

CHAPTER - IV

SOCIAL LIFE OF NASHYA SHEIKHS OF NORTH BENGAL: PAST AND PRESENT

This chapter looks into the social life of the *Nashya Sheikhs* of North Bengal their Past and Present condition of this community. The *Nashya Sheikh* or *Nasya Sekh* is a Muslim community, inhabitants of the northern parts of West Bengal. They are culturally and linguistically similar to both Rangpuri people of northern Bangladesh and Goalpariya people of Assam. Though small in number, a section of people of Purnia in the neighbouring state of Bihar belong to that community and locally they are known as the Bengali Sheikh. With reference of some regional names, more commonly they are known as the *Rajbangsi Muslims*.¹ The *Nashya* are considered to be an important indigenous group found in northern West Bengal, particularly in North Bengal. They concentrated in the districts of Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda district of Chachol and Gajol.² They are homogeneous with the Koch Rajbangsi people and also, they are bi-lingual – one is Bengali language and another is Rajbangsi language or Kamatapuri language. Outside home or in occupational sphere they used both Bengali and Rajbonshi language but in-home setting they prefer Rajbonshi language for communication.³ Rajbangsi's were originally the practitioners of animism, but later on they converted themselves to Hinduism. Although they converted to Hinduism but they were loose followers of Hinduism, but gradually a small section of this people (mainly *Koch, Rajbonshi, Mech, Polia*) converted to Islam.⁴ The local Hindus started calling them '*Nostoseikh*' that means, impure Sheikh or spoiled Sheikh. This conversion of small section influenced many, which resulted major sections conversion into Islam from Hinduism and collaborated with mainstream Muslims. This association impacted

their name '*Nostoseikh*' which slowly got Islamised and turned them into '*Nashya sheikh*'.⁵ The *Nashya's* trace their origin into the indigenous communities of Koch Rajbangsi of northern part of West Bengal. Their conversion to Islam is said to have taken over from few centuries, and the *Nashya* still retain many cultural traits of their pre-Islamic past.⁶ Most of the traditional people of the community are non-practitioner of Muslim beliefs and practices but the newer generations are becoming more Islamic and the number is increasing day by day due to the impact of globalization.⁷

The *Nashya Sheikhs* as a community were once strictly endogamous but their marriage with mainstream Bengali Muslims brought them closer to the Bengali culture. Their physical appearance seems to be more similar to Bengalis rather than Rajbangsi people. They are divided into lineages such as Bepari, Pramanik, Sarkar, Rahaman, Ali, Miah, Islam and Sekh etc. Each of these lineage groups did intermarry among them. The community is mainly following Hanafi school of Sunni Islam.⁸ The community have set up their own political and cultural organization, the Uttar Bango Angrassar Muslim Sangram Samiti, which acts as pressure group for this community. The Government of West Bengal so far identified *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim as OBCs on the basis of their occupation and socio-economic condition.⁹ Currently the people of *Nashya Sheikh* Community in North Bengal, they are politically united through the *Nashya Sheikh* Development Forum (*Uttarbanga Nashya Sheikh Unnayan Mancha*).¹⁰

Cooch Behar was a feudatory princely state merged with Indian union on 28th August 1949 and became a district of West Bengal on 1st January, 1950. Prior to merger it was ruled by the famous Koch king for about four hundred and forty years (1510-1949). Before the Koch king the land earlier called Kamtapur was under the procession of the Khen dynasty.

The present Cooch Behar is situated in the North Eastern part of West Bengal. It is roughly triangular in shape, sandwiched between Assam and Bangladesh. Its total land area is

about 3,087.0 sq. km., of which 60 per cent is low and 40 per cent is high land. Cooch Behar is rich in water resources. The famous rivers are Tista, Torsa, Raidhak, Gadadhar etc. The district is important for its paddy, jute and tobacco product.

According to 1981 census Cooch Behar had a population of 1,771,643 (male 915,461 and female 456,182) its location is composed of a variety of ethnic stocks, mainly of Indo-Mongoloid and mixed origin.¹¹ Harendra Narayan Chowdhuri's account in 'History of Cooch-Bihar' (1908) reveals that the population of different sections of Muslims were Moghals-49, Pathans including Sayyads-1,146 and sheikhs including Nashyas-1,69,551.¹² He further stated, 'By far the majority of the Muslims are the Sheikhs or they are popularly called *Nashyas*. They are, like the greater portion of the Mahomedans of India, Descendants of the Hindu converts to the religion of Mahammed. The title *Nashya* is significant in this respect. It is generally believed to be the corrupted form of '*Nashta*', which means 'fallen' or 'degenerated' and thus appears to be the most probable nick-name which the Hindu subjects of a Hindu principality would give to their converted co-religionists. Different ethnic and religious groups lived together. Majority of them are Hindu some are Muslims and few are Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, political relations between the Koch dynasty and the Mughals. This led to the establishment of peace and interaction between Koch kings and Muslims.¹³

On the other hand, Jalpaiguri was the Northern most districts in pre-1947 Bengal. It was bounded on the west by the Purina District of Bihar and Darjeeling district, on the North by the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan and also Darjeeling district, on the south by the district of Rangpur and Dinajpur and princely state of Cooch Behar and on the east by Goalpara district of Assam. In 1947, under the Radcliffe award the five police stations of Patgram, Tetulia, Pachagar, Boda and Debagang went to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Dinajpur district was one of the largest districts in undivided Bengal. The area of Dinajpur district was 3,986 square miles. According to the 1911 census, the population of

Dinajpur district was 1, 6,463. Dinajpur, the main town of the district, was situated on the left bank of the *Punarbhaha* River. During the partition of the country in 1947, West Dinajpur district was formed with the western part of the district and West Dinajpur district was included in West Bengal. Balurghat is the district headquarters of West Dinajpur district. In 1992, the former West Dinajpur district was re-divided into South and North Dinajpur districts for administrative convenience. Itahar, Raiganj, Kaliaganj, Hematabad, Karandighi, Chakulia, Gayalpekhar, Islampur and Choprablokniye North Dinajpur districts were formed. It is pertinent to mention that in 1947, Islampur was shifted from Purnia district of Bihar to West Dinajpur district. As a result, a large section of the Muslim community in Uttar Dinajpur district came from Bihar.

Muslim rule in Bengal was established in 1201 AD with the conquest of Bengal by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji. After defeating Lakshman Sen, Bakhtiyar Khalji stayed in Nadia for some time and then established his capital at Gaur. In a short time Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered the entire *Barind* land. However, despite the conquest of the *Barind* lands, the Muslim rulers could not occupy East Bengal during the Mughal period due to geographical reasons. However, in East Bengal, the Muslim Sufi saint Shah Jalal and other Sufi communities preached Islam. Under the influence of Shah Jalal, many Hindus converted to Islam. It is pertinent to mention that before the partition of the country in 1947, Hemang Biswas, a mass music artist, took initiative to preserve Hindu-Muslim unity in Sylhet by composing songs on Pir Shah Jalal. The inscription found in Birbhum district seventeen years after the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji shows that Sufi saints from north-western Iran established *khanqas* and settled there. The traveller Ibn Battuta also saw the existence of many Sufi saints in Bengal in the fourteenth century. They preached Islam centered on Bangladesh. They roamed freely in different places and the townspeople gave them various subtopics. Karunaketa Sen writes that huts existed in various villages of Dinajpur district for

the worship of the Muslim community. Which were called *Jummaghar*. Even in one village, there were multiple *Jummaghars* where Muslims from different communities used to gather for religious purposes. Note that the Pirs and Fakirs not only preached the religion, they also cut down the forest and turned many uncultivated lands into cultivable lands. It is known from the writings of Francis Buchanan that the forest tiger and the tiger lived together in Dinajpur. Under the influence of Pir and Fakir, the tigers gave up violence. This power of the Pirs was revered by all and believed that the Pirs and Fakirs possessed magic and miraculous powers. In this way, the Pirs helped to clear the forests of Dinajpur, settle them and expand the agricultural economy. Evidence that Islam did not spread by the sword was in the heart of Muslim rule, Delhi and the Agra region, where the Muslim population ranged from 10 percent to 15 percent. East Bengal and West Punjab, far from the heart of Muslim rule, account for between 60 and 90 per cent of the Muslim population. Even from Dhaka, Murshidabad and Maldar, the epicentre of Muslim rule in Bangladesh, the Muslim population was much larger in Dinajpur, Rajsahi and Nadia. "

The district consisted of two well- defined tracts which differed in physical features, history and administrative arrangement, types of economic activities, funereal arrangement and production systems. One tract which lay to the west of Tista River and also partgram to the east of the river came under the British rule after the East India Company received the Dewani in 1765. The total area of this tract in 1931 was 879 sq. Miles. The other tract lying to the east of Tista, known as eastern Dooars or in common parlance Dauars, having an area of 2053sq miles, was taken away from Bhutan at the end of the Anglo Bhutan war of 1864-65. It deserves mention that till the 1940 people of local origin not only in Jalpaiguri but in neighbouring Rangpur district too referred to Dooars and Bhutan.

In the perspective of the administrative history of Bengal Presidency, the district of Jalpaiguri was most recent. It came into being in January 1869 by the amalgamation of the

Tetulia subdivision of Rangpur district with recently annexed Dauris. The district headquarters came to be located in Jalpaiguri, a village which was residence of the Zamindar of the Baikunthapur estate Hooker who visited '*Jalpaigoree*' in early 1849 describe it as a 'last straggling village the place had a also military cantonment even before it was selected as the distinct headquarters.'¹⁴ Sometime later it was also chosen as the headquarters of the commissioner for Rajshahi Division. Dr. Ananda Gopal Ghosh in his article 'Muslims of Jalpaiguri District' states that in Jalpaiguri District three sections of Muslims are generally found-*Pathan*, *Sheikh* and *Nashya*.¹⁵ Later on, the *Nashyas* declared them as *Sheikhs*. They are local Muslims and primarily live-in villages and practice agriculture. The Muslims were generally termed as '*Deshi*' and '*Bhatia*'. There was practically no social tie among these two groups of Muslims because the '*Deshis*' were cultivators and '*Bhatias*' were engaged in different other skilled professions.

Social Structure of the Nashya Sheikh Community:

The socio-economic condition of the *Nashyas* is miserable and deplorable in compared to the other Muslim communities. Gradually under the pressure of a big culture and lack of consciousness their (*Nashyas*) own culture, tradition, beliefs, rituals etc. were pushed to the verge of endangerment rendering them socially, economically, culturally, educationally extremely backward. Their main occupation is cultivation, but cattle farming, small scale business, selling of fish, mutton, chicken etc. are also other sources of their income. *Nashyas* are mostly interested in cow trading. They were always a subject of subjugation and hatred by the higher-class Muslims. The literacy rate among the *Nashyas*, especially among the women is a matter of grave concern. Superstition and lack of consciousness is another impediment to the growth of this community. Other dogmas of this community are *pardah* system (veil), child marriage etc. The marriage between *Nashya Sheikh* and another upper-caste Muslim group is prohibited and strictly followed.

Among the local Muslims Pathan, Sheikh and *Nashyas* are found in Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and some parts of Malda district specially Gajol and Chachol of North Bengal. The *Nashyas* were originally the lower caste Hindus. According to the census of 1871, the total population of the Muslims was 74,791 males and 70,189 females; total, 144,980, or 44.2 percent of the population of Jalpaiguri districts.¹⁶ At the present day, the religion of Islam has ceased to make any further progress in the district. Presently the *Nashyas* populates in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri in huge number consisting 600,911 out of the total population of 2,4792,155 in Cooch Behar and 369,195 out of the total population of 3,401,173 in Jalpaiguri respectively (Census 2001),¹⁷ in which *Nashya Sheikhs* are most prominent.

Nashya sheikh community, in general, is a contested Muslim community from Rajbanshi, Koch, Mech and Poliya community. So, there are many similarities in language, creed, social rituals and culture between *Nashya sheikh* community and Rahbabshi Hindu social framework. On the other hand, *Nashya sheikh* community are distinct from Muslim community. Although they are being followed Islamic tradition. Muslim community still are not agreed to regard *Nashya sheikh* s Muslim religious community. They remain as neglected caste in Muslim society. Elite Muslims usually could not accept a marital relation between a son of the Khan family and a girl of *Nashya sheikh* Society.¹⁸ Other social class converted Muslims such as *Dhai, Nadeghosti, Hazem, Bhat, Badiya, Beldar, Goysala, Sarkar, Kosai, Kalwarmomin, Ansari, PahariaMusalman, Jhola* embraced racially. In changing social religious framework *Nashya sheikh* community believes in the concept of equality, unity and brotherhood. Although *Nashya sheikh* community was converted Muslims. They have followed the Islamic traditions. They regarded every *Musalman* as a brother of each other. In this way they made togetherness in every stage of society.¹⁹

The position of women:

Discussions about the position of women' have a special place in the current discussion. In order to organize programs for women's welfare on women's empowerment, women's emancipation, women's equality, etc., various research articles are being written, government activities are being announced and many voluntary organizations are being formed. After all, has there been any significant change for those who are so organized? This dialectical thought has been lingering for a long time but the right direction is still out of reach. Unwittingly, our West Bengal is divided into two parts North Bengal and South Bengal. This division is based on the location of the two banks of the river Ganges flowing through the state. As the capital city of the state, South Bengal is naturally much more advanced than North Bengal for natural reasons. In that sense, it is undoubtedly backward or backward towns in the state of North Bengal, that is, the people living in this town are backward from there. Again, according to the overall picture of the state and the country, there is no difference between the leading and backward groups of the people of the country. As in other parts of the country, one of the major backward communities in this region is the Muslim community. It can be said with certainty that there is a difference between men and women in the same way as in other places. Like other districts in the state, the Muslim population of North Bengal ranks second in religious beliefs. In this context, the picture of the districts of North Bengal can be seen at a glance. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda are the six districts of North Bengal. For administrative convenience, these six districts have been divided into 16 subdivisions, 67 Police Stations and 77 aggregate development blocks. The total number of villages in North Bengal is 7575 out of which the number of inhabited villages is 7145. According to the 2001 census, 1.47 crore people live in North Bengal which is 18.4 per cent of the total population of the state. Districts of North Bengal at a glance:²⁰

TABLE4.1**At a glance the population and literacy rate of the districts of North Bengal:**

Name of The District	Total Population	Literacy Rate		
		Total	Male	Female
Darjeeling	1,609,172	71.79	80.05	62.94
Jalpaiguri	3,401,173	62.85	72.83	52.21
Cooch Behar	2,479,155	66.30	75.93	56.12
North Dinajpur	2,441,794	47.89	58.48	36.51
South Dinajpur	1,503,178	63.59	72.43	54.28
Malda	3,290,468	50.28	58.80	41.25
North Bengal	14,724,940	60.45	69.75	50.55
West Bengal	80,176,197	68.64	77.02	59.61

Source: Census of India 2001, Final Population, W.B.

