

**DYNAMICS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND THE ROLE  
AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN NATUNPUR  
(CASE STUDY OF A BANGLADESH VILLAGE)**

**JHARNA NATH**

**THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

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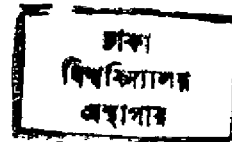
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1984



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## PREFACE

This thesis is part of the Project entitled "Action-Oriented Study of the Role of Women in Rural Development" under the direction of Professor T.S. Epstein and Dr. S.P.F. Senaratne of the University of Sussex, U.K. Five South-East Asian countries, viz., Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri-Lanka were included in this Project. This study was done as a part of Bangladesh component.

My gratitudes are to the Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission, Bangladesh, for selecting me for the research. The funding came from the UNICEF/UNDP, I am grateful for their generous financial support. I am particularly thankful to Ms. Rene Gerard, Senior Programme Officer, and Mrs. Jawshan Ara Rahman, Chief, Women's Development Unit, UNICEF, for their endless support and encouragements in my study. I am also thankful to the authorities of the University of Rajshahi for having granted me study leave for five years.

I am specially indebted to my supervisor Dr. B.K. Jahangir for his guidance throughout. His valuable comments and suggestions at various stages of my work not only helped me to put my ideas in focus to probe deeper than I would otherwise have done. Professor T.S.Epstein and Dr. S.P.F. Senaratne also helped me with their valuable comments, and affectionate inspirations. Without their constant moral support it would not

have been possible for me to tide over the many phases of depressions that often I was plagued with.

I would specially like to thank Drs. A.M. Shah, and Abhijit Dasgupta, University of Delhi, M. Rouf, Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan, as well as Sajogyo, Centre of Rural Sociological Research, Indonesia for their constructive and insightful comments. I must express my gratitude to Professor F.R. Khan and Drs. A.G. Bhuiyan and B.M. Choudhury of the Department of Sociology as well as Professor Sanat Kumar Saha of the Department of Economics and Mr. Ali Anwar of the Department of English, Rajshahi University for their sincere co-operation in various ways all the time.

I do not know how I can express my gratitude to the ever helpful people of Natunpur. I recall with fond nostalgia my stay in the village which was as happy and as it was a fruitful experience. I am ever grateful to my landlady and landlord without whose support and constant care I would not have been able to do my field studies.

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Finally I must acknowledge my gratitude and thanks to my parents, brothers and sisters who turn a hand in running my family during the period and specially to my two little school-going daughters who patiently bore with my absence and neglect of them made yet worse by occasional tantrums.

(iv)

I am of course also thankful to Mr. Bhanu Chowdhury and Mr. Ajit Chakrabarty for typing the thesis with such care and patience.

DEB  
Jharna Nath  
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ABSTRACT

This thesis focusses on women's behaviour within the setting of Natunpur, a Bangladesh village. Since women's behaviour is taken to symbolise the prestige rank of their respective households and kingroups it is important to examine it within the social setting of which it is so obviously an integral part.

The changing fortunes of individual households and kingroups greatly affect what women can and cannot do. Only those households that have access to income outside agriculture can expect to maintain or even improve their economic standing. Most of Natunpur's old established households that depend solely on farming are set on a downward economic trend, mainly as a result of the increasing population growth and an inheritance pattern whereby not only each son but also the widow and her daughters have a right to a share in the ancestral property. This leads to increasing numbers of unviable farm units, which in turn results in the concentration of larger areas in the hands of the few wealthier villagers who can buy up land.

Women are cocooned within this socio-economic system. Constraints to their mobility and behaviour are directly related to their life-cycle phase: the older the woman the freer she is. The increasing impoverishment of the poorest

households forces their women to become kamla, i.e., work as casual labourer for anybody, who pays them to do so. A household with a female kamla occupies the lowest prestige in Natunpur. On the other hand, the few educated Natunpur girls, who work as teachers outside their village add to the prestige rank of their respective families. Thus the poorest women are 'pushed' into working for their living while the upper stratum girls are 'pulled' into professional occupations.

The above brief outline is discussed in great detail in the five chapters of this thesis.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
PREFACE                      ...                      ...	ii
ABSTRACT                      ...                      ...	v
CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION                      ...	
1.1 The Problem                      ...	1-6
1.2 Some Related Studies                      ...	6-13
1.3 Method of the Study                      ...	13-22
1.4 The Village Setting                      ...	22-31
CHAPTER 2 : DYNAMICS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES	
2.1 Natunpur's settlement History	32-35
2.2 Residential Pattern                      ...	35-47
2.3 Land Ownership and Population Growth                      ...	47-51
2.4 Economic Mobility Versus Prestige Ranking                      ...	52-62
2.5 The Operation of Landholdings	63-72
2.6 Agricultural Implements	72-78
2.7 Labour Force Participation in Cultivation                      ...	78-82
2.8 Cropping Pattern                      ...	82-87
2.9 Economic Diversification	87-96
2.10 Exogenous Inputs                      ...	97-103
2.11 On-going Economic Trends	103-106



	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER 3 : KINSHIP AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION	
3.1 Household Compositions and Demographic Factors	108-111
3.2 Household in its residential and Kinship Setting ...	111-120
3.3 Natunpara with its <u>Gusti</u> and Individual Households ...	120-159
3.4 Beharipara with its <u>Gusti</u> and Individual Households ...	159-171
3.5 Satbhagipara with its <u>Gusti</u> Households ...	172-178
3.6 The Role of <u>Samaj</u> in Natunpur	178-195
CHAPTER 4 : ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN NATUNPUR	
4.1 Women as Symbol of Household Honour	196-201
4.1.1 Women in Natunpara ...	201-210
4.1.2 Women in Beharipara	210-223
4.1.3 Women in Satbhagipara	223-225
4.2 Women and Property ...	226-242
4.3 Women and the Domestic Cycle	242-258
4.4 Women's Work Pattern ...	258-285
4.5 Profiles of Three Village Women	285-289
4.6 Development Project for Village Women: A Mother's Club ...	289-297
CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSION ... ..	298-306
BIBLIOGRAPHY ... ..	307-320

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		<u>Page</u>
1	Parawise Distribution of Natunpur's Population ... ..	26
2	Age and Sex Distribution of Natunpur's Population, October, 1978 ...	27
3	Educational Levels of Natunpur's Population by Age and Sex in Percentages ...	30
4	Generationwise Settlement of Natunpur Households by Para (Percentages) ...	36
5A	Settlement Pattern of Natunpara <u>Gusti</u> and Non- <u>Gusti</u> Households in Economic Categories in Percentages ... ..	37
5B	Settlement Pattern of Beharipara <u>Gusti</u> and Non- <u>Gusti</u> Households in Economic Categories in Percentages ... ..	37
5C	Settlement Pattern of Satbhagipara <u>Gusti</u> and Non- <u>Gusti</u> Households in Economic Categories in Percentages ...	38
6	Natunpur's Landholding Categories by Para	48
7	Sharecropping Land Owned by Natunpur Residents	64
8	Land Mortgages in Natunpur (Households)	69
9	Comparative Expenses and Yields for Different Crops per Bigha ... ..	73
10	Ownership of Agricultural Assets in Economic Categories ... ..	76
11	Labour Participation in Cultivation by Economic Category of Household ...	79
12	Comparative Market Value, Cultivation Cost and Profits for Different Crops per Bigha (1978)	85
13A	Occupational Pattern Among Natunpur Men in Economic Categories by Para. Natunpara	89
13B	Occupational Pattern Among Natunpur Men in Economic Categories by Para. Beharipara	93

TABLE	<u>Page</u>
13C Occupational Pattern Among Natunpur Men in Economic Categories by Para. Satbhagipara	96
14A Natunpur Residents Upwardly Mobile by Economic Categories (Households)	104
14B Natunpur Residents on Downward Trend by Economic Categories (Households)	105
14C Natunpur Residents on Even Economic Keel by Economic Categories (Households)	105
15A Household Compositions in Natunpur in Economic Categories (Natunpara)	112
15B Household Compositions in Natunpur in Economic Categories (Beharipara)	112
15C Household Compositions in Natunpur in Economic Categories (Satbhagipara)	113
16 <u>Gusti</u> of Natunpur in Economic Categories and Family Compositions by Para	127
17 Female Labour Force Participation in Natunpur by Economic Category and Household Composition	275
18 Parawise Distribution of Women's Labour Force Participation in Natunpur	278
19 Female Labour Force Participation in Natunpara Economic Category and Household Composition	279
20 Female Labour Force Participation in Beharipara Economic Category and Household Composition	282
21 Female Labour Force Participation in Satbhagipara by Economic Category and Household Composition	283

LIST OF CHARTS

CHART		
1A Cultivation Costs of One Bigha Aus Paddy		74
1B Cultivation Cost of One Bigha Wheat		74

CHART

1C	Cultivation of One Bigha		
1D	Cultivation of One Bigha and		
2A	Crops Grown on One Bigha non-Irr.	75	
2B	One Bigha Sugarcane, Time of Cultivation and Yield	75	
2C	One Bigha Jute, Time of Cultivation and	34	
3	Types of Natunpur Households		
4	Chart sets Out the Different Types of Complex Households in the Village Natunpur		11
5	Kinds of Work Done by Women in the Household		261
6	Who Performs What Work Among Natunpur Women		264
7	Details of a Poor Woman's Income-Earning Work and Remuneration (1978-79)		271

LIST OF MAPS

1	Location Map	...	...	xii
2	Mouza Map	...	...	23
3	Village Map	...	...	24

DIAGRAMS

1	Village Social Organisation	...	...	40
2	Crop Calendar	...	...	83

CHART		<u>Page</u>
1C	Cultivation Cost of One Bigha Sugarcane	75
1D	Cultivation Cost of one Bigha Jute	75
2A	Crops Grown on One Bigha non-Irrigated Land	84
2B	One Bigha Sugarcane, Time of Cultivation and Yield	84
2C	One Bigha Jute, Time of Cultivation and Yield	85
3	Types of Natunpur Households	110
4	Chart sets Out the Different Types of Complex Households in the Village Natunpur	110
5	Kinds of Work Done by Women in the Household	261
6	Who Performs What Work Among Natunpur Women	262
7	Details of a Poor Woman's Income-Earning Work and Remuneration (1978-79)	271

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2	Mouza Map	...	...	23
3	Village Map	...	...	24

#### DIAGRAMS

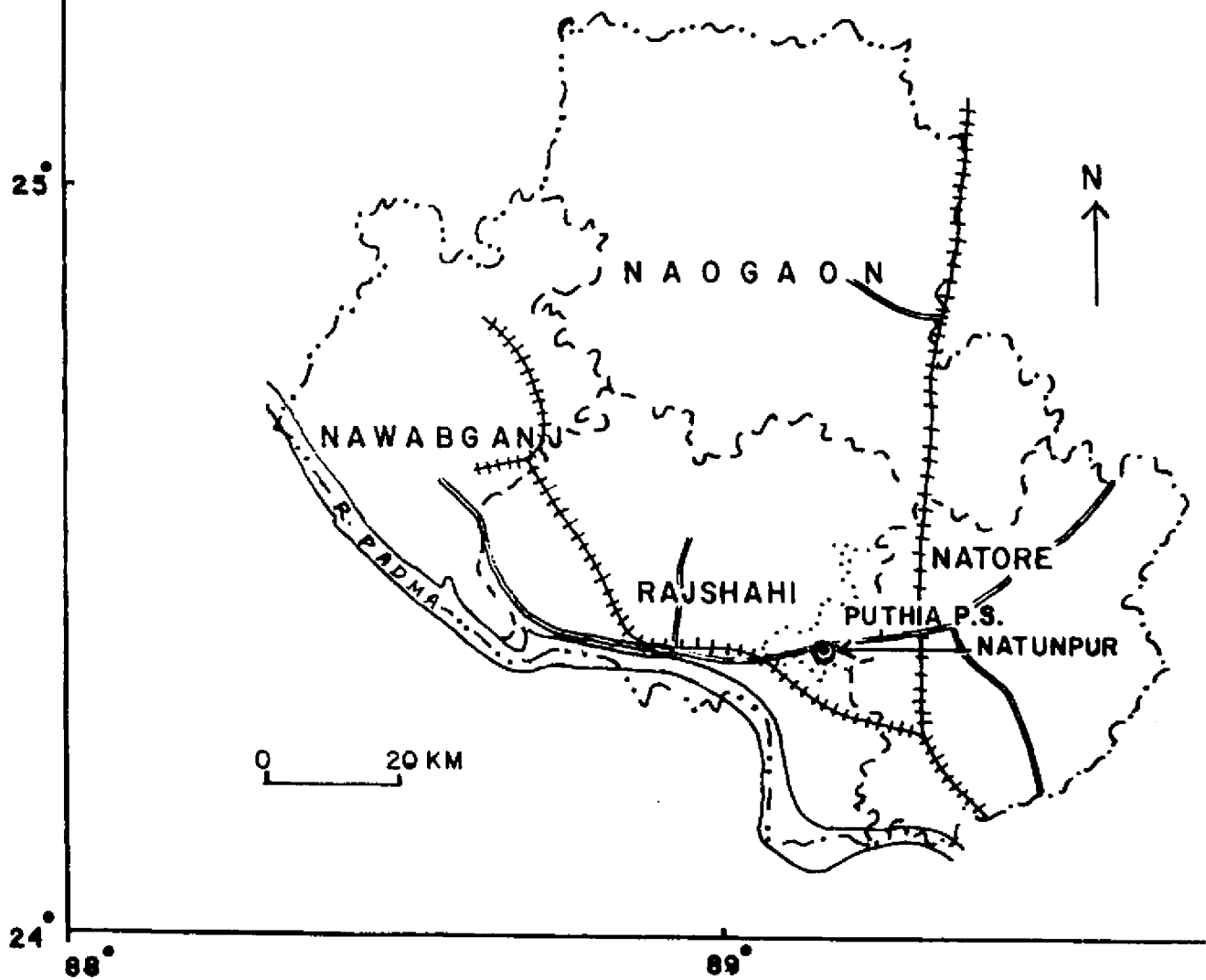
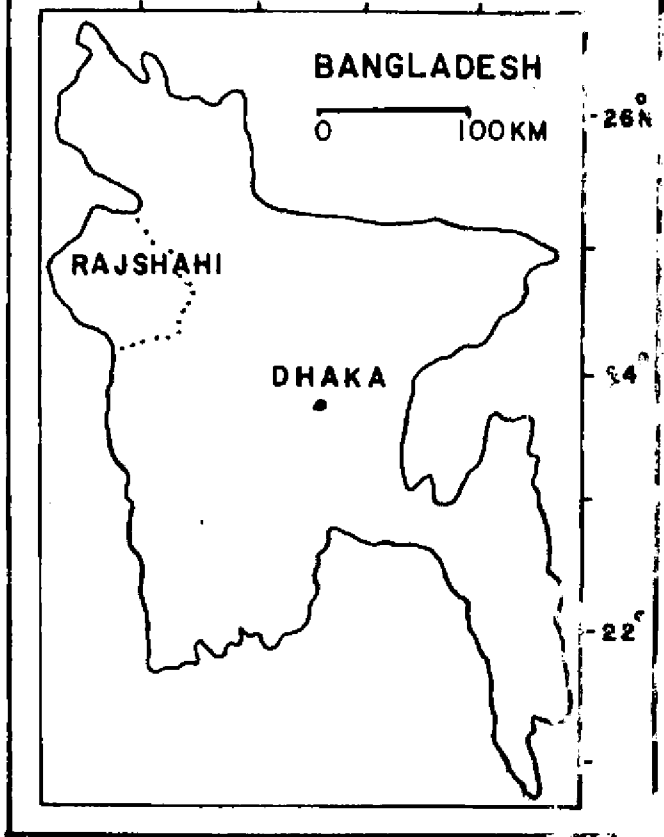
1	Village Social Organisation	...	...	40
2	Crop Calendar	...	...	83

# RAJSHAHI DISTRICT

## LOCATION OF NATUNPUR VILLAGE

### LEGEND

- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY ..... (dotted line)
- DISTRICT BOUNDARY ..... (dashed line)
- SUB-DIVISION BOUNDARY ..... (dash-dot line)
- RAILWAYS ..... (line with cross-ticks)
- ROAD ..... (double line)



MAP - 1

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Problem

On 16th December 1971 Bangladesh came into being as an independent state. Before that it was Pakistan which consisted of two parts. West Pakistan was situated on the north-west side of India, and East Pakistan was situated on the eastern side of India. Majority of the population in both the wings were Muslims; however, they were heterogeneous in terms of language, culture and traditions. After nine months of liberation war, the portion called East Pakistan separated and established itself as independent Bangladesh.

Poverty and overpopulation are two main problems of Bangladesh. Agriculture carried out in traditional way provides the main source of income. Bangladesh is not rich in mineral or power resources but has only few industries. There are 65,000 villages in Bangladesh. More than 80 per cent of the population live in villages. Thus without knowing villages intimately one cannot know the society and culture of the country. Accordingly village studies in Bangladesh are receiving the attention of more and more scholars at home and abroad.

