

**Development Deficit and its Historical Antecedents: A Study of
Muslims in West Bengal**

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INTRODUCTION

“The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social position.....*it is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within this period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances.....by the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of his society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and its historical push and shove.* The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and promise.”-C. Wright Mills (Sociological Imagination: 5-6; emphasis mine)

We start with this definition of the sociological imagination because at a personal level, it has made the researcher identify with the discipline of sociology, the criticality that is innate to it as brought to the fore by theorists like Mills¹. The ‘promise’ of sociology envisaged by Mills is what inspired the researcher to reflect on his biography and locate it within the history of the region he comes from, West Bengal, and to further locate it in the history of the country. This research is a result of such an endeavour. The viability of experience, continuing from Max Weber and his concept of ‘social action’², as an analytical tool is the significant contribution and also the underlying idea of ‘sociological imagination’. It is not only through individual experiences that a biography derives meaning from its location in history, but the experiences and lives of individuals within similar circumstances in history that one can become aware of one’s life chances, arrive at plausible explanations and become conscious of the power relations operating within the society in a particular

¹ Sociology has always been concerned with possibility of order in a society and with the varied reasons for conflict and change; one also finds that sociology has been at the forefront in its collusion with the state to produce knowledge on the people inhabiting a society, to make possible the very sustenance of social order. But in this endeavor, the discipline is practiced in a constricted manner. See Zygmunt Bauman. *Intimations of Post-modernity*.

² An action is social by the virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the actor himself who further reorients it according to the reaction of others is a rough definition of social action.

historical epoch. This consciousness is possible if one is armed with the required sociological imagination so as not to reduce the conditions of life to psychological or individual factors; but to seek to explain it at a wider societal level.

The inception of the idea for the research took place in seeking answers for the researcher's own life condition. The heightened consciousness came from the researcher's reading of sociological texts such as the one quoted above and from researcher's interaction with my classmates who were mostly Bengali Hindus (he was the only Muslim student in the class of 2008-2010) in his post-graduate course in sociology at the University of Calcutta³. The questions that emerged from the reflections were intriguing and informative: How does he explain the poor condition of the household, and as well as the character of the area (Park Circus, Central Kolkata) in which their rented flat was located, mostly poor and heavily concentrated with Muslims? How does he explain the acute paucity of education among the earlier generation of his wider family and their occupations?⁴ Why did his father have to engage in a petty business and give up on his studies when he came to the city? What were the compulsions that made his mother, and now his brother, not complete their studies? Interestingly, they became the foundational questions while reflecting on the relationship between the state and the Muslim community in West Bengal. However, one can only discern a pattern when the problematic is viewed from a wider community level and among a greater population. It is only then that it becomes a 'social fact' as conceptualised by Emile Durkheim⁵ and viable for research.

The state of West Bengal had no communal overtones in the politics practiced there, different from the politics in states like Gujarat, especially after the pogrom of 2002. And in view of the absence of such overt communal politics, the state has been considered 'safe and secure' for the Muslims. However, in the wake of the Sachar Committee report in 2006 and the Report of the National Commission for the Religious and Linguistic Minorities

³ The faculty is constituted by Bengali Hindus with no member from any of the minority communities present in the faculty. The names of the permanent faculty are: Dr. Gayatri Bhattacharyya, Dr. Sudeshna Basu Mukherjee, Prof. Bholanath Bandhopadhyay, Prof. Swapan Kumar Bhattacharyya (now retired), Dr. Basabi Sur, Prof. Bula Bhadra. Among the visiting faculty were Prof. Emeritus Prasanta Ray and Prof. Abhijit Mitra, among others.

⁴ I am the only member in the entire family, both on the maternal and paternal sides, to be pursuing an Mphil/Ph.D course.

⁵ Emile Durkheim. *Rules of Sociological Method*.

of India (2007), the political atmosphere presented wafts of change which had been missing in the three decade long Left Front rule at the helm⁶.

According to the Sachar Committee Report (SCR from here on), the Muslims in India constitute the largest minority population at 13.4% of the total population. The community, as a 'whole', is considered to be lagging behind other 'socio-religious communities'⁷, and is thought of suffering from a 'development deficit'. It is in this context that a more detailed study had become necessary to obtain certain facts about the community in order for more efficient policy level interventions (SCR,2006 : 2). A question arises from the observation: what are the reasons behind such a 'development deficit'?

The concept, 'development deficit', as used by the SCR refers to the lack of progress and development within the Muslim community when measured in terms of the development indicators constituted by health indicators, educational status, employment status, access to bank credit, physical infrastructure etc. in comparison to other socio-religious communities. The SCR observes that there has been a lack of any systematic study of the religious communities and this was one of the first endeavours carried out under the aegis of the present government. How did the Muslims come to occupy such a marginalised position, in terms of socio-economic indicators, access, equity and security, in the country? There has been the factor violence which has been concomitant to the marginalisation of the Muslim community in Indian history. From the violence in the late 19th century, to the riots in Calcutta and other regions of Bengal, as well as regions in other states prior to 1947, to the widespread violence during the partition of the country and now the violence in Gujarat 2002; the ghost of violence looms large in the 'construction' of Muslim community to the development deficit that is found in the community.

Violence and Marginalisation

India has been witness to a number of riots in the post-1947 period as posited by certain academics⁸ and they agree that they have been on the rise since the 1970's with the

⁶ There were also the widespread discontent with the land acquisition program and the indiscriminate massacre of peasants and the fighting population in places like Singur, Nandigram and Lalgarh.

⁷ The term has been used in the Sachar Committee report to designate the different communities such as SC's, ST's, Sikhs, Upper Caste Hindus, etc.

⁸ See (Varshney, 2002); (Robinson, 2005)

rise in prominence of the right wing combine of RSS, BJP and others. It reached a flashpoint in 2002 with the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat. It served as wake up call for both the government and the academia. And, the two aforementioned reports were made in the aftermath of the Gujarat pogrom⁹ 2002 keeping in mind the appalling condition of the community in the country. The pogrom in Gujarat was carried out against the Muslim minority community living in different cities. In a sting operation¹⁰ conducted by the Tehelka magazine and the newspaper reports suggest that the killings had the sanction of the authorities as they failed to act in time. And it was described as a retaliatory action to the train being burnt in Godhra. It is not a one off incident that does not deserve attention but is part of an “institutionalized riot system”¹¹ that has been there for a long time. The violence in itself becomes a factor in the feelings of insecurity among the Muslim community, and it has made them to stick together and thereby get concentrated in certain areas. Though there are other factors which are responsible for the formation of enclaves or ghettos, still violence is one of the more significant reasons behind it¹².

Thus, one can find a considerable attention towards such violence that affects the Muslim community and other minorities. However, these are instances of “subjective violence” as understood by Slavoj Zizek.

‘Subjective violence’ according to Zizek is the explicit violence with an identifiable agent which occupies the attention¹³, for example, the kind violence often seen during inter-communal and inter-caste violence. However, the need is to go beyond the subjective violence and try to understand the “contours of the violence” by trying to engage with systemic violence or the violence which happens at the structural level (ibid. : 1). The acts of subjective violence are understood to disturb the “normal” state or the social order. However, there is violence inherent within this “normal” state whereby the relations of

⁹ Pogrom in the dictionary mean :“An organized, often officially encouraged massacre or persecution of a minority group, especially one conducted against Jews.” (www.dictionary.com); “A mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority.” (www.britannica.com)

¹⁰ Tehelka , 3, November, 2007 http://www.tehelka.com/story_main35.asp?filename=Ne031107After_killing.asp; accessed on 4th November, 2011; 2:36pm

¹¹ Paul R. Brass. *Development of an Institutionalised Riot System in Meerut City, 1961 to 1982 in Economic and political Weekly*, Oct. 30, 2004. Pp-4839-4848.

¹² See Ravi Kumar. 2010. *Ghetto and Within: Class, Identity, State and Political Mobilisation*. Delhi: Aakar-Sruti for a study on the formation of the Muslim ‘ghetto’ in Jamia Nagar, New Delhi.

¹³ Slavoj Zizek. 2008. *Violence*. Picador : New York.

domination are maintained. It is this violence which he terms as 'systemic violence'(ibid. : 2) . For Zizek, there are obvious socio-political, ideological, economic and cultural struggles that take place but remain invisible; while the more explicit subjective violent acts are mediated through the media as well as the literature(ibid. : 3). He is making a fundamental point here. If this idea is extended to the kind of violence, both systemic as well as subjective, that is perpetrated against the Muslim community, then the kind socio-economic as well as political condition of the community brought to the fore by the SCR can be taken as an instance of the former while the instances of violence against the community that mark the history of independent India will be a examples of the latter¹⁴.The systemic violence is actualized through the processes of marginalisation of the Muslim community.

Marginalization is defined as "the social process of becoming or being made marginal (especially as a group within the larger society)" (from www.dictionary.com). The SCR, in its observation discussed that there was a general feeling of marginalization, inequality and insecurity among the Muslim population of the country. The inequality being talked about is the unequal access to education, occupation, infrastructural facilities such as proper housing, access to water, better sanitation etc. It is to be understood that marginalization, inequality and insecurity feed each other and help in reproducing the status quo. Marginalisation and inequality also point to a fundamental difference in the relations of production. The concentration of the workers in the unorganized sector of the economy is a case in point. They are basically landless agricultural labourers, small traders and mostly self-employed (SCR, Appendix: 337). In terms of political marginalization, the declaration of Muslim dominated villages as reserved for the Scheduled Caste candidates even though the population of Scheduled castes living in the area is lesser than the Muslims. (SCR, Appendix)

The crucial aspect of the observations is the lack of security, whether economic, political, or at the personal level, felt by the Muslim population. It is this lack of security which leads to the ghettoization of the Muslim population in the urban areas. This geographical concentration of the Muslim population has been understood as a result of the tension with the majority community, a result of the violence that ensues during the riots. And the riots are understood to be a fundamental extension of the communalism that is on

¹⁴ Though there are instances off violence against other socio-religious groups such as SC's, ST's, Sikhs, Christians etc. they are however beyond the scope of this study.

the increase within the country. Even though history is replete with instances of inter-communal violence but the present rise in communalism is different. The watershed event was the Babri Masjid demolition which coincided with the adoption of liberal policies by the Indian state. It marked the phenomenal increase of the political reach of the right wing forces such as Rashtriya Swyamseva Sangh(RSS) and the Bharatiya Janta Party(BJP). So what brought about the rise of radical nationalism in the country? Aijaz Ahmed(2004) posits that it was the need of the material forces present within the country that lead to the development of a radical nationalist ideology. The political ascendancy of the Right wing organization happened in the wake of the decline of "...the Nehruvian, left-of-centre hegemony coupled with the failure of the Left to provide a national alternative" (p-28). This form of nationalism is not directed against the imperialist forces but against a community, against an 'other'¹⁵. As discussed above, this conception of 'other' comes in when the state as a juridico-political entity needs to legitimize itself through the idea of a nation; and a nation requires a 'people' whom it can represent. It is in the nation-building process itself that the Muslims have been identified as the 'other'¹⁶. The present variety of Hindu nationalism according to Ahmad is not antagonistic but complementary to the liberalization process. He locates the rise in the Hindu nationalism in the larger politics of the world¹⁷. So the question arises, is violence not detrimental to the business of the bourgeoisie? Ahmad pushes the argument even further to say that the violence that takes place seldom hurts the interest of the Hindu bourgeoisie except in certain cases like Bombay, 1993. For him, the violence that riots present are an exception from the violence that has been routinised and has become part of ordinary lives.

But the focus on violence in the available literature is extraordinary. It was only in the wake of the SCR findings and recommendations that a substantial amount of work have come to the fore. However, there is an overwhelming focus on the debates related to violence, communalism and its counter in secularism. And it thus makes the structural violence which is responsible for the abysmal condition of the Muslims in the country in

¹⁵ See Ahmad(2004) "On the Ruins of Ayodhya"

¹⁶ For a better explication of the conception of people, see Agamben(2000[1995]); Mann(1999); while for the development of Hindu nationalism and the consequent construction of muslim other see Mathur(2008); Kumar(2010)and Ahmad(2004)

¹⁷ Ahmad describes the rise of "irrationalist populism" as an intrinsic part of the neo-liberal phase of the economy.p-31

general, but it becomes interesting in the states where there are less frequent incidence of violence and in such states, it becomes hard to trace back the condition of Muslims to the social structure and its relations. An example of such a state in the light of the SCR findings is West Bengal.

The Condition in West Bengal

The SCR posits that the condition of Muslims in West Bengal is worse than some of the other states in India in terms of occupational status, educational achievements, health indicators etc. The state has the second largest population of Muslims in the country¹⁸ constituting 25% and above, of the total population of the state. However, the share in occupational structure, landholdings, educational achievement is dismal. Though there are instances of violence, the West Bengal state had been governed by a single party for three decades. It has not been witness to any of the communal clashes of the magnitude that has taken place in Gujarat for example; even the violence in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid Demolition in 1992 was much lesser as compared to the rest of country. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) lead Left Front government had come to power and carried out land reforms in the 1970's. Though it would be interesting to see how equitable the land distribution was, it is not part of the present work due to non-availability of data land owned according socio-religious categories. Before the left Front government came to power there was a Congress lead government which came to power after the country got its independence from the British colonial rulers. However, the independence was also marked by a partition which left a deep mark on the history as well as the collective memory of the people of the country. The partition of the country resulted in widespread violence and bloodshed and West Bengal was created as a result of the partition of the Bengal province of pre-independent India. It is here that the political and socio-economic condition of West Bengal before and after Independence becomes important to historically trace the development of the Muslim community in West Bengal, and how it became the minority community in the state.

Chatterji (2007) discusses the kind of politics and socio-economic considerations that precipitated the decision to partition the Bengal province. In short, the Muslims

¹⁸ Sachar Committee Report.

constituted a majority in the Bengal province of pre-independent India; but were reduced to a miniscule minority after the partition. The political parties representing the Muslim community were dominant and held important posts both at the level of local governance such as gram panchayats and urban municipalities as well as in the legislative assemblies. It did not bode well for the Bengali Hindus especially the elite, educated sections known as the 'bhadralok' who occupied most of the bureaucratic positions available in British India. Chatterji describes this class of elite Bengali Hindus as absentee landlords who had made great dividends by acquiring land with the help of the Permanent Settlement Act introduced by the British. However, they mostly migrated to the cities to work as bureaucrats for the British government. However, having lost favour with the British for certain reasons and with the specter of shift in power impending, they increased the ante for a separate state for the Hindus as recounted through the debates in the parliament which is presented by Chatterji. The attempt was to resuscitate the dying Hindu community by gaining the political power in independent India. In the large scale migration, most of the Muslims who were in India and could not afford to migrate, stayed back while the exodus of Hindu refugees continued for a long time; however, their relocation and rehabilitation were a big problem. While the richer rentier class, bureaucrats, the upper caste 'bhadralok' could move in the aftermath of the partition, it were the dalits or the namasudras who suffered the most. They became victims of political maneuvering and false promises, and one still find a huge section of refugees settled adjacent to railway tracks. The Marichjhapi (a small island in the Sunderban jungles of the border of West Bengal and Bangladesh) massacre was one specific instance when the refugees who had settled there were removed and killed in an organized manner by the state under the CPI(M) government. Chatterji also refers to the arbitrary and hurried nature of the border that was drawn between the regions later known as East Pakistan and West Bengal respectively; the kind of political and economic reasons involved in the geographical division of the region¹⁹. This effectively reduced the Muslims from being a majority community to a minority one with little say in decision making.

One of major reasons for the shift in stance from the Hindu political leaders in the period prior to partition was the peasant movements and the movement for a separate nation-state by the majority Muslim population especially in east Bengal. At the start of the

¹⁹ Chatterji(2008) Introduction; pp-1-16.

19th century there had emerged the Swadeshi movement, also termed as the Hindu revivalist movement. It coincided with the First Partition of Bengal. This period also saw the rise of various Bengali Hindu writers and intellectuals, who had a nationalist fervor in their writings but it was replete with anti-Islam references. The dominant position that the Bengali upper castes enjoyed owing to their superior education, rich rentier background could be seen in the positions they occupied in government and political institutions. However, along with their dominance in the economic and political sphere, they had an overwhelming presence and say in the determination of what constituted the Bengali culture, and what position the Muslims enjoyed in it. Since the majority of the Muslims were peasants, the aspect of culture and its determinants were thought to be beyond their reckoning. However, there did emerge a contestation at the level of culture from a section of the Muslim intelligentsia. They questioned and criticized the arbitrariness with which the culture was formed and emphasized on the integral position of Muslims within. It is in their effort to formulate a distinct Muslim culture informed not only by the religious markers, but by the increased consciousness of their marginal position within the social structure. This consciousness would be coupled by the majority in numbers that they possessed which could help in wresting away the power away from the Hindu upper castes who dominated the governmental and other decision making institutions. The contestations at the level of culture and the focus on the socio-economic condition of the Muslims played a huge part in the peasant movement and have been therefore discussed in the first chapter of this study. However, the marginalized position of the Muslims had been part of the structure for almost two centuries but things took sharp turn only in the decades preceding the partition, the time was marked by unprecedented violence in the forms of riots as well as peasant movements against the agrarian structure. It becomes pertinent then to provide a small account of the agrarian economy of Bengal in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the changes which took place in the 1930's, the crisis in the economic structure leading to the denuding of the relations of power in some regions and the subsequent movements and incidences of violence.

Bengali Muslims in History: The Economic Dimension

This section deals with the structural crises that ensued in the wake of the Great Depression that affected the world in the 1930's, and consequently had its effect on the

agrarian economy of Bengal, especially east Bengal, leading to crisis in the region. However, before delving into the processes of the emergence of crises in the system, one has to delineate the character of the agrarian structure in Bengal.

The Permanent Settlement in 1793 had accorded the right of ownership over land to the zamindars, “a class of people whose role in rural society....had been to collect revenue and remit it to the government, not to hold or exploit land as such” (Bose, 1986: 3). And this has become the predominant focus of studies on the agrarian structure of Bengal. However, Bose tends to differ as he understands that the ‘zamindari system’ waned in importance in the late 19th and early 20th century. It is here that he seeks to locate increased concentration on the “revenue history, formal landlordism and tenancy” in the literature. He posits an alternative explanation of the agrarian structure of Bengal and divides it into four regions- east, west, central and northern. The predominant forms of relations of production were a result of the economy being dependant on an “extensive subsistence base while at the same time participating in a growing international trade. The history of a subsistence-oriented peasantry engaged in petty commodity production for a well-integrated world market has to be set in the context of the demographic constraint on resources as well as the international and regional dimensions of the colonial political economy. A study of the network of agrarian credit relationships is more relevant in the late colonial period than a focus on ties of revenue and rent. It not only provides the critical linkage along which fluctuations in the world economy were transmitted to the region's agrarian economy, but also forms the most important element in the complex of agrarian relations within the region” (ibid: 5). This shift in the exploration of the agrarian structure gives a good vantage point to analyse the peasant politics in Bengal.

The definition of the agrarian structure becomes important then as Bose seeks to refute the ‘jotedar thesis’ propounded by Ratna Ray and Rajat Ray²⁰. In the ‘jotedar thesis’, power operates in the agrarian structure at two levels- at the “revenue collecting structure over the village and the landholding structure within the village”. It is in the landholding structure within the village that the jotedar²¹ or the tenant with a landholding varying from 50 to 6000 acres existed under the patronage of the rent collecting zamindars and

²⁰ Rajat Ray and Ratna Ray, 1975. ‘Zamindars and Jotedars: A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal’, in *MAS* 9 (1), 81-102.

²¹ (Bose, 1986) points the problem in the definition of ‘jotedar’ as under its ambit are included village landlord, rich farmer and dominant peasant while the root term ‘jote’ means a cultivable piece of land.

talukdars²²; these jotedars had specious political sway over the village and were dominant. Thus, the entire politics and changes in the agrarian structure in Bengal in the late 19th and early 20th century is explained from the vantage point of the role of the jotedars. For instance the success of the nationalist movement against the British is understood in the strength of the relationship between the zamindars and the jotedars, and the fracture in the relationship in East Bengal between the Hindu zamindar and the Muslim jotedar is understood as the reason behind the rise of Muslim 'separatism' and the failure of the Indian nationalist movement led by the Congress having a stronghold over there reducing it to a fight between the colonial rulers and the Congress (ibid: 6). The increasing importance paid to the role of the 'jotedar' is found to be illusory for Bose as the existence of the 'jotedar-adhiar' in the regions of North Bengal were generalised for the entire Presidency of Bengal. However, as Bose underlines in his analysis of the agrarian and economic structure of Bengal, there were far more nuanced relationships of power and mechanisms operating which affected the rise or lack of peasant movements in Bengal.

The author creates a typology of agrarian social structure to highlight the differences existing in different regions. In north Bengal, there was a dominant class of rich, enterprising farmers or village landlords (jotedars) and the sharecroppers (adhiars) formed a polarised agrarian structure. While in the east Bengal there existed the peasant smallholding system and in the west Bengal, there was the peasant smallholding-demesne labour complex dominating the structure (ibid.: 11). These different types of the agrarian structures had their own specific relationship with the wider economic processes and were affected by changes within them, or the flow of credit and its mechanism played a significant role in the determination of the functioning of the structure.

In a summary account of the prevalent structure in the region of north Bengal, in the late 19th and early 20th century, especially in 1930's, there was a dominance of the jotedars, big and small both. The big jotedars monopolised the product market and extracted a large proportion of the adhiars' produce in the form of share rent and loan interest but they also played an important role in "reproduction" of the system by "redistributing part of the surplus both in the form of capital for basic inputs and as grain advances", that is by

²² Talukdar is the person responsible for collecting 'taluk' or the rent collecting right below that of zamindar. Bose, 1986. "Glossary".

providing the credit for the next year's produce. The adhiars on the other hand owned the implements of production in the form of the ploughs but the class was mostly formed of poorer villagers who either had stopped cultivating their own land or had no land whatsoever, and were dependant on the jotedar for everything to the extent that the jotedar decided the kind of crop that was to be grown. Thus, in the emergent picture of the landholdings present in the region of north Bengal, one finds that the jotedars had large areas of demesne²³ or personal land which they cultivated using the labour of sharecroppers and labourers. Bose, further, points to the source of credit also remaining in the hands of the jotedars, as they controlled the labour of the adhiars (sharecroppers).

However, our focus would be on the regions of east and west Bengal where the major instances of violence took place in the period prior and after the second partition of Bengal in 1947. The agrarian structure in the region of east Bengal was dominated by the small peasant landholding system. Since there were hardly any rich farmers, on the scale and magnitude of the ones present in the region of north Bengal, in east Bengal, one finds a huge number of small peasant with small landholdings using family labour or hired labour in the production process. And it is because of such a system one finds less polarisation between the classes where the small inequalities played a huge factor. The few zamindars and talukdar that were present in east Bengal under the Permanent Settlement Act belonged to upper castes Hindus and also the bhadralok while the small peasant class was mostly made of the Muslims and the namasudras²⁴. In the absence of high subinfeudation of land with the major share existing as small peasant landholding in east Bengal, there was not much exploitation as it was witnessed in revenue and tax collection with high subinfeudation in west Bengal. While the khas or demesne lands owned by the landlords was also less, thereby the proportion of the labourers working on the khas or demesne lands was much lesser. Thereby, the magnitude of exploitation due to the zamindari system was much lesser in the eastern region of Bengal.

In east Bengal the zamindari rent thus as a mode of appropriation of profit became less significant and it was overtaken by moneylending with the consequent rise of a class of

²³ The meaning of the word 'demesne' is "1. possession of land as one's own: land held in demesne. 2. an estate or part of an estate occupied and controlled by, and worked for the exclusive use of, the owner. 3. land belonging to and adjoining a manor house; estate." Source: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/demesne?s=t> accessed on 21.07.2012 at 1:33 pm.

²⁴ Dalits of Bengal

mahajans (talukdar mahajans and the moneylending majans). With the depreciation in the power of the zamindars and the talukdars due to a lack of dependency on the part of the farmers on the zamindars as found in west Bengal, while some became redundant, others especially talukdars reinvented their mode of appropriation of profits and became talukdar mahajans engaged in majorly moneylending. Along with the talukdar mahajans, there entered into the scene the class of trader-mahajans (mostly belonging to the Marwari community of Rajasthan) who were the link with the market for the peasants. They emerged as the veritable conduits of credit flow in the eastern Bengal small peasant economy.

The need for credit was due to a shift in the cultivation practices of the small landholding peasant of east Bengal in the late 19th and early 20th century whereby “ the small peasant economy of east Bengal was drawn into the web of an export-oriented colonial economy. Small peasant producers raised jute for the world market on their minuscule holdings. The market and the credit system, which kept the peasant family alive and helped to reproduce the small peasant economy, became more important than rent as the channels of the drain on the east Bengal peasant.”²⁵ The shift from subsistence agriculture to jute .was brought upon by a rise in the population and the low returns that emanated from the small landholdings of the peasants. Jute was an expensive crop to cultivate and this made the need for credit mandatory; and thus it facilitated the entry of moneylenders in the small peasant economy of east Bengal. The investment in jute was not restricted to indigenous capital, rather merchant capital made its way into economy through the credit flow. And it is here, that the vicissitudes of the world market made the jute cultivator susceptible accumulation of debt. There seemed more concentration of power in the moneylenders as they controlled the credit of the economy. “The dispersed nature of peasant production meant that the grower had little bargaining power over prices *vis-a-vis* the highly organised trading sector. An elaborate marketing mechanism involving a long chain of middlemen took away a fair amount of the peasants' due.”²⁶ And with the absence of any storage facilities, the jute had to be sold off quickly, gaining a price lower than the market rates, so that the peasant could pay off the high interests for the money borrowed from the moneylender and also to pay the rent to the landlord or the zamindar. The

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 32

moneylenders, often upper caste Hindus, had a strong grip over the peasants and the reproduction of the system, and even though the peasant owned the means of production, he was not free and susceptible to market and credit relations; but this sort of relationship of production differed significantly from the 'jotedar-adhiar relationship prevalent in north Bengal highlighted before.

While there was a deterioration in the power and dominance of the zamindar with the rent collection becoming a more muted effort at appropriation of profits in east Bengal, it was detrimental in the regions of west Bengal where there existed a number of zamindars and patnidars²⁷ with high subinfeudation within the agrarian structure. The zamindars and the patnidars also became the principle source of credit there after 1860's. This was brought into contention by the colonial intervention in the late 19th century in agriculture. "These groups controlled the credit and that critical proportion of surplus land which enabled the smallholding and peasant economies to go on reproducing themselves". However, with the expansion of the market for grain, it was the moneylenders and the patnidars who reaped in the most profits along with a small class of rich peasant; but the condition of the small landholding peasants deteriorated and they became dependant on the credit system operative in west Bengal to sustain the cultivation process on a yearly basis. Subsequently, there emerged a trend whereby a de facto ownership of raiyati lands by the non-cultivating moneylenders-zamindars increased as the failure to pay the dues with interest facilitated the appropriation of the lands within the khas land of the zamindars. This difference in the structure where the credit relations in the eastern region of Bengal differed entirely from that of the western and the northern regions made the difference on the political mobilisation of the peasants who were within the iron grip of the zamindars and the subsequent movement under the banner of the Krishak Praja Party.

While the subinfeudation was great in the western region, it was not so in the northern and the eastern regions. However, the source of credit and the control of the market over production were detrimental in the social formations in the subsequent years. In the 1930's with the Great Depression overwhelming the world, it also had its effect on the economy of particularly east Bengal. The source of credit since it lied with the

²⁷ Patnidar comes from the word 'patni' which means a type of tenure (mainly found in west and central Bengal), while the holder of such tenure, usually intermediary between zamindar and raiyat in west Bengal; raiyat means the peasant; tenant under the meaning of the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885

moneylenders (trader mahajans and the talukdar mahajans), and the jute market hit by the depression coupled with the lack of flow of foreign capital into its production and the lack of funds from the colonial government, there emerged fracture within the small peasant economy of east Bengal which grew into sharper contradictions. With ever rising debts and the inability of the moneylenders to provide credit, the structure of dominance built upon the control of credit by the moneylenders was denuded and their power which germinated through the credit flow was questioned. The onus of providing credit fell upon the talukdar-mahajans as the trader-mahajans in the absence of sufficient finance in the recession hit war economy did not have money to lend. While the inability of the trader-mahajans to lend was due to the lack of foreign mercantilist capital, the talukdar-mahajans thought it to be bad business as the recovery of the loans to the peasants was becoming increasingly difficult. With the credit mechanism in such dire straits, there emerged a shift in the power equation. And as Bose notes, the power shift went in favour of the peasants in east Bengal. "It robbed the predominantly Hindu talukdar-mahajans and trader-mahajans of their chief source of economic control and power. From 1930 onwards, the east Bengal countryside increasingly became the scene of a violent conflict between a predominantly Muslim peasantry and a mostly Hindu rural elite."²⁸ This can be a viable explanation for the circumstances which provided the groundswell for the peasant movements that marked the period prior to 1947.

The same was however not the case in west Bengal. The existence of the moneylending landlords along with the tenure holders in the western regions exercised a more direct control over the land making the distinction between the proletarians or the landless (or with less land) labourers and the peasant sharper as compared to the difficulty of making such a distinction in east Bengal. The crisis of the 1930's only added to rising and entrenched dominance of the moneylending landlords. as Bose puts it that "With the fall in prices and the absence of credit, many peasant smallholders were in the doldrums, and the khamar²⁹ sector took long strides at their expense. Landlords and rich peasants continued grain loans to dependent sharecroppers and labourers in the khamar sector. The strengthening of the ties of dependency in this particular form of agrarian organisation precluded the possibility of any sustained or widespread challenge to landlords' and rich

²⁸ Ibid. 277

²⁹ Land owned by the moneylending landlords who used hired labour to cultivate the lands.

peasants' power."³⁰ And with labour required in the small landholdings as well, there could emerge no unity between the small peasant landholders and the labourers. And thus, there emanated no outright challenge to the dominance of the landlords within the structure of dominance. This may be an explanation for the lack of any peasant movement in the western region of Bengal. The protests were often lead by the dominant 'land controllers', i.e. the moneylending landlord; while the small landholding peasants in short bursts of protests in areas where the 'demesne-labour' was minimal along with the upwardly mobile peasants formed the major plank of protests against colonialist rulers and formed the substantial part of the nationalist movement.

From the discussion above, the picture that emerges is not of a watertight divide between the rentier class of Hindu zamindars and Muslim peasants which was responsible for the politics of communalism which came to mark the decade or two prior to 1947. Rather, the mahajans or the moneylending class played an important in politics of the region since they had come to dominate the processes of production and reproduction. There is substantial economic basis for the polarization of the Muslims and Hindus; but there are nuances and specificities involved in the politics practiced, and its actualization differed from region to region. For instance, there was a widespread mobilization in the eastern region while the same kind of violent movement did not come to mark the agrarian relations in the western region. Again, there were also a relationship between the 'peasant politics' and the 'organised politics' of the time, and it is in such interstices of the relationship that the politics of communalism has to be seen in the two decades prior to 1947 (Chatterjee, 1982).

Peasant Communal Ideology: The relation between the Economic and the Political

Chatterjee (1982) tries to put forward an uneasy relationship between the agrarian relations existing in Bengal then, and the rising incidence of violence. He understands that in an undifferentiated peasantry like that of east Bengal, there existed a peasant communal ideology which is intrinsic to the everyday lives of the people. The basis of such an ideology for Chatterje emanates from the principle unit of a peasant community which comes to mark every agrarian structure belonging to the raiyatwari system. This peasant community

³⁰ Ibid.

then is included within a wider network of communities such as the national community through relations of trade or revenue collection as well as cultural markers. This sense of community for Chatterjee became the driving force behind the consideration of any landlords as well as the colonial state apparatuses as something 'outside' the ambit of the community, and the major incidence of violence were thus directed at them. However, the same yardstick was not used for someone who belonged to the community, but has reached a position of prominence where he is capable of extracting surplus i.e. a Muslim talukdar or mahajan. He takes up the issue of music before the mosques which had become the most common reason for most of the violence in the mid-1920s. Such incidences were often found in the city spaces which represented the seat of exploitation of the peasants as it engaged in retail as well as wholesale trade. And in the evidence furnished by historical documents, mostly the music concerned was part of processions usually involving the immersion of the idol, or kirtan organised by the rich landlords or mahajans of the area. The cities being dominated by the Hindus, the Muslims were in a position of subordination and the normal response to violence on the part of the Muslims was an organised form of protest such as a strike; however, the retaliation in a huge manner was affected in the rural areas and it was quick. The fundamental point that Chatterjee is trying to make is that the incidence of violence definitely germinate from the structural relations in the times of crises and scarcity such as the droughts, or recession hit market effecting the sale of jute, but they take the religious form because the religion forms the basis of the community, the communal ideology of the peasants finds its expression through religion. "The very nature of peasant consciousness, the apparently consistent unification of an entire set of beliefs about nature and about men in the collective and active mind of a peasantry, is religious. Religion to such a community provides an ontology, an epistemology as well as a practical code of ethics, including political ethics."³¹ The structural basis lies in the undifferentiated character of the peasantry in the eastern region as compared to the differentiated peasantry in the western region such as Midnapore, Hooghly, Burdwan and Bankura. The difference in the political mobilisation is found wherein in the districts mentioned above, it is the accentuation of class differences and contradictions based on class that are used for the movement, while in the eastern region the basis is in the peasant-communal ideology.

³¹ Ibid. p. 31

The constitution of the peasantry may be different but the action undertaken against the state and its functionaries, as well as the feudal landlords is often violent. The violence is required in such instances because of the entrenched nature feudal relationships, and the privilege that a landlord enjoys in such a structure. It is through violence that symbols of the feudal dominance are targeted. The same is observed in the case of movements against the bureaucratic machinery of the state which stands at a 'perceptual distance from the everyday lives' of the peasants. However, whether the movements are understood in a positive or negative light, whether a movement is termed 'terrorist' or 'Gandhian' or 'communal', can only be understood within the interlinkages of the peasant politics with the structure of organised politics of the period³². And there emerges a reciprocal effect within this relationship of peasant politics and organised politics wherein one is affected by the course taken by the other and vice versa. The significant aspect of the argument lies in its understanding of the relationship between the political and the economic or the agrarian structure here. It is not thereby sufficient to find the basis of violence within the structural factors but it is only through mediation through politics that it is actualized; a veritable basis in ideology is sought for the actions directed at the bureaucratic state structure or the feudal relations of dominance. And it is only through the linkages at the levels of peasant and organised politics that the categorisation of the movements is done. This analytical premise provides us the entry point to discuss the political processes prior to the second partition of Bengal, and how the writing of mainstream history of the country is divorced from the socio-economic background of the violence that came to mark the movements in east Bengal; rather, the focus has been on the effects of such violence, and the overt communal tones of the movement.

Formulation of the Problem

Against the historical background of concentration on the socio-economic aspect of Muslim marginalisation and the contestations as found in the literary writings and literature covered in the course of the research, it is interesting that before the SCR findings were made public, there was not enough literature focussing on the socio-economic and political marginalisation of the Muslims in West Bengal in particular. Rather, the focus has been on the rising incidence of violence and increasing polarisation due to heightened

³² Ibid. p. 34-35.

communalism. It is in the context of increasing communalism that we find a plethora of literature (Ahmed, 2004; Baber, 2006; Banerjee, 2002; Chakravarthi, 2002; Engineer, 2003, 2004; Kumar, 2010; Mander, 2007; Mathur, 2008; Pandey, 1990, 1999; Robinson, 2005; Sarkar, 2002; Vanaik, 1997; Varshney, 2002) discussing the condition of Muslims in the aftermath of the violence that has been perpetrated against them, the severe “humanitarian crises” occurring in these areas due to which the categorization of Muslims as ‘other’ happens only in relation to the violence perpetrated against them. This kind of violence is associated with communalism, the best counter to which is secularism according to some authors. The concern for communalism then is traced back to the movements in the pre-1947 period that were against the agrarian structure and later, for a separate nation-state. The movements had a communal colour to them but they were movements against the structure of dominance and hegemony. However, the politics became narrow in scope even though the situation had not changed, if it had not got worse. The politics came to be reduced to one determined by religion, and the religious as well political leadership had a great role in reproducing the politics within the ambit of religion. As it has been recounted in the case studies, there have emerged contestations in the sphere of politics against the determination of politics by religion, from within the Muslim community itself. There was an undeniable marginalisation of the Muslims, and coupled with the violence which had been on the rise in the post-1947 period, it only made it worse. The debates then concentrate on the ineptness of Indian secularism to deal with the issues of violence and communalism, and the need for more effective policy interventions to strengthen the democratic ideals of secularism; while at the other end, there is the understanding of secularism as an imposition from above, a Western import which can never work within the Indian contexts³³. The debate however can make ‘invisible’ the marginalization, the inequality and the exploitation suffered by the Muslim community brought to the fore by ethnographic studies such as Seabrook and Siddiqui (2011), Sikand and Ali (2007) and Kumar (2010) or the observations made by the Sachar Committee Report and the Report of the National Council for the Religious and Linguistic Minorities, or the independent studies made by MKA Siddiqui under the aegis of the Institute of Objective Studies. The point

³³ Though they are referred to as “anti-secularists”, the researcher does not agree with the categorization. But the people understood as championing this line of argument, though different in their own ways, are T.N.Madan and Ashis Nandy who are most prominent.

therefore is to go beyond the 'subjective violence' and investigate the very nature of the structure and its relation with the politics of the state which makes such exploitation possible. It becomes pertinent to investigate the structural processes that make such a system possible when in a state like West Bengal which was under the leadership of a Left-front government with its secular and democratic credentials, the Muslim community as a whole is worse off than other socio-religious communities (based on the observation made by the Sachar Committee Report).

Research Questions

There are three inter-related questions which would help us in our endeavour:

What is the present socio-economic and political condition of Muslims in West Bengal with respect to landholdings, occupational structure, and representation in government jobs, income, access to infrastructural facilities and education, and political representation in comparison to other socio-religious communities as reflected in the Sachar Committee report?

The SCR makes it amply clear that the development parameters of Muslims in West Bengal are among the lowest. Rather than understanding this development deficit in terms of 'endogenous' or cultural factors intrinsic to the Muslim community, or externalizing it to 'exogenous' or structural causes as found in the development literature, we would like to trace the historical antecedents of this situation of Muslims taking the cultural and structural to be dialectically related. What were the historical antecedents of the present development deficit of the Muslim community in West Bengal?

The third chapter would use few studies to bring in a comparative aspect to better highlight and understand the situation in West Bengal. One of our objectives would be to understand whether the situation in West Bengal is unique in terms of the development deficit that characterizes the Muslim community there as compared to other states? What are the contestations at the level of politics within the Muslim community?

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a review of available literature which is relevant to the subject in hand as an M. Phil thesis is expected to be, though an ethnographic study would provide a more concrete picture and would be the next step in this pursuit. The literature has been chosen according to the themes that are being worked on. The study has also referred to newspaper reports and articles, magazines and journals. The study has tried to

incorporate some of the studies undertaken by certain institutions such as Institute of Objective Studies in Kolkata given their vast array of work on the Muslims of West Bengal. The study would also undertake an in depth study of the relevant data on the socio-economic and political condition of Muslims in West Bengal provided by two government reports, namely the Sachar Committee Report(2006) and the Report of the National Council for the Religious and Linguistic Minorities(2007). Though the study is vast in scope, the representation and the analysis of data would be in a truncated form to suit the demands of the research. Since the majority of the questions dealt with in the study have been addressed in the disciplines of political science, history and theology to a certain extent, the study would also use the knowledge that is available on the subject within these disciplines. Also, there has been an attempt to substantiate the statistical data provided by the SCR with some studies based focus group discussions and ethnography to provide a qualitative analysis of the development deficit brought to the fore by the SCR.

Chapters:

The SCR presents us with data that highlight the socio-economic backwardness and development deficit that characterizes the Muslim community in West Bengal at present. However, we understand that beyond the dualism of ‘endogenous’ or cultural factors and exogenous’ or structural factors, the antecedents of the present situation can be found in the history of Muslims in West Bengal. Thus, one of our objectives would be to look into ‘the history of the present’ with regard to Muslims. The **first chapter** undertakes this task of examining the historical pre-conditions that are related to present condition of Muslims in West Bengal, characterized by a development deficit.

The **second chapter** provides a descriptive analysis the present socio-economic and political condition of Muslims in West Bengal with respect to landholdings, occupational structure, and representation in government jobs, income, access to infrastructural facilities and education, and political representation in comparison to other socio-religious communities as reflected in the Sachar Committee report.

The **third chapter** would involve an analysis of studies undertaken by researchers, firstly, giving a comparative understanding of the situation of Muslim in other states,

secondly through an exploration of the importance of cultural and social capital in the social reproduction process, thirdly, how the social reproduction process along with the instances of violence plays a role in the ghettoization of Muslims. The next task of the chapter is to understand the politics of collective identity and exploration of voices that stand in opposition such politics, and also to delve into the question, how and when do people in such a marginalised condition, raise their voices in protest not only against the majority community, or the state ruled by them, but also against the elites and their politics within the community?

