(a) Social Contacts and Interactions

A look at figure 9 will show that the Muslim neighbourhoods of Gauhati are spatially separated from one another. Often, as in the case of Sarania (in ward XIV) and Santipur (in ward IX) the distance is more than three miles. On the other hand, the neighbourhoods in the central part of the city are relatively close to one another. Thus the distance between Islampur (in ward XIV) and Hedayatpur (in ward XI) is hardly a furlong; Machkhowa (in ward VII) is situated within two furlongs of Lakhtokia (covered by wards IV and V). Again, in the case of Fauzdarigaon (in ward VI) and Lakhtokia, the distance is less than a furlong.

In such a situation, where the Muslim localities are often spatially separated from one
another it is not possible for the residents to know one another or act as members of one local community. On the other hand, in the case of Singimari and Uttar Jalukbari the face-to-face and compact settlement pattern have led the Muslims to constitute distinct local communities in which everybody knows everybody else. This 'knowing' also determines the quality and content of social relations among the villagers in each of these rural communities. In the case of Gauhati, social intimacy is usually confined to the residents of a neighbourhood. It may be extended when the neighbourhoods are situated close to one another or when kinship ties link residents of different neighbourhoods.

The residents of old and established Muslim neighbourhoods like Macphkhowa, Fauzdarigaon and Lakhtokia, who are in most cases city born persons, tend to maintain close social contacts among themselves. It has already been pointed out in chapter eight that the city born Muslims trace their descent from the earliest Muslim settlers in the city. Besides, marriage
relations contracted over the years have also linked up many such residents to a considerable extent.¹

In the case of recently-established neighbourhoods like Santipur, Sarania, Chandmari and Birubari, where the bulk of the residents are migrants to city, inter-personal and inter-household relations are confined mainly within different groups based on factors of kinship, occupation or place of origin. These factors have also substantially determined the choice of neighbourhoods of the migrants. For example, in Santipur the immigrant Muslims who migrated from a village called Dampur (some 16 miles north-west of Gauhati) live in the eastern part of the neighbourhood. Again, in the case of Birubari the migrants from the village live in the southern part of the neighbourhood, while the city born Muslims, who have migrated to that neighbourhood, live in a compact area in the northern part of Birubari. All these factors tend to ensure a sense of unity within each specific group in such a neighbourhood. Thus a neighbourhood-level sense of unity is somewhat lacking in the case of these

¹ See figure 10, following page 236, demonstrating kin links between 16 households occupied by the city born Muslims situated in four different neighbourhoods.
neighbourhoods where the bulk of the residents are immigrant Muslims from the villages or from different parts of the city itself.

One comes across a situation in Gauhati which is rather different from some other cities of India. For instance, in Calcutta the Muslim immigrants who have primarily concentrated in the slums (bustees) of the city, tend to duplicate the closeness and structuring of social life of their ancestral villages (Siddiqui 1969:1917). The re-creation of village type of social organization is absent among the Muslim immigrants to Gauhati.

The intimacy and active interactions which one observes among the residents of the old Muslim neighbourhoods are partly due to ties of kinship. But except among the Marias of Islamnatty ¹ kinship ties have not been able to evolve a strong sense of unity on the neighbourhood level among other sections of the city born Muslims. This is mainly because most of the old Muslim neighbourhoods of the city are gradually becoming heterogeneous in

¹ See pp.278-281.
nature following the emergence of business establishments and the increase in the number of non-Muslim residents in these areas. These neighbourhoods are also gradually losing their distinctiveness as Muslim neighbourhoods.

However, though the Muslim residents of a neighbourhood in Gauhati do not seem to maintain close and active day-to-day contacts, they nevertheless display a keen awareness about each other. For example, the Muslim women do not normally indulge in informal social calls on a large scale within the neighbourhood. But they are well-informed about most other Muslim homes in the neighbourhood, though they themselves have not visited most of these homes. Besides the communication of information through gossip, formal ceremonial gatherings in any home, such as at marriage or circumcision, also provide the residents of a neighbourhood the opportunity to get to know one another.

The people who live in the same neighbourhood naturally have casual encounters with one another in a variety of day-to-day situations. This also enhances the level of familiarity. Besides, the menfolk
go to offer prayers and attend religious festivals in the jamat's mosque. This also helps them to get to know one another.

Informal social visits and day-to-day contacts between the Muslim inhabitants of two different neighbourhoods are, to a significant extent, determined by the physical distance between these neighbourhoods. This even determines the frequency of interactions between kinsfolk. As pointed out earlier, marriage relations involving the city born Muslims have linked up various households situated in different neighbourhoods of the city. This way kinship ties have frequently cut across the boundaries of various neighbourhoods. But even then effective interactions take place in day-to-day situations between kinsfolk who usually reside close to one another. This situation was narrated by Saleh, an elderly man of Kumarpara, in the following manner:

"There are some 33 homes in Gauhati where I have relatives. But these relatives are scattered in different parts of the city. Of these related homes, 13 are situated in my own mahalla [figure 10 shows kin links of Saleh in some of the households at Gauhati]. My relatives living in other parts of the city are always telling me that I do not visit them regularly. But how can they expect me to move throughout the city at this age just
An example of inter-relationships between 16 Muslim households in Gauhati. Simplified from an extended genealogy, this diagram shows the kin links of E (ego - a 60 years old householder) to the household heads in 15 other households (within dotted lines) situated in four different neighbourhoods of Gauhati. Households 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 are situated in one single neighbourhood, while the others, i.e., 4, 5, and 16 are situated in three different neighbourhoods.

Fig. 10
for the sake of keeping up contacts? Sometimes
I meet my relatives unexpectedly in the market,
in the street and even in the city bus. This
sort of meetings help us to exchange news about
ourselves. However, I try to visit my relatives
during the Id festivals and when specific
occasions arise."

Usually, one's day-to-day associates are to
be found in one's own neighbourhood. A resident sees
and meets one's kinsfolk and friends living in the
neighbourhood fairly frequently. Neighbours who share
certain common interests might meet on purpose. Thus
going out together for a cinema show, a football
match or to the local club for recreations provide
scope to sets of neighbours to interact closely.

