women's education, yet in actual practice the injunction of the Quran in this respect is completely ignored by the Muslims. The Muslim community considers education of girls as unnecessary. As a result, a situation has been developed where Muslim societies are found to be educationally most backward in the contemporary world (Kabir, 1969).

According to the Quran there is no distinction between men and women in the matter of education. It assets "they are losers who be sottedly have slain their children by keeping them in ignorance" (Q :6:14).

The educational status of the Muslims in India is highly depressing and disheartening. They are educationally lagging behind. It has been noted that, the Muslims have entered into the field of modern education at a very late stage. Though correct

census data is not available, it can be estimated that the literacy rate of the Muslims in India is about 48% for male, and 19% for female, with a total of 34% for both the sexes (Hamid:1985).

It has been observed that the female literacy among the Muslims is significantly low and this is one of the important reason of perpetuating low social status of the women. It is also reported that the Muslim educational situation is quite 'dismal'. Out of a total of 3604 Degree Colleges in the country, only 54 are managed by the Muslims, and the Muslims account for 3.5% of all seats available in the technical institutions of the country (Khan : 1978).

It has also been reported that the drop out of the Muslim students from schools and other educational institutions is also of quite a high rate. A sample survey on the educational status of the Muslims of some selected regions of West Bengal reveal the facts that, the enrolment figures of the Muslim students at school level is about 46.38% and it's drop out rate is about 58.97% (Government of India : 1983).

Siddiqui (1984) pointed out that the recession of the Muslims towards socio-economic backwardness and their systematic withdrawal from the mainstream of the country's economy is the legacy of the colonial rule. In his opinion the main factor of socio-economic backwardness of the Muslims is their ignorance and lack of education.

Engineer (1991) has noted that the Muslims in India lag behind other communities in education to a significant extent. He has observed that the percentage of Muslim students, both boys and girls, decreases as the level of education rises, and that of non-Muslim students increases with the level of education. At high school and at higher level, Muslims are at least three to four times behind other communities.

According to Islam acquisition of knowledge is a great duty of woman as of man. Islam suggests the women folk to develop their rational faculties along with physical ones and thus ascend to higher planes of spiritual existence (Qutb 1964).

The Muslim women in India are still very far behind the men in the matter of literacy and education, though increasing efforts are being made to improve this condition. In 1914 the 'All India Women's Conference' was organized, and held its first meeting. Since then meetings have been held annually in various centres of India. The main aim of these organization is the improvement of social condition of the women.

In Muslim society the Mullahs are more powerful on the uneducated masses and they are always opposed to the education of women. But, the educated women have supported girl's education, for instance, the Dowager Begam of Bhopal who came out of her own adherence to parda, for educational and social reform.

Bengal was the typical example of educational backwardness of the Muslims. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the

Bengali Muslims lagged far behind the English education for various socio-economic reasons. But during the mid-nineteenth century there was a change towards English education. Sir Syed Ahmed fought against this tendency and set his co-religionists on the road of modern education during the middle of the nineteenth century. In Bengal the same process was started by Kazi Abdul Bari, Sayed Amir Ali and others during the late nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century a movement was started towards formal education among the upper stratum (Asraf) of the Muslim society. The Muslim masses are gradually realising the necessities of formal education. Now-a-days the Muslims of both upper and lower strata who have better economic position are taking modern education. But due to their various economic and social problems the spread of formal education is not still very remarkable among them.

Educational Problems in Chakmodhu and Kochutia:

Illiteracy is a major social problem of the Muslim women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia villages. Generally they avoid modern education due to various reasons. Between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were several religio-political movements in Bengal in the name of religious revivalism for 'jihad' against the British power and to resist the diffusion and acculturation of western culture. As a matter of fact modern education which was started by the British completely bypassed the Muslim society of that period (Dey, 1982, Mondal, 1989).

Apart from this socio-historical factor, the other major reasons for educational backwardness of the Muslims are as follows:

(1) The economic condition of most of the Muslims is so poor that to spend even a very negligible amount of money for education is a luxury for them.

(2) The social atmosphere is not at all favourable for the spread of education among their women.

(3) Most of the mothers of the villages are illiterate. So they fail to provide any guidance to their children in education.

(4) Due to the parda system most of the women have to discontinue their studies at the primary level.

(5) Lack of awareness on the part of parents regarding importance of female education.

(6) Scarcity of separate educational institutions for women.

Peer (1991) has pointed out that there have been two major reasons for educational backwardness of the Muslims. Firstly, they fear that modern education undermines their religious faith, and secondly discrimination against the Muslims by the other in education and employment.

The educational problem of the women is undoubtedly due to the early age of marriage for which the girls discontinue their education. The parda system is equally responsible for discontinuation of girls' education (Ahmed: 1974, Ahmed: 1981, Mondal: 1987 and Karim: 1980).

The state of education of the Muslims of Chakmodhu village reveals that, out of the total 961 individuals, 314 (32.68%) are illiterate, and 62 (6.45%) are literate. Only 313 (32.57%) and 241 (25.08%) of the villagers have primary and middle education. The percentage of the school final and graduate degree holders are 23(2.39%) and 8(0.83%) respectively.

In Chakmodhu, out of 504 males, 136 (26.98%) are illiterate and 25 (4.96%) are literate. The frequency of primary, middle, school final and graduate standards are 168 (33.33%), 158(31.34%), 12(2.39%) and 5 (0.99%) respectively.