One of the most important criteria for the development of education, in that sense, the overall literacy rate of the state is 68.64 percent whereas in North Bengal it is 60.45 percent. Again, this rate of inequality between men and women also exists. In the state where male literacy rate is 77.02 percent, in North Bengal male literacy rate is 69.75 percent. The female literacy rate in the state is 59.61 percent while in North Bengal it is 50.55 percent. A picture of the backwardness of North Bengal can be seen in the disparity in literacy rate. It goes without saying that out of the total 19 districts of the state, eight districts have a lower literacy rate than the national average (65.2 per cent) and five of these districts are in North Bengal. Darjeeling district alone has an average literacy rate of 71.79 per cent, higher than the national average of all the national and state literacy rates. There is a good reason for that, but that is not the point. However, the literacy rate of Siliguri, the only subdivision in the plains

of this district, is more or less the same as that of other districts of North Bengal. The literacy rate of the three hill subdivisions has always been high.

If this is a picture of the overall literacy of the districts of North Bengal, then it is easy to guess the difference in this rate among the different populations. Before discussing the position of the Muslim community in the districts of North Bengal, our overall situation can be seen in the context of our country. In the words of the poet, "Different languages, different costumes, different combinations are great." For centuries, people of different religions have carried on the great tradition of great reunion by living together and maintaining good relations. But as not all communities develop at the same rate, some divisions are growing. If the necessary initiatives are not taken properly, which can take a terrible form? For example, the lion's share of the overall development that has taken place in our country is being enjoyed by the people belonging to the caste Hindu community. However, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities, one of which is our current population, their level of development is very low, but we are all citizens of one country. In the absence of information, the real picture is not presented to the public. Again, based on the information obtained, it can be said with certainty that the Muslim community is extremely backward from the socio-economic point of view. In 2005, the Prime Minister of our country formed a high-level committee headed by retired Judge Rajinder Sachar, popularly known as the Sachar Committee. The report of that committee states that Muslims are backward in two ways; their inferior education with which the inferior quality of education has been added has greatly increased their deprivation in improving the present education. The report further states that the Muslim community in West Bengal lags behind the caste Hindus and even the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state in terms of education and socio-economic status.²¹

In the context of the current position of Muslims in our state, Islam based on the 2001 census mentions that one of the largest and minority communities in the state is the Muslim community. Twenty-five percent of the total population of West Bengal belongs to the Muslim community. Regarding the educational status of the people of this community, it has been stated that among the Muslims of the state, the number of people who have taken up to primary level education is 50.3 percent which is less than 54.4 percent of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes where the overall number is 80.4 per cent. The percentage of people who have completed elementary education or up to eighth standard is 26 percent Muslim, 29.9 percent Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and 58.1 percent overall. The undergraduate population is 3% Muslim, 3.5% Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and 14% overall. He added that the number of Muslim government employees in the state is only 2.1 percent. He also noted that although Urdu-speaking Muslims are leaders in this regard, the number of Bengali-speaking Muslims is negligible. From these figures, an overall picture of the socio-economic status of Muslims in the state has emerged.

If this is the picture of the overall Muslim backwardness of the state, then the position of the backward North Bengal where there is overall backwardness is easily conceivable. Muslims occupy an important place in the society and culture of the state. Muslims are a minority in terms of the country and the state, as well as in their larger socio-economic and political infrastructure. They have been described as socially backward, financially poor and politically powerless. In this context, the position of our target Muslim community in the districts of North Bengal can be seen at a glance.

TABLE4.2

At a glance the population of the districts of North Bengal, Muslim Percentage of population and Muslim population

Name of The District	Total Population	Total Muslim	Percentage of Muslim population
Darjeeling	1,609,172	85,378	5.31
Jalpaiguri	3,401,173	369,195	10.78
Cooch Behar	2,479,155	600,911	24.24
North Dinajpur	2,441,794	1,156,503	47.36
South Dinajpur	1,503,178	361,047	24.01
Malda	3,290,468	1,636,171	49.72
North Bengal	14,724,940	4,209,205	28.58
West Bengal	80,176,197	20,240,536	25.25

Source: Census of India 2001, Final Population, W.B.

The Muslim population in the six districts of North Bengal is 28.58 per cent (4,209,205). The highest number of 49.72 per cent (1,636,171) Muslims live in Malda district followed by 47.36 per cent (1,156,503) in North Dinajpur district. The lowest percentage of Muslims is 5.31 per cent (85,378 per cent) in Darjeeling district and a little higher at 10.78 per cent (369,195) in Jalpaiguri district. In the other two districts, the number is 24.24 per cent (600, 911) in Koch Bihar and 24.01 per cent (361,047) in South Dinajpur.

There are also linguistic differences in what Muslims have developed so far. The Muslims of West Bengal are mainly divided into Bengali and Urdu. The majority of Muslims are Bengali speaking while a handful of Muslims are Urdu speaking. On the other hand, Bengali-speaking Muslims live mainly in rural areas. On the other hand, Urdu-speaking

Muslims usually live-in urban areas. In terms of infrastructure, people in urban areas enjoy more benefits than those in rural areas. Naturally, Urdu-speaking Muslims enjoy the lion's share of development compared to Bengali-speaking Muslims, but their numbers are very small. Since the Muslims of North Bengal live mainly in the rural areas, the pace of development of the Muslims here is very low. Excluding Malda and Islampur, the number of Muslims in North Bengal is almost non-existent. The percentage is not calculated, only a handful of families can be found in some cities. In Balurghat, the district headquarters of South Dinajpur district, we reached out to two families through personal experience till 1979. Owns a Medina hostel, He lived on the Far East side of the city, known as *Antebasi*, and the owner of Nadia Shawl Repairing probably lived in a slum. I have now heard that two or four more Muslim families have settled in the town. But this position of the people of this community in a district headquarters. This is a picture of Muslims living in the urban areas of North Bengal. The development of a community based on a village cannot be overstated.²²

A number of researchers have shed light on the socio-economic backwardness, development and change of Indian Muslims. They point out in their research that for various reasons, Muslim society lags far behind the stability of modernity. One of the reasons is widespread illiteracy and backwardness in education. At present, education has been identified as the key to development. In view of this important key to socio-economic development, the overall literacy picture of the districts of North Bengal and especially the Muslim literacy picture can be seen at a glance.

The average literacy rate of the six districts of North Bengal is 60.45 percent with male literacy of 69.75 percent and female literacy of 50.55 percent. In the case of Muslims, the literacy rate is 51.72 percent. Among them, male literacy rate is 60.13 percent and the female literacy rate is 42.49 percent. In terms of overall literacy rate of the state (68.64 per cent), the difference in literacy rate of North Bengal districts (60.45 per cent) is 8.19 per cent

less than other districts of the state. Gender differences: Male literacy rate in North Bengal is 7.27% lower than male and female literacy rate in the state is 59.61%. Literacy rate in districts of North Bengal (50.55%) is 9.06 percent less. This picture of literacy indicates the backwardness of the districts of North Bengal. The difference in female literacy in particular has presented backwardness not only in terms of literacy but also in terms of socio-economic status of women in the region. In this context, it should be noted that the literacy rate of the total eight districts of the state is even lower than the national average literacy rate of five districts in North Bengal.

TABLES 4.3

At a glance the overall and Muslim literacy rate of the districts of North Bengal:

Name of the district	Muslim literacy rate in the districts of North Bengal			Literacy rate of districts of North Bengal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Darjeeling	71.79	80.05	62.94	50.38	60.86	37.92
Jalpaiguri	62.85	72.83	52.21	55.34	64.98	45.01
Cooch Behar	66.30	75.93	56.12	56.07	64.59	47.11
North Dinajpur	47.85	58.48	36.51	36.04	45.98	25.50
South Dinajpur	63.59	72.43	54.28	67.21	72.81	61.33
Malda	50.28	58.80	41.25	45.30	51.56	38.68
North Bengal	60.45	69.75	50.55	51.72	60.13	42.59
West Bengal	68.64	77.02	59.61	57.47	64.61	49.75

Source: Census of India 2001, Final Population, W.B.

The situation of Muslim literacy rate in the districts of North Bengal is again deplorable. In North Bengal, where the overall literacy rate is 60.45 percent, the Muslim literacy rate is 51.72 percent, which is 8.73 percent less than the overall literacy rate.

Difference between Muslim literacy rate as compared to overall literacy rate of North Bengal districts by male and female literacy rate is 9.62 percent less than male (69.75 percent) literacy rate in North Bengal. Difference in female literacy, the literacy rate of Muslim women (42.49 per cent) is 8.06 per cent lower than that of women in North Bengal (50.55 per cent). As a result, the backward community in the state is North Bengal and the more backward Muslim community of that community is also the backward woman society of this society. According to international beliefs, Muslims are the most backward among other minority communities. The following table is presented in support of the statement.

TABLES 4.4

West Bengal has a higher literacy rate than any other community:

	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Jain	Total
Male	81.12	64.61	77.20	91.37	83.09	96.46	77.02
Female	63.09	49.75	62.30	81.98	66.22	88.87	59.61
Total	72.44	57.47	69.72	87.19	74.73	92.81	68.64

Source: Census of India 2001, Final Population, W.B.

Among the various religious communities in the state, Muslims are the most backward in literacy. While the Muslim literacy rate in West Bengal is 57.47 percent, the Hindu literacy rate is 72.44 percent. Christians 69.72 percent, Sikhs 87.19 percent, Buddhists 74.73 percent and Jain's 92.81 percent. For natural reasons, although the Muslim community is slow, it is attracting the attention of researchers in sociology and social anthropology.

The main topic of the present article is the Muslim Women's Society of North Bengal. Female literacy is one of the most important criteria for the development of any society. From this point of view, the women's society of North Bengal can be highlighted. Table 3 shows that North Bengal's female literacy rate (49.75 per cent) is 9.86 per cent lower than West

Bengal's overall female literacy rate (59.61 per cent). In the context of the districts of North Bengal, South Dinajpur is the only place where the overall literacy rate (54.28 per cent) is 7.05 per cent higher than the Muslim female literacy rate (61.33 per cent). Although the Muslim literacy statistics of this district seem unbelievable to me, the information is true. In the case of other districts, there is a wide disparity in the overall literacy rate. Among the districts of North Bengal, Darjeeling district has the highest overall literacy rate (71.89 percent). There, too, the Muslim female literacy rate (37.92 per cent) is 25.02 per cent lower than the overall female literacy rate (59.61 per cent), which is the largest gap between male and female literacy among the districts of North Bengal. In the other four districts, the gap is 9.01 per cent in Cooch Behar, 7.20 per cent in Jalpaiguri, 11.01 per cent in North Dinajpur and 2.57 per cent in Malda. Again, this gap between men and women is quite worrying. Which is clearly mentioned in Table 3? To get rid of this situation, the national and state governments need to take necessary steps to expand education, especially for Muslim women in the backward districts of North Bengal and for the Muslim community as a whole.²³

Indian women's society is backward in education and Muslim women's society is more backward. One of the main reasons for the backwardness of women's education is the basic outlook of the Indian education system from prehistoric times. From the beginning of the institutional education system in ancient times to the present time, the education system of our country is religion-dependent. From ancient times to the present day, the Indian education system can be divided into four eras. Ancient education, medieval education, British education and post-independence education. Throughout the ages, there has been an attempt to keep women in the grip of religious discipline in the male-dominated society. In ancient times, the emergence of a strict intellectual system of Vedic education created some opportunities for women's education, but there were very strict restrictions on women's education. Although the Muslim education system was introduced in the Middle Ages,

women did not get the right to education. Although there were mentions of some mad women in the era, they were all members of the royal family. Their lessons have been completed in the inner courtyard of Rajpuri.

Although many changes have taken place in the education infrastructure over the ages, the mentality has not changed completely even today. As a result, it is not in our heart for women to become educated in the real sense. This is the mentality of most of them, whether they have been subjugated or enslaved by men for ages. That utterance of the Manusanghita, woman will be under the father in childhood, under the husband in youth, under the child in adulthood. Women will never be free. Even today we continue to observe this traditional saying like a devout devotee. Everyone agrees, regardless of their religious beliefs. Naturally, some initiatives have been taken to promote women's education, i.e., Muslim women's education, but the actual implementation is just a fantasy.

Not only North Bengal or Muslim women's education, the overall education of any country depends on political will. If those in power have the goodwill to build a truly benevolent state system, the first step taken is to expand universal education. We learn this lesson from the history of the welfare state in the country. But there is plenty of room for question about the goodwill of the rulers of our country and state. If exploitation is to be maintained in the name of governance, then the ruling class never takes initiative to spread education among the people. The more education opportunities are created, the more it becomes impossible to govern. In this situation, if the overall education is to be expanded in the real sense, then the government of the country or the state government has to formulate a realistic plan and involve the people in its implementation. Only then the desired result is possible.²⁴

Since Muslims are the most backward in the society especially Muslim women therefore special programs need to be taken for their development. In order to bring the

pioneers and the backward people in a row, only the special needs of the backward people can be brought in a row. To that end, facilities need to be provided by the government. Only then can the backward Muslim women of North Bengal in particular and North Bengal as a whole be developed. The present article seeks to present a picture of the general and especially Muslim society in North Bengal. Some developmental ideas have also been introduced on the basis of various data. But this is just an attempt to present a bigger problem. The questions raised here can be analysed in more depth to find the right direction. However, the main goal of the discussion is the actual development of the target group. And man wants the development that can be seen with the eyes, can be touched, that is, direct development. Education is an indirect means of development. That one-hundred-year-old crop of Chinese proverbs but its qualities are not easily realized by people. Naturally, these activities are not directed towards the way they need to be conducted in order to achieve this development. As a result, the desired goal is still elusive. Education programs alone are not enough, and other development programs need to be integrated. Because hunger is never a pursuit, just as it can never be fruitful if it takes the initiative to expand education without thinking of financial development. Again, overall development is impossible leaving a large section of the society behind. To that end, the overall development of North Bengal can be achieved through the real development of Muslim and Muslim women society.

