Caste among the Indian Muslims

The contact of the people of India with Arabia, the land where Islam took its birth has been pretty old. Historians and archaeologist believe that India’s commercial and religious intercourse with the people of Arabia was intimate even before the advent of Islam (Qanungo, 1968: 18-19). Not only Indian merchandise found its way into Arabia but Indian thoughts and deities were also carried by Indian and Arab merchants to parts of Arab land where they had received acceptance.

Soon after the Islamic revolution in Arabia in the 6th century A.D., Islam entered into the Indian Sub-continent as a socio-political force first through the sea route of the south western coast and the southern tip of peninsula and later through the land route of the North West. Those who came through the sea route were predominantly merchants while those who came through the land route were mainly conquerors. Saints and missionaries followed both paths (Faridi and Siddiqui, 1992).

Islam is neither a new religion known only for the last fourteen centuries, nor it is named after its founder. Actually there is no particular founder of Islam. All Prophets of God, appearing in various countries and at different times had worked for the same religion. The religion took a perfect shape through its last prophet, Hazrat Mohammad (Ahmad, 1991).

Indian Muslims are not a homogenous community as is the general perception. Muslims are divided on the bases of different religious ideologies, caste differentiation and customary practices. Prophet Mohammad prophesized that his followers would be divided into 73 Sects. And so far 132 sects have been recorded. The ethnic and cultural amalgamation of the foreign strain with the indigenous strain has contributed to Muslim population’s unique rites and rituals (Rizvi and Roy, 1984).

Even in the case of earlier invaders their ‘racial purity’ was gradually lost by inter-marriage with the indigenous population. Though a few families claim to have resisted this inter-mixture, the majority of the Indian population, particularly in Bengal and Southern India, by and large, show a strain of indigenous elements in them. This is clearly visible in their religious rites, rituals and certain customs which are recorded by Jafar Sharif (1921:19-22).
These customs and religious rites differ in many important aspects from the orthodox system prevailing among Muslims of Persia, Arabia and Egypt. “Except for the urban Muslim elite, Indian Muslims had developed their own version of Islam, no doubt with regional variations, and Indian Islam was knocking at the door of the elite, too. Akbar and Dara were the devout exponents of Indian Islam” (Imam, 1975).

From the foregoing account it is evident that though Muslims appear to be constituting a homogenous group; actually they represent a culturally and ethnically diversified group bound together only by their common belief in Islam. Even in the religious domain, Muslims are classified in different sects and have diversified schools of thought and, as will be seen later, these groups form a firm basis of differentiation amongst the Indian Muslims. However, the division and sects among Muslims are as innumerable as are prevalent among their neighbours.

Though the division among Muslims appear to be too simplistic to outsiders, more so due to the religious overtone of equalitarianism, the actual situation reveals a most complex set-up neither resembling the Hindu caste system nor the western class pattern, yet drawing clear boundaries through diversified ethnicity and differing religious ideologies (Rizvi and Roy 1984).

The Muslims in India do not belong to a single ethnic or cultural group. The Arabs, Afghans, Persians and Turks came to this country one after another, and those Muslims who claim foreign descent trace their origin from these ethnic groups. But it was noted that people of indigenous origins constitute the bulk of the Muslim population in India (Faridi and Siddiqi, 1992).

The sections of Indian Muslims, who were converted to Islam from the indigenous population, retained some of their social structure and occupations and this introduced the counter-part of Hindu caste system into the social structure of Indian Islam (Ibid: 66).

Muslims as minority have an impact of this pattern of caste-culture, no doubt with different nomenclature. The etymology of this impact also lies in the minority position of Muslims leading to a tendency for latent emulation of the cultural styles of the majority. To a certain extent, the inter-caste marriage also imparted this tendency to
Muslims because Hindu women having been brought-up in the caste culture were obsessed and compelled to follow that pattern in their social behaviour. Secondly they infused the said pattern in their rearing of their children (Ibid: 100).

Caste is deeply embedded in Hindu social system which has produced varnas as fourfold division of society according to the sanctity of purpose and the level of its achievement. Caste is deviated form of varnas which in due course, accommodated the modern pressures of space and time and, thus, became deshaped. In this process of change the apparent features of the group were taken into account but its purpose was neglected. As a matter of fact, form became more important and the purpose was neglected. However, the foundation on which the structure and its form were developed cannot be ignored. Caste is thus related to the philosophical and ideological basis of Hindu Religion which provide the framework within which a person operates and on which his or her entire ways of acting and conduct of affairs depend. The position of a person is considered with reference to place or region (Desa), time (Kala), efforts (srama), and endowment (Guna)\(^1\) (Ibid: 20).

**Caste Characteristics**

Social historians, sociologists and anthropologists define caste in different ways. Risley defines it ‘as a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with a specific occupation, ‘claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous community’\(^2\) (Risley, 1915).

According to Nesfield it is ‘a functional union bonded by marriage union’.\(^3\) Ketkar treat it as a social group bearing two characteristics:

1) Membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born,

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2) The members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the
group.\textsuperscript{4}

Dutt finds endogamy, restriction on commensality, fixed occupation, hierarchical
grading and closeness of the group as main features of a caste. Hutton\textsuperscript{5} (1955) observe
some features of caste as follows:

1) It is an endogamous group ,
2) Restriction on commensality,
3) Hierarchical grading of caste,
4) Pollution by either direct or indirect contact with a members of a low
caste ,
5) Commonly associated with occupation,
6) Caste status is finally determined by birth.

Senart\textsuperscript{6} (1930) finds the following features in caste system:

1) Close Population,
2) Hierarchical Group,
3) Chief or council,
4) Occasional assemblies,
5) Common occupation, and
6) Common customs.

Leach observes that ‘caste denotes a particular species of structural organisation
indissolubly linked with what Dumont rightly insist as Pan – Indian civilisation\textsuperscript{7}.
Srinivas (1962) considers it to be the structural basis of Indian Society\textsuperscript{8}. Ghurye
(1969) finds it ‘as small and complete social world in themselves marked off
definitely from one another subsisting within the larger society\textsuperscript{9}. He further outlines
the following features of caste system:

\textsuperscript{4} S.V. Ketkar, History of Caste in India, New York, Ithaca, 1909, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{6} E. Senart, Les Casted dans L’Inde, (1968), translated into English (Caste in India) by E.D. Ross, London, 1930, p.20.
\textsuperscript{7} E.R. Leach, op. cit, p.5.
\textsuperscript{8} M. N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India, Bombay, Popular Publishing, 1962, p.73.
\textsuperscript{9} G. S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1969, p.4.
1) Segmental division of society,
2) Hierarchy
3) Restriction on fooding and social intercourse,
4) Restricted choice of occupation,
5) Restriction on marriage,
6) Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections.

An analysis of the caste characteristics found in Indian society and observed by different social scientists enables us to draw a caste syndrome on the basis of which we can characterize a group as caste. They are as follows:

1) Birth determines caste membership,
2) Endogamous nature,
3) Hierarchical order,
4) Privileges and disabilities,
5) A sub culture. (Ibid. P. 21).

Caste also helps the group of individuals to develop a specific sub culture. All these are patterned into social structure. This is true for Hindu society because caste groups are important units which are by their differential position and function integrated into the social structure and serves the desired ends.

**Sociological Studies on Muslim Caste System**

Muslim social structure cannot be explained through caste groupings as castes among them are less rigidly organized and there are limited rituals of purity and pollution. However, some sociological studies have discovered that Indian Muslims also are organised into caste groups. The sociological literature in this respect indicates two views. One view is that caste-organization exists in Muslim society and it is on the
pattern of Hindu caste. Ansari\(^{10}\) (1960) is the exponent of this view. He observes four caste divisions among the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh. They are Ashraf, Muslim Rajput, clean occupational caste, unclean castes. He further divides Ashraf into Sayyad, Sheikh, Mughal, and Pathan. The clean occupational castes according to him are placed into thirteen other groups; Julaha, Darzi, Qassab, Nai or Hajjam, Kabariya or Kunjra, Dhunya, Faqir, Teli, Dhobi and Gaddi. Bhangi constitutes the unclean castes. He further mentions in the foot note with reference to Risley and Levy that unclean caste are Arzal.

