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Title of Thesis: Social Change in a Muslim Migrant Community of Burdwan: A Study of Raniganj Muslims, West Bengal.

ABSTRACT: The study is about the Muslim community of Raniganj, a town in the Burdwan district of West Bengal. The town is famous as the birth place of coal mining in the country. The total population of the town is 122,891. In 1774 A.D., coal mining operations in the country was started in Raniganj. Since then, various industries like iron, cement, glass, paper mill, etc., opened in Raniganj and adjacent areas. Prime factor in the opening of ancillary industries was the availability of coal as a fuel in the Raniganj coalfield. With the opening of railway link between Calcutta and Raniganj in 1855, industrial activities further increased. The increasing industrial units needed a continuous flow of labour force to run the mills and factories. To find employment in these industries and to make fortune out of the growing popularity of Raniganj as a marketing town, different class of people from different places started coming. Bengalis, Muslims, Marwaris, Punjabis, Jains, and other ethnic groups came to Raniganj.

The migration of Muslims to the town began as early as 1860s, after the India's First War of Independence. Today, they constitute about twenty five percent of the town's total population. The present study was carried out to find the mechanisms of social mobility and its manifestation in the form of social and cultural changes. The ethnography method of enquiry was adopted to carry out the research. Tools of participant observation and interview method were used for data collection.

No society or community can remain static for a long time. No society is perfectly open or perfectly closed. In every society, there is scope for mobility and personal ambition, and in every society there are mechanisms that inevitably prevent equality of opportunity. Since the time of their migration, Muslims have experienced both inter-generational (between generations) and intra-generational (within generation) mobility. Some of them have moved longer distance in the social hierarchy while others only few steps. The three main domains of mobility adopted by Muslims are those of education, trade and business and power structure. Mobility leads to

restructuring of roles and a change in inter-personal relations. The restructuring of roles and relations has brought concomitant changes in the marriage and network relations which now extend to more distant places.

With improvement in one's class situation comes the desire to improve one's social status. Merely having enough wealth does not guarantee social honour. Economic prosperity can be a precondition, but not always, for a claim to higher social status. It requires suitable adjustments in their life style as well. There is a cultural dimension of mobility. This cultural mobility gets manifested in multiple ways. Consumerism becomes an accepted mode of life. Ostentatious celebration of festivals and grand feasts on various occasions becomes a regular feature of mobile families. Interpersonal relations become more class-centric. Performance of hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) is another aspect of achieved mobility. Visits and charities to religious institutions (mosques and shrines) increase. Reform movements are another dimension associated with the improved social condition.

The process of social change among Muslims is in operation but at a slow pace. The increased prosperity, urbanization, growth of education and reform movements has all contributed in this process. At one point of time there was in-migration of Muslims to Raniganj for better opportunities and now there is an out-migration from Raniganj, again for better opportunities. Although these two processes are still going on but the flow of out-migration is far greater than that of in-migration.