The position of women in Islam is very clear. The attitude of the *Quran* and *Hadish* bears witness to the fact that a woman is at least as vital to life and society as man himself.²⁵ The status of women was taken for granted to be equal to that of man. Islam has given to the women are equal to rights and privileges. The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of the man but they are not necessarily identical with them. There is no grand assumption that women are less important than a man just because her status, roles and rights are not identically the same as men in the *Nashya Sheikh* community. But the

fact is that Islam gives her equal rights, acknowledge her recognizes her independent personality. Though Islam admits the equality of men and women yet, in practice inequalities between them are very wide in many areas. Their conditions are also something different from the ideal's norms due to various historical and socio-cultural reasons.²⁶

In traditional Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts women in *Nashya Sheikh* Community used to live in a much-closed social environment. There were many social restrictions regarding the patterns of behaviour and activities of the women. They observed strict seclusion or *Purdah*. The women in *Nashya Sheikh* Community were suffering from several social disabilities. The girls were mostly married at a very early age, immediately after puberty. Unilateral from of divorce and polygamy etc. were also prevalent. The education had been a serious problem among the *Nashya Sheikh* women in Jalpaiguri & Cooch Behar districts. The literacy rate of women among the *Nashya Sheikh* Community is still now very poor. Women are under their father at their childhood stage at the younger age under their husband and at the older age under their sons. The women could not come out of the social structure to move forward. However, a little number of Muslim girls goes to the school but they have lack of mentality be educated. Firstly, they have no educational environment in their home. Secondly, they could not purchase books for the lake of many. Not only the problem is found in Muslim girls but also, it's found the enter *Nashya Sheikh* Students.²⁷ The economic roles of the *Nashya Sheikh* women were very significant in nature. They were basically engaged in domestic works and child rearing, keeping of fowls, ducks, cows and goats was a common practice of the *Nashya Sheikh* households and the women were mostly engaged in such activities. A few of the *Nashya* women were also engaged in certain craft works such as weaving, cane basket making etc. The women who belong to the *Nashya Sheikh* community are mostly in isolation. They were ignorant, illiterate and confined in their homes due to strict rules of *Purdha* or seclusion. Instead of equality and justice, their

position in society was exploitative in nature for various reasons such as performance of excessive labour, negligence, avoidance, Fremantle fortune and separation or divorce even in sexual matters. However, widow remarriage was allowed and usually practiced by the people. The birth of the girl was looked down upon as very unfortunate and their opinion in family matters and other social affairs. The system of dowry though prevalent was not very high and compulsive as at present.²⁸ The sample survey reveals that 53% of the males married before the age of 17 as against 89% of the females in that age group. The materials on record go to indicate that the rites and rituals followed by them at different stages of life cycle (birth, marriage, death (excepting burial) are similar to those prevalent prior to their conversion, i.e., these are still followed in accordance with their traditional heritage. In the cases of divorce, re-marriage, widow-marriage they do not strictly adhere to prescribed Islamic rules, but are guided by the traditional norms and values.²⁹

The *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim feels that the incident of close-kin marriages is in decline due to the allure of dowry. The *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims say that the dowry system has only recently come into vogue among them. In fact, in inquired about the incidents of dowry and found that in the fifty's dowry had not been involved in any marriage in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. They consider it a Hindu custom. The *Nashya Sheikhs* ideally repudiate the system of dowry as it is not according to their *shariat*. The rich Muslim, however, cannot resist the obvious attractions of getting more wealth through dowry. Besides the recent Hindu trait of dowry, the *Nashya Sheikhs* have adopted a host of other Hindu customs in their marriage ceremonies. They apply turmeric on the bodies of groom and bride, they send lagan, parents to the bride by the groom's party, and they observed *Astamangala*, in which the newly married husband comes to live with his wife in her natal home for a day after marriage.³⁰

Food Habits:

Diet systems of the *Nashya Sheikh* community are similar to that of Rajbanshi *Jati*. Village inhabitants of *Nashya Sheikhs* like to eat rice, bread, meat and different types of vegetables. It is interesting to say that earlier they had eaten frowsy rice or bread; nowadays they have not eaten a frosty diet. In recent times we found changes in their food habits, such as instead their traditional diet system such as *shidal, cheka*; now instead of these they eat rice, buckler, breed, fish, meat and various vegetables. Their favourite diets are fish, meat, and dal. But in the previous time the people of the Hindu society domesticated goat, duck, pigeon and hen in order to make their economic benefit besides using these animals as food.³¹ In the same way the people of the Muslim community are domesticated these animals. Few decades ago, and still also the domestication of hen and duck has become a common feature among the people of Muslim community. Hence, in most of the houses of Muslim community there separately provided cell for the animals. In order to solve the increasing demand of milk, curd etc cows are also domesticated.

They welcomed their guests by providing them rice with meat. Most important changes of their food habits were drinking of liqueur, which is highly restricted in the Shariat. Even the wise people of the village or Imam were compelled to ostracize liquarishen men in the society. It is a hard task to say that drinking was not prohibited in their society. In the earlier time the devastating problem of the *Nashya sheikh* community was drinking water. Because, they had to carry drinking water from natural ponds, rivers, drainage and lakes.³²

In the present time the scarcity of water has been solved. Now the Gram panchayat has given different facilities like tube-well, etc. to the *Nashya Sheikh* community and along with the *Nashya Sheikh* the rest poor people of the village are getting the facilities. Along

with water facilities the *Nashya Sheikh* community is accepting different facilities like milk, *chhana* etc. from goat.

Dress and Ornament:

Generally, the male members of the *Nashya Sheikh* community were used to long pants, shirts, *lungi* (lower dress of the male); *pajama* (women pant), sandal etc. a few decades ago the peasants of *Nashya Sheikh* community used the traditional dress like *Tawel*, *Lungi* (dress of lower part of the male), half pant for the work in the field. These dresses were used to cover up the secret portion of the body. In previous times the peasants of the *Nashya Sheikh* community worked in the agricultural field with wearing *lengti* (innerwear). But in the present-day changes have been found in the society about dress like the lengthy (innerwear) is not been in use by the *Nashya Sheikh*. Instead, they wear *Lungi*, half pants, full pants, shirts etc for their daily life. Previously due to the scarcity of footwear they used *Kharam* (one kind of footwear made by bamboo or wood) instead of shoes. Now *kharam* is not available but high status in the society like *Maharam*, *Munshi* etc are used to wear religious cap, Panjabi and pajamas in early days but these dresses are in common use by the villagers also, like *Nashya sheikh* as well.³³

In now a day there are several changes found in the dress of *Nashya Sheikh* Women's also. Earlier dresses are similar to the *Adibasi* or tribal people, women's dresses are divided into two parts upper and lower portion. Upper portion was covered by towel or short clothes; lower portion was covered with clothes surrounding their body. They did not use their inner wear as they did not have their stable economic condition or social requirements for using so. But now a days we don't found the earlier dresses instead they use sari, *churidar*, etc. even the *Nashya sheikh* community women of town area are use modern dresses also like jeans, top etc. The most interesting feature of *Nashya Sheikh* women's dress is that they did not use veil in the past and in present also, nut some *Nashya Sheikh* women are using veil which is

not due to the religious concern but to seek attention of other Muslim groups but a few. Now *Nashya Sheikh* Women use sari or *churidar* and the *orna* of their sari or *churidar* is covered their head.³⁴In ornaments, the *Nashya Sheikh* women generally did not use ornaments though in a few cases they used ornaments of low-cost metal like bronze, copper etc. but they now use ornaments of silver, city gold etc and in some cases gold ornaments also.

House:

The *Nashya Sheikh* community though did not have any special feature in constructing their houses. Their houses were very much similar to those of the *Rajbanshi* Hindu community people. Some of the houses are arranged in a line though some are isolated. Most of the Houses were covered with streams and railings and walls were made of Bamboos. The poor kitchen and one room for domesticated animals.

These rooms were constructed by bamboo posts and strums. As these materials were easily available so there were no problems in constructing new houses or deconstructing the old one, for the poor people. By begging or borrowing bamboo and wooden material were collected. Earlier, they could have straw in nearby river sand banks. They constructed their bed room with a long shelf, over which they used straws for their comfort. Over which they used handmade mat and hand patched cloth. For pillow, they used old cloths or wooden stools together. For the night lamp, twister's straw sticks were used which slowly glittered and by blowing it flame came out, by using that flame night lamps were kindled; more over flames were used in smoking tobacco as well. Few families of little high esteem had a drawing room, evens four-five family jointly head drawing room which was used for gatherings or hospitality to the guests, *Fakirs*, *Darbesh* etc. Earlier, the Mosques were not prevalent in the villages, on special occasions the villagers were gathered in nearby Mosques for Namaz or religious prayer. But from 1970 onwards Mosques are increasing in the village label also.³⁵

Nowadays we find significant changes as far as houses are concerned within the N.S. community. Instead of strains and bamboos, houses are now constructed with tin and so in some cases cemented houses are also in use. The room on the North side is considered a big cottage. Earlier most the *Nashya Sheikh* family did not have any Latrine, male and female members of the family used open areas for ablutions. But now the situation has changed because of the Government policies, facilities and onwards of the *Nashya Sheikh* Community people.³⁶ There is no special feature in their House or cottage making this the same as Rajbangsi, some houses are in Aligned and some are scattered manners. Previously they used to make their House with bamboo and jute tricks. But at present they make their House with Tin on the roof and wall and Bricks Houses also noticeable. Though at present Earthen House is found in Malda and Dinajpur district among the *Nashya Sheikh* community. They give more importance to the northern side cottage of a House³⁷

Marriage:

The *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim occurring in the area of study are a quixotic mixture of the both local (regional) and textual (Islamic) rites. We will describe first the local rites that have become an integral part of *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim marriages, as these give us an insight into the mechanism of adjustment that the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims make in a plural society. We shall then move on to the textual rites to strength my hypothesis regarding the maintenance of *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim's identity.³⁸

Marriages are usually arranged by the parents and guardians. When people visit a family to select a bride or a groom it is locally known as *Namsamandha*, which literally means "negotiations".³⁹ *Lagan* is usually sent in a new leather suitcase or in a small still trunk. It is sent a few days or a week before the marriage. It includes a complete set of clothes- a share, blouse, petticoat, handkerchief, shoes or sandals, cosmetics and so forth. Sometime we noticed a book dealing with conjugal life along with the cloth and

cosmetics.⁴⁰ During *Astamangala*, when the newly-married husband visits his Wife's natal home; he is often invited by the newly-related kin within the village to them. Each of these families gives him five rupees according to their means, after entering him. He also receives gifts from his wife's family. In the course of me inquires I came to know of two Muslim brothers in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar who married in; one got one hundred and forty rupees in lieu of clothes and the other a wrist watch costing one hundred and fifty-five rupees from their wives' families.⁴¹

The smearing of the bodies with paste of turmeric is done every morning anoint the body of the groom with perfumed paste prepared from the leaves of a particular tree locally known as *sondha*, plus certain special flowers called *gophul* with the addition of a few other items. At the time of applying *sondha* the women sing songs. The turmeric paste and *sondha* used on the body of the groom is scraped off and sent to the bride to be smeared on her body in turn. The Muslims say that the perfume of *sondha* attracts *jin* (spirits). To prevent this happening, the bride and the groom have to keep close to their persons an iron article, usually a *janti* or a pair of nutcrackers. Spirits are supposedly rendered harmless by the proximity of iron. The day before the actual marriage ceremony no turmeric or *sondha* is applied. On this day the bride and the groom bathe in the morning, using soap if desired. In the evening there is a ceremony known as *khirkhawano*. This is held in both the brides and the groom's homes. During the ceremony a dish of sweetmeats and home-made rich cakes is placed before the bride or the bridegroom. Village relatives who are in attendance present gifts to the betrothed after taking a little of the food from the plate and putting it in the mouth of the bride or the groom as the case may be. In the ceremony of *khirkhawano* the father first puts some dust (*dhulphul*), which is collected from the shrine of *satypir*, into the mouth of the bride or the groom. This dust is considered sacred. Lastly the mother takes part in the ceremony, putting a small portion of the sweets into the month of the betrothed.⁴²

On the marriage day the groom is accompanied to the house of the bride by villagers and relatives. Members of this party are locally known as *barat or borjattri*. The party of *barat* who came to the marriage of the girl which I attended consisted of only a few men and women, besides the mother of the groom. Woman companions who come with the groom and his *barat* party are locally called *dolabibi*. The groom, if he can afford it, manages to hire or borrow a horse and prefers to come riding to the *shamiana*, or marquee, but not being used to riding horses he mounts the beast only when actually approaching the village.⁴³

The groom and his party came in the morning. They were given an outhouse (*baithakhana*) to stay in. The groom wore *chapkan* (a long shirt), white pyjamas, shoes of black leather and socks. At about eleven o'clock the members of the *barat* party bathed and then took food prepared for them by the bride's family. The grooms and brides' parties communicated only through the matchmaker. At about 1 p.m. the marriage ceremony took place. On the evening of the same day the groom was given a special dinner. A few of the bride's relatives who were on joking terms with the bride, and now considered themselves to be on the same terms with the groom, shared food from the same plate with him. They joked with him while eating the food, often embarrassing him to the point of curbing his appetite. On the following morning the bride and the groom were sent away in a bullock cart with her belongings.⁴⁴

Although most of the Bengali Muslims in Koch Bihar and other parts of the region are Hindu converts, they have been observing their rituals and other rituals, but in the past, they have been carefully observing the rituals and traditions. Where religious restrictions also become secondary to them. It is here that the northern *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims have their uniqueness and uniqueness which nurtures the deep sense of harmony among all the peoples of the region since time immemorial. As mentioned earlier, they i.e., *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims also observe the anniversary of the deceased like Hindus. In the same way, in the case of

marriage, we still find enough similarities from the rules of conduct to the song or the folk thoughts. Even decades ago, *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim women used to wear vermilion like Hindus after marriage, and according to all Hindu wedding customs, the use of *dala*, *chilonbati* (sieve), *kulo* sorting, pot placement, lamp lighting, banana, betel nut are almost identical. However, the main ceremony of the wedding was performed by *Mollah or Munshi* in accordance with Islamic rituals. And the wedding song in the dynastic society is therefore known as the wedding song of the Muslim society, it can be said that this wedding song or song has established a popular social thought by complementing each other.⁴⁵

The auspicious time for the marriage of the Muslims of this region is in the Hindu calendar. *Ghatak* also saw the arrival of certain days. The marriage relationship developed during *Ghatak's* marriage. *Ghatak* farewell is also done according to the Rajbangshi tradition with clothes, prices, gifts. *Ghatak* also goes from house to house building a garland of that relationship. This is his unwritten profession. Unlike Hindus, Muslims in this region do not get married in the month of *Poush, Chaitra or Mal*, and there is no provision for marriage in the month of Muharram or Ramadan. With Islamic thought in mind.

Bargaining on the question of dowry is like that of the Hindu community. It was decided to speak in front of five people of the village. Yellow on the body is the tradition of the two houses, it is also a ceremony. At the wedding, the bride wears a red fringed sari, but no other fringed colour. Like the Rajbangsi, the Muslims of this region perform a number of essential functions from the day before the marriage. The arrangement of wedding *barandala*, *chalunbati*, *kulo* also reflects the Hindu religious rituals in the marriages of the Muslims of this region. There is a special style of decorating '*chailonbati*' which is similar to Rajbangshi wedding. It can be said that there is no special difference. It is placed on a bamboo sieve in a beautiful square with a banana peel, before which the sieve is decorated with Alta, vermilion and turmeric. The reason for enclosing the banana shell is so that all the materials placed on

the lamp do not fall on the banana, lamp, and pot. This is the way to get rid of clutter you don't need. It is one of the essential items for the marriage of the Rajbangshi and *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims of this region. This *chalun* lamp is decorated with 16 vermilion (i.e., 8 pairs) bananas, at least four lit lamps with oil, salt, *ampata* with two jugs of water, a pair of whole betel nuts and a few betel leaves (of course pairs) etc; By doing this, the *Sadhva* women are an experienced woman appointed for marriage who is also known in the society as *Bairatima* or *I Bairati*. This *Bairati* dynasty also performed all the rituals along with the priest in the marriage. There is a dance song with it. It can be said that his leadership created a pleasant atmosphere. They are also known as '*Gidali*' in the Muslim society. This *chailoan* lamp, i.e., the dollar, reflects the fertile culture of the community. Bananas are a symbol of the future health of the future couple, the lamp here is the flow, happiness and prosperity (care is taken so that the lamps do not go out in any way), moreover, vermilion, banana, betel, betel nut are all elements of fertile thought. Before the main ceremony of marriage, that is, according to the Islamic rites, the '*Nikah*', all the rituals of the Hindu rites were performed by the *Ai Bairatis* with laughter, jokes and mockery. And the tumultuous dance of *Kathagan* continues in every episode. However, it is said that the song is not a song keeping in mind the Islamic thought. Because singing in Islamic Sharia is against Islam. Such a song:

Dalarnam mor rangomala

Dalarnam mor phulmala

Dalasajeboroghorermajhe

Rosiyadamanerdalasajilore

Rosiyaaaroserdaladekhi baba kande

Daladekhi maa o kande

Daladekhichaoyal daman hasilore...

