

CHAPTER - 4

THE VILLAGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES
AND
THE WOMEN

CHAPTER - 4

THE VILLAGE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND THE WOMEN

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

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

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

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

Household And Economic Status:

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

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

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

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

Table - 23

Economic status of the people of Chakmodhu

| Age | Male | | | | Female | | | | Total | | | |
|---------|--------|----------------|-----------|--------|--------|----------------|-----------|--------|--------|----------------|-----------|--------|
| | Earner | Partial Earner | Dependent | Total | Earner | Partial Earner | Dependent | Total | Earner | Partial Earner | Dependent | Total |
| -5 | - | - | 108 | 108 | | | 99 | 90 | | | 198 | 198 |
| 6-10 | - | - | 85 | 85 | | | 97 | 97 | | | 182 | 182 |
| 11-15 | - | 9 | 68 | 77 | 1 | 6 | 66 | 73 | 1 | 15 | 134 | 150 |
| 16-20 | 9 | 25 | 37 | 71 | | 8 | 51 | 59 | 9 | 33 | 88 | 130 |
| 21-25 | 25 | 18 | 12 | 55 | 3 | 7 | 29 | 39 | 28 | 25 | 41 | 94 |
| 26-30 | 42 | 7 | 8 | 57 | | 4 | 44 | 48 | 42 | 11 | 52 | 105 |
| 31-35 | 27 | 1 | 1 | 29 | 3 | 1 | 31 | 35 | 30 | 2 | 32 | 64 |
| 36-40 | 34 | 1 | - | 35 | | | 23 | 24 | 34 | 2 | 23 | 59 |
| 41-45 | 23 | - | - | 23 | | 1 | 15 | 16 | 23 | 1 | 15 | 39 |
| 46-50 | 17 | 1 | 1 | 19 | | | 26 | 26 | 17 | 1 | 27 | 45 |
| 51-55 | 18 | 1 | 1 | 20 | | | 14 | 14 | 18 | 1 | 15 | 34 |
| 56-60 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 14 | | | 13 | 13 | 5 | 1 | 21 | 27 |
| 61-65 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 | | | 7 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 13 |
| 66-70 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| 71-75 | 1 | | 5 | 6 | | | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 7 | 8 |
| 76-80 | | | - | - | | | 1 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| 85 | 1 | | - | 1 | | | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Total n | 205 | 69 | 338 | 612 | 8 | 28 | 511 | 547 | 213 | 97 | 849 | 1159 |
| | 33.50 | 11.28 | 55.22 | 100.00 | 1.46 | 5.12 | 93.42 | 100.00 | 18.38 | 8.37 | 73.25 | 100.00 |

Table - 24
Economic status of the people of Kochutia

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

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

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

Table -25

Occupational pattern of the people of Chakmodhu

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

Table - 26

Occupational pattern of the people of Kochutia

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

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

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

Table - 27

Monthly Family Income of the People
of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

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

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

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

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

Jori work or Embroidery work

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

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

In Chakmodhu village there are 82 (29.93%) males and 33 (91.56%) females engaged in this activity. The jori work is also done by both the boys as well as the girls.

Case Studies:

Case Study 1 —

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

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

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

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

Case Study 2 —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Case Study - 3:

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

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

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

Case Study-4:

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

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

and also observe fast during Ramjan mothⁿ".

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

Caste Study-5:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economic position and participation of women

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

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

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

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

Table - 28

Incidence of livestock ownership
of Chakmodhu and Kochutia

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

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

Women's place in Family Economy:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table - 29
 Respondents' Attitude Towards Employment of Women in Chakmodhu and Kochutia

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

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

Rules of Inheritance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Observation

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

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

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

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

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

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