Of the 457 females of Chakmodhu, 178 (38.95%) are illiterate and 37 (8.10%) are literate. The frequency of primary, middle, school final and graduate standards are 145 (31.73%), 83(18.16%), 11 (2.41%) and 3 (0.66%) respectively.

By contrast the educational status of the villagers of Kochutia reveals that out of 1015 individuals, there are 622 (61.28%) illiterate, and 89 (8.77%) literate persons. The frequency of primary, middle, school final and graduates are 122 (12.02%), 125 (12.31%), 43(4.24%) and 14 (1.37%) respectively.

In Kochutia out of 550 males, 281 (51.10%) are illiterate and 74 (13.45%) are literate. The frequency of primary, middle, school final and higher standards are 68 (12.36%), 81 (14.73%), 33 (6%) and 13 (2.36%) respectively.

Of the 466 females of Kochutia, 341 (73.18%) are illiterate and 15 (3.22%) literate. The frequency of primary, middle, school final and higher standards are 54 (11.80%), 44 (9.44%), 10(2.15%) and 1 (0.21%) respectively.

The comparative picture of educational status of the people of two villages reveal that, the rate of overall literacy is slightly higher at the urban adjacent village i.e. Chakmodhu. But the most notable picture is that, the rate of higher education is comparatively better in the interior village (Kochutia) than that of the urban adjacent village. The probable reason behind this is that, the people of the fringe village have no ambition for higher education as there are job opportunities in urban and industrial sector, while in the interior village there are a few landed aristocrats who are in a position to afford sufficient time and money for higher education. Tables 31 and 32 represent the educational status of Chakmodhu and Kochutia.

Attitude Towards Modern Education:

From empirical study it is observed that, among the Muslims there has been less demand for modern education. Among them the old and traditional minded men and women have less interest in modern education for their sons and daughters though they understand the value of it. They are satisfied with their present day situation and always try to solve their immediate economic needs by putting their sons to varieties of occupations, thus they have

Table - 31

Educational Status of the People of Chakmodhu

Age group	Male							Female						
	Ill. Lit.	Lit.	Primary	Middle	Passed SF/HS	High	Total	Ill. Lit.	Lit.	Primary	Middle	Passed SF/HS	High	Total
6-10	16		69				85	22		65				87
11-15	17	4	31	25			77	15	17	30	20			82
16-20	21	3	8	37	2		71	14	12	15	22	3		66
21-25	16	5	16	14	3	1	55	14	4	9	12	4		43
26-30	12	4	10	26	4	1	57	14	1	8	14	3	1	41
31-35	8	3	3	15	-		29	16	1	9	7	1	1	35
36-40	7	2	9	14	-	3	35	13	1	4	3		1	22
41-45	7	1	3	10	2		23	11		1	3			15
46-50	7	1	4	6	1		19	23		3	-			26
51-55	6	1	8	5			20	12	1	-	1			14
56-60	8	-	4	2			14	11		1	1			13
61-65	3	1	-	2			6	7						7
66-70	3		2	1			6	2						2
71-75	5		-	1			6	2						2
76-80	-		-				-	2						2
81 & above	-		1				1	-						-
Total N	136	25	168	158	12	5	504	178	37	145	83	11	3	457
%	36.98	4.96	33.33	31.34	2.39	0.99	100.00	38.95	8.10	31.73	18.16	2.41	0.66	100.0

Note: Ill. Lit. (Illiterate): The person who can not read and write in his mother tongue
Lit. (Literate): The person who can read and write with understanding but not holding school certificate
Primary: The person who passed class IV standard or read beyond the primary stage
Middle : The person those who studied upto class X.
SF/HS : The person who passed school final or higher secondary examination
High : The person who passed the B.A., B.Sc., B.Com or M.A., M.Sc. or M.Com examonation.

Table - 31 (Contd..)

Age group	Total						
	Ill.. Lit	Lit.	Primary	Middle	Passed SF/HS	High	Total
	38	-	134	-	-	-	172
	32	21	61	45			159
	35	15	23	59	5		137
	30	9	25	26	7	1	98
	26	5	18	40	7	2	98
	24	4	12	22	1	1	64
	20	3	13	17	-	4	57
	18	1	4	13	2		38
	30	1	7	6	1		45
	18	2	8	6			34
	19	-	5	3			27
	10	1	-	2			13
	5		2	1			8
	7		-	1			8
	2		-				2
			1				1
	314	62	313	241	23	8	961
	32.68	6.45	32.57	25.08	2.39	0.83	100.00

Table - 32

Educational Status of the people of Kochutia

Age group		Male							Female						
		Ill. lit.	Lit.	Primary	Middle	Passed SF/HS	High	Total	Ill. Lit.	Lit.	Primary	Middle	Passed SF/HS	High	Tot
6-10		50		49				99	49		33	1			83
11-15		39	3	6	23			71	34	1	7	15			57
16-20		28	10	4	17	6	1	66	38	2	3	9	3		55
21-25		27	8	3	14	7	4	63	47	2	3	9	4	1	66
26-30		29	18	2	10	4	2	65	36	1	1	3	1		42
31-35		23	12	1	3	3	2	45	23	3	1	1	-		28
36-40		14	12	1	4	1	2	34	24	1	1	1	1		28
41-45		12	2		2	-	1	18	26	2	2	4	1		35
46-50		20	2		4	2	1	29	22	2	2	1			27
51-55		16	3		2	4		25	7		-				7
56-60		9	3		-	3		15	15		1				16
61-65		10	-		2	1		13	7						7
66-70		3	1			-		4	8						8
71-75		-				1		1	2	1					3
76-80		-				1		1	2						2
-85		1						1	1						1
Total	N	281	74	68	81	33	13	550	341	15	54	44	10	1	466
	%	51.10	13.45	12.36	14.73	6.00	2.36	100.00	73.18	3.22	11.80	9.44	2.15	0.21	100.

