UNIT 16   MUSLIM SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Structure

16.0   OBJECTIVES

On going through this unit you should be able to

- describe briefly the emergence of Islam and Muslim community in India

- list and describe the basic tenets of Islam with special reference to its views on social equality

- explain the social divisions among the Muslims

- describe the processes involved in the maintenance of social control in the Islamic community

- describe the main features of Muslim marriage, family and systems of inheritance

- list the main festivals celebrated by the Muslims

- indicate some of the external influences on Muslim social practices.

16.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we examined the various facets of Hindu Social Organisation. In this unit we are going to look at some important aspects of Muslim social organisation. We begin our examination with an introductory note on the emergence of Islam and the Muslim community in India. We will proceed to describe the central tenets of Islam, elaborating the view of Islam on social equality, in a little more detail. This will be followed by a discussion

on certain aspects of Muslim social organisation. We shall focus on social divisions among the Muslims, the way the Muslim community tries to maintain social control, their institutions of marriage and family, their system of inheritance and festivals. We shall also look at some of the external influences on Muslim social practices.

16.2 EMERGENCE OF ISLAM AND MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN INDIA

The word 'Islam' means submission to the will of Allah. The followers of Islam called Muslims believe that Quran is the true word of Allah. They believe the Quran was revealed to mankind through the medium of his Prophet and messenger, Muhammed. Islam came into being in the early seventh century in west central Arabia but its systematic formulation and establishment took place only in 622 AD, when Muhammed emigrated from the city of Mecca to Medina. Thus Muslim calendar records events from the first lunar month of that year July 16th 622 AD.

Prior to the emergence of Islam in Western Central Arabia, there were only clusters of warring tribes. Prophet Muhammed brought in a number of social reforms and established a well ordered set of beliefs and practices. Islam, as a religion, became established in this region and began to spread as a political community or "ummah" with its own laws and socio-political institutions. Today Muslims form about one seventh of the world's population. They are highly concentrated in Asia and Africa. Their tiniest concentration is in Oceania (includes Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia).

With regard to the emergence of Islam in India, it was introduced into India by Arab traders, who gradually established settlements on the western and eastern coasts of south India. They obtained permission to practice their religion. Sind was conquered by the Arabs early in the eighth century and north west Punjab by the Turks in the eleventh century. The Delhi Sultanate was established by 1206 AD. It was about the sixteenth century that Mughals built up an extensive empire. The establishment of Muslim government at any place was usually followed by the construction of a mosque and other related socio-religious activities. As the Muslim rule strengthened in India, their numbers also increased. The large numbers of Muslims in India are mainly due to conversion (Gazetteer of India 1965: 466-467).

Today numerically the Muslims comprise the largest minority community in India. According to the 1981 census Muslims constituted around twelve percent of the total population in India. In 1991 also their strength remained same as in the previous decade, around twelve percent of the total population. In 1981 Jammu and Kashmir had the highest percentage of Muslims (64.19 percent). In 1991, the Muslim population was highest in Assam. In Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Orissa the Muslim population is low. In Kerala and in West Bengal Muslims formed nearly 21 percent of the total population of those states in 1981. Assam (28.43), Kerala (23.3), Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were the States, which had Muslim population in 1991 above national average. Some States such as Sikkim and Meghalaya had Muslim population less than 1 percent.

16.3 TENETS OF ISLAM: VIEW ON SOCIAL EQUALITY

As mentioned earlier in section 16.2, Islam means submission to or acceptance of the will of God. Its perfect form is found in the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah (acts and sayings of Prophet Muhammed). Islam is a monotheistic religion, i.e. it believes in one God who is considered the Creator of the universe, of time and space whose law governs everything that exists. The Quran is the word of God, revealed to his messenger, Prophet Muhammed, in order to lead mankind on a righteous path. The Muslims believe that there will be a 'Last Day' when God will judge all mankind. The belief is that on the judgement day, those who have led a good life will be rewarded and those who have led a bad life will be punished.

The important commands of Islam are prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, performance of all that is enjoined and abstinence from what is forbidden and *Jihad* or striving in the way set by God with all the resources at one's disposal. The social rules of behaviour include among other things the observation of the principles of equality and brotherhood among Muslims and of earning one's livelihood through personal labour. The totality of beliefs and practices is called the *Shariah* (path) of Islam (Gazetteer of India 1965: 468-469). Now let us examine the Islamic view of social equality in order to understand the link between what is believed and what is practised in relation to their social organisation.

