

## CHAPTER-VI

# NASHYA SHEIKH AND OTHER COMMUNITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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This chapter looks into a comparative study of *Nashya Sheikh* Community of North Bengal. The North Bengal is one of the backward places of West Bengal as far as India. Within the six districts of North Bengal the Muslim community is the biggest minority community from the North of Ganga to the heart of Himalaya, from Mahananda to Sangkosh, the geographical location in which North Bengal situated the old inheritance are marked as Muslims. They are the son of soil of North Bengal. The Muslims were ancestral of this area from the historical age with the clearance of forest. Their struggle can be found approx, the Tarai and Dooars from a very early age. Within the conflict of socio-political, environmental changes, development-underdevelopment, destruction, they are rich to the present century overcoming the various struggles of caste, from the last few centuries. They used to depend on the Agriculture of the village centric North Bengal which is still mobile in this area. Especially in the Districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar of North Bengal, Agriculture is the major source of livelihood. Most of the *Nashya Sheikh* People of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar Districts have been engaged themselves in Agriculture along with various other Communities. As the common occupation is Agriculture, so the people of many Communities have a few common characteristics, such as economic condition, their lifestyle, their social status etc. So that, we cannot differentiate a *Nashya sheikh* community of people from a Rajbangsi Hindu or a Polia, Mech, or other Communities. Only the *Nashya Sheikh* people can be differentiated by their Religion.<sup>1</sup>

## **Demographic Changes:**

By the time of independence of India, in 1947, the territory of North Bengal was dissected. Moreover, the Koch Bihar kingdom fell down during 1950 and some parts of Purnia district was merged into the West Dinajpur. Refugees were taken in North Bengal from East Bengal. From India some people gone to East Pakistan, in this socio-economic perspective the local Muslim community faced a big backdrop in their political and socio-economic sectors.<sup>2</sup> They were simply found most as agricultural labour or as mason, rickshaw driver, unskilled labour, transport worker. Even they were found as the beggar also. They were even backward in the education and government jobs. This is very much of a concern from the point of view of a minority community. Is there no path for solving this backwardness in our constitution or political system?<sup>3</sup>

Before partition, some aristocrat educated Muslims came to North Bengal from South Bengal. Some for jobs, some for business, and they became permanent residents of this area. In Army of Maharajah of Cooch Bihar, there were some Muslim Mughal and Pathan employed. After partition, aristocrat Muslims went to East Bengal. Now they have some relatives alive, however they have been assimilated to local Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

Before going through the point that is changing the demographic picture, we represent a short introductory word on the above point. As we have been taken the source of data from various date especially the Census Report of 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001, found that it characterised the different wings of process of migration and immigration of Muslim group at here.<sup>5</sup> The Districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar had a Muslim majority area before independence. On the basis of source and information from the essay named 'Jalpaiguri Muslim Samaj' written by Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh, published in Madhuparni, Jalpaiguri zilla Sankhya, has given a float light over the point with a new dimension.<sup>6</sup>

He shows, Jalpaiguri with Muslim majority town alike from the other towns of India. It had different characters. Muslims of Jalpaiguri were intellectual middle class, land owner tea planters, educationist and businessman.<sup>7</sup>

The different classes of this Muslim group have come from the different parts of our country. They are lawyers, and the Bar Association has been dominated by them. They were politically conscious. Central National Muhammadan Association was established at Jalpaiguri also. In 1923 Sonallah donated huge money to Swaraj Fund. That's why he was awarded as Amir-ul-Mulk by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. Not only that, he was the strong patronise of social activities also. He donated funds for establishing a School, Social Organisation and Mosques. Dr. Shiv Shankar Mukharjee, through his research work, shown Muslim engaged in business were came from Dhaka, Nowakhali and Patna districts of East Pakistan. Not only that Muslims of Bihar, U.P. and Lakhnow gathered here. They gradually became financially sound through their respective businesses. So according to Professor Ghosh, Muslims of Jalpaiguri can be classified with their category of origin i.e., Pathan, Sheikh and Nashya.<sup>8</sup> J.A. Millign in his survey reports showed that a large number of Muslims from Dinajpur, Purnia and Bihar came here and settled at Rajganj as described by Nassya by Upendranath Barman. So, on the basis of linguistic similarity their successors lived at different parts of Indo-Bangladesh border area adjoining region of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts. Keeping in mind the above information we representing the recent structural history i.e., demography of Muslim group residing at Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts.<sup>9</sup>

The Muslim groups are gradually becoming minority, after soon the independence. So, the lot of this city who paid the large amount of revenue to the colonial Government had been washed out and migrated to East Pakistan after 1947. The migration in microscopic as described by Ranajit Das Gupta in his essay "Hindu relation of Jalpaiguri districts in pre

independence”, published in Charu Chandra Sannayal, Smaraq Grantha, meanwhile it is to be noted that Hindus migrated here in lieu of their exchange of property of East Pakistan. The exchange was done among the Hindus of East Pakistan and Muslims of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts.<sup>10</sup>

Within four decades through these characteristics of migration and push back policy of Bangladesh Government large number of Muslim settled once again in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts. The migrated outsider and converted, all are gathered since after the 1971. It is very much cleared that the Muslims have been settled after the sign of Neheru-Liakat Pact (1950). Muslim immigration of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts was found to have risen significantly.<sup>11</sup>