Table - 32 (Contd..)

		T o t a l				
Ill. Lit.	Lit.	Primary	Middle	Passed SF/HS	High	Total
99		82	1			182
73	4	13	38			128
66	12	7	26	9	1	121
74	10	6	23	11	5	129
65	19	3	13	5	2	107
46	15	3	4	3	2	73
38	13	2	5	2	2	62
38	4	3	6	1	1	53
42	4	2	5	2	1	56
23	3	-	2	4		32
24	3	1	-	3		31
17	-		2	1		20
11	1			-		12
2	1.			1		4
2				1		3
2						2
622	89	122	125	43	14	1015
61.28	8.77	12.02	12.31	4.24	1.37	100.00

least interest in education. Only a few families in both the villages try to educate their children at the higher standard for getting white collar jobs and high social status in the society. Though the village women generally realise the importance of education, yet due to economic backwardness and various other social reasons they feel no eagerness to educate their sons. They generally try to educate their sons upto the primary or the middle stage for achieving the ability to read and write Bengali and English languages as well as knowledge in simple mathematics so that they may take up semi-skilled or skilled jobs in factories. It is observed that most of the Muslims favour modern education for their children only under good economic condition. They never try to educate their children if they are inadverse economic condition. Therefore in most of the cases they remain illiterate.

In both the villages a very few men and women (estimated about 5.9%) are properly trying to educate their sons and daughters upto higher level for securing skilled, highly skilled and white collar jobs. This is particularly noticed in upper strata of the Muslim families of the villages under study. In general, parents are not ambitious about their children's future career. For various socio-cultural reasons they favour early employment for their children. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia some of them just send their children to school but do not take any proper care to sharpen their performance and withdraw them from school as soon as they develop the earning capability. This is due to the parents illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness and so on. The proper educational

atmosphere is lacking both in Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia. The impoverished economic condition of the Muslims is seriously hampering their women's education. It is observed that, the level of education among the economically well-off families in both the villages are higher than that of the economically backward families. Most of the girls are withdrawn from schools at the age of ten or eleven due to poverty. Girls are also withdrawn from the schools at their early age for arranging their marriage. "Poverty rather than religion is responsible for educational backwardness of the Muslims" (Chitnis : 1983).

Objectives of Education:

The average women of Chakmodhu and Kochutia have reported that their parents do not have any definite aim for their daughters. Basically they want to educate their son to acquire knowledge which would help them in getting a job. They also said that very recently there has been a change in this attitude. Parents now a days have the desire to educate their daughters also.

The educated women have expressed their views that, the major contribution of education has been towards improving their position and has helping them in securing job in necessity. It also gives them a higher position in the family and in the society.

The women who are illiterate or less educated have no clearcut notion about the future aims for their children, while the educated parents are aware of the situation and ambitions for their children. The female students of Chakmodhu remarked that,

'their parents do not have any definite aim for their daughters' education because they do not consider education as an important aspect of social life'. But they think that, education is the most important thing for them as it gives higher status and superior position to the women. In their opinion the girls must continue their studies for the sake of their future life. It has been observed that girls of the younger generation today views education as a direct means of achieving higher social status through employment and economic betterment.

Traditional and Religious Education:

The muslims always try to teach their children about the principles of Islam. So, religious education is an imperative for a Muslim. The Muslims of Chakmodhu and Kochutia believe that religious education is an essential aspect of their education. For the traditionalists the entire function of education is the ability to read and understand the Quran. Traditionally, a person's education should start at the age of four years four months and four days. In upper and middle class families it is done by a Moulvi or a learned religious man, who guides the child to hold a pen and to trace the word Bismillah i.e. the name of Allah on a takhti or a small board. The takhti, and a pen are both made of gold, silver or lesser materials depending on the status of the family. Subsequently, a moulvi is engaged to teach a child or a child is sent to a maktab or Madrasha.

In both the villages it has been noted that girls are more frequent than boys among the maktab goers. The Maktabs or seminaries are usually maintained along with the mosques. Here children are taught Arabic of primary level. They also learn Urdu from this institution. It is a prestigious qualification for the Muslim to know how to read the Quran. In Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia it has been found that more women than men are acquainted with the reading of the Quran.

Now-a-days the school-going children have given less emphasis on the reading of the Quran. At present the parents seem to be concentrating more on school home work rather than on the Quranic lessons. Today, the boys and girls do not find enough time to read the Quran due to their parents' emphasis on school education. So, with the increase of school education, the enthusiasm for the Quran reading is decreasing. Thus it can be said that changes in traditional religious education and the parents' attitude towards it have a very significant impact on the life of the Muslim children, particularly in the context of their school education.

In Muslim society Maktab and Madrasha (seminaries) play the most significant role as sacred instituion, particularly in the context of religion and religious education. In Chakmodhu and Kochutia students are given meticulous training in the correct reading of Quran and namaj. They learn how to make the appropriate niyat for each religious performance and how to do wazu properly. They also learn the correct way of greeting. They are taught how

to behave at the time of listening to Khodba and how to recite the appropriate dowa and darud at the time of milad.