As 28 years old Kutub, a resident of Lakhtokia, told me:

"I was born and brought up here at Lakhtokia. I have many relatives in this
locality. I have also a number of friends here. I know most of the residents of our locality.
Whenever I come out of the house I am bound
to meet people who are known to me. We may not
talk to each other every time we meet, but even then
we at least nod and perhaps exchange greetings.
On Sundays I go to the club in my neighbourhood
where I meet most of my friends. The other day,
I went to a football match with some of my
friends. I met there my mama [mother's brother] and dada [father's brother] after
the play. My mama lives in our locality and
my dada lives in Machkhowa. On my way back
I accompanied my mama in his car. We went to
his house directly where I spent the whole
evening with mama, mami [mother's brother's
wife] and their children. On my way back home,
I met my elder sister who had come to our house
on a visit. She is married away and lives at
Dighalipukhuri area."
(b) Neighbourhood-level Identity

The quality and frequency of interactions among the residents of a neighbourhood is, to some extent, dependent upon a sense of neighbourhood identity and unity. This sense is obviously lacking in the case of the majority of the migrants to city and other non-Assamese Muslims. Even many city born Muslims living in Machkhowa, Kumarpara and Lakhtokia display little interest in a neighbourhood sense of identity. They point out various reasons for which they no longer feel like living in these neighbourhoods or take active interest in local affairs. Some of the sentiments expressed by these persons run as follows:

"Our neighbourhood has become a cosmopolitan area."

"Now there is lack of unity among the Musalmans of our mahalla."

"Most of the people here are illiterate and difficult to deal with."

"The social atmosphere in our area has deteriorated. Many undesirable people have come to live in this area."

"The neighbourhood is too congested."

"Our locality is no longer a residential area. It has become a bazar."

1 The Assamese Muslims call themselves Musalman. Hughes (1935) considers the word Musalman as the Persian form of the word Muslim.
Despite the fact that many residents express a desire to move elsewhere from their present neighbourhoods, they do not do so. The economic factor is there. Moreover, many among them would not like to deprive themselves from various urban amenities by moving away to the outskirts even if they could afford to build a house elsewhere. Kuddus, a resident of Lakhtokia, made the following comments about his neighbourhood:

"Even fifteen years ago, this neighbourhood was a clean and quiet residential area. But nowadays it is becoming dirty and congested. All sorts of people are here who are neither Muslims nor Assamese. It is difficult to make these people aware of the need for developing the locality. These people remain busy with shops and business, while we ourselves keep busy in bickerings and backbitings. Few days ago some Muslim women went round various homes seeking contributions for the development of a graveyard. Some people commented that this was not a job for women and that these women were being too modern. When people are busy only in criticizing, how can you expect me to do anything for the neighbourhood? I now keep myself confined to my own interests. I usually visit only my relatives and close friends. I go to the mosque, offer prayers and come back home. I give contributions whenever asked for by the managing committee of the mosque. But I do not take part in the meetings of the jamat. This is the best way to keep one's own prestige safe."
SOME INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE MUSLIMS

Household-level occasions such as circumcision, wedding and death and funeral involve the family and the close kin of the householder much more than the neighbourhood at large. The social life of the Muslims is highlighted in many ways in the observance of these occasions.

The circumcision (sunnat) ceremony is, however, a private gathering of close kinsfolk. A boy is usually circumcised between the ages of 3 and 5. Among the rural Assamese Muslims also, a boy is circumcised at this age. A boy is usually circumcised at his own house. Muslim barbers, invariably non-Assamese in Gauhati, known locally as badia or hajam perform the circumcision.¹ On the day before the ceremony, a milad² is held at the house. A feast is also arranged after the milad, if the householder can afford it. Like the

¹ The recent years have brought some change in this regard among the urbanized Muslims. An educated and well-to-do Muslim whose wife is admitted in the maternity ward of a hospital for delivery, usually gets his new-born son circumcised in the hospital itself.
² See page 101.
circumcision, aqiqah[^1] is another private ceremony of the close kinsfolk. In this ceremony a name is given to the baby. For the selection of the name the parents consult an Imam.

A boy or a girl's marriage is usually arranged by the parents and elders. Nevertheless there are exceptions to the norm. When a love affair between a boy and a girl becomes a matter of gossip among relatives and friends, the elders from the two families will consider the prospects of marriage. Formal negotiations at the level of the two families must precede any marriage. An affair between a boy and a girl might also lead to a dispute involving the elderly members of the immediate kin circles of the boy and the girl. This usually happens when the family elders of either the boy or the girl consider the match to be inappropriate. The following instance may be cited as an example:

Shakil, who owns a furniture shop, had an affair with a girl from his neighbourhood. They

[^1]: The Islamic ceremony of shaving the head of a new-born on the 7th, 14th, or 21st day after birth. A cow or a goat is sacrificed in this ceremony and one-fourth of the sacrificial meat is distributed usually among the kinsfolk. In some other household ceremonies, if a householder cannot afford to slaughter a cow, beef is sometimes purchased from the butcher's shop.
knew each other since their childhood. When both of them attained marriageable age, the girl's parents expressed their unwillingness to marry away their daughter to Shakil. On the other hand, Shakil's parents had nothing against their son's wishes. The attitude of the girl's parents offended Shakil's parents. The girl let her parents know that she would not marry anyone but Shakil. The stance taken by the girl's parents created a lot of bitterness between the two families. The girl's parents, however, failed to change her mind. Finally they had to agree to accept Shakil as their son-in-law. The two families then patched up the differences created by the episode and formal marriage negotiations were started.

Among the Muslims of Gauhati, marriages are frequently contracted between persons residing in the city itself. In this regard the Gauhati Muslims approximate the Uttar Jalukbari Muslims who also contract marriages within the village. But the Gauhati Muslims seem to differ from both the Singimari and the Uttar Jalukbari Muslims when they have to choose brides from outside Gauhati. In that case the Gauhati Muslims will tend to go further afield than the vicinity of the city. The Gauhati Muslims, especially the city born people, seem to think that it is more respectable for the family to bring a bride

---

1 An analysis of the data from 116 households shows that in the case of 65 households the wives are Gauhati born women. Again, as many as 36 girls from the sample households have been married away in different neighbourhoods of the city.
from parts of Upper Assam. The girls from Upper Assam are thought to be more sophisticated than their counterparts in the rural areas of Kamrup and Darrang districts.

Table 25 shows the number of Gauhati Muslim girls married away to other places as well as those who have been brought to Gauhati from other places through marriage in the household sample. The distances of the localities from Gauhati are also indicated in the table.