Islam is claimed by its believers to be a religion of equality. There are a number of Quranic verses that instruct the Muslims that in evaluating an individual they should not accord much importance to such factors as race, nationality, or ancestry. What matters is the extent to which a Muslim practices the teachings of the Quran.
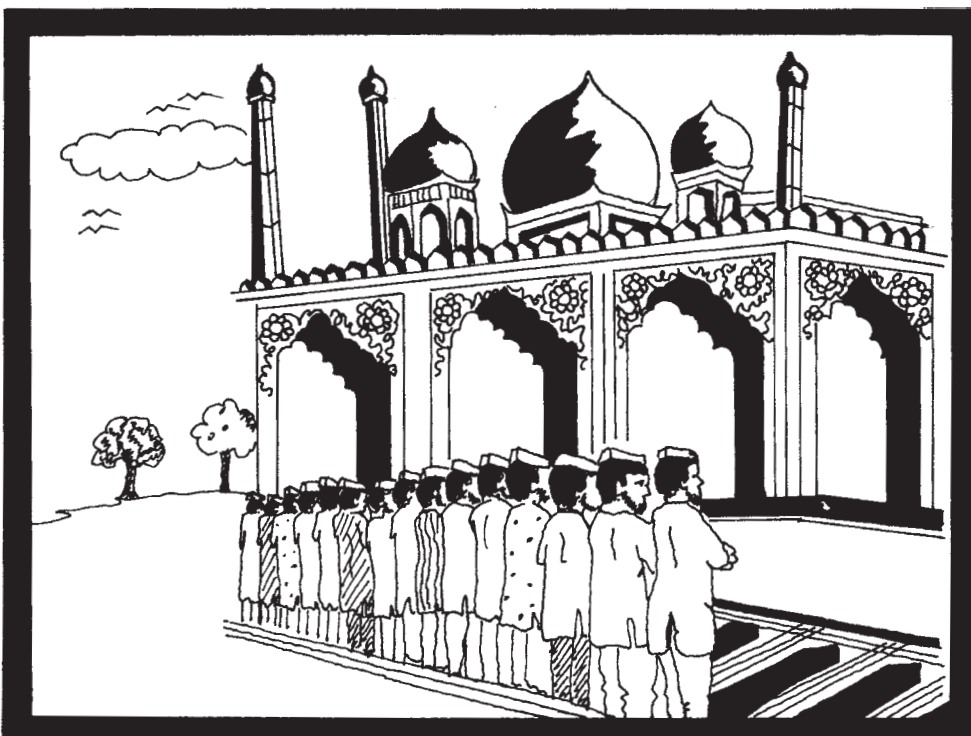

Fig. 16.1: Prayer at a mosque

Muslims insist that the principle of equality be upheld in day-to-day living. All Muslims irrespective of their group affiliation could say *namaz* together and that they need not observe restrictions on eating and drinking together whenever an occasion arises. It is also held that there are no formal restrictions on inter-group (caste) marriages, and that, in fact, Islam encourages it. The existence of an inter-group hierarchy is also denied. Figure 16.1 shows a prayer being held at a mosque.

Check Your Progress 1

i)   Briefly describe the emergence of Islam. Use five lines for your answer.

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ii) What are the important commands of Islam? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) What is the Islamic view on social equality? Use twelve lines for your answer.

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16.4 ASPECTS OF SOCIAL ORGANISATION

In this section, we shall look at certain aspects of Muslim social organisation. We find that though Quran recommends the egalitarian principle and provides the ordering principles for social behaviour. In reality there are social divisions among Muslims. Then we discuss the Islamic sanctions relating to family, marriage and inheritance. The next section deals with some festivals celebrated by Muslims. But first let us look at the social divisions in Muslim society.

16.4.1 Social Divisions among Muslims

The most popularly known division among the Muslims, all over the world, is the division between Shias and Sunnis. They hold the divergent views of and interpretations over Islamic texts and tradition. In India, a vast majority of Muslims are Sunnis (Gazetteer of India 1965). Apart from these kind of divisions there are also other kinds of social groupings among Muslims in India, which reflect the influence of Hindu beliefs and practices specially those relating to caste system.

Muslims in India are divided into two major sections, (i) those who claim to be the descendants of early Muslim immigrants and (ii) those of indigenous origin whose ancestors were converted to Islam. The former section has often been called *Ashraf* or *Shurafa* (singular *sharif*, Arabic words, meaning honourable), while the latter section does not have a specific name. In Bengal, according to Risley (1908), it was designated as *Ajlaf* (for clean occupational castes) and *Arzal* (for unclean castes).

Here, we will first discuss the *Ashraf* category of Muslims and then Muslim converts of Indian origin.

i) *Ashraf* **category of Muslims**

In the Muslim social hierarchy, the descendants of immigrants from Persia, Afghanistan, Arabia and Turkistan are recognised as the highest category of Muslims in India. The Indian Muslim castes, known as Sayyed, Shaikh, Mughal and Pathan comprise this category.

Sayyed are considered to be descended from Fatima's line. She was the daughter of the Prophet Muhammed. As direct descendants of the Prophet, Sayyed are accorded highest social status among the Muslims. They are subdivided into two lineage sections, Hasani and Husaini. After the names of the descendants of Hasan and Husain. Further subdivisions of Sayyed are called Jafari from Jafar as Sadiq, Rizvi from Ali ibr Muras ar-Raza and so on. Some Sayyed subdivisions are named after the disciples of Sayyed saints such as Chishti, Jalali and Oadiriya (Blunt 1931).

In the second rank of social hierarchy of the Muslims come the Shaikh. They are considered to be the descendants of early Muslims migrants of Mecca and Medina. They trace their descent from either (i) The Ansar or Ansari (the helpers), meaning those who provided shelter to the Prophet and his followers, or (ii) the Muhajirum the immigrants, meaning those who were citizens of Mecca and migrated to Medina as the followers of the Prophet.