CHAPTER ONE

The Bengali Muslims in History: The Political and Cultural Dimension

The subject matter of socio-economic backwardness among the Bengali Muslims had dominated the Bengali Muslim literature as well as government census reports, and works such as William H. Hunter's *Indian Mussalmans (1871)*¹ since the late 19th century. The census reports and Hunter's work presented a different view of the position of Muslims in Bengal, made them more aware of their situation and paved the way for movements of self-assertion as well as movements against the status quo. The majority of the Muslim population lived in the eastern region of Bengal and thus the exploitative socio-economic relations there came to dominate their discourses. It is interesting and perplexing at the same time that a theme which had been so recurrent in the discourses, ceased to arouse interest in the period after 1947. The present chapter thus delves into the literary discourses that emerged after 1910 till 1947. It attempts a juxtaposition of the discourses that had emerged during the Swadeshi Movement by Bengali Hindus to assert a distinct selfhood, with the various Muslim voices that formed part of the dominant discourses amongst the Muslims in that period. The attempt thereby has been to locate the anti-establishment voice against the socio-economic relations that were responsible for the wretched condition of the Muslims during the time. Hegemony of the upper caste Bengali Hindu bhadralok traversing the socio-economic, political as well as cultural aspects of everyday existence was omnipresent in that period. The concept 'hegemony' has been formulated by Antonio Gramsci². To surmise his argument in a few words, 'hegemony' is "to say an integral form of class rule which exists not only in political and economic institutions and relationships but also in active forms of experience and consciousness"³. To counter such hegemony, an alternative form or the creation of new experiences and consciousness is required along with the change in socio-

¹ (Hunter, 1965(1871))

² (Antonio Gramsci, 1971)

³ (Williams, 1983) "Hegemony" p. 144-145

economic and political structure⁴. Thus, the works Bengali Muslim authors discussed later in the chapter have to be viewed in that light. Furthermore, contrary to the view that the Muslim identity formation should be seen in the light of the partition and the call for a separate state, the academic intervention of scholars like Ayesha Jalal(2000), Joya Chatterji (1994, 1998, 2007), Sumit Sarkar (2002) Sugata Bose(1986;1982) and Neilesh Bose (2009) posit an alternative explanation to the whole communalism and separatism axis spawned by the politics of the period and the partition in 1947. The spectre of violence against one community or the other has dominated academic writings on the Muslim condition thereafter.

The Bengali Muslim Conundrum

The question of what constitutes the category “Bengali Muslim” has been an important one in the studies on Muslims in Bengal. The corollary questions that emerge are: how do we define Bengali culture? And how do we define a Muslim? Is the definition of Bengali culture dependent on the symbols of the upper caste Hindu cultural practices or has the religion of Islam fostering a different culture among the Muslims is also a part of the hitherto Bengali culture? Is there a disjunction between the terms “Bengali” and “Muslim”, or are there common grounds that can surface with a little prodding? The period before 1947 saw widespread mobilisation by leaders of both communities. But the Muslims of the region were mostly held culpable for the kind of violence that followed the partition of the Presidency in 1905. It is often understood that the Muslims had instigated the violence given their violent communal nature under the leadership of the Muslim elites. Major historical works are replete with such prejudiced disparaging of the Muslims⁵.

In her analysis of important authors⁶ in the Bengali Hindu literary lexicon, Joya Chatterji traces the origin of communalism in the *bhadralok*⁷ culture. It is ‘culture’ that formed the ‘crux of the difference’ between the Hindu and the Muslim

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*, Cambridge, 1989; Shila Sen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1937-1947*, New Delhi, 1976; and Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Bengal Muslims 1871-1906. A Quest for Identity*, New Delhi, 1981.

⁶ Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Nabin Chandra Sen and Akshay Kumar Maitra were the writers whose works have been analyzed by Joya Chatterji(1994).

⁷ A working definition of ‘bhadralok’ can be:- “A term used in the historiography of modern India to refer to many different political and socio-economic persuasions, from the salaried worker to the rent-seeking landlord to politicians of persuasions on all ends of the political spectrum.”- (Bose N. , 2009), Glossary, p. 412.

communities. The essence of such a culture lay in the attainment of education and 'bhadrata', or a cultivated sense of articulate and aesthetic living, and provided a status which the *bhadralok* came to associate with a 'class' they specifically constituted⁸. The construction of Hindu selfhood involved the stereotyping of the Muslims and attributing certain characteristics to them. She uses the works of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay to bring out the politics of culture that was used to define the Muslim 'other' in his writings. In his works, especially *Bipradas*, there is an attempt at reconciliation between contradictory aspects within the Hindu religion. The aspect of effeminacy is countered with the well-built, handsome protagonist who is a zamindar⁹. This figure of the protagonist is important as it stands in contrast to the servility that had started to characterise the 'babu' or the service class under the British rule. Sarat Chandra was appalled by this, and with the changing socioeconomic conditions of the 1930's, the nationalist fervour of the writings became "an essence" entrenched in the Hindu personality. It was through 'culture' that the reconciliation was effected, a reconciliation "between manliness and passiveness, orthodoxy and tolerance, spiritualism and a love of freedom, other-worldliness and worldly responsibility, formal western knowledge and actual self-knowledge."¹⁰ One of the most troubling aspects of Hinduism was the issue of untouchability which the author understood could be resolved within the framework of the Hindu religion. The breakdown of credit relations and the withering of the old socio-economic as well as political dominance of the *bhadralok* in the 1930's, there emerged a sense of anxiety which is reflected in the writings of Sarat Chandra's works too. In order to maintain the dominance, the need was to instil a sense of pride and responsibility among the population of the Hindu community. By presenting the breakdown of the old feudal order as ominous for 'Hinduism', he propagates the values which have been defined by the *bhadralok*-zamindari group of the time. In lieu, the exclusion of Muslims from such a narrative only becomes necessary as the peasantry mostly belonged to Muslim community.

⁸ The ambit of the term is so wide that its usage has gained disrepute and the definition of the concept is contested. For a better elaboration of the concept, see (Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, 1973) and (Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, 1994). Since the rubric of the term covers a wide class of people belonging to upper castes, it has been used interchangeably with landlords, the middle class of government servants, the rentier among others.

⁹ The character being referred to is Bipradas from his novel of the same name. Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, *Bipradas. Sarat Rachana Samagra*,

¹⁰ (Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, 1994, p. 170)

The polarisation being affected in the novel is petrified in his further writings. In the analysis of *Bartaman Hindu-Mussalman Samasya* ('The Current Hindu-Muslim Problem')¹¹, Joya Chatterji brings to the fore "the relationship between the growing social conservatism of bhadralok society, its changing political preoccupations, and the emergence within it of a full-fledged communal ideology."¹²

"If learning is simply knowing how to read and write, there is little difference between Hindu[s] and Muslim[s] . . . But if the essence of learning is width of the mind and culture of the heart, then there is no comparison between the two communities ... Many may hope to establish a parity of learning [between them] but I do not. A thousand years has not been enough time [to achieve this] - nor will another millennium suffice."¹³

Saratchandra makes 'culture' the characteristic that is present in the Hindu community and is found lacking among the Muslims. Here, the interesting facet of such an endeavour is the forging of a unity of Hindu community divided on the basis of caste, and was a change from his ruminations on the impossibility of such a unity. However, the political and economic necessity of forging the unity made him use the metaphor of 'culture' as a bridge between the unequal populations. In trying to forge a wider caste unity among the Hindus¹⁴, he seeks to portray them Muslims as a single monolithic community with similar characteristics. The attribution of characteristics such as overwhelming sexuality and virility, 'debauchery', criminal activities like looting, raping and *abhadrata*, (or the lack of gentility that was found among the Muslims) sought to demonise the entire Muslim population. The nationalist zeal of Muslims was also questioned in his writings.

"Hindustan is the homeland of Hindus. (*Hindustan Hindur desh*). Therefore, the duty of freeing this nation from the chains of servitude belongs to Hindus alone. Muslims look towards Turkey and Arabia, their hearts are not in India ... Today it is vital that we understand this point - that this work is the work exclusively of

¹¹ Reproduced in Harihar Ghosh (ed.), *Sarat Rachana Samagra*, vol. III, p. 841. See also the appendix of (Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, 1994)

¹² Ibid. p- 173

¹³ Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, *Bartaman Hindu-Mussalman Samsasya*, p. 843. Quoted from (Chatterji, 1994, p. 174)

¹⁴ However as Joya Chatterji remarks that this all pervasive caste unity might have been the ideal, but it was seldom realised. The elitism that was intrinsic to the bhadralok culture did not allow them to mingle with the lower castes. And their sense of superiority derived from the belief that Muslims were nothing but converts from the lower rung of the society. (Chatterji, 1994, p. 189)

Hindus, and of no one else. There is no need to get agitated counting the Muslim population. Numbers are not the ultimate truth in this world ... When Hindus come forward and vow to free their country, then it will matter little whether a few dozen Muslims lend their support or not”¹⁵.

As Chatterji argues that the use of the word *desh* was not only meant to signify the nation but the native place or the place of origin for the people which the Muslims could never understand as they came from a ‘foreign land’ and their allegiance always lay with the global Muslim population and not with the matters of the country¹⁶. Saratchandra, in the essay, further states that the Hindu bhadrakok dominance should remain unchallenged even if the majority of the population thought and voted otherwise. Rather, a claim for unintelligibility was inferred upon the majority population of the Muslim peasants, thereby, dismissing any decision involving the majority Muslims at the helm as incorrect. This was the period of the swelling peasant movements against the Hindu dominance which has been discussed later in the chapter. This association of culture with the Hindu religious practices excludes the Muslim religion and its practices.

The Syncretistic Strain within Bengali Muslim Culture

However, there is understood to be a syncretistic strain present within the folk traditions of Islam. Asim Roy’s work *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition of Bengal*¹⁷ was important as he tried to delve into historical works to trace out the origins of the Islamic tradition in Bengal. In his argument, he refutes the understanding provided by scholars of Muslims of the region being half converts and their tradition having nothing to do with the dogmatic tenets of Islam. Rather, he understands the folk tradition, which was previously dismissed off hand by scholars as of no importance, a result of cultural and symbolic interchange between the “great” tradition of Islam and the “little” traditions that existed in the regions. He found a “syncretism” between the “great” and the “little” traditions present in Islamic “folk” practices of Bengal and that for them Islam did not override the . Even though he gave a more nuanced understanding of the “great tradition-little tradition” model, he did not change the

¹⁵ Ibid. p- 844. Quoted from (Chatterji, 1994, p. 178)

¹⁶ Ibid. 178

¹⁷ Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

basic premise of the model. The “syncretistic” nature of the Islamic folk practices, the little traditions, was to be seen as influenced by and “culturally continuous with the primary or indigenous Hindu great tradition for centuries”¹⁸. The basis of the argument above lies on the condition of disjointedness present at the core of the Bengali Muslim identity. For Roy, there can be a successful placation of differences between the “Bengali culture”, the basis of which is the Hindu tradition dating back to many centuries and Islam, but at the very essence, they both are implacable and different sources of identity. Thus, in the argument presented by Roy, the location of Bengali culture in the Hindu religious tradition, an indirect reference to the difference in civilization is made, whereby the Hindu civilization is privileged as the basis of all the folk traditions that have emerged in Bengal. In his subsequent essay¹⁹, he brings out an ingenious explanation of the Islamic practices and improves considerably on his arguments, but does not change the basic premise of his argument. He finds the use of “mediators” to be prevalent in the Islamic practices but as one scholar argues, the “mediators” existed between two distinct traditions, isolated and irreducible to each other. However, N. Bose (2009) critiques such an understanding, and instead brings out the “co-constitutive” nature of “Bengaliness and Muslimness” in his work.

Bengali Culture and Muslims: Co-constitutive or Disjointed?

Rafiuddin Ahmed, in his *The Bengali Muslims, 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity* (1981) focuses on the difference and disjointed nature of Bengali Muslim identity. At the outset, it is necessary to point that for him there was a distinction between the Bengali culture and the Muslim culture that existed in the late 19th century. For the Muslims in Bengal, the choice was either of the two. In the period after the 1857 Mutiny, the Muslims had become more conscious of their identity shaped by religion and politics as reconstructed by Ahmed through the debates and discussions that used to take place on different platforms. As he understood Islam as an external imposition, a result of proselytization, he did not think of it as a part of the Bengali culture that had emerged in the late 19th century. For him the definition of Bengali culture was the one constructed through the symbols and practices of the upper caste Hindus who were dominant in the sphere literature, and occupied most of

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 250.

¹⁹ Asim Roy, 2001. “Being and Becoming a Muslim: A Historiographic Perspective on the Search for Muslim Identity in Bengal” in Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya (ed.), *Bengal: Rethinking History, Essays in Historiography* New Delhi: Manohar.

the governmental and other institutions. The Faraidi and Tariq-e-Mohammadi movements lead by religious preachers such as Titu Mir, Dudu Miya and others was a movement in the 19th century to purge Islam of the un-Islamic practices. However, this was at the apparent level; rather, the underlying motive of the movement was to form a community or umma to voice genuine peasant demands (Roy, 1999). This has been discussed later in the chapter. Returning to the discussion, Ahmed makes a teleological assumption between the demand for a separate nation and the revivalist movement happening at the end of 19th century. Thereby, reducing the genuine and rational demands of the people of a region to an identity movement based on religion, feeding the communalism and the separatism debate which is associated with the Muslim politics in the pre-1947 period. Rather, in this formulation he failed to read the socio-economic basis of the movement that used religious markers to mobilise and propagate.

In contrast, Joya Chatterji (1998)²⁰ understands that the Muslimness of a Bengali Muslim is “vitiating to the extent that he is a Bengali”(265), that is the Muslim identity of Bengali Muslim is inseparable and co-constituted by his Bengali ethnic roots. Through an analysis of works of Asim Roy²¹ and Richard Eaton²², she questions the disjunction that is often associated with the concept of ‘Bengali Muslim’, whether Islam was imposed from above on the Bengali culture. Complementing Asim Roy’s argument, she criticises the view that the history preceding 1947 involved a process of Islamicization of Bengal; the process of implantation of a ‘pure’ Islam, an idealized form of Islam, on the infertile grounds of Bengal, and thus, the Bengali Muslims are not the ‘true Muslims’ as the ‘core values’ and the language Urdu, was missing there. This comes from an understanding of an unchanging and dogmatic Islam. Yes, there were movements which sought to get rid of, what were considered as the “impure” practices in the movements of the 19th century. But she departs from Roy’s position when she understands the proselytizing initiative under the Mughal rule was not just to promote the religion. Rather, the “pirs” and others who had come to Bengal carried agricultural implements along with

²⁰ Joya Chatterji, “The Bengali Muslim: A Contradiction in Terms? An Overview of the Debate on Bengali Muslim Identity” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 16, 2 (1996): 19.

²¹ Op. cit.

²² Richard Eaton. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.)

them. This has been observed by a number of historians chief among them is Richard Eaton. The attempt was to develop 'capital intensive' agriculture and an ethics of entrepreneurship among the people. This becomes important as it also questions the association of *only* the proselytizing impulse with Islam; and as Chatterji puts it, the converts to Islam were not Hindus but people inhabiting the areas who incorporated the practices of Islam within the ambit of their cosmological system. Chatterji goes onto point that the emergence of Islam in Bengal was not a paradox; rather, Islam was fundamental to the polity and economy of Bengal having no seeming fracture. Here, instead of understanding the "folk" traditions of Islam as being built on the foundations of Hindu religion, the argument locates it in the material existence of the people of the region. The argument then reads like this- even though at the cultural level, apparently there seems to be an imposition of Islam on the "folk" practices of indigenous people; but in reality, it was not an imposition. Rather, as Eaton writes, the involvement of indigenous people in the clearing of forests and agricultural activities paved the way for the same indigenous people to adopt the religion of the one who taught them to use the implements and engage in agriculture. Thus, Islam found a place in the worldview of the people. Even though Roy argues that the practices of the indigenous people co-existed with that of Islam, still he finds the genesis of the "un-Islamic" practices within Hinduism, and as pointed his other essay, Roy (1999) finds that in the wake of the Faraidi and other Islamic revivalist movements, the people found it difficult to let go of their practices. They resented the changes sought by the revivalists. However, they did not have a choice because the revivalists were offering them a proposition in the form of the movement to change their conditions. This apparently gave them a sense of insecurity and uneasiness which got externalised to view the Hindus as enemies. There was thus a disjointedness which got sharper during these revivalist movements. This is what Chatterji is arguing against. Islam was an integral part of their worldview, and the revivalist movement provided a platform to voice their demands emanating structural inequalities. This has been pointed out by Roy also but he still manages to expound a relation between communalism and the uneasy relationship between Islam and the indigenous folk practices. Similarly, with Ahmed the Bengali culture that was present in the late 19th century did not fit in with the Islamic revivalist movements, and he finds the communitarian assertion of the Muslim identity as responsible for the separatism one finds in the 20th century, and

not the emergence of a class conscious peasant ready to fight against the exploitative agrarian relations.

Partition of Bengal, 1947

The Partition of India in 1947 saw two nation-states being formed and successively gains Independence. While India had a unitary territorial basis, the nation state of Pakistan was divided into two regions, West Pakistan and East Pakistan. The severing of the country into three portions was a tough job, and Cyril Radcliffe was thus brought in to draw the boundary. It was a tough job because of the mixed nature of population residing in the regions of Bengal and Punjab. Still they tried to divide the regions according to the population numbers, as in the community which had a greater population in a region got to either stay in India or Pakistan. But there were no outright majorities, and significant population of the minority population stayed in some regions. It is then that the population transfer became a huge logistical nightmare. It involved widespread violence and significant number of deaths and loss of property.

The reasons behind the partition were not simple. Rather, as Chatterji (2007) understands it, there were definite interests to be served. The shift in Bengali Hindu politics, from one that was against the Partition in 1905 and the support for it in 1947 holds the key to understand the complicity of the Hindu political leaders in the Partition of the country. The construction of the boundary under the Radcliffe Award was submerged in details. There were copious notes on what was to go where, from the civil servants to the last typewriter. It took just ten weeks (from 3 June to 17 August, when Radcliffe's line was announced) for the Radcliffe's line to be considered as the border between India and Pakistan in the west as well as in the east. The decision to partition the country was taken in Delhi and London, and not in the places where the partition was to be affected. With the decree from London positing that the Bengal legislature be divided into two with a 'shadow cabinet' to take charge of the leadership in west Bengal, the decision to partition the province was put to vote in the Bengal Assembly where the Hindu legislators voted in favour of the partition while the Muslims voted against it. "The provisional West Bengal Legislative Assembly resolved, by 58 to 21 votes, that the province should be partitioned and that West Bengal should join India's Constituent Assembly. At a separate meeting later on the same day, members of the East Bengal Assembly voted against partition by 106 to

35”.²³ Two thirds of the districts in Western region of Bengal had a Hindu majority of 55% decided on the basis of the census of 1941 done according to the thanas or territories under police stations. This division sought on the basis of thanas gave the Congress the possibility of staking claims on certain territories with some precision²⁴. The business of drawing up the line was left to people that were nominated, mostly judges in both the provinces of Bengal and Punjab to argue for or against the specificities of the border in the Radcliffe Commission. The central high command of Congress chose to stay away from the process and let the Radcliffe commission delimit the two separate nation-states post-1947. The decision to partition the country and the formation of the frontiers was undertaken due to political considerations. There were various plans proposed to the commission by the Congress and even dissidents from the party. In the end however, as Chatterji argues, the Radcliffe Line matched the blueprint presented by the legislators who argued for the Congress plan of dividing the territory. However, there were strategic problems in going for separation of the provinces. There were certain presuppositions which informed the decisions and plans forwarded to the Commission, “ that all-India would come to West Bengal’s aid and would help it to make good deficiencies and iron out disruptions and distortions in the economy of the new state. Second: that the disposition of India’s revenues – and West Bengal’s share of them – would remain largely unchanged. And third: that trade between the two parts of Bengal would continue much as before. Underlying these assumptions was a fourth of astonishing naivety: that the sub-continental economic and fiscal *status quo ante*, and West Bengal’s role within it, would remain unchanged despite the partition of India”²⁵. Instead, the West Bengal government was left to fend for itself as waves after waves of Hindu refugees started coming in while the economy of the region was changed forever. The Radcliffe Award divided the province of Bengal into West Bengal covering a territory of 28,000 sq. miles with a population of over 21 million people and East Bengal, a territory of 49,000 miles with a population of 39 million. 5 million Muslims found themselves in West Bengal while 11 million Hindus were in East Bengal²⁶. Overnight the Muslims became a minority in the western region within the

²³ Burrows to Mountbatten, telegram dated 20 June 1947, TP XI, No. 278, p. 536.; Footnote #4: Chatterji (2007: 21)

²⁴ Ibid.p. 39

²⁵ Ibid. p. 56-57

²⁶ S. Chakrabarty, *With Dr. B.C. Roy*; pp. 59-60. C.f. Chatterji, 2007: 57

Indian nation state while the Hindus staying back in East Pakistan had the violence of Noakhali, Tippera as well as the riots in Calcutta in 1946 in the backdrop had to be considered to decide on future. However, the Hindu as well as the Muslim community was not a homogenous; rather, there existed divisions which came into play when the time to move arrived. The poorer sections had no choice but to stay. The decision thus to leave was different for different sections; some could not stay because of the prospect of being a minority in a country, these were the sections which were better off. There was also remarkable change in the social norms in eastern Bengal²⁷. The transfer of population from one region to another was marked by violence, massacre, rape and arson. And it has informed the memories of people displaced from their homes as found in a study of a Nadia village²⁸. These memories and political propaganda has been responsible for the viewing of the Muslims in the light of the partition and the violence that followed it. There has also been a predisposition to view the politics of the Muslims in the period prior to partition as “communal” and “separatist”. However, there are genuine demands which get glossed over in such a formulation.

“Delinking”- Partition and Muslims

In her *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*²⁹, Ayesha Jalal makes a poignant criticism of the propensity to link the Muslim nationality movements with “communalism”. Through her analysis of individual biographies and works of leaders, philosophers and other eminent personalities, she tries to bring to light the heightened movement in certain regions such as Punjab, Kashmir and Sindh. The nationality movement in these areas could not be reduced to a single strand of argument such as communalism/separatism as the movements had been shaped by historical circumstances, the people involved sometimes belonged to various political ideologies and the movement was also informed by a distinct culture in which religion had a vital role. Thus, the politicisation in these regions had taken place in the interstices of religion, culture and

²⁷ Chatterji draws this conclusion from the attempts at marriage made by a poor Muslim labourer to forcibly marry a Hindu girl.(ibid.)

²⁸ Tetsuya Nakatani, ‘Away from home. The movement and settlement of refugees from East Pakistan in West Bengal, India’, *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies*, 12 (2000);c.f. Chatterji, 2007: 111

²⁹ Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000),

regional identity. The foisting of a Muslim identity in the regions had not emerged to satiate narrow gains but was a political expression of the people to fight against a fundamentally centralised politics, hegemony of a particular religious community, for instance the upper caste Hindus. Jalal interprets the politics of the regions in their dialectical relationship with the centre, a colonial government recognising a single party (Congress) as the representative of the political aspirations of all the people, even though the same political organisation facilitated the cause of upper caste Hindus who were dominant in the regions. In her work, she has tried to deconstruct the idea of a monolithic “Muslim” identity and community. Through the political and socio-economic processes present in the late colonialism, there had emerged the whole prospect of solidifying a community for Muslims; to view it beyond the colonial context eschewing the production relations and exploitation within that system of production would amount to inscribing to the community the markers that have are nothing but predispositions of a different religious community. She further states that:

“While exploring the nexus of culture and political power, the analysis avoids presuppositions which unproblematically link a religiously informed cultural identity with the politics of cultural nationalism. Rather than assuming the prior existence of a community of Muslims, the purpose is to investigate how perceptions of cultural difference, despite class, regional and sectarian variations, led to the articulation of a discourse based on the colonial state’s privileging of religious distinctions in Indian society.” (Preface, p- xii)

The state itself had been involved in the process of identifying the parameters of the Muslim politics of the regions. In the post-colonial period, the history of these regions had been constructed backwards from the Partition in 1947. Jalal argues that such a construction gives a distorted understanding and that such an argument eventually categorises the Muslim politics as communal. Rather, the politics of the pre-1947 period have to be viewed in their own workings, demands and ideologies, and have to be “delinked” from the event of partition. This will provide a different paradigm to the understanding to the politics of the regions. It would also help appreciate the need of the Muslim community of the region to assert their differences from the Hindu community based on religious markers to counter the exploitative socio-economic relations. The works of Jalal help to reconfigure the political aspirations of the Muslims in the pre-independence period. The politics of Muslims

were viewed in their resultant impact in the form of partition and violence, and the politics was understood as “separatist” and “communal” with M.A. Jinnah leading the way with his two nation theory. However, this understanding of the politics subsumes and makes invisible the genuine nationality movements, movements against the status quo which erupted from amidst the people. The delinking of these movements from the event of partition may help view the movements beyond the “Muslim separatism” and “communalism” debate. Even though she does not analyse the situation in Bengal extensively, but her work helps situate the formation of the Muslim community in Bengal in a different analytical framework. It helps position the political debates in the history of Bengal in a much wider scope.

IV

The history of Bengal has always been the history of the Bengali Hindus given the scant presence of Muslim nationalist figures or literary greats. The presence of the Muslims in the partition related memories and narrative has always been of the ‘other’ who tore the region into two for his/her own narrow gains. There is always a sense of nostalgia for the home that was lost during the severing of the region among Hindu writers. And it has an important role in the formation of collective and individual selfhood. The silence on the role of Muslims in the history of Bengal becomes conspicuous. In lieu, there are works that celebrate the contribution of various Hindu intellectuals in their different capacities but remain oblivious to the works of Muslim literary greats except for say Nazrul Islam. As culture becomes the site of dominance, it also gives rise to a protracted struggle.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe: Post-Colonial Thought and Historical Difference*³⁰, does something similar. To surmise his arguments succinctly in a few words would be difficult as he attempts to deconstruct the “European” markers of history, a “political modernity” which is constituted by “state, bureaucracy, capitalist enterprise, civil society and scientific rationality.” However, the problem emanates when one attempts to portray the societal structure of countries outside Europe using the same institutions as markers. It presents a distorted picture of the colonised and the post-colonial countries, and in a teleological framework, these countries appear catching up to the more advanced European countries. He suggests the use of an alternative paradigm whereby the “political modernity” of a

³⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-Colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000),

country like India can be studied through its own cultural markers. And it is here that he uses references from Bengal. In doing so, he uses everyday practices that could be found in the city of Calcutta like the *adda*³¹, or the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore in articulating the “national imagination”. However, noble his understanding and celebration of difference from the Western world, he falters when discussing the Bengali imagination and excluding the contribution of Muslims altogether. He understands that the imagination of Bengal has no place for Muslims after the experience of violence that accompanied the partition of Bengal. The Hindu population holds the Muslims responsible for the division, and coupled with the nostalgia for the lost homes, expunges Muslims and their place in the historical process altogether from memory and its expression is veritably found in the texts that are produced.³² As N. Bose (2009) argues that the emphasis on how the prejudices developed and worked in reality does not pay due attention to the discourses that were produced prior to the Partition and after. It neglects the definition and articulation of selfhood that was undertaken by the intelligentsia as well as the general Muslim population³³. Ignorance of the cultural markers amongst the Muslims which were a veritable part of Bengali cultural and literary history, helps rid the onerous task of critiquing the very sense of community that Chakrabarty accentuates in his attempt to criticise the Western model of “political economy”.

In his significant historical work on Bengali Muslim identity formation both on the collective and individual level, Neilesh Bose in his unpublished dissertation argues that the origin of the community identity has to be displaced from being just hinged on the religious aspect; rather it has to be understood in the historical context of “both regional Bengali and broader, trans-regional South Asian Islamic terms.”³⁴ He tries to argue that religion and secularism do not need to exist on two ends of a pole; rather the secular can co-exist with the religious. In his work, Bose tries to seek the conscious and active role played by the Bengali Muslims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the “construction of their own socio-political identities”³⁵.

³¹ Chakrabarty uses the definition given by Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay of *adda* as “careless talk with boon companions” or the “chats of intimate friends,” as well as “long, informal, and unrigorous conversations”.

³² Ibid. p.- 21

³³ Ibid. 17-18.

³⁴ Neilesh Bose, 2009. *Anti-colonialism, Regikonalism and Cultural Autonomy: Bengali Muslim Politics, c.1840s- 1952*. Phd. dissertation, Tufts University. p-3.

³⁵ Ibid. p-4.

For him, Islam is not a limiting predictor of the various pathways toward the articulation of a selfhood.....but rather a point of reference and the basis for a particular social identity that connects.....” different movements that have taken place in the late 19th and early 20th century (Bose, 2009;p-26).

Bose, in his work carries out an extensive analysis of the kind of literary works produced during the time, especially in the 1920’s and after, in the Bengali language by Bengali Muslims such as Nazrul Islam and others. The existence of various journals, where the Bengali Muslim intellectuals, debated, discussed as well as critiqued the works of various leading Bengali Hindu intellectuals for fomenting a rabid communalism, shows the active role played by the Muslim “organic Intellectuals”³⁶ in developing a politicised and well informed consciousness among the greater population of the Bengali Muslims especially the peasants. Furthermore, the intricate relationship between the economic, the political and the cultural existed in the Bengali Muslim peasant politics and the movement that happened in the decade and a half preceding the independence and partition of the Indian subcontinent. The attempt here would be to draw extensively from Bose’s work and seek an historical explanation of the hitherto backwardness of the community and the kind of conscious attempts made by Bengali Muslim leaders, intellectuals and the general population for the overall progress of the community as a whole. However, it is important to present a short analysis of the coming of Islam to Bengal, the reasons behind it, the formation as well as the change within the social structure with the advent of Islam and the role of the Islamic revivalist movements as the first attempt to forge a community among the Muslims in the 19th century.

Bengali Muslims in Pre-colonial and Colonial History: The Coming of Islam and the Formation of the Social Structure in Bengal

Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1972) in trying to trace the social background of the formation of the nation-state of Bangladesh identifies the process of import of the caste structure to Bengal with the coming of Brahmins brought in by rulers of southern and western India. Subsequently, the indigenous population was identified as

³⁶ The concept had been formulated by Antonio Gramsci. See Antonio Gramsci, 1971. *Selections from Prison Notebooks*.

“*sudra, antyaja, mleccha and yabana*” (Mukherjee, 1958: 160³⁷; c.f. Mukherjee, 1972: 265) as early as fifth century AD. The caste structure got ossified, with its doctrines of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution as well as marriage rules, within the social structure and happened concomitant to the introduction agriculture and cultivation to promote a stabilised society by 12th to 13th century (ibid.). However there did exist a ‘compromise’ between the Brahminical and the non-Brahminical way of life, such as eating of non-vegetarian food by Brahmins, which still imparts a distinct character to the Hindu tradition of Bengal and makes them different from the Brahmins in rest of the country. However, the spread of Hinduism was restricted to the western side of the Padma (a tributary of the river Ganga) and the eastern side of Bengal came under the influence of Buddhism and *Vaishnavism* which did not change the practices both on the religious and the economic aspects. The religious practices that developed in these areas came to be known as *Sahajiya* or ‘simplified religion’. The Brahmins considered such practices sacrilegious and defiling keeping thus a safe distance from the region. It is only during the conquest undertaken by Mughal rulers that Muslim preachers and others came into the scene, and there large scale conversions of the majority population. This has been well documented in the work by Richard Eaton (1994). He refutes three theories which are often used to identify the processes of conversion to Islam in Bengal, namely the “immigration theory” whereby the Muslims have supposed to have come and settled in Bengal from Central Asia while the “sword theory” posits that Islam being a militant religion performed the conversions using coercive methods. The third theory understood the processes of conversion took place as a result to gain economic and political privileges from the ruling classes; however, as evidence furnished by Eaton, the majority of the Muslim population were found in the rural areas away from the seat of power in the urban areas and too far to obtain any privileges of any sort. Another theory understands that the conversion to Islam was undertaken to escape from the clutches of the degrading Hindu caste system, but as mentioned above, the spread of Hinduism in eastern region was not the same as in the western region. It is here that he tries to provide an insight into the role played by the Sufi preachers and the Sufi tradition which was similar to the *Sahajiya* tradition and the cult *Vaishnavistic* preachers of that time. The Muslim rulers were mostly interested in satiating their economic interests and paid scant

³⁷ Ramkrishna Mukherjee. 1958. “The Rise and Fall of the East India Company”; Berlin Verlag der Wissenchaften; Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

interest towards the conversion of the indigenous people. The process of ‘conversion’ was not simply restricted to the literal meaning of the term; rather the endeavour was to constitute a community that would be engaged in the clearing of forests under the aegis of a ‘maulvi’. He makes certain observations: firstly, that “the largest increase in the Muslim population in the rural eastern Bengal came in the wake of the Mughal conquest of the region” in the 17th and 18th centuries; secondly, the proselytization of the indigenous tribes was not the primary motive, rather the Mughal officials were asked to refrain from it; instead the attempt on the part of the Mughals was to add to their revenue and eastern Bengal provided the richest source, and hence the Muslim men performed the function of bringing the various tribal groups to form a community in order to engage in economic activities such clearing of forests. There was a gradual process of the indigenous people taking up the religion of the leader who had brought them together to form a community and there existed no specific point of ‘conversion’; thirdly, the Muslim religious leaders were also functional in acquiring new lands in various ways either by buying it from absentee or non-cultivating zamindars or intermediaries, or they might clear the land and ask for recognition from the rulers as intermediaries to collect revenue for the government (Eaton, 1994: 220-224). The important aspect that emerges from the discussion above is the important role played by the religious leaders in the spread of the religion and in the formation of the community. It was in the 19th century that the Islamic revivalist movements gathered steam and were instrumental in leading some of the peasant movements in the late 19th century.

The Revivalist Movement and the Socio-economic question

There were two major Islamic revivalist movements in the 19th century, the Tariq-i-Muhammadiya and the Faraidi, in Bengal. It is important because these movements sought to purge the Islam practised in the region from all the un-Islamic practices, and there was a strong anti-feudal, anti-zamindari tenor to the movements. Asim Roy (1999) in this regard writes of the inability of the literature on these movements to appreciate the contribution made by the revivalists in the political and socio-economic domain, informing in lieu the consciousness of the Muslim masses. For him the simplistic distinction made between the ‘social’ and ‘religious’ concerns of the revivalists does not delve into the intricate relationship between the religious and the social-political, and how one affects the other. It is here that he is critical of

Raifuddin Ahmed who makes such a distinction and reduces the revivalist movement as the attempt by the preachers to exploit the poverty of the peasants, and direct the energies of the movement towards the attainment of the impossible goal of 'pure' Islam. Ahmed concludes by terming the movement as a failure as a huge section of the population remained out of the reach of such 'pure' Islam and continued with their old practices. Roy finds such a view as undermining the impact of the revivalist movement.

Rather, the scope of the movements cannot be reduced to such narrow goals. Instead one should view the movement as providing a newer meaning of Islam to individual Bengal Muslims; but not often in the magnitude or direction eked out by the revivalists. In a more succinct observation, Roy states that:

“...the revivalist movements must not be viewed purely as agencies of puritanical religious reform, as they gave the poorer Muslims a new awareness, a corporate voice, transformed the people into a community, and paved the way for later political changes, as most writings on the subject do underline. What is critically important here and not to be overlooked is that all these changes, regardless of whether they involved a new spiritual awakening or a desire for greater material rewards, all occurred under the umbrella of Islamic revivalism. Hence it is not possible to separate this new world-view from religious changes and the new understanding of Islam.” (Roy, 1999: 45)

The focus on socio-economic justice was the underlying motive found in the teachings and practices of revivalist leaders like Haji Shariat Ali, Dudu Miyan and Titu Mir. The idea of socio-economic justice and equity emanates from the Islamic ideology of equity enshrined in its doctrines, and combined with the idea of Islamic brotherhood, it had the potential of imparting the movements a revolutionary colour. This development of both a religious as well as the awareness of the deprived condition of the Muslims within the Bengal society became determining the psyche of a Bengali Muslim. For Roy, it could either make an individual conscious of their socio-economic condition or make them entirely dependent on the revivalists.

The more significant aspect that Roy highlights is the formation of the community, or the 'umma', that could tide over the differences between the ashrafs and atraps, and make the peasant masses in the rural areas identify with the ideas of towards the political mobilisation of the Muslim community espoused by the ashrafs, or the urban elites. The militant activity often displayed in the movement lead by the

revivalist preachers such as Dudu Miyan who successfully campaigned and even was allegedly linked to the murder of a zamindar. This sort of militant activity for Roy was a natural consequence of the consciousness gained by the Muslims of their socio-economic deprivation and the feeling of alienation under the new rulers. The Islamisation identified in these movements had a rear guard action to coalesce the Muslim population into a revitalised community beyond the fault lines which had developed in their midst. The consequence of such an overt Islamisation for Roy had been the tendency to become exclusive and inward looking which bred communal feelings often leading to conflict. One important consequence of the questioning and dispelling of the un-Islamic practices within these movements was to put the tease the worldview of Bengali Muslims out of its shell. It made the relationship between the dual identities, of a Bengali ethnicity defined by a common language and certain common practices shared with the Hindus and the overtly assertive Islamic identity espoused in the course of these movements, an uneasy one. For Roy, the externalising of such feelings of unease towards the Hindus, and blaming them for their plight, the Muslims sought to ease this inner conflict³⁸. Though the argument seeks to locate the genesis of the communal feelings and conflict within the Muslim community, it would be seen in the course of the chapter and in the Introduction, that the circumstances were different at the start of the 20th century and conducive for the peasant struggles and movements which formed a veritable part of modern history and moulded the politics and events in the decades preceding the partition of the country. However, one cannot deny the important role played by the revivalist movements in bringing the community together, highlighting the socio-economic as well as political condition of the Muslims vis a vis the Hindus and challenging both the economic and religious structure within the region often involving violence. It provided a leadership to the community giving them a sense of worth and security and paved the way for the later mobilisation of the Muslim community in the early 20th century.

The Common Ethnic Basis for Amicable Hindu-Muslim Relations

Mukherjee (1972) contends however that there was an amicable unity amongst the Hindus and Muslims based in different regions. “The 'Bengali' forces of consolidation were, however, greater than the forces of alienation in the 19th century.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 53.

Muslim sufism and Hindu sahajiia or vaisnavism found a fertile soil in Bengal against orthodox religious systems and helped in the development of a Bengali culture and a Bengali language” (Das Gupta 1946³⁹; c.f. Mukherjee, 1972: 266). The language Bengali also came to be recognised as a literary language and words from Persian and Arabic also became a part of the Bengali lexicon. This was enabled by the economic structure of Bengal then. For him the *jati* structure was well entrenched in the social organisation giving rise to many “functional castes” within the social structure maintaining harmony and balance within the society. “Cotton weaving had developed in those days as an important industry in Bengal, in which were engaged the Hindu tanti and the Muslim jolaha. Fishing was an important occupation in riverine Bengal, in which were engaged the Hindu jalia, kaibarta, pods, etc, and the Muslim nikari, dhawa, mahifaoash, etc. The oilpressers were the Hindu kolu or the Muslim khulu, and so on” (Mallick 1961: 3-26⁴⁰; c.f. Mukherjee, 1972: 266). Thus, in the 16th- 18th centuries, there had emerged a distinct Bengali identity at the point of attaining nationhood based on shared territory, “common history, community of culture and language, common economic organisation based on agriculture and industry (mainly the production of cotton and silk textiles demanded in the international market through agencies of European East India Companies), and a distinct psychological identity which was asserted against superior or analogous powers” (ibid.). The last instance of assertion of identity took place in the collective political action taken by 12 landlords, both Hindus and Muslims, against Mughal rulers or the attempts by Nawabs of Bengal using both Hindu and Muslim generals to declare Bengal as free from the Mughal rule (ibid.). So, the question arises then, how does one explain the loss of amity between the two religious communities in the state of Bengal? What lead to the fracture in the pan-Bengali identity that Mukherjee is talking about?

It is with these questions that the dissertation jostles with however in an indirect manner. If the Muslims were such an indistinguishable and integral part of the Bengali culture and the symbolic space, what transpired in history that they became such a marginalised section as found in some of the literary writings in the 1920’s and 30’s? What lead to rise of such a vibrant peasant movement that threatened to

³⁹ Sashibhushan Dasgupta. 1946. *Obscure Religious Cults as Background of Bengali Literature*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta.

⁴⁰ Azizur Rahman Mallick. 1961. *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal: 1757-1856*. Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan.

overthrow the feudal structure in place? What relationship did the politics of the time have with the socio-economic condition of the time? And eventually, what led to the Second Partition of the Bengal Presidency after the first one was rescinded?

Mukherjee understands the reason behind the “alienation of Bengali Muslims from the Bengali Hindus” was in fact due to the changes in the economy of Bengal brought about by the colonial rulers. The worst effected were the Muslims in the discrimination that the East India Company practised against the Muslims in the “field of administration and civic organisation as well as in the economic activities pertaining to the interest of the Company and its officials” (ibid.: 267) while aristocracy withered into obscurity. The advantage however was given to the Hindus who were favoured by the Company. Not to the entire population but to the few who chose to align with them and engage in business with by becoming ‘agents’ for their merchandise and thus, established a firm stronghold on the economic organisation of Bengal (ibid.). However, they could neither garner similar business opportunities as their counterparts from abroad, nor they could use the profits gained to invest in industries since the existing policy directives constrained them from doing so (Bagchi, 1970: 223-256)⁴¹. This group eventually benefitted by turning themselves into landed aristocracy in the wake of the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. They became powerful landlords by the middle of the 19th century dominant in the entire region of east Bengal except for a few regions. With sub-infeudation following the Settlement Act, the Hindus were in an advantageous position to become intermediaries and amass wealth especially in the eastern region where they came to dominate a Muslim peasant population. Consequent to this rise to a position of prominence within the economic sphere, was the increasing accessibility and availability of education for the Hindus. As a result, concomitant to the government institutions and the mercantile firms being entirely constituted by the Hindus, the rent they enjoyed provided a section with the opportunities to pursue science, literature and art. The socio-economic situation had changed in under a century and it was reflected in the observation made in the 1871 census:

⁴¹ Amiya Kumar Bagchi. 1970. “European and Indian Entrepreneurship in India, 1900-30” in Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee (eds.), *Elites in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

“Hindus, with exceptions of course, are the principal zemindars, talookdars [i.e., owners of large-sized sub-infeudatory estates], public officers, men of learning, money-lenders, traders, shop-keepers, and engaging in most active pursuits of life and coming directly and frequently under the notice of the rulers of the country; while the Musalmans with exceptions also, form a very large majority, of the cultivators of the ground and of the, day labourers, and others engaged in the very humblest forms of mechanical skill and of buying and selling”(quoted in Khan, 1960: 19⁴²; q.f. Mukherjee, 1972: 267).

