Chapter I

Introduction
Over the past two decades, commendable efforts have been made by sociologists to analyse and understand the nature of social organization among Indian Muslims (Mujeeb 1947; Gupta 1956; Karim 1957; Ansari 1960; Misra 1964; Dube 1969; Leach (ed) 1971; Ahmad (ed) 1973; Bhatly 1976). These studies have highlighted data which have enabled sociologists to understand Muslims in India. The debate on the nature of social stratification and kinship organization among Muslims in India is un-ending and much research has been undertaken on these aspects. Apart from this, research findings on Muslim education, rituals, religion, politics and culture are also available (Jafar 1936; Ahmad 1973, 1976, 1976, 1981, 1983; Madan 1976; Haq 1970). However, little research has been undertaken on the socioeconomic aspect of contemporary Indian Muslims.

The present study is a modest attempt in that direction. The study is aimed at gaining insight into the socioeconomic structure of the Ansaris of Bijnor district.

The Ansaris form the pivot of this study — firstly because they have the dubious distinction of being identified as Julaha and considered quite separate from the real
Ansaris\(^2\) - the direct descendents of "Ansar-e-Madina" (the helpers of the Prophet Mohammad). The real Ansaris or Farangi Mahlis\(^3\), as they prefer to call themselves, appear to bear a contempt against the Julahas who have taken the appellation of "Ansaris". The real Ansaris are considered 'Ashraf'\(^4\) while the Julaha-Ansaris are included in the category of "Ajlaf". The fact that the Julahas call themselves Ansaris is indicative of the fact that they have a desire to be identified as such so as to elevate their status in society. This desire of upward mobility and social respectability\(^5\) has often been accompanied by economic betterment. Thus, it is assumed that the Julahas of Bijnor district have improved their economic status and have taken the appellation of Ansaris. Secondly, historical records reveal that the Julahas in the pre-colonial and colonial times, were socio-economically a depressed group (Mehta 1946, Habib 1981). It would be, therefore, meaningful to study the socio-economic status of the Ansaris of Bijnor district under the changes that have taken place in India since independence. The socio-economic and political changes in India, coupled with rapid industrial growth, have affected large sections of Indian society. Other studies (Dube 1951, Srinivas 1952; Bailey 1967; Cohn 1968) have shown how changes in
Indian political and economic structure have affected other groups of people within the rigidity of the Indian caste system.

The uniqueness of the Indian caste is a much debated topic and will not be dealt with directly in this study. However, what is significant for the present study is not only the caste-like features of the Ansaris and their desire for upward mobility, but also their orientation not only to their own caste group but also to the Indian Muslim Community at large. After all, the status of Ansaris is first and foremost identified within the Muslim community and then within the Indian society as a whole. The complex nature of economic progress, the process of social mobility, and the desire of the low status groups to move up the social ladder and their subsequent effect on the structure of society need to be thoroughly examined.

India is a multi-religious country. However, along with innumerable religious minorities, the population of India is generally divided into two broad categories: the Hindus and the Muslims. Though these two communities have been closely associated for over thousand years,
there are wide variations in their culture and ideologies.

Literature on Hinduism exposes 'caste' as a fundamental institution of Hindu society. Since there are so many different approaches to the study of caste, it is necessary to specify particular points of view. There is very little agreement among the scholars regarding the definition of caste. It would be a very difficult task to examine each opinion in detail. However, the main features of the Hindu caste should be elaborated so that one can compare and contrast caste among Hindus with 'caste' like groups among Muslims.

Some authorities on caste maintain that there is a certain minimal set of primary characteristics which together constitute the real boundary of caste among the Hindus. Srinivas (1969) holds that the main features of caste prevailing through the past centuries may be identified as follows:

(1) Endogamy
(2) Hereditary occupational association
(3) Hierarchical ordering
(4) Rules of commensality
(v) Concept of purity and pollution
(vi) Ritual and other privileges and disabilities.

The classical studies, (especially those by Ghurye 1950; Weber 1967; Srinivas 1969; Senart 1975; Hutton 1977) have discussed such features in much detail. The main point to reflect here is that these elements of caste are not as rigid as they are theoretically described to be.