More than half the population are women. Thus the importance of rural women can be readily appreciated. As most of the Bangladesh population reside in villages, both Government

and private sectors consider rural development of strategic importance. Government and non-governmental bodies have been planning and implementing different rural development programmes with a view to alleviating the worst poverty. However, my observations and research on village life in Bangladesh show that only a few well-off and influential villagers benefit from these development programmes while the poor are getting poorer day by day. The GNP has been increasing but the benefits are not shared equally by every one. Though half the population are female, they are almost totally neglected and often not recognised by development planners. Recent studies by scholars like Boserup, (1970) show that women are worst affected by development programmes in the rural areas. The poorest women who used to work in rice processing, now are out of work as rice is now processed in mills.

To ensure efficient implementation of rural development programmes, the importance of women as a vital human resource has to be considered. Boserup (1970), Germain (~~1976~~ 1976), Zeidenstein (1973), Abdullah (1978) and many other scholars at home and abroad and even the Government of Bangladesh have come to appreciate that women have to be integrated in the development process of a developing country. Simply because if half the population is excluded from the developmental process of a country, it will not develop. A country's socio-economic and cultural development cannot be realised if half



the population lags behind. Women not only participate in the production process, but they also manage the household and look after the health, nutrition and well-being of all the members of their households. Therefore, the examination of the role of women in Bangladesh rural development programmes is theoretically challenging as well as practically important.

Many studies show that the results of development programmes are not equally distributed among villagers. Well-off people are getting most of the benefits, (see Epstein, 1973; Jahangir, 1979). Moreover, there is population explosion coupled with an inheritance pattern according to which all the sons and also other members of a household have the right of share in the ancestral property. Thus most inherited property is in the process of becoming smaller and smaller. Only those who can earn money outside farming and buy more land are in a position to increase the ancestral property. Thus even if a village starts with a reasonable distribution and size of landholding, the standard of living of its members, unless they have access to other than farm income, is found to deteriorate over time. For example, a family with 10 acres of land and ten equal heirs will in the next generation, divide the land into 10 one acre units and this process of sub-division will continue in future generations. Those with unviable farm units mortgage and/or sell their land to those who can afford to buy land from them. Because the area of cultivable land is not increasing, the accumulation of landed properties in the hands

of a few villagers leads to increasing disparities in its distribution.

People in Bangladesh are not only concerned with the improvement of their economic status, they also attach a high value to religiosity and noble character. Social status and prestige are something after which most people hanker. Villagers with newly gaining economic prosperity try various ways to buy prestige. Again the households who previously had socio-economic status, but now due to various reasons are on a downward economic trend struggle to keep their status position. These various types of socio-economic and status struggles are going on in Bangladesh village societies.

Women who are obviously a part of this social system are also affected by the socio-economic condition of the family and the society of which they are members. A woman's role is considered as symbolising the prestige rank of her household. Therefore, she is taught to be modest and dependent at every stage of her life-cycle. Her mobility is restricted; her place is considered to be within the four walls of her household. A household's prestige ranking is largely determined by its womenfolk. In turn, as already mentioned, women's behaviour pattern is very much influenced by the socio-economic status of their respective households. Her personal qualities also affect her status ranking. Thus women do not belong to a homogeneous category, nor of course do men. But much less is

known about the female half of the population than about the male half.

Therefore, some knowledge regarding Bangladesh society and its culture is necessary for a better understanding of the position of women. There exists a deep-rooted influence both of Hindu and Muslim culture which affects women's behaviour. Most of the village women thus live within a 'Bounded Universe' where they not only behave in tune with the socio-economic status of their respective families but also have to respect the ideology and traditions which exist in the society. However, social life is never static; things are always changing. Thus it is important to discover how women are adjusting to the changing situations.

To understand the role of the women in a society one has to understand that society, i.e., the system of that society. Without analysing the overall social system, it is not possible to understand a part of it. One has to understand how social system is organised and how it works; a change in one part affects all the other parts. In my study, I focussed on the role of women in the society. An individual woman acts as a member of a household first, the household in turn is part of a kingroup and or the samaj (little community) which again occupy a particular position in village society, which is never static. Accordingly, in this thesis I try to examine

the dynamics of womens behaviour as I observed it in one village.

Though one single village study cannot be regarded as representative of Bangladesh rural society, I suggest that it can help to illustrate certain trends. I selected Natunpur village where development programmes were going on. This is regarded as one of the more developed villages in Bangladesh. In Natunpur both Hindus and Muslims live side by side. Like most other Bangladesh villages, it is socially and economically differentiated. Natunpur is well communicated with other parts of Bangladesh. It has electricity, a school, rural health centre, family planning clinic and many other amenities of life which are found in developing areas of Bangladesh. There are people of old established households with traditional outlooks and new immigrants who adjust more easily to new situations. These are the complexities with which I try to grapple in this thesis.

## 1.2 Some Related Studies

Since the 1950's researchers in the field of sociology and anthropology in the Indo-Pak subcontinent have given emphasis on village studies. In India, the emphasis was mainly on caste, agrarian systems and social change. This is exemplified by India's Villages, M.N. Srinivas (ed) 1955; Caste and Economic Frontier, F.G. Bailey, 1958; Economic Development and Social

Change in South India, T.S. Epstein, 1962; Indian Village, S.C. Dube, 1967. These were pioneering works in village studies. These focussed on the village social structure and its changing pattern.

Whilst Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan and was known as East Pakistan, a few village studies were done there by different scholars. Among them, The Changing Society of India and Pakistan, A.K.N. Karim, 1956, based on secondary data, explains the general features of social stratification and social change; it also shows the influence of British rule on the society of the then East Pakistan. The author also analysed Nayanpur, a village in the Eastern part of East Pakistan and compared it with sixteenth century Bengali villages. S.A. Qadir in his book Village Dhaniswar, published in 1960 discussed mainly the man-land relationship of the study area. "The study also included collection of available historical evidence in order to provide some understanding of the underlying process of this transformation over time." (1960:1). P. Bessagnet in his study of Sahabad Village explains the pattern of family and kinship in a Hindu village, (see Md. Afsaruddin, ed. 1963, Sociology and Social Research in Pakistan). This was only a small study. Ramkrishna Mukharjee published in 1971, his Six Villages of Bengal. He conducted the field work between 1942 and 1945 in six villages of Bogra district, which is situated in the northern part of Bangladesh. He gave emphasis on the

economic structure of the villages. As the study is based on the materials collected in the mid 1940s, it obviously analyses the village structure of those days. On the other hand, Hafeez Zaidi, 1970 studied two villages of East Pakistan called Ramnagar and Alipur in Comilla. Though that book too was published at the beginning of the 1970s, his field work was conducted in the 1960s. He discusses family, social stratification, kinship and factions in a social and psychological context. His book, The Village Culture in Transition, "... is to furnish authentic and carefully observed materials to the student of Pakistan village society." (Preface of the book).

Md. Afsaruddin's book which first appeared in 1964 named, Rural Life in Bangladesh, is based on the study of five villages of Bangladesh. The study used mainly the empirical method. According to the writer, though his study focuses on attitudes and how they change it also examines the village structure and its changes. The first five chapters deal mainly with the structural aspect of social life in Bangladesh. The subsequent chapters have been devoted to the attitudinal study and consequent changes in structure (1979:11). A. Chowdhury did his intensive field work in village Meherpur, Dhaka. His book, A Bangladesh Village - A Study of Social Stratification focuses on the social stratification pattern of the village Meherpur.

B.K. Jahangir, 1979, studied two villages Nayapara and Mirabo in Dhaka district. The name of his book indicates both its subject matter and his findings, i.e., Differentiation

Polarisation and Confrontation in Rural Bangladesh. It is the result of intensive field work. The book is mainly concerned with peasant social structure and the process of changing social systems.

There exist also a few unpublished dissertations dealing with village social structure, family and kinship and other social variables. T. Hara, a Japanese scholar did two years field work from 1962-1964 and submitted his doctoral thesis, "Paribar and Kinship in a Rural Village in East Pakistan", at the Australian National University, in the year 1967. It is a study of Paribar and kinship in village Gohira in Chittagong district, in the south-east corner of Bangladesh. Hara discussed various ideas and concepts that prevailed in the village, because he argues that the "Philosophy of the villagers" is necessary for the understanding of their society. He mainly concentrates on the study of Paribar (family), kinship, family status, marriage, purdah, women's life-cycle etc. N.U. Ahmed studied three villages near Dhaka. His thesis titled, "The Peasant Family and Social Status in East Pakistan", submitted to the University of Edinburgh in 1968, deals mainly with peasant family structure. In the preface of his thesis, he states that, "... The original idea of making an investigation only into the nature of the conjugal role-relationship was later expanded into a wider attempt at studying kinship, relationships within the family, the life-cycle of the individual and the developmental cycle of the 'domestic group'. P. J.

Bertocci's "Elusive Villages: Social Structure and Community Organisation in Rural East Pakistan", an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, East Lansing, Michigan State University in 1970 is a study of Hazipur and Tinpara, two villages in Comilla district. The main emphasis of this study is on social structure and community organisation. It also gives some information on the nature of family in those villages. The majority of the households in these two villages are simple households, Bertocci also explains how family structure and wealth change over time. A. Q. Bhuiyan who did his field work in village Khawajapur in Comilla for his doctoral dissertation, "The Family in a Village in Bangladesh", 1978, focuses mainly on the household dimension of family. It shows its connections with the wider society and also the impact of various factors, such as modernisation of traditional agriculture, establishment of new mills and factories and various such other things on family structure in Khawajapur.

The literature on Bangladesh villages, as discussed above, all focus on village structure, stratification, family, kinship and the like. All these studies except one were done by men. Here it must be mentioned that on the Asian sub-continent rural women do not normally have any public interaction with men who are not by any chance their family relations. Thus studies done by male scholars contain hardly anything concrete about women, T. Scarlet Epstein, the only female scholar who studied two South Indian villages also focussed mainly on social structure and the changing process of the two villages. It is only



since the International Women's Year of 1975 that some studies have been carried out by female scholars at home and abroad that focus on women. In anthropology some interesting works have been published, e.g. M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (ed.) Women Culture & Society (1974); R.R. Reiter, (ed) Toward an Anthropology of Women (1975); Critique of Anthropology (Women's issue), vol. 3 (1977) and J. Giele & Smock (ed.) Women: Roles and Status in Eight Countries (1977).

Hara (1967), Ahmed (1968), Bhuiyan (1978) give each some information regarding women, while explaining marriage, kinship and also husband-wife relationship; they also describe the life-cycle and the domestic cycle. Before that Karim's article, "Changing Patterns of an East Pakistan Family" in B. Ward (ed.) Women in the New Asia (1963) described the urban family only. Following those earlier studies are those that were conducted after the liberation war of 1970. Many women of Bangladesh lost their husbands, brothers and other members of their family, many of them were even tortured by Pakistan soldiers. The plight of these women attracted many agencies to find out more about the life of these women. As a result, international agencies like the Ford Foundation encouraged many scholars to produce short studies on the role of women. T.A. Abdullah (1974); R. Jahan, (1974); K. Kabir, A. Abed, and M. Chen (1976); S. Lindenbaum (1968); E. Sattar (1974); S. Zeidenstein and Laura (1973) all of them studied different aspects of rural

women. A Research and Study Group called Women for Women published several articles on the situation of both rural and urban women. The articles written by R. Jahan; E. Sattar; G.M.E. Von-Harder; J. Ellickson on rural women of Bangladesh in the book Women for Women (1975) are of great importance in understanding Bangladesh rural women. Another book named Situation of Women in Bangladesh, brought out by Women for Women (1979) consists of several articles explaining the situation of both rural and urban women. S.F. Alamgir (1977) in her study Profile of Bangladesh Women based on secondary data, discusses many points, i.e., women's work, decision-making, control of resources, marriage system, property rights etc. A. Farouk and M. Ali (1975) state in their book that women work longer hours at productive tasks than do men. J. Arens and J.V. Beurden, a Dutch couple, stayed in Jhagrapur village for one year and wrote the book called Jhagrapur - Poor Peasants and Women in a Village in Bangladesh (1977). It is an examination of rural peasant life of Bangladesh. Its several chapters deal with women. They show how rural women of Bangladesh are exploited in the village context. They are doubly exploited; as poor and as women in the poorest class. These are the main studies relating to Bangladesh women. There are of course some related studies on family planning. However, it seems that all the written materials relating to women in the rural context either mainly analyse the social structure and its change or focus on various aspects of women's life. There is no single

study as yet which analyses women's role as an integral part of the social system. This is what I attempted to do in my study of Natunpur village. Thereby, I tried to help fill the gap in our understanding of women's part in rural Bangladesh.

### 1.3 Method of the Study

I participated in the pre-field work training which the Project Directors conducted at the University of Sussex, U.K. There were theoretical courses in Anthropology, Women and Development studies. In addition, T. Scarlet Epstein and S.P.F. Senaratne discussed with us the methodology we should apply for our study. All this was most helpful in the field situation. However, in my fieldwork I noticed that it is most important for a researcher to be tactful in the field. Field researchers have to be prompt in taking decisions in changing circumstances, and have to respect their informants while trying to adjust to the field situation. Amiability in character is a great virtue for field researchers.

As part of our first Project Conference held in Sussex University in June 1978, different scholars talked about different field problems. This was also a very useful experience for us. T. Scarlet Epstein talked about the importance of finding suitable accommodation in the field, A.M. Shah pointed out that researchers have to be careful so that they are not influenced by the village headmen and leaders. He also

emphasised the importance of the selection of suitable accommodation which may provide easy access to all levels of people. S.P.F. Senaratne threw light on the methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Bertocci, Jahangir, Bhuiyan, Chowdhury and other male field researchers mentioned in their studies that they could hardly meet or see women in their study villages. Bhuiyan wrote, "The women I interviewed were mostly young though not nubile girls, and old women. Most of them were from kamla and grihastha families." (1978:76). Anwarullah Choudhury in his book A Bangladesh Village says: "I was served food sometimes, by their servant boy and sometimes by male members of the family in the Banglo-ghar where I used to sleep. I never saw the adult female members, ....". In Toward an Anthropology of Women edited by Reiter, it is rightly mentioned that, "a great deal of information on women exists, but it frequently comes from questions asked of men about their wives, daughters and sisters, rather than from women themselves. Men's information is too often presented as group's reality, rather than as only part of cultural whole." (1975:12).

For female field workers meeting women poses no problem. Here I outline the methods I used in my field work. In the selection of Natunpur as the basis for my study I used several criteria. Since most of the available village studies have been conducted in Comilla and near Dhaka, I thought it better to work

in northern Bangladesh, which had hardly been studied. Moreover, since I lived in that part of Bangladesh it was convenient to be near my residence where my family was living. This I realised would enable me to visit my children periodically. I thus decided to select a village near my residence and working place. At first I went to the Puthia thana<sup>1</sup> office in the district of Rajshahi and talked to the thana Social Welfare Officer and other officials there. After further discussions with my country supervisor and other social science department teachers in the Rajshahi University, I selected three villages of that thana for preliminary investigations. I visited each of these villages and talked with the villagers. From these discussions, I became convinced that Natunpur was what I was looking for as it was more developed as compared to other villages in the area and would, therefore, enable me to study the changing role and status of women in rural society going through a process of transformation.

To find out a suitable place for residence was the major problem, I faced. I first visited the village with the village extension worker. Knowing my background, the purpose of my visit and my intention to stay in the village, at least for a year one rich Hindu household head volunteered that I could stay with them. This meant that I had to share a room with the

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<sup>1</sup> Thana is an administrative unit. There are several villages in one Union, a number of Unions in one thana and a few thana in one Subdivision or Subdistrict. The thana has recently been renamed as Upazila (subdistrict).

unmarried daughter of the household. At first it helped me to get an idea of the village life. My hosts were generally respected in the village. They provided me with physical and social security, which is a must for a woman field worker. Living with them helped me establish rapport with the villagers without demeaning my status.

It is an old established household. I could develop first hand relationship with the villagers and with the outsiders living with them. For my initiation into the village my stay with the family was very helpful. But gradually I felt that I was becoming dependent on them, which, I realised, was not good for my study. They never allowed me to pay for my expenses, because they considered it demeaning for their family. While living with them my mobility was curtailed and I found it difficult to invite whom I chose to the house. Though the family was very nice to me, I felt hesitant whenever somebody visited me in their house. Then gradually, I found a house which suited my purpose. It was in the middle of the village, and also by the side of the biggest pond, where most of the villagers both men and women came to bathe and for other cleaning purposes. The owner of the house, being a carpenter, was landless. They have two rooms, they live in one and agreed to let me move into the other. They are related to my first landlord. I had told him that I badly needed a room for my study purpose, and requested that he should arrange my residence in his relative's house. At first he and his family were reluctant

to do so, but gradually they understood my problem and agreed to my plan. I made arrangements to build a pit latrine for my new residence and made a boundary fence with jute-sticks around the house. My new hosts considered me as their daughter and I started calling them as uncle and aunt. My residence problem was thus solved.