Furthermore, the emergence of the ‘middle class’ at the end of the 19th century was thus constituted almost entirely of the Hindus and it had a major impact on the social structure of Bengal, and as Mukherjee states, it was felt more acutely in the region of east Bengal. For Mukherjee, the previous social harmony which had come to mark the Bengali social fabric was not to be found because of an indifference coupled with contempt for the Muslim way of life by the dominant Hindu majority. The conflict situation which had been present started to boil over into the open at the start of the 20th century. The political situation came to a precipitous situation during the First Partition of Bengal but for Mukherjee, the decisive break did not take place because of a shift in policy by the British favouring the Muslims⁴³. The Muslim especially the leaders coerced the colonial government to provide facilities of education and jobs for the Muslims and in lieu there emerged a Muslim middle class (A. K. Nazmul Karim, 1956: 138-143⁴⁴; c.f. Mukherjee, 1972: 267). This nascent formation of the Muslim “middle class” held a lot of promise for the Bengali social structure. The rise of the middle class was facilitated by a corollary rise in the number of Muslim *jotedars* according to Mukherjee. Though a more nuanced definition of *jotedar* and the agrarian structure has been provided by Bose (1982), still it is valuable to the current analysis to delve further into Mukherjee’s formulation. He understood this class of *jotedars* employing landless labourers and sharecroppers often

⁴² Abdul Majed Khan. 1960. “Research about Muslim Aristocracy in East Pakistan” in Pierre Bessaignet (ed.) *Social Research in East Pakistan*. Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan. pp. 17-29.

⁴³ However, there has been enough evidence to argue that the major reason behind the annulment of the First Partition was because of the pressure provided by the Hindu leaders and intelligentsia, while the Muslims were in favour of the Partition. See Chapter One of this dissertation.

⁴⁴ A.K. Nazmul Karim. 1956. *Changing Society in India and Pakistan*. Dacca: Oxford University Press.

poor peasant. The children of 'jotedars' could avail the education and form linkages with the urban middle classes strengthening the formation of Muslim middle class.

There emerged the possibility of a polarisation happening on the basis of classes and overriding the threatening communal polarisation. On the one hand would be the propertied and middle class belonging to both the communities while on the other, there would be the impoverished peasantry of both the communities. The formation of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) to represent the interests of the peasants and the possibility of a peasant movement held its own promises going beyond the religious lines to mobilise people. And, the presence of both Hindu and Muslim members of the party is an example of the inter-communal character of the party.

However, the nature of the dominance of the Hindu middle class was far too entrenched in the Bengali economy for the Muslims to compete with even though they formed the government in 1937. "The urban population, the educated community, the landed interest, and the bureaucracy of Bengal, were still predominantly Hindu. Also, regionally, West Bengal-with its Hindu stronghold-held East Bengal-with its Muslim stronghold-as its hinterland" (ibid.: 268). And, as Mukherjee understands, this was the primary reason behind the Muslims, especially the middle class, pledging their allegiance to the Muslim League and going onto demand for a separate nation-state to have a "separate territory, a separate market for its goods and services". The argument that Mukherjee (1972) puts forward is a credible one. But it has to be tempered with more nuanced discussions on the agrarian structure existing in Bengal in the late 19th and early 20th century to explain the rise of violent movements which came to be identified as 'communal', and have left an indelible mark on the structuring of Indian history (the discussion on the agrarian structure has been carried out in the Introduction). However, the contestations were not limited to the political and economic sphere; rather there existed a near total literary hegemony of the Hindu writers. And within the writings of Muslim litterateurs, there was also the need to present different cultural basis, as opposed to Bengali culture which had come to be dominated by Hindu cultural symbols and markers, for the shaping of a community and a movement against the established socio-economic order as well as for a greater nationality struggle. Similarly, the literary works also provide us the vantage point to delve into the socio-economic

condition of Muslims in the early decades of the 20th century, and find a link with the hitherto socio-economic and political condition of the Muslims in the state of West Bengal.

From the embers of the First Partition of Bengal...

Though there had been historical precedents in the form of the Faraidi movement, but the major thrust for a distinct cultural and social identity for the Bengali Muslim was provided during the Swadeshi Movement⁴⁵, Bengal's very own nationalist movement in opposition to the first Partition of Bengal in 1905. The colonial government under Viceroy Lord Curzon affected the partition in view of the logistical problems being faced by the government and the need for the development of the backward and impoverished regions of the Muslim dominated areas of Eastern Bengal.⁴⁶ This is in contrast to the historiographical understanding which deterministically reduces the basis of the partition to deliberate division of political sentiment in Bengal on religious lines. Rather, the declaration of the partition was "...due to a bloated and overworked administration, an unwieldy population, and a lop-sided focus on Calcutta to the neglect of hinterland locales, particularly cities in the east like Chittagong and towns in the north like Rajshahi. The late nineteenth century showed a population boom in Bengal, as in the last thirty years of the century the province's population rose to over seventy-eight million⁴⁷, larger than any other province of British India. This rise in population affected Bengal's social life, in addition to swelling numbers in Calcutta, by straining the government's ability to adequately provide water, sanitation, drainage, and public services in ways that were beneficial to the general population."(N. Bose, 2009: 67). The partition was in fact to divide the region in such a manner that after the partition the population of the Eastern part of Bengal would be 30 million (or 3 crores) and this would facilitate an overall development of these impoverished regions. Development was envisaged in various sectors such as education, trade and industry. This was to be achieved by ensuring a proportionate representation of Muslims in educational institutions and facilitating

⁴⁵ The Swadeshi Movement was a Hindu revivalist movement in the period after the First Partition of Bengal. Notable leading figures of the movement were Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. See Sumit Sarkar, 1973. *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1905-1908*. (People's Publishing House: New Delhi)

⁴⁶ See *ibid*.

⁴⁷ 1 million is equal to 10 lakhs in the Indian numeral system, which means the population was approximately 7.8 crores.

their participation in job sectors which were dominated by educated Hindus residing mostly in Calcutta. This was to ensure the dominance of this small section of the population ended (ibid.). Moreover, the effort was clearly to provide a unity to the erstwhile Muslims in East Bengal.⁴⁸

The response however was a mixed one from the Muslim intellectuals and litterateurs. With the partition of the region arose the anti-partition agitation often associated with the Swadeshi movement. There were a few who took part in the agitation, but the majority were uninterested and indifferent from the aforementioned agitation. It is during this time that the writers in different voices reached out to the Muslim masses to make them recognise their majoritarian position in terms of numbers and their debilitating existence being a result of the Bengali Hindu dominance. A pertinent remark as a challenge to this dominance was expressed by Nawab Salimullah⁴⁹, “Does the euphonious phrase “Indian Nation” mean only and restrictedly the Hindus of the two Bengals? Is not the mixing up and fusion of all the various races a consummation to be striven after and desired? Is it to be assumed that the development of an Indian nationality should be synonymous with the development of the Bengali Hindu, apart from and outside all other races and communities?”⁵⁰ However, bowing to enormous pressure, the colonial government negated the partition and the region of Bengal was back as the old geographical entity it was prior to the partition.

But, it marked a good departure point for the mobilisation of the Muslim peasants on both the cultural as well as the political fronts. One of the most interesting tracts, *Krishak Bandhu*⁵¹, written by Garib Sayer and published during 1910 has been analysed and discussed by Sumit Sarkar⁵². In the essay, Sarkar points to the parallel themes of development and Islamicization of the Muslim peasants in the poem. The poem emphasizes on the pursuit of ideals of Islam to make people restrict themselves from unnecessary expenditure and to arm themselves with modern agricultural techniques. In the process, a fervent emphasis on identity was seen where the differences between the Hindus and the Muslims were expressed; and the purging of

⁴⁸ For Curzon’s remark during his tour of East Bengal, see Bose(2009;69); Richard Cronin, 1977. *British Policy and Administration in Bengal, 1905-1911*. Firma KLM: Kolkata, p-23

⁴⁹ The erstwhile Nawab of Dhaka then.

⁵⁰ Cited in Vinod Saxena (ed.), *Partition of Bengal* (New Delhi: Kanishka, 1987), p. 113; c.f. Bose (2009:70)

⁵¹ *Krishak Bandhu*, in its translation means the friend of the peasant.

⁵² Sarkar(2002), *Two Muslim Tracts for Peasants, Bengal 1909-1910*.

un-Islamic and syncretistic practices was called for. This was done with equal emphasis on the poor condition of Muslim peasants. , Sarkar quips that the invocation of Islam to mobilise the Muslim peasants to address the issues related to their backward condition as “...an almost copybook instance of class issues being simultaneously evoked, and effectively subordinated, to developed communal discourse.”⁵³

One of the more significant developments of the time was the establishment of the Dacca University in East Bengal after the annulment of the partition. It was done to better educate the Muslim peasant masses who lagged behind the Hindus when it came to higher education; in some institutions the number of Hindus were thrice or four times the number of Muslims enrolled even though the population numbers of both the communities in the province were almost similar. In Bengal, the general decrease in numbers at the higher levels of education as compared to the primary schools was in fact caused due to the absence of Urdu and Arabic as a medium of instruction while preference was given to Sanskritised books and methodologies, and certain books carried pejorative references to the Muslim community (N. Bose, 2009: 73). However, the establishment of the Dacca University drew a lot of flak from some of Hindu intellectuals; rather, there was general opinion that those “...people who worked in the fields didn’t have time for academic study in a university” (ibid.: 75). The vehement opposition to the establishment of the university is to be seen in the threat it posed to the dominance of the Hindus in “...educational administration and the economic world surrounding education” (ibid.).

It was during this period that certain stereotypes about Bengali Muslims had emerged in the in the popular understanding and to some extent in the literature written by the likes of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Hemchandra Bandopadhyay, Saratchandra Chattopdhyay and Nabin Chandra Sen. As one academic indicates that the failure on the part of the Swadeshi leaders to toe a single line of politics was a greater cause of the increasing communal feeling rather than the mutual enmity between the communities. “Swadeshi leaders became increasingly ambivalent, combining an overall commitment to a non-communal conception of national integrity (without which Bengal would have been an empty shell) with the sometimes thinly disguised-and for that matter, sometimes completely overt deployment of

⁵³ Ibid. p-98

communal stereotypes to explain the willingness of the anti-Swadeshi movement (i.e. Muslims) to cooperate with the British against the national interest.” (Sartori, 2008: 248). Mostly the stereotyping centered on them being understood to be as not belonging to the land, secondly as aggressive peasants making life difficult for the zamindars and the third one was of the revivalist Muslim who travelled to preach and purge the un-Islamic elements from the ways of life of the people. This drew a whole series of criticism from the Bengali Muslim writers.

The language which was used by the Muslims writers was called the *Mussalmani Bangali*. *Mussalmani Bangali* had Persian and Arabic words in the Bengali that was used in general; but a total refurbishing of the language took place and it became gradually more Sanskritised. A somewhat similar purgation of Urdu, Persian and Arabic words took place in the language Hindi⁵⁴. The trend can be found in the works of the famous litterateurs Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. This expunging of Persio-arabic words forced the Muslim writers use the new, standardized Sanskritic Bengali. Though literature on the Bengali Muslims was sidelined in the market, still there arose a new wave of writing in the late 19th century discussing various themes; chief among them was the poor condition and backwardness of the peasants and the critiques of acerbic attacks made by writers such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his novels *Durgeshnandini*, *Sitaram*, *Anandamath*, and *Rajsinha*. This point to the fact that the process of identity formation among the Bengali Muslims was not a result of antagonism based on communal lines, but a reasoned rational approach to create a distinct cultural and political platform to ensure the economic wellbeing of the people; and the need for such a platform was caused by a consciousness of their own condition in the society brought about by unequal relations of production.

Mir Musharraf Hussein was one of the most prolific writers when it came to the critiques of the existing unequal conditions. He wrote extensively in the end of the 19th century. His writings included texts such as *Jamidar Darpan (Landlord Mirror; 1873)*, *Udasik Pathik Maner Katha (1890)* among others. They mostly dealt with the exploitation suffered by the peasants at the hands of the zamindar. There were writers such as M.I.A. Ahmadi who wrote *Unnati Sopan (Stepping Stones to Improvement)* emphasising on the need to open their eyes when they still exist in a “....deep

⁵⁴ See Alok Rai, 2002. *Hindi Nationalism*. Orient Blackswan: New Delhi.

slumber...with their eyes tight shut they are silently bearing the torture of insult, hunger, and indebtedness, and are losing respect for their own religion...it is for the sake of justice and religion that I am placing this *Unnati Sopan* before this decaying society.”⁵⁵ Another important text written in the same period was *Burir Suto* (Old Woman’s Thread; 1909)⁵⁶. The author was Mohammed Mahsenullah who laid continued emphasis on the importance of peasantry in politics while discussing the relations between the zamindars and the peasants. This text also marks a watershed development in the Bengali Muslim political identity formation. It was in this text that the importance of forming peasant associations was understood while the need for increased representation of Muslims in the local governments so that it could be transmuted into power in the state level government. The need for mobilization and representation in the partaking of power emphasised in the text was the impetus and benchmark for the political and socio-cultural movement that were carried out in the decades preceding the independence and partition of the region.

These texts were written in first decade of the 20th century. With the annulment of the First Partition, a different hue had been imparted to the relations between the communities and its foregrounding in the literature and politics had been conspicuous. In the next three decades, the events and ideologies that were thrust into the collective conscience of the Muslim community, though heterogeneous, moulded the politics from thereon. The early years of the 1920’s saw the indomitable rise of Kazi Nazrul Islam. Though his life was an inspiration in itself⁵⁷, it was his writing which influenced the community formation and politicisation of Bengali Muslims in the early 1920’s and after. His writings were published in many journals. He wrote extensively on issues related to social justice, against the oppression meted out to the peasants by the zamindars, his writings contained a strong reinvigoration of Islamic ideals but had elements from the Hindu mythology too; however, he was against the blind pursuit of religion and religious fanaticism. The writings also had an anti-colonial tenor to them. His poems “*Dhumketu*” and “*Bidrohi*” were two of his poems

⁵⁵ M.I.A. Ahmadi, *Unnati Sopan*, p-3. Cited in Bose(2009)

⁵⁶ See Sarkar(2002), *Two Tracts for Peasants, Bengal 1909-1910*

⁵⁷ See Bose, N.(2009); Rafiqul Islam, 1972. *Nazrul Jibani* (Life of Nazrul), Bangla Academy: Dhaka:, p. 1-62;Rana Razzaque, “Some Aspects of Bengali Muslim Social and Political Thought,” p. 336-337; Hossain, Mozaffarand Subrata Kumar Das, (eds. and trans.), 2005. *Kazi Nazrul Islam: Speeches* Nazrul Institute Dhaka, p. 81-90; Serajul Islam Choudhury, 1994. *Nazrul Islam: Poet and More* Nazrul Institute: Dhaka; Rezaul Karim Talukdar, 1994. *Nazrul: The Gift of the Century*, Mannana: Dhaka. p. 13-35. See Gopal Halder, 1983. *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, Sahitya Academy : New Delhi; Muzaffar Ahmed, 1965. *Kazi Nazrul Islam Smritikatha (Memories of Kazi Nazrul Islam)*, Calcutta for his writings.

where he vehemently criticises to the point of denigration the religious bigotry he saw within the community; the abysmal criminal justice system; the appallingly poor condition of the people, and the need for a total upheaval, a “revolution” in the social system to bring in a more equal, socialist state without any kind of violence or discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and class⁵⁸. However, Nazrul did draw his share of scorn from other contemporary Muslim writers who did not like the understanding of Islam and its practice presented in his writings.⁵⁹ The works of Nazrul marked a new direction in Bengali Muslim politics where “...religion was invoked for political reasons by a community, though not in a narrowly exclusionary sense”(N. Bose, 2009: 128-9), and coupled with anti-colonialism to seek to overthrow an imperialist government.

Muzaffar Ahmad, was another such figure who represented the progressive politics that came to mark Bengali Muslim politics in the next two decades. He was a member of the Indian Communist Party⁶⁰. His politicisation into the communist mould was brought about by the alienation he had felt in the exclusionary character of the Swadeshi Movement. As B.T. Ranadive comments, “there is no doubt that a large number of Muslim youths wanting to identify themselves with the anti-British upsurge in those days [the 1920s] were repelled by this [Hindu] revivalist expression”⁶¹. Ahmed wrote trenchant critiques of Bankim Chandra’s novels such as *Anandamath* and viewed the Swadeshi agitation as a “Hindu revivalist movement aiming to restore Hindu rule” (ibid. 130). His ideological moorings in Marxist-Leninist ideas were also influenced by the Russian Revolution (1917-1921). It is interesting to note that the need to change the existing relations of production and to usher in an overall change in the social structure, the writers sought ideologies going beyond the straitjacketed understanding provided by their religion or existing contemporary political ideologies and practices.⁶² The different strands of thought present in the Bengali Muslim literature had certain themes in common such the development of the community; emancipation of the peasants from an exploitative relation with the landlords; the use of religion to mobilise the Muslim population

⁵⁸ Bose, N. (2009), pp-106-128

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See Muzaffar Ahmad, *Myself and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929*

⁶¹ B.T.Ranadive, “Muzaffar Ahmad and His Times” in *On Comrade Muzaffar Ahmad: A Birth Centenary Publication*, (Kolkata: National Book Agency Limited, 1989), p. 14.

⁶² Op. cit. 153

while championing the cause of social justice and equality in an unjust and unequal society; and to stimulate the formation of distinct Bengali Muslim culture as opposed to the saturated mainstream Hindu Bengali culture.

There remained a concerted effort on the part of the Muslim intelligentsia and the legislators to address the socio-economic issues that were ubiquitous in the Muslim community. The majority of the issues revolved around the condition of the Muslim peasants. Thereby, in the debates presented in the Calcutta's Bengal Legislative Council the Muslim legislators argued in favour of the Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill in 1926 and the Primary Education Bill in 1927-28 (Bose N. , 2009). This was to address the issues of wretched nature of the exploitation suffered in the then erstwhile landlord-tenant relationship and to make primary education compulsory for the population. In the purview of the lack of representation of Muslims in various sections of the administration, the push for literacy became a necessity to ensure that a proportionate representation of the Muslim population was ensured. As for the legislators vying for the change in the landlord-tenant relationship which had been in place since the Permanent Settlement had been affected, it was harbinger of many such protests and agitations for the rights of the peasants from the legislative assembly to the Mufassils in the rural areas. These efforts went in tandem with the formation of literary associations such as the Muslim Sahitya Samaj in Dhaka⁶³ and the publication of many journals. To put it concisely, this period saw a considerable spurt in the number of journals and periodicals pointing to the existence of healthy debates on the questions of identity, culture, socio-economic condition and religion among the Muslim intelligentsia; while Muslim legislators increased the tempo for positive and beneficial changes on the administrative level. The entry of the peasant as a political subject in the debates and discussions, and the dissemination and propaganda especially among the peasant masses for their political mobilisation can be credibly linked to the peasant movement and the formation of the Krishak Praja Party that defined the period before the eventual partition of the region.

Peasant Movement and the Krishak Praja Party

In the Marxist understanding, the systemic crises in capitalism occur largely due to a process of capitalist over accumulation⁶⁴. Also, the wartime economy had its

⁶³ Erstwhile capital of Bangladesh, also referred to as Dacca.

⁶⁴ This has been succinctly explained by Paul Sweezy in his *Four Lectures on Marxism*.

own demands on the global system of production. As a collateral effect, this had its impact on the economy of Bengal and made the relations of production, that were present in Bengal then, untenable. It is in this period that, with a heightened peasant consciousness under the leadership of peasant organisations, the peasants had led a very successful movement against the feudal structure. And subsequent to this was presence of journals which highlighted the plight of peasants and played an important part in initiating discourses supportive of the peasant movement partaking in a way by moulding and directing the movement to its desired end.

The presence of journals like *Bulbul* and *Mohammadi* offered a decisive departure from the kind of writing that existed before them. Instead of focussing on Islamic philosophy and social critiques, the new breed of writers harped on the political identity of the Muslims. The "... intellectuals began to emphasize elements of a distinctiveness which included a highly particular focus on a Muslim social identity as a constituent part of Bengali Muslim identity, and therefore, greater Bengali, identity" (N. Bose, 2009: 251).

The changes in the thought processes of the intellectuals were a reflection of the changing socio-economic and political condition in the region. The Communal Award of 1932 was an incendiary to the storm that was to grip the political situation in the region which determined the course of the history of the region. The Communal Award was implemented to ensure proportionate representation of the Muslims in politics. This was to be done through separate electorates for both the communities as a joint electorate would have made it impossible for Muslims to be chosen. At the heart of the determination of the electorate were certain educational, property and tax requirements which would have made it impossible for the Muslims to garner a proportionate representation in the government⁶⁵. The basis of a separate electorate was not unfounded; rather there had been the 1909 Indian Councils Act (The Morley-Minto Reforms) and the Government of India Act of 1919 which were implemented to protect the interests of the minority living under a majority (N. Bose , 2009). The Communal Award drew an acerbic response from the intelligentsia as well as the general population of the Hindu community. A prescient observation from the

⁶⁵ In the purview of the requirements, within the joint electorate system, Muslims would have consisted of only 500,000 voters (roughly 2% of the of the 2.5 crore population) while the Hindus would have had 591,000 voters (2.5 % of their population) which included the Scheduled castes as well. See (Bose, N. 2009: 252-54) (Chatterji, 1994: 18-55). For a more general understanding of how a separate electorate functioned for the Muslims, see (Jalal, 2000: 160-63).

government was that the award had been “universally condemned by Hindus as placing their community in a relatively inferior position which is not justified by their superior wealth, level of education, or past political record”⁶⁶. The justification for the maintenance of power and representation greater than the proportionate population was contingent on the ‘cultural superiority’ that the Hindus had over the Muslims who were understood to be ‘backward’ in every way. With the Congress voicing their protest against the award, rebel members of Congress who were against such a position went on to join other organisations (N. Bose, 2009: 254). In time, there emerged then a peasant politics which reverberated through the Muslim population.

The most effective politicisation of the peasants took place in East Bengal. The Muslims in the eastern part of Bengal constituted the vast majority of the peasants and demesne labour under the Hindu landlords rule⁶⁷. In the past, the status quo of the landlord-peasant as well as the landlord-demesne labour agrarian structure had been maintained even in the aftermath of peasant movement fuelled by religion. However, in the 1930’s and after, with the Great Depression and a wartime economy, the lack of credit in the transaction between the peasant and landlord, there emerged a strife in the relationship and the deference and subordination which had sustained the exploitative relationship was undermined. Thus, the elements were present in the vestiges of the societal structure to bring about a total change within it, and the peasants rose in revolt against the mahajans⁶⁸ and the landlords. However, since the majority of the Muslims in this region were Muslims, the mobilisation was in turn on communitarian lines against the landlords and mahajans who were mostly Hindus. Here, the “religious communitarian identity under these circumstances imparted the social bases of solidarity to articulate class based political demands”⁶⁹. The material concerns augmented by the famine of 1943 in the wake of breakdown of the credit relations between the peasants and the landlords lead to the emergence of the peasant as conscious, active agent of social change.

Peasant associations were formed in different areas of the region. There were meetings held under the rubric of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP from hereon) at

⁶⁶ Home Political File #18/12/1932, p-2. C.f. Bose, N. (2009), p-253.

⁶⁷ See the Introduction of this dissertation for the analysis of the agrarian structure undertaken by Bose S. , *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1914-1947*, 1986.

⁶⁸ The transliteration of the word ‘mahajan’ is somewhat closer to the meaning of moneylender in the local parlance of the villages.

⁶⁹ (Bose S. , *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1914-1947*, 1986), p.168

different times all throughout Eastern Bengal. And, the ‘communal’ tinge of the meetings that had been reported in the government observations was to do with the leaders urging the peasants not to pay rent and the looting of Hindu traders⁷⁰. The formation of the Krishak Praja Party took place in 1935-36. Some of its demands were “abolition of the zamindari system without compensation, the reduction of rates of rent, remission of old debts, free and compulsory education...”⁷¹; and the protection and promotion of certain Muslim rights and interests, and the propagation of Urdu as a language along with Bengali.⁷² The years previous to the 1937 elections had seen the meteoric rise of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League (ML from hereon). Jinnah wanted a larger Muslim unity and wanted to forge an alliance with the KPP; but refused to acquiesce to demand of the abolition of zamindari system in order not to alienate the Muslim zamindars. Thus, in the elections of 1937 even though the KPP had greater share of votes, the ML won by a whisker. The significance of the elections had been the prime focus on the rural areas, the enfranchisement of Muslims with the rise in percentage of the electorate and the eventual rise of Muslims in the political arena to change Bengal politics forever⁷³. The promising rise of the KPP was however followed by a rapid decline in their fortunes especially under the Fazlul Huq⁷⁴ led ministry. The KPP had gone onto to form an alliance with the ML. In this partnership with the ML, KPP which had emerged to play the vanguard role for the peasant movement, after forming the government did not heed to demands of the peasants. The foreclosure of peasant demands such abolition of the zamindari system decimated the KPP. The ML put the communitarian demands of the Muslims of foisting a broader Muslim solidarity beyond the class divides and issues related to such inequalities. Even though many of the demands of the peasants were ‘negotiated’ by the government with the decreeing of various acts, the demand of the abolition of zamindari system was not taken into consideration. There was an inverse relation between rise of the ML and the decline of the KPP in which many of the KPP members went on to join the ML.

⁷⁰ V/10/82, Report on Administration of Bengal, 1934-35, p. xxx. C.f. (Bose N. , 2009, p. 256)

⁷¹ (Bose N. , 2009, p. 258)

⁷² *ibid.* (Bose N. , 2009) also points to the creation of a rift in the KPP due to the specific economic demands which had not pleased the Muslim zamindars or landlords of Calcutta

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 261. N. Bose argues that the enfranchisement and the focus on rural areas was possible due to the Government of India Act of 1935. See Humaira Momen, *Muslim Politics in Bengal: A Study of the Krishak Praja Party and the Elections of 1937*. Dhaka: Study Home, 1972.

⁷⁴ Fazlul Haq was the Premier of the first government formed after the elections held under the GoI Act , 1935 held in 1937.

The Shift in Hindu Nationalist politics and the Consolidation of the Muslim community

There was a change in tenor of the Bengali Hindu nationalist politics as well where, rather than the demand of a separate Bengali state, the allegiance now had shifted to the greater demand of the Indian nationhood. The allegiance of the Muslims was in turn was questioned; but they remained undeterred as the demands were socio-economic, the fulfilment of which would help them exist. Thus, when questioned about his allegiance to the nation, a radical communist writer Abul Mansur Ahmed, in his “Amar Dekhar Panchas Bachar Rajniti”⁷⁵ showed a chart (below) of what he thought was reflective of the agrarian structure and relations of production existing then, showing that his priority lay with the improvement of conditions of existence of the Bengali Muslims as an unequal but free nation would not guarantee to do that.

Hindu	Muslim
Zamindar	Peasant
Mahajan	Debtor
Lawyer	Client
Doctor	Patient
Magistrate	Accused
Players	Audience
Jailer	Captive ⁷⁶

Though the binaries created here do not completely represent the ground reality, it still serves to provide a reflection of the thoughts that dominated the symbolic space. It also is a reflection of the counter discourses that were formulated in the countenance of the Hindu mainstream discourse which often deflected the attention from the kind of socio-economic hardships that were suffered by the Muslims and represented them as foreign to the land with a lack of genuine allegiance. Ahmed understood the peasant movement led by KPP to be the only genuine movement where the fight was for the self-respect of then Muslims. Though the influence of KPP declined in future, it did ensure, as N. Bose(2009) puts it, “..After the rise of the KPP, Bengal’s social relations were no longer between

⁷⁵ Abul Mansur Ahmed, “Amar Dekha Panchas Bachar Rajniti,” in Rafiqul Islam (ed.), *Abul Mansur Ahmed Rachanabali*, p. 96.

⁷⁶ Source ibid. Q.f. (Bose N. , 2009, p. 263)

zamindar and peasant, but between Hindu and Muslim. This was not, of course, an instantiation of religious difference, but a strategized construction of difference rooted in the material culture of Bengal”⁷⁷). It is interesting to note the emphasis on the material existence that was omnipresent in the Muslim literature. The consciousness that was instigated by various Muslim writers and the intelligentsia in the wake of the First Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement, gave rise to a protracted struggle and fight against the Hindu upper caste dominance which climaxed in the mid-1930’s and 1940’s. The focus was on the neglected socio-economic condition of the Muslim peasants who formed the majority of the population of Bengal and were on the receiving end of an exploitative relationship. This exploitation played itself on both the economic and the socio-cultural levels. Thus, there emerged along with the terse politics of the peasant, the want and the need to practice and inculcate a distinct Muslim culture. The movement in literature gathered steam in the late 1930’s and carried on with the specific demands that had been highlighted since 1910 and 1920. Instead of understanding Islam as an obstacle to change, the effort was to point aspects in Islam which could lead to economic development by focussing on the ideas of thrift, savings and hard work present in Islamic teachings⁷⁸. The idea was to formulate one’s own language which would have the persio-arabic and Urdu words that formed an indistinguishable part of Bengali prior to the purging undertaken during the Swadeshi movement and after; the language understood to be Mussalmani Bengali. Also, alternative historical explanation of the genesis of the Muslim community was also attempted. Au fond, the primary objective was to mould the disjointed Muslim community into a whole, and to address the wretched condition of especially the Muslim peasants. But the interesting common factor in all the discussions at the ideational level as well as the movement on the ground had been the burgeoning socio-economic divide between the landlords and the peasants, and especially between the Muslim peasants and the Hindu landlords as well as the mahajans. Exempli gratia, the pamphlet *Mussalmander Arthasankat O Tahar Pratikar* (The Economic Crisis of Muslims and its Solution)⁷⁹ discussed the repression suffered by the krishak samities during the movement. Importantly, in the pamphlet he

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 264; italics in the original

⁷⁸ (Bose N. , 2009, p. 268)

⁷⁹ Muhammad Abdul Rashid, *Mussalmaner Arthasanket O tahar Pratikar*(The Economic Crisis of Muslims and its Solution)(Calcutta: Mohammadi Press, 1936). First published in Mymensingh where the author hailed from. C.f. (Bose N. , 2009, p. 269)

criticises the concept of swaraj (self-rule) championed by his contemporaries all throughout India. For the writer, the well-being of the Muslims is what will guarantee an overall social development; rather, than a politically achieved swaraj which will leave the relations of production unchanged. He writes, “If the property and tax qualification is not taken away from the vote, who is going to carry the message of peasants to the people?”⁸⁰ The author is referring to the tax and property requirements that were required before the Communal Award and the Government of India Act. The understanding intrinsic in the essay is that the government formed by the people of region will not change the relations of production, and the dominance that is enjoyed by the upper caste bhadraloks would have remained the way it was while it would not affect a change in the condition of the Muslim peasants.

For the dominant, upper caste Hindus, their shift in political allegiance was a consequence of a concomitant shift in the sharing of political power. The Muslims had formed a ministry, were dictating the terms of the government, and had effectively reduced the Hindus to a minority. This was an unusual situation for the Bengali Hindu bhadralok community who had enjoyed unbridled dominance from the political economy to the culture of Bengal. This challenge to their hegemony along with the violent movements in the Mufassils⁸¹ and the rural areas had wrenched them asunder from their perch of dominance over Bengal.

The Movement for Pakistan: ideas and contestations

In period of 30 odd years, the Bengali Muslim community formation reached another stage with the demand for a separate nation of Pakistan. The support for the nation of Pakistan was not something that was instilled in the midst of the population, but a culmination of the struggles and agitations that were waged to garner a voice in the polity and economy of the region and to end the entrenched dominance. However, the idea of Pakistan was not the one that was eventually put in practice. The contribution of the East Pakistan Renaissance Society (EPRS hereon) to the debates on the feasibility and necessity of Pakistan is prescient to cull out significant points to reflect on the politics and ideas behind the struggle.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Mufassils are small towns in districts present in the rural hinterland of Bengal. They became the nerve centres of peasant politics in the mid-1930's.

Mujibur Rahman and Abu Jafar Shamsuddin⁸² were two of the founding members of EPRS in Calcutta. According to one of them, the state of Pakistan would be a federal nation and the “struggle for freedom not just for one *desh*, but for many *deshes*, many *jatis*, as India is a large federation of *jatis*.”⁸³ This understanding was further substantiated by the strong belief that the idea of Pakistan would crystallise the efforts that have been present since 1910 to mark a distinct cultural and literary space for the Bengali Muslims; the prospect of freedom to seek an entirely different cultural whole.⁸⁴ Similar efforts were championed by Mujibur Rahman and Abul Mansur Ahmed. While Mujibur defended the idea of Pakistan in his book *Pakistan*, Mansur Ahmed, a friend and fellow comrade of Shamsuddin, was more prolific in his writing and incisive in his ideas. The nationalist idea of an ‘Akhand Bharat’ (Unified India) propagated by the Congress, the mainstream nationalist party, was criticised by Ahmed on various grounds.

“The prevailing trend of social change, aimed at the imperialist edifice, was simply not revolutionary and only replicated the structures of imperialism in theory and practice. It simply replaced the colonial state with “Akhand Bharat,” and did nothing to revolutionize social relations or political thought.”⁸⁵ For him, such an idea of a nation state would only be one imperialist state replacing another as various cultures, ethnicities, collectives, nations existed within the Indian subcontinent, and to subsume them under a singular idea of a nation would only countermand the development and wellbeing of these culturally distinct regions. It would result in a kind of ‘cultural fascism’ where the differences between different cultures would be glossed over to provide for the idea of a single nation, and it is here that he locates the danger for the particular Bengali Muslim culture. The culture of the Bengali Muslims would cease to matter in the under culturally dominant upper caste hindus. Thus, as the fight for a separate state is waged against the imperialist powers, it became important to emphasise on the distinct culture of the Bengali Muslims; and to further, make the culture a basis for the formation of the nation state. It is in this context that the idea of a separate nation state in the form of Pakistan was a revolutionary one where the nations could exist within it, a federal state based on the principle of self-determination. The respect for minorities became one of the

⁸² Mujibur Rahman and Shamsuddin were the editors of *Azad*.

⁸³ Shamsuddin, *Atit Diner Smriti*, p.362. c.f (Bose N. , 2009, p. 294)

⁸⁴ (Bose N. , 2009, pp. 294-295)

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 302

important bases for the formation of the nation state. The idea of the Bengali Pakistan was entrenched in “agriculture and cultivation (*krishti*), language (*bhasha*) and civilization (*sabhyata*)”⁸⁶. For Ahmed:

“Pakistan is not just for the ten crores of Muslims and their “community”—it is a claim for the thirty crores of minorities in India and their full religious, agricultural, and geographic and territorial rights. “Pakistan” has provided inspiration and hope for the common people of India to voice their own identities and aspirations, has given them courage to assume self-confidence, and in the world of impending independence and change, [“Pakistan”] has given a language of freedom for all *jatis*.”⁸⁷

He championed the cause of a federalism of different nations, and the revolution that would be Pakistan would ensure that India would be broken into different parts where a kind of equality would exist based on the achievement of complete self-determination.⁸⁸ The movement for Pakistan gave a political thrust to the ideas that had been in the literature produced by the Bengali Muslim litterateurs in the previous three decades or more. It galvanised the varied ideas into a political ideology as the emergence of the idea of Pakistan was the perfect culmination of the movement for cultural autonomy that had been the basis of so many literary writings⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ (Bose N. , 2009, p. 302). For a better understanding of his ideas, see Abul Mansur Ahmed, “Pakistaner Biplabi Bhumika,” *Mohammadi* 16th Year, 1st Edition, Falgun B.S. 1349/1942, cited in Sardar Fazlul Karim (ed.), *Pakistan Andolon O Muslim Sahitya* (The Pakistan Movement and Muslim Literature) (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1968),

⁸⁷ Abul Mansur Ahmed “Pakistaner Biplabi Bhumika,” p. 78; quoted from Bose N., 2009, p. 309.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See Andrew Sartori “Abul Mansur Ahmed and the Cultural Politics of Bengali Pakistanism” in Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (eds.), 2007, *From Colonial to the Post-Colonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

The Spectre of Violence, Failures and the Unrealised Promise

However, the violence that ravaged Calcutta followed by Noakhali changed the complexion of the politics of the region. The demand for ‘cultural autonomy’ ceased to be the focus; rather the horror and apprehension caused by the magnitude of the violence made the Muslims anxious about a different state. The Great Calcutta Killing occurred on what was called the ‘Direct Action Day’⁹⁰ by the all India Muslim League. It started on the 16th of August, 1946 and continued till the 19th of the same month. A spate of violence where thousands were butchered had been organised as people had been collecting arms and weapons. “Though numbers vary widely according to different accounts, between 5,000 and 10,000 people died and nearly 15,000 were injured. This event had reflected both the conflicts between the ML, the Congress, and the British colonial state at the center as well as the rising disaffection with the ML ministry in the Government of Bengal.”⁹¹ The pattern that is prevalent in any ‘communal’ clash was evident here too. Hired goondas (henchmen) were the major participants with evidence also present of Marwari blacksmiths having weapons in their possession.⁹² The ML government then had been unable to stop the violence and there have been debates in history regarding their role in the violence that had gripped the region. But as studies carried out by academics recently have inferred that the number of Muslims killed was more and suggested that the government had little role in the riots.⁹³ It was followed by violence in Noakhali, a district in Eastern part of the Bay of Bengal. This recent episode of violence marked “the shift from relatively unorganized and often class based communal violence to organized rioting with direct involvement of the organized political world”⁹⁴ In Noakhali, the violence was directed at the Hindus; however, the character of the violence was different. It was a result of the “complete communalization of violence using religion as a legitimising force”

⁹⁰ This day was planned as a day for agitation against the non-inclusion of ML in the negotiations that were taking place for the formulation of an interim government at the centre.

⁹¹ (Bose N. , 2009, p. 350)

⁹² Some of the studies on Great Calcutta Killing of 1946 are Claude Markovitz, “Case Study: The Calcutta Riots of 1946,” November 2007, Debjani Sengupta, “A City Feeding on Itself: Testimonies and Histories of Direct Action Day” *SARAI Reader: Turbulence* (2006): 288-295, Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), and Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassell, 1950).

⁹³ See Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengali Muslim Discourses, 1871-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*.

⁹⁴ Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

meant as a retribution for the violence in Calcutta.⁹⁵ It was far removed from the violence during the peasant movement, a movement for a separate culture, and a nation.

In the aftermath of the violence, events on the political front took a decisively different turn. The idea that was ‘Bengali Pakistan’ remained at the ideational level as the then premier of the Muslim league government of Bengal, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, moved the Delhi resolution of 1946 wherein with a clever sleight of hand he went in for a centralised state of Pakistan rather than the federation of nations that had been envisaged by the Bengali Muslim intellectuals and promised in the Lahore resolution in 1940⁹⁶. Even many of the Bengali Muslim League members were agitated at this change and felt betrayed. Though there was an attempt for the cause of a united Bengal, it never really materialised in the acutely polarised environment of violence and insecurity. Pakistan was thought to be the only possible solution, imminent in the wake of the threat of more religious violence. N. Bose (2009), however, goes on to argue that though there was an increasing communal frenzy gripping the region, the reduction of the movement for Pakistan to Muslim separatism based on Muslim identity is a misnomer as the movement had a long history in Bengal, was entrenched in a “multi-layered set of identities” that were propagated beyond the syncretistic understanding provided by Asim Roy⁹⁷ or the regional patriotic meaning attributed by C.A. Bayly⁹⁸; rather, it was “a construction of Bengali regional culture that positively valorised the Muslim portion of that culture, a valorisation which itself was an innovation in the realm of ideas and activism”(p. 355), which was in reaction to the definition of Bengali culture provided by Bengali Hindus which had perpetually excluded the Muslims from it.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ (Bose N. , 2009, p. 351)

⁹⁶ The matter being referred is the change in the phrase “independent sovereign states” of the Lahore Resolution(1940) where the word “states” was changed to “state” and termed as a “mistake”. Abul Hashim, *In Retrospection* 1974, (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Of Bangladesh), p. 125-26. Later on, it had been accepted by Liaquat Khan that it was not a mistake, and the promise of constituent assembly for the Muslims of India was made but was never implemented. (Bose N. , 2009, footnote-46, p. 352)

⁹⁷ See Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)

⁹⁸ See C.A. Bayly, *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁹⁹ See Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* who conducts an analysis of the formation Bengali Hindu selfhood in the 1930’s and 1940’s through the texts of writers such as Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay discussed in a subsection at the beginning of this chapter; Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*.

It is important to refer to the time after 1947 when under a Muslim League government, the minority Hindus came under attack, were discriminated and the people who suffered the most were the lower castes especially the namasudras. The democratic ethos that was championed by the Muslim intellectuals since 1910 remained unrealised. The “revolution” that was envisaged in the formation of Pakistan rather gave rise to a geo-political and humanitarian crisis where thousands of Hindu refugees were left without any means of livelihood, homes and clothes. It was a blatant attack on the Hindus in a majoritarian state with the support of the police and state. This was in contrast to the democratic ethos that writers like Nazrul Islam, Hashim and others had emphasized in their writings.

The contestation at the level of culture through the works of eminent Muslim writers posits a different picture altogether of the Muslim thought and action at the time of the partition and before that. The ‘idea’ of Muslim separatism coupled with their inherent communalism feeds the memories, nostalgia and politics that have often been recapitulated from the partition. The past had been reconstructed from the inventory of the partition motif. The violence that left a deep scar has certain ontological and epistemological shortcomings. In the period leading up to the transfer of power and the dismemberment of the subcontinent, there was fear and anxiety that had engulfed the people in that climate of violence. Thus, the motive behind the uprising and the movement of the peasants under the KPP and the intelligentsia gets displaced from being a socioeconomic one based on the relations of production, augmented by the deteriorating credit relations and the famine that followed during the Great Depression to one that can be reduced to a fantastic theory of communalism innate to the Muslim community which lead them radical separatist behaviour. It is in the purview of such a functioning of the discourse on Muslims that a fanaticism is associated with their cultural markers and everyday practices. And thus, the knowledge produced is often not disinterested. This can be seen in the works on partition and the politics of that time. Even if arguments don’t overtly pursue such an opinionated understanding, the ascribing of the instigation of violence to the Muslims often amounts to indirect vilification of the community. It becomes important then to argue against such a tautological or circular reasoning whereby the violence associated with the partition is reduced to the leitmotif of separatism/communalism intrinsic to the Muslim community. It bears heavily on the kind of common sense ideas that are hitherto formed about the community.