It can also be assumed that after the Pakistan resolution 1940, the migrants of the Muslim groups from the Eastern part of Bengal started and with the partition of Bengal the influx of migrants into North Bengal took place in large scale. It obviously influences the society, economy and polity of the post partition of North Bengal.<sup>12</sup>

Changing demography of dominating Muslim group has become significantly increased. Before the independence the bulk number of Muslim lawyers, intellectuals and businessman migrated to Bangladesh and few of them were settled, in rest of Muslim majority area of Bengal.<sup>13</sup> The demographic picture of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts had shown the Muslim majority region. Mainly they settled at Indo-Bangladesh adjoining area, few of them settled at Shishubari of Alipurduar Sub-Division, newly township of Jaigong and Mathabhanga Subdivision of Cooch Behar. Not only that Birpara, Madarihat, Hasimara, Sitai, Shitalkhuchi we can find a large number of Muslims settled here. The area of Jalpaiguri Sadar Division i.e. Rajganj ,Berubari, Pukurjan, Sannasikata are also the Muslim majority area . It is noticed from the Sarba Shikhya Mission, the majority Muslim students are reading at Sannyasikata High School. It is very questionable that the areas where they

settled had confined within the adjoining region. Recently they settled in difference area of nearly from the town also i.e. Siliguri, so the area where they settled in Jalpaiguri District has a rectangle in shape. <sup>14</sup>

Now we represent the comparison figures of population of Muslim groups in Jalpaiguri district in respective census of 1961, 1971.

**TABLE 6.1**

**Population (Religion wise) in the District of Jalpaiguri in 1961 and 1971**

1961			1971	
Religious community	Population (number)	% of total population	Population (number)	% of total population
Hindu	1160954	85.41	1591201	86.81
Muslim	129771	9.55	156992	9.97
Christian	48570	3.57	55707	3.18
Buddhist	18258	1.34	15628	0.89
Jain	780	0.05	1572	0.08
Sikh	950	0.06	1253	0.07

**Source: Census of India, 1961, 1971.**

Here we found that the Hindu population was decreased in 1971 but Muslim population was increased, from 1961 as 1.40% and 0.42% respectively.<sup>15</sup> When the Christian and Buddhist Community's population percentage was also decreased, but the Jain and Sikh population was increased.

Another comparison of figures of population by religion in Jalpaiguri district gives us a fare idea in proliferation of Muslim population.

**TABLE 6.2**

**Population (Religion wise) in the District of Jalpaiguri in 1981 and 1991**

1981			1991	
Religious community	Population (number)	% of total population	Population (number)	% of total population
Hindu	1938062	87.50	2375168	84.81
Muslim	193658	8.75	281054	10.04
Christian	63555	2.87	107969	3.85
Buddhist	16368	0.74	31633	1.13
Jain	1406	0.06	862	0.03
Sikh	1628	0.07	1607	0.06
others	149	0.01	2250	0.08
Total population	2214871	100.00	2800543	100.00

**Source: Census of India, 1981, 1991.**

Here in this decade, we found the Muslim population was increased as 1.29% in the Year of 1991, whereas the Hindu population was decreased as 0.84% in 1991 as compared of 1981.<sup>16</sup>

Here we can see the Hindu population with the span of decades has gone down from 87.50 in 1981 to 84.81 in 1991, registering a decrease of approx 2%, whereas the Muslim

population has increased from 8.75% to 10.04% registering a steady increase. In addition, here we found an interesting increase in the percentage of population of Christian and Buddhist's. Whereas the population of Sikh and Jain were decreased in 1991 from 1981.

**TABLE 6.3**

**Population (Religion wise) in the District of Jalpaiguri in 2001**

<b>2001</b>		
<b>Religious community</b>	<b>Population (number)</b>	<b>% of total population</b>
Hindu	2893124	82.32
Muslim	395680	12.39
Christian	138725	3.99
Buddhist	39610	1.14
Jain	1036	0.03
Sikh	2135	0.06
Others	2604	0.07
Total population	3472914	100.00

**Source: Census of India, 2001.**

Here we found that the Muslim population was increased in 2001 as 2.35%, where Hindu population was decreased in 2001 as 2.49% as compared as 1991. On the other hand, in the year 2001, the Christian and Buddhist population increased but Sikh and Jain population remained the same as compared to 1991.<sup>17</sup>

Now we can see, the overall changes happened from 1961 to 2001 as far as population is concern within various Religious Communities, which shows, Hindu population was decreased as 3.09%, Muslim population was increased as 2.84%, Christian population was increased as 0.42%, Buddhist population was decreased as 0.20%, Sikh population was only remain the same as 0.06% from 1961, Jain population was decreased as 0.02% in the District of Jalpaiguri.

**TABLE 6.4**

**Population (Religion wise) in the District of Cooch Behar in 1991 and 2001**

Religious community	1991		2001	
	Population (number)	% of total population	Population (number)	% of total population
Hindu	1659733	76.45	1871857	75.50
Muslim	506728	23.34	600911	24.24
Christian	1467	0.07	2162	0.09
Sikh	215	0.01	330	0.01
Buddhist	353	0.02	474	0.02
Jain	2093	0.10	2193	0.09
Others	556	0.03	489	0.02
Religion not stated	*	*	739	0.03
<b>All Regions</b>	<b>2171145</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>2479155</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001.