I bought a kerosine stove and cooked my own food, I appointed a village girl who used to help me wash the utensils and clothes. She was a poor Muslim girl of the old established para<sup>1</sup> of Natunpur. I could get first hand information of what was happening in the village from her. Though I could afford to have food of higher quality than what I ate in the village, I purposely scaled down my food consumption so as to be in tune with my landlord's family. Often I cooked curry and gave some of it to my uncle and aunt which they frequently reciprocated. Thus developed an easy relationship with them. Gradually I developed an easy relationship with many other villagers as well. From my everyday interaction with villagers I realised that I had to conform to their image of a good woman. There was no scope for any inconsistency in my behaviour. Normally it is not considered as good conduct for a Bangladesh village woman to talk at length with men. In my case though they made a concession, because I am an educated woman and working at the University and also because they realised that for my own work there it was important for me to meet local men. Even so, I was always careful to ensure that I was not entirely left to

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<sup>1</sup>Para refers to a cluster of households.

myself with a male informant. I was always alert to keep a reasonable distance from them. It helped me to keep my image among the villagers as a polite and respectable woman which in turn facilitated the conduct of my field work in the village.

I began my study by taking a 100 per cent census of the village. This took me about two and half months. Information about age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, property and income were thus gathered. The schedule was prepared in English, but I asked the questions in Bengali and filled up the forms in Bengali, so if the villagers wanted, I could show them the forms and what I was writing about them. I told them that I was going to write a book about their village as part of my academic degree. Some of them were eager to know what sort of help they were going to get from the study in terms of relief or work. I explained to them that as things were changing so rapidly, only if present conditions are written in books the coming generations will be able to know their cultural roots.

Like most other field researchers I also had problems in getting data regarding the age of informants and the dating of specific events. The ages of individuals I recorded were only approximate in most of the cases. Most villagers cannot tell their correct age. I took time more than I needed to fill up the schedule, because just by chatting with the persons, and by casual gossiping I was able to develop good relationship with



them, I invited them to come to my residence and at the same time accepted their invitations to visit them.

I made a sketch map of the village and on it numbered the households. At the same time I made a map of the village households indicating who belonged to what gusti (patri-lineage) and also tried to find out who belonged to which samaj and faction. Through this process I learned to understand the socio-economic relationships between different groups. I tried to use every opportunity to participate in gatherings so that I could meet people more intimately. I participated in all the religious and social occasions that occurred in the village while I was doing my field work. I took the geneologies of every gusti and life history of villagers, specially those who were old and established in the village. For the immigrants I tried to ascertain how and why they came to Natunpur and what type of relationships they were developing while staying in the village.

Whenever possible I tried to guide the gossip in a particular direction. Thus I got the views and opinions of the villagers in the context of their different problems. The technique of group interview helped me in getting peoples' opinion and comments which otherwise would have been very difficult to get. I selected my informants out of these groups. I found that persons with amiable nature and reliable character were also good informants. I had intensive discussions with informants and checked and rechecked the data thus collected

before I accepted them. Tea-stalls are places where menfolk assemble where they gossip and talk about all kinds of matters regarding the village and outside. Unfortunately as a female researcher I could never attend the gatherings at the tea-stalls. I attended all kinds of formal and informal meetings and gatherings but never mingled with the tea-stall crowds. It is generally considered as demeaning for a woman to sit and participate in the gossip at the tea-stalls. I asked two of the University students who resided in Natunpur to let me know any important matter they heard discussed by the tea-stall crowds.

I consulted the 1914-15 cadastral Survey of the region called Natunpur as well as the 1974 Revisional Survey of the same area. I also have consulted the land records of the area available in the Record Room of Rajshahi Court, (Mohafezkhana). I consulted the official records and discussed matters relating to development and social issues with Union Council Chairman, Union Council members and thana officials. I also reviewed appropriate District Gazetteers, Census reports and various other kinds of reports of the area as well as relevant historical materials.

Male researchers in Bangladesh villages are usually suspected of being tax inspectors. Since I am a woman, Natunpur villagers never thought of me as a tax official but rather as a family planning officer. They are used to seeing female family planning officials in their village and they do not have

high respect for them. At first I intended to collect also some information on family planning as part of my census, but soon I discarded the idea. Gradually villagers began to understand my position and it became easier to continue my field work.

I tried my level best to write down the field notes every night, before I forgot the points. Inshort, I followed the method of intensive field work in the present study, which includes direct participation and observation technique. However, it must be mentioned here that I used pseudonym for both village and the villagers to ensure anonimity of villagers. I have also rounded up the percentages in the tables excepting in few cases.

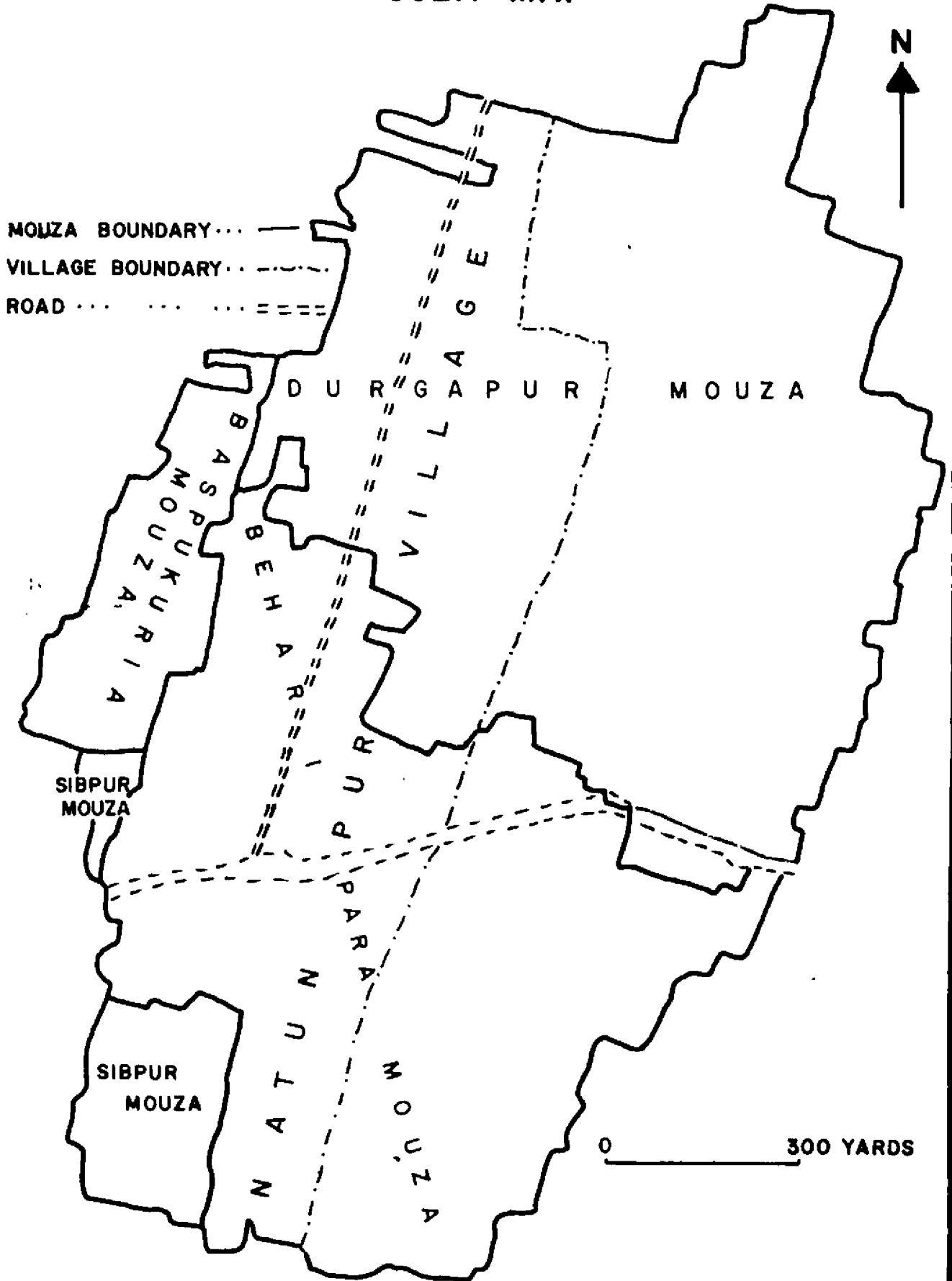
T. Scarlet Epstein and B.K. Jahangir visited my village while I was in the field. It helped me in establishing my position in the field and at the same time I could consult them on my work. Discussions with them helped me to sort out some of my problems in the field. After my first spell of field work I gave a seminar at the UNICEF Office, Dhaka and benefitted from the comments of the participants attending the seminar. At the Project Conference held in Colombo in late 1979, all the researchers including myself engaged in the project presented their preliminary reports. We received comments from different scholars there. They were of great help in better understanding our problem. We had long sessions and discussions there with academicians, development administrators as well as representatives

from funding agencies. I then realised that there were some gaps in my data which I needed to fill in before starting my analytical work. Thus after coming back from Colombo conference I went to the village and stayed there for a further four months to fill up the data gaps and to clarify a few of the problems discussed at the Colombo-Conference. Though I worked in Rajshahi, B.K. Jahangir, my supervisor visited me in the village and also in Rajshahi. I also met him in Dhaka and learned a lot from his comments and advice in organising my thinking. Subsequently when I began the write up of the thesis I continued to receive his advice for which I am extremely grateful.

#### 1.4 The Village Setting

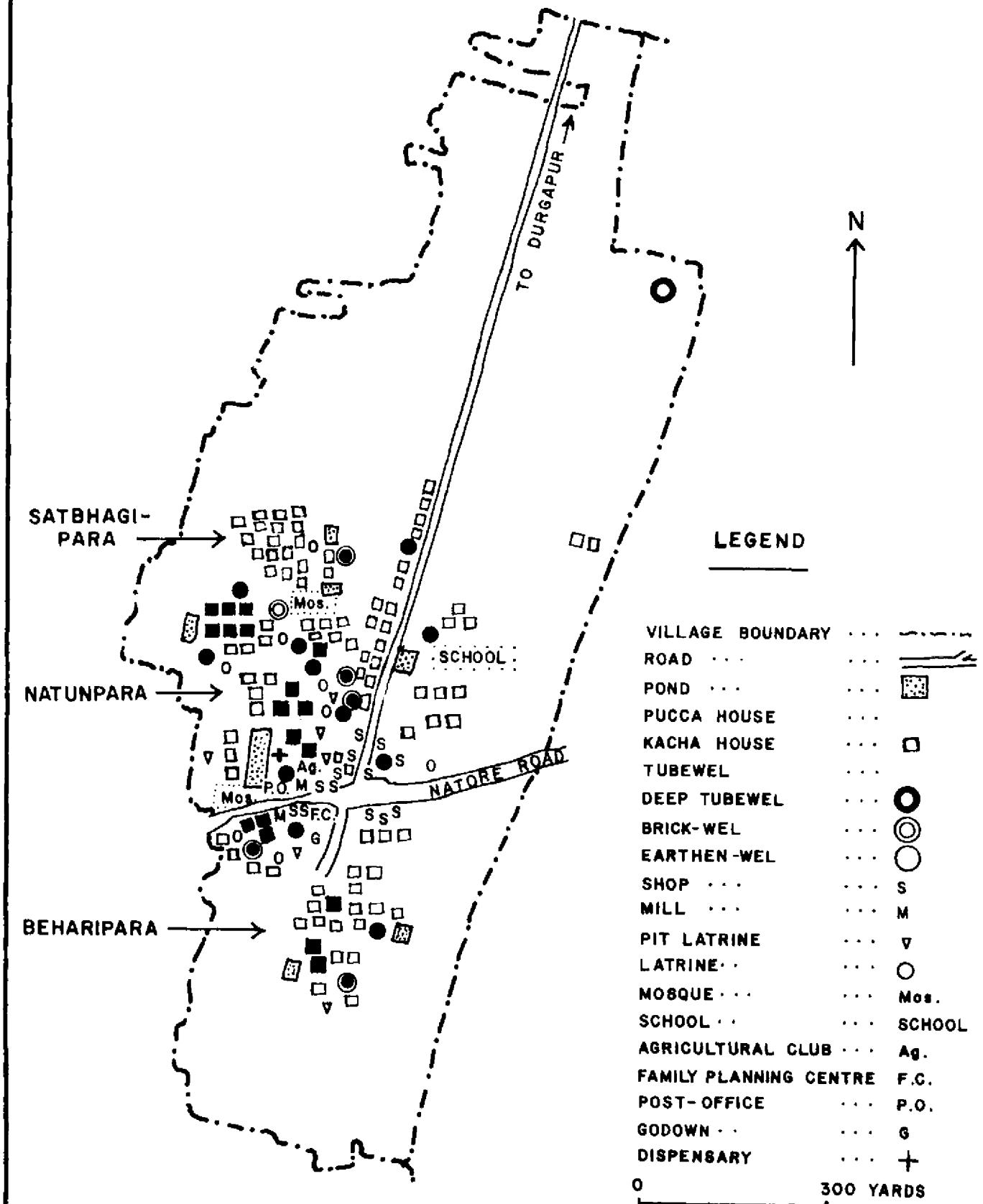
Natunpur, the village on which this study is based is situated 15 miles from Rajshahi, a divisional town in the northern part of Bangladesh. An equal distance separates it from Natore, the nearest subdivisonal town. The main road connecting Dhaka with Rajshahi passes through Natunpur and divides it into two parts. The four portions of this village are in four different mouzas (revenue collecting units) i.e. - Durgapur, Beharipara, Baspukuria and Shibpur (see Map 2). Most of the old establishments are in the northern part of Beharipara mouza. In the southern part, most of the settlements are occupied by recent new immigrants. Previously most of the southern part of Beharipara was under the control of the Zamindar

# MOUZA MAP



MAP-2

# NATUNPUR VILLAGE



MAP - 3

of Puthia. Puthia is the thana headquarter. In the village there used to be a bi-weekly market in Natunpur under the control of the local zamindar. A share holder of Puthia's zamindar used to control another bi-weekly market in Baneswar, which is two miles from the earlier Natunpur market. The market in Baneswar still exists but the village under study has now ceased to have a market. Quarrels among the two shareholders resulted in the extinction of the Natunpur market. There are altogether 26 bi-weekly markets within a radius of about 15 miles from Natunpur. From the very beginning of the village settlement the importance of its own market and the surrounding markets had a great effect on the economy of the area. Even now the bi-weekly market in Baneswar is one of the most important markets in the vicinity.

The old settlement in the northern part of Beharipara mouza, is now locally called Natunpara. Another old settlement is in the north-west corner of the village, which belongs to Baspukuria mouza. Most of the new settlements are in the southern and eastern parts of Beharipara mouza. The southern part of Beharipara mouza is known as Beharipara.

The study village consists of three paras, namely: Natunpara, Beharipara and Satbhagipara. In Natunpara along with old settlers there are a few recent immigrants. Satbhagipara situated in the extreme north-west corner of Natunpur, is

Table 1

Parawise Distribution and Natunpur's Population

Households	Natunpara		Beharipara		Satbhagipara		Total
	No. of house- holds	%	No. of house- holds	%	No. of house- holds	%	
Hindu households	3	4	6	18	-	-	9
Muslim households	60	96	27	82	14	100	101
Total households	63	100	33	100	14	100	110
Hindu population	18	4	39	17	-	-	57
Muslim population	435	96	189	83	88	100	712
Total population	453	100	228	100	88	100	769

the most congested part of the village. It contains the longest established households of Natunpur, who by now rank among the poorest villagers: 93 per cent of this para's households are small farmers and landless families, who own less than nine bighas<sup>1</sup> (see Table 6). A large proportion of the new settlers reside in Beharipara. Altogether Natunpur's total population in 1978 amounted to 769 persons of whom 406 (53%) are male and 363 (47%) women.

<sup>1</sup>One bigha is equal to 0.33 acre.



Table 2

Age and Sex Distribution of Natunpur's  
Population, October, 1978

Age	Male No.	%	%	Female No.	%	%	Total	%	%
0-10	168	51	41	159	49	45	327	43	100
11-20	106	61	26	68	39	19	174	23	100
21-30	43	41	11	63	59	17	106	14	100
31-40	38	53	9	34	47	9	72	9	100
41-50	23	55	6	19	45	5	42	5	100
51-60	14	50	3	14	50	3.80	28	4	100
61-70	7	58	2	5	42	1	12	1	100
71 +	7	88	2	1	12	0.20	8	1	100
<b>Total :</b>	<b>406</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>363</b>		<b>100.00</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table 2 sets out the age and sex distribution of Natunpur's population. From this it can be seen that 43 per cent villagers are below the age of 10 which roughly coincides with the overall age structure of Bangladesh, 66 per cent is within the age of 20. While the male/female ratio is fairly even for the population below 10 years, for those between the age of 11 to 20 years there are more males than females. This can be readily explained by the fact that most girls are married before they reach the age of 20, whereas the majority of young men are still unmarried at that age. Many daughters of the village are married into neighbouring communities, which explains the preponderance of men

in the age group of 11-20 years. On the other hand, there are more females than males in the age group of 21-30. This is the result of a number of few deserted wives and widows falling into this age group. The main reason for the imbalance in the sex ratio is that most of the females are married to males within the next successive age group. The wife has almost always to be of a lower age group than her husband, there are 14 widows and 6 deserted wives, living with their father's or brother's families in Natunpur.