The partition had been one of the watershed events that defined the 'biography' of the Indian nation in the years to come. The ramifications of the partition have been indelible. It has been defining the nature of Indian politics ever since. As Joya Chatterji (1994) tries to argue that economic interests and political ambitions were responsible for the split of the state into two. And, it was not only the doing of the Muslim 'communal' leaders, but had the vehement support Hindu leaders, rather as constructed through the constituent assembly debates and other events, they were the first to call for the second partition of the state of West Bengal. Chatterji locates the genesis in the false binary of nationalism and communalism¹⁰⁰. Rather, to her the counter to communalism is secularism¹⁰¹. The nationalist movement was quite often than not given a secular veneer to garner popular support. The idea of *sarvadharmā sambhava* or the mutual tolerance of religions was manifest in such discourses; but, the equating of the nationalist with the 'Hindu' served as the latent aspect or the bottom line of such movements. Even though the nationalist movement was directed against the British colonial government, the use of religion to mobilise people paid rich dividends, if not for the nationalist movement but certainly for the interests of particular groups (Chatterji, 1994:2).

The heightened nationalist fervour of the period before the partition was against the background of the Second World War, the deepening economic crisis, the religious polarisation of the communities, the widespread violence that had come to define the region and the loss of the dominance that was enjoyed by the upper caste Hindu Bengalis. An important policy level intervention was suggested in the Cabinet Mission's proposal of May 1946. It would have accorded the political power of certain provinces to the Muslims, and in lieu, reducing the Hindus of the region into a minority and condemned to political subordination. It was not accepted; rather, a decision taken in Delhi to partition, an outcome of the negotiations between leaders of the Congress party, the all India Muslim League and the viceroy Lord Mountbatten. While Jinnah was not averse to remaining within the Indian nation, he wanted a

¹⁰⁰ Pandey(1990) has criticized the binary of nationalism and communalism; rather he posits that nationalism and communalism had common precedents to the point that one had become indistinguishable from the other. however, I do not agree with his formulation of the concept 'sectarianism' to describe the politics of the right wing Hindu organisations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bharatiya Janata Party(BJP).

¹⁰¹ However, this understanding has been contested by Ashis Nandy(2003), where he understands anti-communalism to be the counter of communalism and not secularism imposed from above.

decentralised state; the congress leadership under the aegis of Nehru wanted a centralised state to tide over the crises that had gripped the entire nation. Thus, there emerged the plan to partition the regions of Punjab and Bengal. It was border drawn in a very short span of time by Sir Cyril Radcliffe. The news about the bordering of the regions was kept under wraps until very late. This was one of the major reasons for the pervasive violence that came to mark the event.

Muslims in West Bengal after 1947

Though it would be worthwhile to probe deeper into the partition studies, the focus here is to bring to light the condition of the Muslims after the partition staying on in West Bengal. This is a very truncated account and in no way representative of the condition of the community in that period. The attempt is rather to give a modest overview of the little literature that has been covered in the course of the dissertation. The paucity of available literature on the rule of the Communist government spanning over more than three decades can be seen as one of the biggest and vital shortcomings of the present work. Still, it would be meaningful if a discussion on the condition of the community in the aftermath of the partition can be used as informative ‘input’ to better apprehend and reflect on the present condition of the community.

The difficulty of analysing the condition of the Muslims that stayed back in West Bengal is echoed by Chatterji (2007). The lack of documented evidence, government reports and paucity of academic work makes it an analytical nightmare to generalise or concretely comment on the condition of the Muslims that stayed back as a minority in West Bengal. An estimated number of five million or 50 lakh people had stayed back. In waves of migration, Muslim population moved towards East Bengal over the next two decades after the partition due various reasons. As a consequence, what such migration did was to reduce the number of Muslims in the nerve centres of Bengal, the hub of economic, political and cultural activities especially Calcutta. In Calcutta the number of Muslims residing there reduced to less than half of what it was before. Mostly the people who stayed back in West Bengal were “poor with few or without any assets, no connections and hardly any skills to help them begin a new life across the border”¹⁰². Using the census figures of 1931 and comparing them with the

¹⁰² (Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India*, 2007, p. 172)

corresponding figures of 1971¹⁰³, Chatterji (2007) notes the sharp decline in the number of Muslims in Bengal; the numbers display a drop from one out of every 4 of the population being a Muslim to being one out of 10 in the city areas. The situation became even more acute with the inflow of Hindu refugees from the newly formed East Pakistan. The Muslims staying on had to ‘assimilate’¹⁰⁴ themselves to their existential conditions and display in unequivocal terms their loyalty to the nation¹⁰⁵. The process of assimilation has its own ramifications and involves a subsuming of the culture of a minority group. However, instead of fighting against the process of assimilation, the Muslims especially the leaders were forsaking many of the previous allegiance to form new ones and foster a sense of security for themselves in that fervent climate of hatred and violence. But the sense of security and well-being though fostered in letter and spirit could not be found in practice. Under the then B.C.Roy lead congress government, Muslims became an indistinguishable presence. The ones who were chosen belonged previously to the Muslim League, and had shed their old allegiance to join the new party. With the increasing incidents of Hindu refugees settling on properties left by fleeing Muslims became a bone of contention and conflict arose when the owners returned to claim the land. Corollary to this was the increasing exodus of Muslims from villages, a result of the violence that had become the norm of certain parts of the Bengal hinterland. This became the trend and consequently, the Muslims displaced as a result of the violence settled in areas and regions already populated by Muslims. Even though in principle the government had taken a secular stance (or the mutual tolerance of religions) and made it a state policy, there were many incidents of violence against the Muslims that were not efficiently discouraged or countered by the state¹⁰⁶. The assimilation that was often required of the Muslims was often coerced and part of multifarious processes of intimidation and submission. As Chatterji argues, the secularism championed by the government

¹⁰³ Census of India 1971, series 22, West Bengal, part I-A, pp. 278–9.

¹⁰⁴ Assimilation as a concept is concomitant to two corollary concepts of adaptation and acculturation.

¹⁰⁵ Joya Chatterji highlights this acid test of the Muslim loyalty especially through the speech made by Vallabhai Patel, cited in Mushirul Hasan, 1997, *Legacy of a Divided Nation, New Delhi*. P- 148; cited from (Chatterji, 2007, p. 173)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p

glossed over the coercive tactics often used to make Muslim minority recede back on certain of traditions; making it later on a norm where practice had been stopped¹⁰⁷.

A 'ghettoisation' becomes apparent from the process of the settlement which is a specific feature of Muslim settlements even today." In Malda, for instance, Muslim numbers increased by 63 per cent in the decade between 1951 and 1961. In West Dinajpur, the Muslim population grew by 51 per cent in the same period; in Birbhum growth was 39 per cent and in Murshidabad 35 per cent."¹⁰⁸ As the trend of such forced resettlements gathered pace, small Muslim locations disappeared altogether while Muslim concentrations in the Northern rural areas bourgeoned¹⁰⁹. A similar pattern also emerged in southern Calcutta as documented by M.K.A. Siddiqui (1969) about the increasing concentration and ghettoization of Muslims in smaller areas¹¹⁰. Simultaneous to the ghettoization of the Muslim population was the demarcation of the Hindu and Muslim localities. The concentration of Muslim population was also concomitant to the process of erasure of the traditional occupations of the Muslims. After the partition and its share of violence, studies¹¹¹ have shown that Muslims had ceased working on their traditional occupations and moved onto do certain menial jobs or self-financed small enterprise to make ends meet. A perceptive observation made by an anthropologist in 1974 posits that the Ansaris had moved on from their traditional occupation of weaving to *bidi* making, rickshaw pulling, workings as street vendors or as dockworkers¹¹². Even though many went on to get educated and managed to change their occupation, for the majority of the population "the loss of their old local bases, old patrons and old ways of life, which for so many urban Muslims had revolved around their mastery of hereditary crafts, reduced them to a life of poverty."¹¹³ With the means of existence in such over populated rural and urban areas becoming increasingly difficult and the desperation for a meagre living, while some individuals took up jobs as daily labourers or remained unemployed, some took to criminal activities such as "smuggling of contraband goods" and other unlawful activities. These areas were largely illiterate

¹⁰⁷ The incidents of stopping the *go-kurbani* or the cow slaughter which took place on Bakr-eid is an example cited by Chatterji (2007), p. 178-180

¹⁰⁸ (Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India*, 2007, p. 186); Census 1961, p. 223;

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* p. 189

¹¹⁰ (Siddiqui, 1974, p. 26); see also N.K. Bose *Calcutta: 1964*; Chatterji (2007)

¹¹¹ M. Basu, *Anthropological Profile of Muslims in Calcutta*; also M. K.A. Siddiqui, 'Life in the slums of Calcutta', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 December 1969.

¹¹² M. Basu, *Anthropological Profile of Muslims in Calcutta*, p. 14-15 c. f (Chatterji, 2007, p. 193)

¹¹³ *Ibid* p. 16;

and had a high rate of reproduction. As Chatterji argues the intention to engage in criminal activities was to eke out a living.

The emergence of small pockets of concentrated Muslim population has as a consequence brought about a political process where the Muslims have been reduced to being treated like a vote bank. The Muslim vote became an important factor after the annulment of the separate electorate policy¹¹⁴. Though they were viewed as a veritable vote bank, it never proved to be any sort of protection from majoritarian violence. A host of vacuous promises were thrown their way, but there emerged a very smart political acumen among the Muslims given the position they occupied in the political process. The processes of community formation assumed a different proportion altogether in the slums and ghettos that had emerged. The sharing of a common trauma and experience in the form of displacement and systematic marginalisation imparted a sense of heightened community consciousness to the Muslims living in the areas. It also marked a change from the politics emerging from the inequities of the socio-economic and political structure as well as the cultural hegemony of the Bengali Hindu upper castes, to a politics based on memory, feelings of loss, bereavement which formed the basis of the community: the formation of this ‘community’ presents a sense of security and stability. The processes were however under the rubric of the religion and led by religious leaders as well as *imams* who organised the population and emphasised on the superiority of the Muslim way of life and its symbols.¹¹⁵ These Muslim enclaves under the various religious organisations such as the Rezae Mustafa, the Tabligh Jamaat, the Muslim Jamaat, the Jamaat Islami and Al Hadis reoriented their politics to address issues related to displacement and rehabilitation of the Muslims barely able to sustain themselves even though the Hindu refugees were rehabilitated, to reinvigorate the threat of loss of their culture and voice their protest against the “‘institutional’ communalism”.¹¹⁶ Another practice emerged in West Bengal politics whereby the immense nature of the problems being faced by the population in the Muslim enclaves instilled a sense of suspicion in the minds of the people. The suspicion was concerned with the inability of the political parties to address their concerns and interests. It was thought to be deliberate. Instead of addressing such structural crises, the ploy evolved by various political organisations

¹¹⁴ “The Constituent Assembly debated the report on minority rights on 28 August 1947 and voted to abandon separate electorates: CAD V–VII, pp. 277–99”; footnote-105, chapter 5 in Chatterji (2007)

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p- 204

¹¹⁶ This concept has been formulated by J. Chatterji(2007), p. 199.

was to placate the population by nominating a Muslim candidate¹¹⁷. Though this ensured a proportionate representation in assembly of the Muslims in 1964 elections¹¹⁸, the change to their conditions of existence had been minimal, and is the case even today.

Conclusion

The discussions on the literary works that were spawned in the three decades from 1910 give us a clear insight into the kind of decaying condition of the Bengali social structure- a feudal and exploitative one. In such a system, where the majority of the peasants were farmers or employed as agricultural labourers with little or no land of their own under the dominance of upper caste Hindu zamindars, landlords and moneylenders who had a concomitant dominance in the sphere of culture too, the works of the eminent authors and political writers highlight the concern among the intelligentsia regarding the poor condition of the Muslims then, and the passion for raising the standards of living, education, use of religion to instil entrepreneurial ethics and finally, the mobilisation of the population for the formulation of a new culture based on the religion practiced, which was distinct and far removed from the culture that had come to be associated with the mainstream Bengali culture saturated with Hindu symbols and practices. The intervention from the Muslim intelligentsia came in the form of writing critiques of the major contemporary writers such as Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopdhyay among others. There was a systematic emptying out of Persian and Arabic words from the Bengali lexicon with the emphasis on a more Sanskritised Bengali. However, this did not deter the Bengali Muslim writers from producing literature though their works were marginalised. These works were not only critiques of the literature produced by these literary stalwarts, but there was an attendant emphasis on the erstwhile socio-economic condition of the Muslims in the region of east Bengal. This need to counter the hegemony of the bhadralok culture was an offshoot of the larger politics of the region for parity on the level of status; brought about by a socialist, egalitarian society envisaged at the breakdown of the feudal structure that had been in place. Though the ideal of such a society was not realised, still the ideas serve as a departure from the

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 206-207

¹¹⁸ There were 37 Members of Legislative of Council (MLA) who were Muslims proportionate to their 18 percent population according to the 1961 census figures. (Chatterji, 2007, p. 206)

kind of literature produced about the Muslims of Bengal, and provides a new paradigm to understand the politics of the Muslim community in the decades preceding 1947. It also provides an analytical basis for the discussion of the social, economic and cultural backwardness of the community that have been brought to the fore by different reports in the first decade of the 21st century.

The partition left the region divided into two haphazardly drawn parts. In the region of West Bengal, the Muslims were affected in a huge way. The lands they owned had to be left behind during the Partition, and came to be occupied by Hindu refugees leading to conflict. There was also the case of majoritarian violence which forced them into enclaves. The destruction of the handicrafts industry left a huge number of Muslims working as daily wage labourers, rickshaw pullers, bidi making etc. In the garb of secularism, many of the old practices had to be forsaken by the Muslims to be completely 'assimilated' within the Indian state. The Muslims became a miniscule presence in the politics of Bengal.

Violence was also instrumental in the formation of ghettos as hundreds of Muslims moved from their villages to occupy villages where there were a significant number of Muslims already present. Areas such as Malda, Mushedabad, West Dinajpur and Birbhum came to be Muslim enclaves in the rural hinterland. This was the case in Calcutta too where certain areas became populated with Muslims. Though there were other processes at play, violence was one of the aspects which coerced the Muslim population into cramped areas.

In that very same vein, the formation of ghettos or Muslim enclaves in the following decades changed the very character of Muslim politics and mobilisation from what it had been at the start of the 20th century. It was due to structural and institutional refurbishing at the ground level as well as at the very top, sometimes through coercion and sometimes through more subtle methods that the Muslims became just a 'vote bank', as viewed by different political organisation. This was partly due to the inward looking politics of *imams* who lead the revival of the religion and the mobilisation of the population under religious groups. The 'community' became the bastion of security and hope in the countenance of the marginalisation in the Hindu majoritarian state. The basis however of such a community was religion and the increasing emphasis on religion and revival of its practices narrowed the focus of the politics of Muslims in the post-1947 period. As a consequence the character of the Muslim politics and imagination changed dramatically. The politics was reduced

to certain demands often decided by the Muslim elites. However, one cannot categorise the Muslim community as a monolithic entity and there is evidence of dissent from within the community, as discussed in the third chapter. The Muslim community becoming an “interest group” under an elite leadership within this liberal democratic framework was not the politics that was envisaged by the authors of the pre-partition era. It can be argued that the above statement indulges in romanticism. In a way it is correct, but it also highlights a pathos that surfaces when sifting through history one comes across a politics and the understanding of an egalitarian society found in the literary works of the authors at the elixir of Bengali Muslim politics. The critique of the social structure which was immanent to their works is found missing in the academic works that revolve around humanitarian crises that are caused by communal violence. No doubt the plight of the victims is important, but to restrain oneself to resolving the immediate crisis is to eventually miss the big picture as Slavoj Zizek puts it. The systemic violence that is intrinsic in the functioning of the social structure thus remains unquestioned.

The systematic displacement of the Muslim population through coercive and violent methods from various districts of the region and forcing them to inhabit cramped districts, the burgeoning population of the ghettos in Calcutta further pushed them into an abysmal condition which coupled with the social backwardness has been instrumental in the marginalisation that government reports have brought to light in the recent times. The next chapter thus attempts an analysis of reports and studies conducted to highlight the debilitating condition of the Muslims in West Bengal.

Chapter Two

Exploring the Socio-economic Condition of Muslims in West Bengal: An Account Based on the Findings of the SCR

The census of 2001 marked a new watershed in data collection. After a gap of five decades data was collected on the basis of religion. It was cross tabulated with education and other factors, but not the socio-economic condition of the different socio-religious communities. It was used by the Sachar Committee¹ headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar to create their report on the condition of Muslim minority community in the country. Along with the data provided by the National Sample Survey Organisation and other reports, the committee had tried to reconstruct the ‘real’ condition of the Muslims with regard to demographic characteristics, education, and employment, access to bank credit, infrastructure and participation in public programmes in comparison to other socio-religious communities that have been identified in the report. The socio-religious categories have been disaggregated to a large extent, for instance, using the data from the National Sample Survey; separate estimates have been made of Hindu upper castes, Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Communities (OBC’s) making the comparison even more viable and representative. A similar disaggregation was affected for the Muslim community who were divided into the general and Other Backward Communities along with recognition of internal socio-economic and cultural distinction within the Muslim community. It categorises the issues that dominate the public perceptions which are as following:

- i. **Identity-related issues**-“Muslims carry a double burden of being labelled as “anti-nationalists” and being appeased at the same time. The fact that the so-called appeasement has not resulted in any

¹ The Sachar Committee Report is also known as ‘Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report.’ Prime Minister’s High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, November, 2006.

benefits is ignored”². The identity markers that stand out for the community make them susceptible to suspicion and discrimination at the institutional as well as in everyday life. One of the basic matters of contention is the treatment of women within the Muslim community because of the Muslim personal law; however, a similar concern for gender justice is absent when it comes to the lack of access to education, infrastructure and employment opportunities on a wider societal basis. “The public focus on personal law and other socio-cultural characteristics of the community also has another negative externality; the cause of backwardness is assigned to the community itself.”³

ii. **Security-related concerns-** Insecurity is one of the basic concerns of the Muslim community spread over the country and mostly so in states communally polarised. Discrimination at the hand of police and other governmental institutions adds to the insecurity; a consequence of the insecurity is the concentration of Muslim population in few pockets in urban as well as rural areas putting increasingly tremendous pressure on resources and limited space. This often is the result of the discrimination in housing, schools and jobs. Further, it can be argued that the ‘ghettoisation’ of the Muslims into ever fewer spaces makes it impossible for them to utilise economic opportunities⁴ and difficult to effect any policy level interventions for the required overall development of the community.

iii. **Equity-related issues-** The existence of inequity is always to be historicised to delve deeper into the perception of discrimination and inequality amongst the Muslims. According to an academic this is the source of ‘a sense of alienation’⁵. The problems of equity basically lie in the sphere of education, employment, access to infrastructure, politics etc. A few examples of the issues which may be held responsible for a sense of alienation present within the Muslim community are: the ‘communalisation’ of reading material and lack of

² (Basant, Social, Economic and Educational Condition of Indian Muslims, 2007, p. 828)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

access to quality schools; low participation rate in government jobs along with ‘low bargaining’ power of the workers; non-availability of credit; and the unfair delimitation process that is undertaken where Muslim majority areas are often declared as reserved constituencies for SC’s Or ST’s. The equity related issues are what form the fundamental basis of this chapter.

The report created a furore as if a new discovery or something unexpected had taken place. But as the previous chapter has outlined, the focus on the socio-economic condition, the ‘backwardness’ of Muslims and the reasons behind it, had dominated the writings of many Bengali Muslim intellectuals. Thus, the outpouring of disproportionate anxiety and surprise just exposes the proverbial predisposition to not question the very basis of what has caused such a condition of social ‘backwardness’ among Muslims; and instead hand out more sops to contain the crisis in the political arena. This is the gap which the Sachar Committee help fill, to ‘present’ facts that had been part of history for long enough, ignored and part of a ‘culture of silence’ practiced in the academia. The disposition of the academics especially in sociology to be enamoured by the social structure and organization of the Muslim societies trying to find similarities or differences of the caste system as compared to the Hindus is very well part of a knowledge system that sociology has championed since its inception. The seminal works of Ghurye, Srinivas, Dumont, have been basically concentrated on the aspect of caste organisation in the Hindu society. The basis of such overt interest in the caste organisation of the Hindu social organisation has been to delineate the possibility of order in such a hierarchically based social structure. In lieu, the works on Muslims in India have also been centred on the existence of caste like structures among the Muslims, for instance works like Imtiaz Ahmed ed. *Caste and Stratification among Muslims in India* (1978). Even though there has been much work on Muslims of India, it is highly interesting to note the scarcity of work on Bengali Muslims in sociology and anthropology for instance the mention of the Bengali Muslim kinship organisation in the appendix of the book *Kinship in Bengali Culture* by Inden and Nicholas (2005 (1977))⁶, a work on the dynamics of Muslim

⁶ Ralph Nicholas and Ronald Inden. 2005 (1977). *Kinship in Bengali Culture*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

social organisation by Mondal (1994)⁷ and also the early works of M.K.A. Siddiqui (1974)⁸ on the social organisation of Muslims residing in the slums of Calcutta. The importance and relevance of studies on the social organisation of Muslims in the Bengal and India cannot be denied; but they have to be viewed as valid entry points into the internal differentiation and heterogeneity present within the Muslim community. However, the basic focus on their social organisation without a corresponding critical engagement with the marginalisation of the community which had been the emphasis of Bengali Muslim intelligentsia before 1947 shifts the discourse entirely. There exist a good number of works on Bengali Muslims in the discipline of History but their buck often stops at 1947. The present condition of the Muslims can only be understood in a contemporary context with the study of the changes and persistence of the socio-economic condition of the Muslims living in West Bengal post-1947, in the background of the well-entrenched political and socio-economic structure prevalent in the state. This study, however, is not such an attempt. It is rather a very modest endeavour to represent and analyse data provided by certain reports and studies that were available. And in lieu, provide a picture of the socially embedded nature of the structural violence that is underplayed in the academia.

Beyond the violence, migration of population, the politics and the belligerent tenacity to stay on even after the partition; the violence during riots that are a veritable part of history of the country and is often used to define the 'nation'; it is important that the Muslims in Bengal are now subject of a different debate. Their plight as highlighted by the Sachar Committee report along with the suggestions of the Rangathan Mishra Committee report (Report of the National Commission for religious and Linguistic Minorities, 2007) presents a viable lens to view the 'ghettoisation'⁹ that has been effected ever since 1947 and even before that. Slums of Calcutta have been part of the interest of many social scientists; mention must be made of seminal works by N.K. Bose¹⁰ and M.K.A. Siddiqui¹¹. But these works contained just an anthropological interest in the structuring of the social organisation

⁷ Sekh Rahim Mondal. 1994. *Dynamics of Muslim Society*. Inter India Publications.

⁸ M.K.A Siddiqui. 1974. *The Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in their Aspects of Social Organisation*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India

⁹ The process of ghettoization and its impact have been discussed in the third chapter of this study.

¹⁰ N.K. Bose. 1964. *Calcutta, 1964: A social survey*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India

¹¹ M.K.A Siddiqui. 1974. *The Muslims of Calcutta: A Study in their Aspects of Social Organisation*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India

in these slums, and the culture often imbued on the inhabitants in such a space without any focus on education or on their marginalisation¹². Thus it becomes important to bring to light the educational demands, achievements and the proportionate representation at different levels of educational institution of the Muslims residing in the urban or the rural areas. Even though the madrasas have a small percentage of school going children as students (but in West Bengal the number is quite significant), they are still considered to be an important part of the Islamic way of life, both in the positive as well as the negative perspectives of viewing their functioning. Thus, the analysis below tries to bring to light some of the aspects involving the education of Muslims dominant in academic debates and discussions.

Education and Muslims in West Bengal

The attention provided to the low level of educational attainment of the Muslim community in the country, and their ‘deprivation’ in the Sachar Committee Report has been corroborated by few studies that have been discussed below. A prescient observation is that the “literacy rates among the Muslims are lower than most other SRC’s (except for SC’s and ST’s) and are not increasing fast enough to converge with the literacy of other groups”¹³. The unavailability of data had been one of the major stumbling blocks in illuminating the ‘backwardness’ of the Muslim community in India. This is a view that has been voiced by A.R.Kamat in his essay of 1981¹⁴. He voices his concern over the viability of certain studies and the indispensability of some to the study of Muslim educational ‘backwardness’ even though they may be limited in scope. Providing data from different studies conducted in Mumbai and Maharashtra on the educational attainment of Muslims and their participation in employment in public offices, Kamat tries to provide an analytical framework to understand the educational situation of Muslims in the country. The presence of a historical perspective in any work on the Muslim is mandatory as it would help locate the educational attainments within a dynamics of politics, role of intelligentsia,

¹² However, through his interest in the educational and social upliftment of the Muslims in West Bengal, MKA Siddiqui has published a plethora of works through his association with the Institute of Objective Studies which provides valuable data and analysis of socio-economic, political and educational condition of the Muslims in India as well as West Bengal, aspects of structural marginalization that have been speciously missing from the mainstream academic endeavors.

¹³ (Basant & Shariff, 2010, p. 10)

¹⁴ A.R.Kamat. *Literacy and Education of Muslims: A Note*. In *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16(23), (June 6, 1981), pp. 1031-1033

partition and its psychological impact, and also help explain the regional disparities in the educational status of the community spread throughout the country, for instance that in the year 1935 the “united provinces, Punjab, the Central Provinces, and the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, Muslim literacy and school enrolment were comparable to general enrolment, if not higher. It was in areas like East Bengal and parts of Bihar where the Muslim population was mostly backward-agrarian and extremely poor, that they were also considerably lagging behind in education. And like many other middle-and-lower-stratum communities their enrolment proportion decreased rapidly as they reached the higher stages of education.”¹⁵ Thus, the historical perspective presents us with precedents that help explain how the educational processes and institutions have facilitated the Muslims in overhauling their educational ‘backwardness’, or having systematically marginalised them pushed them into even more abysmal circumstances. Further, to expound his analytical framework better, he understands that the specification of the “present class, occupational and other social stratification of the Muslims segments” is necessary to substantiate any work on the educational condition of the Muslims. Also, whether the Muslim population is mostly urban based or rural; and the specific dynamics of the social organisation within the Muslim community with its own form of stratification and property relations to better reflect on the educational achievements and not to fall into the trap of conceptualising them as homogenous community¹⁶.

He lists certain common suggestions that are used to explain the educational ‘backwardness’ of the Muslims in the country, “(a) religious traditionality and backwardness of those professing Islam which is supposed to identify the religious and the secular; (b) partition of India and the acute psychological crisis of identify it created for Indian Muslims, and (c) the deliberate neglect of and discrimination against Muslims by the larger (Hindu) society which professes to be secular but is in fact discriminatory whether in education or educated and literate employment.”¹⁷ He refutes the proposition (a) listed above as right wing propaganda as he understands that in a traditional society like India religion has formed the basis for a long time, and is no explanation for the educational ‘backwardness’ as there exists enough evidence of the Muslim progress in education in the five decades preceding the

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 1032

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

partition of the country.¹⁸ So the need is to locate the genesis of the backwardness in the socio-economic structure within the Muslim community and its population existing in different parts of the country.

Table. 1 Literacy Levels

	ALL	Hindus	SCs/STs	Muslims	All Others
India (13.4) ¹⁹	64.8	65.1	52.2	59.1	70.8
West Bengal (25.2)	68.6	72.4	56.1	57.5	81.6

Source: Sachar Committee Report Estimated from Census of India (2001) Tables C9, C8-SCs and C8-STs

The general estimates of the educational attainment in the SCR present data on the percentage of Muslim children who never attended school which is found to be only lower than that of SC's and ST's in India while the dropout rates are the highest amongst the Muslims and increases significantly after middle school. Though the enrolment rates are still not very high, there has been a marked improvement in the enrolment rates of the Muslim children. But the Muslims still belong to lower half of the educational attainment levels when it comes to primary and higher secondary levels. This becomes detrimental and explains the deficit and the lag suffered by the Muslims at the higher educational levels. The percentage of graduates from the community is among the lowest.

While 60.9% Muslims have attended primary school at the all India level²⁰, the corresponding figures for West Bengal is 50.3%, lower than the SC's/ ST's at 54.4% and 'All others' at 80.4%. In the urban setting, 59.3% of males and 56.0% females from the Muslim community have attended primary school while the corresponding figures for the rural setting is 48.8% and 46.7% respectively for males and females. In all counts, the percentages are even lower than the SC's and ST's; and far off from the category of 'all others'. The extent of dropout rate prevalent among the Muslims can

¹⁸ Op. cit. p. 1033.

¹⁹ Figures in the parentheses denote the share of the Muslim population to the total population.

²⁰ The data have been reproduced from the tables 4.6 to 4.8 found in the Appendix of the Sachar Committee Report. pp. 296-303. We have used only the data provided on the all India level and the corresponding data on West Bengal.

be gauged by following figures: 26% of the total Muslims children of school going age attended middle school; the figures for urban areas was 34.2% males and 35.7% females while the figures for rural areas was 24.5% males and 22.7% females who had attended middle school. These figures drop even further with 11.9% of the population having completed matriculation (standard ten) as compared 13.1% of SC's/ ST's and 38.0% of 'all others'. The percentage of Muslim women completing matriculation falls acutely in the rural areas at 5.9%. At the graduate level, the figures become even more disproportionately inclined against the Muslims. One of the major factors behind the low level of graduation has been the high dropout rates and there have been studies that have tried to engage with these issues and others to throw more light on the educational 'backwardness' of the Muslim community in India and West Bengal in particular. Pertinently, the focus then tends to be centred on the reasons behind the high dropout rates and it has spawned various independent studies and analyses which will help in elucidating the circumstances even better. In his analysis of the school dropout rates, Husain (2005) counter poses the tendency with the need for child labour in such areas. The necessity for child labour also emerged from the socio-economic background of the households covered in the study (discussed later in the chapter). He cross tabulates the slums surveyed according to the socio-economic indicators with the dropout rates and the income from child labour found in the respective slums. The dropout rate in the slums bore an inverse relation with the socio-economic background of the households; the dropout rates increased as one moved lower down the income brackets in which the slums had been categorised. The percentage of income from child labour however varied; it could have been due to the amount paid and the kind of work the children were involved in.

It becomes important here to discuss a counter argument from the perspective of the state. Quoting the data from the survey report of the National University for Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), Sheikh Saidul Haque (2011)²¹ contends that the usage of data that is a decade old does not present the improvements

²¹ Sheikh Saidul Haque. MUSLIMS IN WEST BENGAL: UPLIFTMENT OF SOCIO ECONOMIC, EDUCATIONAL STATUS. Saturday, April, 16.2011
<http://www.gourangachatterjee.blogspot.in/2011/04/muslims-in-west-bengal-upliftment-of.html>. The writer was also the incumbent member of parliament from the Bardhaman-Durgapur districts. Accessed on 13.03.2012 at 2.30 pm

that had been affected by the CPI(M)²² led government during that period, and points to improved educational condition of Muslims where they for 28 per cent of all primary school going students as compared to the national figure of 9.4 per cent. Again, using the data from Sarva Siksha Mission released by District Information System of Education (DISE) for 2009-10, he contends that more than 99 per cent of the children in the state had got admission in the state while 90 per cent had got admission at the upper primary stage. Further, 6, 41, 000 Muslim boys and 8, 40, 000 Muslim girls were in secondary and higher secondary education. The percentage of Muslim students appearing in the Matriculation level was 21.39 or 2, 15, 000 in numbers out of the 10, 04, 931 students appearing in 2011. The percentage of Muslim students had been in the around 20 per cent since 2009. A similar percentage of students also appeared for the Higher Secondary or standard XII examination. But what this small treatise on the ‘upliftment’ of the Muslims does not delve into is the pass percentage, the high dropout rates, or even attempts at a comparison of different socio-religious categories. It does not reflect on the socio-economic condition of the Muslims residing in the state or the concentration of Muslims in increasingly smaller spaces. Rather, it would be interesting to sift through some of the analyses and discussions on the educational status of Muslims to probe even more deeply the causes for their educational ‘backwardness’.

Sonia Bhalotra and Bernarda Zamora (2010) conducted an analysis of the data not utilised by the Sachar Committee and arrive at certain insights into the educational attainments and “to provide evidence of low growth in school enrolment and completion rates among the Muslims of India”²³. They conduct a cross sectional study of the data provided by the National Family Health Survey in 1992-93 and 1998-99. Using statistical tools of analysis, they seek to delineate the probable causes behind the differential in high enrolment and high dropout rates respectively; and compare it among different socio-religious categories. The basic premise of the essay is captured in the question “Can the differences between religions be explained by endowments, location and attitudes?”²⁴ A detailed commentary on their essay is beyond the scope of this work, but it would be interesting to look at some of the probable conclusions etched in their work. According to the authors, in the survey of 1992-93, the children

²² Communist Party of India (Marxist).

²³ (Basant & Shariff, 2010, p. 10)

²⁴ Ibid.

in the age grade of 6-14 forming 60.6 per cent of the sample population²⁵ categorised as upper caste Hindus have the highest enrolment rate at 80.7 per cent for boys and 64.1 per cent for girls. Compared to the above figures is the disadvantaged position of the lower caste Hindus (SC's and ST's) and the Muslims exhibiting enrolment rates of 66.5 per cent for boys and 44.9 per cent for the former socio-religious category, and 66.5 per cent for boys and 52.9 per cent for girls for the latter. Though there had been remarkable improvement in the enrolment rates, still "there remains (in 1998-99) a shortfall (relative to upper caste Hindus) of 13 per cent among low caste children and 10 per cent among Muslim children...a symptom of deep rooted social divisions in Indian society"²⁶. Corollary to the above observation is that the educational differentials across social groups is greater for girls and may be reflective of the parental attitudes existing within the community (for instance, the tendency for son preference among the upper caste Hindus is one such parental attitude that probably could be one of the reasons behind the gender differentials in education). The conclusions also throw light on the high dropout rates and the low rate of completion of education among the 'disadvantaged' communities. One of the major reasons pointed out by the authors is the 'transient shock' that a child may receive in case of a financial crisis in the family; thereby, even after the return to normalcy, the 'transients shocks' have permanent effects on completion of schooling²⁷. Using differences in terms of wealth, demographic characteristics and distribution in terms of rural and urban areas as components to reflect on the enrolment probabilities, they argue that "A substantial part of these differences is compositional, reflecting for example, that similarly endowed Hindu and Muslim Households (for example, similar wealth, educational attainment, and household size and composition) would come out with different educational gaps depending on which state they were in"²⁸. Thus, they argue that certain regions have an impact on the educational attainment of different religious groups. Furthermore, they identify certain behavioural effects on educational attainments where even with the same conditions of existence between two religious categories, the behavioural aspects intrinsic to the religious categories play a huge role in the decision of their educational choices. In a departure from the obvious arguments to explain the disadvantaged condition of the Muslims of India, the authors

²⁵ See *ibid* for the procedure and rationale behind the choice of sample.

²⁶ (Zamora & Bhalotra, 2010, p. 191)

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

reckon that the attempt should be to go beyond the discrimination factor and understand other aspects that are also at play here. The covariates that are used to explain the low enrolment rates of the lower caste Hindu categories cannot be used in the same manner for the Muslims, a primary instance of which is the lack of positive attitude towards education even in more advantageous positions. They argue that discrimination could be one of the factors, but there can be other factors such as the less ambitious nature of Muslim parents, or lack of good, 'suitable' schools. To drive home their argument, they posit that discrimination, if all pervading should also be present in health statistics. But the evidence from the health statistics is mixed for the Muslims as compared to lower caste Hindus who have similar poor endowments. In the end, the authors argue that the "Muslim disadvantage in primary school education, like the Muslim advantage in child survival reflects long standing differences in attitudes across communities such as appreciation of the rewards to schooling or the benefits of breastfeeding"²⁹ in the absence of any conclusive evidence of discrimination against the Muslims. The analysis presented by the authors above is significant in locating the relative position of the Muslims in terms of literacy; however, they recognise certain behavioural characteristics as being responsible for the current literacy status of the Muslims. This however takes the attention away from the wretched condition of the Muslims in certain regions, for instance, in the slums of Kolkata. The discrimination that they find missing is rather conspicuous in the occupations of the majority of the Muslims in Kolkata, and the consequent effect it has on the educational attainment and demand for it. This has been the focus of various researchers such as M.K.A. Siddiqui who have discussed and analysed the relationship between literacy and the socio-economic conditions of the Muslim community. He develops an argument that does not effectively reduce the social and educational backwardness of the Muslims to their some 'behavioural characteristic' intrinsic to the community.

Education in the slums of Kolkata

M.K.A. Siddiqui has been among the few alternative voices which often buried under the cacophony of debates that concentrate on violence and communalism. In a decrepit office of two rooms with a single shelf to rack up the books in Hindi,

²⁹ Ibid. p. 192

Bengali, English and Urdu, the Institute of Objective Studies, Kolkata chapter, is located in one of the Muslim majority areas in Calcutta and impossible to find if one is new to the place. There are a good number of journals that are published, and a number of books and booklets containing essays by Siddiqui himself provide that vantage point that helps in locating the Muslims in the social structure. Starting from his work on the Muslims living in the slums of Calcutta in 1969 to his recently published essays on the educational advance of Muslims and the need for improvement in Hindu-Muslim relations provide a wide array of data and analysis, far removed from some of the more celebrated works on Muslims. The forte of Siddiqui's works lies in his emphasis on the occupational, educational aspects constituting the socio-economic profile of the Muslims in Calcutta. And there have been various surveys and field research conducted under the aegis of Siddiqui, the latest of which was conducted in 2002³⁰. In this work, he provides data to corroborate the finding of the Sachar Committee report. In a survey conducted on the educational attainments and access to education in a slum area, he presents certain undeniable numbers. He understands that education is inextricably linked with the socio-economic condition of the community. And thus, while presenting the figures on the educational pursuits of the Muslims, he also presents the corresponding figures on the kind of occupational engagements of the population. According to Siddiqui, the term 'floating population' is often used to describe the population settled in overcrowded slums. This is to dissociate from any responsibility for the 'amelioration' of their condition, rather it is a common practice to remove a slum without providing the alternative rehabilitation for the displaced population. In a description of the spatial organization of the Muslims, Siddiqui writes:

“It should be borne in mind that over 75 per cent of the Muslims of Calcutta live in bustees³¹ situated quite adjacent to the Central Business District (CBD). This area is often referred to as slums, but they are not the areas of disorganization, of people rejected by the society, as the term is understood in the Western World. Calcutta bustees are the areas of

³⁰ (Siddiqui, *Life in the Slums of Calcutta*, 2002)

³¹ Bustees are defined by Kundu and Basu as “congested settlement with a high population density, having grown in an unplanned manner, and facing problems of infrastructural deficiency”. Amitabh Kundu & Somnath Basu, UNESCO Management and Social Transformation Programme, Working Paper No. 4, December, 1999.

poverty and sub-standard housing and neglect, serving as the abode of the underprivileged. In fact they are areas of ‘forced backwardness’, largely as a result of the traditional outmoded tenancy laws which have undergone modifications...without bringing about a desired change in the life of the bustee dwellers.” (Siddiqui, 2008; p. 14)

Forced Backwardness

The concept of ‘forced backwardness’ warrants a further explanation of the processes through which it is affected. The concept itself is useful to understand how the backwardness cannot be understood as intrinsic to the culture of the Muslims but has to be located in the wider structural processes. Describing the land ceilings imposed by the state, he opines:

“It is a unique form of zamindari abolition which does not vest the ownership of land in the hut owners but to the state Government. In this manner the ruling class have prevented the hut owners from effecting improvement or development of the housing condition. This has given rise to rampant corruption, illegal constructions, emergence of a class of people who with a combination of money power and muscle power are serious threat to the people....New tenancy laws, adversely affecting the hut owners, rendered them less capable of educating their children and participating in development works...”(ibid.)

The prerequisite of development in the form of new buildings is always preceded by a process of displacement of the existing population. The most important functioning organ of the state in this regard is the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) which has been hounding the Muslim populations from various areas to a more concentrated population of Muslims leading to overcrowding and competition for limited space, or sometimes it leads to the creation of new bustees. In this regard, the scope of Siddiqui’s argument refutes the view of bustees being inhabited by a ‘floating population’; rather, he understands them “no less ‘indigenous’, naturalized and stable than others” (ibid. p. 15). This demographic outlining of the Muslims residing in bustees as it provides a valid basis to propound an argument regarding the educational status of the Muslims, as with an unstable population it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain or affect any policy level intervention absolving the

state of the inadequacies it is plagued with; however, if the population residing in the bustees are understood as a stable population, then the state as well as the civil society are bound to address the deteriorating condition of the population residing there. Yes, there have been efforts to impart education to this section, but the survey posits the shortcomings and the overt apathy that the state displays in this regard.

Levels of Literacy

It is often understood that the stringent following of the traditional form of education is the cause behind the educational backwardness of the Muslim community; however Siddiqui uses the studies conducted by Broomfield (1968)³² and Mehta & Patwardhan (1968)³³ which highlight the cost of education being high and unaffordable, and “the curriculum was so designed as to estrange rather than interest the Muslims”³⁴. From the survey mentioned above, the findings obtained posit a dismal picture of the Muslim community residing in the bustee under consideration. In his short note on the findings, the author tries to present a probable correlation between the socio-economic condition of the Muslims and the lack of education in such circumstances. The ‘juvenile’ population in the age group of 6-20 years form 40 per cent (370,000) of the total population; instead of the total population being in school or any sort of educational institutions, only 9 per cent (36,000) were found to be attending school or any educational institution while 15000 or 4 per cent read in government affiliated schools. However, the fortunate few could not continue to study for long as the high dropout rate of 80 per cent suggests. Thus, the findings of the survey could be summarised in a few points: 16.95% could only sign, 14.19% had read up to the primary level and numbers kept on tumbling down with only .17% of the population having read up to graduate level³⁵.