Here we found the Demographic changes in the District of Cooch Behar within various Religious Communities from 1991 to 2001. Due to unavailability of sources, we aren't able to mention the Demographic status of earlier decades. From the available data we can say that the Hindu population was decreased as 0.95%, Muslim population was increased as 0.9%, Christian population was increased as 0.02%, Buddhist and Sikh population was remaining same, whereas Jain and Other population was decreased as 0.01%.<sup>18</sup>

On the whole the Muslims are settled at Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts. They played a significant role in different aspect of life. On the basis of source of information especially signified the socio-religion and economic relationship of Muslims with the Rajbanshi's also. They worked with the Hindus and involved in Agriculture, food production and Government service. Here we can see the cultural assimilation of different communities. It gave a new shape of livelihood. Source from Ranajit Das Gupta, Grulling and Ananda Gopal Ghosh we may agree that Jalpaiguri had its different in Eco-Religious-Political character. Muslims are influenced here like Hindu. They are neither communal nor conservative. They are mixed with the Hindus, Rajbanshi's and another sect also. So, it is one of the District towns which represent a new shape of Indigenisation and brought a new era in the history of modern India.

#### **Adaptation, Adjustment and syncretism:**

To find this answer we have to consider our democratic system, constitution, Mandal Commission and central- state governance policy. We can find agitation against Brahmanism of the south Indian states as early as our independence, it started from 1885. But the higher castes people of south India were divided into many forms, whereas lower castes people were united for their culture and language especially the Drabida language and cultural community. For this Muslim community has been enjoying the benefit of other backward communities before independence. During the formation of the constitution of India the

constitutional body was very much concerned about minority reservation and for this the advisory committee on fundamental rights and minorities formed under the leadership of sardar Patel. This committee supports minority reservation and recommended it. But H. C. Mukherjee and others strongly opposed the recommendation of minority reservation in the constitutional assembly. For that this proposal of reservation was abandoned.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from anthropological platforms, it can be noticed that in regards to folk culture, Muslims are mainly influenced by local culture. The flow cultural continuity of folk culture of Koch, Mech-Rava, Rajbangsi and Polia is still existent. Dr. Riajul Haque in regards to research on folk culture stated, "In the various Muslim society of West Dinajpur District, despite existence of somewhat different type of profession, linguistics and behaviour, there is no difference with main stream Koch cultural sphere's festival, folk play and folk songs." In regards to folk culture, the Muslims of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri are connected to Rajbangsi folk culture. In the usage of turmeric, in decorating house, during sowing new crop, the ceremony of gochorpona, Nabanna, songs of marriage and other ceremonies of marriage, otherworldly ceremony, cutting hair of newly born child, Sath bhakshan of pregnant lady, beating drums during Maharam, playing Lati, Tajia procession and immersion, in lighting essence sticks in the Dargah of Pir, in lighting candle, in Manating, in believing ghosts, in doing Jharphuk, in menu list having Sukatachhyaka, use of shidol, etc numerous examples exist. They are naturally connected to Rajbangsi folk culture. Even Muslims too were included into Hindu laws like Rajbangsi's under Koch monarchy. "The Muslim of Kochbeharis also generally guided by the Hindu law of in evidence unless any Muslim dissents and proves in court that his family was guided by the Muslim law from before."<sup>20</sup>

In social norms Muslims don't have the so-called Varna system like Hindus but because staying close to Hindu society complete emancipation from it could not be gained. During Turkic-Pashtun age, a handful foreign Muslims (Turkic, Afghan, Irani, Arabi) were in

the leadership of the society. They identified themselves as “sharif” (Aristocrat, Sharif). As per Hindu Varna system of four classes, this Ashraf was used to be identified. Sayyed (a learned person like Brahmin), Mughal-Pashtun (warrior like Kshatriya), Shaik (merchant like Vaisya), and remaining native converted Muslims were called “Atraf” or non-aristocrat. In North Bengal, these “Atraf” sect’s local untouchable Muslims were called “Nasya-Shaikh”. In later days, during partition and district reconstructions other low caste Muslims too were included into the populace of North Bengal, though their number is limited. In present, in regards to regional and professional terms the sects which can be noted among the Muslims are noted below.<sup>21</sup>

“**Nashya’Sheikh**”- Now North Bengal’s 90% Muslims are *Nashya Sheikh*. “Nashya” means “Nasta”. Sheikh means qualitatively best. Foreign Muslims identity was Sheikh. But in course of time, it took just to be Muslim to be called a Shaikh. As it was believed that local converted Muslims were degraded in quality because of conversion, that’s why this class’s Muslims were called ‘*Nashya Sheikh*’. These Muslims are basically converting from local communities of North Bengal like Rajbangsi, Koch, Polia and Deshiya. That’s why even today their language is Kamrupi or Kamtapuri. Except religion they are similar with Rajbangsi, Polias in terms of clothing, food, folk culture, profession and in appearance. They are all peasants and habitations are in rural area. Negligible parts who are now employees in urban areas they too came from peasant families and urban area’s small group of Muslims still retained their connection to rural areas. Surplus agricultural labourers are involved in professions like pulling Rickshaw. These *Nashya Sheikh* Muslims were referred to as Rajbangsi Muslims to be the researchers. But in some pre-independence census and in Government documents and in some post-independence Government’s gazettes the word “*Nashya Sheikh*” can be found. In nature they are simple and good neighbours.<sup>22</sup>

**Bengal Sheikh:**

As the word “Sheikh” means better or best so with the intention to identify self with aristocratic status, like other Muslims of West Bengal, Bengal Sheikhs to identify them as Sheikh. They generally live in South Dinajpur with Bengali as mother tongue. They are basically peasants and generally live-in rural areas. Their behaviours, folk cultural, attitude and in appearance they are similar like Rajbangsi’s. Their ancestors converted from the Rajbanshi community. Many refer them as Rajbangsi Muslims too.<sup>23</sup>