According to Leach (1971), this set of minimal criteria indicates certain cultural traits. Leach has critically examined some empirical studies of caste and commented that the authorities have been confused in using the term caste. For instance, Weber on the one hand considers the structural aspect of caste and states that "caste is a fundamental institution of Hinduism" (Weber 1967, p.396). On the other hand, he points to the existence of caste among the 'Mohammandens' of India and among the 'Buddhists'. For him, caste groups are similar to 'status groups', in which the social position of an individual is determined through particular life styles and economic pursuits. "Status groups are normally communities" (Weber 1967, p.186). Weber has elaborated
the meaning of status group while discussing class situation. The first important attribute which Weber accords to the concept of status is that of an 'epoch' (Weber 1967:193). At this point he refers to the political communities of antiquity and of the Middle Ages. He considers class and status as two distinct categories: class refers to societies where the work groups are differentiated and status group refers to societies where the work groups are undifferentiated (Parkin 1972:29-39; Bendix 1974:156-158; Fallers 1974:143; Therborn 1978:141).

The second attribute of status is the social esteem and honour accorded to members of society. In this sense, "Status", according to Weber, "may be connected with any quality shared by a plurality, and, of course, it can be akin to a class situation: Class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions" (Weber 1967:187). Although class and status refer to two different dimensions, Weber suggests a relative dependance of status on class. He considered the class situation as a predominant factor in view of the fact that a particular style of life expected for members of status group is usually conditioned by their economic condition (Weber 1967:187). However, Weber has tried to consider class and status as distinct from each other.
The third characteristic of status is that class and status are connected with each other even when they are distinct. According to Weber, "social status may partly or even wholly determine class situation, however, being identical with it" (Weber 1967:405). It can be, however, concluded that for Weber, status and class refer to one phenomenon and no distinction between them is maintained although both are sharply distinguished. Status for Weber, is the "judgement of men by men", which is determined by a "specific positive or negative, estimation of honour" (Weber, 1967:188). Furthermore, status, like class, has also pluralistic nature and can be classified into positive and negative types. This pluralistic nature of status groups may determine the position of a community in a whole social system. Hence, Leach (1971), while criticising Weber argues that caste in its structural as well cultural sense conforms to 'closed status groups' of the United States and of the European nobility. Thus, the notion of caste like structure among Indian Muslim social groups may also conform to Weber's idea of 'status group'.

Leach (1971) has viewed the usage of the word caste in the two different senses: ethnographic and sociological. Ethnographically the word caste refers to a system of
social organization peculiar to Hindu India. It refers to Rig-vedic background where ethnic distinctions were classified on the basis of *Varna*.

Sociologically, caste denotes certain cultural traits which may conform to any social system other than the Hindu Social system. Historical studies (Panikar 1954 and Majumdar 1949) show that caste-like groupings were present in the Avestan Persian society, to which the Rig-vedic divisions form a very close parallel. Even the most primitive communities of the present day Australia, have in one way or another, caste-like groupings, (Berndt 1954). Thus, on the basis of certain restrictions with regard to occupation, endogamy and commensality etc. the caste features are presumed to be present among the Muslims of India and the Indian Muslim society is considered to be classified on the Hindu caste pattern. It would be then interesting to examine the relevance of the term 'caste' applied to the system of stratification in the Muslim Society - with specific reference to the Ansaris of Bijnor district.

**CASTE AMONG MUSLIMS**

Caste among Muslims can be analysed at two levels. The ideological level and the social level. At the ideolo-
cal level the Muslim society is antithetical to caste considerations. The ideological determinism of Muslim social life rests on the guiding principles of the Holy Quran and Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet). The Holy Quran discourages social discrimination on the basis of any ascribed or achieved criteria and it binds together all its followers by saying "The believers are a band of brothers." (49:10). The Prophet of Islam has also proclaimed the idea of brotherhood in his noble sermon at the occasion of "Hajjatul-Mida" (the farewell pilgrimage) by saying:

"Oye men ! Harken unto my words and take ye them to heart !
Know ye that every Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim and that ye are now one brotherhood."

(Ansari 1960, p.28)

The concept of egalitarianism provides basis for constructing an ideal society in which social harmony is inconceivable in the absence of social equality. According to Beteille (1977) an egalitarian society may be conceived as one in which all its members of different positions enjoy the same measure of prestige and power. In such a society there is no question of upward or downward
mobility. From this point of view the concept of egalitarianism in the Muslim society is misleading and rooted in misconceptions. Islam does not speak of such a utopian society which is built on the promise of social equality. Islam does not affirm equality of positions in social intercourse. The proclamation of brotherhood by the Quran and the Prophet does not amount to a negation of unequal positions. On the contrary, it implies that in a Muslim society there can be people of various unequal statuses such as the ruler and the ruled, rich and the poor, and so on. Yet all the Muslims are bound together with a fraternal relationship of religious faith and belief. The Quran clarifies this concept of brotherhood as it states: "If they (repent) take to prayer and pay the alms-tax, they shall become your brothers in the faith." (The Quran: 9:11, p.314).