The Mughal and Pathan subdivisions of the *Ashraf* rank third in the social hierarchy of the Muslims. Both are almost equal in social status. Those who

came to India with the Mughal (concept form of the word Mongol) armies and subsequently settled here were known as the Mughal. Their main subdivisions, based on different ethnic and tribal origins, are Chagtai, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmans and Qizilbarh.

The Pathan are descendants of those who migrated to India from Afghanistan or from the Pashto-speakers of the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan. At present, regional subdivisions of Pathan Muslims are based on their prolonged residence in one or the other parts of India, e.g., Rohila Pathan are the inhabitants of Rohilkhand region. Mostly, the Pathan have four major sub-sections namely, Yusufzai, Lodhi, Ghani and Vakar. These sub-sections are further divided into sub-sub-sections, such as, Ghilzai, Mohammed, Mohammedzai, Tarin, Durrangi.

Among the *Ashraf* groups, are also included those pseudo-*Ashraf* who claim descent from one of the Ashraf caste. Ansari (1959-60: 37-38) has given several examples of attempts by some groups for raising their social status through their claims to Ashraf descent. Ansari has given a long list of certain castes, mentioned in the 1931 census report of Uttar Pradesh. These Muslim castes have tried to raise their social status by claiming new surnames and also corresponding high social status.

ii) Muslim Converts of Indian Origin

The Muslim converts of Indian origin are generally called by their caste names. In this group are placed three distinct groups, namely, converts from high caste of the Hindus, converts from clean occupational castes and converts from unclean occupational castes (Bhangi or sweeper, Chamar or tanner). We will briefly speak about each of the three groups.

Converts from High Castes

In the social hierarchy of the Muslims in India, converts from high castes of the Hindus are placed below the rank of *Ashraf*. Many of the Rajput branches of a family in north India have Muslim branches, e.g., the Bais, Bhatti, Bisen, Chandel, Bargujar, Chauhan, Pawar, Rathore, Tomar. At times some of these groups try to mix with higher-ranking groups of Muslims (see Ansari 1959-60: 40). By and large these converts still follow some of the Hindu practices, e.g., they do not marry first cousins, either cross or parallel. Islamic law allows the marriage of near-kin whereas among the Hindus in north India, prohibition regarding marriage extends to distant degrees of kinship relations on both father's and mother's sides.

Clean occupational Castes

Clean castes are those, which are permitted contact with higher castes under certain rules. These are opposed to unclean castes which are not permitted any contact with higher castes. The matter of cleanliness is considered in terms of the nature of one's traditional occupation. Some occupations involve necessary contact with the persons of higher castes. People who perform such occupations belong to clean castes. For example, a barber has to necessarily come in close contact with his client. A barber belongs to a clean caste.

The castes, belonging to clean occupations rank below the *Ashraf* and Muslim Raiputs, comprise the bulk of Muslim population in India. The descendants of the converts from Hindu clean castes belong to this category. The process of

conversion often involved either groups in different castes of the whole caste group. Many castes of this kind have both Hindu and Muslim sections. For example, it is common to find a carpenter, tailor, laundryman, potter, barber, and goldsmith in both the Hindu and Muslim communities.

These sections operate exclusively in matters of family, marriage and kinship while they also act as one in trade union activities. We can divide these castes in three groups, namely, (a) castes without a Hindu counterpart in existence at present, (b) castes with a larger Muslim section and a smaller Hindu section, (c) castes which are opposite of (b), i. e., with a smaller Muslim section and a larger Hindu section. Let us briefly discuss each of these groups.

Ansari (1959-60: 41-42) includes the following castes of Uttar Pradesh in this group.

a) Atishbaz (firework maker), Bhand (jester), Bhatiyara (innkeeper), Bhishti (water carrier), Gaddi (grazier), Momin Julaha (Muslim weaver), Mirasi (Musician), Qassab (butcher), and Faqir (beggar). According to Ansari, all these castes have exclusive Muslim following. Only in some cases there are Hindu castes with similar occupations. But these groups are known by different caste-labels. For example, a Bhishti (water carrier) in Hindu community is known as Kahar.

b) Castes with larger Muslim and smaller Hindu section in Uttar Pradesh, according to Ansari (1959-60: 46) are known by the following names.

    Darji (tailor), Dhuniya (cotton carder), Kunjra or Kabariya (green grocer), Manihar (bangle maker), Saigalgar (metal sharpener), and Rangrez (cloth printer).

    Ansari's account of these castes is based mainly on his study of the 1931 census reports. It is possible that this situation has now changed. In fact, we need fresh data on this aspect to say something with certainty.

c) Castes with larger Hindu than Muslim sections have obviously provided few followers to Islam. Speaking about Uttar Pradesh, Ansari (1959-60: 47) includes Dhobi (Laundry man), Kumhar (potter), Nai or Hajjam (Barber) and Teli (oil presser) in this group.

Muslim sections of these castes are identified on account of their separate caste councils (Panchayat). These are endogamous castes, practising their own ceremonies and customs.

