

CHAPTER - 2

ISLAM, MUSLIM SOCIETY AND WOMEN

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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 Mokka. The Prophet's father Abdullah came from this stock. He married a lady of the Zuharathan, 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 idolatry. He used to go to Mount Hera near the city of Mokka to pass his time in meditation 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 Mokka, 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 Mokka 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 Mokka. Now the question arises, what circumstances helped the prophet to organize the lower (oppressed) class? Researches have been made on the social organization of Mokka 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 Mokka were the most important clans, yet the real functional units of pre-Islamic Mokka 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 middlemen, the debtor class, the wage-earners and the clients. Due to commercial orientation of the Mokka 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 Mokka 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 Mokka. 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 Mokka. 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 Mokka. 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 ruler 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 preach 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 Khalipheth 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 reign 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 Mokka 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 (beahast).

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 agglomeration 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 based. 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. The 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 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 the middle east (Central Asia, West Asia, Afganistan, 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 Khanguals (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), Wahabi (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, Wahabis 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 tabligh. In comparison to the Barelvīs 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 Tabligh-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 incarnation 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 i.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.

Waaahabi (Ahl-e-Hadish)

The followers of Ahl-e-Hadish are popularly known as Waaahabi. 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 Waaahabis also believe in the democratic nature of the Khalifate on the issue of succession to the prophet. But the Waaahabis 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 follow 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 pre-Islamic and extra-Islamic tradition 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 seen 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 jatis or Hindu castes (Ahmad : 1973, Ansari : 1960, Berth : 1960, Bhatta-charya : 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 scavenging, 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 correlate 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, Tamilnad 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.

Rizvi and 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 non-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 masses and 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 stratified 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 whatsoever 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 Iraq 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 practiced 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 position 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 'SILM', 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.

In spite 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 empirically 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, subjects, 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.