Some verses of the Quran reveal that there may be people of diverse origins. The Quran speaks of "the diversity of tongues and colours", (30:22: p.189) and the sexes, nations and tribes as follows:

"Men, we have created you from male and a female, and have divided you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another. The noblest of
you in Allah's sight is he who fears Him most."
(The Quran:49:13; p.269)

In the above stated verse, it is implied that mankind has been divided into various nations and tribes. This indicates the philosophy that man always lives in groups, nations and tribes through his relation to the respective group or tribe. Ayatullah Mutahhari (1984) contends that, "association of individuals with tribes and groups has a natural purpose."(p. 143). If these differences did not exist, it would have been impossible to differentiate one man from another. These differences serve as an essential condition of social life. It must not, however, be used as a pretext for prejudice and pride because superiority is supposed to lie in human nobility and piety.

The concept of equality in Islam means that all human beings, irrespective of variations in sex, colour, language, tribes, nations or occupation, are equal in their being human. They are the progeny of the same father and mother (Adam and Eve). This concept of brotherhood, however, does not conform to the ideal concept of egalitarianism because Islam does not cons-
truct such a society in which different positions may enjoy same power and prestige. Glimpses from the Islamic history reflect that the Prophet of Islam enjoyed the highest social prestige and power and no other Muslim could be equal to him. But the prestige, so bestowed on him was in no way used to denigrate others. No records of any form of social discrimination such as rules of commensality or specific prescription for spouse selection are available. Similarly, a common Muslim could not equally enjoy the status of a caliph or ruler. Hence, it becomes obvious that there may be different ranks and positions in a Muslim society. The only thing which binds together all the different social positions into one single brotherhood is the consciousness of the rights and duties which Islam allocates to all its believers. Thus, any Muslim himself cannot, by his free will and inclination transfer these rights and duties to anybody else and deprive himself of them. For instance, the ritual prayer, fasting, paying impost (Zakat) and to command to good and to prohibit from evil, are some of the duties for all Muslims to be equally performed. Similarly the right of inheritance, the respect of father and mother and the punishment of crimes are equally applicable to all the Muslims. In this way, everybody, whether he is a ruler
or ruled, black or white, rich or poor is equal and alike with regard to these rights and duties. Hence, the equality of rights and duties among Muslims has often been confused with equality of social positions.

The ideology of Islam does not give way to caste considerations nor does it segregate people in stratified groups which determine specified rights and duties for each category. In fact, Islam bestows equality of rights and duties to all its believers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies on 'caste' among Muslims, however, reveal that there is a wide difference between what is prescribed by Islam and what is practised by its followers. It is this aspect which attracts the attention of many a sociologist and has led the present author to examine the socio-economic structure of the Ansaris of Bijnor district and analyse this in terms of the position accorded to them by their Muslim brethren.

Ansari (1960) is the first anthropologist to highlight the existence of caste among the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh. His study is based on source material of census reports.
published by the British administrators. These reports, according to Ahmad (1973) are "superficial" and "inaccurate". Nevertheless, Ansari's attempt has the merit of offering an explanation of origin and development of caste among Muslims. His pioneering work has opened "new vistas" for all subsequent studies on Muslims in different parts of India (Ahmad 1973:1).

The central theme of Ansari's study is to understand the emergence of caste among Muslims. According to him the history of stratification among Muslims can be traced to the settlement of four ethnic groups of noble ancestry in India. When these groups came in contact with the Aryan (who were already divided as priests, nobles and commoners), a four-fold division of Muslims into Syed, Shaikhs, Moghals and Pathans came into existence. According to Ansari (1960:1) this stratification was a result of what he calls "the dynamics of acculturation" between the two communities - the Hindus and the Muslims. Here Ansari follows Crooke (1926) and O'Malley (1941) who have indicated that the division of Syeds, Shaikhs, Moghals & Pathans into four separate caste-like groups was an outcome of socio-cultural impact of the Hindu caste system.
However as Ahmad (1973) has pointed out, Ansari evades several questions. On the one hand, he narrates that the foreign rulers came to India with certain distinct ethnic backgrounds and they established four separate groups according to their noble descent. On the other he contends that social stratification among these groups was due to cultural contact with Hindu castes. This represents a distorted explanation which does not lead to a conclusion whether stratification among Muslims took place on account of preoccupation of their early nobility or it merged as a result of acculturation. Moreover, the three-fold Aryan hierarchy is not symmetrical to the four-fold division of the Muslims.