The other view is that not caste but caste like features exist among Indian Muslims. Ahmad considers castes among Muslims as not a cultural or structural feature but as a manifestation of the principle and feature characteristically associated with Hindu castes\(^{11}\). He (Ahmad) further finds endogamy and status mobility as features of Siddiqui Sheikh of Allahabad\(^{12}\) which he studied. Momin\(^{13}\), Bhattacharya\(^{14}\) and Siddique\(^{15}\) observe in their respective studies one or more features of Hindu Caste among Muslim particularly endogamy, hierarchy and sometimes caste council. Aggarwal\(^{16}\) finds even gotra among Meo Muslims of Rajasthan and Haryana (Ibid: 23-24).

Sociologists generally observe two features of Hindu Caste among Indian Muslims. The First is ‘Endogamy’ and the Second is ‘Hierarchy’ (Ibid: 26).

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16 Pratap G. Aggarwal,’The Meos of Rajasthan and Haryana’, in Imtiaz Ahmad(ed.), *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims*, Delhi, Manohar Book Service, 1972, pp.21-44.
Srinivas rightly considers caste to be “the structural basis of Hindu Society”\(^\text{17}\) capable of adjusting to different socio-political conditions.

The caste system has got diffused in other communities living in this country, like the Muslims, Jews, Sikhs and Christians, and different elements of caste have penetrated in these communities too. Hence, in some detail, the characteristics of Muslim society and the pattern of social stratification among them has been presented (Ibid: 31).

**Caste and Varna System**

The first literary traces of the caste system are to be found in the Rig Veda, but instead of the word ‘caste’, mention has been made of *Varna* (colour). In the earlier version there is description of only three *varnas* i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya, but in the later versions of the fourth *Varna*, Sudra has also been added. It states that Lord Brahma (*Purusha*) was pleased to create the four *varnas* from different parts of his body.

The term ‘caste’ developed later and gradually replaced *Varna*. Some writers have tried to distinguish between the two though in actual practice caste and *Varna* are interchangeably used. The layman is unaware of the complexities of *Varna*. To him it means simply the division of Hindu society into four orders, viz., Brahmana (Brahmin, traditionally, priest and scholar), Kshatriya (ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (peasant, Labourer and servant). The first three castes are ‘twice-born’ as the men from them are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of *upanayana*, while the Shudras are not. The Untouchables are outside the *Varna* scheme.

According to the *Varna* scheme there are only four castes excluding the Untouchables, and the number is same in every part of India. But even during Vedic times there were occupational groups which were not subsumed by *Varna* even though it is not known whether such groups were castes in the sense sociologists understand the term. Today, in any linguistic area there are to be found a number of castes (Gupta, 1991). According to Ghurye, in each linguistic region, there are about

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200 caste groups which are further sub-divided into about 3000 smaller units each of which are endogamous and constitute the area of effective social life for the individual. Thus Varna are four in number whereas the number of castes run into thousands (Ghurye, 1969).

According to traditional or religious theory, the social status of each individual is fixed by heredity and not by personal qualification, merits or material considerations. This means status is determined by birth and not by worth. Hence it is ascribed to the individual and not achieved by him. Every good caste man is expected to do his duties without trying to improve his social status, which is predetermined. He may expect to go higher in the social scale only by strict adherence to the duties of his caste.

At the existential level there does not exist a single Varna (caste) with an all-India structural network of kinship, occupational specialization and continuity of social interaction. At the existential level, therefore, castes or jatis are divided into hundreds of regional endogamous groups. The linguistic barriers between regions have served to isolate them further on the one hand and the regional cultural variations, the built-in system of institutionalized inequality and mutual repulsion among jatis, on the other, have further reinforced the regional or local character of castes. From a comparative view-point, caste structure differs in regard to internal rank differentiation from one region to another. Empirically, therefore, castes or jatis exist as micro-structures of Indian phenomenon in reality a cultural framework of caste exist as a pure category. It lays down normative principles without having much to do with actual processes of structural and functional variations in the reality of caste system (Singh, 2002).

According to his actions in one life, a person is rewarded or punished by being born in a higher or lower position. Thus difference of status and social inequality are justified by the religious doctrines of karma (work) and dharma (duty) and the transmigration of soul.

The entire Hindu society is divided internally into four major groups, each one of them known as Varna which is further divided into a number of castes and sub-castes placed in order of relative superiority and inferiority. They have a status, set of duties,
some taboos and restrictions upon behaviour, follow the hereditary occupation and are endogamous. Linguistic region is also very important which sets territorial limits to marriage. As for example a Kashmiri Brahman should not marry a Brahman from Tamil Nadu or Mithila in Bihar because they belong to different linguistic territories. Together with the linguistic region the family, caste and village life plays a vital role in the traditional society in India (Faridi and Siddiqi, 1992). Varna system has served as a model or framework for the study of changes, particularly so mobility in the caste system. Caste on the other hand which are numerous competed with each other to move up in the hierarchy through the process of ‘Sanskritization’ in which higher castes served as a role model or reference group (Gupta, 1991).

Different writers have given different definition of caste and tried in their own ways to highlight its characteristics. The word ‘caste’ comes from the Portuguese word *casta* signifying breed, race or kind. Originally this word in true sense was used in 1563 Gracia -de -orta wrote that no one changes his father’s trade and all those of the same caste (*casta*) of shoe makers are the same. Here Gracia- de -orta refers to one important characteristic of caste i.e. hereditary occupation (Faridi and Siddiqi, 1992).

### Theories on Caste Development in India

Apart from the religious or traditional theory of origin of caste there are a number of other theories particularly presented by different European thinkers. Most of them think the Indian caste system to be an artificial creation of the Brahmins to maintain division in the society and uphold their supremacy.

Nesfield (1885) thinks that this system has developed through different occupations. In the beginning there were different occupational groups which later on became hereditary, and thus formed different castes. He considers that this is a natural product of society in which religion did not play any part\(^\text{18}\).

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Of the most celebrated writer Risley (1908) believes, that caste system has nothing to do with religion. It developed through the interaction of different races and the practice of hypergamy. He argues that Varna means colour, which symbolises caste. The Aryans were white people while the Dravidians were the Negritos, a branch of the Negroes. The victorious group, Aryan imposed their rule on the dark coloured Negritos, the Dravidians. The Aryans were the Brahmans the noble and the high, while the Dravidians, were the dasa, or Sudras, the mean and degraded. These two formed the two castes in the long run as Aryans stopped marriages with Sudra women after a sufficient and long time. The other two intermediary castes, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas developed out of other racial elements in India.

Ibbetsom (1920) gives a different explanation of the origin of caste system. He thinks that the Brahmans exploited their position, and degraded all occupations, those of trader, agriculturists and artisans, except their own and that of their patrons of the ruling classes. He explains caste as arising from combination of tribal practices, functional guilds and primitive religion. He thought division of labour made hereditary to be the cause of the origin of this system (Ibid: P. 38).

The census 1901 divided the Indian people into three types of tribes and seven types of castes, which included:

1) The tribal castes i.e. tribes converted to caste, preserving their original name and many of their characteristic customs but modifying their ‘animistic’ practices more and more in the direction of orthodox Hinduism and ordering their way of life in the same manner.
2) The functional castes based on traditional occupation, even though many of their members would have abandoned them. The adoption of new occupations or of changes in the original occupation gave rise to subdivisions in the caste which ultimately developed into entirely distinct castes.
3) The sectarian castes comprising a small number of castes which commenced life as a religious sects founded by philanthropic enthusiasts, but which, as time went

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on and the practical difficulties they faced increased, forced a separation and got themselves recognised on the lines of an ordinary caste.

4) Castes formed by crossing.

5) The national castes.

6) The castes formed by migration, i.e. the members of a caste who left their original habitat and settled permanently in another part of India; they got separated from the parent group and developed into distinct caste.

7) The castes formed by a change in customs, i.e. the formation of a new castes as a consequence of the neglect of established usages or the adoption of a new ceremonial practice or secular occupation (Census of India, 1901: 521-9) (Singh, 1996).

**Basic Attributes of Caste**

Leach rightly remarks: “A caste does not exist by itself. A caste can only be recognised in contrast to other castes with which its members are closely involved in network of economic, political and ritual relationships” (Leach, 1960: 05). This network outlines the working of the caste system.

In his thorough going analysing of social structure, Nadel has suggested that every role has a hierarchy of three different types of attributes, viz. “peripheral”, “sufficiently relevant”, and “basic or pivotal”. Attributes are called peripheral when their “variation or absence does not affect the perception and effectiveness of the role” (1957:31) a variation in, or the absence of, the sufficiently relevant attribute makes “a difference to the perception and effectiveness of the role, rendering its performance noticeably imperfect or incomplete”. The basic or pivotal attributes are used “in the sense that their absence or variation changes the whole identity of a role”. The problem of the identification can be solved if we can enumerate the attributes of caste units according to their relevance.