**Sayeed:**

Sayeed, this word means leader. Arabic enlightened and educated family’s people are known as Sayeed. North Bengal’s West Dinajpur (present day North and South Dinajpur) and Cooch Behar’s Lelay’s a group of Muslims identify themselves as Sayeed. They are not Arabic but converts to Islam from these areas. However, they sing Ghajal, kawali, Giit and Baul songs while travelling from house to house. In return they accept something in home holder’s house. In profession they are basically baggers. Many calls them “Machbhandary” in Cooch Behar.<sup>24</sup>

**Sheikh:**

Scatterly some Pathan descent’s aristocratic Muslims today still live in Maldah. They identify themselves as Sheikh. They use a language named Khotta which is an admixture of Hindi or Urdu. Ratua, English Bazaar, Manikpur Thana belonging to Diara and Tal, are main places of their habitation. Many consider their original homeland was in Bihar’s Darbhanga.

**Dinajpuri Bhatia:**

In Darjeeling district in both Dinajpur districts there is a group of Muslims who are known as Bhatia’s. Many consider them to be included in Maldah's districts’ Sherbadiya group. General tradition is many years ago, their ancestors were in Arab country. In North

Bengal, their arrival happened during Sher Shah's time. Prior to this supposedly they were in downstream areas or in the South. Whatever the case is now they have been totally assimilated among local people. Now they are classified as BPL. They are mainly involved in professions like rowing boat, agriculture, business of cow-buffalo and goat.<sup>25</sup>

**Bhatt:**

“The word “Bhat” came from the word Bhar. Bhars generally used to entertain kings and landlords by singing poems. In two Dinajpur’ areas adjacent to Bihar border, those Bhatt class’s Muslims who can be seen today, however, no longer do this work. Perhaps their ancestors could have done this. Now they are mainly involved in repairing umbrellas, sewing cloth and samiyana. There is dominance of Urdu in their language.

**Gain:**

Generally, the singer community is identified as Gain. In almost every area of North and South Dinajpur, there are more or less Gain community’s Muslims. They mainly earn their livelihood by singing the Pachali of Satyapir and Madder Pir. They are generally Muslims of Rajbanshi language. Their pachali song is very much like Rajbangsi cattle herder’s songs of Gorakhnath.

**Hiram:**

Various Muslims belonging to the barber class’s Muslims of various areas of North Bengal are called Hiram. Apart from cutting hair and beard, Hajams also do circumcision or Khatna. In regional terms they are called “*Naua*” and “*Osta*”. They generally live more in areas of two Dinajpur districts adjacent to Bihar. They are mainly Hindi speakers.

**Bakani:**

This class's Muslims generally live in North and South Dinajpur. They are generally converting from lower Hindu castes. They are mainly peasants in profession. They are mainly interested in selling various agricultural crops by basket in Bazaars.

**Adivashi or Tribal Muslim:**

These Muslims are generally of Santhal descent. Their main area of habitation is Jalpaiguri district's Doors area. They can be seen engaged in mainly agriculture, collecting woods from forest and working as Coolie in tea gardens and in cattle farming. Their language is Santhali. They still don't use Arabic names; instead, they still use Santhali names.

**Momin or Ansari:**

In Kaliachak's vast areas Momin Muslims live. They are called Jolas too. Their previous profession was working in the handloom industry. They are converts from lower caste Hindu sects.

**Panjhra:**

They are Muslims of fishermen class, involved in the fishing industry. They are converts from lower Hindu castes. They have a tradition of using Sindur among their married women.

**Deshi:**

Desi Muslims identify themselves as Gaurdeshi. Probably after the fall of the King of Gaur, their ancestors began to live in areas near Gaur. But many guess their ancestors could be Rajbangsi. Now their customs are very much like Rajbangsi's.

**Badiya:**

Kaliachak, Maniachak and in Ratua area Badiyas live. They are called Sherbadiya. According to some they are descendants of Pathan king Sher Shah. Integrand to customs they are La-Majhobi meaning they are not believer of any 4 ways of Islam. Professionally they are mainly peasants and small businessmen.<sup>26</sup>

**Bihari Muslims:**

For many days, Hindi speaking Muslims from Bihar have lived in North Bengal. Now they are this area's permanent residents. They are simple, loyal and modest. Most are involved in small occupations. As Butcher, Dhunkor, small business man, washer man, and barber they are known. Mr. Ahul Fazal, a member of the Association gave oral evidence. In fact, he has stated that the 'Pahadia Muslims' constitute an endogamy social group and they are identifiable as a separate racial group entirely distinct from the other social groups. It has been stated that persons in this class or their ancestors who originally belonged to Scheduled Castes and other degraded or depressed classes embraced Islam and this class is a class of converted Muslims from the Scheduled Castes and other such low and depressed classes in society. Though a class converted to Islam from such sections of the downtrodden people, the persons in this class maintain their separate and distinct identity and it is not possible for any other group to infiltrate into the social group. It has also been stated in evidence that the person in this class who are converted Muslims from Scheduled Castes and other downtrodden and depressed classes have still maintained even after conversion many of the customs and traditions of the class or caste from which they became converted and notwithstanding becoming Muslims, ceremonies like 'Bhatriditiya' and 'Rakhi Bandhan' are still in vogue in this class. It has also been indicated in evidence that this class generally speaks its own ethnic dialect and maintains its mode of dress-style, food habits and various other activities which are largely based on the old traditional habits of the class or tribe to

