

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 (B)	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 (42.80%) 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 it 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), Conkin (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) wife's, daughter's husband's sons or their grand or 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 become 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	<u>No. of families</u>	
	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
<u>Under Female Headship</u>		
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	<u>No. of families</u>	
	No.	%
1. Father with married son and widow grand mother	2	0.88
2. Father with married son and unmarried 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 , unmarried 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
<u>Under Female Headship</u>		
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 Members:

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 blessedness 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 daughters. 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 veiled 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 (bhabhi) 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 (bhabhi) 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 veiled 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 namaž (Friday prayer). Children of Chakmodhu and Kochutia learn namaž 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 namaž. Girls are often taught namaž within their families by the senior ladies. The elders usually take care in teaching the youngsters 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 expended 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 superior 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 Chakmodhu and Kochutia reveals that, the majority of the Muslim women stay at home 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.	Widower	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			Total	Female			Total	Total			Total
	Unmar.	Mar.	Widower		Unmar.	Mar.	Widow		Unmar.	Mar.	Widower/ widow	
-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 divorced lady.

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 grandparents 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 female 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		Age(X)	Female	
	Frequency (F)	(FX)		Frequency (F)	(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:

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

Mean age at marriage for Chakmodhu female:

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

Table - 16Age 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 in such 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 jewellery, 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 wives. 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 become 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 contract (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/~~Rs.~~50,000/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 it 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 extremely 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 transgresses 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 decree for the dissolution of her marriage on any one or more of the following grounds:

- i) the whereabouts 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 or his suffering from leprosy or a virulent venereal disease,
- vii) option of puberty before the wife attains the age of eighteen, provided the marriage has not been consummated.
- 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 polygyny 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		(b) In the village		
Daily	Occasional	Daily	Weekly	Occasional
Five times daily prayer in home such as <u>Fajar</u> (at morning), <u>johar</u> (at noon), <u>Ashar</u> (at afternoon), <u>Mokrob</u> (at evening), <u>Esha</u> (at night)	<u>Shabe-Barat</u> , <u>Roja</u> , <u>Kurbani</u> .	Five times daily prayer in the village Mosque	Friday-prayer or <u>Jummah-namaj</u> in the village mosque	<u>Muharram</u> , <u>Akhri-char-Shanbah</u> , <u>Fathihah-i-duwar-daham</u> , <u>Fathihahi-ya-j-Dahum</u> , <u>Id-Ul-Fitar</u> , <u>Id-ud-juha</u>

Table -20Major 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. Am hiri-char-Shanbah	In the last Wednesday of Safar	Prayer, fasting
3. Fatihahi-duwa2-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 <u>Quran</u> was revealed
7. Id-ul-fiter	First day of Shawal	Completion of the month-long fast of Ramjan, i.e. <u>Roja</u>
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-duwax-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,	6) Jamadi-ul-Soni	(10) Shawal,
2) Safar	7) Rajab,	(11) Zel-Kod, and
3) Rabi-ul-Awal	8) Shaban,	(12) Zel-Hoj.
4) Rabi-ul-Soni		
5) Jamadi-ul-Awal	9) Ramjan	

Of these twelve months in Islamic Calendar, the month Robiul-awal is the most important, because Prophet Muhammad was born on this month. Several 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 villages to distribute it among the poorer. 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 Khbir at their respective home for offering it to the poorer. 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 poorerers 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 lunch and dinner. Family fitara is also distributed among the peorers 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 specifically 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 attend such 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-2-Juhar) this prayer may be offered any time after the sun begins to decline from its zenith until it is about midway on its course to setting.

(c) The Mid-Afternoon Prayer (Salatu-I-Ashar) which begins 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 sunset extends till the red glow in the western horizon disappears.

(e) The Evening Prayer (Salatu-I-Esha), 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 interested in 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
31-35	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 changing. 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 contrast 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.