The different attributes of unit mentioned by various writers can be arranged as under:

1. **Basic (pivotal) attribute:** Endogamy

2. **Sufficiently relevant attributes:**
   a) Membership by birth
b) Common occupation  
c) Caste council  

3. Peripheral attributes:  
   a) Name  
   b) Diacritical signs (Atal, 1979).

The position of a caste group has been discussed by various scholars from various points of views. For example, Sharma attempts to judge the position of a caste on the bases of two elements - ceremonial and secular values. To Sharma, the ceremonial aspect refers to the ritual and religious performances and observances; the secular aspect of Hierarchy includes achievement. The secular values encompass the sphere of behaviour of the individual at the feeling and action levels pertaining to the desire for mobility (Sharma, 1953:901-10).

The commensal hierarchy according to Mayer in addition to other factors is a manifestation of the difference in the state of various caste groups (1960: 33-60). He also says that the ranking of the caste group is nowhere more clearly seen than in the commensal rules of eating, drinking and smoking. In the caste system occupation is closely related, and this aspect of caste system could not escape Mayer’s attention but he says that occupation, in turn, is related to commensality.

Dube’s interpretation of hierarchy is based on superiority and inferiority (Dube, 1961:36). Ritual pollution and purity according to Gough (1959:127-47), is the bases of ranking of caste groups. This approach can be termed as ‘interactional’, which claims that hierarchy is determined by ritual variables.

To Marriott (1960:97-107), ranking can be done on the bases of both interaction and attributes. The first one takes into account the ritual ceremonies and commensal relations while the second approach, on the other hand deals with distributive system.

Providing a causal analysis of the variables in the caste system D’Souza (1981) divides the Variable into three categories a) Variables which are central to the definition of caste b) Variables which are the causes of the central variables; and c) Variables which are dependent upon the central variables.
Chapter - II

The caste status according to him is the central variable in the caste system. There is general agreement with respect to the caste status as the most important variable for describing the gradations among different castes, because the caste status may be empirically measured by asking the members of community to rank the various castes according to their social status. However, the degree of caste stratification would depend upon the degree of unanimity among members in ranking the caste groups. The perfect degree of unanimity indicates the existence of the caste system in its rigid form and complete ambiguity indicates the absence of caste. The variable of caste status, as already pointed out, is operationally defined here “as the prestige gradation or social evaluation of the relevant ethnic groups by members of the community and operational counterpart of the caste status may be designed as caste ranking” (D’Souza 1981:67) (Ali, 1992).

Composition of the Muslim Community

(A) Racial division of Muslim society

Muslims society under the Mughals was composed of the following racial groups:

(1) The Mughals: Muslims who came to India with Babar (the first Mughal Emperor) from central Asia were commonly known in India as Mughals. As the entire region from which they hailed was called Turan, they came to be known in India as Turanis. They claimed superiority over other Muslims by virtue of the fact that they belonged to the ruling house. Aurangzeb observes about them in his Will as follows: “The Turani people have even been soldiers. They are very expert in making charges, raids, night-attacks, and arrests... In every way, you should confer favours on this race, because on many occasions these men can do the necessary service, when no other race can”.

(2) The Persians or the Iranians: The inhabitants of Persia or the land south of Oxus, in the region of Iran, were known either as Persians or Iranians. The Persians were equally skilled in the use of arms and the drudgery of book keeping and financial matters.
(3) **The Afghans or Pathans:** The origin of the Pathans has been a subject of controversy among the Historians. The term ‘Pathan’ is not a native word at all. It is the Hindustani Form of the Native word Pukhtana, which is plural of Pukhtun, or Pakhtun. Broadly speaking, the tribes speaking the Pashtu language were called Afghans. They inhabited a large part of Afghanistan and parts of the North-West frontier Provinces of India.

(4) **The Arabs:** There are few families of Arab Origin in India. In Delhi there were about two thousands Arabs, who lived together at a place named after them *Arab Ki Sarai*. They supplied Arabian horses to the stables of the kings and nobles in India.

(5) **The Hindustani Muslims:** The largest group of Muslim society in India was that of Muslim natives of India. These were known as Hindustani Muslims.

**(B) Tribal division of Muslim Society**

(1) **The Pathans:** The Pathans were divided into two major tribes- *Sarabin* and *Kalani*. The tribe *Sarabin* was considered to be superior to the tribe *Kalani*.

(2) **The Saiyids:** The clan of the Indian Saiyids which attained prominence during the eighteenth century was that of the Saiyids of Barha.

(3) **The Shaikhzadas:** All Indian Muslims who were not Saiyids were known as Shaikhzadas, “descendants of the saints” a polite designation. They held lands and also were in the service of the state. They were reputed to be very subtle and of great intelligence. They were also said to be very litigious and legal expert. Some of them became recluses.

(4) **The Bulochis:** The term “Buloch”was used in different senses. Sometimes it denoted the Buloch. The Bulochis did not try for any service at the Mughal court, though some of their chiefs acted as Governors and Faujdaras near their own country. They were capable of fielding fifteen thousand horses and much infantry in the event of a battle. They were Sunnis.
(5) **The Gakkhars:** They inhabited the region situated on the other side of the Chenab River, extending as far as the Indus. They were good soldiers, and many of them were in the imperial service. They were esteemed for their courage.

(6) **The Mewatis:** The Meos live in the region known as Mewat or the Meo country, which is situated in the South-East of the Punjab and which now forms the part of state of Haryana. They claim to be of Rajput origin and sometimes bear even Hindu personal names.

(7) **The Bohras:** The Bohras derive their caste name from the word “Beohar”, which means trade. A Bohra is thus a merchant. Since the entire community carried on trade, they were called Boharay.

(C) **Social Stratification of the Muslim Society**

The medieval Indian Muslim society may be divided into three classes. The first two *ahl-i-saif* (men of sword) and *ahl-i-qalam* (men of the pen) together constituted the social aristocracy or the ruling class. Their number was very small as compared with the third viz, the masses. At the top of the social order were the ruling aristocracy and the relatives of the king. The men of the pen included the theologians and the litterateurs, the Mashaikh and the Sadat. At the bottom of the ladder were ‘*awam-i-khalq*’ or the common people. There were the peasants, the professional clerks, and such men of business as artisans, bankers, money lenders, merchants and vagrant religious mendicants.

The Muslim community in India during the eighteenth century was composed of four prominent racial and tribal groups-the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sayyads and the Sheikhs. All these four groups were regarded as Ashraf.

The sons of some Sayyads and ‘Ulama’ and the sons of some clerks too were addressed Mirza. Mirza Qatil argues that the root of the word “Mirza” was “Amirzadda”. However it was mostly the Saiyid families which supplied the ‘Ulama’, Shurafa, and other men of the arts and learning, they became famous with the appellation “Mir” or “Mirza” affixed to their names on account of the respect shown
to them. That is some were called Mir, and some others were called Mirza (Umar, 1998: 5-17).

Under the Muslim rule a new type of social stratification was created by the Muslims. K.M. Ashraf (cited in Karim, 1956: 129) roughly divided the Muslim society into three divisions. These are: (1) The upper classes; (2) The Domestics and the slaves and (3) the Masses.

The upper classes consisted of the following three sub-divisions namely, (I) Ahl-i-daulat, or the ruling class proper, composed of royal family, the nobility and the army chiefs; (II) Ahl-i-Sa’adat, or the intelligentsia, which comprised theologians, the judicial functionaries, the Syeds, the leaders of religious thought, men of reputed piety and religious devotion and men of learning, especially poets and writers; (III) Ahl-i-Murad, or the class catering to the pleasures; which are composed of musicians and minstrels, dancing girls and others, who contributed to the success of pleasure parties.

The ‘Domestics’ and the ‘Slaves’ under the Muslim rule constituted a distinct class, separate from the Muslim masses. The ‘Masses’ comprised of the lower sections of the people (Ali, 1993).

**Four Major Groups in Islam**

Muslims in India are popularly divided into four groups: Sayyad, Sheikh, Mughal, and Pathan.