In both Chakmodhu as well as in Kochutia girls are more frequent than boys among maktab or madrasha growers. It is a prestigious qualification for Muslim women of both the villages to know how to read the Quran. It was noticed that more women than men know how to read Quran.

Some house wives in Chakmodhu and Kochutia are running maktabs at their own residence. It was observed that the maktabs running by the women are very popular in the villages, mainly because parents and guardians did not like to send their grown-up girls to the maktabs attached with mosques which are administered by the men mauluvis. Again the teaching hours in the maktabs of house wives were adjusted to suit the majority of the girl students.

Attitude Towards Women Education:

The study of the attitude towards education of women of different ages reveal that there are differences in opinion between the younger and the older generations. The old and traditional minded poeple and the Mullahas generally oppose modern education for women beyond the acquisition of some ability to read the verses of the Quran (of course without understanding their meaning). A great majority of the middle aged women are of opinion

that, women may have education upto the elementary stage to enable them to read the Quran and to read and write in Bengali. This group of women seem to express the extreme traditional view. Yet a few of the middle-aged women as well as a section of the youths have agreed that, some knowledge of Bengali, English and mathematics in addition to reading the Quran is a desirable equipments for the women. They also admit that education of the women at least upto secondary standard is essential for teaching their children at the initial stage. All these people opposed the education of women beyond secondary stage, on the ground that higher education would spoil the girls. They think that with higher education they would not do household work and they would not maintain the rules of parda. They might even run away with some one or arrange their own matches.

Only a few of the educated and modernized women definitely supported higher education for the women. But they say that the increase of educational facilities need not necessarily increase the number of literate women among the Muslims. This is mainly due to the opposition the women receive from their family members. They stated that more education is important for both boys and girls, because it not only awakens an urge for a prestigious position, whether at home or society as a whole, but also helps to retain that position against many hazards of life. Though there are variations in the degree of women's education from urban to rural, the status of women in relation with education is neither possible nor justified.

A middle aged informant of Chakmodhu has stated that in Muslim society education for girls is not considered as an important one. Majority of Muslim mother are against of their daughters' education for various social reasons. But they consider the importance of girl's education and viewed that education gives superior status to the women. The educated mother are of opinion that, education can build up a strong nation by rearing able and ideal citizen, so all mother must be educated. Primary teaching of the children begins from their home . So mothers must be educated.

In the present situation, it has been noted that parents have realised the importance of modern education. In the urban or fringe village modern education has been becoming popular among the Muslim girls particularly among the middle class group. Small group of affluent families still oppose it for traditional reasons, while others regard it as a symbol of modernization. In urban as well as interior areas, the majority of the village people belong to poor economic category, hence poverty is the predominant factor that governs their negative attitude towards girls' education, although they support it.

The respondents feel that education for girl's is not only desirable but also necessary for their children. An informant of Kochutia has expressed that education is essential for girls for improving their social position in the family and in society. Education has become necessary for every female not only for marriage but for her economic independence and social prestige.

Now-a-days, men prefer marrying educated girls. In Chakmodhu about 68% of the respondents agree that education help to improve the girl's status and marriage prospects. While in Kochutia the corres ponging figure is nearly about 39%. The respondents have the desire to educate their daughters. They thought that one of the major role of a mother is to supervise her children's education at home, and to give necessary encouragement to them. It is very interesting to note here that, the Muslim mothers who were agains of their daughter's education even two or three decades ago, now pays attention to their children's education. The table 33 represents respondent's attitude towards girl's education.

Table - 33

Attitude Towards Girl's Education

Age category		Chakmodhu			Kochutia		
		Agree	Dis-agree	Total	Agree	Dis-agree	Total
16-30	No	109	37	146	103	60	163
	%	37.98	12.90		31.69	18.46	
31-45	No	59	16	75	38	53	91
	%	20.56	5.58		11.69	16.31	
46-60	No	30	23	53	22	28	50
	%	10.45	8.02		6.77	8.62	
61 & above	No	9	4	13	9	12	21
	%	3.14	1.39		2.77	3.69	
Total	No	207	80	287	178	147	325
	%	72.13	27.87	100.00	52.92	47.08	100.00

Attitude Towards Co-education:

Co-education is a long standing controversy in India. Among the Muslims seclusion of women is strictly observed and to come in front of strangers is a sin. Most of the men and women are against the system of co-education. Mrs. Ansura a middle aged women remarked, 'the girls will be spoiled if they allow to go to a co-education school'. She also feels that, for adolescent and adult girls the system of co-education is not convenient as it affects the system of parda observance. But today the value system of parda is gradually changing. Even now though the Muslim girls are increasingly going to schools and colleges including the co-educational institutions, yet the old attitude still continues. However, the women of both the villages always prefer the girl's schools or girl's college for their daughters' education.

Even in such an environment there are some progressive families. A respondent of Chakmodhu remarked that her guardians do not feel that the girls will be spoiled if they go to co-education school or college. She herself is a student of co-education college and interacting with other fellow students both boys and girls as friends.

When the question was asked whether co-education was desirable or not, 61.67% percent of respondents in Chakmodhu said that it was undesirable. On the contrary 56.31% in Kochutia objecte to sending their daughters to such an institution. The respondents' attitude towards co-education has been shown in the table 34.