Table 25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance of the Localities from Gauhati (in miles)</th>
<th>Number of Women Married away from Gauhati</th>
<th>Number of Women brought from other Localities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 +</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marriage among the Gauhati Muslims is contracted even between kin but they maintain the restricted
degrees in this regard as dictated by the Islamic Code. As pointed out earlier, kin marriages are frequently contracted among the Marias. The prevalence of kin marriage among the Marias is due primarily to the social distance which other Muslims maintain towards them. It may be pointed out that among certain other Muslim communities of India, i.e., among the Muslims of Gujarat, kin marriages are performed with a view to retain the family wealth within the wider family itself since the daughter is an important beneficiary under Muslim Law (Misra 1964: 153). Again, kin marriage in certain other Muslim communities (e.g., Punjabi Muslims) is performed with a view to renewing and strengthening an already existing connection. It is also viewed as a means whereby the shortcomings of a family may not be exposed to outsiders (Eglar 1960: 93-4). The Punjabi Muslims also consider it as an index of social prestige (Alavi 1972: 6).

In the course of investigation a number of cases where a man has married his parallel cousin (father's brother's daughter) came to light. A typical union of this kind is shown in figure 11.
The formalities of a wedding cover two separate ceremonies: the ring ceremony (magni or joran) which is followed by the actual wedding ceremony (nikah). After the finalization of negotiations between the families of the future bride and the groom, a party consisting of the close kinsfolk and the parents of the groom-to-be visits the future bridal home. The party carries a gold ring, silk clothes and sweets as presents. The negotiations are sealed with the presentation of the engagement ring to the future bride.

For the actual wedding ceremony, kinsfolk residing all over the city and outside of it, neighbours, and friends, including people of other religions, are invited. The invitation to the wedding reception is extended through printed cards (in Assamese or in English). Within the city, the task of invitation may be undertaken by women relatives of
the bride or the groom as the case might be. Such personal invitations are usually extended to those households with whom the family is really close.

Visible activities for a wedding, such as the erection of a pandal and a welcome arch, begin a few days ahead of the wedding date. Besides the kinsfolk, unrelated neighbours also participate in these preparatory activities. Young men of the neighbourhood usually construct the pandal and the arch. They are also entrusted with the responsibilities of receiving and entertaining the guests. This way, the entire neighbourhood may become involved in the affairs of a single household. The elderly men of a neighbourhood give suggestions, as and when asked for, regarding various preparations for a wedding.

Usually the general reception for the invited guests is arranged a day ahead or following the wedding day, during the afternoon hours. The guests are entertained with tea and snacks. The main wedding feast is confined to the Muslims only. It is arranged on the day of the marriage or a day ahead of it. In the case of a wedding feast, kinsfolk and the Muslim residents of a neighbourhood are invited.
On the day of the marriage ceremony, the groom reaches the bride's home by late evening. The party which accompanies the groom consists of kinsfolk of the groom, residents of the locality and personal friends. Usually after the dinner is served to the groom's party, the nikah is performed. Following this the groom's party returns along with the bride. It may be pointed out that in the case of Singimari and Uttar Jalukbari Muslims, the groom reaches the bride's home by midnight and the nikah is performed early in the morning. Again, among the rural and urban Muslims of Upper Assam, the groom reaches the bride's house between afternoon and late evening and the nikah is performed usually before dinner is served to the groom's party.

In essential features, the wedding ceremonies as solemnized by the Gauhati Muslims do not differ a great deal. However, there may be variations in such

---

1 To perform a nikah, the parents of the bride and the groom fix the mehr (bride's financial security). Following this, the Imam asks the consent of the bride and the groom in the marriage. As soon as the consent is obtained, the Imam recites verses from the Quran. After this the Imam leads a supplication in which all the persons present also join. When either the bride or the groom belongs to a place outside Gauhati, the mehr is usually fixed on the day of maan. It may also be pointed out that among the rural Muslims of Lower Assam the mehr is fixed on the day of nikah while among the Muslims of Upper Assam it is fixed on the day of maan.
matters as the size of the gathering, total expenditure and so on. Besides this, the number of non-Muslim participants in a Muslim wedding also varies from household to household. Usually non-Muslim co-workers of the groom or the bride, personal and household friends are invited in Muslim weddings at Gauhati. They come to attend the general reception and usually bring wedding gifts. Some of them also accompany the groom to the bride's home where the nikah is performed.

An event such as death concerns not only the kinsfolk of the deceased but also the residents of a neighbourhood to which the deceased belonged.

When someone dies, the residents of the neighbourhood immediately gather in the deceased's home to offer their condolence to the members of the bereaved family. A kin of the deceased proceeds to inform the kinsfolk living in other parts of the city about the death. The kinsfolk are also informed the time at which the funeral is to be held. In the mean time, a person from the deceased's neighbourhood or a kin would inform the caretakers of the graveyard to prepare a grave. There are two paid caretakers attached to the old graveyard of the city situated
in ward VIII. Another graveyard was opened in late 1950s in ward XIV following the increase of Muslims in that part of the city (see fig.9). The caretakers of the old graveyard are paid around ₹12.00 for digging and preparing a grave.

Usually the funeral procession consists of a large number of persons. Besides the male kinsfolk, the male residents of the deceased's neighbourhood and men who knew the deceased closely join the procession and attend the funeral rites. On the fortieth day following a death, the sallisa ceremony (post funeral rite) is performed at the deceased's home. On this occasion the kinsfolk and the Muslim residents of deceased's neighbourhood participate in the milad and in the feast.

SOME ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE MUSLIMS

(a) Religious Organization

The mosque is the principal religious institution among the Gauhati Muslims. There are twentyone mosques in different Muslim neighbourhoods of the city (see fig.9). These mosques were established at different times.

1 Of these mosques, in the case of 20 information were collected with the help of a cyclostyled schedule (see Appendix II).
along with the emergence of the Muslim neighbourhoods. It is gathered that in the case of eleven mosques belonging to the old Muslim neighbourhoods (e.g., Machkhowa, Fauzdarigaon, Lakhtokia, Dighalipukhuri), the lands on which the mosques were constructed were endowed for the mosque by various persons. In the case of others, the residents of the neighbourhoods took the initiative for building the mosques and accordingly they acquired suitable sites.