Reasons for low levels of literacy

He cites certain important reasons behind the low levels of literacy amongst the Muslims of the city³⁶. Even though the majority of the Muslims in Bengal speak in

³² J.H. Broomfield. 1968. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society, Twentieth Century Bengal*. Berkeley

³³ Mehta, A. and Patwardhan, A. 1968. ‘The Communal Triangle’.

³⁴ Q.f. Siddiqui (2008), p. 20

³⁵ Ibid. p. 22-23

³⁶ The Sachar Committee Report puts the numbers for Muslim literacy in West Bengal at 57.5% as compared to the state literacy percentage of 68.6%. The urban Muslim literacy for males is 72% and for females, it is 59%.

Bengali, there is a huge population of Urdu speakers residing in the city of Calcutta who are either migrants living for generations or have shifted in search for work. The problem however in terms of education becomes acute when there exists, on an average, one school for 30,000 Urdu speaking people as compared to “one school for 9000 general population in the city”. Extending his arguments even further Siddiqui understands that a vast bulk of children are driven away from education due to poverty, and 60% of the total population of Muslim children work in either family owned enterprises or in other small organisations to earn and contribute to the family income. This becomes a deterrent for their education often resulting in a high dropout rate. Corollary to the above mentioned factors is the feeling of “helplessness and apathy amongst the Muslim masses on account of a perception that dominant social environment looks at their development including self-improvement with disfavour and suspicion”³⁷. In the light of the data presented above, he understands that the socio-economic condition of the population acts as one of the major factors in educational attainment and subsequent employment. In his survey, the average floor area for each Muslim family was not more than 120 sq. ft. However, without a corresponding figure of average floor space for each Hindu household along the lines of the survey, any generalisation becomes problematic and hazardous. Nonetheless, a further description of the small households presents the absence of proper civic amenities, use of the small space not only for cooking but also for work often utilised by self-employed people. Within this space, a child is expected and forced to study. Tracing the ‘backwardness’ in education to the occupational structure of the population inhabiting the bustee, Siddiqui uses the findings of his survey to present a perspicacious analysis; and further explicates the ‘downward mobility’ found among the Muslims.

The link between Occupational Structure and Affordability of Education

He lists the different occupational activities and a basic concentration in handicrafts is found along with a small class of businessmen and professionals. “Apart from a small class of businessmen, mainly emerging from traditional handicrafts, some general merchants, with a traditional background in trade, a sizeable

³⁷ Ibid. p. 25.

number of street hawkers, a vast bulk of Muslims are artisans, engaged in a number of handicrafts...different bustee areas specialize in handicraft related to paper, leather, rubber, embroidery and needle work, tailoring and dress making, book-binding, kite making and lenses making etc.” (Siddiqui, 2008, p. 27) However, the monopolistic control that Muslims had over certain handicrafts and occupations introduced by them has gradually been usurped by people who “being resourceful and having better access to power structure and credit facilities” now have the reins of said industries and occupations such as soap industry, bakery, and tannery among others (ibid. p. 27-28). The artisanal work and occupations still held onto by the Muslims provide them a basic sustenance on the margins as without a healthy access to credit facilities (this has been highlighted in the Sachar Committee Report also), marginalisation in the political sphere compounded by the exploitation suffered in the market and by the middlemen, the Muslim community appears unorganised as a collective and somewhat incapable of acting for their betterment³⁸. Having categorised the different occupations that the Muslims were engaged in, Siddiqui found that 36.76% of the sample population was engaged in paper craft, 22.41% in petty business, 4.90% in leather craft, 5.35% in embroidery, 2.99% in hawking and approximately 3.5% in masonry and carpentry. The proportionate representation from the bustee in government service was 1.90% while 1.54% worked as private tutors. No significant percentage was found for occupations of the imam, teachers or the compounder while a fraction did work as motor drivers or rickshaw pullers. With such a position of marginality in the occupational structure where the majority have to eke out a living by engaging in petty business or handicrafts, it becomes difficult to educate their children. It is here that Siddiqui proposes certain measures to improve the condition of Muslims such as the removal of middlemen, and more systematic policy interventions. He also wants equal emphasis on primary education and methods to curb the dropout rates along with emphasis on developing healthy relationship between Hindus and Muslims developing a more efficient model of pluralism and

³⁸ Ibid.p. 28. This understanding of incapacity of collective action is held by Siddiqui and it can be contested at various levels. Nonetheless it is an insight into the difficulties faced by the Muslim population. At present, any protest, spontaneous or otherwise, has been mostly on religious lines in the city of Calcutta (the Taslima Nasrin and the Salman Rushdie issues) or related to evictions; in contrast to which is the peasant movement against corporate land grab in Nandigram where a majority of the peasants affected were Muslims. Though the socio-political circumstances were different, still it reflects on fallacy of any monolithic understanding of the politics practiced by the Muslim community.

tolerance. However, for him the efficiency of pluralism lies in the betterment of the Muslim community, collateral and necessary for curbing the any further polarisation of the communities³⁹.

Demand for Education

In his work on the demand for education among the Muslims residing in different slums of Calcutta⁴⁰, Zakir Husain questions the validity of the propositions that the educational backwardness of the Muslims is due to their allegiance to traditional Islamic values, a refusal to modern education and opting for madrasas instead, and the gender bias against girls attaining any form of education. Through his findings obtained from the survey of five slums in and around the Park Circus area, in central Calcutta, he seeks to show that the importance of education in the lives of the sample taken from the Muslim population. He gives a vivid account of the research setting, highlighting the lack of proper facilities like scarcity of water, no electricity etc. in certain slums. The sample mostly belonged to the lower income group and were third or fourth generation migrants from the states such as Uttar Pradesh, or had recently moved from the areas in Sunderbans. He found certain socio-cultural differentials while comparing different slums; and while people in certain slums spoke Urdu or Hindi, some were bilingual, i.e. well conversant in both Hindi or Urdu and Bengali. Most of the population is employed in the informal sector, either working in shoe making factories (what he calls “stable jobs”) or working as daily wage labourers. It is on the basis of the difference in the socio-economic condition of the population that he categorises the slums and their ‘socio-cultural’ distinctiveness.

Against this background, he seeks to delineate the importance of education in the lives of the sample chosen for the study. Here, it is important to qualify the respondents who were basically the parents of the household surveyed. It is their perception towards the education of the children, and also the circumstances which facilitated or made it impossible for the children to study. The issue here is that in such low income households (even though he categorises the slums relatively on the basis of income, the average income is of the sample in question was still low

³⁹ Ibid. p. 28-31

⁴⁰ Zakir Husain. 2005. *Analysing Demand for Primary Education: Muslim Slum Dwellers of Kolkata*. In *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(2), (Jan. 8-14, 2005).

according to the figures cited in the essay⁴¹), he tries to illuminate the propensity of the parent to send their children to school irrespective of gender. He specifies and categorises various factors that act behind the decisions taken by the parents. Contradicting reports which state that the primary motive behind education is to improve the employment prospects of the children, Husain argues that his survey reveals that employment guarantee is not the predominant motive behind education of the children; rather, there seems to be an increasing importance given to the role played by education in everyday life and the 'emphasis' on higher education is also found sustaining the view that higher education can only guarantee a good job. This consciousness of the need for higher education among the population is crucial and at the same time interesting, as it posits a different view of the demand for education among the Muslims. It also presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the proportion of the Muslim students present in higher education, and what ails or facilitates the representation.

Further, education also enhances the marriage prospects of the children, especially the girl child. It is here that Husain observes that his findings present that no gender bias exists in the enrolment ratios at the primary level, i.e. I-V, but there exists a substantial dropout rate. This dropout rate is enforced by the low income of the families, and the increasing costs of education make it difficult for them to send their children to school. A somewhat interesting observation is the proclivity to send the girl child to school more than the male child. Here, the author posits that the poor employment opportunities provided in the labour market along with the perceived sense of discrimination against the Muslims, discourages the parents from educating the male child any further⁴². However, if the generalisation is extended it can prove to be fallacious; instead if the argument is restricted to just the findings of the survey, the observation dispels the perception of the male child given preference over the female child. The preference of having the female child educated is to increase her chances of getting married to better prospective partner given the poor condition of the household⁴³. Yet even if the abovementioned observation augurs well for the

⁴¹ The average monthly income of the 'high income' households was Rs.3851.75 with an average family size of 5.45 which is not exactly belonging to high income bracket as the category would suggest.

⁴² (Husain, 2005, p. 139)

⁴³ Ibid. p. 140

educational achievements of the female child, it still smacks of entrenchment of the patriarchy in the motivation behind the education of the female child, and to ignore it would lead to precipitous inferences. These observations mark a watershed in the literature on the educational attainment of the Muslims in Calcutta. It refutes the idea that has percolated and ossified into a 'common sense' belief that the educational backwardness of the Muslim population in Calcutta is due to the 'values and practices' intrinsic to the culture of the Muslims.

. The probable conclusions from the study suggest that the demand for education varies from slum to slum. Through use of econometric analyses, Husain understands that the demand for education is irrespective of the income of the family; and thus, the variations in demand for education could be attributed to variations in the socio-cultural contexts of the slums. Through his rigorous analyses and discussions, Husain presents a viable argument against the common sense perceptions that reduces the educational 'backwardness' to the inherent practise of the community itself; but with the help of this survey, one can gauge the demand for education is universal. However, the lack of means to cover the expenses of education and a basic level of sustenance forced many to send their children to work resulting in high dropout rates. Though the author does not bring to light the entrenched political and economic subordination of the Muslim population or locate the process in history, and generate a plausible explanation for the low income standards of the sample and their concentration in such small spaces in the essay, it still gives a thorough, specific yet representative analysis of the educational demands and attainment in the slums of Calcutta. It is actually one of the few studies of its kind. Further, there still exist a large number of the Muslim population which lives in the rural areas of West Bengal, and which avails the education provided by the madrasas that exist there along with the government run schools. The focus in the forthcoming section would be on the madrasas situating them in the global as well as national political and socio-historical context to better put into perspective how the political and the economic aspects of life have a bearing on the education attained and the demand for it.

The Spectre of the Madrasah

The madrasa system of education has come to occupy a huge number of debates on their role in the education of the Muslim children and the more political

connotations that have come to be associated with their role in terrorist activities. A distinction however should be made between a maktab and a madrasa. A madrasa is more of a conventional school offering different subjects just like other schools except for the emphasis on Islamic theology and practices of with hostel facilities; whereas a maktab could be a place within a mosque or any school offering education, secular or religious, i.e. imparting of teachings of the Quran and how to read it⁴⁴. The maktab are found in many Muslim concentrated areas of the city where the children are often sent to receive the religious education after receiving general education in a mainstream school.

The increasing emphasis on the madrasa education is inevitable as this system of education performs an important role in the rural hinterland of West Bengal. Throughout history ever since the establishment of the first government madrasah in 1791 under the auspices of the colonial government and Warren Hastings, the attempt has been to empower the Muslims who had “lost those sources of emoluments which can enable them to bestow much expense on the education of their children and are deprived of that power which they possessed, of endowing or patronising public seminaries of learning”⁴⁵. The madrasas were also endowed with the role of evolving a process of learning to lessen the fissures between the Muslim and the non-Muslim world. But the outcomes have been dismal as the difficulty faced by the Muslim students in gaining access to better educational infrastructure, better economic conditions is exacerbated by the composition of the syllabi that is present in various madrasas and the selective recognition of the degrees⁴⁶ offered through the madrasas by other well recognised institutions. An analysis of the Madrasa Education Committee Report of 2002 presents some facts about the condition of madrasas in West Bengal. A grand total of 3, 07,470 students were found to be reading at different levels of the madrasa system of education with 5731 teachers available to instruct the students in different subjects. This was a first of its kind report on the madrasah system of education in West Bengal after the autonomy bestowed upon the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education. Earlier, the report on the madrasah

⁴⁴ The third institution in this categorization is jami used for university. See Nazeer Ahmed. Modern Issues In Islamic Education. From www.irfi.org at 14:30 pm on 11.06.12

⁴⁵ Warren Hastings, Minutes of 1785, in Report of the Moslem Education Advisory Committee. Government of West Bengal, 1934. Q.f. (Aleaz, 2005, p. 560)

⁴⁶ The madrasas such as the Calcutta madrasa, Furfura Sharif and others offer degrees of Alim (equivalent of standar X), Fazil (XII), Kamil (graduate) and Mumtazul Muhaddethin (post-graduate).

education used to be just a section in the report of the Educational Commission of West Bengal. For instance, the report of the education commission in 1991 made some comments which throw light on the difficulty faced by the madrasa students. “Under the traditional system of Senior Madrasah Education, only those candidates who passed the Fazil examination with English as an additional subject, were considered eligible for the Pre-University (Arts) course of the University of Calcutta. Subsequently, the West Bengal Council for Higher Secondary Education allowed such students to be admitted to class XI in Higher Secondary schools.”⁴⁷ The report puts the total number of madrasas at 420, while students reading in the madrasas at 1,10,950 while the total number of students taking the exams was 13,406⁴⁸, a sharp decline in the completion of education is also prevalent here. The total number of teachers was 4298. A phenomenal increase in the number of students is seen while the total number of madrasas increased to 507. While around 4 per cent students avail madrasa education in the country, around 15 per cent of the Muslim students avail it in the state of West Bengal. The number of students stands at 5, 35, 000 according to the latest estimates⁴⁹. Similarly, the total government expenditure it has been argued stands at 610 crores.⁵⁰ However, there was a statement made by the previous chief minister against the increasing number of madrasas on the Indo-Bangladesh border alleging that they stop indulging in anti-national activities. This presents us with a valid reason to counter pose the perception of the madrasas and the much talked of minority development programmes championed by the state; how the increasing expenditure does not arm a madrasa student with the viable means to earn a decent employment in the sector dominated by mainstream education.

An essay by D. Bandopdhyay⁵¹ is illustrative of the perception of the madrasas from the academic vantage point which percolates to inform the ‘common sense’ perceptions and vice versa. For the writer, the madrasas represent a regressive and decadent practice which has to be replaced by secular and modern institutions. “*The Indian nation cannot march forward with a major segment of its largest minority*

⁴⁷ Report of The Education Commission of West Bengal, 1991. p. 62.

⁴⁸ The source of the data is the West Bengal Madrasah Education Board.

⁴⁹ This was the expenditure incurred by the outgoing government of CPI(M) as reported in Haque (2011). The sources for the figures have not been identified by Haque, but they still give us a probable figure of Muslims availing madrasa education.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ D. Bandyopadhyay, Madrasa Education and the Condition of Indian Muslims, EPW, April 20, 2002.pp. 1481-84.

group remaining backward, illiterate, unenlightened and weak. It is the duty of every section of Indian society to help in the mainstreaming of this section. But the issue of modernisation of madrasa education brings up the vested interests of fundamentalist elements trying to protect their turf and the political system which strives to utilise the backward for electoral gain.”(Bandyopdhyay, 2002: 1481; italics in original). Interestingly the ‘imagination’ of a ‘nation’⁵² informs the need to mainstream the ‘backward, illiterate, unenlightened and weak’, as in this section is holding back the nation on its march towards greater progress. Thus, the expected reaction directed towards madrasa education which is held responsible for such a deplorable state of affairs. This essay was written after the Buddhadeb Bhattacharya government had expressed increasing concern with the rise in number of madrasas. He criticises the pedagogic activities, a stereotypical formulation of madrasas that exists in the Western media images, a throwback to the orientalist imaginings of the West of the East. The students it seems suffer from ‘institutionalization’ in the madrasas; the example he cites is of the madrasas in Pakistan covered in a BBC documentary. “Young minds are brainwashed in madrasas for carrying forward the messianic spirit of Islam. Their dogmatic approach and intolerance of other points of view produce fanatics – the ideal material for Jihad.”(p. 1483) Perhaps, it would have been not ‘baneful’ for Bandyopadhyay to have utilised his ‘secular’ acumen to have established the different socio-political and economic structures and circumstances existing in the two different nation states with their own requirements to function and retain their status quo. His generalisations are nothing but amateurish, lacking any intellectual rigour whatsoever. He quotes the education report of 1962 to basically buttress his floundering arguments about the madrasas and the situation of the Muslims. The reports views the madrasa as the conduit through which the indoctrination of Muslims into a stringent worldview is completed; thereby restricting their criticality not going beyond the doctrines of Islam. This is posited to be one of the major reasons behind the social backwardness of the Muslims; thus, divesting the state and the social structure from any responsibility for the hitherto condition of Muslims. The panacea for the backwardness is education through the ‘secular, liberal’ mode of education in contrast to the ‘conservative, stringent’ education received in the madrasas; thus, it would provide the platform to mainstream the marginalised minority and ensure that

⁵² The nation as an imagined community as conceptualised by Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*.

work participation of the Muslim increase. The argument for the secular liberal model of schooling to mainstream the marginalised could be viewed as a sort of ‘privileging’ that is accorded to practices and worldview of the dominant with respect to the dominated, and is reflected in the way the secular, liberal model of education often infused with the symbols of the majoritarian community is privileged against the education model present in the madrasas; it can be rather argued that it is a false binary as the educational practices are a result of a larger understanding of society and religion where there apparently exist insurmountable differences, but as the chapter before has discussed, that religiosity can co-exist with secularism and often a form of secularism exists within the realm of religion. This privileging is reproduced when it comes to work opportunities, and various other socio-economic aspects that could be used to improve their lot. Throughout his essay he cites examples from Pakistan quoting its President while on the other hand trying to establish that religion has no impact on the employability of a person (here the example is given from the British context). Nonetheless, for Bandopadhyay the alarming increase in the number of madrasas in West Bengal, under the Left front government is what can be an example of minority appeasement to “garner their votes” as there are no existing checks to stop their growth in the state. The crucial point is whether the mushrooming of the madrasas is the result of funding from middle eastern countries to promote terrorist activities in the country which can be a veritable threat to the security of the country giving ever more reason for state surveillance of the madrasa, or is it the unaffordability of education, the poor socially backward condition of the Muslims which makes them see the madrasas as a haven to educate their children. It can be argued that the education imparted in madrasa setup is not at par with the mainstream, ‘secular’ education making it even more difficult for the Muslims students passing out of the madrasas to secure jobs and a good future. The socio-economic, cultural and political factors have been detrimental to the condition of Muslims. Far from being conjectural, history provides a valid, plausible explanation for their social backwardness, and to suggest or argue that the madrasas are responsible for Muslim ‘backwardness’ is just to satiate certain vested interests.

Yoginder Sikand (2003)⁵³ in an article exploring the relationship between the madrasas and the state delineates the processes through which modernization and

⁵³ Yoginder Sikand, 2003. *Madrassa Reform and the Indian State*. In EPW 38(43). pp. 4503-4506

reform of the madrasa education is being achieved in the country and the role that has been played by the state. In effect, he brings out the underlying meanings and presuppositions, the politics and dynamics of the entire situation that bears evidence to the inefficiency displayed in the effecting of the changes that had been envisaged. The politics behind the reform and modernization process has to be situated in the global political paranoia involving terrorism and insecurity that has torn asunder the world order (or restructured it?). The point that is made by Sikand in the essay is that compared to the 'rationale' behind the modernization of the madrasas earlier, which were considered to be a symbol of the Muslim backwardness in the country, the primary reason behind the increasing attention paid to the madrasas now is the view that they are the breeding ground for 'Islamic terrorism', the places where young children are brainwashed to become 'jihadis'⁵⁴ and pose a threat to the first world countries. On another level, the financial independence of these institutions also posed a threat as their activities could not be regulated or kept under the scanner. Again, "(R)ather than representing a radical shift in the aims and methods of the madrasas as such, this changed rationale is a reflection of the growing strength of Hindu chauvinism in India that is based on an abiding hatred of the Muslim 'other'". Sikand goes on to argue that the independence of the madrasa from the state also poses a "...challenge to the project of a monolithic Indian nationalism based on brahminical Hinduism." A combination of these many factors has contributed to a "paradigm shift" in the perspective in which the state understood the workings of the madrasas. There was a nonchalant attitude towards this institution of education to hundreds of Muslims, and the decrepit situation of the madrasas have been portrayed as a major reason behind the 'backwardness' and the inability of the Muslim population to be a part of the 'mainstream'. The shift to a more conscious attempt to direct and control its proceedings under the facade of 'reform' and monetary assistance in the overtly charged and paranoid global political situation, and the coercive demands made by the right wing Hindu elements, one can see that the politics behind the reformulation of policy involving the madrasas has always been to address macro level problems of the

⁵⁴ 'jihadi' is a term referred to the fighter who crusades against non-Islamic practices. The reference to 'kaafir' or the non-believer of Allah is also misunderstood as the Quranic verse describing the 'jihad' or the fight against unbelief and 'kaafir' has a historical context and were used during the fight Prophet Mohammed led to recapture Mecca; however, these terms are often used in an ahistorical manner. The culprits can be identified both within the Muslim community as well as outside it that use it for vested political and economic interests.

state rather than resolving the problems at the micro level of the Muslim population. Still the population constitutes a veritable vote bank which cannot be left in the lurch; and within the secular scheme of things “‘modernisation’ rests on two premises: that such ‘modernisation’ is needed in order to promote ‘modern’ and ‘rational’ thinking’ and that it is only by ‘modernising’ themselves that madrasa students can enter the educational ‘mainstream’ of the country”⁵⁵ and contribute and maintain the national integrity of the country.⁵⁶ Thus the underlying presupposition in such a statement is that the madrasas indulge in traditional education thereby ‘cutting off’ the Muslims children from the ‘mainstream’ and denying them the opportunity to compete at the highest level. This proves to be a hindrance for the imagination of a nation, albeit a homogenous one in the hegemonic frame constructed by a distinctly “‘upper caste Hindu ethos”⁵⁷. In the scheme of things, the cauterization of a particular Muslim identity is a collateral requirement of the ‘mainstreaming’ or the assumption of a pan-Indian identity⁵⁸.

The efforts of the state to provide assistance to the madrasas have been majorly concentrated in, “(i) setting up by state governments of boards for madrasa education, (ii) providing financial assistance to selected madrasas to teach secular subjects, and (iii) arranging for recognition of certain madrasas by certain state- funded universities.”⁵⁹ In the aid package which may be miniscule from the state government, the salaries of the teachers is covered; but in return the madrasas have to rein in changes in the syllabi and the functioning of the institution according to the directives of the state; thereby, coming under the aegis and surveillance of the state. However, the choice to collaborate with the state boards is entirely up to the respective madrasas. However, there emerges a dilemma when one understands that the inclusion of madrasas would subject them to being under the direct control of state; but the non-inclusion or non-recognition of the madrasas may be a sign of the madrasas being excluded in the sphere of education. The point then emerges is that there should be relative autonomy provided to the madrasas to decide on their

⁵⁵ ('Prof Joshi Has Designs on Madrasas', The Milli Gazette, February 1- 15, 2000) c.f. Sikand (2003; p. 4504)

⁵⁶ Nizam Elahi 2001, p. 12-13. Cf. *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

syllabus and recognition of the certificates provided by the madrasas by the mainstream education system.

In an insightful observation, he reflects on the difficulties faced by madrasas in getting the funds sanctioned for the ‘modernisation’ of the madrasas. The entrenched prejudices are present at every level of the bureaucracy. The example of a Hindu Brahmin officer withholding the disbursement of funds sanctioned for the madrasas by the central government in Bihar just deflates the secular subterfuge of the whole process⁶⁰. In certain states, however, there have been commendable improvements. In states like Madhya Pradesh, 3500 out of 6000 madrasas received financial aids⁶¹; and in Rajasthan where the performance of the students in the exams conducted was remarkable in the year 1999, and Sikand notes the effective role played by the state in the improvement⁶². However, there still remains the spectre of Brahminical chauvinism which has been on the rise, though tacit still conspicuous in everyday life. For Sikand, the efforts to modernise and reform the madrasas would amount to zilch if the problem of Hindu Muslim relations and the increasing influence of the Hindu right wing is not “seriously tackled”⁶³.

In a comprehensive and erudite analysis of the Madrasa education system in West Bengal, Bonita Aleaz in the essay, *Madrasa Education, State and Community Consciousness: Muslims in West Bengal*⁶⁴ sieves through historical documents and government reports to bring to the fore the systematic shortcomings of the educational process in play in West Bengal. She uses the perspective put forward by Nandini Sunder in her study of RSS run schools⁶⁵. To summarise the theoretical disposition of the work, it looks into the linkages between the “desired education and the emerging consciousness” within the Muslim community of West Bengal. It is founded on the view that any human personality is “shaped and moulded” at two levels of the state

⁶⁰ The concerned officer responsible for the disbursement of funds delayed doing so citing “preoccupation with other matters”; the non-utilisation of the funds made the central government stop the funding which was due for next year only to the dismay of the madrasas. See Haque, Irshadul (2001): 'Bureaucrats Foil Madrasah Education Modernisation Programme', The Milli Gazette, October 1-15, p 23; Sikand (2003) p. 4505

⁶¹ See 'Educational Awareness among Muslims: A Positive Step' (<http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15042001/Art1.htm>).

⁶² 'Madrasa Modernisation in Rajasthan', Islamic Voice, June 2001).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Bonita Aleaz, *Madrasa Education, State and Community Consciousness: Muslims in West Bengal*. EPW, 40(6), Feb. 5-11, 2005. pp. 555-564.

⁶⁵ Nalini Sunder (2004): 'Teaching to Hate RSS' Pedagogical Programme" in EPW, April 17, Volume 39.

and the community. The state requires a citizenry which would be sympathetic to its functioning and the social order, while a community requires its members to espouse its traditions for its continuity. It is here that the fundamental function of the institution of education can be located.⁶⁶ The reproduction of knowledge as a result inheres in lieu a structure that gets reproduced through these ‘moulded’ individuals. The author finds the role of the community as a conduit in the interface of the state and society, and understood it as “inward looking” and involved in just self-sustenance⁶⁷.

The article was written during the time the declaration that was made by the then chief minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, under the aegis of the then CPI (M) lead Left Front government, to the madrasas that had cropped up in the border areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal to stop any anti-national activities that might be brewing there. It was also to supposedly curb the flow of illegal migrants from Bangladesh in the light of the ever increasing numbers of Muslims in the state⁶⁸. It is interesting to note that a similar wave of concern with the activities of madrasa was seen in the globe, the culmination of which was the Samuel Huntington thesis of “clash of the civilizations”⁶⁹. The scope of the Huntington thesis has to be seen in the background of the re-definition of the global politics in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on United States of America which gave rise to turmoil in the Middle East, the declaration of war against terror by USA and the clandestine business interests of the global investors in that “war on terror”. The pre-supposition of Huntington’s work lies in contradistinction fostered supposedly by the Muslims on the level of their being, existence and worldview. Being a distinct civilization, the Muslims have been thus understood to be on the path of an imminent conflict.

To explicate the workings of hierarchy in what she understands as “complex societies spawned by late capitalism”, the author uses Pierre Bourdieu’s perspective of the school performing the task of the religious institution (in a feudal society) of ‘transmuting power’ and the ‘sanctifications of social divisions’. Bourdieu explicitly

⁶⁶ (Aleaz, 2005, p. 555)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ The Muslims constituting almost 25% of the population in 2001 from the 15% in 1971 has been the reason for the rising concerns not only of the then West Bengal government, it has also been part of a similar anti-Muslim propaganda of BJP.

⁶⁹ (Huntington, 2002)

points to the formation of distinction among the population: "a social hierarchy dissimulates itself, to those it dignifies no less than to those it excludes, as a scale of human excellence, how a historically arbitrary social order rooted in the materiality of economic and political power transmutes itself into what displays very outward appearance of an aristocracy of intelligence. Under this angle the granting of an elite degree is not so much a 'rite of passage as... a rite of institution': it does not demarcate a before and an after so much as it differentiates and elevates those destined to occupy eminent social positions from over whom they will lord" [Bourdieu 1996:ix-x]⁷⁰. Bourdieu makes a cardinal point as he seeks to trace the genesis of the difference in status of various groups. He finds it in the 'materiality of existence' and the inheritance of an unjust and unequal social order gets reproduced even under the ruse of an equal society in terms of access to resources. This is what structures the social and symbolic space which accords a distinct position to different communities.

Aleaz further uses the distinction made by Bourdieu between the 'reproduction of knowledge' and 'production of knowledge'. During the time of imperialism, the 'production of knowledge' always took place in the metropolis or the Western colonising countries, while the "reproduction of knowledge" took place among the masses of the colonized countries⁷¹. This epistemological difference in production of knowledge highlights the processes through which the structures of domination were reproduced. Aleaz extends the use of the analytical framework to include education within its ambit, and posit the use of education "as a means of preservation and reproduction of the authority, not only cognitive authority but also political authority"⁷². In locating the production of knowledge within this framework, she also sheds light on the kind of considerations that are at play when deciding the viable sources of knowledge, what can be acceptable to the society and the institutions that are considered adept at imparting such knowledge. The discussion at length of the article puts the present work in perspective to analyse the current educational indicators of the Muslim population in West Bengal.

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu (1996): *The State Nobility Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, tr. by Laretta C Clough, Cambridge: Polity Press. Q.f. (Aleaz, 2005, p. 558)

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² (Aleaz, 2005, p. 558)

There have been major works on the Muslim social structure and presence of internal “caste” like divisions within them. However, the extent to which they are practiced or enforced is not similar to the caste system in the Hinduism. In the context of Bengal, there is a similar division between the “ashraf” and the “ajlaf”. While the “ashraf” trace their lineage from the Prophet Mohammad himself, the ajlafs are considered to be the commoner and constitute by the ‘converts’, and beyond the sanctity and ‘sacredness’ enjoyed by the “ashrafs”⁷³. However, beyond this “class-caste” like divisions in the Muslim, lies the movement of for assertion of identity and freedom in history. In Bengal especially the agitation for a separate “cultural autonomy”, the peasant movements and the eventual demand for a Purba Pakistan (later Bangladesh in 1971) showcases the precedence in history of the hitherto movements for self-assertion in the wake of politics of the Hindutva zealots. The madrasas provided the modicum of resistance to the imposition of supposedly secular education, “where the secular setup was in actuality the realm of dominance by the majority Hindus” which “remained outside the reach of the poverty stricken Muslim”⁷⁴; and the madrasa became the only institution to educate their children. Hence, the representation of madrasas as symbolic of the backwardness of the Muslim community confers and reproduces the same epistemic frame that is used to produce knowledge about the Muslim community and its individuals, a categorisation which orders them and classifies them, and bestows them a position in society which further helps in reproducing the stereotypes (“terrorist”; “Pakistani”; “backward”) that have been inferred onto them. Thus, the representation of the community ceases to be disinterested if the madrasas are seen in their functioning, procedural misgivings about the syllabi, the emphasis on the religious scriptures, and understood as havens for terrorists without for once scrutinising the role played by the madrasa in the formation and sustenance of the community (“umma” as understood in Islam); and the avenue for education for a major proportion of poor Muslim children, a result of the structural inequalities that exists within the society.

⁷³ There exist four schools of Muslim religious thought namely the Hanafi, the mohammadis, the radiccals and the group constituted by the “low castes”; while first three belong to the “higher” caste like category of “ashrafs”, the latter are just a group alienated by the elitism of the upper caste Muslims and seek to satiate economic requirements thereby trying to achieve upward social mobility. See (Aleaz, 2005) for a more detailed discussions of the various schools.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 560

Through different reports on the educational condition of the Muslim community, Aleaz draws attention to some crucial and critical assessments. These assessments probably render a plausible explanation into the construction of the hitherto worldview of the community, although not in its entirety. There exists a fundamental problem at the very basis of the madrasa education system⁷⁵ and is aggravated by the continuous lack of empathy and required attention from the state to provide basic infrastructural facilities to develop these institutions further. The government apathy to the concerns of the Muslims is compounded by the absence of Muslim voice in the state affairs. Exempli gratia, the infrequent disbursement of funds to the madrasas; denial of permission to change junior madrasas into senior ones and there are various instances that have been cited⁷⁶ reflect poorly on the government's functioning. There had been a literacy drive by the West Bengal government in the 1990's but it did not reach or had any impact on the condition of the backward Muslims of the state. The major reason according to Aleaz (2005) had been the use of an "instrumentalist approach" or "required means for desired goals" approach whereby the population is treated as homogenous, and policy level interventions which are designed to achieve targets leave the basic and fundamental socio-economic and cultural structure unchanged. However, the government's approach is the same in the implementation of all its programmes; thus an overhauling of the approach itself is required. In a situation where there is a structural basis to the exploitation and 'backwardness' of a particular group, using target oriented approaches to bring in the changes would only be at the superficial level while retaining the status quo. Rather, the requirements at the ground level have to be taken into consideration instead of a top down approach. The situation which emerges from the discussions above is a precarious one where the argument for refurbishment or the modernisation of the madrasas ensues a greater control of the state over its functioning and the resultant surveillance over its students; however, in the absence of state funds the condition of the madrasas would remain poor with no exposure given to its students. Instead, there should be an attempt to provide the means, in terms of financial aid, to improve the infrastructural facilities of the madrasas without impinging on their freedom to formulate the syllabus and hand degrees to their students. Rather, there should be an attempt made by the state to view

⁷⁵ Aleaz(2005) points out the faults in the syllabi itself which does not make the individuals gaining degrees from the madrasas to be successful in the competitive world.

⁷⁶ See (Aleaz, 2005, p. 561)

the importance of the madrasas in the constitution of the Muslim ‘umma’ (community) and instead recognise the educational pursuits of madrasa students by providing an equal recognition of the certificates and degrees provided by the madrasas at par with the mainstream education. This has to be implemented in various institutions within the country.

The situation in the educational sphere having been outlined above, it becomes important to delve into occupational structure and locate the Muslims within, since there is a direct relationship between educational attainment and the occupational location of the Muslims, and vice versa.

Economy and Muslims in West Bengal

The report of the Sachar Committee observes that “(A)vailability of employment provides an individual and her family with purchasing power, enabling her to acquire subsistence as well as consumption goods to satisfy the basic needs, comfort and leisure. In addition, enhanced earnings through employment allow investment. This can take the form of purchase of durable consumption goods and investments in areas like education, health and capital assets. Such investments are critical for increases in future incomes and for sustaining growth at the level of the individual as well as the economy. While economic benefits derived from such an increase in the entitlements are substantial, employment also has significant non-economic benefits. The belief that one is engaged in some worthwhile activity provides a sense of esteem and well-being to the worker.”(Chapter 5, p. 87)

One of the basic concerns for Muslims in West Bengal has been the lack of access to employment opportunities, and the focus thereby on the discussions and works on education is part of the same anxiety that informs their worldview: how education improves the chances of a better living? Or do they understand education as futile given the perception of operational discrimination at work in the different organized working sectors? “Without economic returns to education provided in the form of a higher probability of getting employment or earning higher income, investment in human capital formation will not occur. Similarly, while ownership of physical capital creates opportunities for employment, growth in employment generates resources for new capital formation.”(ibid.) The economy of the state had been under the control of a single political front for over three decades. The Left Front initiated a land reform

program which had benefitted a large section of the population belonging to the poorer sections in the 1970's. However, this work does not delve into the land reform programs and its subsequent impact on the socio-economic structure of the state; nonetheless it cannot be denied that it has had an important role to play in the politics as well as the organisation of the social structure that is in place at present. The focus in this section would rather be on the location of the Muslim population in the occupational matrix present in the state.

Worker Population Ratios/Rates (WPR) is a concept to understand the extent of participation of a section of the population in economic activity⁷⁷. The SCR uses the 61st round of NSSO (2004-2005) data to provide the observation and inferences on the economic and employment condition of the Muslims. The WPR of the Muslims is significantly lower in rural areas while in urban areas the Muslims lag behind other SRC's by a smaller margin. Certain interesting observations of the SCR are that the poorer sections of the population may not be appropriately (or "gainfully") employed; but they have a tendency of not reporting themselves as unemployed. Thus, rather than status unemployment rates, the daily unemployment rates had been preferred in the report. Against this background, the committee reviews the condition of Muslims employed in various sectors of the economy. The overall concentration of Muslims in the category of self-employment has been the most significant observation made by the SCR (2006), "about 61 per cent of the total Muslim workforce as compared to about 55 per cent of the Hindu workers. In urban areas this share is 57 per cent for Muslims and 43 per cent for Hindus. Among women the share is as high as 73 per cent for Muslims and 60 per cent for Hindus (p. 91)." Given the high concentration in self-employment, the need for credit facilities becomes very important. However, the credit facilities are hardly available for the Muslims. In West Bengal, 52 per cent of the total number Muslim workers in urban areas are self-employed whereas the overall percentage of the self-employed in the state is 45.5.(See Table at the end of the chapter). Now the SCR posits a financial exclusion at play with regard to Muslims. Though the credit facilities and priority sector advances⁷⁸ to the Muslim

⁷⁷ For a detailed understanding of the concept, see SCR, p. 89.

⁷⁸ The priority sector broadly comprises agriculture, small scale industries, other activities/borrowers, such as small business, retail trade, small transport operators, professional and self-employed persons, small housing, education loans, micro credit and so on. Certain types of funds deployment are also identified as priority sector advances: these are investments made by banks (prior to 31st March 2005) in special bonds issued by specified institutions like State Financial

community is commendable at all India level, in West Bengal, as observed by the SCR, the percentage for the Muslims in the total amount outstanding⁷⁹ per account is 9.2 and the resultant differential between the Muslims and other SRC's is very high (the 'all others' category has over 90 per cent stake in the total amount outstanding). This provides us an idea that even though the Muslims are able get loans sanctioned, the amounts are often low in comparison to other groups.⁸⁰ This is a trend that was also present in 44 Muslim concentration districts of the country where the number of accounts held was good, but the share in the amount outstanding was dismal except for a few districts. With the low levels of amounts sanctioned, the growth in the self-employed or own account work becomes difficult, and only helps in maintaining a basic sustenance level in the background of high incidence of poverty among the Muslims. This makes the employment situation even more precarious as there is a low level of participation in regular salaried jobs, low representation in government services and Public Sector Undertakings as well as in police and other security related activities.

The regular salaried jobs provide a stability and security desired in an increasingly globalised economy. It is here that the most effective marginalisation has taken place. Though "the conditions of Muslims with respect to regular jobs do not seem very different from those of OBC and SC/ST Hindus when one compares the aggregate estimates and those for male and female workers separately" (SCR,), the share in regular, salaried jobs for the Muslims is even lower than SC's and ST's. Compared to 27 per cent of Muslims in regular work, the corresponding percentages for SC/ST's, OBC's and Hindu UC workers is 40, 36 and 49 per cent respectively. In the government jobs and PSU's the share of Muslims at the all India level is less than 24

Corporations/State Industrial Development Corporations, Rural Electrification Corporation, NABARD, SIDBI, National Small Industries Corporation Ltd, National Housing Bank and HUDCO. Other investments by banks in securitized assets representing direct lending to agriculture, SSI sector, investment in mortgage-backed securities and venture capital and deposits in Rural Infrastructure Development Fund are eligible for inclusion in priority sector lending as well. These investments are included in the category of "others" (SCR, 2006. Footnote# 2, p. 124).

⁷⁹ The parameter of total amount outstanding is used along with the number of accounts held by a particular socio-religious group and the amount outstanding per account to capture the flow of credit to the Muslims. While the number of accounts held in the Scheduled Commercial Banks gives the accessibility to credit for the Muslims, the amount outstanding per account gives us a share of the total amount outstanding of all the groups providing an indicator of the average size of loans provided to the Muslims. (SCR, 2006, p. 124)

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion of the differentials in PSA's provided to different groups, see SCR(2006)

per cent as compared to 39, 37 and 30 per cent for SC/ST, Hindu-UC and Hindu OBC's respectively⁸¹. One does not observe a dissimilar pattern in the large private enterprises where Muslims have the least share of the jobs. The differentials between the SRC's are greater in urban areas than in rural areas when it comes to share in regular work. Out of 14, 18, 747 employees in the Indian railways, the Muslims constitute a meagre 3.0 (22.4%) per cent in higher positions while in lower positions the percentage is 5.0 (37.3) as compared to the 92.8 and 88.6 per cent respectively in higher and lower positions for the Hindus (which includes UC, SC's/ST's and Hindu OBC's). In National Security Agencies, 3.6 (26.9%) per cent in higher positions and 4.6 (34.3) per cent in lower positions are the respective shares of Muslims with the corresponding figures for all-Hindus similar to that in the railways⁸².

The employment situation West Bengal is no different where the percentage share of Muslims in PSU's is miserable as well as in other state departments. In the Tables 1-3 at the end of the chapter, the percentage of Muslims in government departments is a meagre 2.1 per cent with highest representation in the Health at 7 per cent; however data for the representation in education and transport could have made the whole picture a bit different. The SCR accepts the lack of provision of data from the West Bengal government and accepts that definite observation based on data has not been possible. Still West Bengal too displays a similar trend to that prevalent throughout the country except for a few states. The representation in the Judiciary is a bit disappointing too with a majority of the Muslims concentrated in lower level jobs.

The SCR further observes that Muslims are basically found in either street vending or own account activities with a major percentage of Muslim women engaged in them working from home (this aspect has been discussed later in the chapter through the essay by Unni (2010)). Also, they are mostly found in manufacturing and trade. In manufacturing, Muslims are mostly concentrated in textiles industry, tobacco production, electrical machinery and auto repair and maintenance. The growth in the above mentioned industries have fluctuated a lot but still have a lot of potential as posited by the SCR needing a greater level of policy intervention and future investment (SCR, 2006, p. 101). In West Bengal 20.6 per cent of Muslims were found to be working in Manufacturing out of the total percentage of 16.8 of the total

⁸¹ The source of the data is the SCR, 2006, Appendix Table 5.2 and 5.3 for the year 2004-5.