Most of Natunpur houses are made of mud, some of them have tin roofs, but the poorer ones are covered with sugarcane leaves. Only 16 per cent of all the houses, including the Government quarters are of pakka (cemented) structure; 21 per cent have tin roofs and the remaining 63 per cent are mud huts covered with sugarcane leaves. Recently one rich household built a two storied pakka house and another middle farmer also constructed a pakka house. Three other middle farmers and two small farmers each built a mud house recently. This indicates that pakka houses are still a luxury, which only the wealthier can afford. In 1978 there were nine big usable ponds, seven tubewells, six pathkua (earthen wells) and one pakka well. Three tubewells and one pond are more recent innovations. In 1978 there were five sanitary latrines and one pit latrine have recently been installed. In Natunpur altogether seven per cent of the houses have sanitary latrines and 10 per cent have pit latrines. Having a latrine in one's house has become a prestige criterion in the

village. Households concerned about their status arrange to have sanitary latrines put into their homes. Accordingly, the three most recent sanitary latrines have been installed in each of the two middle stratum households and one rich farmer household with educated members. One of the two middle stratum households installed the latrine just before the wedding ritual of the eldest son, who himself is a lecturer in a private college in Puthia. Similarly two years earlier another middle stratum household built a pit latrine shortly before the daughter's wedding. Another rich Natunpur family installed a latrine in their home because some educated relative with the family came to stay with them from town for about a year. This immigrant family has now built a house of their own in Natunpur and has recently shifted there. The latrine in their rich host's home is now used by the young wife of the family; elderly women and men altogether refuse to use it. The same holds good for most other latrines in the village. Though they are definitely regarded as status symbols, only a limited number of people use them.

Natunpur is considered as a swanirwar (self reliant) village. The Agrani Rajshahi Subdivisional Swanirwar Workshop was held in the village in 1976; electricity was introduced in 1978; a family planning clinic was opened in 1977. The R.S.S. (Rural Social Service) started its programme in the village and with the initiative of the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) formed an agricultural co-operative society in

Natunpur in 1977. Natunpur villagers installed deep tubewells; they use fertilizer and are also keen on producing more sugar-cane as cash crop.

There is a considerable difference in the educational levels achieved by men on the one hand and women on the other within Natunpur.

Table 3

Educational Levels of Natunpur's Population  
by Age and Sex in Percentage,  
October/November 1978

Age Group	Literacy	Primary	Secondary	Inter-	B.A.	Masters
	M/F	M/F	M/F	mediate M/F	Student M/F	M/F
0-10	17/12	2/-				
11-20	41/9	24/12	3/1	-/1	1/1	
21-30	9/7	16/11	8/7	1/3	-/1	1/1
31-40	12/5	10/1	5/-	-	2/-	1/-
41-50	13/-	6/-	2/1			
51-60	2/-	2/1	-	1/-		
61-70	-	1/-				
70 +	6/-	1/-				

Girls from only two families have received higher education. There is a primary school in the village. Parents tend to neglect their children's education especially, that of girls.

Only three girls from this village attend the secondary school which is 1½ miles away from Natunpur. One Hindu lady is a teacher in the secondary girls school. All the three students go to school with her. There is a free night school in Natunpur, sponsored by the thana Rural Social Service.

Natunpur can, therefore, be ranked among the more developed villages of Bangladesh.

The preceding outline of Natunpur's setting indicates that the village has developed not only economically but also in terms of health and welfare services. All these factors denote the development of the village. However on closer examination it soon becomes obvious that the benefits derived from the development process have not been shared equally; while some villagers have become better off, others are getting increasingly poorer all the time. This uneven development is due to several factors, the most important of which is population growth set against an inheritance pattern according to which not only each son but also the widow and daughters each has a claim to the ancestral property. Moreover, the differential responses by different individuals to similar stimuli also account for the unequal development that has been taking place in Natunpur. These variables are examined in detail in succeeding sections to help analyse the dynamics of socio-economic realities within Natunpur and relate that to the changing role of women.

## CHAPTER II

### DYNAMICS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES

#### 2.1 Natunpur's Settlement History

The land records of 1914-1915<sup>1</sup> indicate that the zamindar of Puthia controlled a large portion of Natunpur: the biggest pond of the village and the area of the market place along the road side. He was a direct tenant of the Emperor of India while all the other lands of the area were occupied by different individuals. Most of them took the land from the zamindar on a tenancy basis. The early land records show not only the kinds of tenancies then existing but also stipulate the names of the tenants. I cross-checked these data with the information obtained from the present generation of the locals about their ancestors' first settlement in the village. I, therefore, was able to draw the lineage of a number of those living in this area more than half a century ago. The Revisional Survey of 1974<sup>2</sup> and the local land records list the present landowners. Accordingly this facilitates an analysis of the Natunpur settlement pattern with considerable historic depth.

The three village para show each a distinct pattern of settlement: in Satbhagipara and at the northern end of Natunpur reside the descendants of the tenants of the then zamindars. They have thus been living in Natunpur for more than two

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<sup>1</sup>1914-1915 Cadastral Survey was conducted under British rule.

<sup>2</sup>1974 Revisional Survey was done in Bangladesh.

generations. This made it impossible for outsiders to settle there and acquire lands. By contrast the roadside area where the lands were under the direct control of the zamindar of Puthia caters for more recent immigrants.

After the partition of India in 1947 zamindars left the region and went to India. At that time Abed, a young energetic and clever man took the opportunity and bought the zamindar's lands at low prices. There were then also several rich Hindu businessmen who were feeling insecure in the village. They were undecided at the time whether to stay in Pakistan or to leave for India. They thus did not like to increase their property thereby increasing their liability. Abed's parents were Muslims from India. He himself began his economic career by doing odd jobs: he sold betel leaves, drove a tamtam (cart pulled by one horse) for one Dr. Hussain and for one Paramanik, the then rich and influential men of the area. Now Abed is the richest man not only of Natunpur but of the whole neighbouring area. Gradually his relations from India came and started small businesses. They settled on the southern side of the Natore road, the area which Abed previously occupied. Recently all of them had the land recorded in their own names. They are now paying rent to the Government. Thus in the southern part of Beharipara new immigrants are settling. Migrants arrived in Natunpur not only from India but a few also from Comilla. Those coming from Comilla are very poor; they mostly live in the eastern part of Natunpara, where they were able to buy small plots to

build their houses. They bought the land from older settlers, who are now landless.

It is interesting to explore the reasons as well as the process of the different waves of migration to Natunpur. The most recent immigrants from Comilla explain that they came to this village because this region had become a trade centre during the earlier period and had attracted businessmen from different parts of the sub-continent. Therefore, many people know of its existence and the possibilities it offered.

Like in many other intra-rural migratory movements Natunpur settlers too arrived in the village because difficulties had forced them to leave their places of origin. Muslims left India and sought refuge in East Pakistan; disasters, such as the floods of the river Gomoti in the Comilla area,<sup>1</sup> made displaced people seek home elsewhere. Once the people are on the move they usually try to activate kinship ties, lineal and or affinal, to find a place to settle. This emerges clearly from an examination of the Natunpur history of settlement.

The customary practice of patri-virilocal marriage coupled with bridewealth<sup>2</sup> provided a useful channel of migration. Brokers brought girls from Comilla, arranged marriages for them

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<sup>1</sup> See Bhuiyan, Quadir: unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Delhi, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> It was a customary practice in the locality though not sanctioned by Islam.



with men from established families and collected the bride-wealth. These transactions are called meya becha, selling a girl. Presently in Natunpur there are still four women who originated from Comilla and married in this way into Natunpur. These women are now over 50 years old. They remember how they helped their brothers and other near kin also to come to the village. These men came and began to earn their living by agricultural labouring. By now most of them have married Natunpur wives and are generally accepted by the villagers.

Other villagers originate from neighbouring villages: some settled patri-uxorilocally to take advantage of the wife's family's higher economic status, while population pressure made others move to Natunpur. Overall the village migratory pattern reflects the exodus of Hindus and the influx of Muslims.

## 2.2 Residential Pattern

As already mentioned paras within Natunpur reflect the waves of emigration and immigration that have affected the village, Natunpara is situated to the north of the main road which cuts through the village. It constitutes the social and commercial centre of the village: there is an agricultural club, post office, a charitable dispensary, one flour mill, a ration shop, the local doctor's dispensary, tea stalls as well as a sugarcane purchasing centre. Recently Abed the richest Natunpur villager has built there a mosque for all to use. The biggest pond is also there by the road side. Most of the

population of this para are old established residents. They have been living there for more than two generations, some even for three generations. The table below shows the generation-wise settlement of Natunpur households. Twenty two (35 per cent) household heads are first generation settlers.

Table 4

Generation-wise Settlement of Natunpur  
Households by para (percentages)

	Natunpara %	Beharipara %	Satbhagipara %
1st generation	35	36	-
2nd generation	25	58	7
More than 2 generations	40	6	93
Total (%)	100	100	100
Numbers	63	33	14

Note: For details see Table 5A, 5B and 5C.

Sixteen (25%) are second generation settlers and 25 (40%) trace their ancestry in Natunpara back more than two generations. Among the 38 (60%) of Natunpara households belonging to the first and second generation settlers only 10 (26%) have been there for more than 50 years. By contrast the 25 households who have been in Natunpara for more than two generations have

Table 5A

Settlement Pattern of Natunpara Gusti  
and Non-Gusti Households in Economic  
Categories in Percentages

Economic Categories	No. of Households	%	1st Generation		2nd Generation		3rd Generation	
			<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>	<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>	<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>
Rich	3	5	2	-	-	2	2	-
Middle	20	32	2	5	10	2	11	2
Small	23	36	3	8	7	2	14	-
Landless	17	27	-	15	-	2	9	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4</b>
		<b>100</b>	<b>35</b>		<b>25</b>		<b>40</b>	

Table 5B

Settlement Pattern of Beharipara Gusti  
and Non-Gusti Households in Economic  
Categories in Percentages

Economic Categories	No. of Households	%	1st Generation		2nd Generation		3rd Generation	
			<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>	<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>	<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>
Rich	3	9	-	-	6	3	-	-
Middle	5	15	-	-	15	-	3	-
Small	10	30	3	6	16	3	3	-
Landless	15	46	-	27	6	9	-	-
<b>Total:</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>
		<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>		<b>58</b>		<b>6</b>	

Table 5C

Settlement Pattern of Satbhaqipara Gusti  
and Non-Gusti Households in Economic  
Categories in Percentages

Economic Categories	No. of Households	%	1st Generation		2nd Generation		3rd Generation	
			<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>	<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>	<u>Gusti</u>	<u>Non-Gusti</u>
Rich	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle	1	7	-	-	7	-	-	-
Small	10	72	-	-	-	-	72	-
Landless	3	21	-	-	-	-	21	-
<b>Total:</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>-</b>
		<b>100</b>			<b>7</b>		<b>93</b>	

lived there for more than 50 years. Of these 10 household heads two came as young orphans and were brought up by their relatives. Afterwards they settled in the village. Another three household heads are themselves more than 70 years of age. Five more household heads belong to one Gusti (patri-lineage) and are second generation immigrants. This of course means that their families have been living in Natunpara for more than 50 years.

It is essential to examine the para kinship structure to understand the residential pattern. The gusti is the most important kin unit in Natunpur. Membership of a gusti offers certain advantages. The incidence of gusti households among first generation settlers is rare and increases with depth of settlement

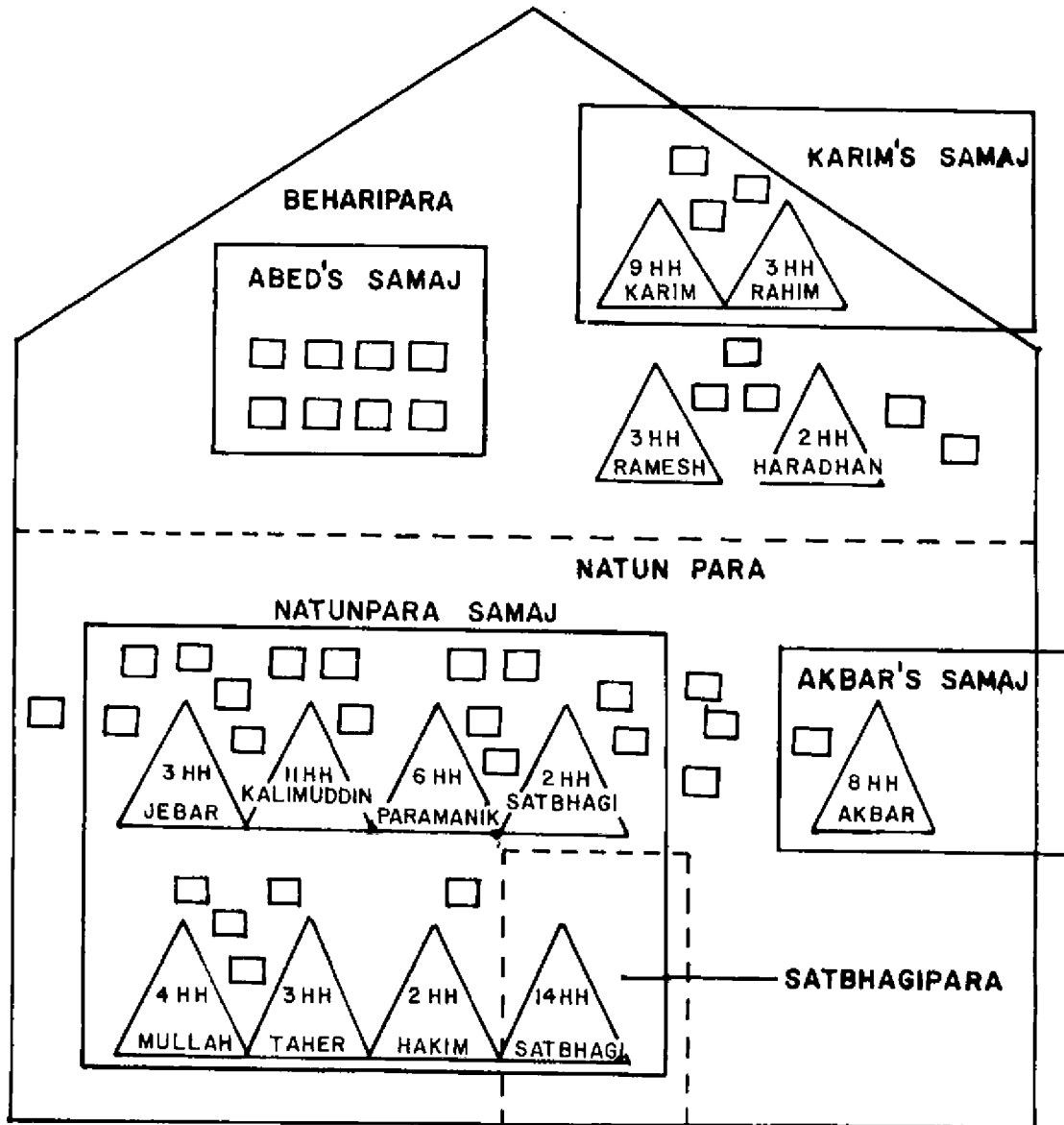
history. More than half of the 40 non-gusti village households reside in Natunpara (see Diagram I). The eight Natunpara gustis consist of 39 households (see Diagram I). Many of the founding fathers of these gustis are by now dead. Of the first generation households in Natunpara 18 per cent originate from nearby villages, 27 per cent from Comilla, 32 per cent from a region, now part of India, 14 per cent came for service jobs while the remaining nine per cent have settled here because they were landless and received at least some land for residential purposes, from their in-laws. The role of women in these households differs drastically from those in more tradition-bound virilocal marriages: these women are more dominant, move relatively freely and take decisions in many matters of life, which the others find difficult to take.

The first of the settlers from Comilla came with his sister when he was a mere boy. He worked as rakhal (yearly contract servant who generally looks after the cattlestock of the master and receives food, shelter and clothing). Gradually he was able to buy a piece of land and build his own house. Now he sells vegetables and also works as a broker and as an agricultural labourer. All the other Comilla men are his relations. When they first came they stayed with him; only gradually some of them bought land to build houses. Those unable to build their own homes are staying with relatives. Most of them are petty businessmen and/or agricultural labourers. Thus, these people are able to live in the same area and develop a close relationship among themselves. Through being grafted into the Natunpara

DIAGRAM— I

VILLAGE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Para wise distribution of 4 Samaj 12 Gusti & 40 individual households .



VILLAGE ... GUSTI ... NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS ... H.H

PARA ... INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT A LOCAL GUSTI ...

SAMAJ ...

NAME OF GUSTI	NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS	NO. OF HOMESTEAD	NAME OF GUSTI	NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS	NO. OF HOMESTEAD
KARIM	9	6	AKBAR	8	2
RAHIM	3	1	MULLAH	4	1
RAMESH	3	1	TAHER	3	2
HARADHAN	2	1	HAKIM	2	2
JEBAR	3	3	SATBHAGI	2	1
KALIMUDDIN	11	8	SATBHAGI	14	3
PARAMANIK	6	4			

samaj (little community) they have been integrated into the village community.