This *dala, chalun*, while arranging the lamp, so the women led by *Bairati* all sing together. An emotional atmosphere is created, through dance songs. *Gidali's* group presents *Dala as Rangmala and Phulmala* here and describes the state of mind of the parents with Daman and Berry through a song. The *Bairati* women complete the folklore by singing multiple songs around *Dala*.

Many folk customs of Hindu, especially Rajbangshi society are still observed with care by *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim society. Like the dynastic society, the bridge of kinship between the bride and groom is built through dance songs. A kind of folklore idea works in an attempt to reflect on the future life of the future couple through some small folklore. Such a twin game, a lot like a cow game. Water is poured into a water-filled vessel (pot, cauldron) and the lamp is floated by two. If the two come closer to each other, it is assumed that the future life of the couple will be happy. Of course, the game continues until the pair. For Hindus, this game is played with water or a small part of a crown.

When the bride and groom are yellow, the brides and grooms all sing along with laughter and jokes. Like Hindus, this folklore is performed through joy and fun by all the neighbours.

Holdichokmokchaoyal o daman

Daman sei holdipailenkonkhane

Bhaijokebondokthuiya

Sei holdiaanchi khaya

Sei holdidamanormaakosobghay.

Semantics :(HoldiChhakmamak - Yellow smeared face, Chawal-Boys, Vaijo-bhabii.e.,Baudi should be (mako-mekhe) make up.

Again, without describing the expression on the groom's face, someone sings a song for the purpose of feasting.

Mata chayanadan kur

Ohe poncho aio

Mata Khanibacharseobeler moto

Mata chayna den kur

Ohe poncho aio.

(Semantics: Mata-Head, Dan-Give, Aio-mather, Bairatis are addressed; Baller-Bell, Kur-Turmic powder)

The groom is dressed in vermilion while applying turmeric. Multiple songs are sung while wearing this vermilion.

Chilchilchorompayediye

Chollammoydan, meyraaamaajaan

Moydanotenamiyadekhongsidurerdokane

Meyraaamaajaan

Oi sindurporaitenariruthilogram

Meyraaamaajaan

Hate ache semlaurumal

Mochmonarirgram, meyraaamaajaan.

When the yellow is smeared, the groom's son-in-law (*Banu* is addressed in the dynastic Muslim society) and his friends pick up the bride or groom. This program is known as '*Koldharani*'. Like the '*Mistar Dhara*' of the Rajbangshi society, the marriage of the Muslim society of this region is also a matter of 'Dost'. It is customary to say the word 'friend' three times or to recite '*kalema*' like the bride and groom to form a kinship relationship. However, like the dynastic society, the influence of this style is decreasing

among them. This extinction is not only happening in Islamic thought, but also in social and economic and certainly due to mentality. That is why the issue of '*Mistar Dhara*', '*Panichita Baap*' is also on the verge of extinction in the dynastic society. The groom is arranged according to Islamic rituals in accordance with the rules and regulations. There are some songs at that time. It should be noted that religious Islamic rituals are somewhat accepted, but ceremonies such as weddings cover a large part of the ceremonies of lost nationalities of the past, and all that exists in the notable dynastic folklore is a little different. There is a scattering of songs as well as the language, lyrics and dynasty of the songs in the Kamatapuri dialect. There is no difference in pronunciation and posture. It is here that the issue of conversion to the question of nationality becomes apparent. Even if religion has changed for some reason, they still cherish the chronological thinking of the past, transcending petty religious sentiments. As for the lyrics, the consonant captures all the contexts of the time left behind. Religion has become just a stepping stone to sectarianism.

Khatokoriyamoishalkons mor

Mukhejhampodari

Batonotenai mor moishal, dhoraitenai mor moishalre

Ekshoektamoishampishalkonaeklaychoraiche

Batanotenai mor moishalre

Duratenai mor moishal re-

Kon basotinerbetikonadiyeche mor moishalokasha re

Batanotenai mor moishal re.

The original animal husbandry of the Koch-Rajbangshi society *Maishal* the culture surrounding *Bathan* is captured in the lyrics. This thought provoked the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim community, which was once a large part of this glass dynasty. Although the religious boundaries have changed over time, the shadowy shadow of the source field has come up in

the songs, uttered by other women, one of the bearers of the village tradition. Many such songs are scattered in many villages. These have not been lost in the fires of time and economy. And since it is not lost, we can find the commentary of the past by testifying to the present. At one time, in the Rajbangshi society, the pre-wedding songs were widely sung, in the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim society, therefore, the song ceremony took place around the folk rituals. Although both groups have summarized these issues in the course of time, those songs strongly indicate the close connection between the past and the present.

Although Rajbangshi society is Hindu, marriage ceremonies are very different. Although there is a scriptural part, this part is done by the so-called Kamarupi Brahmin. *Adhikari Bamun* has a big role to play. Again, the folk part is done by *Bairati* i.e., experienced women. There are many differences in marriage. Even in the *Nasya Sheikh* Muslim society, except for some ceremonies like recitation of Kalama in front of *Ukil Baba* and *Sakshi Sabud* under the influence of Islam, the rest of the rituals are not religious in nature but can be said to be more of a folk tradition. It is to be noted that this lawyer *Babai* was respected in the Muslim society like the *Panichita* father of the Rajbangshi society and was bound by kinship. For a long time, the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim community has followed their own traditional thinking. Lately, in some cases, religious restrictions have not been a major obstacle. On the contrary, the majority *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim society has given importance to issues like marriage and early mutual thinking. With a few small changes, they have incorporated life and family as their own folklore.

In Rajbangshi society, the bride is given on the day of marriage but in Muslim society, the gift is given on the next day, that is, on the day when the groom goes home with the bride. The bride's father will hand over the betel nut and raw money to the groom. There is no separate episode of stale marriage. As soon as the bride enters the house of the father-in-law, the boy, i.e., the groom, will sit in the north-south house with the boy's mother on his

lap. There are some folk ceremonies and songs. The women of *Barapaksha*, *Bairatis* will complete these ceremonies in dance songs and take the bride as their own.

Song in every episode; in the past, wedding ceremonies in dance were given another dimension, just as in the dynastic society as in the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim society. Over time, the mentality of both groups has changed dramatically, especially for economic reasons. And in these way songs, songs are being lost from society. However, in some areas the practice of this song evokes old times. That applies to the Rajbangshi society as well as to the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim society.

The rule of collecting something to stop the bride and groom at the gate is quite common in the rural society. The people of *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim Samaj also blocked the way through the gate of the bride's house. Drinks, betel nuts, *bidis* block the way for the bride and groom. After the debate over *Dakshina*, the matter was finally settled in a joke. As a model of rural folklore, the groom has to handle many things with a smile to get a bride. The funny thing is that in this case, even if everyone is released, the groom is stopped until he gets a suitable *Dakshina*. After leaving, they sing again, especially women. I have no enemies.

Hate damanernarkelbashi

Date damanernishi

Biyakoirbaraaichen daman

Aajabadsharbeti.

Ki ki daman aainchen daman

Jhompavoreya

Jhompakhuliyadekhong re, daman

Sudhuaakarmati.

Jhompakhuliyapakmarnung

Vora sobharmaje.

Another song;

Baser agale duma mir mir kore

Ghaichegaburbogunai

Hulurnakandekhe

Aanohuluk bando kathalergoche

Katholbeichapaishadiya-

Hulurnachondekho.

(Semantics: Jhamp-bag, Aka-Unun, Pak Marnung-running, Gabru-groom, Bagunai-Jamai, Dhuma-Dhoya, Hulu-a kind of animal, Biral- Cat)

In these songs, just like in Rajbangshi society, in *Nasya Sheikh* Muslim society also *Ibairati* and women sing for the bride and groom. A pleasant atmosphere of humour is created through the song. As a result, a different environment is created between the groom and the bride in which everyone is not only acquainted but also a bond of kinship. When the bridegroom comes home with the bride, the bridegroom's wives, especially the bridesmaids, block the way, demand money to carry him in their arms, and sing songs. In that song, there are more than one words addressed to the bride. The words by which the bride is made her own, domestic:

Chikiyarduladulbodoner kala

Kali nageichenborubiyakenebela.

Nijerjeithanihoiyachariyanadei gala

Take nabujhaitehoiyageichebela.

(Semantics: Jathani-Barshali, Baru-Bar)

The groom is jokingly asked why it is so late to return. Or held the bride's boudi? Seeing the tiredness of the groom's body ('*chikiadhuladhul badan kala*') the groom has been

slanted. In fact, in this way, through the joke, the ceremony called marriage is taken to another level by everyone, especially the women.

Songs are sung for the purpose of the bride, there are slashes as there are slanting remarks, sometimes there is a mockery of age but none of them is literally true, everyone knows that this is how the *mahal mahal* makes the wedding happy it is also a part of the folklore.

Sonar koti, ruparkoti

Didi boraibaporibar genu-

Gacherboraigacheroilo

Kotibaroilo dale

Noyasorokdiyajaykerajar beta dakaypuchari kore.

Etoboyoseetokalerkoina

Biyo ban a hoi tore

Shisvorasendur dish

Biyobakorimtokenakvorasona dim biyobakorimtoke

Another same song;

Mukhikusaiyergonogonogito

Tor bap nachateyageiche

Amar balichoto.

Palkirkaportuliyadekhong

Dumrakolargach

Amar borughorsondaichekare sitar pati

Tomarbalighorsonday

Dilkis kore mati.

(Semantics: *kushai* - sugarcane, *chateya*-ball, *dhali* - bride, *dhumra* - thick, *tiknis* - tupshabda).

In this way, through the song, there is an invisible competition between the opponents. The bridegroom is heard by the women of the bride's side and the bride is heard by the bridegroom's side. All in all, as the kinship between the neighbours surrounding the marriage intensifies, so does the relationship between the people of another village. Marriage became a proper celebration. Especially the women of the two villages, forgetting all the arrogance surrounding the marriage for a few days, join in the joyous atmosphere. Old relationships are new.

The wedding songs of the Muslim society of this region, the wedding songs of the Rajbangshi society complement each other. Nothing special from the language, words and presentation of this song, one can find the source of *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim society. The folklore aspect of the past is reflected in the song. The use of vermilion is hidden in the word vermilion, the friend actually holds the mister, *Ukilbaba*, *Panichita* is the name of the father, the twins play, and the dia-floating lap indicates the relationship with the dynastic society in everything. In fact, in the evolution of sociology, religion has changed, but there has been no special transformation of secular and social thought. This has been under the pressure of time and under the influence of some supernatural acceptance. For which the special feature of the Muslim society of this region. Religious orthodoxy has never been a problem for harmony. Another ideology has been created with folklore, popular ideas and religious generosity which is a unique feature of this region. In this specialty, therefore, wedding songs or hymns are not only a small element, but also another humorous source of self-assembly.

Religion:

The *Nashya Sheikh* community of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri are the follower of Islam. The converted *Nashya Sheikh* community though not been able to overcome the ritual and influence of the previous religions, but the main ideology of Muslim religion i.e peace, they embrace. So, they are quite liberal. The poor villagers of *Nashya Sheikh* Community are influenced by the *Munshi* and *Maolana* of their village.⁴⁶ They follow the five principles of Islam i.e *Namaj* (prayer), *Roja* (fasting), *Hauj* (pilgrims), *Zakat* (charity), *Kalima* (religious quotations). Most of the *Nashyasheikh's* male and female, like to pray for *Namaz* five times a day. Every year they followed fasting of one month for *Roja*. But many female and male members of the *Nashya Sheikh* community do not follow it strictly. The *Nashya Sheikh* Community people of villages and towns are practicing *Haujjatra* (pilgrims) to Makkah and Madina. The *Hajis* are (who has gone to pilgrim to Makkah and Madina) Mazar Miya Haji (Nathua hat), Haji Kasimuddin Rahman (Duramari), Haji Akbar Ali (Dhupguri), Haji Sahidul Islam (Dhupguri) and many others. For charity i.e., *Zakat*, the *Nashya sheikh* community people give as far as they could to the Masjid, Madrasha and the beggars of nearby places of Masjid and Madrasha. Every male and female member of *Nashya sheikh* community read the *Kalima* or religious quotations as well.⁴⁷ In now a day within the districts of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri ideology of Muslim religion propagated by *Tablig-e-jamat*. The main centre of *Tabliq-e-jamat* in Jalpaiguri is situated in Sisubari (now in Alipurduar district) and the main centre of Cooch Behar district situated in Suktabari. The *Nashya sheikh* community people are deeply influenced by the Sufi ideology as well. They have deep faith to the Sufi pir also. *Nashya sheikh* community people travel the *Dargah* of Sufi *pirs* and *darbesh* quite frequently. In this regard fair are conducted every year by the Sufi pir and darbesh. The places of pir and darbesh of Jalpaiguri district are are Kalu Saheb er mazar (Jalpaiguri), Majnu Shah er mazar (Dhupguri), Tafiut Saheb er mazar (Rangalibazna) and Hajrat Shah Sufi Sher Ali er mazar

(Khuniabhita, Dhupguri), HaldibariEkramulSahebermazar (Coochbehar). The Nashya sheikh community people interested in this mazar are quite remarkable, along with another Muslim and non-Muslim also. During nineteen hundred seventies the number of Munshi and Mauluvi at the village level were too small, so the Munshi and the Mauluvis were brought from Bihar and U.P and they *Namaj* of the male member of villages. This Munshis and Mauluvis kept a long beard and wore a fagetupi (religious cap) and with the influence of them the male villagers had started. The ritual of long beard and white religious cap. They helped in various religious customs and rituals even in marriage, naming ceremony, *khatna* (circumcision) etc. According to the Quranic law, they used to be the high esteemed persons of the village. They directly or indirectly help in conducting *Namaz*, *Hauj*, *Zakat* etc. They used to explain the good (halal) and bad (haram) also. Even in the *Qurbani* (sacrifice), they used to be most important person.⁴⁸

The birth of the first child is normally greeted with the warmest demonstration of unaffected joy in the homes of the parents of both wife and husband. The birth of the first child usually takes place in the house of the wife's parents. A *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim sends his expectant wife to her parent's home when her time approaches. This is a local custom. This custom is also prevalent among the Hindu. The wife is not sent to her parent's home for subsequent births; but some parents who can afford to, and live either within the village or nearby, bring their expectant daughters' home to all such locations.⁴⁹ At childbirth, women of a particular Hindu caste are called to attend as midwives. In general, no women of any other caste or community work as midwives in the areas. The wife of the head of the Hindu family at Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar, together with her son's wife, serves as mid wife to the Muslim villagers of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and adjoining villagers.