Secondly, the Aryan belonged to only one racial group while the Muslims came from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. Hence, Ansari has created several ambiguities in defining caste among Muslims (Ahmad, 1973).

Another noteworthy study is by Misra (1964) which throws light on various Muslim communities in Gujrat. This study is important because it gives a historical account of Muslim communities and compares them with the Hindu communities. In this study Misra has tried to explore
the extent to which the Muslim social groups conform to the Hindu castes. Thus, he is first to raise an important question whether Muslim groups, under the cultural impact of Hinduism can be called castes.

Misra follows almost the same historical trend as Ansari has reflected. He states that the Arab conquerers brought with them fresh racial strains which led the distinctions to be made among Muslims on ancestral line. The influence of Turkish social system encouraged the formation of a stratified hierarchical society. Thus, for Misra, the introduction of Islam, being an egalitarian religion led not to the elimination of the caste system but to its proliferation. Here Misra seems to be confused in seeing the Turkish social system as an expression of the castes since the Turkish social system was based on racial groupings rather than caste categories. Consequently, it was not the Islamic ideology introduced by the Turks which led to proliferation of the caste groupings among Muslims. Rather it was the cultural impact of the Hindu castes that the racial nobility was later pronounced among Muslim as "caste pride" (Misra 1964).

Misra, however, contends that Islam lacks basic rigid caste features as they are found in the Hindu caste
system. Islam has no allocation of specified roles. Nor is there any pollution index according to which the members of one Muslim social group may maintain social distance with the other. Institutionalization of caste in Muslims is, therefore, haphazard and partial.

A serious attempt, to extract same sociological conclusions from the debate whether the term caste is applicable to the Muslim social system, was made by Ahmad (1973, 1976). The work merits sociological appreciation as it refers to some important social problems such as caste, family kinship and marriage among the Muslims in India. Different contributors have dealt with the structure and functioning of social stratification and the problems of family, kinship and marriage among the Muslims in particular localities. While defining caste among Muslims, most of the contributors have followed the cultural specific definition of the institution and based their discussion on the Hindu phenomenon. They are justified in doing so because the Muslims themselves do not define caste, and, in fact, they deny the existence of caste among Muslims. Thus, in comparison to the Hindu caste system, most of the contributors find that the Muslim social structures, they studied, display some caste attributes such as endogamy,
occupational specialization and the hierarchy of the groups.

If we analyse these features structurally, we find that endogamy among Hindu is observed, so as to maintain "purity" of "blood", whereas among Muslim social groupings there are no such strict rules. On the contrary, endogamy among Muslims is practised as a tradition just to maintain cultural homogeneity as indicated by Mines (1973) in his study of Tamil Muslims. What Siddiqui and Ahmad (1974) suggest, is that the occurrence of endogamy as a means of purity of blood and bone, is also a tradition which is asserted through genealogical records. Had this principle been a rule, it would have been equally practicable on all the Muslim social categories. But there are only a few Ashraf families who use their genealogical record as a source of their family pride rather than that of caste.

Occupational specialization is another factor which determines a caste position in the social ladder. But there is difference in the degree of correspondence between caste and traditional occupation at the various levels of social hierarchy. In the case of Muslims there is no particular occupation related with higher social strata. For example, Bhattacharya has pointed out that the upper
groups in rural West Bengal do not claim any hereditary occupation. Ahmad also refers to the fact that Shaikh Siddiqui in Uttar Pradesh are not engaged in any specialized occupation though they were originally land record keepers. This indicates that correspondence between caste and occupation is strikingly low among the higher status groups of the Muslims since they follow a more diversified pattern in occupational specialization. However, among the lower Muslim groups, occupation becomes an important status indicator as in the case of the occupations of weaving, oil pressing, butchery, etc. etc. It is this very aspect which needs to be examined and analysed.

Caste hierarchy among the Hindus is based on the relation of pure and impure which leads to a hierarchy of statuses based on pollution. The contributors have no consensus of opinion on the question how far the notion of ritual purity and pollution can be found to exist among the Muslim social groups. For example, D'Souza (1973) in his study of Muslim social divisions in Mysore and Kerala, and Dube (1969) in her study of the Muslims of Laccadive Islands, admit that while the different Muslim groups are hierarchically ranked yet it does not indicate any possibility of ritual purity and pollution with the basis of social ranking. On the other hand, Siddiqui (1973) and
Bhattacharya (1973) are inclined to see the elements of ritual purity and pollution in the case of Muslims. Siddiqi reveals that the symbolic ritual notion of pollution is expressed on the occupation of feasts where the higher categories do not sit and dine together with lower categories. But this pattern does not reflect any direct evidence of the notion of ritual pollution. What it indicates is a sense of cleanliness and hygiene, which acts as maintaining a social distance rather than that of pollution. But this is a debateable point.