Those households who originate from India also form a distinct group. They live close to each other and continue to improve their conditions day by day. Of the 14 per cent households who have settled here because of service jobs only one who is living here for more than 50 years formed a gusti. This gusti along with another household of their kin, who has recently migrated from a neighbouring village, together constitute one samaj (Akbar's samaj). They also have their samaj relationship with the neighbouring village. They are considered as Bhadralok (gentry). The majority of the Bhadralok are educated. They hold important positions in the village. The village doctor, one of the prominent village leaders belongs to this gusti.

Kinship plays a part not only in encouraging immigration but also helps new households to settle down and to develop and maintain good relationships with longer-established villagers. Of the Natunpara second generation households three quarters belong to four gustis, the rest have no gusti affiliation in the village. Only 19 per cent of the households have been living here for less than 50 years; the bulk, i.e., 81 per cent are long established households who have been in the village for more than 50 years. Forty per cent of Natunpara households are third generation settlers. All of them have been living in this para for more than 50 years. Only eight per cent of the Natunpara

households, who have a history in the village of over 50 years do not belong to a gusti, while the remaining 92 per cent belong to six gustis. They are the old settlers, all have agricultural background, some of them used to be involved also in agro-businesses.

Beharipara is composed of more recent settlers: 36 per cent of the households are first generation immigrants, 58 per cent are second and only six per cent are third generation immigrants (see Table 4). One recent immigrant who settled here less than 50 years ago formed a gusti, (Rahim's gusti) because his sons have established separate households after they got married. All the other 92 per cent households do not belong to any gusti. Ninety-two per cent of Beharipara first generation settlers came less than 50 years ago. The one householder who has been residing in the village for more than 50 years has not yet formed a gusti. He came here long back for doing petty business and is now an old man. His wife and some of his children are still in Mymensingh, another district town of Bangladesh. He keeps aloof from most of the villagers and does not even belong to any samaj in Natunpur. He married his eldest son, who is with him in Natunpur, to Zarina a girl from a neighbouring village but as yet has failed to establish good relations with his son's in-laws. The bride is not very happy in the village because her husband frequently beats her and all the other family members also do not seem to like her. She is not allowed to go visiting her parents regularly. As her parents are in another



village and none of her near relations live in Natunpur a distant relation (Dur Samparker Atniya) from Natunpur often comes to protect her when she is in difficulties.

This indicates the different status of a woman who has kin, peers or close friends living close-by and those women who like Zarina are completely cut off from any help and support. A woman who lives in a gusti household has a wider network of links with other households. If she encounters serious problems within her own immediate family she can put her case to the samai or to the other households within her gusti.

Among Beharipara first generation households, 25 per cent are in service. Twenty six per cent are related to Abed, the richest Natunpur man. They originate from India and followed Abed's parents to the village. Seventeen per cent are related to Karim, another influential man of the village. One of them lost his parents in early childhood and was brought up by Karim's family. Afterwards when he was grown up and married, Karim's father gave him a small plot of land. Previously he worked in Karim's field but he also learned to drive and now works as a scooter driver.

Another example of the importance of kinship ties refers to a Hindu who had lost lands in his village and moved to Natunpur, where he built a hut near his sister's house and started doing petty trading. None of the 1st generation Beharipara settlers belongs to the rich or middle strata. Twenty-five per cent are small farmers and the rest are landless.

Their low ranking in terms of land holding is due to two reasons: first of all, since they immigrated only recently when there already existed a shortage of land they had difficulty in acquiring land; and second, most of them have the background and experience of petty trading. This enables them to derive a livelihood in the village from sources other than agriculture.

Twenty-six per cent of these recent immigrant households originate from India, eight per cent from Mymensingh, 25 per cent are service personnel without any kin in Natunpur, while the remaining 41 per cent come from neighbouring villages. The majority of them are petty business people and service personnel. Except for the latter who remain at the fringe of the village society, all other first generation Beharipara settlers participate in the local samaj with whose support the individual households settled in the village. These immigrants thus settled in the para where they had pre-established social linkages.

Fifty-eight per cent of Beharipara households are second generation household settlers. Among them 26 per cent are non-gusti and 74 per cent are gusti households. There are four gustis consisting of 17 households in Beharipara; 12 per cent gusti households are rich, 29 per cent are middle farmers, 41 per cent are small farmers and the remaining 18 per cent are landless. Karim's gusti claims 53 per cent of the gusti households in Beharipara (see Table 16). Their forefathers were engaged mainly in agriculture; only gradually they have come to

take up business and other kinds of professions. Fifty-five per cent of the Hindu households in Natunpur belong to two gustis whose forefathers came to Natunpur for business. The trading tradition of the village has to be taken into consideration in this context. Some of the successful businessmen invested in land. Landholding is always considered a status symbol. Those who do not have to buy foodgrains for their household consumption are considered well-to-do families and thus deserve respect.

Another 18 per cent gusti households in Beharipara belong to Rahim's gusti (see Table 16). Their forefathers came here from the nearby villages. Many of them still have connections with their villages of origin. Including Abed 20 per cent non-gusti households of Natunpur have migrated from India and settled in Beharipara. All of them are related to Abed. Only six per cent of Beharipara households are third generation settlers. Half of them are middle farmers and the other half are small cultivators (see Table 5B).

Satbhagipara has the longest settlement history: 93 per cent are third generation and only 7 per cent are second generation settlers. All of them form one gusti. Though they have their own group identity they belong to Natunpara samaj. Their forefathers were all agriculturists and even now all of them depend on agriculture for their livelihood. They either have small plots of land or work as agricultural labourers. Seven per cent of Satbhagipara households are middle farmers, 72 per

cent are small farmers and the rest are landless (see Table 6).

The founding household of Satbhagi gusti was a well-to-do farmer. He went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and became a haziri. He also arranged the construction of a mosque. The mosque is still there, but because of the poverty of Satbhagi dwellers it is now managed by the Natunpara samaj. In the succeeding generation there were seven brothers who shared the ancestral property (Satbhagi means seven sharers, hence the para name). Population growth in successive generations reduced Satbhagi households to the rank of small farmers and landless labourers. Their concentration on agriculture prevented them from diversifying their economic activities (see Table 13C).

Altogether Natunpur at present has a heterogeneous population which originates from many different parts of the Indian sub-continent. Even in the Bangladesh District Gazetteer for Rajshahi (1976:49) the situation has been recorded "The numbers of muhajirs or persons who have moved into the district from India as a result of partition or fear of disturbances connected therewith was 75,900. Of them 71,000 came from West Bengal, about 4,000 from Bihar and states, and the rest from Assam and elsewhere". Natunpur certainly reflects this large migration of Muslims from India to East Pakistan when India was partitioned in 1947. But even before partition many Hindus and Muslims were attracted to the village by its trading tradition. A large number of the pioneer settlers were followed by some of their

kin. Kinship links were crucial in enabling successive waves of migrants to settle in Natunpur.

### 2.3 Land Ownership and Population Growth

Natunpur lands are fertile and lie on a plane. Villagers still regard land as the most productive and prestigious asset. Those fortunate immigrants who managed to accumulate capital from their trading activities all tried to invest at least part of it in agriculture. These traders are now the biggest Natunpur landowners. Commercial earnings are generally considered a means to acquiring land rather than an end in themselves. Villagers gauge the economic rank of a household not by its total income but rather by the period for which it does not need to purchase its staple foods. Food self-sufficiency is also an important factor in marriage negotiations. Therefore, title to land and cultivation of crops are of crucial importance in Natunpur's socio-economic system. The villagers own only 695 bighas of cultivable lands, which result in an average of 6.3 bighas per household. Thirty-nine per cent of the population constitute the small farmers, who cultivate only 16 per cent of the lands, 24 per cent, who are middle peasants cultivate 44 per cent, while the 6 per cent wealthiest households own as much as 40 per cent of the cultivable lands. Altogether 70 per cent of Natunpur households are either landless or small farmers.

Villagers of course do not only require cultivable lands but more urgent still to them is access to residential facilities. The growing shortage of residential lands in Natunpur is reflected

Table 6

Natunpur's Landholding Categories by Para

Landholding categories	Natunpara		Beharipara		Satbhagipara		Total	
	No. of house-holds	%	No. of house-holds	%	No. of house-holds	%	No. of house-holds	%
Rich 25 bighas +	3	5	3	9	-	-	6	6
Middle 9-25 bighas	20	32	5	15	1	7	26	24
Small 0.5-8 bighas	23	36	10	30	10	72	43	39
Landless 0.05 bighas	17	27	15	46	3	21	35	31
<b>Total:</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100</b>

in the homestead pattern. According to the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 "Homestead means a dwelling house with the land under it, together with any courtyard, garden, tank, place of worship and private burial or cremation ground attached and appertaining to such dwelling house and includes any out-buildings used for the purpose of enjoying the dwelling house or for purposes connected with agriculture or horticulture and such lands with well defined limited whether vacant or not, as are treated to be appertaining thereto" (U.B. Act XXVIII, Section 2).

Sixteen per cent of Natunpur households reside in their own homesteads; they are all first generation settlers. Nineteen per cent of all Natunpur households reside in a portion of the paternal home; they live in separate households but on paternal premises while the father is still alive. Forty-six per cent of the households now live in parental homestead, after the father's death. These 46 per cent households are all second or third generation settlers. Five per cent of households have taken up residence with the wife's paternal unit; these are all cases where the husband comes from a lower socio-economic stratum than does the wife. Another 3 per cent households now live in the wife's paternal homestead after her father's death. Five per cent households live in rented accommodation and the remaining six per cent reside with relatives. One third of this last category of households (i.e., two families) had become landless in their village of origin and subsequently moved to Natunpur where they built houses on their relative's homesteads.

Residential arrangements indicate the centrality of kinship in Natunpur society. Junior generation households depend mostly on the parent's homestead for accommodation; a small but growing proportion move into the wife's parents' homestead. They thus try to manipulate their kinship network to their own best advantage: if a man marries a wife whose family can offer them a better accommodation and altogether a better life than does his own family, they settle patri-uxorilocally, otherwise they settle with the parents or his kin.

Access to residential land in the village is a necessary but by no means sufficient condition for settlement in Natunpur. Everyone has to have some means of livelihood, all of them aspire to land ownership and self-sufficiency in staple foods. But only a small number are able to realise their ambitions. The skewed land distribution led to the introduction of an official land ceiling, to generate more egalitarian access to land.

During British rule in 1793 the Permanent Settlement Act made zamindars proprietors of the soil. These zamindars were liable to pay the colonial rulers a fixed annual revenue. The actual cultivators were able to retain only a small proportion of their produce, the rest of all went to the zamindars. After the establishment of independent nations on the Indian sub-continent in 1947 the Pakistan government passed in 1950 the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, according to which ryots (cultivating tenants) became landowners liable to pay land revenue only to the government. Thereby the zamindari land tenure system was abolished; for the large mass of cultivators land became a heritable and transferable asset. The previous tenants become free to use their lands the way they themselves wanted. The 1950 Tenancy Act also introduced a land ceiling of 375 bigha per household; a later amendment reduced that total to 175; in 1972 it was further reduced to 100 bigha, which is the rule presently in force in Bangladesh.



Here in Bangladesh, the domestic cycle under conditions of rapid population growth leads to continuous subdivision of plots; many heirs of non-viable land units are forced to sell out and become landless. Even the sons of the wealthiest farmers know that they will have to share their heritage with all their siblings, and that only those among them who will manage to tap other than farming sources of income can hope to equal their parental wealth. In general, villagers rank the sons of the biggest landowners already among the middle peasants. For instance, Haradhan is generally accepted as one of Natunpur's richest peasants, yet his own son Gopal is already ranked among the middle peasants.

This process of division of ancestral property is inevitable as long as the available cultivable acreage is strictly limited and population continues to increase while alternative income-earning opportunities do not arise in sufficient quantity to take the strain off the village economy. All Natunpur land that is cultivable is already privately owned. Therefore, acquisition of land by one household inevitably involves a sale by another. Though since the 1950 Act cultivators can sell their land, there are certain restrictions on the free sale of land. According to the rule of pre-emption share tenants and cultivators of contiguous plots have the first right to buy land. In spite of this constraint on land sales some Natunpur men manage to buy land in the vicinity of Natunpur. To show how and why land titles change hands I now outline the profiles of three successful Natunpur entrepreneurs.

## 2.4 Economic Mobility Versus Prestige Ranking

### Profile - I

Zahir, now a rich peasant owning 40 bigha inherited only six bigha from his father. At first he used to live jointly with his elder brother. He then began to levy mortgages from needy farmers and thereby increased the area under his control. He also took advantage of buying sugarcane and selling it at a profit. To acquire the capital necessary for his financial transactions he applied for official loans available to cultivators at low rates of interest. In 1970, for instance, he got such a loan and invested the money in purchasing sugarcane and made a handsome profit on the deal. Zahir profited from the dire needs of some of his fellow villagers. Sugarcane cultivators who desperately need money, specially during the difficult months of June and July often sell their still immature crops at half the rate they would get if they waited until they could harvest the sugarcane. The seller receives the money at the time of the transaction while the crop is still in the field. Usually four or five months later when the crop is ripe the buyer arranges to cut the sugarcane and sells it to the official buying centre located in Natunpur. The buyer thus gets a 100 per cent rate of return within five months of his original investment. An official working at the sugarcane purchasing centre in Natunpur revealed that about 90 per cent of the small growers regularly sell their crops either some months before they mature for half the ultimate price or shortly before the harvest at

about 80 per cent of its value. Not only small farmers but also middle peasants sell their cane crop some months before it matures when they urgently require cash for an emergency or working capital to help them cultivate their other crops of paddy or jute.

Zahir is deeply involved in these sugarcane transactions. He is always ready to buy the immature crop. When he later sells it to the purchasing centre he not only gets the higher price paid there but also benefits from the arrangement whereby growers are entitled to buy six seers sugar well below the market price from the mill for every 25 maunds of cane they deliver. Some of the money Zahir has made by buying and selling sugarcane he invested in acquiring more land. He offers farmers attractive mortgage terms for their land. Most of the land he thus acquired is situated in neighbouring villages. Raghurampur lies adjacent to the para where Zahir resides; Jaigirpara neighbours, Natunpara and its residents belong to Karim's samaj. The following few examples show how Zahir managed to increase his landholding from six to 40 bigha. Meherullah, who resides in Jaigirpara and belongs to Karim's samaj mortgaged three bigha for Taka 500 to Zahir to whom he subsequently sold the land since he was unable to repay his debt. Similarly, three girls from Raghurampur mortgaged two bigha to Zahir for Taka 3,500. Zahir expects that they too will not be able to pay their debt and that he will acquire also this land. One of Zahir's friends residing in Baspukuria, another village near Natunpur, mortgaged two bigha to him for Taka 5,000. The debtor invested the

money in buying a pond, and then sold the land to Zahir. Hamid of Biraldha, another village in Natunpur's vicinity also needed cash and mortgaged two bigha to Zahir for Taka 3,500. Sohrab of Jaigirpara straight away sold 2½ bigha to Zahir for 5,000. Sohrab needed the cash to arrange his daughter's marriage.

The preceding account indicates several important features of Natunpur's present day economy and society. It clearly shows that only individuals, who are prepared to diversify their economic activities have a chance to acquire more lands. They do so by first acquiring mortgages of lands within easy reach of Natunpur, and subsequently purchasing it when their debtors are unable to repay the loan. Moreover, Zahir's land acquisitions also illustrate the reasons why some people mortgage and sell land. All of them do so only because they urgently require ready cash and land represents their only, or one of the few assets they can sell. The social pressures which make men spend a lot of money on their daughters' weddings forced Sohrab to sell some of his land. Once farmers begin to sell off part of their land a cumulative decline in their economic conditions usually begins and it does not take long before they become altogether landless.

These days a villager needs to extend his social network over a wider area if he wants to acquire more land. Thus Zahir now owns land in several villages neighbouring Natunpur. Even so unless Zahir's children are at least as entrepreneurial as

their father each one of them will be left with only a small acreage.

### Profile II

Emdad's case indicates a similar spread of socio-economic links with neighbouring villages. As the unmarried brother of a middle-peasant, Emdad tries many different avenues to acquire more funds to buy more land. Like Zahir he buys immature sugarcane at discount prices and makes a considerable profit in selling the ripe crop; he also offers loans against land mortgages. Since he insisted on keeping his earnings to himself and refused to share them with his kin, his elder brother, Rahman, got so upset that he decided to break up the complex family. Rahman requested Emdad to form his separate household. Accordingly, Emdad now lives with his widowed mother and one of his brothers, who is disabled, while Rahman resides with his wife and children as well as his youngest unmarried brother. Their parental property was shared equally by Rahman and Emdad; the latter continues to be entrepreneurial, while the former is satisfied with concentrating on farming his inherited land. Emdad buys land from whoever and wherever he can. He bought 1½ bigha in Biralda for Taka 1200 from a man who at first had given a mortgage. He also acquired 2½ bigha of Biralda shrine land for Taka 1200. In Fatehpur, another village in Natunpur's vicinity, Emdad bought 7 bigha for Taka 15,000. After the purchase was completed he offered a share cropping arrangement to the man from whom he bought the land. Moreover, he bought

another two bigha in Baspukuria (a village neighbouring Natunpur) for which he paid Taka 2000. Finally, he bought three bigha in Natunpur from a fellow villager.