Table - 34

Attitude Towards Co-Education

Age category		Chakmodhy			Kochutia		
		UnFavourable	favourable	Total	UnFavourable	favourable	Total
16-30	No	94	52	146	119	44	163
	%	32.75	19.12	50.87	36.61	13.54	50.15
31-45	No	47	28	75	42	49	91
	%	16.37	9.76	26.13	12.92	13.08	28.00
46-60	No	34	19	53	19	31	50
	%	11.85	6.62	18.47	5.85	9.54	15.39
61 & above	No	2	11	13	3	18	21
	%	0.70	3.83	4.53	0.92	5.54	6.46
Total	No	177	110	287	183	142	325
	%	61.67	38.33	100.00	56.31	43.69	100.00

So, from the above discussion it may be noted that, the changes in the attitude of men towards the emancipation of women is due to the impact of modern education on them. Now-a-days the uneducated women are facing various difficulties not only outside but also at their own home. As for example, the mothers of school going children have today realised the importance of modern education while helping their children in doing day-to-day home-work of their school. It is found that, the members who were initially opposed for girls education, now realized the importance of sending their daughters to schools and colleges for education. Now-a-days aspiration for girls' education is gradually increasing .

Due to spread of education and urbanization some changes have taken place in the family and in society by which women's roles have also changed.

The women, who were interviewed, whole-heartedly supported formal education as necessity for their life. Only the old and illiterate women have advocated that formal education is not essential for their girls. But the educated women have stated that education leads women to economic independence and enlightenment. Thus it can be said that education has definitely contributed to improving their status.

Observation

Islam is never against the education of women. The prophet has proclaimed that one of the most important responsibilities of a father to give education to his children, both boys and girls.

Education plays the very important role in every society. In Muslim society the spread of formal education is not yet very remarkable. Illiteracy is a major social problem of the Muslim women due to social environment, low level of economy, lack of awareness and strict parda practices, etc.

The state of education in Chakmodhu village reveals that there are 32.68% illiterate, 6.45% literate, 32.57% primary, 25.08% middle, 2.39% School Final/Higher Secondary and 0.83 graduate degree holders. While in Kochutia the corresponding figures are 61.28%, 8.77%, 12.02%, 12.31%, 4.24% and 1.37% respectively.

The state of female education in Chakmodhu reveals that there are 38.95% illiterate and 8.10% literate women. The frequencies of primary, middle and school final or higher secondary standards are 31.73%, 18.16% and 2.41% respectively. There is only 0.66% female graduates in this village. While the corresponding figures in Kochutia are 73.18%, 3.22%, 11.80%, 9.44%, 2.15% and 0.21% respectively.

Education of parents seems to be significantly related to the educational level of the respondents. Income also seems to be

another factor with which the education of the respondents is significantly related.

In Chakmodhu and Kochutia it has been noted that old and traditional minded women are less interested in their children's education, especially in girls' education. The women of both the villages have thought that their parents did not have any definite aim for their education. The majority of the women have said that education is necessary for acquiring knowledge and for achieving higher position in family and society. In Chakmodhu 68% of the women have thought that education is an agency which will improve the status of women, while in Kochutia only 39% of the women have the similar kind of thinking.

The positive response to female education is not very enthusiastic in both the villages. Poor economic condition, lack of awareness etc. are seriously affecting education of the women. Majority of the aged women have the idea that higher education will spoil the girls and they will not maintain the rules of parda. In their view the women must stay at home and should not go out for education and employment. Only a few educated and forward looking women whole-heartedly supported higher education for girls. They consider that primary teaching of the children begins from their mother, so all mothers should be educated.

In Chakmodhu only 61.67% of the parents object to send their daughters to co-educational schools, while in Kochutia the

corresponding figure is 56.31%. This is due to the system of parda and the traditional conservative attitude of the village people.

Due to impact of modern education, urbanization and modernization some changes have taken place in family and in society and through which women's role have also changed to a certain extent. The above findings clearly indicate that education has definitely contributed to improve the status of Muslim women in both the villages under study.

CHAPTER - 6

THE PARDA AND STATUS OF WOMEN

CHAPTER - 6

THE PARA AND STATUS OF WOMEN

The Concept of Parda:

Islam does not forbid women from going outside their houses for busines 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 face 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 women 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 charlemague", says that under Grecian law a women 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 khirkiis 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 Hasan, Lady Abul Qadir, Lady Muhammad Shafi, Begum Shah Nawaz, Lady Imam, the Ladies of the Tyabji, Rahimtoola and Chinoy familes 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 Bhatty (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 matriliny.

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 femine 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 idelogy 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 urbanizati 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 indispensible 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 chanc 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 cirlce of interaction, which has denied her greater opportunity. He also pointed out that parda has hindered the various activities which are eminently suite 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 vialibility 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 chance 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 saw 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 at 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 informa 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 (bonaior 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 incist that she observes parda and confines her social contacts to the females only. Husbands and wives can not talk in the presence of other edlderly kins. The women generally veil their face before their elderly relatives and usually disappear into the backroomds 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 embroidary 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 infront 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 cirlce 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 ocassionally 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 youngers 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 indispensalbe 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 follows 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.

CHAPTER - 7

GENERAL OBSERVATION
AND
CONCLUSION

CHAPTER - 7

GENERAL OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSION

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 idealy 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 Ummah 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 therights 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, Waahabi 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 existance 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 is 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 harrassment to the women.