The **Sayyads**, a term meaning ‘lord’, also known as Pirzada, ‘descendants of a saint’, or Mashaikh, ‘venerable’, claim descent from Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, and as religious teachers, soldiers, and adventurers, flocked into India with the Muhammadan armies. They tell a tale that the Angel Jabrail or Gabriel, when he came down from heaven with the divine revelation held a sheet over the Panjtan-i-pak, the five holy ones, Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain, and exclaimed, ‘O Muhammad! The Almighty showers his blessings upon thee, and ordains that thou and the offspring of the four who sit with thee shall henceforth be Sayyads’. It is difficult to say how many of the present Sayyads belong to the true foreign stock, but probably their number is small. The saying runs, ‘last year I was a Julaha or weaver, this year I am a Sheikh, next year, if prices rise, I shall be a Sayyad’. The men take the title of
Sayyad or Mir that is Amir, ‘leader’, before their names, or Shah, ‘prince’ after them, while the women add the title Begum, ‘lady’.

Sheikh, ‘venerable leader’, is a term which should properly include only those of pure Arab descent, and the name is specially applied to three branches of Quraish tribe from which the Prophet sprang: the Siddiqui, claiming descent from Abu Bakar, the first Khalifa, known as Siddiq, ‘the veracious’; Faruqi, from ‘Umar al- Faruq, ‘the discriminator between truth and falsehood’, the second Khalifa; Abbasi, from ‘Abbas’, paternal uncle of Muhammad. But the term Sheikh has now become little more than a title of courtesy, and it is generally assumed by Hindu converts to Islam.

The term Mughal is a form of the name Mongal, the race which invaded India after the campaigns of Chengiz Khan, and it is now generally applied to the followers of Babur or those who were attracted to India by his successors.

The name Pathan, a corrupted form of Peshtana or Pukhtana, speakers of Pashto, a language current beyond the north-west frontier and within British territories (Sharif, 1972: 9-11).

**Genealogical Division**

There are no genealogies in Islam. The Islamic principles do not permit the division of society into hierarchical order. But in real situation, the Muslims are divided into number of hereditary groups. This social hierarchy is so deep rooted that it continues even after the death of an individual (Ali, 1992).

The genealogy is given to trace out the various religious sects and groups which had originated at different times of the Islamic history. The prophet belonged to the Quraish tribe. His daughter Fatima was married to the Prophet’s father’s brother’s son, Ali. This was the beginning of institutionalizing of cousin marriage which is most significant feature and determining factor of Indian Muslims in general.

**List of the Asna-Ashariya**

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<th>Descent Traced to</th>
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<td>1) Ali’s mating with another wife than Fatima</td>
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<td>4)</td>
<td>Zaid Shahid</td>
<td>ZAIDI/ZAIDIYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Zainul Abidin</td>
<td>ABIDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Mohammad-al-Baqr</td>
<td>BAQRI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>Jafar-al-Sadiq</td>
<td>JAFARI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>Musa-al-Kazim</td>
<td>KAZMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9)</td>
<td>Ali-ibn-Musa-al-Raza</td>
<td>RIZVI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10)</td>
<td>Mohammad-al-Taqi</td>
<td>TAQVI</td>
</tr>
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<td>11)</td>
<td>Ali-al-Naqi</td>
<td>NAQVI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12)</td>
<td>Hasan-al-Askari</td>
<td>ASKAR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Imams of Shias

1. Ali (d-661) = Fatima

2. Hasan (d-670)

Sharifs of Morocco Idrisids of N. Africa

Zaid (d-740) Imam of the Zaidis of Yemen & N.Africa

Ismail (d-775)

Fatamid Caliph of Egypt

Al Muntasir (d-1095)

Nazar (d-1097)

Ismail (d-775)

Ismailis of Yemen, Syria & Bohras of India.

Imam of Ismailis

Imam of the Nizarith or Eastern Ismailis, Khojas, etc

Austali (d-1101) 9th Fatamid Caliph

3. Husain (d-680)

4. Zainul Abidin (d-713)

5. Mohammad-dal-Baqar (d-732)

6. Zafar-al-Sadiq (d-765)

7. Musa-Al-Kazim (d-799)

8. Ali –Al-Raza (d-834)

9. Mohammad-Al-Taqi (d-835)

10. Ali-Al-Naqi (868)

11. Hasan-Al-Askar (d-873)

12. Muhammad d-Al-Mehdi

The Awaited disappeared in 873

Imams of the Asna-Ashari or Twelve Shias

Prophet Mohammad (570-632)

1. Ali (d-661) = Fatima

2. Hasan (d-670)

3. Husain (d-680)

4. Zainul Abidin (d-713)

5. Mohammad-dal-Baqar (d-732)

6. Zafar-al-Sadiq (d-765)

7. Musa-Al-Kazim (d-799)

8. Ali –Al-Raza (d-834)

9. Mohammad-Al-Taqi (d-835)

10. Ali-Al-Naqi (868)

11. Hasan-Al-Askar (d-873)

12. Muhammad d-Al-Mehdi

The Awaited disappeared in 873

Imams of the Asna-Ashari or Twelve Shias
Thus the three major groups deriving their descent from the family of the Prophet ('Khandan-e-naboot') are Asna-Ashariya, Ismailiya and Zaidiya. Ismailiya is a group of Shias formed after the death of Sadiq, the sixth Imam.

Asna-Ashariya are believers of 12 Imams. Strictly speaking Asna-Ashariya is a term belonging only to the Ali’s family and his descendants through his Sons, Hasan and Hussain and most of the Asna-Ashariya clans can rightfully use the titles.

By far the largest ‘Khandans’ are the Rizvis and Naqvis. Asna-Ashariyas are scattered all over northern India (Rizvi and Roy, 1984).

**Theory of Caste of Muslim Society in India**

Caste in Muslim Society in India may be traced to the times of Mahmud Ghazni, the King of Persia, who came to India followed by Muhammad Ghori. The theory of caste in Muslim society depends on two major factors. One is clan and another is profession. It is a known fact that there is no caste in Islam. Casteism is a method of causing division among people which is wrong as all men are equal in the eyes of God.

The caste system cropped up among Muslims due to the profession adopted by one person, which was followed by the family, generation after generation and thus a caste by profession came into being. The second theory says that caste system started among the Muslims in India, due to clan. The clan originated after the death of some great man and the whole family was identified that person and when the family grew into larger number in successive generations, it became a clan. The famous clans in the history of Islam are:

1) Sayyad: Which is originated from the marriage of Imam Ali with the daughter of Prophet Muhammad and marriage of Imam Ali with other women. Their children were called as Sayyad Alawi (the children of Imam Ali).

2) Siddiqui: Which originated from the First Caliph (Named Abubakar-e-Siddiqi) of Muslims after Prophet Muhammad’s death.

3) Faruqui: Which originated from Omar Faruque, the Second Caliph of Muslims, after Abubakar’s death.
4) Osmani: Which are originated from Osman, the Third Caliph of Muslims after Omar’s death.

5) Mirza: Which originated from Amirzadeh (children of King’s family); in short, it became Mirza, or from the marriage of non – Sayyad with Sayyad.

6) Pathan: Which originated from the tribes of Afghanistan.

7) Khan: Which originated from Mongolians, basically Genghis Khan.

8) Ansari: Which originated from Ansar, the friends of Prophet Muhammad, living in Medina

9) Qurashi: Which originated from Quraish tribe of Mecca to which tribe Prophet Muhammad belonged (Madani, 1993).

Elements of Caste among the Muslims

1. HIERARCHY

Several authors consider hierarchy to be an important feature of caste system among Muslims in India. Their views are largely supported by the field work they did in different regions of India. D’Souza (1978:41-56) finds Muslim divisions in Karnataka and Kerala hierarchically ranked. But he does not associate this differentiation on the basis of purity and pollution. He lists four principal criteria of social ranking among the Moplah Muslims. These are hypergamy, the amount of dower payable by the husband to his wife in the event of a divorce, use of special articles of distinctions and segregation and restrictions on social intercourse (D’Souza, 1978:47-49).

To Dube (1978:57-95), social ranking among Muslims on the Laccadive Islands is based on hypergamy, the nature of occupation and the relative standing of the caste in the politico-economic structure. Such ranking criteria naturally allow for a greater interplay of wealth, prestige and status honour in the determination of the status of castes and individuals. She points out that Koya men can marry Malumi women but the marriage of Koya women with Malumi or Melacheri men is severely discouraged.

Siddiqui (1978: 243-268) observes that ranking is based on the nature of occupation, the comparative numerically strength of the groups, and descent.
Bhattacharya (1978:243-268) points out that the ranking of castes is based on a number of non-ritual criteria such as the seclusion of women (Purdah), performance of ablutions after urination and the observance of daily prayers.

Ahmad (1978:171-206) argues that descent, particularly the source from which it is traced and its distance from Mohammad, as well as the degree of Islamization of customs and ritual practices of the group are the criteria for social ranking among the Muslims of Allahabad.