Emdad's case illustrates a number of interesting aspects of present day village life. First of all, it shows the socio-economic interdependence of villages. Emdad lends money to many farmers residing in villages neighbouring Natunpur. If they cannot repay their debts, and many are unable to find the necessary money, Emdad purchases the land his debtors mortgaged to him. Though he is always keen to increase the size of his landholding, it often creates difficulties for him to cultivate land situated outside his own village. This then results in sharecropping arrangements between the new and the previous landowner and reaffirms the socio-economic linkage between Natunpur and its neighbouring villages.

Emdad's widening social network has also helped him in taking advantage of governmental schemes: he took a loan of Taka 5,000 from the Agricultural Bank and another Taka 25,000 from the Janata Bank, which is also a Nationalised Bank. Access to government credit schemes thus promotes a villager's entrepreneurial activities. Emdad not only converted credit facilities into lending against mortgages and subsequent land purchases, but also ventured into business. He invested in a construction business as well as in a sugarcane crusher which processes molasses in Natunpur itself. He hires Natunpur

labourers on a contract basis on his different business activities. His continued economic success enables him to enter into the political arena and become one of the village leaders. He has already become a member of the Natunpur Social Welfare Project Committee, Juba-complex, (youth complex), and of the erstwhile Gramsarker<sup>1</sup> (village Government). These are all new developmentally oriented institutions organised by the Government. Emdad also takes part in the village salish.<sup>2</sup> He thus shrewdly uses his economic success to attain political positions which in turn put him in a strategic position to strengthen his economic activities. However, it must be noted in this context that to follow this path of development a man needs to start off from a certain prestige base. Emdad enjoyed this advantage for he comes from solid middle-peasant stock. Not all entrepreneurs are equally fortunate.

### Profile III

For instance, Abed Hazi has to struggle much harder than Emdad to gain social recognition within Natunpur, although he is now wealthier than Emdad. Villagers still hold it against him that he comes from pauper background. His father Eman Ali was a resident of Murshidabad, now in India. He used to cross the river Padma with other villagers and businessmen there and came to Tebari, Taherpur and also to Natunpur for petty business.

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<sup>1</sup> The institution of 'Gramsarker' (village government) was introduced by the Government of Bangladesh in 1980. Now defunct.

<sup>2</sup> Arbitration.

Eman Ali used to sell areca nuts, betel leaves, cigarettes etc. Subsequently, he started selling also molasses and chatu (ground pulses) in the markets. Gradually he came to know the people of this area and settled in Natunpur. He built a thatched house near the Natunpur Hat, (bi-weekly market) brought his wife, bought a cow, started selling cow milk and also used to sell areca nuts and betel leaves in the hat as well as to villagers. At that time there was a doctor in the village dispensary named Dr. Hussain. Eman Ali's wife used to address the doctor's wife as mother though it was only a fictive relationship. Eman Ali used to sell milk to the Hussains. Then afterwards Dr. Hussain bought a tamtam, a kind of horse cart. He used this tamtam to visit his patients in different villages. He asked Eman Ali to drive the cart for him. The patient used to pay the charge for driving the tamtam, the money was taken by Eman Ali. Dr. Hussain bought two more tamtams which were driven by Kalimuddin and his brother Mayez, Kalimuddin is now one of the richest farmers in Natunpur. Eman Ali's eldest son also drove the tamtam. At the time Abed was a young boy and went to primary school. During off time he used to sell, in the weekly markets, a kind of cake made of ground rice called dhupi-pitha. He was already then able to make a profit of 56 paisa (hundred paisa make one taka) with which he prepared a small box and borrowed some matches, bidi (country cigarettes), areca nuts and leaves from the shop of Ramakanta, who is the brother of newly rich Natunpur farmer, Haradhan and started retailing these items in the weekly markets



whenever he found time. Thus he came to know many traders. Once he was grown up he started selling kerosine with Ganesh Agarwala and Balaram Agarwala (two Marwari Indian businessmen) and also mustard oil with Hara Prasad Roy of Natore. At the time of the second world war, he managed to secure a food grain licence. As a result he had to collect paddy in the Sadar Sub-division. At that time he managed to make a good profit. Abed asserts that he could not sleep at night in peace unless he was able to make a profit of at least Taka 500 daily. This may be an exaggerated statement since Taka 500 then was a fortune, but it indicates his economic aptitude.

India was divided in the year 1947, and with the abolition of zamindari rule, land came onto the market. Abed Hazi together with Malimuddin and Pramanik bought substantial areas of land. In 1951, Abed bought 10 bigha of land in Biraldah, his elder brother used to look after that agricultural land. One bigha of land then sold at a price of Taka 20 to 25. In the same year Abed got the contract for the supply of sheep and goats to an Institute in Rajshahi. At that time he came in contact with many more people. He got contracts to supply bricks, cut earth for roads and also to construct roads in different places of the then East Pakistan. He ventured as far as Dhaka, Barisal, Faridpur, Cox's Bazar etc. In the year 1953 his father died and his eldest brother Azhar continued to look after the lands. But in the year 1958 at the time of Ayub Khan<sup>1</sup> he came back home and

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<sup>1</sup>Ayub Khan - President of Pakistan from 1958-69.

started living in Natunpur. Two years later Abed got work in the government works programme. With an influential man of Baneswar (recently he became the Chairman of the Baneswar Union Parishad) Abed started a trading outfit and won the contract to construct roads and buildings in Puthia thana and the nearby area. In 1963 electricity came to Baneswar. As referred to earlier, Baneswar, is a very important place because it is a big market place and the Union Office is also situated here. Jadunath Agarwala, another Marwari of Baneswar started a flour and oil mill there. In 1968 he sold a share in the mill to Abed because he needed money for the marriage of his daughter. Thus Abed got involved in oil and flour milling in Baneswar; now he has got the largest mill in Baneswar. In 1978 when electricity came to Natunpur, he took the opportunity and started a flour and rice mill in Natunpur. While investing in many different kinds of enterprises, he also bought lands whenever he found the opportunity to do so. He also offered credit against land mortgages and dealt in sugarcane. He managed to buy 20 bigha in one plot and established a deep tubewell on his land. Abed had to follow devious routes to acquire these 20 contiguous bigha. He pursues a number of different kinds of business ventures and like Emdad takes advantage of the low cost Government credit scheme. Not so long ago he borrowed Taka 15,000 from a Nationalized bank and invested money in breeding fish in the village ponds. All his life Abed Hazi seems to have been alert to new economic opportunities, which

which enabled him to become one of the richest men in the area.

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 Abed was jailed for one year because of his collaboration with the Pakistani militia. As soon as he was released he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and on his return he arranged and paid for the building of a mosque by the side of the big Natunpur pond and the main road passing through the village. He decided to devote all the money realised from his fish-breeding in this pond for the maintenance of the mosque and the support of an Iman, the man calling for and leading the prayers in the mosque. Thereby he has become a Hazisaheb, a holy man.

In spite of all Abed's wealth and the benefit that this has bought, he is still not regarded with the respect he thinks he deserves. There is a lot of gossip circulating about Abed Hazi in Natunpur. Even his own samaj people say that he has married four wives of whom two died, one is still with him, while he deserted the other. They allege that he has taken over all the property his numerous wives had inherited from their own parents. It is also rumoured that he fraudulently deprived villagers of their land. Abed Hazi is generally regarded as a shrewd and mischievous person: he compelled his own brother to leave his lands and Natunpur and move to Rajshahi. In 1971 during the war of liberation he took active part in killing freedom fighters; he is also believed to have looted rich Hindu homes, which made him rich overnight.

## 2.5 The Operation of Landholdings

The majority of Natunpur people look after their own land. There is nobody who is only a sharecropper. There are sharecroppers who also own land. Only a few households have given up all their lands in sharecropping due to different reasons. As mentioned earlier, the large majority of Natunpur households are composed of small farmers and landless families. They constitute altogether 70 per cent of the total number of village households (see Table 6). This accounts for the fact that sharecropping is not very common in the village. Only a few wealthy landowners are in a position to offer sharecropping arrangements while some of the small farmers are forced by lack of the necessary tools and equipment to have their land cultivated by sharecroppers. Table 7 shows that 40 per cent of Natunpur households who sharecrop out are responsible for 70 per cent of the land so cultivated. Those are the richest landowners. Now more than 7 per cent of the sharecropped out land is owned by small farmers. Only 37 per cent of Natunpur sharecropped out land is cultivated by Natunpur villagers. Most of the other land is situated in nearby villages where it is cultivated by local residents. By contrast only a nominal amount of Natunpur land is cultivated by Natunpur villagers and owned by outsiders. Only as few as 9 per cent of Natunpur households have given 211 bighas of land in sharecropping while 15 per cent of the households have taken 78.5 bighas of land in sharecropping. Thus it shows that comparatively more land is given out in

Table 7

Sharecropping Land Owned by Natunpur Residents

Economic categories	Households sharecrop out		Amount of Land in Bighas		Households sharecrop in		Amount of land in Bighas	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich	4	40	148	70	1	6	18	23
Middle	3	30	49	23	7	41	48.5	62
Small	3	30	14	7	8	47	11.5	14
Landless	-	-	-	-	1	6	0.5	1
<b>Total :</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>100</b>

sharecropping than is taken in. Half of the nine per cent of households who have given land in sharecropping have given all their land in sharecropping; these total altogether five households. Among them one rich peasant has all his lands in the adjacent village, where he used to live before; he has given all his land in sharecropping to the people of that area. This system is going on since their forefathers time. The other male members of the household are mainly engaged in business and other professions. The heads of two other Hindu households belonging to the middle and small strata respectively are two brothers who give away all their land in sharecropping. They are engaged in business. They lost their father when they were quite young, so their mother gave away lands in sharecropping

since there was nobody to look after the property. Even now they do not have any implements for cultivation. They do not have the experience and the ability to look after the land themselves. Another one is a very old man whose extended family has broken up: he partitioned his land property, most of it he gave to his sons outright, while the rest he leased out to sharecrop. The old couple now live by themselves, their married daughters come and visit them whenever they can manage. One son now works in Rajshahi. He gave his land to his brother for sharecropping. These accounts indicate the various reasons why people of different categories have given their lands in sharecropping.

In Natunpur, four (66%) of the rich give their land in sharecropping. As mentioned earlier one rich man has given all his land in sharecropping while the other people have given only portions, which are situated in different villages, far away from their residences. The land is given for sharecropping to the people of the area where it is situated. Only one of the sharecroppers is related to a rich peasant. The richest man of Natunpur Abed Hazi has given  $8\frac{1}{2}$  bighas of land in sharecropping. Altogether 14 people of the village and the nearby villages do the sharecropping for him. His daughter's husband has got three bighas of this land in sharecropping. He is a small farmer and his economic condition is not very good. Otherwise none of the sharecroppers are related to Abed Hazi. Most of his land is

given to three influential middle peasants, two of them are from Natunpur and the other is from a nearby village. Thus he has developed a very strong patron-client relationship. Abed Hazi is the richest businessman of the area, he is increasing his business day by day. He is investing his capital in business with the intention of increasing his income flow.

It needs to be stressed here again that land is becoming scarce in Natunpur, therefore, those who are interested in buying land try to do so in different villages. It is of course difficult to get land in adjacent plots or even in the same area. As I already outlined newly emerging Natunpur landowners are buying land in different surrounding villages; they even give out mortgaged lands they acquire to the mortgager to sharecrop them. It is too difficult for the new owner to cultivate land under his own supervision. Even in Natunpur village itself there are people who have mortgaged their land and then agreed to sharecrop it. There were three such cases in Natunpur in the year 1978. The man who has mortgaged his land finds this a useful arrangement because he can get at least half the produce. Small peasant Afzal gives his six bighas of land in sharecropping to his father-in-law because he himself does not have the necessary farming implements. Moreover, he is not efficient enough to manage the property on his own and he is the only male member of his household. He keeps  $1\frac{1}{2}$  bighas of land which he is cultivating himself, for that he has to hire both implements and labour. One small peasant sold away a portion of his land

and bought a plough and bullocks in the hope that he will get land from others and sharecrop it. But he complained that landowners do not want to give land in sharecropping to poor people.

Landlords often prefer to have kinsmen rather than strangers as sharecroppers. Among the rich people who have given lands in sharecropping, two do not have any kinsmen who can sharecrop their lands; another one lets one of his poor kinsmen cultivate his lands, while the last one rents his lands out to a man, who owns adjoining plots and is, therefore, in a good position to sharecrop the land.

It, therefore, emerges that rich farmers let their land be sharecropped and give more attention to business, they also put their land into sharecropping if it is far away from their reach to look after the land. The relationship between a sharecropper and this landowner develops into a patron and client linkage. The sharecropper is obliged to the landowner. By contrast in cases of small and middle peasants who have given land in sharecropping to a person economically better off than the landowner, the situation is quite different. There the landlords are seen to be obliged to the sharecropper. In case of problems they take the help of the sharecropper. For instance the two Hindu households who have given their land to Zahir for sharecropping feel secure in doing so because they will get their proper share; in case of hardship, they get a loan, if necessary they can mortgage



their land to Zahir and most important of all, in case of communal tensions they can count on protection from Zahir. Zahir stated publicly that if they sell land, they are going to sell it to him. Thus they have their mutual calculations. Yet sharecropping is not a common phenomenon in Natunpur. Though apparently it seems that a good amount of land is under sharecropping, a close look shows that it belongs to a negligible few.

So far I discussed the pattern of sharecropping. Now I turn to the land mortgage system that is available in Natunpur. Generally the urgent need for cash forces farmers to mortgage some of their land. Natunpur households have mortgaged 22½ bighas to fellow villagers and 3¼ bighas to outsiders. In mortgages as in sharecropping kinship and village neighbours play an important part. Only if there is no kinsman or close friends prepared to contract a mortgage the farmer approaches someone else. As mentioned earlier rich farmer Zahir acquired mortgages of 14 bighas. Most of the land is situated in nearby villages. He attracted debtors by offering them a high value for their mortgaged land. Many of these mortgagors are unable to repay their debts and ultimately sell the land to the person to whom the land is mortgaged. This enables the creditors to accumulate a considerable acreage in a short period of time.

Here is a detail of the situation (see Table 8). Of the 22 households who mortgaged land, 64 per cent are small peasants, 32 per cent are middle and only 4 per cent are rich households.

Altogether 26 bighas of land are thus mortgaged of which 71 per cent are given by small peasants, 25 per cent by middle ones and only 4 per cent by rich households. But in case of mortgagees the situation is somewhat different. Only 14 households have taken lands in mortgage of which 21 per cent are rich, 36 per cent are middle and 43 per cent are small households. They have taken altogether 50 bighas of lands. 22½ bighas are located in Natunpur village and the remaining 27½ bighas are in neighbouring villages. Thirty-six per cent of land is taken by the rich, 33 per cent by the middle and the rest is taken by small peasants. Among this 31 per cent small peasants, only one does not have implements for farming. All

Table 8

Land Mortgages in Natunpur (households)

Economic categories	Mortgagors of Land		Amount of Land in Bighas		Mortgagees of Land		Amount of Land in Bighas	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich	1	4	1	4	3	21	18	36
Middle	7	32	6½	25	5	36	16½	33
Small	14	64	18½	71	6	43	15½	31
<b>Total:</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

the others have the necessary agricultural assets. These small peasants are all among the ones who are improving their economic condition from their inherited position. On the other hand among the small peasants who have mortgaged their lands only one household has farming implements. All of them are set on a downward economic trend. Only two of them have mortgaged their land to relatives. All the others have pledged it to the villagers. Middle and rich Natunpur peasants are mortgagees not only in their own village but also in neighbouring villages. By contrast all Natunpur mortgagors got loans from Natunpur people only. This indicates that Natunpur villagers are economically well off to meet the village demand for credit. They do not have to ask neighbouring villagers to take their land in mortgage. Those who have implements and are in need of money often mortgage their land to the person from whom he can take land as sharecropper. As for example, Badar, a middle peasant, who already sharecrops Abed Hazi's land has given Abed Hazi 2 bighas of land and has taken Taka 5,000. This is a much larger amount than the prevalent rate. Badar is now sharecropping the aforesaid land. Thus he can get half the produce.