Ahmad (1973), however, has rightly concluded that the ritual dimension of caste is weak among the Muslims and its form differs from the Hindu model in certain details. Hence, while the various field studies disclose the fact that caste among Muslims has not attained the degree of elaboration peculiar to the Hindu model, it raises certain questions in regard to Muslim caste-like groups. This question remains unanswered and it needs further research.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Indian Muslims are generally divided into two social categories:

1. *Ashraf* (nobles), and
2. *Ajlaf* (coarse rabble).
The term Ashraf refers to four ethnic groups of foreign extraction:

i) Syed
ii) Shaikh
iii) Mughals, and
iv) Pathan

The Ajlaf category, on the other hand, includes converts from high Hindu castes and from artisan and serving castes such as: butchers, tailors, oil-pressers, spinners and weavers etc. (Ansari 1960, Dumont 1972, Ahmad 1976). The weavers are further divided among 'Julahas' and 'Koris', according to their faith. Hence, the Muslim weavers are called Julahas and the Hindu weavers, Koris (Habib 1981).

Sociologists and social anthropologists have argued that the social system of both the Ashraf and Ajlaf categories conforms to the Hindu caste system (Ansari 1960, Misra 1964, Ahmad 1973, Momin 1977). Although there is consensus of opinion that the ideology of Islam discourages the formation of segments, it is interesting to note that the general attitude of many contributors towards caste among Muslims has been to discover analogies between the Hindu and the Muslims social groupings.
It is generally assumed that the Ansaris of Bijnor district were originally Hindu weavers. History of Bijnor district reveals that almost half a century ago there lived in Bijnor a weaving class known as "Kori". These koris belonged to a depressed section of Hindu castes. According to the existing literature these people embraced Islam enmass and were later called 'Julahas'. (Bijnor, a Gazetteer 1908). So the Koris, after conversion to Islam, were supposed to seek a social position in the Muslim social structure. But that conversion did not affect the social position of Julahas because it was a well known fact that they came from a lower Hindu caste group.

According to the 1931 census the Julahas are listed as the largest occupational caste in Uttar Pradesh. During early 1930s they organized themselves into the All India Jamiat-ul-Ansar (most often known as All India Momin Conference) which works as a determining body of their socio-economic and political expression (Ansari 1960). Though there is no documentary evidence, it is commonly believed by "non-Julaha" that the Julahas unanimously decided in the first session of the said conference to abandon the "disgraceful" title of Julahas and call themselves 'Ansari'. If this is to be believed then one could have said, that by proclaiming themselves Ansari, the Julahas were making conscious
efforts to climb up the social ladder in Muslim "caste" hierarchy.

Studies in caste mobility have indicated that economic development enables persons of lower castes to move up the social ladder (Hawley (1950), Bailey (1962), Thompson (1965), Almieda (1978), Doshi (1986), Bhatti (1971). The Ansaris display a more prominent example of such social mobility while they invariably claim a Shaikh Ansari descent.

The Shaikh Ansari descent refers to the category of Ashraf Shaikhs, who, during the early days of Islam were divided into two groups:

(i) the Muhajirin (the immigrants)
(ii) the Ansar (the helpers).

The Muhajirin were those who migrated with the Prophet of Islam from Mecca to Medina. The people who helped the Prophet and gave him shelter were designated as Ansar.

The Muhajirin of Shaikh descent are divided into various ethnic groups such as Shaikh Qureishi, Shaikh Siddiqui and Shaikh Farooqui etc. whereas the Ansaris of Shaikh descent claim their origin from Abu-Ayub-al-Ansari,
a famous companion of the Prophet (Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1960, Vol.I). Ansaris of such descent are regarded as Ashraf and most of their families in India still reside at Mohallah Farhangi-Mahal in Lucknow, U.P. Thus, the Ansaris belong to both the Ashraf and Ajlaf categories. The Ansaris who trace their direct lineage from Abu-Ayub Ansari and have no specific occupation (such as weaving craft), are regarded as Ashraf. On the other hand, the Muslim weavers (Julahas) are presumed to belong to the Ajlaf category. Misra (1964) contends that the lower Muslim communities or the new Muslims who have attempted to rise in the social scale, have taken the appellation of Ansari in place of the old. It is in this context that the term Ansari will be used in this thesis.