Unclean Castes

Lastly, we have the Muslim untouchables, occupying bottom place in the Muslim social hierarchy. These people do the menial tasks, including scavenging and sweeping. They are descendants of converts who retained their low social status along with their caste name, occupation and poverty. For example, a Bhangi (scavenger), either a Muslim or a non-Muslim, is not permitted to enter a mosque. In theory, it is possible for a Muslim Bhangi to pray in a mosque, but in practice his entry into a mosque is disapproved. On the other hand, an untouchable Muslim is permitted to learn Quran while an untouchable Hindu is not supposed to learn religious texts.

16.4.2 Caste and Kin Relationships

Having discussed social divisions among the Muslims, let us now see how

these divisions reflect the operation of caste and kin relationships in Muslim social organisation. Cultural characteristics constituting caste among the Hindus may in turn be used to evaluate the situation of Muslims in India. Such a discussion will help us to follow the interrelation between caste and kinship systems. We can see how caste relationships also act as kin groups. These cultural characteristics may be put as follows.

i)   caste is endogamous

ii)   it involves occupational specialisation

iii) castes are hierarchically ordered

iv) there are restrictions on social intercourse and commensality.

i)   **Endogamy: Zat & Biradari**

Muslims use the term **zat** (equivalent of caste) to express the purity of descent. The *zat* is, therefore, primarily an endogamous unit of society. The households belonging to each *zat* in the village conceive of themselves as a collectivity and designate themselves as ***bhai-band or biradari*** (literally caste-brotherhood). This solidarity among the members is not merely a fictional notion, but rests on demonstrable kinship linkages. Since all the households belonging to each caste are descendants of one common ancestor, or a few related common ancestors, who had settled in the village at the time it was established or subsequently related by ties of common descent. On account of the custom of preferential cousin marriage prevalent among some *bhai-band* or *biradaris,* there always exists a tie of descent among them.

The *biradari* resembles caste in the features of its inner structure, e.g. membership is determined only by birth and the group boundaries are maintained through endogamy. However, violations of the rules of endogamy are not dealt with in an identical manner; they range from mere disapproval to outright excommunication. Among the *Ashraf,* the caste brotherhoods are subdivided again into *Biadharis* (marriage circles) to provide a restricted circle in which to choose a wife. Sometimes the endogamous circle becomes so narrow that it includes only the extended kinship group of the person's parents. Such a limited kinship group is generally termed a *kuf*. Whereas the Biradari generally functions for all ceremonial intercourse, the *biadhari* (marriage circles) within the *Biradari* is restricted to the choosing of wives. The Muslim Rajputs are very endogamous, but do not marry first cousins as the Ashrafs do.

Activity 1

Read carefully the section on the Muslim concept of 'Biradari'. In your own community what does 'Biradari' constitute? Write a small note of a page on "Composition of Biradari in my Community". Compare, if possible, what you have noted down with those written by others at the Study Centre.

Some of the occupational castes such as the Qasab (butcher), Manihar (bracelet maker) are almost strictly endogamous and they generally do not marry outside their castes. Certain other occupational castes, such as Julaha (weaver), Nai (barber), Kumhar (potter) may even practice isogamy (marrying equals). Finally

the Bhangi (scavanger) caste is confined to itself for marriage purposes. A clean caste person would not and does not like to establish marriage relations with Bhangis.

ii) Occupational Specialisation

The second attribute of caste or *Biradari,* which resembles the Hindu caste, is their association with a traditional occupation. An exception to this is the various *Ashraf* groups whose names are indicative of their origin or descent. But in the case of many others groups the various names are indicative of the respective traditional occupations.

Since the division of castes entails a degree of occupational specialisation amongst them, the relationship among the different castes tends toward economic interdependence. The different castes participate in this system in different capacities according to their place in the productive organisation revolving around land. The *Ashraf* groups, who are predominantly landowners and whose principal occupation in the village is cultivation, form the nucleus of the system of economic interdependence among the castes. They are referred to as the ***jajmans***. Muslim castes, whose names imply a traditional occupation, render specialised and traditional economic and ritual services for their *jajmans*. Some of the Muslim castes in this respect are Barhai (carpenter), Darzi (tailor), Dhobi (laundryman) Kumhar (potter), Lohar (blacksmith), Nai or Hajjam (barber), Sunar (goldsmith) Teli (oil presser) Bhishti (water carrier), Gaddi (grazier), Julaha (weaver), Qasab (butcher) etc. Each of these occupational castes, with both Hindu and Muslim section, is sometimes united for trade-union purposes. But for social and ceremonial purposes each section is generally limited to itself. In cases of marriages, ceremonial feasts, ritual observances, each communal section of every caste functions as a distinct and separate unit.

iii) Hierarchical Ordering

The third important attribute of caste is the hierarchical ordering of various Muslim groups. Every Muslim caste has its definite place within the total social organisation. Each caste is considered to be either high or low in relation to other castes. The *Ashraf* castes top the social ranking when compared to the other Muslim castes. Further, every Muslim belongs to a certain caste, his/her social status is, therefore, defined and often fixed according to the status of the caste to which he/she belongs. All the Muslim castes, like Hindu castes, are graded into a hierarchical scheme. The *Ashrafs,* almost by common consensus, are assigned the highest position in the ranking strata by virtue of their supposed descent from Prophet Mohammad. The Bhangis and Chamars are assigned the lowest rank. The Muslim Rajputs are ranked lower than *Ashraf* but are considered higher than the various clean occupational castes. The latter are superior to the Muslim untouchables but inferior to Muslim Rajputs.

iv) Restrictions on Social Intercourse and Commensality

Finally, one observes the presence of restrictions on social intercourse and commensalism (i.e. eating together) among the various Muslim castes. The various *Ashraf* groups observe no restriction in inter-group commensality among themselves. There are, however, several restrictions on commensal relations with the rest of the caste groupings who are considered inferior to the *Ashrafs*.