Structurally, the mosques differ from one another. However, the mosques may broadly be grouped into two types. The reinforced concrete buildings having characteristic domes with a touch of the Mughal architecture. There are also inscriptions of some verses from the Quran on the walls. The other mosques are modest 'Assam Type' buildings with corrugated iron roofs. Of the 21 mosques, 16 are reinforced concrete buildings and 5 are of the latter type. The mosques in the old Muslim neighbourhoods are primarily reinforced concrete buildings. In the case of recently-developed neighbourhoods the mosques are 'Assam Type' buildings.

1 *waqf*, i.e., "Religious endowment or foundation established to support public works and religious institutions" (Morgan 1958: 437).
It has been mentioned in chapter eight that the residents of a neighbourhood, who offer prayers in a certain mosque and contribute for its management, constitute a jamat\(^1\). The number of households within the jamats vary from 15 to 200 households.

Regular prayers, five times a day, Friday congregational prayer and various religious festivals are held at the mosques. The congregation usually becomes large on Fridays, Id days and other festivals of the Islamic calendar.

The Muslims of Gauhati at present seem to celebrate Islamic festivals with a great deal of show and splendour than was the case in the past. Such a tendency has also been noted among the Muslims of some other parts of India. Ahmad (1969) considers this as a change due to the social and political developments in the country which have precipitated a renewal of interest in religion among the Muslims.

---

1 See page 202.
2 See pp.100-103 for details of the Islamic festivals. It should be pointed out that the non-Assamese Muslims many of whom belong to the shia sect prepare a tazia (tomb) and arrange mock fighting among themselves during the Muharrum festival. These Muslims also arrange a procession which passes through the main thoroughfares of the city for hours together carrying the tazia.
and have given rise to revival movements. Aggarwal's (1969) findings among the Meos, a dominant land-owning Muslim caste of Rajasthan, show a similar trend. On the other hand, the Assamese Muslims of Gauhati seem to celebrate the Islamic festivals in a splendid manner with a view to creating a festive atmosphere rather than showing a renewal of interest in religion.

On Fridays and festivals, the residents of a neighbourhood who do not attend regular daily prayers also come to the mosque to offer prayers. Muslim men, who may not belong to a particular jamat also come to the mosque to offer prayers on these special occasions.

Each mosque has an Imam who conducts daily prayers, congregational prayers and festivals held at the mosque. The majority of the Imams are non-Assamese, hailing from parts of Cachar district of Assam. There are fifteen such Imams in different mosques of Gauhati. In many parts of Assam, Imams hailing from Cachar district find easy appointment.

The Imams receive regular pay for their services. The amount of pay varies between Rs. 60.00 and Rs.150.00 per month in Gauhati. Ten, out of twenty, Imams get
salaries varying between Rs.100.00 and Rs.125.00 per month. Besides their formal duties, the Imams also conduct milad in the jamat households at weddings, circumcision, aqika and so on. For such services the Imams get some honorarium from the households.

Next to the mosques, the Maktabs occupy a place of distinction as religious institutions among the Gauhati Muslims. There are fifteen Maktabs attached to fifteen different mosques. Only four Maktabs have separate buildings. These are combined Maktab and primary schools. In such Maktabs, the Muslim children attend classes conducted by the Imams of the mosques in the morning hours while the general primary section for all the children (frequently including non-Muslims) starts from 10 a.m. A separate teaching staff teaches in such primary schools. The Maktab-cum-primary schools are usually found in localities where Muslims and non-Muslims live as neighbours. For example, there is one such institution in Machkhowa, one in Ulubari (in ward X) and still another in Hedayatpur. In such institutions, the primary section is financed by the Board of Elementary Education and the mosque managing committee manages the Maktab section.  

1 See page 105.
Each mosque has a committee which looks after the management of the mosque. The committee members, all men, are chosen by the people of the jamat.

The primary function of the mosque managing committee is the maintenance of the mosque. A person who is appointed by the committee, collects contributions from various households for the mosque fund. Besides household contributions, persons from a jamat also voluntarily donate money for the construction and repair of the mosque. Sometimes persons also bear expenses for electric fittings and the charges of electric consumption in the mosque. In the case of only ten mosques household contributions are collected regularly. In another ten mosques, money for their maintenance is solely derived from houses situated in the mosque premises which are rented out. There are seventeen mosques which own rented houses. Most of these mosques owning premises given out on rent belong to the old Muslim neighbourhoods (e.g., Machkhowa and Lakhtokia) which have become highly commercial sites in the city. These rented houses are mainly occupied by shops and commercial establishments of various kinds, owned mainly by the
non-Muslims and the non-Assamese businessmen. Even in cases of mosques situated in the residential areas of the city, houses have been constructed in the empty space within the mosque premises for renting these out. Usually Muslim migrants to the city live in such rented accommodation.

The mosque managing committees pay the salary of the Imams from their respective funds. Expenditure on electricity, washing of clothes used during prayers (masala), salary of the caretakers of the mosques and the sweepers are also met from the same fund. A committee is also responsible for the upkeep and the annual repairing of the mosque, usually undertaken before the Id-ul-Fitr festival.

Usually the committees are renewed once every year. Such meetings are held either in the mosque premises or in the house of a committee member. However, unless a member voluntarily relinquishes office or unless someone dies while in office, the membership is seldom changed.

In the twenty mosques surveyed, the committee membership is seen to vary between 6 and 20 men. Persons chosen as committee members belong to various
age groups and pursue different occupations. Table 26 shows the age and occupations of the members of twenty mosque managing committees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age-Groups (in years)</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 - 30</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 50</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 60</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 +</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College/University Student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Worker</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The members of a *jamat* offer prayers in their mosque and contribute to its maintenance. Thus the members of a *jamat* have a religious attachment and a moral obligation towards their mosque. But this kind of attachment and obligation seldom creates a sense of unity between the residents of a neighbourhood. Nevertheless, I have come across certain instances which show that some residents of a neighbourhood regard their mosque as a prestige symbol for their locality. During the time of field work, the young Muslim boys of *Dighalipukhuri* arranged an endurance swimming by a Muslim youth of the same locality. They arranged this with a view to collecting money for rebuilding the mosque situated in their neighbourhood. Again, the mosque managing committee of *Kamarpatty* has, through great efforts, built the minaret of their mosque as the tallest among the mosque minarets of the city. The secretary of the committee once told me with evident pride: "Our minar is the tallest of all in the town. But when we planned and started the task of building it, most of our *jamat* people showed little interest in our work".
The mosques exist as visible symbols of Muslim neighbourhoods in Gauhati. But their importance as socio-cultural frameworks to activate the *jamat* people as corporate groups, each with a distinct sense of community identity, is rather limited. The mosques in the present context may be viewed as bases of religious organization centering which only the orthodox Muslim social life continues.