The Ansaris, were an economically depressed community in the pre-colonial and colonial India. The new economic and social order which was ushered in after India gained independence, affected the life of many. The new wealth, as Bailey (1957) puts it, helped in bringing about changes in the Indian society. The Ansaris were not unaffected. The economic incentives given to the 'depressed classes' by the Government, coupled with opportunities for secular education, growth of industry and occupational mobility, affected the socio-economic status of Ansaris.

The traditional occupation of Ansaris is weaving which provides a livelihood to thousands of Ansaris spread all over
India. The history of art of weaving, however, must first be recapitulated.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ART OF WEAVING

The art of weaving is as old as the human history. It preceded spinning. Egyptian mummy wrappings reveal the practice of fine fabric-weaving in about 6400 BC, while a tapestry specimen from the tomb of Thutmose IV (1417 BC) indicates the early production of figured cloth. In China, silk was apparently used in textile in 2700 BC (Chambers' Encyclopaedia 1967:14, p.461).

The use of handlooms in western Europe can be traced to the early 18th century. In 1733, John Kay of Bury (Lancashire) invented a wide handloom in which a flying shuttle was used to fabricate cloth (Chamber's Encyclopaedia, 1967, Vol.14). This invention increased the demand of yarn and gave way to the inventions of spinning machines. In 1760 Robert Kay invented another type of handloom which he named as 'drop box loom'. This loom facilitated use of more than one shuttle and the production of checkered designs. The early nineteenth century was the period in which a new type of handloom was introduced by Joseph Marie Jacquard, a silk weaver of Lyons. This handloom, named as 'Jacquard loom' is capable of weaving very elaborate designs. (Chambers' Encyclopaedia).
In 1785, Dr. Edmund Cartwright invented the powerloom. The powerloom was first used only for plain cotton and wool. But gradually its range extended to fabricate silks, linen, carpets, pile fabrics etc. until all textile weaving was mechanized (Chambers' Encyclopaedia, 1967, 14, pp.461-62).

ORIGIN OF WEAVERS IN INDIA

The exact origin of the art of weaving in India is not known. But historical references to Muslim weavers are available. It is reported that Nizamul Mulk Junaidi, the minister of Sultan Iltutmish, was the descendant of a weaver (Barani 1862). Kabir, a well known Hindi poet of early 16th century was born in the family of a Muslim weaver (Habib 1981). Barani records that to be weaver was a 'badge of low birth'. This indicates that, even under the sultanate of Iltutmish, the weavers were accorded low status, and even a change to a higher rank could not help him to move up the social ladder (Habib 1981).

Muhammad Tughlaq employed about 500 expert weavers at Delhi in the 14th century. These weavers prepared silk and gold brocades for the ladies of the court. The brocade was called 'Kimkhab' (Gazetteer of India, 1973, p.498).

During Mughal Empire, Akbar brought Persian weavers in India in 1580 AD and he established the "imperial" carpet factory in Lahore (Gazetteer of India, 1973, p.499).

The history of Bijnor district refers to the existence of the Muslim weavers. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1964, pp. 150-151) has described the role of Imam Bakhsh, alias Nareen Khan (who belonged to the weaver caste), against the British Empire in 1857 AD. Though Nareen Khan was t
weaver by caste, due to his administrative capabilities and role in the Rebelian, he had taken the appellation of 'Khan' which was considered a symbol of chivalry in Mughal empire. But the historical chronicles do not reflect any impact of his chivalrous character on the community of weavers as a whole. This may be indicative of the fact that a higher status gained by a member of the lower caste is not accepted as such by the other higher caste groups.

These historical perspectives reveal that the weavers have been discriminated and suffered a low status.