which it belonged before conversion. Change of religion has brought about no change in their condition. The particulars furnished go to indicate that there are no Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants and other professionals in this class and only in the teaching field, teachers – Primary, account for 0.5%, teacher –secondary, Account for 1% and teachers – Higher Secondary –Nil. The Educational standard of this class is very low. It is established that in the Government and non –Government services there is nobody in any high and middle rank of the Government and non-Government services. Only in the case of ordinary jobs 3% of the persons in this class are employed in the ordinary Government jobs and 1% in the non-Government jobs. Representation of this class in Government, semi-Government and even non-Government services is indeed negligible. It appears that there is no M. P. there is no member of the Zilla Parishad and Block Panhayat or Gram Panchayat from this class. Living conditions of this class is indeed miserable and most of the people of this class live in thatched huts and the main source of livelihood is fish selling, butchering and working as daily agricultural labourers.<sup>27</sup>

The materials submitted go to establish that this class of Pahadia Muslims consists of persons who or their ancestors have been converted from Scheduled Castes and other low and depressed classes of the society and the change in religion has not in any way improved their status –social, educational and economic, and it appears, on the other hand, that this class has been further down-graded. The materials submitted, clearly establish the educational backwardness and social backwardness of this class and also the very poor economic condition. The Commission is also satisfied that the ‘Pahadia Muslims’ who are converted from Scheduled Caste and other low and depressed classes and who even after conversion maintain identity of the peculiar ethnic origin and continue to observe the traditions and customs peculiar to this class, constitution endogamy social group and they are identifiable as a distinct social group and they live as a distinct social group. The ‘Pahadia Muslims’ in the

opinion of the Commission, constitute a distinct and separate and identifiable class. The Commission is satisfied on a proper consideration of the materials placed before the Commission that the 'Pahadia Muslims' class is a socially and educationally backward class in the State and deserves to be included in the list of Backward Classes in the State. The Commission notes that there has been no opposition from any quarter to the inclusion of this class in the list of Backward Classes in the State. Shri Bhupendra Chandra Barman (a retired Primary School Teacher), Secretary, Nikhil Banga Kshatriya Barman Samaj Kalyan Samiti Appeared before the Commission to represent the case of their class, supported by Shri Bijoy Sankar Barman (Vill- Nutan Durgapur, P.O.- Alinagar, Dist.-Jalpaiguri). They took oaths and submitted necessary particulars. As per their submission, the 'Banshi Barman' class is one of the down-trodden, underprivileged and socio-economically and educationally backward classes of people and they are looked down upon by their neighbours in the locality. It was stated in evidence that they are a small class of people, numbering only 2,251 persons (male – 1200 and female – 1,051). Their Population In the different districts of the State of West Bengal are as follows –Nadia (473), North 24-Parganas (31), Jalpaiguri (754), Cooch-Bihar(882) and South Dinajpur – (111). They are dispersed in the following P.S./Blocks and Gram Sabha of the districts concerned: North 24-Parganas: Barrackpur – I (Majhipara, Palasi) Nadia:Krishnagar South and Ranaghat – II (Bhat-Jangla and Debagam).South Dinajpur : Bangshihari (Brajaballavpur and Alahabad).Jalpaiguri: Falakata (Choakhola, Joteswar, Goabar Nagar).Cooch Behar: Cooch Behar – II, Dinhata (I& II) (Khapaidanga, Gosanimari and Burirhat).<sup>28</sup>

They submitted that though they are small in number, they are distinctly identifiable as an endogamous social group having mongoloid physical features. They migrated to West Bengal and other parts of India (Assam, Orissa) after independence from East Bengal (now in Bangladesh). They were inhabitants of the forest tracts of the Districts of Dacca (Sripur,

Kaliakoir, Savar Police Stations). They are not aware of their old history; whatever they know is based on hearsay and guesswork. This much they, however, know for certain that their forefathers used to live in the jungles under the Vawal Zamindars in Bangladesh. They used to live on hunting and agriculture.<sup>29</sup>

Originally, they were known as 'Sardars'. They worked as Lathials and guards of the Zamindars of Bhawal who designated them as 'Barman'. As the Lathials of the Zamindars, they not only changed their class name from 'Sardar' to 'Barman' but also thought that they were 'Kshatriyas' for which they introduce themselves as 'Surya Banshi Kshatriyas'. But no one cared for those adopted class names and titles. The people in general called them 'Banshi'. This is because; one of their main functions was to hunt in the jungles with bamboo sticks (called 'Bansh' in Bengali) and supply the hunted animals to the Zamindars.<sup>30</sup>

The Banshi-Barmans are internally sub-divided into several exogamous 'gotras' such as Ajgi, Bhoggi, Kanta, Songmati, Chalhais etc. Which follows their mother's line of descent? At present most of them belong to 'Kashyap' gotra. The Goddess 'Kamakshya' in Assam is their main deity and worship of 'Devi Kamakshya' is their major religious ceremony. This indicates their association with Assam since long. It is a fact that majority of them live in the North-Bengal District (Cooch-Bihar, Jalpaiguri, South Dinajpur) where the Rajbangsi's also bear mongoloid physical features and use 'Barman' as one of their surnames. But the 'Banshi-Barman' representatives pointed out that in spite of those facts they have no social connection with the Rajbangsi's; and that both these classes form distinct social groups. The following account of Risley will be quite worth-noting in this regard.<sup>31</sup>