When a male child is born, and especially when the child is the first issue, there is often much clamorous rejoicing. According to the Islamic custom, *azan* (summon to prayer)

is called allowed by a male, not for prayer but to proclaim the birth of the child. This is done at *Nashya Sheikh* only the occasion of the birth of a male child. The child father or grandfather usually does the proclaiming. Some devout Muslims well versed in Islamic rules read *Takbir* (i.e the creed) in the left ear of the new-born.⁵⁰

After parturition the mother observes 'pollution' for seven days. For these seven days she does not over regular prayers (*namaz*). On the seven day after the birth of the barber shaves the child's head and pares the nails of both child and mother. The mid wife's presence is customary at the time of this ceremony. There are two Muslims barbers in the village of *Nashya Sheikh* family, either of whom may be called on this occasion.⁵¹

After being shaved the child is bathed. The mother also takes a birth and her 'period of pollution' is then considered over. On this day *Nashya Sheikh* celebrate *Aqika*. On this occasion parents, grandparents and other close kin like uncles and aunts etc. Name the new-born. *Aqika* consist of a sacrificed to Allah in the name of the child, to goats for a boy and one for a girl. A quarter of the sacrificial meat is distributed among the poor. The *Nashya Sheikh* at Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri usually give away this portion to the poor within the village. Another quarter of the meat is given to kin, generally close kin. The rest is kept for their own consumption.⁵²

Those who cannot afford the ceremony of *Aqika* on the seventh day after the birth of a child may postpone it till the fourteenth or the twenty- first day, or any convenient time later on. Some of them sacrifice only one goat at the time of the *Aqika* of a male child. Others arrange the rite in consumption with *korbani*, when sacrificing a large animal; they offer one seventh of it to Allah in the name of the child whose *Aqika* is being fulfilled. It may be pointed out that there is no such rule in the secret text justifying this practice. The *Nashya Sheikh* in the area of the study, however, does it because they say that for a long time this has

been their practice. The poor who cannot afford anything skip the ceremony of the sacrifice and it is not considered unlawful to do so according to Islam.⁵³

Language:

The mother tongue of the *Nashya sheikh* community people of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur, dakshin Dinajpur and Malda districts as well as Whole North Bengal are Rajbanshi or Kamatapuri language. As they pose the language of Rajbanshi people, so they are considered as the Rajbanshi Muslim or Bengali Muslim. They practiced the Rajbanshi language and culture from the very early days. Though nowadays the new generation of *Nashya sheikh* community is learning Arabic and Farsi in Madrasha but the number is too small. One of the major problems of *Nashya sheikh* community as far as the language is concerned is that their mother tongue is Rajbanshi language, official language are Bengali and English whereas religious language is Arabic and Farsi, so they are not able to concentrate to anyone of those language but they overcoming the problem as far as they could. The important cultural aspects are that though they have changed their religion but not previous manners. The *Nashya Sheikh* use *kamtapuri or Rajbangsi* language and use Rajbangsi customs and manners.⁵⁴ They like to carry on their life as same as Rajbangsi use only different *Roza*(Fasting), *Namaz* (Prayer) and later on there have been introduced Urdu words such as *Abba, Amma, Chacha, Gosul* etc.

Location and area especially this Kamatapuri or Rajbangsi language is known by various names in North Bengal. Such as Rajbangsi, Kamatapuri, Suryapuri etc. The influence of Hindi-Urdu mixed language of Bihar is noticeable in special areas of Dinajpur. On the other hand, the differences between the regional Bengali languages of Suryapuri, Shershahbadia, Penchi and the local Bengali language are also very clear. A temporary review of the language here reveals similarities with the Rajbangsi language in most cases, but the language of the native Bengal Muslims can be considered as the language of the

Rajbangsi Muslims. Which is the language of the native *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim community?⁵⁵

Linguistic differences between Sher Shah Badia and Penchi communities:

***Bangla shobdo* (Bengali Word) *Shershahbadiya Shobdo* (Shershahbadiya Word)
Pechishobdo (Pechi Word)**

Akhon	Akhoni	Okhni
Shilpata	Pata	Shilti
Unun	Aakha	Chulah
Jalani	TheLAR	Kathi
Aakha-	KhacCR	Uskathi
Baba	Babji/ Baji	Bapu
Jangol katr Astro	Haisa	Haosa

The language of the Pathan community:

***Bangla Bhasa* (Bengali Language) *Pathan Bhasa* (Pathan language)**

Ki Korcho?	What are you doing?	Ka Korhoto Re?
Kheyecho?	Have you eaten?	KhailaaHonn?
Chole Gecho?	Gone?	Chall Gohil?

Rajbangsi Muslim and Suryapuri language:

Bengal or Rajbangsi Muslims are living all over the vast area of North Bengal. The Rajbangsi are divided into four classes due to some differences in physical Structure and language; Namely- Rajbangshi, Kshatriya Rajbangshi, Desi Rajbangsi and Palia Rajbangsi. In West Dinajpur district, Desi Rajbangsi and Palia Rajbangsi are known only as Desia and Palia. Similarly, the slightest physical structure and linguistic differences exist among the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim or Rajbangsi Muslims.⁵⁶

The pronouns used by the Nashya Sheikh Muslims are as follows:

Bangla Shobdo	(English Word)	Nashya Sheikh Muslim Shobdob(Word)
Ami	(I)	Mui, Moo, Hami
Amra	(We)	Hmara, Mora
Amake	(Me, To Me)	Mok
Amader	(Us, Our)	Hamar
Tumra	(You, You All)	Tumrah
Se	(She/he)	Uma,Uyai,Usma
Tara	(They)	Umrah
Tar	(His/her)	Okhre,Uyar,Usmar
Take	(Him)	Oshak, Osmak, Ook

Examples of verbs:

Bangla Shobdo (Bengali Word)	Rajbangsi or Nashya Sheikh Muslim Shobdo (Word)
Jabo	(Let's Go) Jamo,Jamu, Jam,Jamku, Jabku
Kori	(I do) Koru, Korchu, Korohi
Korechi	(I Did) Kornu, Koriyahin
Ele	(When) Aalu, Aalo
Na	(No, Not) Nihi
Tar Barite Jete Hobe.	(She has to go Home) Usmar Barit JabaHobi

"Ho", "Bo", "Go" and trivially Re, Ku, etc. are used at the end of the verb in honour. For example, where did you come from? –*Kunthite Ailen Bo?* How much did you pay? *KetokeNilchi Ku?*

Here are a few words from a folk-tale prevalent in Rajbangsi or *Nashya Sheikh Muslim* society.

Bangla shobdo	(English Word)	Rajbangsi or Nashya Sheikh Word
Lau (Sabji)	Vegetables	Toka
Chele	Boy	Chengra, Chuya,
Ache	There is	Chea
Gobor	Dung	Chan
Basher Toiri Jhuri Baskets	made of bamboo	Daki
Komore	At the waist	Kochat
Jomir Simana	Land boundary	Ali
Konistho	Junior	Keni
Korlo	Did	Kolli
Deho	Body	Gotor, Deha
Stri	Wife	Maiya, Jaya
Kupba Idara	Well	Chuha
Snan Korte	To bathe	Gao Duhaya
Egulo	These	E Nungla
Bati	Bowl	Khuri
Boithokkhanar Samne Jayga	The front of the living room	Chundar
Pat Khori	Jute chalk	Sinja

Gash ba Khorer toiri agundhoriyerakhar jonno, To hold a fire made of grass or straw, Bhuti

As the language of Suryapur was mixed in Islampur area of Uttar Dinajpur district, the name of the language was given to Suryapuri Language. The language is spoken from Barduar in Raiganj to Sonapur, Bangladesh in the east, Amar (Purnia) in the west and parts of South Katiyar.⁵⁷

The examples of Suryapuri Language:

Bengali Language	(English)	Suryapuri Language
Taratari Aso	Come quickly	Hidke ass
Eimatroamibarijabo	I'm just going home	Aalaymui jam
Baba	Father	Bau
Bhai	Brother	Bhei
Chele	Boy	Nunu

Although the above Suryapuri language is known by different names, there is no doubt that the Rajbangsi language has merged with it. Even in some cases Rajbangsi language has prevailed. Apart from that, some of the Islamic words adopted by the converted Muslims of West Bengal in the post-conversion period

Such as:

Meat- Gusto

Uncle- Cha-cha

Aunty- Khala

Father- Abba

Mother- Amma

Literature:

The contribution of the *Nashya sheikh* community people in the field of literature is not more than little. But the contribution of the Muslim people of Jalpaiguri district was highly praised by various researchers and scholars. There were a few eminent people available during the pre-independence period, like B.P Rahimunnecha, she was a great literator. She had given economic assistance to a magazine called Mihir-o-sudhakar. BegomSuphura Khatun, (wife of barrister AminurRahaman) daughter of Mymensingh

Barutia Rajbari, during nineteen hundred thirty '*narimul*', a noble was written by her. The most remarkable one was the wise of Zamindar Hamidulla khan of Tetulia, Begom Azizunnechha. She translates the work of Tomas Panne's heroic sentimental 'the *harmit*' in Bengali. She was the first English educated Bengali Muslim poet. In recent times Helen-Nuri-Azad of Bakali (Jalpaiguri) is a very familiar name in the literary field of North Bengal. His writings are published in many magazines and Books. Moulana Mahammad Sahidul Islam is also a much-rewound person of Dhupguri (Gadom), his writings are also found in many Books and Magazines.⁵⁸ Pasarul Alam is a much popular writer of Uttar Dinajpur (Islampur), his writings are also found in many books and Magazines.

On the other hand, in the district of Cooch Behar we are unable to find any *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim community people as far as literature is concern. But in local folk lores and in little magazines we found Muslim scholars in literary field, though they don't have any significant role. As historical writer, we found Amanatullah Chowdhury, though he is not been considered as remarkable one. In the field of Music, Abbasuddin Ahamed established his profile very much. Moreover, as a record artist Naib ali and Ayesha Sarkar of Dinhata win the hearts of the critics. Ajimuddin MIya of Chandamari established himself as a Radio artist. Parvin Sultana of Dinhata and Najrul Islam of Harinchoura (Cooch Behar) are also earned their status in the field of Music.⁵⁹

The family of 'Abbasuddin Ahmed is one of the famous '*Nashya Sheikh*' families of North Bengal. The people of Koch Bihar of Abbasuddin, most of his birth and deeds are soaked in the earthy juice of Koch Bihar and Koch Bihar's mind. His eldest son, Justice Mustafa Kamal, his daughter, one-time East Pakistan and later Bangladesh's famous singers of folk-music, modern music, Islam music all such artists as Ferdousi Rahman are rarely born in Bengal. Justice Kamal retired as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Abbasuddin's second son, Mustafa Zaman Abbani, is also a well-known artist, and his

expertise in music is worthy of envy. He has already gifted several books to the people of Bengal. He has done very important work on Sufism in Bengal. His able wife Ashma Abbasi is also a famous writer. Many poems, stories, novels have come out of his hands. Justice Kamal's daughter Nasheed Kamal is a university professor and a renowned artist of folk music, Nazrul Geeti, modern songs etc. Like his cousin Ferdousi Rahman, he has been performing in many countries around the world besides Bangladesh. The most respected person in this family is Abbas's wife Ratnagarbha Begum Lutfunnesa. There was a simple rural housewife. Man has carefully cared for his accomplished children. But very few people know that that simple rural bride created such beautiful literature. In 1967, he published some of Abbasuddin's letters to the Bhayoiya emperor Abbasuddin in his book 'Praner Aleya', 'Pranapriya Aleya' and Begum Lutfunnessa 'Time Speaks'. These letters are literature. I have rarely seen such a readable letter.⁶⁰

Folk song or Music:

The role of Muslims is very negative in the history of Bengali music until the emergence of Nazrul and Abbasuddin duets. Outside Bengal, Hindustani music has been dominated by Muslim musicians from the middle Ages to the present day. The Muslims of Bangladesh but have not been able to keep pace with the Muslims of other parts of India. The invaluable resources of Bengali folk music have also remained hidden from the public eye, disrespected, neglected and neglected. But in this folk music, the artistic pursuit of the Nashya Sheikh Muslim masses of rural Bengal has been captured for a long time. The family of Abasuddin Ahmed is one of the famous '*Nashya Sheikh*' families of North Bengal. Abasuddin is a man of Koch Bihar, most of his birth and deeds are soaked in the earthy juice of Cooch Behar - the mind of Koch Bihar is nourished. His eldest son, Justice Mostafa Kamal, his daughter, one-time East Pakistan and later Bangladesh's famous singers-folk music, modern music, Islamic music, everything like Ferdosi Rahman was born in Bengal.

Abbasuddin Ahmed:

Abbasuddin Ahmed: (27 October 1901 – 30 December 1959) was born in Tufangang subdivision of Cooch Behar district of *Nashya Sheikh* Family of West Bengal on 27 October 1901 in British India. His father, Zafar Ali Ahmed, was a lawyer at Tufanganj court. Ahmed's first son Mustafa Kamal served as the Chief Justice of Bangladesh during June–Dec 1999. His only daughter, Ferdausi Rahaman is a classical musician. His youngest son, Mustafa Zaman Abbasi, is a folk researcher, writer, singer and social worker. Ahmed's granddaughter, Nashid Kamal, daughter of Mustafa Kamal, is a singer, professor of demography and writer.⁶¹

His early education was from schools and a college of North Bengal. He came closer to music through the cultural programme at schools and colleges. He was largely a self-taught song composer and singer. For a brief period, he learned music from Ustad Jamiruddin Khan in Kolkata. He was a Bengali folk song composer and singer born in the Bengal province of British India. He was known for Bhawaiya folk song which is a style commonly found in Rangpur and Cooch Behar.⁶²

Abbasuddin Ahmed started his career as a clerk in DPI office of Kolkata, where he stayed from 1931 to 1947. Afterwards he had worked in a permanent post in the Department of Irrigation. He was offered a job of a recording expert in a government organization in the time when Ak. Fazlul Haque was the chief minister of the state. His songs played a crucial role in evoking the opinion of Muslim public in the favour of 'Pakistan Movement'. After the partition in 1947, he joined, as an Additional Song Organiser, the Department of Information and Broadcasting. He also participated in the South East Asia Conference in Manila in 1955, the Bengali Cultural Conference in Rangoon in 1957 and the International Folk Music Conference in Germany in 1956 as the representative of Pakistan.⁶³

Ahmed started his career by singing modern Bangla songs for the HMV studios, followed by modern songs of poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh. He then proposed to Nazrul Islam to write and tune Islamic songs, which he sang in numerous numbers and recorded for the HMV studios. He has a pioneering role in bringing the music to the home of the Indian Muslims and arousing them from a state of backwardness. He was the first Muslim in erstwhile India who used his own name in the record labels. Before Abbasddin Ahmed, Muslim singers would use pseudo names, so that their Muslim identity would be anonymous. He later recorded Bhawaiya, Khirol and Chatka which were famous in Cooch Behar and Rangpur as well as the whole present North Bengal. Later he started to sing other folk songs like jaari, sari, bhatiyali, murshidi, bichchhedi (songs of estrangement), marsiya, dehatattwa, and musical plays. He also collaborated with Jasimuddin and Golam Mustofa.⁶⁴

Abbasuddin Ahmed distinguished from his contemporary composers and singers during the '20s. He has been credited with vocalizing everything from Islamic songs to Folk songs. His mesmerizing voice and stirring songs intertwined with our cultural heritage. His musical influence waved in Cooch Behar where he was born. He was committed to heart and soul to learn music. He developed his musical skills under the guidance of Ustad Jamiruddin Khan in Kolkata and Ustad Kader Buksh in Murshidabad. He was acclaimed a folk singer of great originality. Initially, he attained recognition for folk songs like Bhawaiya (a genre of North Bengal folk song aka Cart man's song), Khirol and Chatka in Cooch Behar and Rangpur district. Along with folk, he sang different types of songs such as modern, patriotic, Islamic and Urdu songs.⁶⁵ Folk songs like *Jari*, *Sari*, *Bhatiali*, *Bichchhedi*, *Dehatattava*, *Marsiya*, *Palagan* and Islamic songs such as *Hamd-Nath* sung by him became popular and made him one of the beloved folk artists in this land.