The population of Ansaris has been increasing much to the delight of the ruling elite who exploited their skill and craftsmanship. However, no evidence of constructive measures to improve their socio-economic condition have been recorded. In fact Mehta (1946) has reported that the introduction and import of British goods in India left the weavers unemployed. According to the census reports (1889 and 1931) momin julahas or momin Ansaris form the largest occupation caste with about one million members in Uttar Pradesh itself.
The Ansaris are distinguished as a "Community of backward weavers" (Misra 1964). They are spread all over the country and are called by different names in different regions. In Bhiwandi they are called 'Momins' (Momin 1977). In Baroda they are referred to as 'marwadis' and 'Julahas' (Misra 1964) and in Banaras, Azamgarh and Bijnor, they are called 'Ansaris'. References to Julahas or Ansaris has not been reported from the southern part of India. It is interesting to note that in every day usage, the term julaha is contemptuously used when one wishes to degrade another person. This is peculiar to Uttar Pradesh and quite unheard of in southern parts of India. In fact, to a south Indian Muslim, the term Julaha does not connote the same meaning and connotation as it does to a north Indian Muslim, especially the Uttar Pradeshi.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are three-fold:—First, the study attempts a description of the social and economic organization of the Ansaris of Bijnor District. There have been no detailed ethnographic accounts of the Ansaris. The Ansaris are a widespread community, found in many parts of India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Mutthar and Ansari (1986) have briefly
discussed the Ansaris of Madhya Pradesh. However, there are no other studies of the Ansaris. This study seeks to present on ethnographic description of the social and economic organization of the Ansaris of Bijnor.

The second objective is to deal with the impact of economic development and social mobility generated by economic prosperity of which the Ansaris have been beneficiaries in the social and economic organization. Lastly, an attempt is made to analyse the changes and readjustments of the group because of exposure to education, mass media and political participation.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present investigation is designed to study the socio-economic organization of the Ansaris of Bijnor District. The theoretical basis for the study rests on the principles of social stratification as an emergent condition of occupational differentiation and the principles by which the distribution of these positions is graded. The system of such gradation is based on ideas, values and beliefs of a particular society.
Max Weber (1967) emphasised that social stratification is an "organized manifestation of unequal power in society." For analytical purposes institutionalized power (as defined by Weber) can be classified into three categories: Economic, social and political. Within each of these categories power is designated according to class-status and party. According to Weber, all people with similar economic interests and with similar economic power belonged to the same "class." Weber specifically used economic terms as the means by which economic power could be gained. For instance, ownership can result in the monopoly or control over the sale of economic goods as well as their manufacture. This kind of ownership becomes a form of economic power.

Thus, for Weber the first aspect for power is the market place and second aspect of power is social. Weber used the term "status" to mark off the strata in this sphere. According to Weber (1967) all persons who enjoy the same social honour and prestige and who live according to similar standards generally belong to the same status group. By this definition a person's power in the social sphere derives from the amount and the extent of prestige that he receives from others. Status, unlike economic class, depends upon
a community, since prestige depends upon the judgement made by other members of society. In effect, the individual gains his social position on basis of social evaluation of the other members of society, whereas, class is a form of impersonal placement in a common market situation. Status is, thus, limited to personal evaluations and is judged by the standards that are accepted in the community. Usually these norms, values and standards are realized by some estimation of life styles. Levels of occupation, education and ancestral background are generally used as a basis for evaluating the status of a group or community.

It appear then, that the present study could be conducted in terms of Weber's work where caste is considered as a particular status group. The distinction that Weber made between economic class and status group is particularly suited to the study of Ansaris, who are, infact, defined as a 'caste' by many a sociologist (Ansari, 1960; Ahmad, 1973; Leach, 1960; Dumont, 1970).

The Ansaris were an economically depressed community in precolonial and colonial India. The new economic and social order which was ushered in after India gained independence, affected the lives of many. This new wealth as
Bailey (1967) puts it, helped in bringing about changes in the Indian society. The Ansaris were not unaffected. The economic incentives given to the 'depressed classes' by the government, coupled with opportunities for secular education, growth of cottage industry and occupational mobility, affected the socio-economic states of Ansaris. Theoretically, economic mobility is invariably associated with status mobility and the acquisition of power. Following Weber's contention that a person's power in the social sphere derives from the amount and extent of prestige he receives from others, and the fact that status depends upon the judgement made by other members of the society, led to the formulation of the hypothesis for this study.

The distinction that Weber made between class, status and power, seems to directly hit out at the Ansaris, who, though economically mobile, are not socially acceptable in society. In fact, preliminary observations show that an economically poor Pathan or even a tailor, carpenter, blacksmith or Potter command higher status and prestige in society than an Ansari. In the hierarchy of occupations, weaving is considered a low grade occupation. The stigma attached to this occupation is so deep that even when members of this caste give up their traditional occupation,
the label of Ansari is contemptuously used to degrade the concerned person. It appears that certain occupations are thus degraded by other members of society. The blanket term used for these low grade occupational groups is Kamina. It is believed that persons who either indulge in these occupations or whose fore-fathers had indulged in these occupations are Kamina or neech.