The practice of dowry is a very common feature among the Muslims of the villages under study. However, the system of <u>mehar</u> 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 fring 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, craftmen 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 sanction the share of property rights to the women and allow them to earn in a made 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 bedome 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 retarted 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 opportunitieis 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. Chid-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 fo 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, jewellary 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 persmission 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 retarted 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 beenanegligence 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.

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A P P E N D I X E S

APPENDIX - I

GLOSSARY OF SOME MUSLIM TERMS

Adam	The First man created by God.
Allah	God.
Ahmadia	A Muslim sect popularly known as Qadiani. It ows its name after its leader Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. This sect emerged out of reform movement with the objectivity to combine a spirit of Islamic orthodoxy, a sence of dedication for the preservation of traditional values and a tendency towards some sort of new liberalism. The position of Ahmadia sect is controversial since its leader proclaimed himself as a Prophet.
Aqiqa	A ritual observed by sacrificing the cattle on the name of God for long life and good health of the new born baby.
Ajlaf	It is a status or class category in Muslim Society. Ajlafs are the indigenous Muslims. They enjoy a low status in Muslim community. The term is used for the converted Muslim group especially from lower Hindu caste.
Ajan	Call for prayer.
Amir	Richman.
Asraf	The term used to identify the Muslims claiming descent from the four groups of foreign extraction or origin, namely Sayyad, Shaikh, Mughal and Pathan. They enjoyed higher position in Muslim society. It is a status category in Muslim society.

Ayat	Stanza from the Quran
Baquar id	A day of sacrifice.
Barelvi	A sub sect within the Sunni sect which adherent of the religious (Sunni) philosophy as interpreted by Ahmed Raza Khan of Bareilly in U.P. The followers of this school tend to acept without much criticism the traditional social, cultural and religious customs of the people. Consequently the presence of vast amount of elements of little tradition is noticed among them. They are much more integrated with the local society. They are traditionalists and thus less influenced by fundamentalism and modernism. Clientship of the Saint or Pir is an another important character of this group and they believe in its hereditary form. Majority of the Bengal Muslims, particularly the peasants are belonging to this category.
Beradari	Brotherhood based of kinship i.e. kin circle.
Bhabi	Brother's wife.
Burkha	Loose garment of black or white colour covering the entire body with veiled, opening of the eyes, worn by Muslim women. The use of Burkha among the women of Bengal Muslim Community is very uncommon.
Chhotoloke	A status category consisting the people of degraded nature.
Chhotojat	Ethnic or Social groups of low status.

Deobandi	A sub sect within Sunni sect adherent of the religious view point represented by the Deoband Theological Seminary situated at Saharanpur in Western Uttar Pradesh. The basic objective of this school is to purify the Sunni Hanafis from a number of practices those they have retained in their little tradition. The Pre-Islamic past of the Muslims are denounced and concemned by this school. Islamization in pure form is the basic objective of this school. They do not accept the hereditary nature of Pirism, but follow it only by considering their capability in religious field. They have the missionary wing called Tablique-jamat.
Deor	Husband's younger brother
Dulabhai	Elder Sister's husband. In several areas of Bengal Dulabhai is also called Bonai.
Esha	The prayer time after sunset.
Garibloke	A status category among the Muslims, basically to indicate the ppor people or commoners both in economic and cultural temms.
Hadish	Tradition i.e. the recorded sayings of the Prophet, what He said and did.
Haj	Pilgrimage to Mocca
Haji	The person who performed haj in Mocca.
Halua	Variety of traditional sweet dish prepared in Muslim households.
Hijra	The Prophet's journey from Medina to Mocca. The Muslim era dates from this year i.e. A.D. 622.

Id-ul-Fitar	First day of the month of Shawal. It is marked by breaking of Ramjan fast (roja), congregation prayer and helping of poor. It is the most important religious festival of the Muslims.
Izzat	Prestige and respect.
Jamaat	Gathering of the people.
Jat	Endogamous social unit (grouping) enjoying specific status in the society.
Jamidar	Landlord, popularly known as Aimadar in Muslim Society.
Jori	Gold or silver threads usually used for embroidery works.
Jumma	Friday prayer.
Kaba	The sacred house in Mocca around which there are Pilgrims for performing Haj.
Kabar-Sthan	Burial ground of the Muslims.
Kafir	Non believer of God (Allah).
Kalema	A pillar of Islam, which belief in one God and Muhammad is its last Prophet.
Kazi	The Muslim judge. Also to mean the Muslim marriage registrar.
Khandan	The lineage members i.e., the Consanguinal kin group which traces common descent through known ancestors. In Bengal Muslims Commonly call it Bangso.
Khirki	Backside of the homestead usually meant for the use of the women due to Parda rules.
Khir	Sweet dish prepared from rice and sugar or molases.
Masjid	Mosque i.e., the house of prayer.

Madrasha	School which teaches Islamic tradition among the learners.
Mauluvi	A man learned in Islamic knowledge. Also called as Mullah i.e. the Muslim priest and teacher.
Magrib	Daily evening prayer particularly after sunset.
Majlis	Social on religious gathering of the people.
Mazar	Abode or tomb of the Muslim Saint or Pir.
Mehar	Dower promised by the groom to his bride at the time of marriage.
Mehaman	Respectable and honourable guests.
Milad Sharif	Religious discourse by recitation of religious book, which held on various socio-religious occasions of the Muslims.
Milad-un-Nabi	Birthday of the Prophet.
Mohalla	Neighbourhood. Also called as malat or grami.
Muharram	First month of the Muslim Calendar. A religious festival is also held on this month to commemorate the martyrdom of Hassan and Hussain-the son of Ali
Mughal	An ethnic and social category among the Muslims, who are the descended from Mughal conquerors in India.
Mujahab	Groupings based on religious laws and faiths.
Namaj	The Islamic form of prayer or worship.
Na-pak	Impurity.
Nawab	Muslim ruler or emperor.
Nandai	A kin term to refer husband's sister's husband.
Nikah	Marriage.
Nikah-nama	Certificate of Muslim marriage.