The various *Ashraf* groups assign low status to the non-Ashraf groups because it is maintained that the latter do not observe certain ritual cleanliness *(paki).*

16.4.3 Social Control

Having described how Muslim social organisation is internally differentiated and hierarchically ranked, we shall now turn to other organisational aspects of Muslim society, specially those which restrict and control individuals and groups within the prescribed normative framework. Such an organisation takes two forms: direct control through a governing body, such as a council, and indirect control through public opinion. The Hindu social organisation operates and maintains itself through an operation of both these forms. Let us look at both of them in a little more detail. When particular acts of individuals are not approved by their caste fellows they become the victim of severe criticism. If a violation is serious, the criticism takes the form of action and the offender faces a social boycott the extent of which varies according to the nature of the offence. The other mode of control, through an authoritative body, is generally paractised among the occupational castes where such a body is known as the panchayat. membership in the caste panchayat generally includes all the adult males of the caste; the caste headman, known as *Sarpanch* is usually elected. In a situation of emergency, generally when a member of the caste has committed an offence, the whole panchayat is summoned to hear the case. The caste panchayat then gives its judgement. The most frequent punishment among them is a strict social boycott which is termed as *hugga pani band* (i.e. such a person is not welcomed or entertained by fellow caste members) or *zat biradari bahar* (expulsion from the caste brotherhood).

Among *Ashraf* and some of the higher occupational castes like higher Hindu castes, no authoritative caste council functions. Instead, the general caste opinion of approval and disapproval passes through the communicative network among caste members. Among the *Ashrafs*, joint family functions as the basic unit which controls its members in almost all social and personal matters; in the case of most occupationally related castes which have well organised caste Panchayats, the joint family remains comparatively less significant in social affairs. Among Muslims, Bhangi (Scavenger), Dhobi (washerman), Teli (oil presser), Julaha (weaver) etc. have well organised panchayats which function both as trade unions and as social organisations.

After looking at the pattern of social control among the Muslims, we will discuss in the next section the patterns of family, marrige and inhertance among them. Before proceeding to the next section, let us complete Check Your Progress 2.

Check Your Progress 2

(i)   What are the three distinct groups representing caste like subdivisions among Muslim converts? Use five lines for your answer.

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(ii) What is zat among the Muslim? Use six lines for your answer.

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(iii) What are the means by which the Muslim community in India exercises social control? Use five lines for your answer.

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16.4.4 Family, Marriage and Inheritance

The regulation of the Shariah along with the traditions of the Prophet provides us with a framework for identifying practices relating to Muslim marriage, family and inheritance. The Shariah consists of regulations pertaining to marriage, family and inheritance. The traditions of the Prophet include records of the Prophet's own manner of living and pronouncements on various matters of daily life. These traditions have become a source of normative guidance for Muslim social life. Let us discuss these traditions relating to family, marriage and inheritance in Muslim society in greater detail.

i) **Family**

Muslims, like other communities in India, live in small and large households. Both types of families, i.e., joint family and nuclear family, are found among the Muslims. The size of the family varies from four to eight members or as large as twenty five in number. Vast majority of the joint families are located in the rural areas and more nuclear families are located in urban areas.

Patrilineal and Matrilineal Family: Muslim family is usually patrilocal and patrilineal. After marriage the couple establishes the family at the place of the husband. Exceptions to patrilineal family are rare but not altogether absent. For instance, with the absence of a male heir, the head of the family may invite his daughter and her conjugal family to establish residence in his house. In such a situation, son of the daughter is adopted and becomes the legal heir to property. Another example of departure from the normative type of patrilocal and patrilineal family is the matrilineal families found in Lakshadweep Islands, Malabar district (Kerala) and Ratnagiri districts (Maharashtra) in India (Saiyed, A.R. and Saiyed, V.V. 1982: 117).

Family Break-up: In Islam, celibacy is discouraged and Muslims are enjoined to marry and multiply. Although divorce is a common phenomenon among

Muslims, Islam does not permit divorce to be taken lightly. This is indicated in the Prophet's words, "of all things Allah has made lawful for his servants, the most hateful to him is divorce," (Saiyed, A.R. & Saiyed, V.V., 1982:115). Thus Islam wanted to provide both for family stability as well as divorce in situations where marital maladjustments render healthy family life impossible.