(b) **Community Organization**

An attempt is now made to examine the extent to which social relations among the Muslims are ordered through certain community-level organizations.

1 **Anjumane Sabile Islamia** (The Islamic Society)

This is the oldest community organization of Gauhati Muslims, presumably started in the first decade of this century. The British rulers apparently gave weight to this organization and regarded its views as the views of the Muslims of Gauhati.  

---

1 In 1913 the *Anjumane Sabile Islamia* protested against the proposal of the Government for increasing the strength of the Gauhati Municipal Board from 9 to 15 members and its decision that 10 out of these members would be elected and the remaining 5 would be nominated by the Government. The protest was made on the ground that it would affect Muslim interests and hence, demanded separate representation for them. In 1920, communal representation was introduced into local authorities for the first time but the practice was abolished in 1950 (Rao 1967: 193-4).
The aim of this organization is to take up developmental work concerning social and religious life of the Muslims residents of Gauhati. In 1953, a general meeting of Muslims of Gauhati resolved to amend the constitution of this organization "to keep pace with the contemporary situation". Accordingly, the constitution was amended and in 1954 the new constitution was published by the organization.

This organization ceased to function a few years ago. This is attributable to lack of initiative on the part of the office bearers of the organization as well as due to the lack of sustained interest in the organization on the part of the Muslims as a whole.

In 1969, some elderly Muslims including a few who were office bearers of this organization before it became defunct, tried to revive it and discussed the matter informally on a number of occasions. In September 1969, this group of elderly Muslims convened a general meeting and informed the residents of various neighbourhoods of the city to come and attend the meeting. The aim of the meeting was to
find a way for the revival of the organization. The meeting was held in the "Madrasa High School" situated in ward III. I attended the meeting. Though this was supposed to be a meeting covering all the Muslims of Gauhati, there were only 30 Muslim men present in the meeting. Most of them were elderly persons. One of the former secretaries of this organization presided over the meeting. Several Muslims spoke about the "glorious past" of this organization and pointed out that it should be revived to "maintain unity among the Gauhati Muslims". Some of the speakers felt that the organization ceased to function due to the increase of Muslim population, which could not act as a single body, and due to the fast growth of the city itself. One young man pointed out that the name and certain objectives of the organization needed to be modified so as to keep pace with the present "democratic set up of the country". On the formation of an executive committee, the elderly persons insisted that only those men who had a good command of the scriptures should be included in the new committee.

1 Formerly it was an Islamic institution of religion. Later on, a secondary school for secular education was introduced alongside the religious institution.
On the other hand, the relatively younger men insisted that the members of the executive body should be social workers and not just those who were interested in the religious side alone. This sort of differences of opinion finally led to a chaotic situation in the meeting hall. As a result, the president adjourned the meeting and left the hall. Thus the meeting ended without arriving at a consensus and the organization was never revived.

In this manner, differences of opinion among the people regarding the aims and working of community organizations have led to their closure in many cases. At times, internal differences of opinion among the Gauhati Muslims also hamper the functioning of organizations which are still in existence among the city Muslims.

II Anjumane Khawatine Islam (The Society of Muslim Women)

This is the only women's organization among the Gauhati Muslims. This organization came into existence as an offshoot of Anjumane Sabile Islamia. The aim of this organization is to organize various activities with a view to spreading Islamic teachings among Muslim women and children.
Though there is no restriction on membership, yet it is found that mostly women from the old Muslim neighbourhoods take part in the activities of this organization. Some women who do not belong to this organization feel that it is a forum for the "educated and modern women only". The secretary of this organization, an educated lady, told me: "We want all women to come forward and take part in our activities. But there are some who label us otherwise". Anjumane Khawatine Islam, thus, is not a formal platform involving all or even most of the Muslim women of Gauhati.

In 1960, some women of the city arranged a congregational prayer during the Id-Ul-Fitr festival. This act of offering congregational prayer by the women created a sensation among the Muslims and many reacted sharply against this innovation. A general meeting of Anjumane Khawatine Islam was held where the women who had attended the congregational prayer were criticized for participating in an "un-Islamic" manner of offering prayer. Some women who had attended the congregational prayer also attended this meeting. When they spoke supporting their act, the other women
who had criticized them began shouting and asked them to leave the meeting immediately. The meeting was in chaos and finally the women who attended the congregational prayer left the meeting. A fatwa
was obtained from Darul Uloom (a reputed seminary of Indian Islam for studies on Islamic theology, situated at Deoband in Uttar Pradesh) by some elderly Muslim men on behalf of the women's organization which said that congregational prayer by the women was not lawful. In this connection another general meeting was organized by the Anjumane Khawatine Islam on 21 May 1960. The meeting was held at Machkhowa. In this meeting, 393 Muslim women of Gauhati signed an appeal in support of the fatwa. This appeal was later printed and distributed among the Muslims of Gauhati. Since then no congregational prayer has been arranged by the Muslim women of Gauhati.

III Congregational Prayer Ground (Id Gah) and Graveyard (Kabarstan) Committee

This committee makes necessary arrangements for congregational prayers held in connection with the

1 A formal, authoritative opinion or religious pronouncement or verdict of the ulama (heads of Islamic religious institution) concerning a controversial question (Krishna 1972: 157; Morgan 1958: 436).

2 Also see, Krishna 1972: 156-7.
Id festivals, upkeep of the congregational prayer ground situated in the northern part of ward VI and the graveyard situated in the southern part of ward VIII\(^1\) (see fig. 9). This committee was established in the 1940s through the efforts of the residents of the old Muslim neighbourhoods, particularly Kābākhā and Lākhtokia. The members of the executive body of this committee also belong to these two neighbourhoods.

Before each congregational prayer, the executive body sits in the Maktāb situated in ward VII. The body selects the Īmām who would lead the congregational prayer, fixes the time of prayer, appoints persons to decorate the prayer ground and to collect funds for different kinds of expenses.\(^2\) The committee also gets in touch with the city police and the municipal authorities for the control of traffic and for the supply of water for ablutions on the day of prayer. Local newspapers are also informed by the committee.