### **Suraj-Bansi:**

This title, properly denoting one of the two main shocks of Rajput's, has been assumed within comparatively recent times by a hybrid Mongoloid caste claiming to be the

aborigines of Kamrup and now inhabiting in the jungle tracts of Bhowal in Eastern Bengal. According to Dr. Wise from whose notes this article is condensed, the Suraj-Bansi's were formerly regarded as akin to the Kochh-Mandai, but the Brahmans taking advantage of their credulity and ignorance, led them to believe that they were descendants of Chhatri who, by throwing away their sacred thread escaped the axe of Parasurama". After 1871, Suraj-Bansi's prayed to the Zamindar (who was Srotriya Brahman) to re-invest them with the sacred thread. An amount of Rs. 2,000 was paid and the sacred thread with due solemnity was presented, thereby elevating their position, which created disgust of the Hindus of these parts.<sup>32</sup>

"The Kochh-Mandai, who reside in the same jungle assert that a few years ago the Suraj-Bansi were known as Kochh-Mandai, and even at present Bansi is their ordinary appellation. The Suraj-Bansi's are peculiar to Bhowal, and are not met with beyond the limits of Dacca district. They're certainly allied to the Kochh-Mandai, but have modified the mongoloid type by marrying with low Bengali castes.<sup>33</sup> Their original language, probably a dialect of Garo, has been forgotten and Bengali is universally spoken. The Suraj-Bansi is generally a darker and taller, but less muscular man than the Koch-Mandai. Certain of them still retain the peculiar mongoloid cast of features, with oblique eye lids and scanty growth of hair; but the majority have the common Bengali countenance, with bushy moustaches and voluminous cues, for they have adopted the Vaishnava fashion of wearing the hair, they already call themselves worshippers of Vishnu, and have engaged the services of Patit-Brahman purohit. Twice a year, in Phalgun and Baisakh, they worship under a Sal tree Kamakhya Devi, the tutelary Goddess of Kamrup in Assam. Durga, Manasa Devi, and Bura-Buri are invoked in seasons of sickness and domestic trouble and special honour is paid to the Sun as reputed ancestor and eponym of the caste. They have borrowed three gotras Kasyapa, Aliman and Madhukuliya and marriages into the same gotras are forbidden. Widow marriage has been abandoned; divorce is prohibited, and the Hindu system of marrying girls before

puberty adopted, furthermore having assumed the sacred thread of the Chhatris, they imitate them in observing Shradh on the nineteenth day after death. By Hindus they are not admitted to belong to a clean. Almost all Surajbansis are cultivators, growing rice, tobacco, mustard and cotton on clearings in the jungles. Fishing is deemed dishonourable.<sup>34</sup>

The submission made by the 'Bansi-Barman' class of people and the comments and observations of Risley relating to Suraj bans is go to indicate that this class, 'Bansi-Barman', is an off-shoot of 'Kochh' group of people who are scheduled castes, and that they are the product of "tribe-caste continuum" process. As per their submission the social position of this class is not satisfactory. They maintain their own occupational habits, social customs and rituals for which they are looked down upon by their upper-caste Hindu neighbours. Risley also noted about a century back that they were not considered as a clean caste by the Hindus. Their statement reveals that about half of their population still get the treatment as most ordinary persons like the scheduled Castes and tribes.<sup>35</sup>

It was submitted before the Commission that the average educational standard of this class (both males and females) is up to primary only; of the male population 53.21% and of the females 42.20% read up to primary level; 1.33% of the males and 0.48% of the females up to Higher Secondary level and 0.24% of the males and 0.10% of the females up to Graduate level. The rate of drop outs at different stages of education for assisting the parents in their family as well as other than family occupations are as follows: -Primary level – 66.83%; Secondary level – 4.22%; Higher Secondary Level – 3.99% and Graduate level – 0.66%. The materials on record go to indicate that their attainment in the field of education is not at all satisfactory, and they may be regarded as educationally backward.<sup>36</sup>

Traditional occupation of this class of people is cultivation and they still primarily depend on agriculture. The materials submitted before the Commission reveal that about one-third (30%) of the population possess land as owners 30% own land and also work on others'

land as sharecroppers; 5% totally depend on sharecropping; 34% work on others' land as agricultural labourers. All the categories of farmers are in possession of land much below the ceiling. Only 1% of there is engaged in petty family business. Majority of them are still below the poverty line. Due to lack of education among them, their achievement in the 'services and professional' sectors is also not worth-noting. This class has a practically negligible percentage of employment in Government and Non-Government services at a higher level (0.09%). In middle ranks there are only 0.64% and in ordinary jobs 0.53% only. There is no doctor, no Engineer, no Lawyer, no Chartered Accountant etc. among them. There are only a few Primary teachers (0.40%) and those engaged in other professions (0.44%). The facts established by evidence – oral and documentary go to indicate that the economic condition of this class is extremely unsatisfactory. The living condition of this class of people is also not up to the mark. About 28% live in thatched and mud wall kutcha houses, 49% in brick wall semi-pucca houses, and 23% in pucca houses. About 15% have bathrooms, 25% have dug a well system, 20% have thatched sheds; and 40% go to open fields to attend the call of nature. Cent per cent of them depend on Tube-wells for water. There is no MP, no MLA, no representative in statutory bodies accepting 0.09% in Block Panchayat. Taking in consideration all the facts stated, materials furnished and submissions made, the Commission has arrived at the conclusion that the 'Banshi-Barman' class constitutes socially and educationally a backward class in the State and the Commission recommends inclusion of the Banshi-Barman class in the list of Backward Classes in the State and the Commission, accordingly, advises the Government of West Bengal to do so.<sup>37</sup>

It may be noted that there is no objection to the inclusion of 'Banshi-Barman' class in the list of Backward Classes and no one has raised any objection to that effect before the Commission. No one appeared on behalf of the State Government, although 'Notice' was served on the Government of West Bengal.