Husband and Wife: Among Muslims, it is the duty of the husband or head of the family to provide for the maintenance of the family. In Islam, the wife has a legal right to be maintained by the husband. The social life of the majority of the Muslim women is confined within the family. She spends a major portion of her time in taking care of household matters and in the upbringing of children. Her social and emotional needs are fulfilled by her family. In fact her role and function in the family determines her social position in the family.

Sons and Daughters: Within the Muslim family sons and daughters generally do not enjoy equal social position (Menon 1981: 84). In the past even the birth of a girl was considered as an unfortunate and unpleasant event in the Muslim family (Menon 1981: 17). However, these days children are given equal treatment in routine general matters. But in important matters such as education, choice of career, choice of partner in marriage, the daughters are sometimes discriminated and sons are favoured.

Segregation of Women: Another notable practice among the Muslim families is *'purdah'* or seclusion of women. Majority of Muslims still live in joint families, where women reside in separate part of the house called *'Zanana'* (Menon 1981:21). The seclusion of women from participation in certain spheres of life is enforced through the custom of *'purdah'*. In the past, this custom was considered as a symbol of higher social position of the family. Social change and education has made some dent in this custom. Yet even today this custom remains an important aspect of the Muslim family.

ii)   **Marriage**

In Block 2, unit 7 on Marriage and its Changing Patterns, we described some aspects of a Muslim marriage. Let us examine here the essential features of Muslim marriage in the context of Islamic religion, which has provided the ideological foundation for social behaviour.

Nikah: Marriage among Muslims is known by the Arabic word *'Nikah'*. It takes place in the form of contract and is not considered as sacrosanct (exceedingly sacred). It is obligatory in character. Muslim law maintains that the main objective of *'Nikah'* is procreation and legalisation of children. The essential elements of Muslim marriage are: a) marriage proposal is made by or on behalf of the concerned parties; b) acceptance of the proposal in the presence of one or two male and two female witnesses; c) settlement of Dower or *Mehr.*

The arrangement of marriage is largely the responsibility of the parents, particularly that of the father. In the past, bride or bridegroom had no say in the selection of his or her partner. This disadvantage was even more glaring in the case of female. With the passage of time male members of Muslim community have acquired some freedom in the choice of their spouse. In case of woman the situation has not much changed

Age at Marriage: Islamic law does not specify any particular age limit for marriage. The only condition is that a minor girl cannot join the husband after marriage. Although young girls may be married but the girl should join the husband only after attaining maturity. This interpretation is not related to age but to attainment of puberty. According to the latest amendment of 'Child Marriage Restraint Act' of 1929 the minimum marriageable age of male and female is 21 years and 18 years respectively. Nevertheless early marriage is still widely prevalent in the Muslim community.

Marriage Ceremony: The ceremony of Muslim marriage, i.e. *'Nikah'* is conducted by 'kazi'. It is customary to recite verses from Quran so as to seek Allah's blessings for the couple. Consent is sought from both the individuals. In order to complete the marriage ceremony, a formal document *'Nikahnama'* is prepared. Notwithstanding other aspects, *'Nikahnama'* specifies the nature of Dower or *Mehr. Mehr* is a particular sum of money or property, which the bride is entitled to receive from bridegroom in consideration of marriage. It's a sort of guarantee for the security of the woman. *Mehr* is an indispensable custom without which no Muslim marriage can acquire social or legal legitimacy. *Mehr* is not a fixed amount of money or property. It varies according to the social and economic status of the concerned families. The mode of payment is also flexible. It can be paid either immediately after the marriage or postponed till some mutually agreeable future date.

Mehr **and Dowry:** Islamic Law never mentioned about dowry. But in reality it has become a common practice. Broadly speaking, the amount of *Mehr* has been reduced to a mere symbolic value. Usually it is several times smaller than the dowry, which the parents of many girls pay at the time of marriage. Thus the ritualisation of *Mehr* and the increasing practice of dowry have adversely affected the status of Muslim women and their marriage prospects.

Polygamy: A notable practice associated with Muslim marriage is polygamy or plurality of wives. In Islam, a Muslim male may have four wives at a time. However, he must be able to treat them on equal and just bases. In India, this practice of plurality of wives became popular during the Muslim Rule. These days it is becoming less prevalent. It has considerably decreased among the urban and educated sections of Muslim population.

Islam permits marriage between both parallel and cross cousins. A notable preferential choice is whereby a male marries his father's brother's daughter. Mohammedan Law also provides for certain restrictions in marriage so far as other communities are concerned. A Muslim woman cannot marry a *'Kithabian'* or non-Muslim. But a male can marry a *'Kithabia'*. Let us make it clear that *'Kithabia'(n)* is an individual who believes in a religion revealed through a book {other than Quran) but does not engages in the practice of 'idol' or 'fire' worship, etc.

Divorce and Remarriage: Under Muslim Personal Law, husband enjoys unlimited freedom in matters of divorce. He is permitted to divorce his wife according to his own pleasure or without assigning any reason or cause. On the other hand, a woman does not enjoy such a freedom. This custom has resulted in man's domination arid power over the woman. Although the Prophet gave to the women, the right of obtaining separation on reasonable grounds but in practice this is not so. In general there are two types of divorce, i.e.