---

1 Another congregational prayer ground and a graveyard were opened in the late 1950s in ward XIV, following the emergence of a number of Muslim neighbourhoods in the south-eastern part of the city. Among the Muslims in this part of the city there is also a prayer ground and graveyard committee which arranges congregational prayers and maintains the prayer ground and the graveyard.

2 The funds are spent on the maintenance of the prayer ground, the graveyard, and on the disposal of unclaimed Muslim dead bodies (la waris murda).
about the time of prayer, and the name of the Imam who would lead the prayer. Such information are published by the local newspapers. Besides this, printed posters and leaflets are released by the committee informing the time of prayer and so on.

In the recent years it has become a practice for the committee to invite a prominent non-Muslim citizen, e.g., a political leader or the Deputy Commissioner, to come and address the congregation. The guest makes a short speech before the prayer and exchanges greetings with the Muslims. The speeches made by the guests are usually on the theme of maintaining harmony and integration between various communities.¹

For the maintenance of the graveyard, the committee has appointed two persons as caretakers. They are paid by the committee from its funds. The

¹ To quote a news report:

".... At Gauhati the Chief Minister Sri Mahendra Mohan Choudhury attended city's main congregational prayer held at the Kachkhowa Idgah and called upon the Muslims in Assam to promote the pace of national integration and contribute their services towards Assam's prosperity ....

Sri Choudhury said that the Muslim community in Assam had a great role to play in fighting the vested interests that were trying to create narrow feelings to slacken the bond of mutual friendship and understanding between different sections of the people ...." (The Assam Tribune, 2 December, 1970).
committee spends money on the upkeep of the graveyard from the money collected during the congregational prayers. Some ten years ago, the Anjumane Sabile Islamia, the Anjumane Khawatine Islam and the congregational prayer ground and graveyard committee jointly launched a drive to raise funds for the construction of brick walls around the graveyard. With this aim, groups of men and women visited Muslim households in the city. The brick walls were finally erected from the funds raised in this drive.

The old graveyard (situated in ward VIII) is split into two parts by a road. Usually the Muslims from outside Assam and from outside Gauhati bury their deads in the eastern half of the graveyard. Unclaimed dead bodies are also buried in this part. On the other hand, dead bodies from the city Muslim households are buried in the western half of the graveyard. As at Uttar Jalukbari, in Gauhati also there are clusters of graves in the western half of the graveyard. These clusters are formed as a result of burying the deceased kinsfolk close to one another.
IV Recreational Organization: Clubs and Libraries

There are a few clubs run and patronized by the young men in some Muslim neighbourhoods of Gauhati. These may be viewed as local community organizations. However, such local clubs are mainly to be found in the old Muslim neighbourhoods. Some of the clubs have library sections attached to them. Many clubs and libraries, however, have become defunct in the past due to the lack of active interest of the local youths in a few neighbourhoods. These neighbourhood clubs and libraries are managed by the younger people, mainly to spend their leisure time in playing carrom, cards or just in plain gossip. The elderly Muslims are not concerned with the activities of these clubs and hence they show least interest in club or library affairs.

In some large and populous Muslim neighbourhoods there are more than one club and library. For example, in Nachkhowa there are two clubs, in the northern and southern parts, respectively.

As for the libraries, mention may be made of "Siratan Library" which is the oldest of all the libraries among Gauhati Muslims. It is situated in south
Lakhtokia. It was established in the 1940s with a view to spreading the teachings of Prophet Mohammed. This library contains a fairly good number of religious books. The secretary of the library, a young man, informed me that only few Muslims visit the library regularly and borrow books.

The neighbourhood club is a recreational centre for the younger men of the locality. Only few clubs arrange meetings and "cultural functions" at certain religious festivals, e.g., the Id and the Fateha-doaaz-Daham. Arranging "cultural functions" with a secular touch at major Islamic festivals by Muslim youths of a locality is a fairly recent development in Gauhati. These are, in the main, musical soirees - interspersed with speeches. Prominent non-Muslim citizens are often invited to inaugurate or to act as chief guests in such functions meant for the 'public'.

To sum up: With the growth of Muslim population in the city, community organizations have emerged in different neighbourhoods of Gauhati. Even in the recently-established Muslim localities such community-level organizations have been started by the residents. On the other hand, a few Muslim community
organizations in the city have ceased to function in the recent years. This has happened primarily due to the lack of sustained interest on the part of a large section of the Muslim population. I have met a number of Assamese Muslims who are not even aware of the existence of certain organizations among the Muslims of Gauhati. An elderly Muslim once remarked: "I have only heard about Anjuman or something like that the person even did not know the exact name of the organization only when my son a 30 years old office assistant in the Gauhati High Court told me that a chaos broke out in a meeting due to some differences of opinion. The Musalman here knows only his own interests and for this he can go to any length. He is not interested in the community as a whole".

The educated and articulate Muslims tend to keep themselves away from the Muslim community organizations. This passive involvement in essentially Muslim organizations on the part of the educated and younger Muslims seems partly due to their increasing participation in wider socio-cultural and professional contexts. As an educated, middle-aged Muslim pointed out: "If you are going to take part
in some Muslim community organizations, you will be labelled by the non-Muslims as a communal person. This is because some organizations among us are bound by their constitution to work solely for the interest of Islam. That apart, I find that there is a lack of effort for the development of the general economic and social conditions of the Muslims in the case of these organizations. There are also persons who express their reluctance when asked to come forward and take part in the Muslim community organizations and their activities. One such person remarked: "It is better to keep oneself away from committees if one wishes to avoid unpleasant situations and involvement in disputes".

The immigrant Muslims, including the Assamese and the non-Assamese, as a whole have also added new dimensions to the existing social fields of the Gauhati-born Muslims. Along with the increase in the number of migrant Muslims to the city, especially the non-Assamese, there has been a diversification of occupations, interests and of fields of activities for the Muslim population as a whole. The Muslim population of Gauhati, at present,
is no longer homogeneous in cultural, ethnic, linguistic and economic terms. In such a heterogeneous and diffuse situation it is a matter of personal choice and interest rather than the bindings of a particular socio-religious tradition which tend to determine one's nature and extent of involvement in community organizations. As a consequence, it has not been possible for the Muslims of Gauhati to unite and function as one social entity having common aims and objectives.