2. ENDOGAMY

Several studies carried out in different regions of India suggest that caste endogamy is the most important feature among Muslims. In certain cases hypergamous marriages are also found. Imtiaz Ahmad (1978:171-200) in his study of Siddique Sheikh of Allahabad, U.P. found that the caste characteristics like endogamy and hypergamy are found among them. Siddique Sheikhs claims to be the descendants of Abu Bakr Siddique, the first Caliph of Islam, but actually they are converts from Kayastha caste. They succeeded in forming a new status identity which could be possible by the processes of abandonment of traditional customs and rituals and establishment of marital links with the families of supposedly Sheikh origin and descent. The study (which seems to be motivated by the hypothesis that endogamy and hypergamy can also serve as mechanisms for social mobility for an upward mobile group) is useful to know some caste characteristics prevalent among Siddique Sheikhs of Allahabad.

D’Souza (1978:50-51) points out that the Malbaris of Kerala follow the regulations of endogamy and hypergamy. However, in their ordinary inter-group social relations one does not notice such striking differences as found in the social relations between the Keyis and the rest or between the Pusalars and the rest. The Pusalars are of the local origin and converts from the low Hindu fishermen caste. The Keyis are accorded the highest status among the Malabaris. In the past the men of these Tharavads were big merchants and bankers.

Momin (1978:117-140) observes that endogamy was prevalent among the four sub-groups of Kokni Muslims. However, due to the impact of industrialisation, spread of modern education and Islamization, the practice of endogamy is declining. He further
points out that the higher groups have begun giving their daughters in marriage to the lower groups like Wazahs. The relaxation is based on considerations like wealth, standard of living, education and social status. But there are no intermarriages between the higher Kokni groups and the Telis or the Momins.

Mines (1978:163-164) finds endogamy among the various sub-groups of Tamil Muslims. According to him Tamil Muslims consider subdivision identity to be an important factor in selecting a spouse. A reason for the practice of endogamy is not to maintain purity of blood but to match spouse who share the same economic backgrounds and the same cultural and religious traditions. Bhattacharya (1978:289-290) observes that in Khiruli in West Bengal, the Muslims castes like the Hindu castes are endogamous. Siddiqui (1978: 257-258) in his study of Muslims in Calcutta finds similar practice of endogamy.

3. OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALIZATION

Bhattacharya (1978:289-290) finds upper Muslim groups in West Bengal without any hereditary occupations. On the other hand, the Shahs, Momins and Patuas are associated with hereditary occupations of mendicancy, weaving and painting respectively. He further points out that the Shahs and Momins regard their traditional occupations as worth. The Patuas feel embarrassed to admit that they are traditionally involved in making Hindu gods and goddesses statues. They do not like to even disclose their occupation because it lowers their social prestige in the eyes of fellow Muslims.

Dube (1978:72) observes that certain occupational services and crafts have been confined to the lowest group of the Laccadive Muslims. The barbers, blacksmith and servants of the mosques are drawn from this group. Besides their routine work, barbers are required for certain ritual occasions like birth and circumcision. They do not form a closed endogamous group and their profession is not hereditary.

4. RESTRICTIONS ON SOCIAL INTERCOURSE AND COMMENSALITY

Overall, though the restrictions on social intercourse and commensality have declined considerably over the years among Muslims, they are still important among many
caste groups. Their prevalence was found to be prominent during several occasions like festivals and marriages. Bhattacharya (1978:290-291) has pointed out that the commensal relations are not elaborately structured among the Muslim castes like the Hindu castes in his study. He observes that the Sheikhs of Khiruli in West Bengal clearly admitted that while their men folk take food with the Pathans and the Mughals, neither their men nor women would dine with the Shah, Fakirs, Patuas or Momins. The Sayyads, Pathans and Mughals also admit indirectly that they do not dine with the members of those three caste groups. Bhattacharya makes it clear in his study that while there is commensality between the upper castes, there is no commensality between the upper castes and the lower castes.

Siddiqui (1978: 260-261) finds that restrictions in interdining among Muslim in West Bengal are limited to clean castes who will not dine with unclean castes. He further elaborates that the members of group within the higher categories do not eat or drink with the Lal Begis, a caste of Muslim Scavengers. The Dafalis, who work as priests for Lal Begis, or Qalandars who sometimes live in their neighbourhood, refuse to accept food and water from Lal Begis.

Ali (1978:27-29) observes that in practice certain rules regarding inter-commensal distance are found to be maintained by the caste groups of a higher status in relation to certain lower ones. This is more obvious in the case of the Bhangis (sweepers) in the city against whom discrimination is maintained by the rest of the caste groups. This is often explained not in terms of ritual pollution but on the basis of a repulsion on account of their unclean occupation. He further observes that commensal relationship of the higher groups with the lower groups viz. the Nais and the Dhobis, is less rigid as compared to the Bhangis who are assigned the lowest position in the study (Matin, 1996).

The spirit of caste unites three tendencies, repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialisation, and all three must be born in the mind if one wishes to give a complete definition of the caste system (Gupta, 1991).

The Census of India (1921: 1(1)227) reports: “The great majority of Muslims in this subcontinent are the descendents of the Hindu converts. In 1911 it was estimated that
85 percent of the Punjab Muslims were of native stock. In the rest of India the proportion must have been greater."^{20} In the eastern and southern parts of the country also the proportion of the progeny of the local converts must have been greater. It is well known fact that through the efforts of the Muslims, mostly saints, preachers and Sufis a large number of local Hindus, mostly of low caste, embraced Islam. The Sudras, the outcastes, and even the higher Caste Hindus accepted the new creed in large numbers in different parts of the country. The tradesmen and Muslim pilgrims had started coming down to this country even before the Muslim rule in the Sindh was established.

**Absorption of Caste in Muslim Culture**

Tara Chand in his famous Book “Impact of Islam on Indian culture” (1946) has brilliantly analysed the process of cultural diffusion between the two communities. He writes, “The Muslims of India made it their home. They lived surrounded by the Hindu people and a state of perennial hostility with them was impossible. Mutual intercourse led to mutual understanding.....Thus after the first shock of conquest was over, the Hindus and Muslims preferred to find a via media whereby to live as neighbours. The effect to seek a new life led to a new culture which was neither exclusively Hindu nor Muslim. It was indeed a purely Hindu-Muslim culture.

Not only Hindu religion, Hindu Art, Hindu literature and Hindu science absorbed Muslim elements but the very spirit of Hindu culture and the very stuff of Hindu mind were altered , and the Muslim reciprocated by responding to the change in every department of life."^{21}

Dumont (1970) thinks that caste was consciously adopted by the Muslims in India as a compromise which they had to make in a pre-dominantly Hindu environment. He analyses the processes of conflict and accord among the two communities and thinks that Hindus and Muslims in India entered a sort of tacit and reciprocal compromise. On the one hand the Hindus adjusted themselves as political masters who did not recognise Brahmnic values and “they did not treat even the most humble Muslim

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villagers as untouchables". On the other hand, the influence of caste made itself felt among the Muslims.22

Secondly, the proportion of the local converts to Islam is much greater than the foreigners who came here as traders, preachers, saints, rulers and the like. These local converts, who came in large groups, brought with them their rituals, beliefs, and customs. As Intiaz Ahmed observes, "The large majority of Muslims in India were originally recruited from the intermediate and lower rungs of Hindu society wherein status was rigidly defined in terms of birth and maintained by strong social sanctions. When these groups became incorporated into Muslim society through conversions either by peaceful persuasion or by threat of force or by offers of material and political advantages or by aspirations of social mobility, they must have imported their social systems with them. Since much of the early conversion to Islam was a group process, this must have been easy. Some acculturative influence of Hinduism was thus inevitable.23" (Ahmad, 1978).

Davis (1951) also makes a similar observation, "----- it is not surprising that many of the nominal converts retained much of their former religion, and that indeed Islam underwent considerable Hinduisation in India. Because of conversion and because of inter-breeding between Muslim men and Hindu Women, the Muslims became radically indistinguishable from the Hindu population. Even the Muslim rulers were in many cases the descendents of Hindus having Hindu mothers and grandmothers.24"

All these factors led to a large scale Hinduisation of the Muslims in this country. Complete Islamisation of the converts was neither possible nor practicable.