⁸² Source: SCR, 2006, Appendix Table 9.1-9.2. p. 369.

workforce. In the state, other than the above mentioned manufacturing industries, there is also a concentration in the manufacturing of leather and leather products. However, in Trade the share is 10.5 per cent as compared to overall percentage of 11.7 and is only better than the SC's/ST's which is counter to observation made by the SCR on the higher share in trade for the Muslims on the all India level. The SCR also observed that the Muslims are less engaged in agricultural activities; but for West Bengal where the majority of the Muslim population is found in the rural areas, there is a significant participation in agricultural activities as the data furnished by the 12 Muslim concentrated districts suggest. While a majority of them are agricultural labourers, a good percentage of the Muslims are involved in cultivation. In Uttar Dinajpur, 36.9 per cent of the total Muslim population are cultivators whereas 43.1 per cent are agricultural labourers; for Murshidabad it is 21.6 and 33.1 per cents respectively; South and North 24 Parganas have above 30.6 of the total Muslim population involved as agricultural labourers while 14.3 and 23.6 per cents are cultivators. These data however are not conclusive enough to posit that the very same population may not be engaged in non-agricultural activities. With the fragmentation of landholdings, the acreage of lands owned per individual decreases; as a result of which all the member of a family often do not engage them with agriculture and rather seek jobs in the urban areas. As for the need for agricultural labour, it is seasonal with the kind of crops grown in the state; thereby, for the majority of the population of agricultural labourers, an alternative profession or work becomes mandatory for basic sustenance given the high incidence of poverty in the state of the Muslims (44 per cent in urban areas and 36 per cent in rural areas in 2004-5 as compared to state figures of 24 per cent and 28 per cent for urban and rural areas respectively).

Furthermore, the SCR also observes that there emerges an earning differential between the different socio-religious communities. The report observes that the employment of Muslims workers in both public and private sectors is in the lower rung of the job hierarchy; thereby, there emerges no economic security for them and the "Muslim regular workers get lower daily earnings (salary) in both public and private jobs as compared to other SRCs. While Muslim men and women have lower daily earnings than Hindus in the public sector, the difference in earnings between Hindus and Muslims is much larger in the private sector" (p. 105). The earning

differentials in the private sector, as understood by the report, could be the result of the work undertaken by the Muslims which are “low productivity enterprises” whereas for the public sector the earning differentials emerge from the higher concentration in clerical or Grade IV work.

So, how does one explain the participation of Muslims in occupational structure? What factors come into play in structuring of the occupational matrix of the country, and especially explain the location of Muslims within it? Is there a discrimination at play, or the reasons behind the occupational positioning of Muslims be explained by their educational backwardness? Or does discrimination reinforced with educational backwardness makes it even more difficult for the majority of the Muslims to emerge out of the quagmire that has set its roots within the structure of production as well as social relations? It is imperative then to focus on some of the empirical perspectives as well as insightful analyses carried out on the subject to throw further light on the socio-economic situation of Muslims in India and especially the state of West Bengal.

Omar Khalidi (2006) tries to trace the low share of Muslims in central government services in history. The poor representation of Muslims in the government services has been a regular feature since the Independence of the country and the partition in 1947. There had been a huge exodus of Muslim population and the Muslim professionals and workers at different levels of the government services also had to suffer the brunt of the politically imposed exchange of population. This exodus thus marks the start of the poor representation of the Muslims in different central government services, and sets the precedent for their hitherto low representation⁸³. It was not until the figures and statistics presented by a Minister of State for Home Affairs that the character and magnitude of Muslim representation in the Central Secretariat came to light in 1970-71⁸⁴. Consequent to furnishing of the data the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi appointed a High Power Panel to inquire and study the condition of Muslims in the country. This panel was led by Gopal Singh. The report of the committee brought to the attention of the government some stark findings which were considered to be too volatile and the findings of the Gopal Singh

⁸³ (Khalidi, 2006, pp. 39-41)

⁸⁴ This was part of the statement made by Ram Niwas Mirdha, the concerned minister, and the data can be viewed in greater details in Kamlesh Kumar Wadhwa, 1975. *Minority Safeguards in India: Constitutional Provisions and their Implementation*. New Delhi: Thompson Press. See also Khalidi (2006, p. 42)

Committee report was shelved⁸⁵. The committee had reported that there had been no change in the condition the Muslims' share in government services and their situation was even worse than the SC's/ST's of the country. It was only in 1990 that the findings were tabled before the Lok Sabha (the Lower House of the Indian Parliament) after the defeat of the incumbent government. Through various independent studies, Khalidi tries to show the low percentage of Muslims at senior levels in various government offices, public sector banks, in Indian Administrative Services and Indian Foreign Services in the 1980's and the 1990's. From 1982 to 2004-2005, the percentage of successful Muslim candidates rose from 1.2 per cent to 1.7 per cent⁸⁶. Khalidi tries to delineate the fundamental reasons for such pitiful circumstances for the Muslims. He mentions three explanations most commonly given: "migration to Pakistan, discrimination and educational lag". He refutes the first theory as it no longer qualified as a plausible explanation after six decades since 1947. The second explanation is something that is subtle, invisible and not tangible. There exist no discrimination in the rules and regulations that are championed in a democracy; but the existence of informal instances of discrimination cannot be denied. Thus, according to Khalidi, though one can accept that there are instance of discrimination, but since the character of the discrimination is structurally entrenched and very subtle, there can be no admissible evidence that can prove discrimination in court⁸⁷. Thus, the theory of discrimination is not watertight. He accepts that educational lag is a big 'impediment' to the progress of the community; but he also understands that the lower level jobs are often handed out to individuals by politicians on caste or regional lines. But the political marginalisation of Muslims has been one of the major reasons that something similar to the processes mentioned above could be done by the Muslim politicians to help the poor of the community⁸⁸.

The continuing low levels of Muslim representation in various jobs can be witnessed throughout history. But the existence of discrimination has been factor that cannot be easily denied. The perception of the Muslims by the wider society often informs the decisions taken while hiring someone from the community. Thus, belonging to such a disadvantaged community can become burden for the people who

⁸⁵ See (Khalidi, 2006, p. 43)

⁸⁶ C.f. (Khalidi, 2006, p. 46)

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 48

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 49

belong to the community. Vani K. Borooah (2010)⁸⁹ has developed a matrix of data to provide information on the discrimination faced by disadvantaged groups in the country. The author analyses the *risks* involved in belonging to a disadvantaged group when it came to being employed in various sectors⁹⁰. The concepts he develops are the “*employment risk ratio, (which) measures the odds of a person being in regular employment⁹¹ to being in non-regular employment, given that he belongs to a particular group..*” and “ *group risk ratio, (which) measures the odds of a person being in regular employment, given that he belongs to one group against belonging to another group*” (p. 199). The risk ratios are calculated for four groups, Forward Castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Banias), Hindu Other Backward Classes, Dalits (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) and Muslims. the concepts of risk are used to reflect on the low levels of representation of the disadvantaged groups in regular employment, and whether it can be understood to be caused by ‘attribute disadvantage’ (low levels of education) or ‘access disadvantage’ (lack of access to such employment). Without going into a discussion of the methodology used by the author⁹², a surmised account posits that the measurement of “discrimination at a point in time, (is) conditional on a set of attributes. But the poor attributes of a group may be the result of past discrimination against such persons: the fact that members of a group were denied good jobs in the past was a barrier to their acquiring good educational qualifications and this resulted in their inability to get good jobs” (p. 202). Using the data obtained from the 55th round of National Sample Survey (1999-2000), Borooah categorises the economic status of the sample population into: own account workers (self-employed), unpaid family workers, regular salaried or wage workers, casual wage worker, employers, and seeking and/ or available for work (ibid.). A majority of the Muslims were found to be concentrated in the self-employed category

⁸⁹ Vani K. Borooah. 2010. *On the Risks of Belonging to Disadvantaged Groups* in (Basant & Shariff, 2010)

⁹⁰ Borooah uses the Bayes theorem to conceptualize the risk factor of belonging to a disadvantaged group. The theorem was developed by Reverend Thomas Bayes in the 18th century. For a more detailed discussion of the Bayes theorem and the analytical framework that Borooah uses to calculate the *risks*, see Borooah (2010), Appendix 8A. 2 and 8A.3, pp. 218-220

⁹¹ By regular employment Borooah understands being in regular salaried or wage work while under the category non-regular employment he includes self-employment, daily wage labor and other such works in the informal sector.

⁹² See ibid for a better explication of the methodology used to determine the discrimination suffered by the minority groups and the qualifications henceforth provided by the author. pp. 200-201.

followed by casual wage labourer, and their desirability ranked only better than the Dalits (ibid. pp. 202-204).

The observations and conclusions made by the author are interesting, provoking and empirical. He finds that the representation of the FC Hindus in the labour market was the best as compared to other groups. He understands that the better education and better access to jobs is the reason behind their better representation in the regular employed work which demands a certain level of education. However, in the course of the study, when the inter group differences (for instance, in education and landholdings) were neutralised using statistical procedures, the 'favourable labour market performance of the FC Hindus was considerably reduced. He criticises the focus on improving the access to employment that the government policies concentrate on rather than policies aimed at improving job related attributes; and it could go a long way in helping the Dalits and Muslims overcome the educational 'backwardness' present in their respective communities along with financial and legal backing if necessary. He understands that Muslims suffer from a greater disadvantage in terms of access to regular employment than even the Hindu OBC's, and thus, have a 'more compelling' case for reservation than Hindu OBC's (ibid. p. 213).

The previous essay does not delve into the gender aspect of the labour market, how and where the Muslim women are concentrated within it. This aspect has been addressed by Jeemol Unni (2010)⁹³. In her essay, she underlines the importance of religion and caste in the ownership of assets such as land, and occupational status of the population. She reiterates the point made by Boroaah (2010) that with lower levels of cultural capital or education, the disadvantaged groups are basically concentrated in the substratum of the labour market. She makes a distinction between the formal and the informal sectors where the former is governed by labour laws and regulations, the latter has no such rules or regulations, and basically comprised of private enterprise often non-registered leading to a situation where the labourers are vulnerable to high levels of exploitation. Discussing the nature of the employment and unemployment of Muslims in the country, according to NSS data (2004-5), the author finds the concentration of Muslim workforce in self-employment." The self-employment sector is, however, not a homogenous one and more than a quarter of Muslims were d=found

⁹³ Jeemol Unni. 2010. *Informality and Gender in the Labour Market for Muslims*. in (Basant & Shariff, 2010), pp. 221-234.

to be concentrated in own account work or small single owner operated units with only family labour. A significant majority of regular salaried jobs among Muslims in urban areas were in private enterprises and not in public sector employment, as was the case with Hindus and other religious groups.”⁹⁴ The representation of Muslims in Indian Administrative Services is 3 per cent while in the police and the railways it is about 4 per cent respectively, and in nationalised banks, it is 2.2 per cent. The scenario in West Bengal too is similar where the representation in government posts is around 2 per cent.

While locating the participation of the Muslim women in the labour market, the author notices a disturbing trend. The Work Participation Rate of the Muslim women was lowest among all socio-religious categories at 25.2 per cent⁹⁵. In the rural areas the WPR of the Muslim women is low when for the rest it is surprisingly high. The author understand the reason lies in the unlikely participation of a Muslim household in agriculture along with traditional barriers barring women from engaging in some sort of employment, and the responsibility of household duties and caring of children makes it impossible for them to work beyond their homes. With all the constraints mentioned above, it becomes difficult for the women to be engaged in fixed, regular employment. Thereby, there emerges a trend of getting engaged sub-contractual work where a middleman or a contractor brings the work home to them. More than half of the self-employed women, 56 per cent, in the urban areas undertook such sub-contractual work leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. The wages paid to them are often lesser than what are paid to casual wage labourers. Their work is concentrated in industries like *agarbatti* (*incense sticks*) making, *bidi* rolling, garment and kite making. Since such work belongs to the informal sector, there is no law devising the appropriate wages for their work, and often the contractors were relatives giving them no leeway whatsoever to bargain for better remuneration. The concentration in the self-employment sector is also reflective of the need for them to work under duress of extremely hard conditions of living. It reflects the lack of decline in the incidence of poverty among the Muslims as compared to other socio-religious communities. Thus, as the author argues, these women are actually engaged in subsistence activities and

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 233

⁹⁵ Gol (2006; Table 5.1) c.f Unni (2010)

explains the high percentage of working poor among the own account Muslim women workers.

The high incidence of poverty has been one of the most disturbing facets of the overall development of the Muslim community. At 27 per cent, the poverty ratio⁹⁶ for Muslims was greater than the overall percentage at 22 per cent. Even though there had been a decline in the overall poverty by 9 percentage points, the corresponding decline for Muslims was even lower than the SC's/ ST's⁹⁷. There has thus emerged a section of 'working poor'⁹⁸. A major proportion of the Muslim working population belong to this category whereby their work in private sectors earns them a meagre salary further reinforcing the grip of poverty. The author argues that there is a clear relationship between poverty and informal employment. The way out of such poverty is through education, an investment in human capital. However, the returns from education have been considerably low for the Muslims in the country with a poor representation in regular salaried jobs and no positive discrimination in place comparable to what is given to other disadvantaged groups such as SC's/ ST's and OBC's. Thus, there has emerged a sense of disillusionment among the Muslims regarding the returns from education as the perception of discrimination in the labour is considerably high within the community. This has been found in a study conducted by Jeffrey and Jeffrey (1997)⁹⁹ of the Muslims in Bijnor, Rajasthan where the authors have argued that Muslims regarded their relative economic weakness as the outcome of the systematic discrimination in places of hiring leading them to devalue the importance of education.

The Impact of Land Reforms and Minorities in West Bengal

Husain (2008)¹⁰⁰ in his study of the socio-economic status of the different religious communities in West Bengal presents some valuable data to examine the situation of the Muslim community in the state. The data has been procured from the

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⁹⁷ The figures are for the year 2004-5 and have been reproduced from the Sachar Committee Report, Gol, 2006, Table 5.2. also see (Unni, 2010, p. 225)

⁹⁸ "the working poor are those who are workers and live in households that are below the official poverty line." (Unni, 2010, p. 226)

⁹⁹ Jeffrey, R. and P. Jeffrey. 1997. *Population, Gender and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁰ (Husain, Employment and Economic Status of Socio-Religious Communities in West Bengal: Some evidence from NSS 61st round, November, 2008)

National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) 61st Round (July 2004- June 2005) data in which a stratified, multi-stage sampling design was used to undertake the data. 792 villages and 36,388 individuals from West Bengal were enumerated in the survey (p. 3). In the light of the data provided by the NSS 61st round, Husain goes onto analyse the impact of land reforms on the different socio-religious communities in the state with special emphasis on the Muslim minority community. He admits that the “greater linkages with the urban sector and growth of the non-agricultural sector have reduced the importance of land holding as a main indicator of economic status, it still remains as an important measure of rural wellbeing”(ibid.: 21). In his analysis of the ownership of land by households, it is seen that almost every household across socio-religious communities own land, with over 90 per cent of the Muslim households owning land similar to that of Hindu Upper castes but greater than the Hindu Backward castes and Others (more than 80 per cent). However, the ownership of land is not a true indicator of the benefits accrued from land redistribution, rather it has to be located in the percentage households *cultivating* the lands owned. In the analysis it is seen that the Muslims cultivating the land is alarmingly lower (45%) than the ownership of the land and may indicate a “net leasing out of land by Muslims”. The percentage households who own land but do not cultivate is lesser than other socio-religious communities and hence the Muslims appear to be at a disadvantage. This apparent disadvantage can be counterposed with the argument that the major beneficiaries of the land redistribution were Muslims. The author agrees that it may be true but it does not guarantee the improvement in the socio-economic status of an individual. The reasons outlined by the author are:

- “• The proportion of vested land to total land is quite low (about 3-5% of cultivated land). In the absence of a significant amount of land for redistribution, land redistribution is unlikely to have a major effect.
- The quality of vested land is generally poor. This will further reduce the beneficial effect of land redistribution.
- Finally, land redistribution and security of tenure will have an important effect only if it is supported by a package of complementary inputs, of which

credit is an important component, and if cultivators have access to marketing channels.¹⁰¹

The NSS data on land holdings is collected on a threefold basis: (a) Land owned on the date of the survey; (b) Land possessed on the date of the survey which includes Land owned+ Land leased in+ Land Encroached- land leased out; (c) Land cultivated throughout the year which includes land used for growing fruits and orchards (ibid. 23). According to this categorisation, a Table on the data procured can be formulated. Table.2 below shows that the land possessed and owned by Muslims on the date of survey is smaller than that of other SRC's. Only in terms of land cultivated that the Muslims do better than the H-BC's. As mentioned earlier that the amount of vested land was too small, 3-5% of the cultivable land, the redistribution had little effect on the inequalities of landholdings according to SRC's (ibid.). However, there might be other forces at work here and have to be examined. One of foremost reasons would be the availability of implements for the Muslims to make use of the opportunities created by the land reforms. It is here that the availability of credit becomes an important factor. As the SCR posits, the Muslims held only 16 per cent of the priority sector accounts in agriculture and were provided less than 4 per cent of the amount outstanding. This indicates that the amount outstanding per account for Muslims is low and further reflective of the poor credit flow in the priority sector for Muslims in West Bengal. The redistribution of small and marginal lands to the Muslims without adequate credit being provided, forces many to opt for rural moneylenders who extort a higher interest in the form of a greater share of the harvest.

Another important indicator is the *earnings per unit of land hectare* which is Rs. 141 for Muslims, similar to that of the Hindu-BC but lower than that of the Hindu-UC who earn Rs. 183. The difference in earnings can attributed to the difference in quality of land, technology used and the marketing channels (Husain, 2008: 24).

¹⁰¹ (Husain, 2008: 22)

Table. 2-Average Landholdings (in Hectares)

Socio-religious communities	Land Owned	Land Possessed	Land Cultivated
Muslims	0.25	0.26	0.53
H-UC	0.4	0.4	0.6
H-BC	0.28	0.3	0.48
Others	0.35	0.36	0.62
Total (Rural)	0.3	0.3	0.53

Source: NSSO 61st round; c.f. Husain (2008: 23)

Husain (2008) also tries to delineate the impact of reforms on the condition of Muslims through other indicators available in the data. Using the categorisation of NSSO of the households¹⁰² based on the principal source of income, the author posits that the Muslims have second lowest percentage of households engaged in agriculture related activities (62%; owner/ tenant cultivators-22.10 and agricultural labour-39.90) after the Hindu-UC's while the highest is among the Others (78%). Given the fact that they constitute the second largest community in the rural areas of West Bengal (31%), with lesser links to agriculture related activities, it could mean a lack of security of employment and consumption in the rural economy (ibid.) which is not always possible with non-agriculture related activities (more than 40% of the rural Muslim population). In terms of the categorisation of the employed status, the disaggregated percentages show that among the Muslims almost 50% of the workers are self-employed (Regular wage and salary worker-2.43%, Own account worker-38.66%, Unpaid family labour-10.22%) while 47.16 per cent of them are casual workers. The percentage of regular employed workers is found to be lowest among Muslims in the rural areas compared to the highest of 17.14 per cent of other minorities followed by H-UC-7.7% and H-BC-6.59%. In the course of the essay the author goes on to identify the concentration of Muslims in non-agricultural activities. The data on earning differential is quite insightful. It shows that the Muslims earn lesser than the Hindu-UC's in all form of occupations identified by the NSSO. In the Table below one finds that the payment made to women is worse overall but is pathetic for the Muslim women. The earnings differential is substantial in the non-agricultural

¹⁰² Self-employed in agriculture (cultivators), agriculture labour, self-employed in non-agriculture (household based production), and other labour

activities showing an abysmal gap between the males and females of the Muslim community and the other SRC's. The author reasons that it is inability of the Muslims to make good use of the opportunities provided by the dynamic rise in the non-agricultural sector in the rural areas. However, there is a definite shift towards non-agriculture activities even though the earnings are among the lowest for them. The shift towards the non-agricultural sector may not be because of the 'pull' factors inherent to the sector but the push factors in agricultural activities such as "low average landholdings, lack of access to credit and other structural factors" which play a huge role (ibid.: 31). The data and the analysis reflect on the processes through which the majority Muslims live in a marginalised condition in terms of earnings, employment status and average size of landholdings. These processes may play a huge factor in the deficit in development brought about by structural inequalities, as envisaged by the SCR of the Muslim community though the report itself does not engage with such questions. The abysmal difference in income in the non-agricultural sector may be indicates a process of discrimination which is operational in rural areas. However, one cannot generalise it using the Muslim community as a homogenous category, and thus one has to delve deeper into the internal differentiation within the Muslim community with respect to the indicators mentioned above. Such data however is hardly available; still it gives us a valuable insight into the Muslim condition in West Bengal.

Table. 3-Daily Earnings in Rural Areas (West Bengal)

Occupation	Rural Male				Rural Female			
	Muslim	H-UC	H-BC	Others	Muslim	H-UC	H-BC	Others
Other Primary Activities	57	62	48	44	36	51	45	42
Owner Cultivator	46	52	46	32	7	9	56	-
Agri. Labour	44	52	47	49	36	41	41	48
Tenant Cultivator	43	44	49	-	-	-	50	-
Non-Agri Activities	81	148	102	116	39	64	44	36

Source: NSS 61st Round; c.f. Husain (2008: 30)

A Short Comment on the Health Condition and Access to Physical Infrastructure

In one of the most puzzling findings, the Muslims perform better on health indicators all throughout the country even though the relative access to physical infrastructure in Muslim majority districts is poor. Deolalikar (2010) observes that in terms of the infant mortality and under-five mortality rates, the Muslims have the second lowest rates (56 and 75 deaths per 100 live births) while SC's/ST's have the highest rates (78 and 111 deaths per 1000 live births). There has been a rapid decline in the IMR and U5-MR (-20 per cent in both) among the Muslims even better than the Upper Caste Hindus (-12 and -13 respectively). The data has been procured from the NFHS of the periods of 1992-93 and 1998-99. The performance of the southern states has been commendable in this instance where the IMR is as low as 29 per 1000 live births. The factors which determine the IMR and U5-MR are the socio-economic condition of the household, child sex and birth order, mother's schooling and access to infrastructure such as electricity, drinking water and sanitation (Deolalikar, 2010. pp. 72-75). In a discussion on the existence of child malnutrition among the Muslims, Deolalikar observes that the Muslim children are at higher risk of being undernourished than the Upper Caste Hindus but lesser than the SC's/ST's. There is hardly much difference between the different socio-religious groups in terms of reduction of child malnutrition throughout the 1990's. Thus, a paradox emerges from the data, that the Muslims perform better in IMR and U5-MR, but are at a disadvantage when it comes to child nutrition even the factors affecting both the indicators are the same (for instance, high female literacy, access and utilization of high quality health practices, good hygiene and child feeding practices) (ibid. pp. 79-84). The WPR of women may be inversely related to infant and maternal mortality at low income levels and as we have observed in the course of the chapter that the Muslim women are mostly engaged in own account work, often working from their homes. Besides, social support and solidarity for pregnant women has been found to make an impact. The Muslims perform better in terms of the juvenile sex ratio which is better than other groups (986 girls per 1000 boys for Muslims in 1998-99 as compared to 931, 914 and 859 amongst SC's/ST's, Upper Caste Hindus and Other groups respectively) (ibid. pp. 84-85) . Here, it would be significant to highlight the low levels of literacy and the lack of physical infrastructure in Muslim majority

districts which includes even the basic medical facilities as observed by the SCR. So how does one explain the good health indicators? An essay by Bhalotra, Valente and van Soest (2010) tries to provide certain explanations to the greater advantage in health indicators of the Muslims. Using statistical techniques, they infer that there exist differences in terms of education, employment and fertility characteristics based on number of children and spacing of births which are “unfavourable” when compared to the Hindu children. The better utilisation and access to ante-natal care and child immunization for the Hindu women and children serve as an advantage. But the chances of the Muslim child surviving is greater, and the reasons outlined by the authors are: Muslim mothers being taller have better health status ensuring that the child is not born undernourished at birth; the non-vegetarian diet which helps in lowering the mortality risk when the median person in India is poor; the Muslim mothers are more likely to seek treatment for diarrhoea; the Muslims tend to live in larger villages with better sanitation and health facilities making the area “less prone to disease shocks”; a higher fertility rate also indicates that fewer Muslim children are first born; and since the Muslim women seldom work or work on a contractual basis from home, the care provided to the child is ensures a better survival rate¹⁰³. Robinson (2007) posits that the existence of the advantage can be explained in terms of tight knit kinship circles and marriages within it.

“These features (better child survival rates, sex ratio etc.) may be due to the close kinship networks and marital circles of Muslims, contributing somewhat to the greater physical (and social) security of the children. The possibility of “within-kin” marriage practices and lower marriage payments might also ensure that the girl child is not considered so much of a burden. For Muslim women who marry in more tight-knit circles and more often among kin, the support of the natal family in childcare and in the care of the new mother may be of some importance in adding to the survival-chances of the child, including the girl child. Even so, poverty and disadvantage must be partly responsible for that fact that the Muslim child has a higher risk of being underweight in comparison to a child from another socio-religious community.”(p. 840)

¹⁰³ Bhalotra et.al. 2010. Religion and Childhood Death in India. p. 152.

As the aforementioned point reflects, the social solidarity and support systems for women make up for the lack of access to health facilities. The sociological explanation of the marriage systems practiced in part does explain the better health indicators; but indicators are only concentrated on child and maternal health. It would be worthwhile to go beyond these indicators and explore the health status of the working population in the age group of 15-64. As for the improved health indicators being a sign of better access to facilities and infrastructure, it stands counter to the observations made by the SCR. According to the census of 2001, some of the Muslim concentration villages are not even served with “pucca” roads and bus stops. The SCR emphasised on certain observations such as, (a) “About a third of the small villages with high concentration of Muslims do not have any educational institutions.”(b) “There is scarcity of medical facilities in larger villages with a substantial Muslim concentration. About 40% of large villages with a substantial Muslim concentration do not have any medical facilities.”(SCR, 2006. GoI. p. 150). Along with the above observations are the findings and inferences on the lack of infrastructural facilities such as education, transport etc. in areas where Muslims are concentrated; and the housing conditions of the Muslims is at par with the Hindu OBC’s and SC’s/ST’s but lagging behind the Hindu Gen population. Also, the access to piped water, modern fuel in the form of electricity and LPG is found to be lower among the Muslims as compared to the Hindu gen population (ibid.). With the above observations, there emerges a constricted but viable insight into the educational, economic and health conditions of the Muslims. The analysis has entirely depended on the data and analysis furnished by the SCR and related reports and survey mentioned throughout the chapter; and also certain independent studies and research works to corroborate the findings of the SCR. The attempt has been to give a modest account of the marginalisation suffered by the Muslims at all levels and delve into the arguments and debates concerning their condition.

Conclusion

In the history educational and employment representation of the country, there has been a case of unequal, disproportionate representation of the Muslim community. There can be ideological, conjectural, historical and empirical explanations for it. However, the issue of the Muslim community suffering in the same way that other

disadvantaged groups such as SC's/ST's and OBC's, makes the academic silence (except for few) on the structural marginalisation of the Muslims conspicuous in its abetment to the whole process. From the above discussions the important thing that emerges is that there are differences in the demand for education among the Muslims, in some places it is universal (Husain, 2005) whereas in some regions there is disillusionment from the whole educational process as it bears lesser returns in an atmosphere of discrimination (Jeffrey and Jeffrey, 1997). However, it is widely accepted that education is the most viable conduit for the erasing the 'development deficit' that the community suffers from. But, the interventions in education can only produce results with similar interventions in the economic structure of the society. The high incidence of poverty, low educational levels and the concentration of Muslims in own account work or work with low wages or returns, points to the existence of a nexus of different debilitating factors circumscribing the community within a definite structure that offers no respite or escape. The claim of the Muslim minority community benefiting from the land reforms in West Bengal in the 1970's is somewhat true. However, in the course of the chapter we have come across data which posits that the difference between the ownership of land and cultivation is huge leaving a major section of Muslims in rural areas working in non-agricultural activities, often own account work. The lack of means such as credit flow and marketing channels has also affected their representation in the agricultural sector. This sector is understood to be stable in the rural areas. And the low representation here has been detrimental to their representation in the occupational structure as they got concentrated in the non-agricultural sector. Even though the proportion of earnings is among the lowest for Muslims in the non-agricultural sector, but still one finds them concentrated there. It could be because of the small size of landholdings and the further sub-division of land within the family. Coupled with a systematic marginalisation in politics only makes the matters worse as seen in the delimitation and the subsequent reservation of constituencies for SC's/ST's where the Muslims form the majority of the population, exempli gratia, West Bengal¹⁰⁴. In such instances the political manoeuvring often required in a liberal democracy makes it impossible for the community to wring in any piecemeal changes to their condition, if not threaten the entire system.

¹⁰⁴ SCR, 2006. Appendix, table-

Table 4-Employment Data According To State, West Bengal, 2004-5

Muslim population (percentage)	Total No. Of Employees	Share of Muslims	Education	Health	Home Dept.	Transport	Others
25.2	134972	2.1	-	1.0	7.1	-	2.4

SCR, 2006. Appendix, Table 9.4

Table 5- Share of jobs for Muslims in the State PSU's, West Bengal, 2004-5

	Percentage of Muslims
Group 'A'	0
Group 'B'	1.2
Group 'C'	6.2
Group 'D'	5.1

SCR, 2006. Appendix, Table 9.11

Table 6-Muslim Employees in Judiciary in West Bengal (Total Number of Employees-98593)

	Percentage of Muslims
Group 'A'	2.3
Group 'B'	3.4
Group 'C'	4.3
Group 'D'	7.1

SCR, 2006. Appendix table 9.10

Table 7-Demographic and Socio-economic Indicators of 12 Muslim Concentrated Districts of West Bengal, 2001

DISTRICT	Muslim Population	Percentage Urban	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Literacy
Murshidabad	3735389	8.3	21.6	33.1	48.6
South 24 parganas	2295967	13.2	14.3	30.6	59.8
North 24 Parganas	2164058	20.9	23.6	30.6	65.0
Maldah	1636171	1.6	19.7	27.9	45.3
Bardhaman	1364133	25.3	29.2	33.6	68.8
Nadia	1170282	3.9	30.2	37.7	47.5
UttarDinajpur	1156503	2.1	36.9	43.1	36.0
Medinipur	1088618	11.4	17.8	26.3	65.0
Birbhum	1057861	4.3	27.1	30.7	59.9
Haora	1044383	47.4	4.5	11.5	67.8

Kolkata	926769	100.0	-	-	68.1
Hugli	763471	23.7	23.9	18.6	73.5
Koch Bihar	600911	3.4	38.7	38.5	56.1

Source: SCR, 2006. Appendix Table 3.6. "Socio-economic Indicators of Top 100 Districts (by size of Muslim Population), 2001 Census.

Table 8- Poverty Incidence (West Bengal) Urban

	Year		
	1987-88	1993-94	2004-5
TOTAL	33	23	24
Hindus	29	20	21
SC's/ST's	48	37	41
Muslims	57	41	44

SOURCE: Appendix Table 8.5, Sachar Committee Report, 2006.

Table 9-Poverty Incidence (West Bengal) Rural

	Year		
	1987-88	1993-94	2004-5
TOTAL	46	41	28
Hindus	45	38	24
SC's/ST's	55	49	31
Muslims	47	48	36

Appendix Table 8.6, SCR, 2006.

Chapter Three

The Social Consequences of Development Deficit: Social Reproduction, Ghettos and the Contestations within the Politics of Collective Identity

In the previous chapter, we came across the despicable condition of the Muslim community in West Bengal. Through an analysis of the occupational concentration, educational status, and access to credit and infrastructural facilities along with a measure of the landholdings, the marginalised and excluded condition of the largest minority within India and West Bengal has been brought to the fore. The current chapter is an endeavour to reinstate the subject matter of socio-economic backwardness and the systemic marginalisation against the Muslims. The development deficit of the Muslim community as reflected in the SCR can be substantiated further if one delves into some of the recent studies carried out on the Muslim community.

A Study of the Socio-economic condition of Muslims in India

Sikand and Ali (2006)¹ in their study conducted for the Sachar Committee Report of a small sample from the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh throw some light on this aspect of development deficit of the Muslims. The sample was mostly constituted of the Muslims (87%) while a small fraction of non-Muslims (8.4%) were used in the study for comparative purposes. They carried out a survey using the questionnaire and the interview methods, along with Focus Group Discussions to delve into what Muslims themselves think about their condition and what they want. The findings have been presented separately for the urban and the rural areas in the study.

¹ Sikand and Ali. 2006. Survey of socio-economic condition of Muslims in India. URL: <http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-sikand090206.htm> accessed on 19.06.12 at 11.39 a.m.

Based on the focus group discussions with Muslim men and women, they present a descriptive account of the marginal condition of the Muslims in different states. Some of the general responses from the group discussions were regarding the state apathy to their poor condition which could be traced back to the anti-Muslim bias and the communal prejudice which was on the rise based on the Hindutva propaganda against the Muslims. To emphasise on their poor condition, the comparisons were made with Hindu localities where the facilities such as road, sewage system, banks and dispensaries were much better than in Muslim areas. Development activities rarely reached the Muslim areas and one could find much less number of Muslims employed in the government services and they were rather mostly concentrated in the junior posts of drivers, cleaners, and clerks. Some also stressed on the impact of privatisation and the usage of neo-liberal policies in the last two decades which have been detrimental to the trades and occupations of the artisanal Muslims such potters, weavers, craftsmen, etc. They have been affected even more because of the increasing costs of quality education that such communities can't endure in the face of increasing privatisation of education. Also, they understood that the riots were engineered and not spontaneous events causing considerable damage to life and property of the Muslims, and it has taken place in regions where there have been signs of upward economic mobility among the Muslims. And in the discussions the participants found the state complicit in the acts. However, these are the responses procured from the micro-level discussions held with the respondents and cannot be generalised.

The authors found a large section of Muslims in Bihar working in informal/cottage industries that are not covered by an labour law.. In the case of bidi workers, the authors found that 70% of the bidi workers in Bihar were Muslims as posited by the participants themselves. The wages given to the workers were less than the statutory minimum level, making it difficult for them to make ends meet and the wages had not been revised. They were also exploited by the government commissioning agents, middle men and factory owners. The workers were also asked to work from home by the factory owners so that they could escape the labour laws. The women fared even worse in the industry and were paid much lesser. And more than 75% of the labourers suffered from tuberculosis. In the discussions held with the

Muslims weaver community, a similar picture was etched by the participants while describing the working condition and the amenities provided. In the 1980's there were 20 thousand power loom units and around 40 thousand handloom units in the Bhagalpur district. The handloom units were mostly owned by the Muslims and mostly by the Ansari caste. The industry foundered and there was a specific process through which the reins of the industry were wrenched away from the Muslims. Exempli gratia, the high handedness from the Electricity Board in the supply of electricity provided to the industry, they charged them for electricity which had never been provided even though the promise had been for uninterrupted electricity. The supply of the yarns is now with the Marwaris (trader community from Rajasthan but among the most influential and found in many parts of the country) and this process happened gradually. The Muslims now have to depend on them for the supply of yarn and have to buy at rates fixed by them. The dominance once enjoyed by the Muslim community in this industry was nowhere to be seen, and they lead a similar hand to mouth existence as that of the bidi workers. An interesting facet to the gradual shifting of dominance in the handloom industry has been traced back to the riots which took place in 1989. In the riots, the handloom industry was affected the most and the weavers were the most affected part of the population, and as the participants put it, there was no compensation forthcoming from the state or any rehabilitation package. As a result, a great number of the weavers had to leave for other states to find employment in petty jobs. A complaint that most of the participants had was the hard availability of loans in the wake of the violence. It is difficult to get loans from a bank without the banks doing a "rigorous" investigation and often denying the loan on some pretext or the other, or else there is a demand for a hefty bribe.

As regards the housing conditions, the discussions were also held in some villages of Madhya Pradesh where the majority of the Muslims belong to the butcher community and the population of the village mostly work as bidi workers, are shopkeepers or landless labourers showed poor living conditions. The areas in which they live in is marked by "unplanned houses and huts, and are without any proper roads, sewage system, water supply and electricity. Most of the Muslims live in stone houses or huts which are very congested. Very few of their houses have sanitation

facilities. Due to non-availability of proper drinking water facilities, most families depend on wells and drink dirty water”². The researchers found considerable harmony among the different groups which inhabited the village along with the Muslims. However, there were restrictions placed on the buying and selling of cows which are consumed by the Muslims, the staple food for the poor. In another village, the majority of the Muslims were poor and had low levels of education. They were mostly engaged in bidi rolling or worked as daily wage earners. The bidi industry is mostly owned by the Hindus while the majority of the workers were Muslims. The average income from the bidi rolling trade comes to 15 to 20 rupees a day. In the third village, there is a division of the village created by the national highway between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. In the village, unemployment is their biggest concern as most of agricultural labourers are engaged for only 3-4 months and have to seek work, mostly manual work, somewhere else in the off season. The main occupation of the village however is making brooms which are sold to middlemen for one rupee each while they are sold in the market for over eight times their price. A broom worker earns on an average 15 rupees daily. There is also a carpet factory in the village where the workers are paid 60 rupees a day while the finished carpet is sold for much more and even exported. There are 13 Muslims in the 20 member panchayat of the village. However, as the participants observed the panchayat was inept in handling the issues of the village. Most of the population are poor but have not been issued BPL cards; the practice rather has been to issue arbitrarily based on the whims of the panchayat. Despite the presence in the panchayats and political agency possessed by the Muslims, why was it that no benefits were accrued by the Muslims?

With regard to the occupation, especially government employment, the focus group discussions held in Rajasthan with a Muslim population of 9% in the state revealed that the highest number of Muslims were present in the post of constables (1880 of the 47531 posts available) followed by head constable (417 of the 8363 posts), assistant sub-Inspector (199 of 3188 posts), sub-inspector (126 out of 2815) and police inspector (40 out 778). The discussants pointed to an overt discrimination from the government authorities who pay scant attention to the localities inhabited by

² (ibid.)

Muslims. The researchers then go on to discuss the discussions held in some of the towns in Rajasthan. And the discussion was held in the Shahpura Chandaliya, a Muslims majority locality in Kaithoon town. They found only an Islamic Madrasa in the town for a school and there were no government or privately run schools in the locality. There have been scant development measures undertaken in the locality while the discussant claimed that the reservation meant for the Backward Castes which also included them had provided no benefits whatsoever to any of the residents of the locality. The area under consideration did not have a single house with toilet facilities and the area also lacks proper health facilities with provision for free distribution of medicines. The unavailability of the doctors is one of the complaints of the discussants. Again, in the area the representation of the Muslims in the panchayat is worse than the members of other religions.

In Uttar Pradesh, one of the aspects that the respondents highlighted were the discriminatory policies followed by the government with regard to recognising Urdu as a medium of instruction. The lack of facilities in the mainstream schools provided no opportunities for Urdu speaking families to educate their children in Urdu medium schools beyond the primary level. By privileging Hindi and Sanskrit as the preferred languages and the “delinking” of the majority of the employment opportunities from the knowledge of Urdu has actually marginalised the language even further. Another interesting aspect of the discussion lies in the criticism levelled at the religious leaders who stress upon the observance of strict “purdah” system by the women. The respondents felt that such stringent doctrines are saturated with patriarchal tons, and one has to decry such stringent insistence on “purdah” which becomes a hindrance for the Muslim women to be educated. Rather, the stress should be on investing in separate schools for the Muslim women.

The respondents of the study also expressed concern over the increasing presence of the Hindutva forces in their villages and town. The increasing clout of the Hindutva was due to many shakhas (branches-literally) and schools run by them along with the frequent visits of pracharaks (preachers) from VHP or Bajrang Dal, or the members of RSS. This increasing influence of the Hindutva forces becomes a bane for the

Muslims as they fear that they will suffer a similar fate as that of the Muslims in Gujarat. From the discussions, it also emerged that Muslims knew that the Hindutva groups did not just target the Muslims but discriminated against the Dalits too. In their criticism of the government and the Hindutva groups, they were also critical of the current leadership of the Muslim community. They recognised the role played by the ulema of the madrasas which provided a plank to “promote religious awareness and encourage Islamic learning. They found the madrasas instrumental in the provision of education to their children for free along with the boarding facilities. However, they understood a lacunae in the functioning of the madrasas by pointing to the fact that the functioning of the madrasas and the ulama should be attuned to present socio-economic circumstance, and the stress should be on generating resources to resolve the economic, social and educational problems faced by the community, and not restrict the process to the promotion of “sectarian strife”. Interestingly, there emerges a facet to this observation wherein the view of madrasas providing the groundswell for ‘sectarian strife’ is reflected in the responses of the participants who were Muslims. Furthermore, “many respondents were critical of Muslim political leaders for not raising their vital economic, social and educational problems. They accused them of being in league with Hindutva chauvinists and the state machinery in promoting communal controversies, resulting in the perpetuation of the poverty of the majority of the Muslims. Most Muslim political leaders, they said, were simply 'agents' of various political parties who used Muslims as 'vote banks' but did little, other than adopting some cosmetic measures, for the Muslim masses.”³ They also called for a distinct ‘alternative’ leadership not in the mould of the current leaders, both religious and political, which would focus on the economic, social and educational upliftment of the community as a whole by becoming a ‘liaison’ between the state and community. This leadership will also take initiative in the provision of information and knowledge about government schemes which can be availed by the members of the community for their development. The focus thus is seen here shifting towards the generation of social capital on the part of the leadership to address the development needs of the community.

³ Op.cit.

The low level of development parameters among Muslims is a cause for concern as it also reproduces itself in subsequent generations in the absence of strong state intervention. It is in this light that we turn to Bourdieu and his understanding of social reproduction.