'talaq' and *'khol'*. *Talaq* is exjudicial divorce and it becomes effective when the husband unilaterally pronounces the word *'Talaq'* thrice. In *'Khol'*, divorce takes place by mutual consent.

After divorce a woman is not free to remarry immediately. She is supposed to wait for a specified period before seeking remarriage. This period is called *'iddat'*. On the whole *'talaq'* is considered the most detestable custom in Islam. In India, with the 'Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act', 1939, Muslim woman got the right to divorce her husband on certain specified grounds but men still enjoy much greater freedom as compared to women in matters of divorce.

The Quran and Islamic tradition favour widow marriage. The responsibility for marrying a widow lies with her parents. Although the provision for widow marriage is clearly stated yet until recent times such marriages were presented because of socio-cultural considerations.

Inheritance: Though Islamic society is patrilineal, women in Islam enjoy the right to inherit property. Islamic jurisprudence defines not only the scope of the property a woman may own-by inheritance, by gift and by the fruits of her own labour but also recognises the absolute ownership of it. Both daughters and widows inherit property, including land and houses, from their parents and husbands. Islamic law grants women, even if childless, remarried or divorced complete rights over their inherited property. However, women inherit smaller shares of wealth than men do, a son's share is twice that of a daughter.

16.4.5 Life Cycle Rituals and Festivals

Life cycle rituals and festivals constitute important elements of every religious community. They serve, apart from other things, the purpose of reaffirming one's faith in one's religion. Some of the (important Muslim ceremonies include life-cycle rituals around birth, marriage and death. A few important ones are (i) the naming of the child (ii) circumcision which is done by a barber or in a hospital (iii) the *Bismillah* ceremony, which initiates a child into reading Quran. Feasts and celebrations associated with these ceremonies and festivals not only make for social solidarity among the believers but also allow people from different socio-religious backgrounds to meet and know each other. Let us now look at some important festivals among Muslims. They have two main festivals, namely, *Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Azha.*

On the last day of *Ramzan* and on the sighting of the moon, we have *Id-ul-Fitr*. A prayer service is held. Muslims exchange embraces and greetings after prayers and participate in feasting and merriment. As is clear, these major religious activities and festivals make for social solidarity among Muslims and strengthen their social organisation

Ramzan occurs in the ninth month of the calendar. It is the month of self-purification, and commiseration with the poor. Quran is recited regularly.

Another important festival is *Id-Ul-Adha* or *Bakr-Id.* It is celebrated on the tenth day of the month *Dhul Hijja*. This involves a sacrifice made by pilgrims and performed as part of the ceremonies of *Hajj* in Arabia. The ceremony is observed simultaneously by all Muslims the world over. The Muslims offer food among household members, friends and relatives and the poor. The celebration of the Prophet's birthday, *Idi-Milad* and death anniversaries of

famous saints have also been added to the list of Muslim festivals. Besides these festivals, many Muslims celebrate several Hindu festivals. For example, the Moghul converts gave official status to celebration of *Diwali* and *Holi.*

Mubartam, is the first month of the Muslim calendar, commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husain. Ta'zia processions of the Imams grave are carried out on this day. *Muharram* is not a festival in the usual sense of the term but a commemoration and a period of mourning. On the appearance of the new moon the *fatiha* (opening chapter of the Quran) is recited in the *imam bara* and some refreshment *(sherbet)* taken. The observance lasts ten to twelve days.

16.5 EXTERNAL INFLUENCE ON MUSLIM SOCIAL PRACTICES

Let us in this section mention some studies which indicate the nature of outside influences on Muslim social practices. Ahmed (1974: 326) in his study of' Muslim family in Bihar, found that the importance of *'mehr'* has decreased in the families he studied. Muslims there had incorporated the practice of dowry. Saiyed (1976) has observed that the Muslim Kokni women of Ratnagiri do not inherit landed property though Islamic law provides for it. D'Souza (1976: 167) in his study of Moplah Muslims of Kerala points put that Moplah marriage is considered incomplete without the Hindu function *"Kalyanam".* There is ample evidence to show that British rule and the national movement for independence had made a dent on the Muslim *purdah* system. Educated Muslim women discarded their *purdah* and began to emerge prominently in spheres that were hitherto inaccessible to them. Quarratulain Hyder (1979) has pointed out that literature and journalism became the domain of Muslim women in India. However, it has to be mentioned here that the process of emancipation was mainly confined to the urban middle class women (Saiyed A.R. and Saiyed V.V. 1982:123).

Activity 2

Give examples which show the influence of Muslim social organisation in the following fields.

1) Music

2) Food

3) Dance

4) Literature

5) Architecture

6) Painting

To help you out, here is an example that the *sherwani* and *churidar* are dresses, which reflect the influence of Muslim style of dressing up. Compare your list, if possible, with those written by other students at the Study Centre.

These outside influences, however, have not led to a notable decrease in concern with religious socialisation and the promotion of religiosity among the Muslims. Muslim parents, irrespective of their group status or socio-economic status insist on providing religious education to their children. Emphasis on daily prayers, fasting, group recitation of Quran by women are some features of this concern for religious training. In a pluralistic society like India, Muslims as a minority group seem to feel that it is their duty to cultivate an Islamic religious cultural identity in their children (Saiyed and Saiyed V.V. 1982:132).