The impact of the idolatorous surroundings upon them was great. Moreover, their neighbours and many of their relatives were still Hindus. It was natural, therefore, that many Hindu cultural traits, caste names, rituals and functions also crept into Muslim society. As Davis remarks that "The wonder is not that these hereditary customs and beliefs were adhered to but that some of the teachings of Islam were strictly observed.

The mere switch of religious alliance could hardly incur a complete change of social life”.  

Hutton (1955) rightly observed that the cultural impact of the Hindu society was so great that even the non Hindus were influenced by it in different degrees. Caste rules and restrictions have a great deal of influence on the Muslims, Jews and Christians living in this country. He observes, “even a change of religion does not destroy the caste system, for Muslims who do not recognise it as valid, are often found to observe it in practice, and there are many Muslim castes as well as in Hindus, and when any reforming body breaks away from Hinduism and repudiates caste, it becomes something like a new caste of its own. Jews and Christians also in India often form castes or bodies analogous to castes”.  

Blunt has given a detailed account of the Muslim castes in Northern India. According to him there are castes that are entirely Mohammadan, though recruited partly or wholly from Hindu converts as for example Atishbaz, Baidguar, Bhand, Bhatihara, Bhishti etc. There are castes that have both Hindus and Muslims branches, but with the Mohammadan influence predominant, e.g. Churihara, Darzi, Dhuniya, Kunjra, Manihar. Finally there are castes with large Hindus than Mohammadan branches e.g. Ahir, Bahaliya, Halwai, Jat, Kahar, Sonar and Teli etc.

Sayyads and Sheikhs occupy the highest rank in the Muslim community and mostly do the religious duties. Mughals and Pathans very much resemble the Kshatriyas. Below them there are a number of clean occupational groups which constitute the bulk of the Muslims community in U.P. and Bihar particularly.

According to Ghous Ansari, “they are descendents of the members of Hindu clean castes who have been converted to Islam either in groups from different castes or as whole castes.

Many occupational castes have both Hindus and Muslim sections, such as Barhei (carpenter), Darzi (tailor), Dhobi (laundry men), Kumhar (potter), Lohar (Blacksmith)

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25 Davis, K., op.cit., p. 164
26 Hautton, J., op. cit., p. 2.
etc.”. The Census of India 1901 listed 133 castes, wholly or partially Mohammadan (Faridi and Siddiqi, 1992).

In South India D’Souza (1978) has shown caste like ranking among the Moplahs of Kerala. To him the Moplahs are divided into five ranked sanctions called, (1) the Thangals, (2) the Arabis, (3) the Malbaris, 4) the Pusalars and (5) the Ossans. Each of these sections traces their origin separately. The Thangals trace their descent from the Prophet’s daughter (Fatima) and are of the highest rank. Next in rank are the Arabis, who claim descent from Arab men and local women and who have retained knowledge of their Arab lineage and have adopted patrilineal descent. The main body of the Moplahs are called Malbaris (i.e., people of Malabar). The Pusalars or the New Muslims are converts and enjoy low status. The Ossans are barbers and by virtue of their very low occupation, are ranked low. Regarding the prevailing social hierarchy among the Moplahs of Kerala D’Souza says “the five distinct sections Thangals, Arabis, Malbaris, Pusalars and Ossans form a social hierarchy in which the Thangals are the highest and the Ossans are the lowest” (D’Souza in Ahmad ed. 1978).

He also pointed out that social distance among these castes is very great. They practice endogamy. In interaction the higher castes are given special treatment. The sections eat separately, they have separate mosques, separate religious organizations and separate burial grounds (D’Souza 1959: 504 also in Ahmad ed. 1978: 49). Discussing the social stratification pattern of the Muslim society in Uttar Pradesh Bhatti held the same view and used the term (caste) to the Muslims.

“In fact the structure of the Muslim society in India did not in any time exhibit the Islamic ideal of social equality. An elaborate system of social stratification had been in practice in the very beginning of Muslim rule in India” (Bhatti in Ahmad ed. 1978: 210).

Siddiqui pointed out that though Islam preached egalitarian ideology but in practice the Muslims in India followed some of the characteristics of caste system.

In the *Dynamics of Rural Society*, Mukherjee (1957) obtained first hand information to provide a picture of both the Muslim and the Hindu societies of Bengal. Discussing

27 Ghous Ansari, Muslim Castes in U.P., p. 41, Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, Lucknow.
the caste pattern of the village he says “the basis of society in this subcontinent is caste” (Mukherjee 1957: 73-74). In his attempt to give a picture of Muslim society he points out that although Islam strictly prohibits any distinction between its believers but in India ultimately caste differentiation began to take place in these communities.

As a result, like the Hindus, the Muslims began to prohibit intermarriage and in some places also interdining between the different categories (for example, Mughals, Pathans, Shias, Sunnis, Khojas etc.) and various occupational groups of weavers, oil-pressers, etc. which were hardly in any way different from the previously formed Hindu Jatis, also emerged in this community (Ali, 1992).

It is important to point out that the structural perspective enables one to make cross-cultural comparison of castes, but the cultural view restricts the use of the concept to a given culture and society. D’Souza has mentioned that caste has both cultural and structural aspects. The structural aspect which refers to the determinants of caste, are applicable to all societies while the cultural aspects which refer to the mode of expression of status differences among castes are specific to each culture. “Therefore one may say that whereas the caste system can be compared cross-culturally in its structural dimensions, it is different in its cultural manifestations in different societies. But what is common to the caste system in different settings is more important than what is different because the former represents the independent variables and latter dependent ones; if one were to attempt to bring about a change in the caste system one would pay greater attention to the independent variables rather than to the dependent ones” (D’Souza 1981: 76).

In fact, the structural aspect of caste is an independent variable while the cultural aspect is a dependent one. The variables which determine the caste status are common to all religious categories in India as well as to societies outside India. Therefore, the notion that caste system is a peculiarly Hindu phenomenon has to be rejected. Rejection of such a notion indicates the possibility of studying caste system both among the Muslims and the Hindus as also among other religious categories in Bangladesh and India within the same conceptual and theoretical framework. (Ibid: 41-42).
The main objectives of his study (Ali, 1992) is to reveal social stratification among the Muslims and the Hindus of a Bangladesh village and also to see whether the concept of ‘caste’ is peculiar to the Hindus only or it is applicable to other religious categories, especially to the Muslims. Keeping these objectives in mind a traditional village ‘Charia’ inhabited by two religious categories namely, the Muslims and the Hindus, was selected purposively from a southern district (Chittagong) of Bangladesh (Ibid: 49).

The Muslims are divided into 14 caste groups while the Hindus are divided into 7 caste groups only in Charia village.

1) Talukdar
2) Sikdar
3) Chowdhary
4) Kazi
5) Shaikh
6) Kulal
7) Fakir
8) Munshi
9) Khandokar
10) Maji
11) Khalifa
12) Sarang
13) Mujla
14) Sayyad


In the caste system, the members of a community are divided into a number of hereditary groups, the interactional pattern of each caste group is preordained. That is, a particular position or rank in the hierarchy has such a consequential effect that the behaviour and interactional patterns of the individuals are adopted accordingly. It is also observed that in the case of invitation, special attention is given to members of the higher caste groups as compared with those of the lower ones. Thus, the
egalitarian principle of Islam does not work in the case of extending invitations (Ibid: 159 –160).

In the stratified society, it is usually found that the lower caste do not sit on the chair before the Higher castes. Among the Muslims, the members of the higher and lower caste do not usually use the same burial ground but in case of emergency the members of lower caste can use the burial grounds of the higher castes. For that, the lower caste has to obtain permission from higher caste. Similarly, the members of the higher castes if needed may use burial ground belonging to lower castes. But, for that the higher castes have to obtain permission from the lower castes. But, this practice is very rare. It is possible to judge equality in the mosques, when they assemble for a short time. A careful observation would reveal that almost all front rows are occupied by the members of higher caste groups. The lower castes do not usually stand in the front row, even when the front rows are not occupied by the others. Further, if any members from higher caste group come to mosque in late, then the members of the lower castes manage space for the higher caste in the front row. In fact members of the both higher and lower castes are aware of their respective social standing in the community which determines one’s position in the mosque also. These studies show that caste restrictions, though lesser than among the Hindus are still prevalent among the Muslims and help in sustaining the system of social stratification based on caste among them (Ali, 1992).

Analyzing the Muslims Caste in various Regions of India

The Muslims of Siliguri are segmented into two broad social segments (Mondal, 1997) namely Sharif or Ashraf or Khas and Ajlaf or Aam on the basis of their social standing based on ethnic and occupational backgrounds. A notion of social differentiation is also prevalent between the people of these two categories. The khas constituted the upper block, while the Aam considered as lower block of status categories among the Muslim population of this metropolis.