Muslim Rejuvenation:

In collaboration with Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, Pastoral Poet Jasimuddin and Poet Golam Mostafa he sang the songs composed by them. They inspired cultural practice in Bengali Muslim society and played a significant role in promoting Muslim rejuvenation. Abbasuddin Ahmed worked with Nazrul Islam while he made records with renowned companies like 'His Master's Voice' known as HMV. He also made a number of records with Megaphone, Twin and Regal companies. The song 'O Mon Ramzaner Oi Rojar Sheshey' is an inseparable part of the Muslims which proclaims the embodiment of graciousness and complacency. He was the first singer to lend his voice to this song. He also voiced a collection of Islamic songs composed by Nazrul. Their collaboration consolidated communal harmony that transcended the narrow boundaries of religion.⁶⁶

Bhawaiya and Bhatiali King:

Bangladeshi movie 'Uttarer Sur' (Northern Symphony) is based on the livelihood of one Bhawaiya singer. Woman is the central character of Bhawaiya song. It expresses the feelings and emotions of women. The song '*O Ki Gariyal Bhai*' is one of the Bhawaiya songs sung by Abbasuddin. The song exhibits the woman expressing her love towards the Garials (Cart men).

"O ki gariya bhai koto robo ami panther dikhe chayare...."

Abbasuddin Ahmed portrayed the life of North Bengal. From his childhood, he was surrounded by the feeling of hard-working life and boundless harshness of nature. His song

'Allah Megh De' became one of the worthiest remarks.

"Oh God, give clouds, give water, give shelter, Oh dear one ..."

A traditional type of song sung by boatmen of eastern Bengal is *Bhatiali*. *Bhatiali* songs are about experience, expedition and relentless journey against the stream. His popular *Bhatiali*

songs are written by Pastoral Poet Jasimuddin. Among those *Amay Bhashaili Re*, *AmayDubaili Re* and *Majhi Baya Jao* are widely popular.⁶⁷

The contribution of Abbasuddin is unparalleled and mesmerizing. He wrote an autobiography named *Amar Shilpi Jibaner Katha* (1960). He was posthumously honoured with the Pride of Performance Award in 1960, *Shilpakala* Academy Award in 1979 (posthumously) and highest civilian honour of Bangladesh, *Swadhinata Padak* in 1981 (posthumously). It is quite relevant to ask the question is his spirit and legacy being carried on. It is required to commemorate the folk maestro in order to save our cultural heritage. Abbasuddin made a number of gramophone records that demand to be preserved. He has left an indelible impression meant to be cherished. The great soul left for heavenly abode on 30th December 1959.⁶⁸

These songs are still prevalent in the Muslim community in the villages amidst innumerable rules of conduct on any important social occasion like marriage. However, the prevalence of these songs in urban areas is almost non-existent. Under the pressure of the modern omnipotent civilization of the city, it is gradually disappearing. In rural Muslim villages in remote northern Bengal, wedding songs are usually composed orally to meet immediate needs and are sung to the tune of folk-music, which is why the songs of this region of the Muslim community also play a special role in folklore.

Belief and Customs:

Traditionally, the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim community of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri Districts are believed in various Belief and Customs. They are following these beliefs from generations, like *Gosalpana* (when new seeds of Paddy are showing), *Nayabhat* (when new paddy taking at home), *Pusna* (cake made of rice meal), *Chaitra Sankranti* (last day of Chaitra month), *BachharPahela* (first day of every new Bengali year), *Sona Kapar* (during

marriage gifts of Golds and saris), *HaludMakha* (using turmeric on face and body at the day of Marriage), *Git Gaoa* (Singing of Marriage songs), *Chailan Bati* (giving blessings with lamp), *Pasa Khela* (Playing Pasa), *Swad Khaoano* (giving foods of woman's choice during pregnancy), *Nabo Jataker Chul Katano* (cutting of hair of a new born baby), *Mukhe Bhat* (ceremony of putting rice into a child's mouth for the first time), *Asouchapalan* (after death of any family person), *Kriya Karma* (Final ceremony for the peace of the death soul after 40 days of death), *Dostipata* (making new friends), *Bapdai Deoa*(establish father as a relation), *Mannat Kara* (wish to God or Allah during bad times) etc. Though these kinds of local culture are not approved by Islamic law, those are deep rooted into the mind of the *Nashya Sheikh* people. Though these kinds of customs and beliefs are not now practiced by *Nashya Sheikh* People, but those are prevalent in the society in limited numbers.⁶⁹

The *Nashya Sheikh* people do not like to cut their beard, hair, or nail on Friday. One of the most striking customs is that they believe every child of them takes birth by the blessings of Allah. They also believe that every child will be brought up by Allah. But now there are some changes in that custom. They believe, if three brooms are kept together, there must be a quarrel with each other. If they lend Chilly to their neighbours, they believe, the relation between the neighbours will break up in near future. They are of the view that if they abuse water, which they have to use for Uzor (using water for wash before prayer for Namaz), and the rest of the water if they drink, they will be blessed by Allah. They followed several customs like – if any couple have 16 children, there will be a re marriage between them. Another peculiar custom is that, if any husbands give *Talaq (Divorce)* to his wife and again want to marry to the same wife in future, the woman has to *Nikah* (marriage) with the oldest male person of that village for a minimum 90 days for purity. Only by then the previous husband is able to marry his earlier wife.⁷⁰

It is revealed that they are not confined by the rules of *Shariat*, Islamic customs and Islamic rules. They always maintain the Hindu Rajbangsi culture but need not to justify the culture as following the same as Muslims or not. Even they used to follow the Hindu good day in these special days for their marriage, birth ceremony etc. They always avoid the Hindu evil month for their occasion such as *Poush mash* (month), *Chaitra mash*, *Bhadra mash* etc. and they also avoid the *Ramjan* month (Fasting) and *Maharam* month for their marriage. They also make bargaining in their marriage for dowry. Brides wear red sharee in their marriage like Hindu. So, they are not lagging behind to maintain the Hindu customs and culture. Apart from the few educated *Nashya Sheikh* Families, most of the families who are comparatively less educated or illiterate do not subscribe to the notion of birth control.⁷¹

Though they have changed their religion, their cultural activities are the same as the *Rajbansi* community. They are aligned with the local cultural activities like folk song, dance, music, acting, sports etc. The main entertaining folk song and play of *Rajbansi* in North Bengal are *Bhawaya*, *Kushan*, *palagan* (folk song and drama) are aligned with the *Nashya Sheikh* community. Apart from, many other folk song and drama of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri are- *Gorakhnath Gan*, *Aloary Gan*, *Satyapir and Motherpir*, *pachaliGan*, *Murshid Gan*, *Bhawaiya Gan*, *Dotaradanga*, *Saitolgan* etc. On the other hand, in Malda are- *Gambhira* and marriage song. The Muslim Youths were experts of these songs, the most examples are Abhasuddin. In the field of *Bhawaya*, Muslims are more experts than the Hindu. With these Muslims women are not lag behind; the most examples are Hamida Banu (Assam border), Aysha Sarkar, Parvin Sultana (Dinhata), Jinaraman (Dhupguri) etc.⁷² Now their cultural activities are in crisis, and the big question emerges who will preserve these?

When new seeds of Paddy are sown (Gochorpana):

Paddy plantation is one of the most celebrated rituals of all indigenous Rajbansi and *Nashya sheikh* communities. It is celebrated every year in the months of June and July. This

is celebrated on the first day of planting of paddy.⁷³ This paddy planting method is done through special materials, like - one black shrimp, banana tree, *teoya* tree, jute tree, which are planted on the rituals field. It was arranged with five to seven banana pieces of casserole and five pieces of *kajal* and *sindoor* were given to each. With it, a straw-shaped fire was set on fire. Then the *Borashala* rice seedlings are planted. Five to seven saplings were planted. Gold and silver were given in a glass of water from five to seven trees. This practice is called as Gochorpana.⁷⁴ Then they would go straight to the house with all the extra belongings. Looking back, it was forbidden. Then all the materials were kept in the north house of the house. They came home and drank milk first. On that day, there will be one kind of pulses (*Maskalai*) and black turtles as vegetables on the menu. At meal time it is necessary to take rice pulse vegetables. Nothing can be taken later. *Nashya sheikh* people have been practicing this ritual from their predecessors. The purpose of this ritual is to improve the yield of paddy cultivation.⁷⁵

The basic premise and origin of folklore is the observance of worldly things. Since this area is the main area of agriculture, most folklore is the product of agricultural products. The original form of folklore is the prayer of the abundance of objects or animals that are involved with agriculture. This is the folklore that the goddess is remembered for or those for whom it is observed, all of them are non-Aryan gods.⁷⁶

The main purpose of this ritual is to worship the goddess Lakshmi to produce more rice. At that time there was no way for humans to do so if there were insects and various diseases in paddy. Therefore, people desire the fasts of the Goddess. So, they used to do this. This ritual is observed when the paddy crop is ripe to emerge from the paddy tree during the *Ashwani or Kartik*, (in the Bengali month) planting of paddy in the month of *Ashar*. A farmer and his family observed this ritual. This is celebrated in the *Kartik sankranti*. On this day, a small *Chalais* given to the rice paddy and this is usually made of jute. Many people make this

Chala with straw. Women in the house wipe the door of the house. Apart from that, lemon leaves and puffed rice are sprinkled on each paddy field. It burns the soil lamp with every field. Duck is sacrificed to the paddy field for worship. This duck meat is brought home and cooked and eaten all but the head of the duck is given to the goddess for worship. This duck's head is cooked in a new clay bone and is worshiped.⁷⁷ Roaming around the paddy field and calling goddess Lakshmi by lighting the lamp at night or lighting a fire in a bundle of jute. This time of paddy is called catching up paddy. The practice of performing this behaviour when catching up paddy on the paddy tree. This call is called thus.

“khatolangoldighalish.

Hamardhanerboroboro shish

Saroisaroi

Hanserdimakchurfuti

Ai maa lakhihamarveeti.”⁷⁸

(i.e. “Short plough consists with longer plough stilt.Sprout of our paddy long?

Pipkin pipkin

Egg of Duck and Edible Root.

Comes Laxmi towards us.”)

Thus the treatment is carried out in the pond through the openings of banana trees from the paddy field. The house is celebrated on the eve of the entire observance. The ritual of *Baribandha* is called *Hawkdak*.The last *Ashwin* is called *Hawk* and 1st*Kartik* is the Called *Dak*.On the day of the *hawk*, the farmer went to the field and tied up all his land. So, that the groundwater does not run out. It is done by men and in the house; women tie the straw or banana tree to tree.

Cow bathing folk practices were prevalent among people of all communities. All the cows are bathed on that day. Then oil and semen are fed on the cow horn by rubbing oil all

over the body.⁷⁹ Women in the house worship the cows and enter the cows at night. Cowshed is given special status by burning incense at night. It is customary to feed pumpkins to cows these days. This *BakharJauni* is a medicine for various diseases of cows. If it feeds, the cow will remain healthy throughout the year. This is one of the main purposes of cattle-eating behaviour. This folklore is celebrated on the day before the worship of goddess *Kali* and the night of worship of goddess *Kali*. All the devotees bathed and became pure and worshiped the god with a *Athiya* (special banana) banana. At night the rose is fed and bowed out again in the morning. This folklore is called worship of cows. In this folklore cowshed are well coated with raw cow dung. Then two statues of *Garhiyaand Gorhiani* were erected. These two statues are presented in front of bananas, duck eggs, smear with minimum. Besides these, milk, puffed rice and *Athiya* bananas are worshiped with *Prasad*. This is cow folklore. This folklore is for cultivating agricultural land. It is the belief that the fruit will be more in the paddy tree. This folklore is called a house-bound because on this day, the branches of the thorny bushes and the leaves of poisonous trees are tied in the house. As a result, mosquitoes will not enter the house. Such faith works. Cows want to cultivate land. These are two important resources. Cows and land had a special role to play in the survival of people. This is where people used to practice folklore along with land.⁸⁰

At present, the various practices and beliefs of the *Nashya Sheikh* community of North Bengal are facing destruction due to various reasons for the so-called modernity. On the other hand, for religious reasons, in the community of *Nashya Sheikh*, the influence of the Islamic culture is gradually being lost. *Gocharpana* practices are currently on the verge of destruction because of the change in paddy cultivation as a result of modern competitive crop production. People no longer practice it, because now people do not cultivate paddy only once in a year. Now it has lost its importance due to the production of crops, three to four times in a year. On the other hand, the *Nashya sheikh* community has lost its importance as

there is not being mentioned of the observance of the law in Islamic *Shariah* law. The practice of *Hariguri or Serosero* has also lost its importance today, as a result of using different modern chemical fertilizers and medicine. It has increased the production of crops as well as the use of various kinds of medicine to protect the crops from insects, spiders and several diseases. As a result, the attitude of people has changed. The practice of *Guruchumani* is also not observed in this way because the use of modern tools, techniques and equipment in the cultivation has greatly reduced the use of cows for cultivation in the society. On the other hand, as the Islamic fundamentalist spirit has grown into the intoxicated in *Nashya Sheikh* Community and people have abandoned non-Islamic practices and beliefs in the wake of the infiltration of Islamic customs. Thus, the culture and belief of the *Nashya Sheikh* community is also in crisis today due to the influence of modernity and the Islamic law.⁸¹

Based on the above discussion, we can see that although there are non-Islamic practices and beliefs prevailing in the *Nashya Sheikh* community, it is almost destroyed today. Today, a very small section of families of villages in different districts of North Bengal are still practicing *Gocharapana, Hariguri, Garuchumani* and keeping faith. Because they thought that these practices and beliefs were being practiced by their ancestors. Therefore, they do not believe that these practices and beliefs are in religious law.

The various rites associated with *Nashya sheikh* birth, marriage and death are highly distinct from those of the other neighbouring communities, making the *Nashya Sheikh* community distinctive socially and culturally. Like the other Muslim religious and social practices these rites are thoroughly codified the *Hadith* texts. Over and above this codification there are certain local innovations peripheral to the main body, in no way interfering with the Islamic absolutes inherent in this rite.⁸²The ritual of the life cycle in a society is traditional in the sense that it is practised generation after generation. Its adherents

usually become conscious of the various traditional precepts and practices of their society through informal and formal tutelage by elders.⁸³

So far, the formal knowledge of traditional rituals is concerned; the *Nashya Sheikh* is more systematic in this than any of their neighbouring communities. In so far as the formal knowledge of traditional rituals is concerned, the Muslims are more systematic in this than any of their neighbouring communities. They have codified rules even for the details of their various life cycle rituals. Moreover, there are trained agents to make laymen aware of the tradition.⁸⁴

The Hindu has the core of their tradition in a codified form. However, in practice, the Hindu tends to continue themselves far less to the codified form than do the Muslims. In actuality, the former introduces the enormous number of local usages (*deshachar*) and popular practices (*locachar*) or in other words, local innovations that mostly overshadow the codified tradition. The differences that exist between castes are reflected in the practice of religious and non-religious traditions among the different Hindu castes. Unlike the different Muslim groups under observation, the different Hindu castes do not maintain uniformity in their traditional practices and rites.⁸⁵

Rites of passage of any community have large variations, almost from one household to another. In fact, there is no end to ethnographic description if one desires to go into every detail as practised by the people. However, I have presented here, from a special point of view, the general pattern of the rituals that I have observed and in which I have participated.⁸⁶

Moral Standard:

The *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim peoples are very much simple minded and peaceful in nature. They are very much hospitable and well behaved toward their neighbours. They merely followed the rigidity of Islamic laws but they gave respect to the *Pirs* and *Darbases*.