II

Using Bourdieu: Forms of Capital and Social Reproduction

The low representation of Muslims posits an operational marginalisation present in the educational and the employment sectors of the Indian society broadly, and in the state of West Bengal specifically. The processes through which such a marginalisation is affected is better understood and explicated in and through the works of Pierre Bourdieu, especially his analysis of different forms of capital. Bourdieu's work is significant in sociology since he introduces new concepts while defining existing ones in a completely different manner. For instance, he defines 'capital' as "accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its "incorporated," embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour. It is a *vis insita*, a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures, but it is also a *lex insita*, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. It is what makes the games of society—not least, the economic game—something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle."⁴ Bourdieu understands that capital has the capacity to earn profits and "reproduce itself either in identical or expanded form", and can thus sustain itself in the social structure. The distribution of capital in all its forms is what determines the "immanent structure" of a society which delimits and determines the chances of attainment of particular practices within it. The different forms of capital not only determine the probability of individual's success, but are also functional in the regulation of the social order. However, the understanding of 'capital' posited by him differs from the economic understanding of it. This specification of difference in definition is important as it would otherwise induce a critique of such overt emphasis

⁴ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 15)

on the role of capital (in the economic sense) in the structuring of the society itself⁵. It is also different from the understanding of capital formulated by Marx in his critique of capitalism. "...Marx stressed that capital was not simply wealth but a moment in the relations of production called "capitalism", that it entailed a compulsion to intensify and expand the processes exploitation whereby it was produced, and it turned crucially on the distinction of its constitutive category, abstract labour power, from mere work..."⁶ In contrast, Bourdieu uses the different forms of capital with their capacity to convert that informs his nuanced understanding of class relations. The different forms of capital are:

"Economic capital which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights;... cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility."⁷ There is a fourth form of capital that he defines as ,"*Symbolic capital*, that is to say, capital—in whatever form—insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity."⁸ The 'convertibility'⁹ of different forms of capital is dependent on the 'fields'¹⁰ in which they function. The most significant form of capital in this heuristic

⁵ Rather Bourdieu himself is critical of economic theory which recognizes just one form of capital and its related exchange relation, i.e. mercantile exchange which understands the basic necessity of maximization of profit and reduces other forms of exchange as noneconomic. This is what Bourdieu is trying to refute in his understanding of capital (ibid. p. 16).

⁶ (Calhoun, *Habitus, Field and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity*, 1993, p. 69). He uses the explication of provided in the books, *Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital* written by Marx to push forth the argument.

⁷ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16)

⁸ Ibid. footnote # 3 p. 27. Italics in the original.

⁹ By 'convertibility', Bourdieu understands the capacity of, for instance, cultural capital to be realised in terms of economic capital, i.e. in terms of monetary returns.

¹⁰ 'Field' as a concept stands as a metaphor for a playing field where different players are at different positions having different capacities. These capacities are determined by relations of power or the appropriation and access to capital that one enjoys in a specific position within a field. The position in the field thus provides the one with a strong 'capital' to form the rules of appropriation and distribution within it.

schema of Bourdieu, and the one that is of importance to the present study is the cultural capital. He came across this concept in his research on the educational attainments of school children, and how the success of children in academics was dependent on the class they belonged to, i.e. the profits they got by belonging to a certain class, and also the distribution of cultural capital according to the class divisions present in the social structure.

Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital exists in three forms, namely, the *embodied* state (“in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body”); the *objectified* state (“in the forms of cultural good, e.g. pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.”) and the *institutionalized* state (“a form of objectification which is seen in the case of educational qualifications, a sort of distancing that is achieved to facilitate a more subtle, unrecognisable channel for the sustenance of the status quo). It is here that he points out the fallacy in pursuing a purely economic understanding of educational achievements and investment, a focus on the monetary aspect; rather, for Bourdieu, this is a functionalist argument and it “ignores the contribution which the educational system makes to the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital.” The investment in cultural capital made by the parents, the time and energy, “the labour of the parents is translatable into the “status achievement” of their children in ways not directly dependent on inheritance or even on better schools”¹¹ which provides their children with an advantage in the field of education. However, the transmission of ‘embodied capital’, what he argues as “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus” is dependent on the historical circumstances of a society, its structural inequalities and the class relations existing within it. Since this form of capital is defined as an embodiment, it is found in an individual agent and the appropriation of such capital provides a ‘distinction’ to its possessor brought about by its ubiquitous scarcity. This embodied capital has the advantage of being transmitted

¹¹ (Calhoun, *Habitus, Field and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity*, 1993, p. 70)

in a more disguised manner than economic capital and often can be ‘misrecognised’¹² as symbolic capital, and provide a façade of competence to the whole process. The symbolic efficacy is affected by the appropriation of the accumulated and objectively available resources which is dependent on the distribution of means of appropriation and the relationship that the agent has with resources that are available; hence, this relationship determines according to Bourdieu the accruing of profits in the competition between one agent and her competitors endowed with capital for the same resources ‘generating’ a scarcity. For Bourdieu however the most critical and significant aspect is the transmission which is affected in the family and the ‘embodiment’ of cultural capital within it; and the fast overlaying of the capital on the child is only possible in families endowed with strong cultural capital throughout the entire socialization process. Au fond, the time available for an individual to appropriate the cultural capital at a young age and then continue the “prolonged process of acquisition” can only be facilitated in the absence of economic necessity to work. This can only be possible through the ‘free time’ that the family endowed with strong cultural capital, convertible into economic capital, can initially provide him/her with. It is through the aspect of time needed for acquisition that he establishes the link between cultural and economic capital while the absence of such initial time is understood by Bourdieu as a handicap “More precisely, it is because the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of the mother’s free time) available to it (by virtue of its economic capital, which enables it to purchase the time of others) to ensure the transmission of this capital and to delay entry into the labour market through prolonged schooling, a credit which pays off, if at all, only in the very long term.”(Bourdieu, 1986: 25)

In the objectified state, the cultural capital exists in the form of cultural goods, i.e. “cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments etc.” (ibid.: 20). However, the ownership of such goods can be legal but the precondition of the ability to own such material objects is determined

¹² ‘Misrecognition’ is similar to ‘false consciousness’ where an individual may have the impression that her act is the right thing to do, but may come to falsely believe, or misrecognise it.

by the ‘embodied’ cultural capital. The usage of these repositories of objectivated cultural capital is possible only when the agents try to affect a change in their ‘embodied’ capital. While in the institutionalised state, the cultural capital possessed by an agent is given due recognition through an institution, and it gains in due time a relative autonomy from its bearer and even the cultural capital that was possessed by the agent. The institution provides legitimacy and also generates the aspect of comparison between various degrees. While the economic investment made on the procurement of academic capital generates value (in terms of cultural capital) for the individual when compared to others, Bourdieu argues that in the very same vein, the value of the academic capital is also recognised through the monetary gains it can bring from the labour market.

Social Capital and Social Reproduction

The concept of social capital discussed by Bourdieu is of relevance here. Social capital has been defined by Bourdieu as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.”¹³ The point he is trying to make here is that with the connections, along with the capital in the form of cultural or economic, an agent is afforded an additional privilege if he has the right connections or belongs to a group with rich cultural capital. This becomes the deciding factor when the same agent gets chosen even though his competitors might have possessed similar magnitude of capital if not higher. However, the network of relationships are not a given, etched in stone; rather, they have to be continually ‘instituted’ through various rites peculiar to the group. The reproduction of social relationships whether short term or long term can only be affected through establishment of relations at the symbolic level using social institutions such as the relation of the “brother, sister, cousin etc.”, and through exchange of “gifts, words, women etc.”

¹³ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21)

The above discussion on the forms of capital was to basically initiate a subsequent discussion on social reproduction of unequal class as well as power relations through education. The ‘consecration’ of privilege is done within the system by ignoring it and treating everyone at par; however, as seen in the discussion above, every individual starts with his/her own handicap generated from the cultural capital inherited by them. It is here that “privilege becomes translated into ‘merit’”. While it is a struggle for some, for the members who belong to the dominant classes it becomes part of their heritage. The ‘dissimulation’ at work makes it difficult to recognise the transmission of cultural capital. The transmission of cultural capital is predicated on a cultural arbitrary which is accepted by the subordinated classes. “Bourdieu’s central theme in his analysis of education is that, since what is being inculcated is the dominant cultural arbitrary, excellence and scholastic achievement will naturally be defined in terms of the arbitrary cultural paradigm”¹⁴. Thus, through socialisation the children who have the right kind of endowment of cultural capital compared to those belonging to the subordinated classes (having less of the access to the cultural arbitrary) will achieve more academically. Further, what emerges from the above process is that the ‘habitus’ of the subordinated classes in accepting the legitimacy of the system will actually be strengthening their disadvantage by viewing the demand for higher education as not meant for them, and thus tend to ‘eliminate’ themselves from the educational structure at every level¹⁵. “The process of cultural reproduction reproduces the class relations of the social structure”¹⁶. According to Bourdieu, in a system where the economic domination is legitimated through the cultural realm and vice versa, “there is a close relationship between membership of the cultural and economic elites.....the fact that most members of the economic elite also belong to the cultural elite enables their dominance to be justified as resting upon superior intellectual abilities. On the other hand, the fact that some members of the cultural elite are not economically privileged, and vice versa,- this is the argument about the functions of limited social mobility- is seen as proof positive of the inherent fairness

¹⁴ (Jenkins, 1992, p. 112)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 113.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

of a meritocratic education system, through which *in theory* all can pass, irrespective of their economic capital.”¹⁷

Critique of Bourdieu's Formulation

The most crucial critique of Bourdieu's theoretical premise is provided by Connell (1983)¹⁸ who argues that, firstly, there exists no precise definition of class, and class relations and “are taken for granted”; secondly, it does not delve into the dynamics present at the level of the system. The aspect of change that exists in the system is totally glossed over by Bourdieu absolving any agency from the individual.¹⁹

Connell argues that in various historical epochs different socio-economic as well as cultural structures are present with similarities from the previous ones. This is bound to happen, as from the Marxist point of view, the new is always created out of the old, rather the seeds of change are there in the vestiges of the old structure, and it is brought about by people. Thus, the theory of social reproduction and cultural reproduction “fails to account for social change at the level of the system and does not allow for meaningful agency or process at the individual level.” It is understood to be a mechanical model of society. Furthermore, the social stability that characterises the society is not due to the reproduction process in play but the policy level interventions by the state which tries to quell any disquiet by introducing such changes, and thereby sustaining the status quo by generating a consensus between the classes.²⁰ The point mentioned above reflects the absence of the role of the state in Bourdieu's theorisation. And it is here that Connell makes the cardinal point that the state affecting a consensus between the classes reproduces the relations of domination by producing new class relations rather than reproducing the old ones. Connell's argument is crucial when we try to characterise the development deficit among Muslims and its historical antecedents because there is a need to go beyond the given situation which Bourdieu's formulation helps us understand. The situation of different denominations of Muslims in West Bengal and in other regions may have to be

¹⁷ Ibid. the author discusses the essay, P. Bourdieu, 1973. ‘Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction’, in R. Brown (ed.), *Knowledge, Education and Cultural Change*, London: Tavistock.

¹⁸ R.W. Connell, 1985. *Which Way is Up?* Sydney: George Allen and Unwin University.

¹⁹ C.f. Jenkins (1992; p. 117-118)

²⁰ Ibid. p. 118.

considered as much as their economic history. For instance, there is middle class which has a significant population in Kolkata and in the rural areas, but there are few or no studies investigating their situation. As such an enquiry is beyond the scope of this dissertation, we note the issues associated with Muslims in West Bengal in general with regard to their current predicament.

Understanding the Situation of Muslims in West Bengal

So, how does one understand the educational and employment conditions of Muslims in West Bengal in the light of the above discussion? As the SCR and various independent studies have shown us, the educational indicators of the Muslims in West Bengal are only better than the SC's/ST's while in terms of representation in regular paid employment, even the SC's/ST's do better than the Muslims. The lack of representation in regular employment has its impact on the sense of security and the consequent concentration of population. At the micro level, Bourdieu's insight on time has considerable merit when one examines the condition of the Muslims. The small space of the household, the parents often engaging in own account work within the household, and the devotion of time by the child in both the household enterprise and education presents to us an account of the requirement of capital in all its forms as explicated by Bourdieu to attain higher levels of education.

In the discussion on the Bengali Muslims in history, the aspect of advantage gained by Bengali Hindus, especially the upper caste Hindus-whether in the form of land grants through the Permanent Settlement Act, or the ready acceptance of English education and the subsequent high representation in the government services during the British period-bear upon the hitherto condition of the Muslims in Bengal. The formation of a middle class, the category (though contested) of Bengali bhadralok had a collateral impact on the formation of what Bourdieu understands as the 'cultural arbitrary'. This dominant cultural arbitrary' came to be delineated as far back as the First partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement in the state as found in the works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and others. It was at the level of 'culture' along with the politics that the contestations between the two communities took place. Even though at first the socio-economic condition had

been the pre-dominant premise of the critique of the ‘cultural arbitrary’ and the place of Muslims within it, over the years however, especially after 1947, it has become concentrated on aspects of identity, security and less of equity. Viewed through the analytical lens that Bourdieu provides us, the ‘cultural arbitrary’ had a profound bearing on the representation of Muslims and Hindus in the mainstream educational institutions of the country then, and consequently on the employment structure. This was compounded by the privileging of English education while languages like Urdu and Persian fell out of favour and practice; in Bengal, the emphasis on a more Sanskritised Bengali and the purging of Persian and Urdu words from the lexicon in a way highlighted the same process of identifying a distinct culture forming the dominant and the ‘mainstream’ relegating the rest as alternatives without significance. However, as mentioned earlier, Bourdieu’s formulation is limited in its scope in explaining social movement. It holds that the process of cultural and social reproduction ‘incorporate’ the critique of the cultural arbitrary and becomes even more inconspicuous through the process of dissimulation. What the theory fails to address is that the contestations have wider political connotations which get translated into specific political demands with active participation of individual agents, and thus have their impact on history. This can be seen in the peasant movements under the aegis of KPP and the eventual demand for a separate state in the form of Purba (East) Pakistan.

Marginalisation and Violence

The history of Muslims in India has been under the constant shadow of violence that has ripped through the country at various occasions. The relation between the socio-economic condition of Muslims and violence in the country can be traced to the relations of power and dominance that exist within the country. Violence during riots is often understood as spontaneous and driven by emotional outbursts; but that has not been the case in the majority of the ‘riots’ between the numerically significant Muslim ‘minority’ community, and the ‘majority’ Hindu community brought to the fore in the works of Paul Brass (2004a; 2004b). However, the incidence of violence emanating from such inter-group conflicts is not restricted to polarisation between the

Muslims and Hindus, it can be found to operative in incidences of violence between groups divided on the basis of caste or between the majority community and other minorities (such as the Christians, Sikhs) which are much lesser in number as compared to the Muslims. An approach to the problem of such inter-group conflicts and incidences of violence is through an analysis of the concept of ‘violence’ itself. From the violence that ensued in the wake of the Partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 to the violence that was part of the peasant movement in Bengal in the decade of 1930, and the violence that is part of the numerous ‘riots’, a veritable part of history of India in general and Bengal (later, West Bengal) in particular, the common reading of the incidences of violence has to do with the loss of life and property, the actualizations affected through such acts of ‘subjective violence’ (acts of physical or ideological violence with an identifiable agent, (Zizek, 2009)) on individuals and even groups as a whole. This formidable attention to violence has spawned a lot of works on the impact of violence on the survivors (Robinson, 2005). But violence had been the subject of study in the function it played in the identity constitution of both the individual and the collective²¹. In the wake of an enormous increase in the incidence and magnitude of violence, and also the ‘traumatic’ effect on the formation of ‘subjectivity’ of the survivors, a body of work has emerged on both the South Asian and the International context²². The analysis basically focuses on how “subjectivity- the felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power- is produced through the experience of violence and the manner in which global flows involving images, capital, and people become entangled with local logics in identity formation.”²³ The focus in specific essays has also been on the state

²¹ See Maurice Bloch (1986). *From Blessing to violence: History and ideology in the circumcision ritual of the Merina*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; Veena Das and Ashis Nandy (1986). *Violence, victimhood and the language of silence*. In Veena Das, ed., *The word and the world: Fantasy, symbol and record*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.; Emile Durkheim (1965 [1912]). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: Free Press.; Girard 1977 René Girard, (1977). *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; c.f. Robinson (2005; p. 19).

²² See (Das et al. 2000, 2001); Lea Wernick Fridman.(2000). *Words and witness: Narrative and aesthetic strategies in the representation of the holocaust*. Albany: State University of New York Press; Arthur Kleinman (1997). *Social suffering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²³ (Das, et.al. 2000, p. 1)

induced violence, the presence of violence in ordinary daily lives, and the usage and juxtaposition of narratives to recreate and rebuild lives in the shadow of violence²⁴.

It is here that we can locate the work by Robinson (2005) on the impact of Gujarat genocide on the lives of survivors and her work attempts to provide an insight into the identity (re)formulation or 're-drawing' the co-ordinates in the wake of such violence. Through an analysis of narratives/ remembrances obtained from her participants from both Mumbai and Gujarat, she tries to juxtapose the marginal condition of the Muslims, in terms of socio-economic indicators, with the violence that tears them asunder from their normal way of life and ask them to re-organise their lives from the remnants of such violence, in a way affecting their identity construction. It is interesting to note that events of violence, especially the violence during the Partition in 1947, the large scale violence during the period before and after the Babri Masjid demolition and the recent Gujarat pogrom of 2002, have been markers in history around which the Muslim identity formation and their worldview have been formulated in the academic knowledge produced on the community. The foundation for studies and debates on role of violence in identity formation was laid by the history of communalism in India and the need for a specific strategy to counter it. The political counter was sought in the Indian nationalism in the pre-independence period; but the petrification of nationalism into an ideology meant to sustain the entrenched relations of production, and eventually turning into a religious nationalism serving to fulfil certain political interests of the ruling political parties as well as the ruling classes meant that the constitutional injunction of the word 'secular' had to be considered seriously, and made operational with a modified definition within the Indian society. But the focus on secularism as an effective counter to the rise of the 'new right' and its rabid Hindu nationalism has been found wanting. The rise of the Hindu right in the form of Rashtriya Swayamseva Sangh (National Voluntary Corps; hereon RSS)-Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party; hereon BJP)-Bajrang Dal-Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Association; VHP)-Shiv Sena (Army of Shiv) combine has redefined politics²⁵, while from the 1970's there has been a marked

²⁴ See *ibid.*

²⁵ The rise of Muslim fundamentalist organization such as Majlis-e-Ittehadul-Muslimeen has been mentioned by Robinson (2005).

increase in the incidence of violence in the country²⁶. Through the 1980's and the 1990's violence was rampant as the Babri Masjid- temple issue became the umbrella term for a range of political issues in the country.

The indomitable rise of the right wing in the decades of 1980's and 90's facilitated their rise to become a formidable political opponent to the Indian National Congress (INC) and formed a coalition government at the centre at the end of 20th century. The case of the Gujarat genocide has not been an isolated incident; rather there has been a history of such acts of violence being inflicted upon the Muslim minority community in the preceding decades as well. The underlying characteristics of the violence have been the same: violence as retaliation to incendiary, often individual acts of violence committed by the Muslims; the organised manner in which the massacre is carried out; and the implicit complicity of the state and administrative officials.

However, one can also see a parallel rise of Islamic organisations in India such Jamat-e-Islamia. This can be attributed to the same process of conflict of interests that ensues in the upward mobility of the Muslims. In the wake of violence directed against them, there develops a sense of insecurity, and the need to form organisations to protect the needs of the community at large. They are formed to ensure that the varied interests of the Muslims, related to education, disbursement of funds on scholarship, loans etc. are met with in a decent amount of time. But there are also organisations which have become militant and pledge their allegiance to a greater cause, related to world politics (Indian Mujahideen, Laskar-e-Tayyeba). Even though we do not engage with the formation and functions of these organisations, it is necessary to mention their existence along with the right wing Hindu organisations. We understand the process of the formation of such Islamic militant organisations as part of the same process which gives rise to the Hindu right wing, a process defined by a high growth rate with an inflow of NRI remittances to the organisation and a disgruntled middle class²⁷.

Organised Violence

²⁶ This has been the view of authors such as Basu 1996; Desai 1984; Gupta 2000; Rajgopal 1987; Tambiah 1997; Varshney 2002)

²⁷ (Ahmed, Of Communalism and Globalization: Offensives of the Far Right, 2004)

The violence often witnessed post-1947 during inter-religious conflicts has had a systematic character to them. This has been the argument which has been put forward by Paul Brass (2004) to characterise the violence studied during his ethnographic study of Aligarh and Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. The author posits that in places such as Meerut where there is a high incidence of violence in the post-1947 period, it can be said that there exists an institutionalised systems of riot production (IRS) whereby the 'riots' are produced and are not spontaneous events. He conceptualises the riots as, "Far from being spontaneous occurrences, the production of such riots involves calculated and deliberate actions by key individuals, the conveying of messages, recruitment of participants, and other specific types of activities, especially provocative ones, that are part of a performative repertoire. Moreover, all these actions may require frequent rehearsals until the time is ripe, the context is felicitous, and there are no serious obstructions in carrying out the performance"²⁸. He goes onto discuss the 'riots' that had occurred in 1961 and compares it with the 'riot' in 1982 in the same city. The axis on which the violence is actualized is the political. He makes a direct connection with the political manoeuvrings prevalent in the city, and mostly the timing of the incidence of violence is always during the elections of one kind or the other. By comparing the two incidence of violence, he reflects on the process of entrenchment of the system of riots in the political character of the city in the 21 year period to the extent that the participation of professionals like doctors and lawyers as well as tradesmen in the events became conspicuous and at one with the politics of right wing Hindu elements in the form of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Some significant observations emanating from this essay are firstly, the emergence of the contentions over places of worship concomitant to the production of discourses over the destruction of Hindu places of worship by Muslim rulers (often fostering a construction of the Muslim 'other') becoming dominant as a strategy to mobilise the collective (of the majority Hindu community) against a minority; the involvement of the professional or the middle class aided in their pursuit by the men in uniforms (always abetting in the violence by taking the side of the Hindu majority) in the propagation of violence against the minority community; the incompetence of

²⁸ (Brass, Development of an Institutional Riot System in Meerut City, 1961 to 1982, 2004, p. 4839)

administration to quell such incidence of violence or deliberate procrastination often resulting in an indirect participation in the violence; the escalation of an issue emanating from a very local fracas to engulfing the city in the web of violence; and the response to the violence grew even more apathetic from the state as well as the centre in the 20 year period under consideration, it could be that the reaction to the violence was tempered by multiple levels of political considerations. Further, he also understands that a small incidence of violence can often serve as a 'rehearsal' for a violence of greater magnitude later as he observed in the incidence of violence in 1982 which served the function for the violent massacres that took place in 1987. The important point here is that the 'riots' served in turn the function of polarising the city into two factions divided on the basis of religion. There existed not much difference in the numbers of Muslim and Hindus inhabiting the city, and thus, a polarisation on the basis of religion helped the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other right wing parties to gain a considerable leverage in the politics of the city with the consistent rise in the number of votes polled for them.

The Case of Gujarat, 2002

This study of the violence in Meerut city can serve as a vantage point to analyse other such incidence of violence targeting the Muslim community in the recent past. The incidents of Gujarat (2002) which created a furore in the wake of the magnitude of the violence that had gripped various cities in the state; the important and significant aspect that underlay the violence was the organised or the systematic way in which the Muslim community was targeted²⁹. A brief summary of the events will suffice to bring to the fore the organised manner in which the Muslim community was targeted. It started with the killing of over fifty people on board the Sabarmati Express engulfed by fire near Godhra. With contesting theories and discussions of the events leading up to the train catching fire, the blame was put upon the Muslims and used as a justification for the 'retaliatory' violence which followed. It was organised under the aegis of the chief minister with the support of his administration and police officers. There alleged complicity in the whole violence was brought to the fore by the

²⁹ See the report in tehelka

confessions of certain police officers who defected from the government's version and exposed the deeply entrenched hatred behind the violence. They were eventually made to pay for it through transfers or removed through charges levelled on them for incidents that happened as far as two decades back³⁰. One such incident of organised violence happened in Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad where 69 people were massacred. The case came to be identified with the Gujarat genocide and caught the attention of the general public because of the complaint made by Zakia Jafri and Citizen's for Justice and Peace in 2006 and it named the chief minister Narendra Modi as one of the main accused³¹. However, the focus here is not the petitions for justice and what happened in the ensuing investigation (it would be discussed later), but to fathom the organised nature of the attack which was carried out in the above mentioned massacre. The events leading up to the massacre can be understood through the narrative of Rupa (Tanaz) Mody. The victim was a resident there, before a mob of 10,000 or more had gathered upon Gulberg society. She had taken shelter in the house of the deceased Ehsan Jafri (the husband of Zakia Jafri), a member of parliament who had been hacked to death by the rioters. Describing the modus operandi of the rioters, she highlights the organised nature of the attack, "Suddenly there were hundreds of men scaling the walls and entering the Society. They had hundreds of little vials of chemicals- resembling nail polish bottles, which they threw into our house. As soon as they hit a surface they would explode in flames. The mob had cleverly cut the water supply from the overhead tanks, so we had no way of putting out the fires. They began gheraoing Jafri saheb's house and demanded that he come out. We were 30-40 of us hiding, and we tried to hide the gas cylinders so that the chemicals would not hit them. They were using gas cylinders to blast walls"³². Sanjeev Bhatt, one of the suspended police officers who had confessed against Narendra Modi talks about a meeting held on 27 February, 2002 where he had alerted the chief minister about the massacre happening in the city, and was allegedly told to

³⁰ See Anupama Katakam and Lyla Bavadam. "Standing up to the State" in *Frontline*, March 19, 2012, pp. 13-21

³¹ Anupama Katakam. A Decade of Shame. In *Frontline*, March 19, 2012.

³² *Ibid.* p. 9.

be “indifferent” and let Hindus “vent their anger”³³. This highlights in a blatant way the complicit involvement of the state and the dominant sections in the violence.

The Processes behind Organised violence

The participants of the riots, for instance in Meerut 1982, belong to the class of traders, professionals and the population belonging to the lower strata of the society often constituted by the SC's/ ST's, a point also made by Mathur (2008) in her study of Hindu nationalism³⁴. This constitution of the participant population reflects significantly on the upper castes that are not visibly involved but are conspicuous in their absence. But the presence of SC's and ST's is something that should not come as a surprise. The work done by RSS as a non-profitable organisation in organising medical camps, aiding victims of natural disasters or the schools run by them have been good strategies to reach out to a number of people, a populist measure that sure enough yielded results when the right combine needed it the most, i.e. during the 2002 violence. But how does one mobilise a people to engage in such violent activities? It is through propaganda at the most basic level. Through pamphlets or video recordings in the form of cassettes, compact disks etc. similar to those that were distributed prior to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the attempt from the right wing combine has been to construct the Muslim as an 'other' who has wronged the majority community and must be punished.

Anand Chakravarti (2002) argues that the Muslims in Gujarat suffer from a doubly alienated condition, a result of the marginalisation at the social-material basis, a definite lack of material well-being among the urban and the rural poor of the Muslim community. It can be said that the Muslims share their plight with the a majority of poverty stricken population of the country but the situation for the Muslims in Gujarat grew worse in the wake of the increasing influence of the Hindutva politics under the right combine of the RSS-BJP-VHP where they were discriminated on the basis of religion in an overtly polarised atmosphere. The explanation for such polarised atmosphere has been traced back to the existence of unquestioned and unchallenged

³³ Ibid. p. 20

³⁴ Shubh Mathur. 2008. *The Everyday Life of Hindu Nationalism*. New Delhi: Three Essays Collective.

upper caste dominance without any lower or middle caste movements carried out against the upper caste. Rather, within the model of 'Sanskritisation' vertical caste mobility holds a promise of a better life for some castes (for instance, the Kolis) and thus ensures a level of 'cultural integration' within the wider Hindu religion often leaving no scope for contestations or conflict between the rising castes and the dominant ones. Subsequent to this is the lack of challenges to capital in the form of organised labour unions and movements against attrition which has become one of the major causes behind the pauperization of the population. So, under the aegis of the right wing combine of BJP-VHP-RSS-Bajrang Dal, these issues of socio-economic backwardness among the among a large section of the population is displaced by a blatant focus on the communalization of the political sphere and engaging in the 'demonisation' and construction of the Muslims as the dangerous 'others' tending towards violence of such magnitude. The participation in the violence provides a sense of power to the underprivileged sections of the Hindu community. He touches upon the point of the attention getting diverted from the poor socio-economic condition of the lower castes, tribes, and the Muslims to that of the violent happenings and the participation of the lower castes and tribes with the government apathy towards the Muslims in general. The violence exacerbates the poor socio-economic condition of the Muslims even further, and the lower castes and tribes fare no better.

Thus, without the support of the dominant and influential upper caste members, it would be highly impossible to mobilise or organise violence on such a large scale. Thus, even though the higher caste members often not found in the actual violence, are found to be supportive in a different way³⁵. The support given to the whole 'operation' in the form of financial aid (to buy petrol, machetes, etc.) and the usage of political clout to assure the participants of delayed state response are the ways in which the upper caste participates in the violence; but cannot be held culpable

³⁵ This has been the overwhelming trend as I observed as part of a fact finding team to Bolangir, Orissa where 50 dalit houses were burnt in their clash with the OBC meher community there; but the men behind the organization of the violence had been upper caste Marwari trader who had financed the entire operation providing the petrol required, and also organized a meeting with a visiting VHP politician, Praveen Togadia. It was claimed by the victims that the such violence was the result of the 'fear' of the improved educational and economic condition of the dalits there with a concomitant rise in their political consciousness where they often came to loggerheads with the dominant OBC meher community as well as the Marwari trader community.

since they were not active agents in the whole 'operation'. The targets are mostly the shops and other sources of livelihood or the dwellings of the Muslims. Since there is a lack of 'spontaneity' to these forms of violence targeting a particular community, it smacks of a deliberate ploy to sustain the relations of dominance and authority. For instance, the competitive political atmosphere of the Meerut city in the 70's and 80's where contestations were a part of everyday life, the massacres in 1987 were a denouement for Brass of such contestations and hankering for political power. The polity becomes the veritable conduit for not only the contestations over political power but also the benefits which accrue from a candidate of a particular caste or religion at the helm for the fellow members of the group.

Nonetheless, the interesting fact that emerges from a survey of literature on 'riots' is that the population killed or massacred is mostly constituted of the Muslims, they are the victim community counting the most losses (the same happens in the case of Hindu-Christian violence or inter-caste violence where dalits are the victims); but the focus has always been in these 'riots' and incidence of violence to find the source or incendiary which instigated the violence in the first place, and more often than not, it is the victim community who is held responsible. But Brass (2004) argues that such endeavours to search for the origin of the violence is futile as there is preparedness among the perpetrators for a planned action waiting for such moments to unleash the required battery of violence from their repertoire to rein in the gains that accrue from such acts of violence. The result of such violence has been the formation of enclaves, or ghettos in various cities. It has been the case in the major metropolitan cities where along with the land laws and discrimination, the violence directed against the Muslim community has made them seek security in numbers. Often the ghettos come to be identified with crime, filth, and 'backwardness'³⁶. But this long shadow of violence cannot be restricted to identity formation only, rather it has to be viewed in the wider perspective of the relations of production that come to dominate the societal structure. Though the violence plays a crucial role along with discrimination in the marginalisation of a community, in time however, such overt and blatant

³⁶ This issue has been discussed in detail in the first chapter of the dissertation. For a similar argument on the process of ghettoization affected by violence, see Ravi Kumar (2010); Robinson (2005);

discrimination becomes hard to trace as highlighted in the discussion of Bourdieu's forms of capital. The objective structure, formed in the last instance by the relations of production and domination, comes to operate without an agent or identifiable aspects of domination. Nonetheless, it is important that we now turn to studies that are available on the situation of Muslims in ghettos of Kolkata, and will fathom whether the cause of ghettoization is only due to violence or are there other factors which play a significant part as well? We will then move on to a discussion of the politics of such marginalised people, whether every Muslim is effected in the same way, or are there sections which fare worse than others? How is the politics of collective identity focussed on certain aspects and certain people to the neglect of others?

Study of Muslim Ghettos³⁷ in Kolkata

Even though there are studies on slums and ghettos in various cities of the country, it is not possible to cover all of them here. The attempt however would be to provide an analysis and discussion of ghettos in Kolkata, the capital city of the state of West Bengal.

One of the first studies on the slums of Kolkata was conducted by N.K.Bose and MKA Siddiqui. And there has been constant interest on the slums or bustees of Kolkata since Independence and even before that. Some of the works such as, Furdey (1982), Pal (1986), Sen (1992) Unnayan(1992), A. Dutt et. al. (1994), Dutt et. al. (1998), Ray (2003) Dutta (2008) and Schenk (2011)³⁸ Most of the works focussed on

³⁷ Ghetto as defined by Kumar (2010) "as a physical space within the city which gets constituted historically as a symbol of socio-economic isolation of a particular community vis-à-vis the majority/other communities"(p. 52); the word 'bustees' is sometimes used in the place of slums. Slums are defined by the UN-Habitat as lacking any of the five amenities listed by them: "access to improved water supply, that is, which was sufficient, affordable and the procuring of which does not involve excessive effort; improved sanitation, that is, a system of disposal of waste, and a toilet shared by a 'reasonable' number of people; security of tenure, documents demonstrating people's right to live in the property they occupy, protected from eviction; durability of housing, a habitation of permanent and adequate structure; sufficient living room, which means not more than two people to a room" (UN-Habitat, *The Challenge of Slums*; q.f. Seabrook & Siddiqui, 2011; p. 118)

³⁸ Christine Furedy, "Whose responsibility? Dilemmas of Calcutta's bustee policy in the nineteenth century," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 5, 1982; Surajit Kumar Pal, "The Chamars of Tiljala slum: a preliminary study on some aspects of their socio-economic adaptation in an urban setting" in *Human Science* 35, 1986: 121-123; Unnayan, 1992. *Basti movement in Calcutta: Housing struggle of basti dwellers in the 1950's in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Unnayan); Ashok K. Dutt, Animesh Halder, and

the formation of slums, the occupation structure within, the caste structure and the prevalence of caste, religious and language factors in the segregation of the slums. It is not possible to do a survey of such a huge literature but a few salient points can be made. The genesis of the slums has been due to a variety of factors such as the setting up of factories (Pal, 1986)³⁹ or the migration of refugee population (Ray, 2003)⁴⁰ or due to rural urban linkages and push factors such as the violence that marked the period prior to Independence in states like Bihar (Ray, 2003)⁴¹. There is a wide variety of aspects which characterises the slums. There are 1, 490, 811 people living in the slums of Kolkata constituting one third of the population of the city⁴².

One of the more comprehensive works on the ghettos of Kolkata has been conducted by Seabrook and Siddiqui (2011). The site of the research is the Park Circus-Tangra-Topsia area of central Kolkata just near the 4 number Bridge and Science City with the nearest railway station being the Park Circus station. The authors conducted an ethnographic study working through the different profiles of individuals interviewed by them and at different sites identified by the researchers. The study was conducted with the help of Tiljala-SHED (Tiljala Society for Human and Educational Development), a Non-Governmental organisation devoted to the improvement of the condition of the slums not only in Tiljala but to various other slums of Central Kolkata. The areas covered were Beniapukur, Tiljala, Tangra and Topsia. The authors concentrate on the 'poorest' sections of the Muslim community which inhabit these slums, and mostly work as daily wage labourers in sandal making unit, rubber or plastic factories, leather tanneries, sorting out scraps, rickshaw pullers, housemaids, drivers, among other occupations that the respondents were engaged in. They are mostly paid below the minimum wage level and often their working hours

Chandreyee Mitra, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy in India with special reference to Calcutta," in Allen George Noble, et. al (eds.) 1998. *Regional development and planning for the 21st century*, (Bookfield, VT: Ashgate); Krishna Dutta, 2008. *Calcutta: A Cultural History* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books); Asok Sen, 1992 *Life and labor in a squatters' colony* (Calcutta: Centre of Studies in Social Sciences); Subha Ray, "Rural-urban migration: a case study of a squatter settlement," *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* 38 (2003) and W. Collin Schenk, 2011. "Slum Diversity in Kolkata" in Columbia Undergraduate Journal for South Asian Studies.

³⁹ Op. cit

⁴⁰ Op.cit.

⁴¹ Op.cit.

⁴² Vikram Sen, Director of Census Operations, *Census of India 2001:Provisional Population Totals, West Bengal* (West Bengal, Delhi: Controller of Publications, 2001), T-131.

stretch well beyond the prescribed limits. “Slums, trackless and impermanent, have no geography. They have no history either. They exist for a brief moment, a fugitive humanity, in city spaces; people who come from nowhere and subsequently vanish into thin air. Either the slum gains official recognition by the city authorities and evolves-often slowly and painfully- into a ‘community, or it is razed unceremoniously by police and municipal employees, and the people are dispersed to the four winds.”⁴³

The issue of displacement is something that seldom gets highlighted in the media. It is a common process whereby the slum dwellers move from one place to another, and it came to feisty confrontation in March 2012 when the slum dwellers in Nonadanga, near Ruby Hospital off Bypass resisted against their removal and stayed on despite their houses being burnt to ashes⁴⁴. This kind of struggle seldom gets this much of attention as the slum dwellers are often packed off with a meagre compensation without rehabilitation or rehabilitated in rooms which are hardly worth living in. The authors were trying to delve into what they called the “prosaic reality of everyday life”, the fight for existence and sustenance which these individuals have to engage in their everyday lives, where religion becomes a solace but the search for spirituality is something they don’t have time for. They are critical of the view that the poor condition of the Muslims in these ghettos propels them into arms of the extremist groups and they end up indulging in terrorist activities. The authors agree that there are anti-social elements who are unemployed and on the lookout for anything that will bring them a quick profit; however, they are greatly outnumbered by those who have to work twelve hours a day to earn enough to sustain their families and loved ones, to provide education and subsequently, empower their children to get out of the quagmire they find themselves in. The study is huge in its focus and straddles through individual lives, so it is quite difficult to summarise the work without doing injustice to the details of the lives that the ethnography has so painfully studied.

The population living in these ghettos are mostly migrants from various quarters of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and are mostly Urdu speaking with a spattering of

⁴³ Seabrook and Siddiqui (2011), p. 9

⁴⁴ The residents of Nonadanga have been protesting for over six months now and have faced brutal crackdown and courted arrest too. The researcher was part of one of the fact-finding teams that had visited the place to interview and learn about their struggle.

modified Bengali, or they have migrated from the rural areas of West Bengal seeking better jobs and lives. The Urdu speaking majority of the ghettos are in fact different from the majority of the Muslims which live in the rural areas which speak Bengali and are mostly engaged in agriculture related activities or have migrated to different metropolitans cities to engage themselves in artisanal work. The focus in this section would be to provide a summary of some the individual accounts gathered by the researchers in the area of Topsia and Tiljala.

Topsia as an area is marked by chaos. It is a site of a burgeoning Muslim population with a space that never seems to be enough as waves of population come to inhabit it. As a result, there are a great number of buildings and highrises with no space in between them, “unplanned and unauthorised, towers of cement now loom over the remaining self-built slum areas”⁴⁵. The area is characterised by malnutrition, untreated sickness, exploitative labour and sale of drugs and its addiction. The spectre of drugs looms large over the area and most of its inhabitants in this stretch of land are addicted to it. The drug dens are owned by people who enjoy a considerable amount of political clout, and as the authors understand, even the police are complicit with these drug suppliers as long as they are getting their share. There were a number of men who were addicted to drugs. The authors interviewed a few of them. While most of them spent a great amount of money on drugs and other substances of abuse, some of them had regular jobs and a family to take care of. They mostly responded as not being able to get rid of their addiction and if they stopped, it is very painful and they suffer from severe health problems. Many of them resorted to stealing in order to afford the drugs. One witnesses a predicament of the poor here that with an addiction that they can't give up on but have no money to buy them either, they resort to all sorts of anti-social activities to find easy money to buy what their body regularly requires, a shot or a gulp or a sniff of the stuff they can't get enough of. Then there also the artisans who had been de-skilled with the erosion of their traditional handicrafts and the authors reconstruct this aspect by interviewing such workers. Their lives have been reduced to that of penury. A major section of the population was engaged in the leather industry. However, with the shift of the location of the

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 11

industries to another place (Bantala), far from their residence, it rendered a lot of workers jobless. They have now shifted to working as daily wage labourers.

An interesting observation that emerges from the study is the role played by the women in the sustenance of families and playing the important role of keeping the family together. It is interesting that in a patriarchal structure, which is understood to be stringent within Islam, the reactions from all quarters regarding the pitiful condition of Muslim women is often based on the symbol of the women wearing the burqa. However, beyond the burqa is also the strength of a woman to make ends meet with the meagre income of her husband or supplement the family income by working in households herself. One such respondent, Rashida Begum, living in the area for the last three years with her son, his wife and grandchildren, pointed to the lack of security in a place like this. Her son was the only earning member of the family and worked as a rickshaw driver. She was educated till class VIII and had been working as a nurse and a helper in her prime. Now, they had to survive on her son's meagre income and it was only enough to buy three meals for the family. The children were educated through the school that was run by Tiljala-SHED, an NGO offering meals to the students who attended school. Rashida Begum did not want to live like this; if given a choice she would have wanted a much better life. "There is no security here. The government has plans to evict the people, since it wants to beautify the canal side. We cannot breathe freely for fear of who will come and molest us"⁴⁶. There are a number of such biographies from the area which highlight a common fate and life. No doubt many of the men are abusive, but there is an aspect of agency which the woman has when in the case of Rashida Begum she chose to leave her husband. The restricted mobility within the structure did not allow improving her condition but she did manage to raise a son. This is something common to many women from poor households who have to work in order to provide or supplement the family income. The authors go on to describe the increased prevalence of women in the making of sandals, or are employed as housemaids. This is in contrast to the male members of the locality who are unemployed, the huge population of the adolescents and young

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 16

adults who while away their time either playing cricket or doing nothing constructive.