Orna	A piece of cloth meant to cover head and shoulders of the women.
Pan	Betel leaf .
Pak or Paksaf	Cleanliness and purity.
Panchayat	Informal village Council. Also known as Soloana .
Parda	Seclusion and Veiling of women
Pak-Panja-tan	Sacred five in Islam.
Pathan	An ethnic and social category of the Muslims. They claimed to have descended from Afgan conquerors.
Pir	Muslim Saint. Also called as Sufi .
Qadiria	A Sufi order which believe in freedom of will.
Quran	The revealed word of God i.e., Allah recorded in the holy book.
Quresh	A tribe of Middle East.
Rabi-al-awal	Third month of Islamic Calendar.
Ramjan	Nine month of Islamic calendar. Considered as holy month of daily fasting. In this month the Quran was revealed to the Prophet.
Roja	Fasting.
Riba	Interest and usury.
Rishta	Marriage proposal. Also to mean kinship and relationship.
Sabab	Virtue, good action.
Sadar	The front side of the home usually used by the male members.

Salam	The Islamic way of greeting, by bowing down, with the righthand raised to the forehead as a mark of respect.
Sayyad	An ethnic and social category among the Muslims, who occupy the highest rank. They believed to have come (descended) from the daughter of the Prophet and her husband Ali, the fourth Khalifa of Islam.
Seemai	A special kind of sweet dish cooked with milk.
Shafei	A school of Islamic jurisprudence.
Shariat	The sacred laws of Islam. The main source of its guidance is the Quran and the Hadish.
Shabe-barat	Fourteenth day of the month of Shaban in Islamic Calendar. Muslims believe that the God records the duties of his believers for the ensuing year on this night.
Sharbat	Soft drink, consisting of mixture of sugar and water.
Shaikh	An ethnic and social category among the Muslims enjoying superior position in Muslim society. The literary meaning of Shaikh is the chief. They believed to have descended from Arab ancestors.
Shia	A Muslim sect, followers of Ali, the fourth Khalifa of Islam.
Shirni	Sweet distributed after religious offerings.

Silsila	The school of thought and action of a specific Sufi order. Each of the Pir cultivate their spiritual practices according to particular order called Silsila.
Sunnah	The precepts and practices of the Prophet.
Sunnat	Religious obligation.
Sura	Any of the Chapters (114) of the Quran.
Sunni	A religious sect of the Muslims. It is the largest Muslim sect. Its followers believe in the elected caliphate. The Sunnis are the traditionalists.
Talak	Divorce .
Taravi	Special Muslim Prayer during the month of Ramjan.
Tajiya	Representation of the mousoleum or tombs of Hassan and Hussain, sons of Ali, who lost their lives at Karbala.
Tauhid	The belief in the oneness of God.
Ucchu-jat	Higher status people on the basis of ethnic and cultural superiority.
Wahabi	A sub sect within the Sunni sect.
Wazu	Ritual Purification of body prior to prayer or namaj .
Zakat	An Islamic approach of tax payment. About 40% of the personal income of every kind is levied on Muslims for the relief of the poor.
Zelhaj	Twelve month of Islamic Calendar. The occasion of Pilgrimage to holy Mocca takes place on this month.
Ziyarat	To pay homage.

PRELIMINARY CENSUS
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL, Dt. DARJEELING - 734430
DOCTORAL RESEARCH SCHEME
Scholar—Rokaiya Begum

Serial No.— Village— J. L. No. Panchayat— Police Station—

Block— Sub-Division— District—

Informant's Name— Age— Sex—

Mother tongue— Family Income—

Bilingualism, if any— Religion— Sect—Sunni/Shia/Ahel-e-Hadish (Wahabi)/others (specify) Sub-Sect—Barelvi/Deo-bandi/others (specify)

Theological School—Hanafi/Malaki/Shafei/Hanbali. Mojahab— Ferka— Ethnic Group, Social Group, jat—Sayyad/Shaik/Mughal/Pathan/Mallick/Ansari/Julaha/Khan/Shah/others (specify) Status Group—Boroloke/Garibloke/Ashraf/Aimadar/Khas/Miya/Ajlaf/Arzal/Aam/Chhasa/others (specify).

Iradat (Affiliation to pir)— Mureed— Khanquah & Silsila— Khandan—

Traditional occupation— Total Land holding—(i) HomeStead— (ii) Cultivable Land—

Sl. No.	Name	Sex	Age	Relation to Head	Birth Place	Duration of stay in the village/ year of migration	Marital status	If married					Occupation			Economic status	Individual land holding	Education
								Age	Types	Forms	Payment	Distance	Primary	Secondary	Place of work			

Household & Transport Equipments;
Radio/T. V./T. R./R. P./Cycle/Motor Cycle/others (specify)

Live stocks :

Remarks :

Signature :

Dated :

Research Schedule

Women in Muslim Society of Rural West Bengal

Name of the Scholar :- Rokaiya Begum
Deptt. of Sociology & Social Anthorpology
University of North Bengal, Dt. Darjeeling
Pin—734430