Only one Natunpur woman has taken land in mortgage. She is the wife of a rich peasant and the mother of Gopal, a middle peasant. Gopal and Berek, a small peasant have been close friends from childhood. This has brought the families close together. At the time of the liberation period, Berek saved

the lives of his Hindu family friends. He helped Gopal's family to go to India and take shelter there during the crisis. When Gopal's family returned, Barek gave two bighas of land to Gopal's mother and received Taka 2,500. Barek is now sharecropping this land. Barek's brother Ajam, a small hard working farmer takes mortgages from others. But Barek preferred to mortgage his land to Gopal's mother because he can now sharecrop it. Gopal's father gives all his land in sharecropping. Thus though Barek could have asked his brother to take his land in mortgage, he calculated that it is wiser to give land to somebody from whom he can get it to sharecrop which may also give him some social security. Barek is the son of the late Paramanik (leader) and now he is one of the Paramaniks of the village. Gopal's family is also an influential family of the village. The two families are on friendly terms. Gopal's mother is as yet the only Natunpur woman who has taken land in mortgage.

Mortgages provide money in time of crisis, but for small peasants they mark a step in the downward economic trend. They generally do not get the land mortgaged as sharecroppers and at the same time it becomes difficult for them to return money thus borrowed. Rich and middle peasants thus take advantage of this opportunity and offer more money to the debtors against the mortgage of lands. As mentioned earlier often mortgagees offer good rates which the poor peasants are unable to repay and are, therefore, ultimately compelled to sell land to the creditors.

This same process extends over surrounding villages (see e.g., the cases of Zahir and Emdad, p. 52-59).

## 2.6 Agricultural Implements

Ownership of agricultural assets especially bullocks and ploughs are very important in cultivating land. It is difficult to comment how far the lack of such agricultural implements affects the gradual loss of land but my Natunpur study gives an idea how important they are and how their lack leads small peasants to become poor day by day. Women have very little role to play in this context, except that they may use their paternally inherited property to help their husbands acquire some necessary assets. Women, however, are affected by the on-going economic trend of the households. They always try to adjust themselves to the situation in which they find themselves.

Natunpur farmers claim that one plough and a pair of bullocks are necessary for the cultivation of 14 to 15 bighas of land. Table 9 sets out in detail the expenses and yields involved in the cultivation of different crops on one bigha of land in different seasons of the year. The information provided here is based on data collected in 1978. Specially in the sowing season the need for bullocks and plough is very much felt. Bullocks are necessary also for threshing. A bullock-cart is another useful asset for a farmer. With it one can carry the crops from the field and also can carry them to the market for sale. When not used for personal use, it can be used for

carrying loads to different places. It is considered as a convenient and important source of income.

Table 9

Comparative Expenses and Yields for  
Different Crops per Bigha\*

	Paddy Taka	Wheat (winter crop Taka)	Sugarcane Taka	Jute Taka
Sowing	60	60	96	60
Manure etc.	145	190	480	135
Weeding	95		110	120
Reaping	40	50	200	90
Total Expense	340	290	886	405
Total Yield	700	700	2,000	700

\*For details see Charts I(A,B,C,D).

Chart 1C

Cultivation Cost of One Bigha Sugarcane

		Taka
Ploughing (8x12)	...	96.00
1 md. Phosphate, 1 md. Urea, 30 seers of Potash	...	230.00
100 mds. Cowdung	...	100.00
Seedlings (15x100)	...	150.00
Planting (8x5)	...	40.00
5 Labourers (food/ <u>bid</u> i)	...	10.00
Digging (turning up earth 4 times) (3x5x4)		60.00
Reaping (25x8)	...	200.00
	Total Taka:	<u>886.00</u>

Chart 1D

Cultivation Cost of One Bigha Jute

		Taka
Ploughing (5x12)	...	60.00
Phosphate (10 seers)	...	15.00
Potash (5 seers)	...	5.00
Urea (15 seers)	...	23.00
Cowdung	...	50.00
1½ seers of seed	...	12.00
Weeding 3x8 labourers (3x5x8)	...	120.00
Jute cutting labourers (8x5)	...	40.00
Taking jute out	...	50.00
<u>Bid</u> i and food	...	30.00
	Total Taka:	<u>405.00</u>

Table 10

Ownership of Agricultural Assets  
in Economic Categories

Landholding categories No.	Bullocks, plough and carts		Bullocks & Plough		No Implements	
	Households		Households		Households	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich - 6	5	83	-	-	1	17
Middle- 26	16	62	6	23	4	15
Small- 43	2	5	10	23	31	72
Landless - 35	-	-	-	-	35	100
<b>Total - 110</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>65</b>

Among Natunpur households 65 per cent do not possess any plough, bullocks, or carts, 14 per cent possess only a plough and bullocks and the remaining 21 per cent possess plough bullocks and cart. Of the 21 per cent who possess a plough, bullocks and a cart, 22 per cent belong to the rich while 69 per cent and nine per cent belong to the middle and small categories respectively. On the other hand, of all the rich Natunpur peasants 83 per cent possess a plough, bullocks and a cart. Among the middle category, 62 per cent and among the small category five per cent do so. Seventy-two per cent small category households do not possess any of these implements for cultivation. These rich and middle households who do not own any implements



for cultivation, are the people who have given all their land in sharecropping. But in case of the small peasants who do not possess implements, only a few gave land for sharecropping, they hire implements for cultivation. Thus it becomes difficult for them to improve their economic condition.

It is considerably more costly to hire equipment than just to pay for labour. To engage a labourer for a morning's work costs taka five, while it costs taka twelve to get a man with a plough to do the ploughing. At least five ploughings are necessary to prepare one bigha of paddy land. This makes it prohibitively expensive for a farmer without a plough and bullocks to cultivate paddy.

Mozahar of Satbhagipara gave away all his land for sharecropping; Afzal another small farmer gave away some portions of his land for sharecropping and hired implements and labour for cultivating the rest of the land. In both cases the household heads are the only males around able to work in the field. Afzal is planning to buy a plough and bullocks, so that he can cultivate land by himself. But Mozahar does not have any future plan like that.

Kabir, another small peasant, married recently. He got two cows, but both the cows were sick and weak. He sold the cows and with money bought sugarcane from a needy person in the hope that with the profit he will be able to purchase bullocks. Because of his extreme poverty he could not realise his plan.

He now has to hire ploughs and bullocks from his uncle (father's brother). Again in the case of Ansar when one of his bullocks was sick, it was not possible for him to plough with only one strong and another weak bullock. He had to change one; to do so he had to mortgage a portion of his land, which it was difficult for him to get back. Women have little part to play in these situations. Only in the cases where women have property of their own it can be used on such occasions. Ismail's second brother's wife gave taka 2,000 to her husband to buy a bullock which he needed urgently for the cultivation of the land.

So far I discussed ownership of land and the importance of the ownership of implements for cultivation. Importance of having sufficient family labour is also great in agricultural households specially among the small and the middle farmers.

## 2.7 Labour Force Participation in Cultivation

Women in Natunpur as in most other Bangladesh societies do not work in the fields. All cultivating operations are performed by men, some of whom work on their own farms, while others are tenants or hired labourers. Table 11 shows that male members from 59 per cent of total households take part in cultivating their own lands, i.e., they work in the fields, 31 per cent of the total population are already landless, so there is no question of their working on their own fields. Ninety-eight per cent of small peasants, 77 per cent of middle and 50 per cent of the rich

Table 11  
Labour Participation in Cultivation by  
Economic Category of Household

Landholding categories	Work on Land		Do not work on land		Employ Permanent Labour		Employ Regular Labour		Employ Casual Labour		No Labour Employed		Work on Other's Land	
	No.	%	H/holds	%	H/holds	%	H/holds	%	H/holds	%	H/holds	%	H/holds	%
Rich - 6	3	50	3	50	3	50	4	66	1	16	-	-	-	-
Middle - 26	20	77	6	23	8	31	11	42	4	15	3	11	-	-
Small - 43	42	98	1	2	-	-	-	-	15	35	8	18	12	28
Landless - 35	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	66
<b>Total: 110</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>

work on their own fields.<sup>1</sup> The other half of rich households do not work on their own land; they get sharecroppers to do so, they are engaged in business, and employ permanent and/or occasional labour whenever necessary. Among the middle peasants, 15 per cent do not have agricultural implements (see Table 10), three of them give their land to sharecroppers so there is no need of agricultural implements and the other one who is set on a downward economic trend, does not have any agricultural implements; he has already mortgaged a portion of his land. Twenty-three per cent middle peasants do not work in the field, the only elder son in one of these households is studying at the University and is thus not able to work in the fields, three others give land for sharecropping and the other two household heads, engaged in business, employ yearly permanent labourers. Only two households, i.e. five per cent of the total small category households have plough, bullocks and bullock cart. One of them is the son of a rich household and has inherited these assets from his father, the other one, a hard working migrant from India, is determined to improve his lot. Except one school teacher i.e., two per cent of the small category, all the other 98 per cent work in the fields. Most of them work on other people's land as casual labour. Among the 33 per cent small peasants who have mortgaged their land, except for one none has

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<sup>1</sup> Generally rich farmers in Bangladesh do not work in the field, but in Natunpur 50 per cent rich farmers work in the field, they have traditional agricultural background and do not belong to Bhadralok category.

implements for cultivation. Thus the ownership of implements and the availability of labour in the household itself or the ability of the household to employ labour is a precondition for successful cultivation procedures. Apart from self-employment there are the following types of farm labour available in Natunpur.

a) Neej: This occurs mainly during paddy harvesting. A labourer starts reaping paddy early in the morning. He then carries the crop to the threshing ground where he finishes threshing by evening. The farmer has to provide meals for the labourers. On finishing threshing each labourer is paid seven seers of paddy for every 10 mds. of paddy. Households which pursue mainly agricultural activities and earn only little cash prefer engaging labour on a Neej basis. Labourers thus engaged are within the employer's kin group or of his samaj. Mostly they are the inhabitants of the small village. But with the spreading of a cash economy the system is changing gradually. Poor villagers from the nearby villages have started working in Natunpur and are paid in cash. Some of the Natunpur agricultural labourers started to go in groups to villages to the north of Natunpur where they work during harvesting time and get remunerated on a Neej basis.

b) Cash payments: The labourer works from 7 O'clock to 12 O'clock. He gets nasta (breakfast) generally chapati<sup>1</sup> in his employers house and is paid Taka 5. If he works again in the

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<sup>1</sup>Hand-made bread.

afternoon from 2 to 5, he gets another Taka 3.<sup>1</sup> Only for harvesting paddy some labour is paid in kind; otherwise all other types of agricultural work are remunerated in cash.

c) Exchange labour: 'A' may work in 'B's field for two days, in return 'B' works in 'A's field for another two days. This is a straight forward reciprocal arrangement.

d) Contract labour: Such labour contract is made by mutual agreement. On completing the job labourers are paid. Among men cash payment is more prevalent while among women payment in kind is more common. Problems regarding women's work and remuneration are discussed in chapter four.

## 2.8 Cropping Pattern

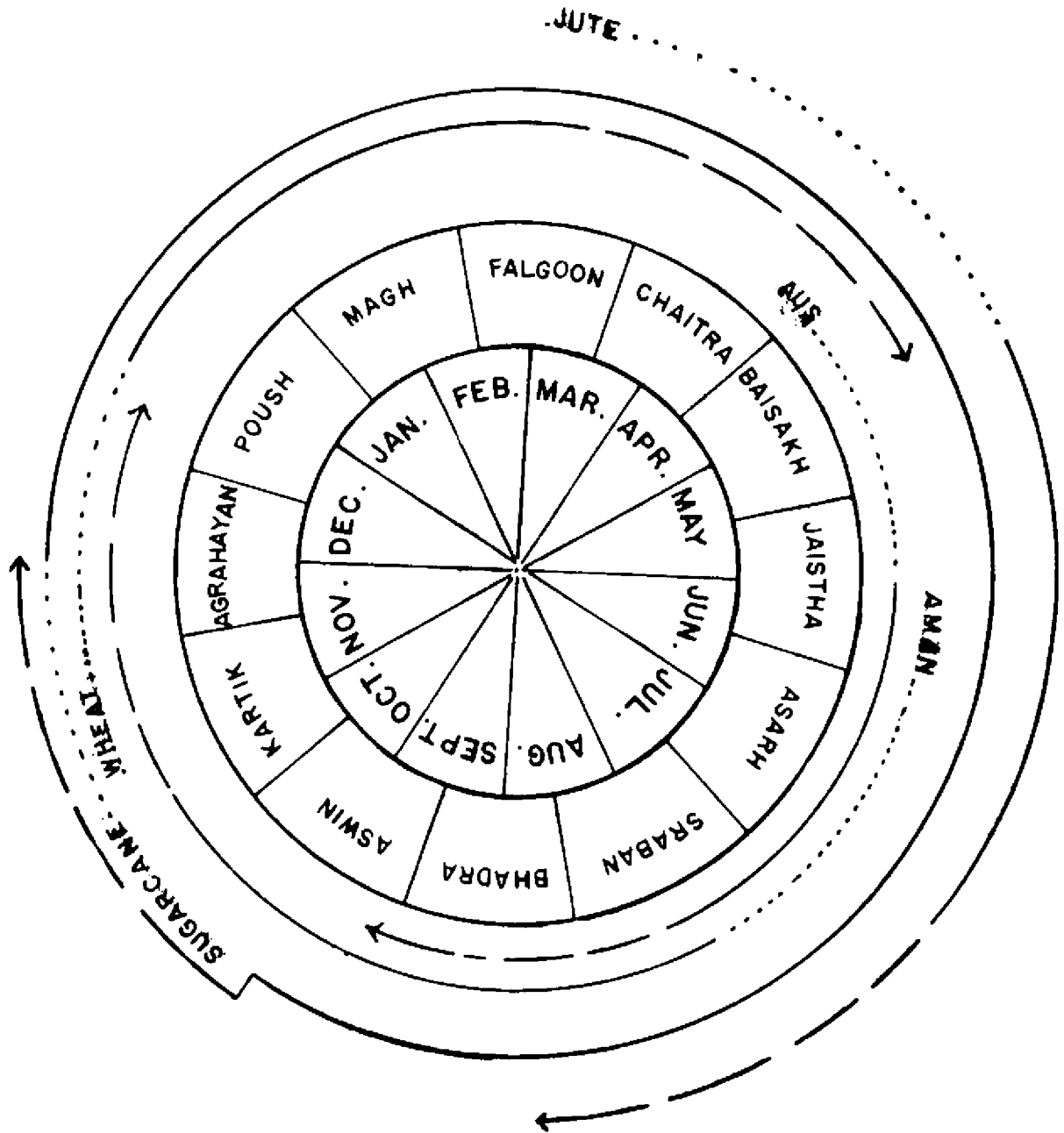
Rice is the staple food of the area; wheat is also used. Since 1976 Natunpur villagers grow more and more wheat. They began to grow the new HYV wheat called sonali which the Government imported from India. Before that the wheat which grew here was of low quality, the yield being only about 5/6 maunds per bigha. Sugarcane is the main cash crop. After the establishment of the sugarcane purchasing centre in Natunpur, sugarcane production around the centre has increased. Jute and other pulses and oil-seeds are also grown in Natunpur. Flooding is not a

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<sup>1</sup> These wage rates were operative in 1978 when the data were collected.

### DIAGRAM - 2

## CROP CALENDAR - 1978-'79 .



SOWING TIME .....  
HARVESTING TIME —————>

problem in the area unlike other parts of Bangladesh. On the other hand, here scarcity of water is a problem. Deep tubewells are installed in various parts of the area. If irrigation can be effectively provided, it will be of great help to the area. The land is reasonably fertile and can produce two or even three crops a year. Below are the charts of the yield of different crops grown in Natunpur.

Chart 2A

Crops Grown on one Bigha non-Irrigated Land

Kind	Sowing	Reaping	Yield
Aus	April-May	Aug.-Sept.	7 mds.
Aman	June-July	Nov.-Dec.	8 mds.
Wheat	Nov. - Dec.	March-April	7 mds.

Chart 2B

One Bigha Sugarcane, Time of Cultivation and Yield

Sowing	Reaping	Yield
Oct.-Nov.	Oct.-Dec.	200 mds.



## Chart 2C

One Bigha Jute, Time of Cultivation and Yield

Sowing	Reaping	Yield
March-April	July-August	7 mds

The crop calendar indicates that it is much more time consuming to cultivate sugarcane than to grow paddy or wheat. However, here it must be remembered that sugarcane is a 12 months crop, whereas paddy and wheat are five to six months crops. It is possible to grow two crops of paddy and wheat for one crop of sugarcane on the same bigha over a calendar year.

Table 12

Comparative Market Value, Cultivation Cost and Profits for Different Crops per Bigha (1978)

Crop	Yield mds.	Market Value Taka	Cultivation Cost Taka	Profits Taka
Paddy (Aus)	7	700.00	340.00	360.00
(Aman)	8	800.00	340.00	460.00
Wheat	7	700.00	290.00	410.00
Sugarcane	200	2000.00	886.00	1,114.00
Jute	7	700.00	405.00	295.00

Table 12 shows that it costs more than twice as much to cultivate one bigha of sugarcane than it does to grow any other crop in Natunpur. Here it should be noted that the calculation of cultivation costs includes cash expenditure such as the hire of implements, labour, the purchase of fertilizer and seeds (see Chart 1A,B,C,D).