A significant population of the children also work as rag pickers. Among the sample population, the researchers also interviewed few who had did not exactly suffer the drudgery of the greater share of the population in the area, but they lacked security, could easily fall back into poverty and had their children working after finishing a nominal level of education. This was the case with Imran, a boy of 19 working with in the sandal making factory, and there other who were of his age. He had left his studies to contribute to the family income and through their joint efforts they could buy a two room house four years back⁴⁷. As the authors aptly observe, “A tradition of child labour makes more sense to a family than prolonged period of study; and, indeed, the collective work of the family becomes the vehicle of upward mobility. It is easy to see the reason for resistance to education, even among people who want to rise in the world: all the pieties about learning freeze on the lips, the more so since not only Muslim crafts been systematically undermined but Muslims are denied into much of the modern sector.”(59) The temporary security that the collective efforts of the family provides helps them reach a status, not of the middle class, but something better than the wretched condition of the rest of the Muslim population. It also provides the avenue for the demand for education which is considered the key to progress, even though many of the educated end up doing the same jobs that their parents did or were doing.

Another ghetto identified by the researchers was Tiljala, a huge area with a huge number of slums. The Tiljala road is one of the most widespread slums in Kolkata and the population is 90% Muslim. After the *Thika*-Tenancy Act of 1981, the ownership of the land in which the slums were passed on to the government from the *zamindars and his thikadar* where the zamindar was removed from the equation and the *thikadar* asked to pay the government directly, and any decisions to raise the prices or evict a tenant had to be done through a government appointed controller. However, the incomplete implementation of the Act lead to the *thikadars* becoming the owners of the property⁴⁸. With the implementation of the Act and some World Bank funds provided to the slum, there have been better sanitation facilities provided and the slum

⁴⁷ Ibid 57.

⁴⁸ S. Roy, “Marginality in a mono-caste slum”, 106-7.

has grown in its area and magnitude. The women here sell vegetables to earn a living and also highlight their plight in not being able to send their children to schools as they don't often have enough to eat even though they have to sell food-items. The sense of insecurity regarding their children being sucked into the world of crime and drugs is something that haunts them, something that was found among the respondents of Topsia. The lands that are occupied by the tenants of a bustee are a valuable commodity for parties involved in construction, often illegal. The police, administrators and the contractors are complicit in the appropriation of lands from bustee dwellers with the promise of providing them with small apartments in the building. However, the apartments often given are often smaller than the hut they were living in, and they are often asked to relocate. Further, the contractors often leave the buildings unfinished, and one would find a lot of such unfinished projects in the ghettos, without any guarantee of its longevity once they have had their share of profits. Even though there are not many manufacturing units in Tiljala road, there are chappals or sandal making units which employs young adult males barely of the age of 18 or 19. While the workers earn somewhere in between 150-200 per day, their employers earn around 2000 in a day as recounted by a respondent.

A significant piece of information gathered from the study is the retaining of old traditional practices in terms of health care. The people revert to using folk medicine in the absence of enough money to afford modern forms of health care, often using "folk-medicine based on roots, plants, herbs, and tree bark"⁴⁹. The authors study the area known as Darapada, the village of drums which we knew to be a notorious one, a haven for criminals and anti-socials, and a site of frequent gang wars between hoodlums of different political factions. The area is inhabited by families who are engaged in making drums from treated intestines which are dried to form the skin of the drum. The population also is engaged in making wooden toys, and the average earnings as a respondent put it, was around 3000 to 4000 rupees a month. However, their trade was in despair as the fairs where they could sell their wares are held few times in a year. They have to sell door to door within the locality or areas within the precinct. But the biggest challenge lay in the flooding of the markets with the cheap

⁴⁹ Ibid. 147

Chinese toys that have been detrimental to such localised small handicrafts industries, which also exist in areas such as Basirhat, near the border with Bangladesh, known for such making of such toys forcing the artisans to migrate to the cities. It is not difficult to find individuals and families in the area living in abject poverty, and this poverty has an impact on the relationships they have with others. As one of the respondents Mumtaz puts it, “ We have lost the old relationships with sisters and brothers. We lost them and do not know where they are. In the crush of poverty, everything is forgotten, even loved ones. relationships fall apart and families separate, go their own ways. If I ask my relatives even for a plate of rice, they will say ‘Oh today I cooked less than usual, how can I give?’”⁵⁰ .

There is a school near the graveyard on Tiljala road. It is a pre-primary school meant for children “living in the social penumbra”, that is belonging to the most downtrodden sections. The children interviewed had great ambitions of becoming successful in life, and the hatred towards men drinking, shouting and quarrelling was something they detested the most. They had parents who worked in menial jobs to provide their wards with education and an iota of hope and opportunity to make it big in life. The children are responsible and even help their parents with the chores (ibid.: 160-161). As the headmaster of the school opines, “the school provides some scope for poor children. They are much more intelligent than they are given credit for, but the opportunities for that intelligence to flower do not exist. Many of the children go with their mother to help out as tiny maidservants, and at home, they have their own duties. The fathers are often absent or drinking. Although most men work conscientiously, some have no responsibility. They marry someone else; and when they tire of the new one, they come back.”⁵¹

The authors then move their attention to huge number of unemployed youths in the area. They interview one such youth named Iqbal, a man of twenty five, married and unemployed. He dropped out of school when he was ten and started working in leather manufacturing units, shuttling from one job to another. However, with the closure of the units in the area, he was left jobless. However, he found what he understands as more lucrative job of a henchman for the CPI(M), where his job

⁵⁰ Ibid. 150

⁵¹ Ibid. 162

included extorting money from the local businessmen and residents in the name of the donations to the party fund in exchange for the security of the neighbourhood. The protection is also extended to smugglers, 'anti-socials' and thieves where they have to part with a percentage of their earnings, for both the local henchmen and the political party involved. However, for individuals like Iqbal, it is the money to which their allegiance to and not the political party or its ideology. While Seabrook and Siddiqui (2011) posit that there has been improvement in the lives of many families in the recent years with the structure of houses being made of concrete and a stable income even though meagre. But this is achieved largely by pooling the income of all members of the family. So, the gains are achieved by getting children also to contribute to the family income, such that their education is affected. Hence, minor improvements in standards of living are thus accompanied by major losses in improving capabilities of youth which will ensure intergenerational socio-economic mobility. However, the present conditions only facilitate social reproduction of poor education and low levels of economic security which leads to the development deficit.

The Politics of Collective Identity

This aspect of political mobilisation and formation of ghettos has been examined by Kumar (2010). In his study of a small sample of groups belonging to different socio-economic strata and living in the ghetto of Zakirnagar, in Okhla, New Delhi. The respondents were administered certain questions and their responses recorded. The author also interviewed the respondents in depth on various aspects related to the politics, the perception of insecurity and role of the police and administration in victimising them, and also on their religious orientation (the sects they belonged to as well as their practices). The author comes up with certain interesting findings in his study. Arguing against the representation of socio-economic condition of Muslims vis-à-vis other socio-religious categories as reflected in the SCR, he understands that a study of the internal economic differentiations within the Muslim community would bring to light the dominance of the political sphere by the Muslim elites. A similar aspect was tackled by Seabrook and Siddiqui (2011) when they described the collusion of the elites in keeping the impoverished in the position they were in and

siphoning off the profits from such population. The elites within the community are understood as interacting with the elites of the dominant majority (Hindu upper castes) as well as the deprived sections among the majority (the dalits). It is important to understand how does the process of ghettoization take place? For Breman (2002), ghettoization takes place in two parts. Firstly the people live in blocks dominated by their own community and in case of any violence or rift; the leaders among them take the cudgels to resolve the matter. However, in the second round the resolution becomes impossible and the members are driven out of the locality (ibid.: 1486). The major reason behind such segregation of the population is understood by the author as a consequence of the networks of dialogue or institutions that facilitated such communication ceasing to exist. The networks that Breman and Kumar are hinting towards is the declining presence of workers or the trade unions and other such institutions which had been the platform for dissent and resistance of a wide spectrum of the population. The decline of such institutions has been detrimental in the “precarious existence” of the informal sector and the unemployed as the modes of expressing their anger and discontent have been shut out. The consequence of such a decline has been understood as an opportunity for the ruling class to use such sections in communal violence as shown by Breman in his study of declining trade unions and the rise of communal violence. Kumar notes that trend is also to be found in the Muslim community where the elites use the unemployed and the informal labour for their satiate their own interests . The ghettoization is often forced as in the aftermath of communal riots and pogroms; groups and families are compelled to shift to Muslim dominated areas⁵². “Many middle class Muslims too, prefer living in such areas although the levels of infrastructural provisions are poor, and even though they can afford living in more ‘posh’, ‘upper’ class Hindu-dominated areas”⁵³. The studies on Gujarat (Breman, 2002) and Delhi (JMI, 2006) posit that the concentration of the Muslims in particular areas is mostly due insecurity. However, such enclaves instil a narrow focus and become ‘insular’ in outlook and become the viable ground for the

⁵² Jahangirabad Media Institute, Action Aid and Indian Social Institute , 2006. *National Study on Socio-economic Condition of Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute

⁵³ Ibid. 109

conservative forces to strengthen then hold on the community⁵⁴. The ghettos also become the basis of the formation of a collective identity based on religion as seen in the case of Zakirnagar where the Hindu population gradually moved out of the area and turning it into an area with a ‘homogenous’ population. However, the author is against such homogenisation which makes invisible the internal economic difference within the area, between the impoverished and the well off. The author now turns to the perception of victimisation in the aftermath of riots or encounters that took place in 2008 and asks certain questions such as, “Are there Muslims who are affected by such situations more or less than others? What kind of distinctions exists between community emerging out of the production process? are problems of inaccessibility, deprivation and wretchedness shown by the Sachar Commission same for every Muslim? Or is it reflective of a sharp vertical polarisation in Muslim society, an accumulation of benefits by a very small minority leaving the vast mass impoverished?”⁵⁵ The author acknowledges the data on the poor socio-economic condition of the Muslims vis-à-vis the other socio-religious communities but also laments the lack of data on the internal differentiation of the Muslim community. For him, the presence of data only in comparison to other SRC’s becomes a “methodological issue, and a contentious one, because firstly it determines the nature of the discourse on Muslims in the country, which is generally vis-à-vis an ‘other’ religious community; secondly, it constructs collective identity as a dominant political paradigm of such a large group of people who comprise the second largest religious group in the country; thirdly, it rejects any possibility of conflict within the community along class lines and denies class as the determining principle of the politics that the elite of the community engages in”⁵⁶.

The explication of the processes of the politics of the elite has been reflected in his findings. He posits that there exist two kinds of violence, “one form of violence is subtle, which affects the physicality of the person when they are picked up by the police and are kept in interrogation rooms without any notice by the state... it also affects their mental structure when they are frisked, or their movements monitored

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ (Kumar, 2010: 70)

⁵⁶ Ibid. :71

and their lives under constant surveillance. The section of the community affected by such violence is constituted of the students and the well off, belonging to the middle class or higher. But there is another form of violence which targets the impoverished class constituted by rickshaw pullers, construction workers and their like who are picked up by the police frequently, held in the jail and released afterwards, it could be a few hours or few days. These are people who view such routine arrests by police as part of their lives and don't concern themselves much to raise a voice of protest against it, as they have a hand to mouth existence and cannot afford to lose a day of work. Often the labourers who are arrested are found working in illegal building sites owned by the better off Muslim contractors. As one respondent remarked, that the police arrests them frequently, and they have to wait for their master to arrive and pay the police officer a huge sum to get them out and start working on the site again. The reaction that emanates from such different forms of violence is alarming. While the first form of violence evokes popular response, the second form of violence often goes unnoticed. For the author it shows how the construction of violence takes place in the popular imagination and the lack of response from the wider community presents the acceptance of such forms of violence, and the lack of rhetorical value in such violence which is found in first kind of violence. And extending his argument even further, he makes an important contribution in highlighting the class dynamics within the Muslim community, where there is a popular response for one kind of violence and not for the other; it reflects how internal polarisation and strife is never allowed to sharpen. In the first instance of violence, it becomes an issue for the community at large but in the everyday violence one finds no such reaction, no such mobilisation on the basis of religion as it would expose the unequal relations existing within the community. Most of the daily wage labourers interviewed by the author had faint ideas of what had transpired in the Batla house encounter while the students and the better off sections knew in depth about the situation, and felt a haunting sense of insecurity in the face of such victimisation. For the labourers the insecurity emanated from the shutting down of the area and the lack of work. Their sense of attachment to the area was also limited to work in contrast to the educated and better off sections which had a territorial basis to their identity formation.

However, as the author posits the impoverished sections more often than not go along with the politics of the Muslim elite and participate in it. The author further sheds light on the lack of protest on the part of the labourers against the violence inflicted upon them by the police and the violence they suffer in the unequal relations of the workplace. This is substantiated by the field study that the author conducted in the area. However, it is not always that the impoverished and the marginalised sections lack organisation and agency. They do organise themselves to criticise the politics of the leadership of the Muslim community as seen in the politics of the Pasmanda Muslims. Though the politics is again based on a collective identity with no insight into the internal differentiation among the Pasmanda Muslims themselves, still it presents us with an insight into the movement within the Muslim community itself against the dominant political paradigm established by the Muslim elites. Further, it will help probe into the question: under what conditions does a population of people extremely marginalised both from inside and outside the community, protest or raises its voice against the established structure?

The Politics of the Pasmanda⁵⁷ Muslims in Bihar

The 'Pasmanda' Muslims is the term used to put the OBC's and Dalits of the Muslim community within a single name. The politics of the Pasmanda Muslims has always been either directed at challenging the Ashraf politica or at changing the living condition of a few. In Bihar, 9.9% of the total Indian Muslim population lives with the population being among the poorest. It is often understood that the Muslims living in Bihar were converts from middle castes or lower castes of the Hindu community. In the records, there are 28 castes divisions among the Muslims of Bihar. Some of the castes are "such as Abdal, Bhathiara, Chik, Churihara, Dafalange, Dafale, Dhunia, Faqir, Gadihar, Dhobi, Nai or Salaami, Qassar, Darzi or Idrisi, Julaha or Momin, Kasai, Lalbegi or Bhangi or Mahtar, Madari, Miriasin, Mirshikar, Mukro, Nalband,

⁵⁷ "*Pasmanda* is a Persian word which means 'backward'. Initially, during the Indian National Movement this unit of social distinction had its existence in the form of '*momin*', which means 'the faithful men of honour' or '*ansar*'. The category *Momin* included all the Muslim castes exempting *Ashrafs*." Q.f. Ali (2010) "Politics of the 'Pasmanda' Muslims" in *History and Sociology of South Asia* 4(2). p.- 129

Nat, Pamaria, Rangrez, Rayeen or Kunjra, Sayee and Thakurai”⁵⁸ are listed in the central OBC list. Another report suggests that there exist 43 caste groups within the Muslims. The report was prepared by Asian Research Development Institute (ADRI, Patna) which had carried out a survey. The findings were something similar to what has been discussed above. The incidence of landlessness among the Muslims was very high in Bihar and the significant number of the population had small landholdings. The landholdings being so small, many of the landholders have no other option but to lease out the land. In another report, the Agricultural Census of Bihar, “the average landholding was 2.32 acres. The survey finds the average size of landholding of cultivating Muslim households to be much lower, at 1.91 acres. Further, barely 8.2 per cent of the Muslim households in rural Bihar have landholdings over 2.0 acres. The percentage of Muslim households having at least five acres of land (generally considered to be the minimum size of an economic holding) is minuscule. The survey also finds that although land ownership is much lower for rural Muslim households than for the general population, relatively better irrigation facilities available to the former in some districts partially compensates for this disadvantage. According to the same report, while 28.4 per cent of rural Muslim workers are landless labourers, 19.9 per cent of Bihari Muslims are acutely poor.”⁵⁹ The acute poverty of the Muslim community is also reflected in the per capita income being a lowly Rs. 46 40 in rural areas and 6320 Rs in urban areas. 49.5% in rural areas and 44.8% in urban areas, the Muslims live below the poverty line. Along with these different levels of marginalisation presented to us through the statistics, posits that the a huge percentage of rural (41.5%) and urban (24.9%) Muslims are in debts and the average outstanding loans are 6790 and 4990 for rural and urban areas respectively⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ Gol. *Mandal Commission Report of the Backward Classes Commission. 1980.* New Delhi: Akalank Publications; c.f. *Ibid.* p. 131. The author also noted that the list prepared by the Mandal commission of 21 Muslims communities as OBC’s he were erroneous as the Dalit and OBC Muslims were compounded together in state government reports along with Hindu OBC’s.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ This data presented by the author is for the overall Muslim population but he contends that since 80% of the Muslims in Bihar are either OBC’s or Dalits, the debt percentage is tilted against this section.

Ali points to the existence of a fracture within Muslim politics in Bihar ever since the Independence between the Indian nationalist Muslim elites and the group which had joined with the Muslim league. In the absence of such Muslims nationalist after 1960's, there had emerged a newly formed plank of political mobilisation- religion. Again describing Urdu as not the language of the masses but the elites, he goes onto show that around 61.6% of the Muslim elites are Sayyad and Sheikhs while only 8% of the elites belong to the Momin (julaha, or weavers) and Rayeen castes. The majority (91.2%) of the elites live in urban areas⁶¹. The dominance of the elite Muslims in Bihar is shown by Ali in the political overwhelming presence in politics. The strategic alliance between the upper castes of Hindus and the Ashrafs has been used by Congress first and later by the regional parties. In the Bihar Assembly in 1995, 17 out of 23 members were upper caste Muslims. The percentage of the Muslims increased in the coming elections, 22.58% in 2000 and 31.25% in 2005⁶², but the percentage still remained low. However, as important as it is to focus on the upper caste dominance within the Muslim community, it is also important to juxtapose it with the representation of Muslims vis-à-vis the Hindus of the region. The author then goes onto discuss the assertion of identity by the Pasmada Muslims in the political sphere of the region going beyond the narrow politics foisted on religion, by the Muslim elites and it fawned a 'communalism' which made the Muslims susceptible to attacks from the Hindutva forces. Rather, the attempt from the platform of the Pasmada politics was to focus on social reforms, employment, education and health. The focus on these aspects could instil a secular basis to the demands of the Muslims and provide a platform for a secular social structure to emerge going beyond the politics of religion⁶³.

VI

The Curious Case of West Bengal

⁶¹ Ali Ashraf, 1982. *The Muslim Elite*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publications; c.f. Ali (2010: 134)

⁶² The data has been procured from the Election Commission of India's list of winning candidates and the caste based analysis conducted by Ali Anwar, 2005. Pasmada Awaz. In *Pasmada Muslim Mahaz*.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 143

The question then emerges that in the absence of communal riots in a state or region, what are the objective relations within the structure of dominance, and how do they get reproduced? Is a state with less frequency of violence a haven for the Muslim minorities? With no existence of a rabid communalism, does it reflect positively of the operational secularism in the state? What is the relation between the socio-economic and the political in such a state with no events of violence in contemporary history?

The aforementioned questions provide a good entry point to try and probe into the condition of Muslims in the state of West Bengal. The state stands in contrast to the states of Gujarat, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh which display a high incidence of communal violence. It has been relatively free of such large scale incidence of communal violence ever since the 1992 riots post the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Nonetheless, the attempt in the previous chapters has been to bring to the fore the poor socio-economic condition of the Muslims in Bengal throughout history as found in the literary works of some of Muslim intelligentsia during the pre-1947 period. The post-1947 period also saw a phenomenal marginalisation of the community in terms of the trade and occupations they were engaged in, and how they got concentrated into few enclaves, or ghettos. From this vantage point, we engaged with the hitherto socio-economic condition of the Muslims in West Bengal focussing on the educational, economic status, as well as the lack of credit facilities available to them and the lack of access to physical infrastructure reconstructed through primarily the Sachar Committee Report (2006). The objective or structural violence that is operational within the state, marginalising the Muslim community cannot be denied. It can be seen in the condition of Muslims in the rural sector where the claim has been of Muslims being benefited from the land reforms. However, we tried to engage with this aspect and found that it was not the case and the Muslims have the lowest percentage of cultivable land and are mostly engaged in the non-agricultural sector where they have lower earnings than the other socio-religious communities.

However, this comparison of the Muslim community as a whole is misleading. There exists certain OBC's in the state which have a distinct movement of their own. The state of West Bengal prepared a list of backward classes on "the basis of

occupation with which social and economic backwardness is associated” (Mondal, 2003)⁶⁴. 8 OBC communities from the Muslim community occupy the list of 60 OBC’s identified by the state. The communities in question are jolha (including Ansari, momin), fakir (including sain), hawari, dhunia, patidar, kasai, nashya sheikh and pahadia Muslim. One such organisation which upholds the cause of the OBC’s within the state is Uttar Bango Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samiti (UBAMSS). It has been on the forefront of a movement to get a OBC community, the nashyas, the suffix of sheikh (Serial No 55, Office Order No 84-BCW/RC/MR-302/97, dated 1.3.1999), a surname used by ashrafs but as a prefix. And they are now recognised as the nashya shaikhs. However, as the study conducted by Mondal (2003) posits, their condition is similar to what has been reflected in the SCR. They have a meagre representation at the political level and the primary reason as understood by the author is the lack of education and socio-economic backwardness. In the study of a village, among the nashyas “40.27 per cent is illiterate, 22.82 per cent is simply literate, 29.86 per cent has primary education, 6.04 per cent has secondary education and only 1.01 per cent has higher secondary/ college education”(4896). The nashyas lack a middle class and not represented in the white collar jobs. They are also looked down upon by the higher caste ahsraf communities who keep a distance from them (ibid.). The nashyas basically trace their lineage from the rajbansis of the region of North Bengal, especially Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling.” Actually they are considered to be the descendants of those Muslims who entered the fold of Islam from various indigenous communities of north Bengal, viz, kochs, mecha and rajbansi” (ibid.). They share the language, customs and culture with the wider rajbansi community of the area, but at the same time they also identify with the wider Islamic tradition of the state. Their Islamicization happened in the two decades prior to 1947. This sharing of their ethnic identity with the wider rajbansi community along with their socio-economic backwardness and political marginalisation has pushed the nashya community to become conscious of their position and organise themselves to seek special rights and empowerment. This movement is similar to the Pasmanda movement and gives us an insight into the fractures within the Muslim community

⁶⁴ Seik Rahim Mondal. “Social Structure, OBCs and Muslims” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(46), Nov.- 15-21, 2003; pp. 4892-4897

also. However, it also provides us with an understanding that the construction of the Muslim community as a whole is not without contestations. And as the author argues, there are various divisions on the basis of ethnic, social and cultural distinctiveness among the Muslims. One finds social inequality among them and there is a hierarchy which exists within the community. And it is in the light of such hierarchy that one can see a number of movements arising among the Muslims in India (ibid. 4897).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to present a descriptive account of Muslims in West Bengal as emerging from the research after SCR. We also have tried to see how far Bourdieu's formulation of kinds of capital facilitates our understanding of the situation. We have then tried attempted to explain the issues of communal violence in relation to systemic violence. Lastly, we have broadened the scope of the discussion by enquiring into the basis of collective identity of Muslims against the stratification by caste and class, and the politics of intra-communal inequalities. Here, we compared Bihar and West Bengal. This is central to the question of why deprivation and destitution do not necessarily lead to protests in some regions.

Conclusion

At the start of this study, we began with a few personal questions related to the researcher. They have not been answered yet since the questions engender complex and intricate relationships of the state, individual and community. The limited nature of this study does not do justice to such a relationship. Still we have, through the entire gamut of this study, touched upon various aspects related to condition of Muslims in West Bengal, and sought an explanation through the available literature. However, it is not enough to provide a concrete picture of the reality, the lived everyday reality of the people whose lives were covered in the course of this study. They do form a part of the disinterested knowledge system, but their lives are not moulded by disinterested structures-social, economic and political.

We delved a bit into the historical formation of the Bengali Muslims, the advent of Islam to the Bengal frontier and the changes it brought in its social and economic structure. The changes were positive as the indigenous people were taught the basic knowhow of agricultural cultivation. This was part of a strategy by the Mughal state to extract revenues from the virgin lands of Bengal, especially east Bengal. In the 19th century, there emerged the Islamic revivalist movements in Bengal to purge Islam of the un-Islamic practices. Though in some instances it was violent, it was directed at the exploitative feudal structure. It also went a long way into forming the ‘umma’ or community of the Muslims there. It was this communitarian feeling which informed their support for the separate state in 1905. This was also the time when the Hindu revivalist movement under the name of Swadeshi movement started gathering steam and was launched full throttle through the works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya and others. They sought to delineate a separate ‘cultural’ basis for the Hindu religion, one in which the Muslim peasants had no part. This was the basis of the cultural and literary hegemony which was established in the years to come. The ‘bhadralok’ as a class was dominant in the economic and political sphere also along with the overwhelming presence in the cultural sphere made possible. They were among the first to take the advantage of English education provided by the colonial rulers. Their rentier and zamindar background helped them in their academic pursuits.

There emerged in the wake of such cultural assertion a constructed image of the Muslim in the literary writings of the Hindu intellectuals. There were processes through which the Bengali Muslim writings were marginalised, the most significant of which was the purging of the language of the Persian and Urdu words, a definite marker of Mussalmani Bangla. Rather, the increased usage of Sanskrit words was encouraged and used in the writings. However, there was a strong response from the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia against such an understanding of Muslims. They were critical of the Hindu litterateurs, and sought to create a platform of their own to propagate ideas of equity of access and opportunity. They were critical of the dogmatic doctrines of Islam, and asked the common person to look beyond them, look at the exploitation and suffering caused due to the unequal relation they bear with the landlords. The period of the 1930's was marked by recession. This hit the jute manufacturers of east Bengal the worst. Their entire business was dependant on the credit flow from the trader-mahajans and trader-talukdars, who were not forthcoming in tending them with loans. The foreign capital which used to find its way into the small peasant economy of east Bengal, was cash strapped and could not provide the required money into the credit channels. In the absence of zamindars of considerable influence, the source of credit dried up with the flight of trader-mahajans and the inability of the talukdar mahajans to provide the required cash. This changed the power equations in the eastern region. However, the same was not the case in the western and the northern region of Bengal. The source of credit in these regions was the zamindars themselves and hence, they had managed to tide over the crisis. In the event of such differences in effect on the economy of the regions, the politics which unfolded was also different in the region. The unravelling of an organised peasant movement under the aegis of the Krishak Praja Party with the support of the Muslim intelligentsia, the peasant as a contender for power emerged in the 1930's. The first elections were won by the KPP in 1937 after the Communal Award of 1935. Beyond the election of the KPP to power, there was the rise of the peasants against the feudal landlords and moneylenders which often used to turn violent. The mobilising strategy in such a situation, what Partha Chatterjee calls the 'peasant-communal ideology', was based on religion since the majority of the peasants were Muslims as opposed to the mostly Hindu landlords and moneylenders. The contribution of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia in this regard was undeniable. The clarion call for a distinct

‘Bengali Muslim culture’ in order to coalesce together the masses to rise up and question the structure which was responsible for their poor socio-economic condition was given by the intelligentsia through their writings. The intelligentsia was also instrumental in establishing the Dacca University to improve the educational standards of the Muslim peasants in east Bengal. The interesting part is that the violent peasant uprising in the period prior to the second Partition of Bengal were identified as ‘communal’ to the chagrin of many academics who view it as a peasant uprising against the feudal structure. The ‘riots’ of Tippera and Noakhali along with the Great Calcutta Killing have become inseparable from the event of Partition and the ensuing violence. The politics of the Bengali Muslim peasants was constructed backwards from the such incidents of violence. The Partition in 1947 was not only marked by violence but it was an event marked by political manoeuvring and haste for power and control. The peasant uprisings which had come to change the face of Bengal, in its interaction with organised politics of Muslim league were routed into a different demand, a demand for Pakistan. Here too the common peasant was cheated as the promise of separate state for Bangla Pakistan was not kept. Instead the powers came to be vested in a central leadership in Pakistan.

The period post-1947 saw the processes through which the Muslim population in West Bengal was reduced to a miniscule minority and through violence and other subtle mechanisms, the Muslim population got increasingly concentrated in certain districts and areas. The population of Muslims which had stayed back after the Partition mostly belonged to the impoverished classes as most of the middle class and the rich had migrated to East Pakistan.

In the post-Independence period one of the major planks on which the left strategy hinged onto was the land reform programme it carried out in the state in the 70’s. Without a shade of doubt it has been credible and has benefited a huge section of the population. The Muslims have been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the programmes. But as the 61st round of NSS data suggests, there is a huge difference between owning land and cultivating it. Even though almost all the Muslims in the rural areas own land, only about half of the Muslim population is into cultivation. Rather they are mostly concentrated in the non-agricultural activities. There could be many factors for such a trend but chief among them is the small size of landholdings,

lack of credit and marketing channels to sell their product. Here we come at an ironical situation, even though the earnings in the non-agricultural sector is lower than the other socio-religious communities, still the Muslims are concentrated in this sector. It can be argued that the push factors from the agricultural sector are more than the pull factor of the non-agricultural sector. Also, there could be discrimination in practice in the non-agriculture sector.

While the first chapter tried to locate the discussion on the socio-economic condition of the Muslims within the writings of Bengali Muslim intelligentsia and their wretched condition in the post-1947 period within the state of West Bengal, the second chapter tried to bring to the fore the hitherto condition of Muslims subjected to what has been defined as systemic or objective violence within the state. The lack of credit facilities, the changing condition of handicrafts, trade and agricultural industry in the wake of liberalisation of the economy, the concentration of the Muslim population in own account work, and the existence within a cycle of poverty and educational lag, reinforce each other. Education has been seen as many to be the key in the development of the Muslim community as it would help generate social and cultural capital and can be translated into economic capital. These are the aspects that have been explored in the discussion on the 'forms of capital' whereby the educational lag is discussed threadbare within the analytical framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu. Even though the theory propounded by Bourdieu was for a different socio-cultural-historical context, it nonetheless provides us with an inventory of concepts we can derive from. We come across the process of social reproduction and the advantage that is provided by the cultural and social capital to the dominant partner, and in the post-1947 period, it was the upper caste Hindus who emerged as the dominant. They took advantage of the educational facilities provided to them since the 19th century which was only possible because of the already existing dominance in land relations especially in east Bengal. In the period after Partition of the province, with the shuffling of the administration and other institutions of power, the Bengali 'bhadralok' came to occupy important positions of power as mentioned earlier. According the SCR report the Muslims in West Bengal are mostly concentrated in own account work and in the informal sector. As the report further goes on to show that the representation of Muslims in the government jobs is dismal

and they lag behind in education with a high dropout rate. The high dropout rate has been understood by a few authors as a result of the need for child labour to supplement the family income. Even though the condition in some areas is pitiful, such as the slums in Kolkata, there still exists a demand for education among the impoverished section. The factors behind the demand for education are many and vary according to the gender of the student. In the field of education, the importance of madrasas has been undermined for quite a while by the dominance of the mainstream, secular education. However, the madrasas still remain a chief source of education for students who cannot afford to study in private schools. One of the more important functions of the madrasas is that it is the bastion of the formation of Muslim community under attack from various quarters. Nonetheless, it is important here to bring to light the lack of recognition of madrasa certificates by certain mainstream educational institutions, and an intervention is required to make the acceptance of the madrasa degree at par with other degrees offered within mainstream education.

The emphasis on education has been found in the ethnographic studies used in the course of the work. However, the achievement of higher education and the generation of social and cultural capital within the current position of the Muslims within the educational 'field' in the analytical framework envisaged by Bourdieu would be difficult. The lack of economic capital which could have provided the means to generate social and cultural capital is missing among many of the Muslims; in the absence of cultural and social capital among the Muslims, it becomes difficult to procure economic capital. It is in such a predicament that the marginalised condition of the Muslim population comes to the fore. But there is another aspect which has been detrimental in the present condition of Muslims in various states. It is violence which is often used to hamper the upward mobility of the Muslims, and it came to the fore in the various focus group discussions held by Sikand and Ali. The violence is always organised and seldom spontaneous. The pogrom in Gujarat, 2002 is a chilling reminder of the organised nature of the violence, but there have been precedents to such violence which have been on the rise since 1970's. The targeting of shops, business, and livelihood of the Muslims is a manifestation of the structural relations which are sought to be sustained through the use of violence.

Violence has also been found to be a factor in the formation of ghettos. Ghettos come to be formed by a homogenous population over a period of time, and at this instance we are looking at the formation of Muslim ghettos. As the study on ghettos of Kolkata suggests that there are other processes at work too. Normally, the ghettos form where there are industrial bases or factories are present. Nonetheless, there is a process, a web in which the poorer sections living in the ghettos are stuck, dominated by local elites in guise of a henchman, or a politician who decides on their politics and sucks the last amount of profit from the people. The local elites work in collusion with the elites of the majority community. But, in the absence of violence in the state of West Bengal, it has been considered better for Muslims than let's say Gujarat. But the socio-economic condition of the Muslims in the state tells us a different story altogether. They fare worse than the SC's/ST's in certain aspects, and in the rural sector, as discussed in the second chapter, they are in a precarious situation, with the least amount of land cultivated, and the lowest earning in the non-agricultural sector. Au fond, the data and studies seem to support the findings of the SCR that the Muslim community suffer from a development deficit in India in general, and West Bengal in particular. The development deficit is a product of wider structural processes. The political marginalisation with few Muslims in the legislative assembly, subtle forms of discrimination in terms of wages paid or the miniscule representation in government jobs and in higher education, or the low level of credit flow to the community, indicates the marginalisation affected at the level of the structure. However, the interests of the entire 'community' are represented by a handful of Muslim elites. The ghettos become a veritable source of identity, a collective one subsuming the individual identities and schisms within the community itself are glossed over. It is in this context that the violence and victimisation of a population are incisively analysed to bring out the difference in reaction of the community. Selective appropriation of events and victims to mobilise the general opinion against the state and certain groups has become the underlying factor of the politics practised by the Muslim elite, sometimes deliberately turning a blind eye towards the suffering and the routine violence suffered by the casual daily wage labourers at the hands of the police and other authorities. Such routinized violence opens up vistas of criticism of the politics of reservation itself. As we visited the biographies of different individuals invisible in the purple haze of development and growth which has come to

mark the country, we understood the necessity of not having street lights in the areas such as Tiljala, Topsia, Tangra and Nonadanga in Kolkata. It is a clever ploy since it helps make invisible the sections which are a complete anti-thesis to the juggernaut of development championed within the country.

Interestingly, however, there are contestations within the Muslim politics which is revealing and insightful at the same time. It helps us understand the politics of collective identity as practiced by the Muslim elites, and the mobilisation is often on the basis of victimisation of a certain section and not others. This section which goes along with the politics of the elites often does not raise a voice in protest against the victimisation both at the hands of the state as well as the local Muslim elites; it is rather suppressed by the diversion of the political energy towards issues that are given evokes a common response from the community formed on the basis of religion. The issues of class relations seldom take centre stage. Au contrary, religion as the basis of community is understood as the bastion of security from the onslaught of right wing politics from the Hindutva combine. And it is here that the objective violence, the violence immanent to the structure which has victims suffering every day, from the woman who has to be vigilant to ensure that her child is not sucked into the world of crime to the construction labourer who is routinely picked up by the police, these instances of violence may get invisible in the mobilisation of the wider community for instances of victimisation that exist beyond this world of everyday violence.

Nonetheless, in the case of West Bengal and other states in India, one of the perceived resolutions to the problems, albeit temporary, has been reservation for Muslims, recommended by the Ranganathan Mishra Committee Report of the National Commission of Religious and Linguistic Minorities (2007). The committee put forward the recommendation of 10 per cent reservation for Muslims, but it has been interpreted at different levels. Soon after, the West Bengal government implemented the recommendation decreeing a 10 per cent reservation for 53 backward communities among Muslims. This was within the quota for OBC's (the rest 7 per cent of the 17 per cent OBC reservation was for Hindu OBC's). But it was challenged in High Court and the case remains pending without any sort of benefits accruing to the Muslims. The hitherto incumbent government which replaced the three decade old predecessor had ordered a survey in 2010. A similar decree was

passed by the central government of the country announcing 4.5 per cent reservation for the Muslims in elite institutions which was challenged in Andhra High Court and refused a stay order by the Supreme Court. The court refusal of the implementation of such reservation is that it is unconstitutional; and that there wasn't enough evidence furnished by the government which would make for a strong case for reservation of Muslims¹. Interestingly as the recommendation and the implementation remain in a state of limbo, the lack of specific and accurate information has been something that recurs throughout Indian history when it comes to inquiry about Muslims. Even if it was there, it never made one sit up and recognise the condition of Muslims before the Sachar Committee Report². For some academics, reservation becomes necessary in a society like India where the disadvantaged groups have been victims of marginalisation throughout history, and reservation would help in producing a middle class which would be the agents of change and development of the overall community³, and given that they are equally disadvantaged as the SC's/ST's are, where the latter outperform the Muslims in some sectors of employment, the case for reservation for Muslims becomes stronger. The precedence of such a procedure are the improved socio-economic indicators of the disadvantaged groups SC's/STs, and also in some southern states where reservation for Muslims has helped in the taking giant strides towards greater equity. However, there exists a section which understands that reservation is not the solution; rather, what becomes necessary is the policy level interventions to generate enough resources, to facilitate more investment in human capital and infrastructure; to generate more information for better accountability and ensure a better functioning of the democracy. Another view is that the reservation should not end becoming a tool of political manoeuvring but that there should be a more nuanced, thread bare understanding of reservation or 'positive discrimination'⁴ before it is implemented with a clear foresight of reservation taking a long time to bring in changes and provide some sort of level playing field for the

¹ "Quota govt caught short on Homework", reported by Samanwaya Roy in The Telegraph. June 12, 2012. p. 4

² The unavailability of the Gopal Singh Committee report is a case in point. It was released in sections by independent journals such as Milli Gazette and Muslim India.

³ (Khalidi, 2006)

⁴ "Positive discrimination" is defined by Thomas E. Weisskopf as "preferential selection of members of under-represented ethnic communities (communities that share common characteristics based on race, caste, tribe, religion which have been ascribed since birth) to esteemed and desirable positions in society" (Weisskopf, 2010, p. 289)

disadvantaged groups⁵. Weisskopf (2010) argues that with the policy of ‘positive discrimination’ there emerge certain caveats which have to be taken into consideration. The performance of a candidate from the disadvantaged community preferentially chosen is a crucial determinant in the efficiency of the policy. In his view the disadvantaged groups are ‘*ipso facto*’ poorly equipped as compared with the more ‘advantaged’ groups in terms of education, employment etc. and thus it becomes a problem to identify the most ‘promising’ candidate among the disadvantaged groups. Thus he posits certain policy level safeguards to ensure the proper and efficient functioning of the reservation policy (p. 307). Some of the recommendations made are to do with how nuanced the procedure to choose the candidate must be; policy to be implemented in sectors where there is a scope for the chosen member of the disadvantaged community to produce social and human capital which is necessary; implementation in well-endowed institutions which would help the member to reach the upper strata; identification of those under qualified candidates who are most likely to succeed if chosen; and most importantly provide the chosen candidate with enough human and financial support⁶.

At the level of politics, there have emerged contestations within the Muslim community regarding the implementation of reservations among Muslims. While one section wants reservation for the entire community, there is a dissenting section which disagrees with the politics of elite Muslims political and religious leadership. The politics of the Pasmanda Muslims in Bihar and the nashya sheikh in West Bengal rooting for their socio-economic development in the face of discrimination suffered at the hands of the upper-caste leadership and the marginalisation at the level of structure itself are examples of such contestations. These sections within the Muslim community rose up to protest and make their voice heard by organising themselves, not only against the elites of the majority religion within the country but against the elites within their community itself. As an academic has observed that these contestations within the community have gone a long way into questioning the monolithic representation of the Muslims in the politics and academics also proving that such a representation had no ‘empirical validity’. Further, “the standard categories used for reservation in India faces varied challenges and counter challenges

⁵ Ibid.p. 308

⁶ Ibid. 307-8

from Muslims, which reshuffle religion, caste and class identities.”⁷ Even the focus on the debate within the community whether reservation should be on the basis of ‘religion’ or class is not only a “political and legal question , but also anthropological and sociological one”⁸ However, one must not forget that the Muslims form a minority within the Hindu majority India, and that the elites and the dominant sections from the majority community work in collusion with the Muslim elites to keep a major section of the Muslims in their marginalised position. That the policy of reservation is not the solution has been identified by many academics. Since the problem lies at the level of the structure which produces and reproduces the marginalisation of a particular community, it is only with the generation of sufficient capital in all its three forms-social, cultural and economic, that a major breakthrough with regard to the ‘Muslim question’ can be made. It is not an easy task, and may be reservation can be a stop gap solution, but the efforts have to be directed at the generation of sufficient resources and ensuring equity of access to them to provide a viable solution to the development deficit identified by the SCR.

Scope for Further Research

This study was an attempt to initiate an interest into a neglected field of sociological research and it has raised several questions which still remain unexplored. Firstly, it would be interesting to have an in-depth view of the socio-economic condition of Muslim with the help of ethnographic studies. A comparative study of a rural village and an urban ghetto would give us the vantage point to substantiate the arguments of this study. There is also a dearth of literature on the urban and rural middle class in West Bengal since the major focus of studies has been the slums of Kolkata and other impoverished sections within the Muslim community. However, there is a section, the rising middle class which has a particular role and function within the community, both at the economic and the cultural level A foray into the composition of different OBC communities which have been listed in the state OBC list as well as those who do not find a place in there, would provide us an insight into the magnitude of the internal differentiation within the community, and the factors associated with development deficit in some sections and regions. How far development deficit

⁷ Mondal, 2003: 4897

⁸ Ibid.

among Muslims could be explained by state apathy, historical factors, class composition, and local politics, and which of these factors are predominant causes under which circumstances, is an analytical problem which requires a careful and a comparative research design that includes macro-structural forces and micro level situations.

Our future research agenda will address some of these concerns based on meticulous fieldwork. The foregoing dissertation is only an attempt to collate and organise available literature on the subject in perspective.

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