Before partition from British period South Bengal's some aristocrat educated Muslims came to North Bengal. Some for jobs, some for business became permanent residents of this area. In Army of Maharajah of Cooch Bihar, there were some Muslim Mughal and Pathan employed. After partition, aristocrat Muslims went to East Bengal. Now they have some relatives living however they have been assimilated to local Muslims.<sup>38</sup>

In the above explanation it can be seen that, among Muslims of North Bengal a larger part is from Rajbangshi Gotra i.e., appeared from Mongolian heritage. Among this underdeveloped Mongolian heritage people, only Muslims are denied opportunities of Reservation.<sup>39</sup>

Other Muslim communities are laid back in terms of financial, social and education. They are a socially deprived class for 3000 years. Even before conversion to Islam they were known as "Non-Aryans". To Aryans they were inferior and hated. They were known as Dasyu in AiterayaBarhmana, Aiteryaa Aranyaka Pakkhikalpo, Smlechha in Mahabharata, Brtaya in Manusamhita, Kirat, Yaban, Khos, Papashay and Nisadh etc in Bhagabat Purana. Before just conversion to Islam, they were hated and untouchable before High caste Hindus. To escape from this neglect, hatred and discrimination even after embracing Islam they still could not escape from Social exploitation.<sup>40</sup> That's why their backwardness and social obstacles have come historically. Medieval era's Mughal-Pashtun rule's history is generally referred to as rule of Muslim rule. In many cases British historian's intentionally distorted information's the rule of Muslim rulers is depicted as destroyer of temples, non-believer, torturer, plunderer, haters of other's religion or even as villains in history and literature. So, common Muslims in social viewpoint become isolated. So, they can't develop confidence.<sup>41</sup>

This social backwardness created backwardness in education too. During British period, British administrator's political motives, to some extent aristocrat Muslim's narrow mindedness, and Muslim's village centric geographical location too were reasons of

backwardness in field of education. Insufficient statistics and a primitive transport system prevent creating a general depiction of education among North Bengal's Muslims. Apart from some old statistics and Indian and West Bengal's Government's negligible information, there is no other way. In British rule there was not much spread of education among districts of North Bengal. Dr. F Buchannan visited North Bengal from 1807-1814 and reported that, Muslim had gotten sufficient chance of education in those districts where major people of were Muslim. He pointed out that in Dinajpur there were 119 Primary schools and 9 Person schools belonged from 13 of 22 Police Station. But there were no Primary schools in 9 Sub-division Rangpur where Muslim was in Majority, even its education system neglected than Dinajpur. There were no Public schools, and handily found a single person who had the legibility to be a cheek. At that have Malda was part of Dinajpur district.<sup>42</sup>

In the year of 1735(1835) in the respect of the decision of Lord Makely, English education system was introduced in this area but Muslim refused to accept the new English education system. Most of people thought, regarding this attitude of Muslim towards the new educational system, Elite Muslims fearing of losing of their religion that why they refused to accept English education and they also thought that this system . With the faults of Muslim society, the problem was further complicated by the British's "Filtration Theory" in regards to education. The modern education system was first implemented in Calcutta and its surrounding areas, but in far distant areas of North Bengal according to this policy no school was built for many days. "As Muslims generally lived in the villages so they did not have the opportunity to have education in urban English schools."<sup>43</sup> In Cooch Behar State, although the Jenkins school was established in 1861, only residents of urban areas and royal Government's employees gained the opportunity to learn. These historical reasons are the sources of historical backwardness of the Muslims in education. The situation created by this backwardness is today even more evident. Although in recent times the separate depiction of

Muslims of North Bengal can't be found separately however still an estimate can be made with the statistics from all India statistics. As per the survey taken by "Yojana Commission" in 1987-88 national rate of literacy was only 52.21%. There the rate of literacy among Muslims was only 42%. The situation of females was even more pathetic. When the national average is 39.42% their Muslim female's literacy rate was only 12%.<sup>44</sup>

Due to backwardness of Muslims in education, during British period the whole Bengal's Muslims became laid back including the Muslims of North Bengal. In the first 100 year of British rule, Muslims were not employed in jobs because of political reasons (so that the Nawabi rule never came back). In regards to these both reasons the number of Muslims employed in administration reduced drastically in Government posts. Although contemporary Bengal's population's half was Muslim as per Hunter Report Published in 1871 among native employees of Government 88% was Hindu. Rest was Muslims and Christians and others. As per Civil List among 2111 Government employees the number of Muslim employees was only 92. Among high Court's Justice, Queen's law enforcing employee and Barristers, there was not even a single Muslim. Among 240 native lawyers enlisted between 1851 to 1868, Muslim was only one. Contemporary Lieutenant Governor of Bengal wrote to Lord Meo in a letter that "I fear we did not play fairly to the Muslims in terms of education. In the Inspecting Agency of Education Department, it is doubtful whether there is even a single Muslim."<sup>45</sup>

**TABLE 6.5****The percentage of the various communities in advantage of various sections:**

Community	Population	Politics	Services	Business	Land
Brahman, khatriya, Vishay	15%	66%	87%	92.2%	92%
Others Backward classes	51.31%	8%	7%	2.3%	5%
S C & S T	22.5%	22.5%	3%	2%	1%
Muslim minorities	11.19%	3.5%	3%	3.5%	2%

**Source:** Rahaman, Bazlay, Mondal Kamishaner Report O Uttar Banger Muslim Samaj, Anagrasar Muslim Sangrami Mancha, Uttar Banga, 1996, p. 27.