LEADERSHIP PATTERN

All those persons who are chosen as office bearers of different organizations are not always prominent persons in day-to-day situations. However, some of these office bearers in Muslim organizations also hold important positions in secular organizations of the city. The Muslims who hold key positions in community organizations and who are thus supposed to 'lead' the people are not always important people or leaders in the sense of having groups of followers.

Persons get the opportunity to come into prominence and hold important positions in community organizations in a variety of contexts. However, one's
own neighbourhood provides much scope in this regard. Active participation in formal and informal situations within the neighbourhood (e.g., mosque committee meetings, marriage and other household ceremonies) helps a person to come into prominence. The success of a person in settling occasional disputes between, say, two inhabitants of a neighbourhood also helps him to acquire some importance in the area. The qualities of mature judgement, sedate temperament and active interest in public affairs gradually establish a man as an important person in his neighbourhood. He also becomes known even in other Muslim localities of the city. It is this type of persons who are normally entrusted with key positions in various committees. The following instance illustrates how a person became prominent in his neighbourhood and how he finally came to hold important positions in various community organizations:

Ali, a 50 years old resident of Machkhowa, holds important positions in three Muslim community organizations of Gauhati. He is also the secretary of the mosque managing committee of his neighbourhood. Formerly he was a general member of this committee. During that period he attended meetings regularly and put forward sound suggestions regarding the management of the mosque. Later on, he was chosen unanimously as the secretary of the
mosque managing committee. It is reported that since he became the secretary, household contributions have been regularly collected. The mosque building has also been renovated during his tenure of office. He also attended meetings of different Muslim community organizations where he made impressive speeches. As a result of these, Ali was chosen as a member of the executive body of the congregational and graveyard committee, Aniumane Sabile Islamia and Fateha-doaz-Daham committee.

In day-to-day life also, Ali is an important person in his neighbourhood. He is invited to various households during marriage and other ceremonies to offer suggestions for making necessary arrangements.

Once Ali also presided over a meeting of the Muslim and the non-Muslim residents of the western part of the city to discuss the construction of a children's park in that area. Ali was elected as the vice-president of the committee for the construction of the children's park.

Such persons who hold important positions in formal and informal situations should not, however, be regarded as recognized "community leaders". In fact, among the Muslims of Gauhati such recognized leaders are hard to come by. It is gathered that when Gauhati was still very much a village, each Muslim mahalla had a headman whom the residents of that mahalla regarded as a leader (matowali) of their own.

On the other hand, in the present circumstances, a sort of contextual or episodic leadership has emerged among the Muslims. Despite their functioning in
specific contexts, these episodic leaders are sometimes referred to as murabbis or matowalis by the residents of a neighbourhood. The areas of activity of such contextual leaders are well-defined. For example, the members of the executive bodies of different community organizations hold the right to exercise power only with regard to the activities of those organizations. Even among them, not all but only a few elderly persons hold such right. Despite this fact, none of them are recognized leaders of the Muslims of Gauhati. In fact, they do not have any power or authority over the community in different spheres of Muslim public life. In this connection, it may be pointed out that only in the case of the Marias, living in a compact neighbourhood called Islampatty, a formal pattern of local community leadership has evolved. The recognized leaders among the Marias form a council which holds the power of exercising social control over the residents of this essentially Maria neighbourhood.¹

Some orthodox and religious-minded elderly Muslims also hold important positions in various

¹ Also see pp. 278-281.
community organizations of the Muslims of Gauhati. This is not because of their active participation in community activities but because of their involved interest in religion and their knowledge of Islamic teachings. Such men usually make speeches on the teachings of Islam at festivals held at the mosques and other places. It needs to be pointed out that such elderly and orthodox persons, who formerly held important positions in community activities, are gradually losing their prominence. Our description of the general meeting held to revive Aniumane Sabile Islamia (pp.259-261) offers an example.

The emergence of diversified attitudes, opinions and aspirations among the Assamese Muslims of the city has created a conflicting situation at Gauhati in regard to their choice of persons as leaders. There does not seem to be a consensus about what type of person should be given leadership positions in the committee contexts. The Assamese Muslims of Gauhati do not offer the image of a unified community being led by a set of recognized leaders. In this regard we may quote Krishna
who writes in general about the Muslims of India:

"There is a growing drift away from religion, particularly among the elite .... The mass of Muslims are making their adjustments as best as they can without any satisfactory guidance from a community leadership, traditional or modernist. The Muslim society is becoming differentiated, particularly its elite, and it no longer has the homogeneity which earlier had given it a relatively monolithic character " (1972:168).

Often the office bearers of various Muslim organizations have to relinquish their positions for not being able to discharge their duties according to the wishes of the people or for not being able to work in accordance with one's own line of thinking and perception. One of the secretaries of Aniumane Sabile Islamia, who resigned on the ground for not being able to work according to his wishes, said:

"It is no longer useful to come forward to take part in the activities of the Muslims of Gauhati. People will criticize you if you do not work according to their wishes, but you cannot also give up what you think to be right."

Broadly speaking, among the Muslims of Gauhati, there is a clear conflict between generations. The older and the younger generations differ from one another
in regard to their attitudes, opinions and outlook. The elderly and orthodox Muslims feel that religious specialists should hold important positions and that it is under their guidance that the Muslims should work. An elderly Muslim pointed out that there should be "an Islamic scent in every sphere of our life". Thus a cultural show organized by the young people of Machkhowa, in connection with the Id-ul-Fitr festival, was severely criticized by the elderly residents of Machkhowa on the plea that the agenda of the show consisted of only "modern songs, one-act play and comical performance". According to the elders, the agenda should have consisted of only ghazal and kawali songs, and recitation of verses from the Quran.

The younger people on the other hand, allege that the older people are not conscious about the social and economic problems of the Muslims. The educated and articulate section among them feel that the Muslims should acquire a broader outlook with a view to keep pace with the changing economic, social and political situations and not just be steeped in religious matters.
SOCIAL CONTROL

The contextual leaders of the various formal organizations of the Gauhati Muslims have diversified interests in keeping with the different organizations in which they serve. As such, they are not in a position to join hands to form a common community-level forum having unitary aims and objects. Therefore, it has not been possible for the contextual leaders to wield collective influence and act as a nucleus of social control over the community.

As noted earlier, only in the case of the Marias we find a formal pattern of leadership which has evolved on the basis of their neighbourhood. The council of leaders among the Marias acts as an agency of social control over the residents.