Those who claim themselves as Khas or Sharif belong to the traditional gentry class usually claim foreign ancestry. They were the business owners, civic or religious leaders and the wealthier person at their place of origin. While Aam are considered as
converted indigenous elements drawn from various Hindu sect or castes backgrounds. The people of this latter block have their own respective traditional occupations. Owing to the notion of ethnicity, social position and nature of occupation various Muslim groups of upper block (Khas) and lower block (Aam) are roughly arranged in stratified order. Each of the Muslim group popularly referred as Jat.

On the basis of ethnicity, descent and place of origin the Muslims of upper block i.e. Khas or Sharif are again segmented into four ethnic categories. These are Sayyad, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan.

Sayyad claimed highest rank as they believed to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad. They are also referred as Mir. Next is the Sheikh who claimed descent from Arab ancestors and who were among the early followers of the Prophet. The Mughals and Pathan accorded the third and fourth ranks who claimed to be descended from the Turkish and Afghan Immigrants to this country and popularly known as Mirza and Khan respectively.

The Muslims of lower block or Aam category are the commoners having peasant background and thus have no claim of noble ancestry. They are also segmented into various groups and loosely arranged in stratified order. The social gradation among them are mostly determined by their past occupational backgrounds. In Siliguri the Muslim groups who have the background of traditional occupations either pursued in the city or abandoned to adopt others but these serve as a mark of their identification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muslim Group</th>
<th>Traditional Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansari or Momin</td>
<td>Weavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Besati</td>
<td>Peddlers of Stationary goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Churihar</td>
<td>Glass Bengal Makers/sellers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dafali</td>
<td>Dram makers/beaters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darzi</td>
<td>Tailors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faqir</td>
<td>Mendicants employed in Dargas and astanas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hajjam</td>
<td>Barbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khardi</td>
<td>Wood makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansuri or Dhunia</td>
<td>Cotton Carders and bedding makers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mahaldar or Nikari        Fish mongers
Qureshi or Qasab or chik   Butchers of goat
Raien                      Green Grocer

All the Muslim groups named above have a general tendency of maintaining group identity through the practice of endogamy. It is more marked among the Muslims of lower block, some of them have even today strong tradition of group Panchayat or council at their native places and that distinguishes them from the Muslims of upper block. But all these traditional characteristics have failed to function properly in the cosmopolitan environment of the city life. In contemporary time due to various forces operating in urban milieu the traditional inter - ethnic stratification of the Muslims is gradually changing and in its place another form of social gradation in the form of status distinction based on class position has been emerging. As a consequence, various Muslim groups (Jats) have lost their traditional endogamous character and this led to increase in the inter –group marriages among them. In this process Ashrafs are now a days gradually getting absorbed in Ajlaf category (Mondal, 1997).

An attempt was also made by Siddiqui (1979) to observe and analyse the interaction of the ‘cultural ideals of Islam’ with the ‘social ideals of caste’ within the framework of the Muslim society. It was seen how these ideals forming the bases of two divergent systems were adaptive of the other and in co-existence within the social organisation of the Muslims of Calcutta (Siddiqui, 1979).

The northern region has been taken here to mean the valleys of the Gangas and Jamuna extending to the Haryanvi and Brij speaking areas. It is this Northern Region that contributes to the overwhelming largest number or the decisive bulk of the Muslim population as well as the maximum number of ethnic groups of varied backgrounds. The groups are categorized into blocks, for the sake of convenience, according to the nature of their backgrounds e.g.

1) Those claiming foreign origin.
2) Those entering into the fold of Islam from castes of higher status.
3) Those with the backgrounds of traditional occupation and,
4) Those with traditional occupation generally considered ‘unclean’.
1) Groups claiming descent from ancestry of foreign origin, having no fixed or specified traditional occupations, not organised on the basis of any group Panchayat and represented in most sects. These groups are found throughout the city and are not confined to any specific region.

   a) Sayyad  
   b) Sheikh  
   c) Mughal  
   d) Pathan

2) Groups of indigenous origin, drawn from the superior Hindu castes, having some sort of group organisation often taking shape of a formalised associations;

   a) Qaum-e-Punjabian (Delhi)  
   b) Qaum-e-Punjabian (Anwala)  
   c) Rajputs  
   d) Malik

3) Groups with a background or traditional occupations, with traditional group organizations or Panchayat of varying strength. This category again may be divided into two main sub-categories according to whether they have entirely abandoned their caste occupations or pursue their traditional occupations at least partially.

   A) Groups that do not pursue their traditional occupation in Calcutta but continue to do so elsewhere.

   a) Momins  
   b) Raki or Ranki

   B) Groups, with occupational backgrounds, that continue to pursue their respective traditional occupations besides adopting other occupations having generally strong group organisations.

   Darzi  Besati  Qalanders  Meo  
   Qasab  Dhobi  Faqir  Ghosi  
   Chik  Hajjam  Patwa  Dafali
4) Groups engaged in occupations that are generally considered unclean like Lal Begi (Ibid:51).

The members of each caste are believed to have a special aptitude for their caste occupation and this aptitude is thought to be transmitted ‘in the blood’. The Rajputs, for example, believe that the martial qualities associated with their caste are a matter of genetics, and Parry (1979) was repeatedly told that India’s humiliation by China in 1962 could only be attributed to the large number of non–Rajputs now taken into the army. ‘You can put these people in the same uniform’, they say, ‘but you can’t make them fight in same way. It is a question of the blood’. The high castes are considered to own their superiority to the fact that they follow a style of life and asset of customs which are both prestigious and pure. By contrast, the low castes are associated with ‘low’ and polluting customs (Parry, 1979).

Among the Muslims in Gujarat the word Nyat is used for the caste grouping, in the same sense in which it is used to indicate the Hindu castes. Evidently, therefore, no distinction as such is felt to exist between the Hindu and Muslim configurations for both are capable of being described by the same word. In early marriage records, the word quam was used to designate the caste. This is the individualistic affiliation, for person is identified by qaum to which he belongs. Collectively, the caste is also called the jama’t, which is equivalent to Nyat. The Communal organization is referred to as jama’tbandi. This system is the traditional expression of communal solidarity in a concrete form, designed to regulate the affairs of the community and to apply sanctions against the infractions of the communal code.

The essential bases of this internal unity can be said to be two fold. In the first instance, a sense of belonging which is shared by most of the members exists and is taken for granted. This is the traditional anchor of the caste pattern. The caste identified the individual and provided the setting for his social self. Secondly, the crystallisation of the caste patterns and their organization, highly sophisticated in certain castes like the Bohras and Khojas, has been felt to confer certain material advantages on its members and has thus been seen as advantageous.
The sense of belonging, supreme element in keeping the caste system alive, in a great tradition which frowns on internal divisions expresses itself in several ways. First in this respect is the integration consequent on a well-knit kinship and marriage system.

A number of localities in all Gujarat town bear caste names—both Hindu and Muslim—and were formed by the influx of these communities settling together in close proximity. Such Muslim communities naturally had their own places of religious worship, often called after them, as Arabon-ki-Masjid. Sometimes, a community has had its own graveyard too (Mishra, 1966).

The Assamese Muslims are an inseparable part of the larger Assamese society which is fundamentally a unilingual composite society. The Assamese Muslims like the Assamese Hindus are also divided into three distinct castes—like groups i.e. (1) The Sayyads or the Dawans in the local language, (2) the Sheikhs or the Goria and (3) the Morias.

Economically both the Sayyads and Sheikhs have been better off than the Morias since Ahom days. Occupationallly, the Sayyads and the Sheikhs had no direct or specific link with traditional or hereditary occupations. The occupations of both of these two groups are overlapping. However, the Morias have a link with traditional occupation of making household utensils from brass and bell-metal. Even the word ‘Moria’ has a reference to the way in which they make utensils by beating. ‘Moria’ in Assamese language means ‘to beat’ (Gait, 1905:95).

The Sayyads are also an endogamous group like the Assamese Brahmins. They do generally tend to resist marriage outside their own group. The Assamese Sheikhs are numerically the largest group among the Assamese Muslims. Their position in the caste hierarchy comes next and very close to the Sayyads and much above the Morias.