When a *Nashya Sheikh* Muslim comes across with other Muslims, they give *Salam* to them for welcome. If anyone doesn't give *Salam*, he might be considered as 'Beyadab' i.e., one who doesn't know any disciplines or formality. Young members give respect to the older members of the society, with their behaviour and soft voice. In meetings of the older members, young members generally don't joint. The people of *Nashya Sheikh* Community don't wear any dress which reflects any disrespect to the seniors. They don't like to talk too much during meals; they don't wear footwear when taking meals. Women of *Nashya Sheikh* People keep distance from the men of society and they are generally soft spoken in nature. Though in some areas due to the social environment they quarrel with each other.⁸⁷

Education:

Education has been considered as a key instrument of change and development in contemporary times.⁸⁸ It is widely believed that the level of education among the Indian Muslims is very low compared to other communities. Though many scholars have reported the educational backwardness of the Muslims; yet most of them have not made any attempt to present an analytical account for this state of affairs.

In any society the system of education plays an important role in training, development and allocation of its manpower resources. It is one of the most important agencies whereby a person with ability can rise from one status to another in social hierarchy. The entire culture, non-material and material both are transmitted and changed through education from generation to generation.

The nature of crisis on education:

Since the colonial lords took over the sceptre of the country, willingly or unwillingly, whatever it was, they also took some initiatives to spread educational education. But the problem is with the Bengali Muslims. The language problem of Muslims in other parts of the

country was not so, complicated as Urdu began to take the form of their oral language, the language of education and the colonial government also thought that Urdu was the only language of Indian Muslims. Here they are wrong. Bengali Muslims are considered to be Urdu speaking. If there is a problem in this, the educational institution is average. In which language school will Bengali Muslims learn to read? Because Persian was the official language during the Mughal period, it was the only language of instruction for upper caste Muslims. Our Bengali Muslims could not learn that. The language of religion is Arabic, but he could not learn it. The language of Indian Muslims is Urdu; But they did not learn. Their oral language is Bengali, and their state language is English. This is the nature of the language crisis of Bengali Muslims. And because of this language crisis, not only the literacy rate, but also the spread of education in the Indian subcontinent was the lowest among the Bengali Muslims. Even in Balochistan, the North-West Frontier Province, the rate of education was very low. But the reason was not the language, but the problem of social attitudes.

In fact, just as Bengali Muslims did not learn Urdu, they did not learn English, the language of the colonial rulers, in the first period. This, of course, was a universal matter for Indian Muslims. Again, the upper caste Bengali Muslims did not allow them to learn Bengali. Bengali Muslims first got the opportunity to learn through Bengal in 1936. At this time Bengali became the medium of entry level education. Apart from that, Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Haque became the Prime Minister (then the Chief Minister was called the Prime Minister) and the tide of educational education of Bengali Muslims came. This tide lasted until independence. Because from 1936 to 1947 the Muslim League and Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party ruled Bengal. One thing that needs to be mentioned in this context is that it was at this time that Bengali Muslims, not only in general but also in part, took an active part in the conversion of Bengali into the language of the royal court and the legislature. It may be

recalled here that a large section of the Muslim members of the newly formed Bengal Legislative Assembly of 1938 were Muslims from the villages of East Bengal. They could not speak English in the legislature. So he used to speak in Bengali. And because they spoke in Bengali, their speeches were not recorded in the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. However, it can be clearly said that the triumph of educational education of Bengali Muslims started in 1937-48, although this journey was not smooth. This is because Urdu was widely spoken in Calcutta and the adjoining districts of Calcutta. The majority of the Muslims in Calcutta were Urdu speaking and that is why the school that Begum Raekeya opened for girls in Calcutta as a Bengali was an Urdu medium school. Begum Raekeya did not think of imparting education through Bengali language in 1911. Because just as there was a lack of Bengali girls, there was also a lack of mentality to read Bengali. Abdul Latif of Faridpur's '*Kathbanga*' or Syed Amir Ali of Hughli was against teaching in Bengali. Evidence of this attitude can be found in the family of Begum Raikeya of Rangpur and the family of Mir Mesharaf Hassan of Nadia. Begum Raikeya's family was not allowed to study in Bengali. Again, the father of Mir Mesharaf Hassan, a prominent and contemporary Muslim writer, hated the Bengali language. With this film in mind, we are talking about the Bengali Muslims of North Bengal. I think if you don't know this canvas, the issue of North Bengal will not be solved. Although North Bengal had some different problems. That is why I am coming this time.

Regional inequality:

Just as Urdu-speaking Muslims were in the majority in Calcutta, so were Bengali Muslims in North Bengal. The number of Urdu-speaking Muslims here was negligible. As a result, the spread of academic education has started late here. Maktab Madrasa was here. But his medium was Arabic or Urdu. In fact, a large portion of Urdu-speaking Muslims belong to the Ashraf class, so they get more government opportunities. For example, we can talk about

Rajshahi Madrasa. Rajshahi Madrasa has received much less government support than Madrasa in Hooghly, Dhaka and Chittagong. Here is an example of this inequality. For example, the Rajshahi Madrasa received very little money from the 'endowment' of the prominent Muslim social worker Haji Mohammad Mohsin. Because there were no Urdu speaking Muslims here. In the end, Rajshahi Madrasa did not get any money from that endowment. Thus, North Bengal was a victim of linguistic deprivation. However, for teaching Urdu, Arabic and Persian in government schools, the British government and the royal family of Cooch Behar adopted their schools.

We are aware of the role of zamindars, *jotdars* and rich classes in the formation of makhtabs, madrasas or modern English schools. But in this role of the Muslim zamindars of North Bengal we see that in the twentieth century it may be mentioned that in the northern part of North Bengal, that is, in the areas outside the permanent settlement, there were no zamindars, there were *jotdars*. And there were zamindars in the permanent settlement area. For example, in Malda-Bogra, Pabna, Dinajpur there were some Muslim zamindars or landlords. In Bogra he had several growing Muslim zamindars. But he could not play such a role in setting up the school. This is also due to language problems and weakness towards Urdu. However, the local Muslim community of Jalpaiguri has played a relatively important role in this regard. This time I am coming to terms with that. Some may question why I am just talking about olives. Of course, there are some reasons. Jalpaiguri is a divisional city of Rajshahi division. The inhabitants (like Bhatia Muslims, Bhatia Hindus) were Muslims, a relatively progressive class. The Muslim community of Jalpaiguri was on par with the Hindu community in any district of North Bengal in terms of land-learning-finance-social prestige. The Muslims living in Jalpaiguri, like the resident Hindus, played a special role in establishing tea gardens. Jalpaiguri had an important place in the history of enterprise of the Bengali Muslim society. At that time, the number of entrepreneurs in the Bengali Muslim

society could not be counted. There was also a significant role in the field of education. Several went on to study barrister, medicine, and the arts at other universities, including Oxford. Sir FA Rahman, the first Muslim Vice Chancellor of India, is from Jalpaiguri. He became the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University. Again, the immigrant Muslim community of Jalpaiguri was of special importance in social prestige. | The only person holding the title of Nawab of North Bengal was Nawab Mesharaf Hassan of Jalpaiguri. However, there was also a family with the title of Nawab in Bogra. However, the majority of the landlords' Muslims were native Muslims or dynastic Muslims. Many large Muslim landowners were in the Dwars Khasmahal area of Jalpaiguri district. Above all, the Muslim community in Jalpaiguri district was of special importance in the politics of the Muslim League. This is why I have chosen Jalpaiguri as the 'model' Muslim district. This time I am coming to that.

The admirable role of the local Muslim landlords (known as *jotdars*) in setting up schools in Jalpaiguri town and district is noteworthy. Although they began to play the role of patronage from the beginning of the three decades of the twentieth century. Munshi Sanaullah Mohammad is one of the most notable contributors in this regard. He was a local Muslim landlord and a wealthy man. His generosity and patronage became legendary at the same time. But what is awaiting analysis in this context is that the resident Muslim society did not play much of a role in the establishment of the school. Although, they were much more influential in the influence of education. It is also seen that the local Muslims played a leading role in the modern schools and madrasas which were established in different parts of the district. The cause of this indifference of the inhabitants and the so-called aristocratic (*Ashraf*) rich Muslims and landlords needs to be thoroughly investigated. Despite this close initiative of the local Muslims, educational education did not spread rapidly among the Bengali Muslims of North Bengal. Because the crisis was long-term and it was a linguistic problem. However, in this context, the women who were at the bottom of the Bengali Muslim

society, but the school opened. Although, he sincerely wanted to teach Bengali girls to read and write. But she could not implement it because she did not get a response from the Muslim community at that time. As a result, the condition of the Bengali Muslim women's society in North Bengal was very sad.

Impact of partition of North Bengal on education:

If the country becomes independent, on the condition of secession, and not on the basis of religion, language or ethnicity. The growing Muslim community moved to 'Pakistan got everything'. Just as the growing Hindu society and later the general Hindu society came to India and took the name of 'Refugee'. And those who went to Pakistan from India took the name of *Mehji*. Towards the end of the post-partition period, the Muslim community in general became obsessed. Despite government generosity, generous promises, and administrative security, they suffered from mental instability in the first quarter of the century. As a result, he could not think much about education. After the coup in Bangladesh, their mentality began to change. I am saying all this in the context of the condition of the Muslims in West Bengal. But just as this change helped them to overcome their emotional turmoil, an old problem began to re-emerge. That is to say, the government of all colours or ideologies of Urdu-speaking Muslims in West Bengal is a little more biased towards the Urdu-speaking Muslims, conscious, unconscious or subconscious. North Bengal is not free from its influence. On the contrary, this effect has further complicated the education crisis of the Muslims of North Bengal. It is the official language of Islampur subdivision of North Dinajpur district of North Bengal, of course Bengali as well as Urdu. This country was not in North Bengal before partition. Because there were no Urdu speaking Muslims in North Bengal. As a result of the reorganization of the state in 1955, several *thanas* of Purnia district were merged with West Bengal and came to be known as Islampur subdivision. As a result of these police stations being with Bihar, their mother tongue became Udu. For this reason, the

government amended the Language Act of 1971 to give Urdu the status of the language of the state of West Bengal along with Nepali. This is why Urdu is the official language of Islampur subdivision. We see this as one of the causes of the education crisis in the Muslim community in North Bengal. This problem did not exist in North Bengal in the pre-partition period.

There is going to be a problem with this new problem. That is why the Hindu and Muslim dynasties in the plains of Kochbihar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts in northern Bengal are demanding education in their mother tongue at an early stage. Just as we generally understand Hindu to mean Bengali, so we understand Hindu in Rajbangshi. But there are Muslim dynasties like Muslim Bengalis, whose mother tongue is Rajbangshi or Kamatapuri. The majority of people in present day Rangpur of Greater Bangladesh and the majority of people in the northernmost northern districts of West Bengal and some districts of Assam speak Rajbangshi. This time new schools and teachers have to be appointed to give primary education in Rajbangshi language. This is the problem of the government. But if there is another problem, even if they take primary education in Rajbangshi, high school and college level education must be taken in Bengali. Then he will study in Rajbangshi language, he will study in Bengali language, again he will study in English language at the postgraduate level and he will have to know Hindi for the job. It seems that the pressure of language will increase in the case of Rajbangshi Muslims. Thus they have to know or read some Arabic, Urdu, and Persian. This time you have to read Hindi, Bengali, and English. It is also true that a number of dynastic Hindu-Muslim students drop out of school at the primary level only for linguistic reasons. This crisis needs to be accompanied by a collaborative crisis. That is what will be the script of Rajbangshi language? Because first they are writing in Assamese script in Assam, in Bengali script in West Bengal. It will also cause script problems and will harm

the Rajbangshi speakers. Dynasty creation will be a loss to literature. Again, the Rajbangshi Hindus and Muslims of Bangladesh will write and read in Bengali.

A few numbers of people are educated in the *Nashya sheikh* society. Before independence the changes of Govt service were uncertain in the community. They could not realise the value of education because they were confined to agriculture heriditically. The light of education could not enter because of the lack of educational institutions in British period.⁸⁹ Their main tendency was the son of a farmer would be a farmer, so the educations were valued less to them. This tangency was mainly responsible for lag behind the community. The back dated thinking is neglected today but the community lost their base of education, modernity etc. Mainly the averages percentage women in North Bengal in Muslim community are highly lag behind. The Socio-Economic factors are more responsible for their orthodox mentality. The women could not come out of the social structure to move forward. However, a little number of Muslim girls goes to the school but they have lack of mentality be educated. Firstly, they have no educational environment in their home. Secondly, they could not purchase books for lake of many. Not only the problem is found in Muslim girls but also, it's found the enter *Nashya Sheikh* Students. That's why their participation is poor in modern education so the rest of the students cannot enter higher education to complete their basic education in Muktab-Madrasha.⁹⁰

Table 4.5

DISTRICT WISE MADRASAHs

District	Jr. High Madrasah (including Unit II and new setup)	High Madrasah (including H.S)	Sr. Madrasah (including Fazil)	Total	Unit II	New setup	H.S (10+2)	Fazil	Urdu Medium Madrasah	Girls Madrasah	vocatioal
Bankura	5	9	1	15	0	5	3	1	0	1	
Birbhum	5	22	4	31	0	2	9	3	0	0	
Burdwan	0	31	3	34	0	0	9	1	0	2	
Coochbehar	0	21	2	23	0	0	5	1	0	0	
Dakshin Dinajpur	3	12	4	19	3	0	6	3	0	1	
Darjeeling/Siliguri	3	2	0	5	0	2	1	0	2	0	
Hooghly	5	23	9	37	2	0	8	5	3	3	
Howrah	5	25	3	33	5	0	12	2	1	7	
Jalpaiguri	3	7	1	11	1	2	3	1	0	0	
Kolkata	0	8	1	9	0	0	2	0	4	3	
Malda	12	55	14	81	12	0	35	7	0	12	
Murshidabad	39	53	16	108	27	9	38	9	0	14	
Nadia	4	14	4	22	4	0	5	0	0	0	
North 24 – Pgs	6	28	17	51	4	2	19	9	0	5	
Purulia	0	4	1	5	0	0	2	1	2	0	
Purba Medinipur	1	14	2	17	0	1	6	1	0	1	
Paschim Medinipur	3	13	3	19	0	3	3	1	0	1	
South 24 Pgs	3	38	12	53	0	3	13	6	0	3	
Uttar Dinajpur	8	15	5	28	0	8	9	3	5	2	
Total	105	394	102	601	58	37	188	54	17	55	156

Sources: West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission 2011.