The neighbourhood of the Marias (i.e., Islampatty) is situated in ward I. This is one of the oldest Muslim neighbourhoods of the city. There are 60 Maria households in the neighbourhood. The settlement pattern of the Marias is compact. As pointed out in chapters eight, the Marias have switched over to various wage-occupations due to the decline of
their traditional occupation of brass-working. Only in 25 per cent of the households the traditional occupation is still being pursued.

The Marias marry within themselves because other Muslims regard them as being of a lower social status. As a result, the Marias have become a sort of "kin-community"\(^1\) within which ties of kinship and marriage link one household with many others. Figure 12 demonstrates kin links between ten Maria households.

The mosque managing committee of the Marias is referred to by them as a panchayat. The committee consists of eleven members whose age varies between 40 and 70 years. Only one among them is a job holder (an office assistant) while the remainder are all in petty business. The elderly members of the committee are regarded by the Marias as their leaders (murabbis or matowalis). Again, among these leaders Dilwar Khan, a 70 years old shopkeeper, is regarded by the inhabitants of the locality as the "chief leader". In fact, Dilwar Khan is often referred to as the headman (gaonbura) of the Marias. He heads the panchayat.

The mosque managing committee or the panchayat plays a significant role in formal as well as in

---

\(^1\) See Hurdock 1949 : 88.
An example of kin links between 10 Maria households (within dotted lines) at Islamgāt, Guwahati (simplified from an extended genealogy).
day-to-day informal situations among the Marias. During marriage and circumcision, Maria householders invite the panchayat and hand over the required money to the headman for arranging the feast. The panchayat accordingly makes necessary arrangements for the feast. Since many of the marriages are contracted within the neighbourhood itself, a single community feast (contributed to by both the households) is arranged by the panchayat.

The mosque managing committee acts as an agency of social control over the Marias. When disputes arise between two parties, the committee, headed by Dilwar Khan, settles the issue. The verdicts of the committee are always obeyed by the Maria residents.

In a two-year period (1967 and 1968), the committee tried and found eight residents guilty of various offences which the committee regarded as contrary to their tradition. Four Maria men were fined for drinking liquor, two men for sexual offences and two women for indulging in quarrelling in public by the roadside. All these persons were tried by the committee on the mosque premises and fines varying between Rs.2.00 and Rs.5.00 were imposed in each case. The amounts realized were deposited in the committee fund.
The kind of socio-political situation obtaining among the Marias is unique among the Muslims of Gauhati. Two forces appear to have been at work simultaneously which has given rise to this situation. First, the social distance which the other Muslims maintain towards this community has led the Marias to consolidate their own identity. The consolidation of their identity has also helped in maintaining unity among themselves. Secondly, the socio-economic background and the network of kinship have helped to create a sense of solidarity within the neighbourhood. Further, their compact settlement pattern provides the Marias scope for frequent interactions and face-to-face relations. In fact, the social situation obtaining among the Marias approximates the social life of those Muslims who have concentrated in the bustees (slums) of Calcutta. Among these slum dwellers one comes across a sense of unity and solidarity based on common background and kinship. There is also a fairly strong leadership system in the bustee which acts as an agency of social control over the residents of the bustee (Siddiqui 1969: 1919).
To return to the general Muslim social life in Gauhati, the force of public opinion which acts as an agency of social control in certain situations in a small community, is not really effective in the city. An individual's allegiance and loyalty does not extend beyond his kinship, friendship and immediate neighbourhood circles so as to encompass the city Muslims as a whole. Therefore, it is meaningless for a person what image other Muslims have of him. The pressure of public opinion may often be there. But this does not lead to any organized action. The following instance illustrates this point:

During the time of field work, an Assamese young man, a Hindu, married a Muslim girl. It was a court marriage. The girl supposedly became a Hindu and the marriage was solemnized as per Hindu customs. Both the boy and the girl were residents of the same neighbourhood. Following this incident, the Muslim residents of that neighbourhood strongly criticized the girl and her parents. This marriage became a matter of heated discussion among the residents. Some people opined that the parents of the girl could, but did not, restrain their daughter. Therefore, it was not for them to take any action against the girl.

A few days after the incident, some elderly Muslim residents of the neighbourhood met the secretary of the mosque managing committee and asked him to initiate some action from the side of the committee against the girl's parents. They also told the secretary
that if such "un-Islamic" events go on happening, these would "affect the prestige of the Muslims." The secretary told the elders that it would not be possible for the committee to take any action against the parents since the mosque committee constitution did not provide for any action in such cases. The secretary pointed out: "Many "un-Islamic" incidents are taking place among the Muslims of Gauhati nowadays. Some Muslims are addicted to liquor, Muslim women move about freely without purdah, men quarrel even in the mosque premises, but nobody seems to be bothered with such lapses among the Muslims."

Religion, which is regarded as an agency of social control, is not always effective in all communities. Hofstee finds that social control in the name of religion operates fairly well in a fully homogeneous community (1957: 358). In Gauhati, the life of the elderly and orthodox section of the Muslims continues centering round the mosques. We have also observed that the Muslims as a whole maintain a link with the mosques, mostly in a formal way. The Muslims are expected to behave and act in some definite ways in accordance with the tenets as laid down in the Sharia. Yet one comes across instances involving the Muslims which are contrary to the Sharia. A drunkard, a gambler, or any person whose activities are "un-Islamic"

1 As quoted by Anderson and Ishwaran 1965: 158-159.
2 The religious law of Islam.
in any way, does not have to face organized or formal action which may entail punishment. For instance, I once saw the following intimidation written in Assamese on the compound wall of a mosque situated in Machkhowa. It read: Machkhowar Madanik Marak Aru Madar Dokan Bhangak (Beat up the drunkards of Machkhowa and destroy the liquor shop). On inquiry, I found that some Muslims of Machkhowa took liquor in a house of that neighbourhood which has also come to be regarded as a place for selling liquor. To stop this, some other Muslims wrote on the walls. This, however, proved to be an empty threat and did not yield any result. Thus such "un-Islamic" acts may create commotion but may not lead to any action from the side of the community against the guilty.

The changing social and economic situation brought by fast urban developments have produced qualitative changes in the pattern of Muslim social relations. The Assamese Muslims do not constitute one single community in the city. They are split into many local communities. Even in these local communities the social life has become rather diffuse with but one or two exceptions.