Meaning in 5 year the percentage of Muslims employed in jobs is 4%. As per all India and West Bengal's past and present's information if the situation of Muslims is so pathetic then the situation of backward minority Muslims of North Bengal can be estimated by any conscious and thinking person. For most village people their village seems to them their world. They know about Bloc and District Headquarter towns to some extent. Their knowledge regarding Kolkata is still unclear and mysterious. They have no clue regarding the culture, History, Geographical location and economy of the greater India. Now from this aforementioned discussion we can come to some decision about Muslim community of North Bengal in the light of historical, anthropological, social, Economic and education.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Bajle, Rahaman, *Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj*, (in Bengali), Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, p. 19.

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<sup>5</sup>Soumendra, ProsadSaha, 'Changing Muslim Demography of North Bengal in Post-Colonial Period (1947-1997): A Case Study of Jalpaiguri District', *An International Research Journal*, Jaipur, India, 2013, pp. 24-25.

<sup>6</sup>Ananda, Gopal Ghosh, 'Jalpaiguri Jelar Musalman Samaj', in Ajitesh Bhattacharya, *Madhuparni*, Balurghat, 1987, pp. 122-123.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Bimal, Pramanik, *Endangered Demography Nature and Impact of Demographic Changes in West Bengal 1951-2001*, Kolkata, 2005, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Ranajit, Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-16.

<sup>11</sup>Ananda, Gopal Ghosh, 'Sadhinata Uttarbanger SiKi Satabdir Britanta', (in Bengali), '1947-Parabarti Uttarbanga-1', (ed.), Ananda Gopal Ghosh & Kartick Saha, N. L. Publisher, Siliguri, 2013, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup>Subhajyoti, Ray, *Transformations on the Bengal Frontier Jalpaiguri 1765-1948*, Routledge Curzon, New York, 2002, p. 138.

<sup>13</sup>Ananda, Gopal Ghosh, 'Jalpaiguri Jelar Musalman Samaj', in Ajitesh Bhattacharya, *Madhuparni*, Balurghat, 1987, p. 123.

<sup>14</sup>Soumendra, ProsadSaha, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup>Bimal, Pramanik, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>16</sup>*Census Report of India 1981 and 1991.*

<sup>17</sup>*Census Report of India 1981 and 2001.*

<sup>18</sup>*Census Report of India 1991 and 2001.*

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<sup>19</sup>Bajlay, Rahaman, *Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj*, Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, pp. 18-23.

<sup>20</sup>Pasharul, Alam, *Uttarbanger Anagrasar Muslim Samaj*, (in Bengali), Sahajpath, Islampur, 2008, pp. 14-23.

<sup>21</sup>*West Bengal commission For Backward Classes Report-8, 29<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1997.*

<sup>22</sup>Rahim, 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.

<sup>23</sup>Bajlay, Rahaman, '*Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj*', Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, pp. 20-21.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Pasharul, Alam, *Uttarbanger Anagrasar Muslim Samaj*, (in Bengali), Sahajpath, Islampur, 2008, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup>Bajlay, Rahaman, *Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj*, (in Bengali), Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, pp. 23- 29.

<sup>27</sup>*West Bengal commission For Backward Classes Report-8, 29<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1997.*

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Abani, Mohon Kusria, *West Bengal District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri*, Calcutta, 1981, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup>Pasharul, Alam, *Uttarbanger Anagrasar Muslim Samaj*, (in Bengali), Sahajpath, Islampur, 2008, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup>Ananda, Gopal Ghosh, *Uttarbanger Itihas O Samaj*, Dipali publisher's, Malda, 2009, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup>Durga, Das Majumdar, *West Bengal District Gazetteers*, Koch Behar, Calcutta-27, 1977, p. 32.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid. p. 40.

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<sup>36</sup>*West Bengal commission For Backward Classes Report-8, 29<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1997.*

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Bajlay, Rahaman, *Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj*, (in Bengali), Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, pp. 30- 36.

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<sup>40</sup>Upendra, Nath Barman, *Rajbangsh iKhatriya Jatir Itihas, (in Bengali)*, SridurgaPublisher, Jalpaiguri, 1973, p. 1.

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<sup>42</sup>Atul, Sur, *Hindu Sabhyatar Nritatwik Bhashy, (in Bengali)*, Sahityalok, Kolkata, 1988, p. 94.

<sup>43</sup>W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans, Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen*, Premier Book House, Lahore, 1871, Reprinted from the, 1970, p. 119.

<sup>44</sup>Bajlay, Rahaman, *Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj, (in Bengali)*, Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, p. 26.

<sup>45</sup>W. W. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup>Bajlay, Rahaman, *Mondal Commissioner Report o Uttarbanger Muslim Somaj, (in Bengali)*, Classic Printing, Jalpaiguri, 1996, p. 32.