According to the West Bengal Madrasha Service Commission (2011), the total number of Junior high Madrasha 105 out of the 3 are Jalpaiguri district and there was no junior high madrasha in Cooch Behar district. In High Madrasah (including H.S) the total number of West Bengal are 394 out of the Cooch Behar are 12 and Jalpaiguri are 7. In Sr. Madrasha including *Fazil* 102 ave West Bengal out of the Cooch Behar district are 2 and Jalpaiguri district are 1. The total number of Madrasha including Junior high Madrasha, High Madrasha(H.S) and Sr. Madrasha (Fazil) in West Bengal are 601 out of the Cooch Behar district are 23 and Jalpaiguri district are 11. In Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts there was no Urdu and Girls Madrasha.⁹¹

The central government appointed on march, 9 2005 a committee of seven member under Sree Rajendra Sachar, a retired Judge to look into the social, economic and education condition of Indian Muslim community.⁹² The Committee had given a Comparative report to study the community with minority communities were the condition of Muslim community of West Bengal is pathetic. The Union government and state government brought the *Nashya Sheikh* and other Marginalised Muslims community under OBC category, to consider the socio-economically backward Muslim class of North Bengal. No doubt, the consideration of the government is positive. The community is hopeful to bring the community under socio-economically and educationally in forward to give the government facilities in government service and other sections. The state of education among the *Nashya* is very disheartening. For historical, situational and socio-cultural reasons the educated middle class has not been properly developed among the *Nashyas*. Since the content of the middle class among them is significantly very small, the *Nashyas* do not figure in any significant number either in white-collar jobs or in politico-administrative matters of their locality. A case study of Jalpaiguri among the *Nashya Sheikh* the literate and educated 27.82 percent had primary education, 24.86 percent had secondary education and only 7.05 percent had higher secondary and

college education. Another case study of a Cooch Behar village shows that among the *Nashya* 48 percent was illiterate and 52 percent was literate and educated. The literate 24 percent and 5.38 percent had higher secondary and college education.⁹³

TABLE 4.6

Educational survey of Nashya Sheikh Community of some areas of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts.

Sl. No.	Name and Address of the School	Percentage of the Muslim Population of the area	Percentage of the Muslim student in the School
1	Belakoba High School P.O- Prasanna Nagar Dist- Jalpaiguri	25%	7.25%
2	Jateshwar Girls High School P.O- Jateshwar, Dist- Jalpaiguri	20%	6.73%
3	Bhutnirghat High School P.O- Bhutnirghat, dist- Jalpaiguri	5%	1.73%
4	Jurapani High School P.O- Jurapani, Dist- Jalpaiguri	12%	3.45%
5	Promodnagar Jr. High school p.o- promodnagar, Dist- Jalpaiguri	30%	17.58%
6	Jateshwar High School p.o- jateshwar, Dist- Jalpaiguri	20%	5.81%
7	Vetaguri Lal Bahadur Sastrividyapith P.O- Vetaguri,	30%	12.25%

Sl. No.	Name and Address of the School	Percentage of the Muslim Population of the area	Percentage of the Muslim student in the School
	dist- Cooch Behar		
8	Ambari Dhaniram High School p.o- Ambari, Dist- Cooch Behar	20%	5%
9	HaldibariNabakishor High School p.o-Haldibari, dist- Cooch Behar	40%	23.38%
10	WahabulUllumjr, High School p.o- Bagribari, dist- Cooch Behar	25%	11%
11	Dewanganj High School p.o- Dewanganj, dist- Cooch Behar	28%	13.70%
12	Dewanganj jr. High School p.o- Dewanganj, via, Haldibari Dist- Cooch behar	27%	13.27%
13	Kamalakanta jr. High School p.o- Fatemamud, dist- Cooch Behar	60%	45.79%
Total		342	146.84
Percentage		26.30%	11.29%

Sources: Educational Survey of Nashya Sheikh Community of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar: Anagrashar Muslim Sangram Samiti (U.B.).

According to the Uttar Banga Anagrashar Muslim Sangram samiti, educational survey of *Nashya Sheikh* Community of some area of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts are reveals that in the area of Prasanagar in Jalpaiguri district the total population of Muslim percentage are 25% but in this area the percentage of Muslim Student in School are 7.25%. In

the area of Joterswar the total Muslim population percentage were 20% out of the Muslim student percentage in school are 6.73%. In the area of Jalpaiguri district at Bhutnirghat the total Muslim population percentage were 5% but the Muslim student percentage in this area are 1.73%. In Jurapani Muslim Population were 12%, where Muslim Students were 3.45%. In Promod Nagar Junior High School the population of Muslim people were 30% where the Students percentage was 17.18%. In jateswar High School Muslim population was 20% against the population of 5.81%. In the district of Cooch Behar at Vetaguri Lal Bahadu Sastri Vidyapith the population of Muslim People were 30% where the students of Muslim community were 12.25%. In Ambari Dhaniram High School Muslim student were 5% where the percentage of population were 20%. In Haldibari Nabakishor High School the percentage of population was 40% where the students were 23.38%. In Wahabul Ullumjr, High School the population of Muslim people was 25% where the Students were 11%. Whereas in Dewanganj High School we found the population were 28% belongs to Muslim Community but the Students were 13.70%. In Dewanganj jr. In High School we found the population of Muslims was 27% but 13.27% were the Students percentage. Here at Kamalakanta jr. High School we found the sound number of Muslim students i.e., 45.79% among 60% of Muslim people. According to the former survey report the whole population percentage of Muslims within the two districts was 26.30% but the Student percentage of both the Districts was 11.29%.⁹⁴

TABLE 4.7

Drop-out statement of NashyaShiekh students (Primary Education) – Uttar Banga Muslim Sangram Samiti (U.B.).

SL. NO	Name and address of the school	Category of students	Year and class. 1994-95,i-ii-iii-iv	Year and class.1995-96, ,i-ii-iii-iv	Year and class,1996-97, i-ii-iii-iv	Year and class,1997-98, i-ii-iii-iv	Percentage of drop-out
1	Hedayetnagar primary school,p.o-Jateshwar, dist-Jalpaiguri	Total-Muslim (NS)	68-29-25-21 46-13-15-07	75-35-29-25 45-19-13-10	82-42-31-26 43-24-17-12	80-44-35-29 43-25-21-16	57% 65%
2	Jigatari primary School,p.o-Dalimpur,dist-Jalpaiguri	Total-Muslim (NS)	95-26-19-09 27-06-06-01	128-28-22-14 42-04-07-04	130-14-28-18 46-07-08-06	120-50-40-20 35-26-05-02	79% 92%

Sources: Drop out Statement Of Nashya Sheikh Students (primary Education), Anagarasar Muslim Sangram Samiti (U.B.).

So, the table 4.3 easily represents the *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims Students of Primary Stage were very frequently Dropped out and out of the total percentage of Drop out i.e. 57% and 79% in the respective Schools they consist the major numbers i.e. 65% and 92% in respective Schools. So, we find that in primary Stage, the *Nashya Sheikh* Students were not able to keep them in School by the Students and by the Parents also, which is also the major cause for their Educational Backwardness.⁹⁵

The average educational standard of the *Nashya Sheikh* class is also very low. The materials on record go to indicate that their participation in the field of education is not upto the mark; about 10% read upto primary stage, 8% upto secondary level, and 3% up to Higher secondary level, percentage of Higher secondary Education among them is quite negligible,

(Graduation-2%, Law-0.5% and post Graduate-0.5%). The spread of education among the female is extremely low; primary -6%, secondary -4% and Higher secondary -1%. One percent only reached up to Graduation level.⁹⁶

Due to poor socio-economic conditions the percentage of dropouts at different stages of education is quite high. It is 50% at the stage of primary level, 80% at the secondary stage, 90% at higher secondary level, 95% at the Graduation level and 99% percent at the post-Graduate level. Their poor economic condition forces the children to join either their family occupation or other t5hen family occupations and thereby assist their parents in managing the family.⁹⁷The sample survey conducted reveals that out of the surveyed population, 9% of the females were literate against 23% of the males. About 17% Of the children (5-14) had school education. The sample survey further revealed that the dropout rate was as high as 89% at the primary stage and 80% at the secondary stage.⁹⁸

Most recently, it has been noticed that a section of the Muslim community has a tendency towards madrasa education. This is the sub continental trend. In other words, this trend is increasing in India-Pakistan-Bangladesh. This trend is also developing rapidly in West Bengal and its northern part. As a result of the expansion of madrasa educational institutions, illiteracy may be reduced to some extent. However, this assumption is also proving to be wrong in Bangladesh. Despite the proliferation of madrasa educational institutions there, illiteracy has not diminished. In fact, illiteracy can be reduced by increasing the opportunities for education in the mother tongue; I think it is not possible in any other language. Because of a child are the language of the mother's mouth and the language of her surroundings. Therefore, if we can teach him in his mother tongue, then it is possible to end illiteracy. Since it is a multilingual country and religion is inextricably linked with the country, the benefits of mother tongue are becoming limited here. That is why the government and the society are not able to teach 52 letters to 52% of the people of the

country. If we look at it as a social problem, it may not happen or even if it is a country of one religion. For a country of many religions, multi-languages and foreign rule, universal education is still elusive. For so long no country like ours has been subdued. I think it is not possible to fully understand the education crisis without this issue. This fear cannot be solved in this country and in this land by blaming it. It is not a matter of decision, but of experience and perception. And it is also a harsh reality that it is difficult to free the country from the curse of illiteracy in a democratic structure through academic debates or popular sentiments. Because religion and language are being used here as a tool of reaction instead of progress in the hand of politicians and religious businessmen.

Political involvement of Nashya Sheikh Community:

In the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar; in the field of society, economy and politics Nashya Sheikh Muslim community could not play important role and their participation also very few. In the political field of Gram Panchayet, Panchayet Samiti, Zila are very few of political representative. There is no representative in the Member of Legislative Assembly and Member of Parliament. In the field of politics there is no big generous in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. In the pre-independence that is during the reign of Koch King there was only centre of politics Projahitosadhini Sabha founded in 1940. It was founded by indigenous *praja* (both Hindu and Muslim), Khan Amantullah sahib gave identity of his generous by the leadership of Projahitosadhini Sabha and as a minister of court. During the same period sir Ansar uddin Ahmed of Mathabanga holding a especial leadership position of Hitosadhini Sabha and he became an important minister during king regime. Pre-period of accession Koch Behar to the union of India, National congress or Muslim league there was no leadership. Only in 1949 were the Projamondal party in spite, in the accused league Khan Amantullah Chowdary, Ansar uddin Ahmed, Moulbi Fazlay Rahaman and Mukbul Hossain these four expelled from Cooch

Behar. Latter period Ansar uddin Ahmed came back to Koch Behar and assumed post of Member of Rajya Sabha. As well as Cooch Behar town Mojiruddin Ahmed, was a local leader of Hitosadhini Sabha. In the latter period he was involved in congress and as an efficient organizer he assumed the post of district president of congress and elected M. L. A. in 1952. In second phase Dr. Fazlay Haque, in the long period all India congress committee member within the congress politics. Before 1977 he was also member of minister of state. Well speaker, handsome and notable efficient organizer and with popularity till today has been serving important role in the political platform of Cooch Behar. In the last phase of left rule, as a leftist Politician emerged Tamsar Ali. He became elected M. L. A. So notable is his political personality. At last, we can say, politics is the direct participation of administration, therefore a group or community's political representative approximately fulfil the aspiration-dream, making reliance in the state system and all the above for the building of the country participant himself. So, emerge the political leadership from whatever the political party there is need to be for the minority community.⁹⁹

The government of West Bengal so far identified 8 Muslim Group as OBCs on the basis of their occupation and socio-economic condition. These groups are *Jolha (Ansari/Momin), Fakir (Sain), Howari, Dhunia, Patidar, Kasai, Nashya Sheikh and Pahadia Muslim*. The Muslim OBC movement in West Bengal is slowly but gradually gaining momentum. Although there is no strong state-level organization of OBC Muslim in West Bengal, but the evidence of their activities is very often noticed at local and regional levels. The most notable among them is *Uttar Bongo Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samiti (UBAMSS)*. This notable organization was first established in 1995 at North Bengal in the state of West Bengal. From the beginning, secretary Md. Abul Hossain and president Mr. Bajlay Rahaman has been serving the same role even today. Representations were received from Md. Abul Hossain, Secretary, Anagrasar Muslim Sangrami Mancha (North Bengal),

P.O.- Jateswar, Dist. Jalpaiguri for inclusion of the '*Nashya Sheikh*' class of people in the list of Backward Classes of the state of West Bengal. The Commission gave hearing to this class on 24.07.1997 and again on 29.10.1997. The persons who gave evidence before the commission included Mr. Bajlay Rahaman, Vice-President, *Anagrasar Muslim Sangrami Mancha*, a high school teacher by profession (who presented the case of their class) and Shri Jugal Kishore Ray, belonging to the *Rajbanshi* class (Scheduled Caste) who supported the claim.¹⁰⁰ The *samiti* is Government Registered Social Organization of OBC Muslim in West Bengal (Reg. No. S-95179). The community leaders of the *Nashya Sheikh* and many other Muslim groups are now the active members of UBAMSS and through which they raised their own profile. The *samiti* has recently entered into the political scene and has been demanding reservations and other benefits for the Muslim OBCs, especially of North Bengal region. The *Samiti* has developed a strong organizational net-work at micro-and macro-level by constituting the village, block, district and control committee within the region of North Bengal. The activities of the *samiti* are very much enthusiastic in organizing movements to protect the interests of the *Nashyas* and *Sheikhs* and other indigenous backward Muslim groups of the region. The leaders of the *samiti* are ended very successful in scheduling the *Nashya Sheikhs* as one of the Muslim OBC group in West Bengal (Notification No. 84-BCW/RC-302/97, dated 1 march 1999).¹⁰¹ The *samiti* is taking much initiative to help the members of the *Nashya Sheikhs* and other Muslim OBC groups (*Ansari, Momin, Pahadia Muslims*) who face several difficulties at the ground level to obtain OBC and other benefits²³. The activities of the *Samiti* have created an atmosphere, which encourages youths of the *Nashya Sheikh* community to strive for economic and educational benefits like reservation of seats in Government jobs, political bodies, and educational institutions. The *Samiti* is very successful in awakening the indigenous and backward Muslim groups of North Bengal.¹⁰²

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⁹⁹Bazlay, Rahaman, 'Koch Behar Zilar Muslim Porichiti', Hossain, (in Bengali), Amjat,(ed.),*Kamrup Theke Kochbehar*, Suhrid publication, Kolkata, 2014, pp.115-116.

¹⁰⁰Rahim, Mondal, 'Emerging Ethnicity Identity among the Nashya Shaik of North Bengal,' of Bhadra, R. K. Bhadra, Mita, (Ed.),*Ethnicity, Movement and Social structure contested cultural Identity*, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 2007, pp. 309-325.

¹⁰¹Rahim, Mondal, *Dynamics of Muslim Society*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi,1999, p. 186.

¹⁰²Report -8, *op. cit.*