In fact today there is a process of **Islamisation** going on wherein various Muslim groups and sub-groups are giving up their practices and customs which resemble those that are present in Hindu communities. In practice this has meant greater observance of their religious traditions and marked turning toward Islamic practices and symbols under the influences of Islamisation. Muslims are rigidly adhering to the law of the *Shariat*. The process of Islamisation has provided a stronger internal unity to Muslims and made them effective politically, as are other organised groups.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   Tick the right answe of the following question.

     What is the Islamic view of marriage?

     a)   Islam does not consider marriage as obligatory.

     b)   Islam looks upon marriage as essential and obligatory.

     c)   Islam encourages celibacy.

ii) State whether the following statements are true or false. Mark T or F against each statement.

     a)   Divorce is permitted in Islam.

     b)   In India, all Muslim families have been found to be patrilineal and patrilocal.

     c)   In Islam, women do not have the right to inherit property.

     d)   The Hindu influences on Islamic social practices can be seen in many areas like marriage, family and inheritance.

     e)   *Ramzan* is a Muslim festival celebrated in the first month of the Muslim Calendar.

iii) What is meant by Islamisation? Use seven lines for your answer.

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....   **Muslim Social Organisation**

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16.6   LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have described some important aspects of Muslim social organisation. We began by a brief description of the emergence of Islam in general and growth of the Muslim community in India. We talked of the important tenets of Islam with a special focus on its view of social equality. We noted that the word Islam means submission to or acceptance of the will of God. Islam is a monotheistic religion and Quran is the most sacred and holy book of Muslims. In our examination of the aspects of social organisation we looked at the social divisions among Muslims as well as the means they employ to exercise social control. We examined the caste like divisions among Muslims and the role of the Panchayat on exercising social control. Marriage, family, and inheritance are described under the heading 'Aspects of Social Organisation'. We focussed on rules regarding marriage, divorce and inheritance. Regarding family we observed that the Muslim family is by and large patrilineal and patrilocal. We concluded our examination with a note on the external influences on Muslim social practices.

16.7   KEYWORDS

Ashraf or Shurafa	Both are plural forms of the Arabic word *Sharif*, meaning honourable. The groups belonging to this category claim to be the descendants of early Muslim immigrants.
Ajlaf	A convert Muslim, especially from a lower Hindu caste.
Bhai-band or biradari	A related group consisting of a member of a caste, literally, brotherhood or an association of kinsmen.
Islamisation	Cultural process whereby groups and individuals distinguish themselves from non-Muslims by purifying themselves of the so called un-Islamic customs and practices.
Jajman	Patron, the recipient of ritual and economic services under the *jajmani* system.
Namaz	Prayer, the Islamic form of worship supposed to be performed five times daily.
Paki	Ritual purity required before prayers and other religious observances.
Zat	Urdu equivalent of the word, *'Jati'* meaning the effective endogamous unit of the caste system.

16.8   FURTHER READING

Ahmed, Imtiaz (ed.) 1983. *Modernisation and Social Change Among Muslims in India*. Manohar: New Delhi, Chapters 1 and 16.

Ansari, Ghaus. 1959-60. Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh. A Study of culture contact. The Eastern Anthropologist, 13 (2); 1-83.

Jackson, Paul S.J. (ed.) 1988. *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices.* Theological Publications: Bangalore, Chapter I, II & III.

Saiyyed, V.V. and Mohammad, Talib 1995. *Religion and Ethnicity among Muslim.* Rawat: Jaipur

16.9   SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

i)   Islam means act of submission to Allah. Its holy book is the Quran, and this was revealed to man through Muhammad the Prophet. It came into existence in the early seventh century in West Central Arabia. Its systematic formulation took place in 622 A.D. when Muhammad went form Mecca to Medina.

ii) The important commands of Islam are prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, performance of all that is demanded of a Muslim. Abstinence from what is forbidden and striving for what is set as the right path by Allah are also a part of the commands.

iii) According to the teachings of Quran all men are equal and no one should be evaluated on the basis of such factors like race, ancestry or nationality. The principle of equality is to be upheld in day-to-day life. Islam expects every Muslim irrespective of his group affiliations or status, to say *'namaz'* together and not to observe any kind of restrictions on social interaction relating to marriage and commensality.

Check Your Progress 2

i)   The three distinct groups are

   a)   converts from Hindu high castes

   b)   converts from clean occupational castes

   c)   converts from unclean occupational castes

ii) Muslims use the term *zat* to express the purity of descent. *Zat* is thus an endogamous unit of society. *Zat* also involves occupational specialisation. They are hierarchically ordered and tend to have an ideological and religious basis.

iii) The Muslims exercise social control with the help of direct means through a governing body like a council or panchayat and indirect means through public opinion such as social boycott by the community of which the violator is a member.

Check Your Progress 3

i)   b

ii) (a) T

     (b) F

     (c) F

     (d) T

     (e) F

iii) Islamisation is a process of social change wherein various groups of Muslims give up their practices and customs, which resemble those that are present in Hindu communities. It has also meant strict adherence to Islamic practices and symbols.