1. Name :

2. Address in full :

3. Age :

4. Education of respondent :

5. Marital Status :

6. Education of husband :

7. Place of Birth :

8. Place of Residence :

9. Social group :

10 Does your family keep a servant Full time/part time. Yes/No,

II Family Data :

1. Who is the head of the family ? Self/Father/Husband/Mother/Other specific
2. What is your total family income ? (from all sources and persons)

3. In your family who makes the final decision on the following ?

	Head of the family	Jointly	Self
a) Family budgeting :			
b) Purchase or real estate :			
c) Purchase of consumer goods :			
d) Schooling of children :			
e) Career of children :			
f) Marriage of children :			
g) Rituals & festivals :			

4. In your family who spends the family income ?

5. How do you manage your household responsibilty on the following :

	Alone	Sharing with relatives	Sharing with husband
a) Cooking and serving food :			
b) Purchase of grocery and vegetable :			
c) Washing clothes and utensils :			
d) Cleaning the house :			
e) Care of Children :			
f) Care of Sick :			
g) Help children in studies :			

6 Do you observe in your family the following traditional customer :	Always	Some time	Never
a) Female members eating only after male members :			
b) Female members standing in presence of male member :			
c) Seperate appartment for women :			
d) Restriction on the freedom of women outside the family ? (Social visits, Shopping etc)			
e) Restriction on travelling :			
f) Restriction on going out for work :			
g) Restriction on meeting outside people :			
h) Preferential treatment for boys over girls : (in serving food, education and other privileges at home etc) :			
i) Restriction on entertaining (receiving guests] :			

III Educational Data

1. Who prompted you to get education ?

2. What is your objective of education ?

3. At what age did you get married ?

4 Do you feel there is restriction in education in your community ?

Always Some times Never

5. Do you prefer higher education for your son ?

6. Do you prefer higher education for your daughter ?

7. Do you prefer co-educational study for your children ?

8. Reasons for not continuing further studies of the respondent :

9. Reasons for not continuing further studies of the respondent children.

IV Women In The Wider Society :

1. Are you a member of any professioal or cultural organization ?
   1. President
   2. Secretary
   3. Committee members
   4. Ordinary members.

2. Do you participate in the activities of the orgnization ?
   1. Very Actively
   2. Actively

3. Do you go alone or need company when you go out ?
   1. Yes
   2- No

4. When you go out for shopping, how do you go ?
   1. Alone
   2. With friends
   3. With husband/relatives
   4, No shopping.

5. What is your attitude towards eating in restaurants ?
   1. Favourable
   2. Unfavourable

6. How often do you go to restaurants ?
   1. Occasionaly
   2. Rarely
   3. Never.

7. How do you usually spend your leisure time ?
   1. Listening to Radio
   2 Reading
   3 Going for movies
   4 Special [others]

8. Do you spend time in traditional hobbies. [sewing, knitting etc].
   1. Yes
   2. No

9. Do you read Newspaper/magazines
   1. Dialy
   2. Occasionally
   3 Never.

10. What are your extracurricular activities ?
    1. Singing
    2. Dancing
    3. Athletics
    4. Anyother [specific]

11. Did you vote in the last election ?
    1. Yes
    2. No

12. Are you interested in politics ?
    1. Yes
    2. No

13. Do you discuss politics with people you know ?
    1. Always
    2. Never
    3. Sometimes

14. Do you know the members of women members, their ratio in different political parties in your area ?
    1. Yes
    2. No

V Attitudes Towards Certain Practices :

1. What is your attitude towards dowry system ?
    1. Approve
    2. Disapprove

2 Do you consider that dowry sytem gives status to a woman ?
    1. Yes
    2. No

3. According to you what is the appropriate age of marriage for the girl.

4. What is your attitude towards choice of partner.
    1. Parents selection
    2. Individual selection

5. What sort of marriage is yours

1. Arranged
2. Love marriage

6. If love marriage what was the reactions of your family members

1. Favourable
2. Unfavourable

7. In the view of changing social conditions do you propose to abolish the ethnic/class hierarchy

	ethnic	class
1.	Yes	Yes
2.	No	No

8. Do you approve of inter religions marriage

1. Approve
2. Disapprove

9 Do you approve of divorce

1. Approve
2. Disapprove

10. Do you approve of widow remarriage

1. Approve
2. Disapprove

11. Do you approve of polygamy

1. Approve
2. Disapprove

12. Do you approve of equal right for men and women

1. Approve
2. Disapprove

13. Do you think that woman should have equal status with men in society

1. Yes
2. No

14 What is your reaction towards modern dress (ultra modern dresses etc)

1. Approve
2. Disapprove

15. According to you what is the ideal number children ?

16. What is your attitude towards family planning
    1. Approve
    2. Disapprove

17. What is your attitude towards employment of women
    1. Favourable
    2. Unfavourable

18. Do you think that employment and education gives them a higher status in Society ?
    1. Yes
    2. No

19 What are your relaltives attitude towards working women ?
    1. Favourable
    2. Unfavourable

VI Attitude Towards Religion :

1. Do you pray regularly ? Yes / No

2. Do you think that it is essential ? Yes / No

3. Do you observe fasting (during Ramzan) ? Yes / No

4. Do you think fasting is necessary ? Yes / No

5 Do you read Religious book ? (Quran) Yes / No

6. How often ? Daily / Weekly / Monthly / once in a year / Never

7. Have you visited any religious place ? Yes / No