Thus, it appears that occupation is important to determine social status of an individual or a community. The society differentiates some occupations as 'superior' and 'inferior'. Ansari (1960) divides Muslims occupational groups into 'clean' and 'unclean'. He draws an analogy of 'Pure' and 'impure' Hindu and Muslim castes. Darzi (tailors) Qassab (Butchers) Hajjam (Barbers) and Julaha (weavers) etc. are considered as 'clean' occupational groups. The 'unclean' occupational groups include Bhangis (Sweepers) and chamars (skinners) which are absent altogether among Muslims (Ansari 1960; Misra 1964). These occupational groups among Muslims are endogamous and exhibit caste-like structure. They conform to Weber's 'Status group' on account of certain peculiar styles of life which are inherited and passed through generations. According to Weber, in the domain of a status group all persons who live the same
style of life are accorded the same social estimation of social honour. The concept of status, then, is conceived as a dimension of stratification which is functionally similar to caste like groups found among Indian Muslims.

Theoretically, economic mobility is invariably associated with status mobility and the acquisition of power. Thus, the main hypothesis of this study is that due to the economic betterment and new opportunities the Ansaris have moved up the economic order. This economic mobility has enabled them to islamize their life style and move up in the social hierarchy but because of the stigma attached to their occupation they are not accorded the status that they seek.

The above stated hypothesis is to be tested in term of the changes that may have occurred in their life styles, with special reference to marriage and family norms, education, religion and political participation.
NOTES

1. JULAH : refers to a Muslim weaver especially a convert from Hindu caste - Kori (Bijnor, a Gazetteer 1908, Ansari 1960, Misra 1964). The term is used synonymously with Ansari and momin, especially in U.P.

2. ANSARI : This term originally refers to the people of Medina who helped the Prophet of Islam after his migration from Mecca to Medina (Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1960, Vol.I).

   It is believed that the descendants of these 'Ansar' migrated to India and their descendants settled in Farangi Mahal, Lucknow. The appellation Ansari was taken over by Julahas. Thus the distinction between Farangi Mahal Ansaris and Julaha Ansaris should be kept in mind. See note 3 below.

3. FARANGI MAHLIS : refer to the Ansaris who claim their descent from Abu Ayoob-al-Ansari, a prominent companion of the Prophet. They are considered as Ashraf.

4. ASHRAF AND AJLAF : Ashraf refers to the Muslim of upper "caste" denoting superiority of status and identified by an Islamized stand and a claim of foreign (Arabs, Persians and Afghans) descent.

   Ajlaf are regarded to be descendants of local Indian population generally considered to be converts or their descendants. They include numerous menial and artisan castes. Ajlaf strata are identified by their hereditary occupation. However, even if the Ajlaf changes his occupation he is continued to be identified with his hereditary occupation. (Karim 1957, Ansari 1960, Levy 1962, Zarina Ahmad 1962, Misra 1964).

5. SOCIAL RESPECTIBILITY : refers to status honour accorded to the Ashraf Castes. The Ashraf, by birth are recognised and respected as respectable persons.
6. **AVESTAN** refers to the division of Society into four major groups since the Avestan period. These four groups were Priests, Warriors, Commoners and Serfs.

7. **ANSARIS** Ghous Ansari (1960) was the first anthropologist to introduce secondary sources of data which highlighted the existence of caste among Muslims. His informative pursuit is "Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh", An Ethnographic and Folk culture Publication, Lucknow. It is interesting to note that the said author himself is a descendant of the Parangi Mahlis.

8. **SEE BETEILLE'S DISCUSSION (1964)**: This case is similar to Beteille's classification of individual identity. Barth (1971) has also shown how the swat Pathans gained mobility.

9. **KAMINA** is a colloquial term and is used to denote contemptuous connotation. It is generally used for the castes who follow hereditary menial occupations.

10. **NEECH** is a colloquial term and is more contemptuous than Kamina. It refers to the caste of a very degraded position. Most Ajlaf castes are identified as Neech and Kamina in common parlance when disgust is to be expressed.

11. **ISLAMIZATION** has been used by the Sociologists in two major senses. First, it demotes the tendency among Muslims to give up customs and traditions which are held to be un-Islamic. Secondly, it refers to a process by which non-Muslim communities or low caste Muslims emulate Islamic cultural features of the upper caste Muslims, like dress patterns, food habit rituals, religious teachings etc. (See Mista (1964), Ahmad (1973) Momin (1977).