The Assamese Sheikhs are also largely endogamous groups. The Morias not only economically but also socially and culturally stand at the bottom of the caste—like hierarchy among the Assamese Muslims. They too, like the Assamese Sayyads and the Sheikhs, are an endogamous group. Occupationallly, they have been engaged in making household utensils from brass and bell metal since early Ahom days. They are
looked upon as a very impure tribe (Robinson 1841: 264). Bhorali too has observed that the Morias were regarded as an inferior caste (Bhorali 1982: 21).

Though both the Assamese Sayyads and Sheikhs have been maintaining interactional distance from the Morias, they are not regarded as untouchable in ideological and empirical sense. However, there still exist some stereotypes against the Morias which have stigmatised the entire community as dirty and unreliable in the eyes of upper groups. Besides the Morias, there is still another small caste like group known as Julahas. They occupy a lower position in the hierarchy among the Assamese Muslims. It is very difficult to identify their exact position in relation to the Morias but their position is definitely much below the Sheikhs (Hasnain, 2006).

The Census of India (1911) categorised the Muslim communities of Bengal into Sharif/Ashraf/Rais (having noble birth, chief or leader of the community), Atsaf/Ajlaf (wretches or mean people), Raizal/Razil (worthless), Arzal (lowest), Kamina/Sitar (mean base) or chhotazat. In the Census of India Gait (1911) has tried to explain the social precedence among the Bengali Muslims in terms of their hereditary title and traditional occupations. The above classification of the Muslim group according to the Hindu caste categories received strong protest from several corners.

Levy (1975) classified the Bengali Muslims of nineteenth century into three categories. These are: Ashraf, Ajlaf and Arzal. According to him among the Bengali Muhammadans the Ashraf or upper class include all undoubted descendants of foreign Muslims (Arab, Persians, Afghans and so on) and converts from the higher castes of the Hindus. The Ajlaf include various functional groups, such as weavers (Julaha), cotton carders, oil pressers, barbers, tailors etc. As well as all the converts of originally functional Hindu castes. The Arzal (Arabic Ardhal) are those who have been converted from the lower castes viz. Halalkar, Lalbegi, Abdal and Bediyaa.

Wali (n.d.) broadly classified the Bengali Muslims of India and Bengali Muslims of nineteenth century into two categories, viz. Ashraf or Sharif and Atraf or Ajlaf. Generally the Ashraf or the legendary claimed noble ancestry whiles the Atraf or Ajlaf. Generally the Ashraf or the landed gentry claimed noble ancestry while the Atraf or the toiling masses and peasants could not lay any such claim to noble ancestry. By
reviewing the above mentioned categorisation of the Bengali Muslims of the Nineteenth century Nazmul Karim (1980) has simply grouped the Muslims of Bengal into following order on the basis of their class system. 1) Upper Sharifs 2) Poor Sharifs, 3) Mixed category of Asraf Bhalamanus or rising Muslim middle class, 4) Atrafs or Non-Sharifs , and 5) Arzal or the lowest of all.

The above segmentation and categorisation of the Muslim groups in India clearly reveal that these were done by the application of structural – functional approach. The most unique feature of this context is that most of the authors have adopted the Varna –Jati and interactional models of the caste system to analyse the social segments among the Muslims. But if it is looked into more intensively it will be clear that there is a great difference between the covert (Islamic ideology) and overt (“caste like” arrangement) aspects of such a social trait (Mondal, 1993).

The term Punjabi Musalman roughly describes those Mohammadan classes and tribe which are to be found in that portion of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province which lies between the Indus and Sutluj rivers to the south of the main Himalayan Range.

The Punjabi Musalmans may be classed under four main heads:

1) Rajputs
2) Jats
3) Gujjars
4) Foreign tribes, who claim to be neither 1, 2, 3 (Wikeley, 1991).

Surnames (Krams) in Kashmir

A very rich repository of information that no historian of Kashmir can ignore save to his disadvantage is innumerable Krams borne by the different groups of Kashmiri society. While these surnames light up different dark corners of Kashmiri’s historical profile, they are specifically examined for their significance as a source for constructing the history of Islam. For a neat analysis of these Krams for our immediate purpose, we may divide them under the following headings and subheadings:
A) Pre-Islamic krams:


2) *Krams* of Urban craftsmen: *Sonar* (goldsmith), *Thanthur* (coppersmith), *Saraf* (banker) etc.


B) *Krams* of the Muslim community of Kashmir:

1) Retention of the prestigious traditional krams: Bhat, Dar, Magaray, Loan, Tantray, Raina, Chak, Thakur, Rather, Parray, Dangar, Padar, Kuchay, Rishi, Pandit, Wani, Tak, etc.

2) Newly introduced krams

(a) Krams with religious connotation: Shaikh, Suhrawardi, Hamdani, Kubravi, Chishti, Qadri, Naqashbandi, Makhdumi, Simmadi, Kashani, Gilani, Madani, Mantaqi, Quraishi, Alvi, Nazki, Yazdani, Rizvi, Balkhi, Bukhari, Rafa’i, Kamli, Andrali, Jilani, Massodi, Jami, Rafiqi, Baihaqi, Sarafi, Nahvi, Mufti, Khatib, Qazi, Akhun, Pir, Mulla, Baba, Shah, Bangi, etc.

(b) Secular *Krams*: Jan, Mirza, Ganaie, Baig, Mughal, Koka, Mir, Khan, Banday, etc.

(d) *Krams* assumed by Socially low groups: Shaikh, Ganai, Mir, Shah, Sufi, Malla, Baba, Dar, Pandit, Nanda, etc.

(e) Personalisation of traditional occupational krams: Zarger (goldsmith), Hajjam (barber), Nanwai (baker), Najjar (carpenter), Ahangar (blacksmith) etc.

(f) Shared krams between Muslims and Hindus: Bhat, Dar, Koul, Pandit, Handoo, Mattu, Nath, Waid, Chalkoo, Malla, Jalali, Zadu, Draboo, Jalla, Wangnoo, Zadu, Zaroo, Kalu, Latoo, Wanchu, Teng, Bungroo, Balu, etc.

(g) Some occupational Krams of Kashmiri Pandits: Razdan, Fotadar, Ambardar, Jalali, Waguzari, Qazi, Muhatasib, Sahib, Sultan, Zamindar, Ganju, Sazawul, Karawani, Naqib, Diwani, Khazanchi, Amin, etc.

The *Kram* profile of Kashmiri society, first of all, helps us in knowing the class and caste composition of the converts and relative response of the different social strata to conversion.

The study of *krams* also helps us to know the second important section, which embraced Islam one and all, consisted of the merchant class known as Wanis (sk. Vanik) as none of the Pandits holds this kram; and all the Wanis of Kashmir are Muslims. This is also substantiated by a contemporary Sanskrit chronicler who especially mentions the merchants for openly disregarding their belief in their ancestral religion and flaunting their faith in Islam. The *krams* also reveal some significant facts about the lower castes and mass conversions to Islam.

The panorama of occupational surnames, particularly the replacement of some *krams* by entirely new ones bring to light an important fact, namely that the occupational castes did not form an undifferentiated mass of people. On the contrary, while all the out castes were held in contempt, some were, however, considered uncompromisingly unworthy either for social intercourse or for human treatment or both. Such were, for example, the Dombas, Chandalas, Pujs (butchers), Hanjis (boat men), Arams
(vegetable sellers) and the like. It is therefore, understandable that these castes abandoned their old krams altogether and assumed new respectable surnames as Ganai, Shaikh, Shah, Mir, Sufi, Dar, Pandit, Malla and the like to claim respectable position in society (Wani, 2004).

(h) Hindus and Muslims in the Kashmir valley have totemic surnames also such as: Dabroo (cat), Kantroo, Gagroo (rat), Hangal (Deer), Kaw (crow), Wanganoo (brinjal), Panzu (monkey), Haput (bear), Khar (donkey), Sheroo (tiger only among the Muslim), Hak (green vegetable) etc.

(i) Other surnames in the Kashmir valley are: Jinsi (trader), Watal (cobbler), Wudroo (Hillock), Khushu (left Handed), Razdan/Raina (keeper of Secrets), Drabu, Teng (mound) (Singh, 1996).

**Conclusion:** Indian Muslims are not a homogeneous community. Muslims appear to be too simplistic to outsider more so due to the religious overture of equalitarianism, the actual situation reveals a more complex set-up. Indian Muslims have developed their own version of Islam, no doubt with regional variation. The caste system got diffused in this community with caste characteristics of social stratification. Muslims in different parts of India like Siliguri, Assam, Gujarat, Punjab, and Bengal etc. have also shown the presence of caste characteristics. The marriage and kinship of Muslims society is also affected by the caste culture.