Rich and poor farmers alike in Natunpur all grow staple as well as cash crops, although 99 per cent of small and middle peasants sell either all or a portion of their cash crops to brokers at well below the market price. The following account of cropping patterns among different categories of farmers should help show the considerations which guide cropping decisions. One of the small farmers in Natunpur devoted half his land to paddy, 17 per cent to wheat and jute and the remaining 33 per cent to sugarcane. A middle peasant cultivated 24 per cent of his land with paddy, 15 per cent with jute and the remaining 61 per cent with sugarcane. Similarly, Zahir, one of the richest Natunpur farmers grew paddy on 24 per cent of his land in 1978, wheat on 15 per cent and sugarcane on 61 per cent.

This comparative cropping pattern indicates that the wealthier farmers devote a considerably larger proportion of their land to growing cash crops, while the smaller peasants put more of their land under subsistence crops. However, even small farmers grow some cash crops. They do so largely because it provides them

with a minimum security; they know that if necessary they can sell the crop even long before it matures. Sugarcane cultivation yields an attractive income. At cane harvesting time even the poorest farmers have some cash available. Therefore, the marriage season coincides with this period in the year.

## 2.9 Economic Diversification

Though land is still the major source of income in Natunpur, there exists already in the village considerable economic diversification. Villagers engage in business, petty trade, driving and several other occupations. They are in a good position to do so because their village used to be the site of a bi-weekly market. There exists, therefore, a trading tradition. Moreover, Natunpur is strategically placed by the roadside and has thus ready access to a transport as well as communication network. The extent of economic diversification seems to indicate the level of development. It varies between the paras. Satbhagipara accommodates 14 households, all of whom except one belong to small farmer or landless category. Petty trading is the only other subsidiary occupation which a few of them pursue. In Natunpara only 28 per cent of the male households have agriculture as their main occupation, while Beharipara men follow an even greater variety of activities.

In Natunpara 40 per cent of households have lived for more than two generations, 25 per cent are second generation settlers and 35 per cent are 1st generation immigrants (see Table 4).

Among the rich and the middle peasants 28 per cent are first generation settlers but all of them are here for more than 50 years. Two of them came as children. When they grew up one of them received property from his affines and the other has gradually acquired landed property. All the others came to Natunpara with some money and have gradually bought lands. They are hardworking and have improved their economic condition over the years. All of them came from an agricultural background and have invested their capital and energy in acquiring landed property. At the time they settled here, land was not so scarce. They got land from the zamindars and also from the old settlers who were becoming poorer day by day. Afterwards only a few of the small peasants have managed to buy land in Natunpara; they are the relatives of the first and second generation settlers. Though they have been staying in Natunpara for less than 50 years they could get accommodation in this part of the village. There are people among them with an agricultural background pursuing other occupations as well. Even so, land is being continually divided among heirs. Those who are engaged in other gainful occupations, can still improve their economic condition.

Within the small farmer and the landless category most of the recent migrants are from Comilla and from the nearby villages. As mentioned earlier one Comilla person came here with his sister who married a middle peasant. When the boy grew up he bought a plot of land and at the same time attracted his relations from



Comilla whom he offered shelter. They could buy land and do whatever work was offered. Most of them are doing petty business. Those who have come from neighbouring villages with agricultural background are now engaged as agricultural labourers. Those who have come with some skill like carpentry etc. are pursuing their craft. Settlers' previous experiences help them find jobs if the opportunity at all exists. Nobody can take up a traditional job without any previous experience. New technical training like driving cars and buses are taken by all categories of people. In Natunpara driving and tailoring attract the young. They are boys with some education and with some economic support from their respective families. There are men among the landless who gradually have lost their land and have become agricultural labourers. Some of them also work as porters at the local bi-weekly market. Porterage is considered low status work, but they have to do this job because they lack the skill to do any other work and do not have the capital either. There are also people with vagabond nature in Natunpara. They cannot stick to any one job. They are inevitably on a downward economic trend. In a household like that, wife and children, also have to work for a living. In rural Bangladesh this kind of character is not a rare phenomenon. Those who are that way inclined try their hands at petty trading. Two small category households have mortgaged and sold their small plots of land; one of them has become a bus driver (Rakib). Two of Paramanik's sons are planning to sell the small portions of land they have inherited and invest the money in setting up

a flour mill with Hazi's son on a share basis. Thus some Natunpara people with small amounts of land without the necessary implements but with some education sell their landholding and invest money in business. If a family changes from concentrating on agriculture to the pursuance of business or other occupations which do not have connections with agriculture then automatically the women's work pattern also changes. They do not get any more agricultural produce for processing in the homestead. Such families are more interested in educating their children than are farming households.

As mentioned earlier most of the new settlers in Natunpur reside in Beharipara. Only six per cent of the households have been living there for more than two generations, 58 per cent are 2nd generation settlers and the remaining 36 per cent are first generation settlers. (see Table 4). Except for a few all the other new settlers have no agricultural background. At the same time it must be remembered it is not easy to get or buy land wherever one wants to do so. Rich and middle strata with a trading tradition usually try to start doing business; whenever possible they invest the earnings in land and thus further improve their economic condition. They often give this land in sharecropping and in turn invest the profit in business again.

The case of Abed Hazi and Haradhan are illustrative of this trend. Haradhan could not progress the way Abed Hazi proceeded. As a Hindu and thus member of an ethnic minority

Haradhan felt insecure after the liberation of Bangladesh and could not make up his mind whether to stay in the village or to migrate to India. Abed Hazi's relatives who recently immigrated came with a trading tradition. They do not have resources to buy land nor the incentive to do so. Hence they start petty trading, selling different things at different markets. Among those some have sweets shops. Some of the small and middle peasants who do not have a trading tradition also have been engaged in business. Middle peasant Karim of Beharipara with an agricultural background is known as a good cultivator. He is also engaged with Abed in a business venture.

In Beharipara 46 per cent of households are landless; only three of them who come from an agricultural background are engaged in agriculture as labourers, all the others pursue different kinds of occupation (see Table 13B). Table 13B shows that only nine per cent of households depend solely on agriculture and only 18 per cent are engaged mainly as agricultural labourers. This shows the involvement of Beharipara people in diversified economic activities. The fact that only six per cent of households in Beharipara have been living here for more than two generations clearly indicates that landlessness in Beharipara is not the result of partition of landed property over the generations. Here more people are recent immigrants with a trading tradition and are, therefore, engaged in different kinds of occupations. However, if a small farmer pursues either only agriculture or petty trading he is unlikely to



Table 13B  
Occupational Pattern Among Natunpur Men in  
Economic Categories by Para

BEHARIPARA

Behari-para	Big business	Doc-tor	Homeo-pathic doctor	Ser-vice	Teach-ing	Petty trade	Dalli	Priv-ing	Rich-shaw puller	Selling huts & sweets	Pulling cart by horse	Agri-cul-ture	Agri-cul-ture	Small shop	Total
Rich	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Middle	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	5
Small	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	2	10
Landless	-	-	1	3	-	1	-	3	1	2	1	3	-	-	15
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>33</b>

improve his lot. A big businessman like Abed Hazi can easily improve his economic condition by doing business only. He has a big house in which he lives and he lets out portions of his house to the people who have come to Natunpur for village level government service. Previously a few such service holders used to live with the villagers and paid monthly or yearly for their food. They never brought their families to the village where they worked. Recently the situation has begun to change. Outsiders are coming to stay in the village with their families and they rent houses. This is a new source of income for Natunpur residents.

In the village context possession of landholding and the ability to meet the family's basic needs, like food, with the produce of one's land is still considered prestigious. Wealthier women can employ poorer ones for the processing of crops; they can help anybody they want to and they can sell the crops without the knowledge of the household head and use money in whatever way they choose. Women appear to prefer the cultivation of staple foods. Women are only marginally involved with cash crops like sugarcane, but they take away the fibres from the jute sticks. Only when farmers employ labourers in the sugarcane fields women have indirectly more work to do i.e., they have to make more chapaties for the labourers' breakfast. This is a laborious job.

As mentioned earlier Satbhagipara is the oldest and most congested area of Natunpur. All the households there belong to one gusti. Ninety-three per cent of Satbhagipara households have been here for more than two generations. Gradually over the generations the original family divided into 16 households. Two of them moved to Natunpara and the remaining fourteen households are still living in Satbhagipara. Among them only 7 per cent belong to the middle category, 72 per cent are small farmers and the rest have become landless in the course of time (see Table 6). Only one i.e. 7 per cent of the Satbhagipara households lives on the products of agriculture only. But among the small farmers 70 per cent are agricultural labourers and 30 per cent work as petty traders of agricultural products. All the landless households in Satbhagipara are engaged in agricultural labour finding work at Satbhagipara and Natunpara. The Natunpara people employ labourers from other villages as well.

The majority of the Natunpur households who have mortgaged the lands belong to this para: 64 per cent of Satbhagipara households mortgaged portions of their land. Sixty per cent of the small peasants of Satbhagipara do not possess any implements for cultivation. Only one small household head is educated. He is a teacher in the village primary school. He got married to a girl from a middle peasant household. The girl also has primary education. He is improving his economic condition. He wants to increase his land holding and has already done so. He

wants to give his children education. He is trying to be the leader of their gusti and also of the village. His gusti people attach importance to his opinions. Though this teacher

Table 13C

Occupational Pattern Among Natunpur Men  
in Economic Categories by Para

SATBHAGIPARA

Satbhagipara	School Teaching	Agril. Labourer	Petty Business*	Agriculture	Total
Rich	-	-	-	-	-
Middle	-	-	-	1	1
Small	-	7	3	-	10
Landless	-	3	-	-	3
<b>Total:</b>		10	3	1	14

\*Buying and selling turmeric powder, jute, paddy and other agricultural products.

is trying to improve his economic as well as social status he has great difficulty in doing so. The older residents with an agricultural tradition are less flexible and less versatile than are more recent immigrants. Recent settlers are prepared to work harder and are less concerned with prestige or kin considerations in deciding what jobs to pursue.

## 2.10 Exogenous Inputs

There exist different governmental agencies for the promotion of agriculture. It has been generally claimed that only the better-off farmers in Bangladesh are in a position to benefit from these exogenous facilities, such as for instance credit schemes. These allegations are borne out by events in Natunpur. Rich and middle peasants utilize government services to their advantage and thereby improve their economic conditions. The IRDP co-operative of Natunpur village provides a good example. It was registered on the 11th August 1977. Prior to this in July 1977 a village level co-operative worker tried to convince the villagers to form a co-operative society. At the first meeting 38 men were present but afterwards only 32 villagers joined the co-operative. An executive committee was formed with six members of whom only one is a rich peasant while all the others are middle peasants who are second or more than second generation settlers. Yet all of them are influential men in the village. None of them are new immigrants.

The village co-operative society is a voluntary organisation. But Thana Central Co-operative Society workers are government servants. Every week at thana level a meeting is held where the managers of all the village co-operatives have to attend. Ideally a farmer has to attend meetings twice monthly and the Chairman of the society has to attend at least once every month. Every week there is supposed to be a meeting in the village

where the manager is supposed to teach the members, what he has learnt at the thane training centre. He is expected to transfer the knowledge to the villagers. But the Natunpur manager said that he finds it difficult to organise a meeting in the village. The members are not keen to attend any formal meetings, whoever attends the meetings gets his fare money which is Taka 1 per mile. A member gets Taka 6 if he attends the meeting. The Manager explained that a labourer costs Taka 8 per day. Therefore, if he stays in the village during the main agricultural seasons he saves a day's wage for at least one agricultural labourer; at the same time he can look after the work properly. In spite of this it is considered by the manager to be very useful to be able to take training at the thana centre because it helps him to know different techniques of cultivation. Moreover, attending thana level meetings increases his social network. He develops relations with various thana level administrators. It gives him confidence and develops his leadership qualities.

Conditions of joining the co-operative were the paying of Taka one admission fee, the purchase of a Taka 10 share and savings of at least Taka one. Afterwards in the middle of 1979 they stipulated savings of Taka 10 a month. At first Akbar, the village doctor was the Manager. He is an influential and honest villager who is also a good organiser. After about two years he wanted to give the responsibility to some other person and submitted his resignation. But everybody wanted him. Akbar

finds it difficult to attend the meetings regularly because he in addition to being a doctor also looks after his farming. He, therefore, asked one of his relations living in the adjacent village to take over his responsibility. He is an energetic young man who is also a member of the Natunpur co-operative society. About half the members are from the adjacent village. They are either relations or close friends of the influential members of the Natunpur society. In actuality the society consists of members belonging to the two adjacent villages. Of course, these two villages are very closely related in many other ways as well. Many of recent Natunpur settlers originate from the neighbouring village. Previously Natunpur was considered a part of that village.

Akbar's relative, Abdul Hussain was appointed as Manager. Of course, he still consults Akbar. The other members do not object to the appointment because they also consider Akbar as their leader. Although kinship plays an important part in leadership, villagers also consider other criteria such as sincerity and honesty.

As a registered society Natunpur can now claim credit up to Taka 20,000 at a rate of 12½ per cent interest. But for various reasons they did not ask for this money. Firstly the members did not feel the necessity of loan with a 12½ per cent interest rate. They thought that it would be a problem to collect payments of the loans from villagers and did not want

to take all that trouble. One of the active co-operative members related that after the war of liberation some of the villagers were given tin sheets to repair the roofs of their houses; within a few months most of them had sold the tin sheets for consumption purposes. Therefore, the active members are reluctant to act as credit brokers, taking the responsibility of collecting the cash from village debtors.

In the year 1979 Taka 12,000 were given to Natunpur co-operative members as loan. Anyone who had bought a Taka 10 share is entitled to Taka 100 credit. Members must also show why they are needing the money i.e., the details of how they are going to utilise the money in agriculture. They have to provide at least one bigha of land as security. Thus the landless can not be members of the co-operative society. The Natunpur society prefers to utilise the credit for the benefit of the whole co-operative society. They gave money to the central committee, who has bought wheat seeds which are sold to members at lower than market prices during the sowing season. The manager explained that if the society can manage to accumulate a reasonable amount of money they can match this with government credit and use the money to buy a bus. They think that this will be a profitable business. By now about one third of all the original members lost their membership because they failed to deposit their Taka 10 monthly savings. They do not show any interest in the co-operative any more. New members have enrolled. Most of them are from the nearby village from



where the manager is selected. He has good relations and influences his fellow villagers. The richest man of the village is not a member of the co-operative society. He took a loan of a considerable amount direct from the agricultural bank.

There are other co-operatives besides the IRDP co-operative. The villagers can get loans from other sources as well. For the cultivation of sugarcane the growers can get loans from the sugar mill. The loan is given in three instalments, so that the growers can utilise it in the best possible way. Here again the rich and the middle farmers can make the best use of it. The case of Zahir, a rich farmer, shows how he improves his economic condition with money he has taken from the sugar mill for cultivating sugarcane. He invested money not only in sugarcane cultivation but in other business as well. This accounts for his fortune. There is also a village agricultural co-operative the executive members of which are rich and middle strata villagers. In theory small farmers can get loans during different seasons of the year for cultivation of different crops. But the executive committee always likes to give loans only to those persons who return loans in good time. They all know fully well the character and economic strength of each villager, and do not like to take a risk with the collection of debt. Taking loans is still regarded as a low prestige symbol. Kalimuddin a rich peasant, who runs the village shop revealed that he does not like to take a loan, not

only because it is not interest free, but more important because it diminishes one's respectability. He prefers the responsibility of managing the agricultural co-operative and distributes money among the members. This enhances his importance.

The government Social Welfare Department has innovated a project in a few villages of Bangladesh. The R.S.S. (Rural Social Service) has undertaken a programme to help the poor (both men and women). With their initiative a landless society was formed in Natunpur. Rich and influential people were not asked to join or to be members of the executive committee. They are not even consulted who should be given loans. The social extension workers began by conducting a socio-economic survey, then formed the society and subsequently decided who were the needy villagers eligible for aids. Those who got loans used money for petty business or for purchasing goats etc. Some of them are sincere and regularly repay their debts, while others do not repay even a small portion of the loan they took. The rich and influential people of the village emphasised that had they been consulted before, they would have advised not to give loans to those people.

There are two deep tubewells in Natunpur, one in the plot of Abed Hazi and the other in the field of an influential middle farmer. Both the households are second generation immigrants. Migrants are found more active in taking new initiatives. But

neither of the two deep tubewells is properly utilised. Most of the time it is out of order. Only about half of the land under deep tubewells is using its irrigation facilities. The drainage system is not sufficient. Even 50 per cent land does not get the benefit of deep tubewell irrigation regularly. This is so because of economic problems, technical problems and at the same time organisational problems. Research regarding the irrigation technologies of Bangladesh indicates similar problems. Fertilizers and high yield varieties of seeds are also available in Natunpur, but these items are out of reach of the poor peasants.

### 2.11 On-going Economic Trends

In preceding pages I discussed the history of settlement in Natunpur and outlined its effect on present day economic organisation. I have also argued that the prevailing inheritance pattern and the continuous population increase result in individual holdings becoming smaller and smaller over the generations. A growing proportion of villagers is completely landless. Those villagers who pursue also other than agricultural sources of income appear to improve their economic standing at the expense of those who remain full time agriculturalists.

There are thus two distinct trends noticeable simultaneously in Natunpur. Some households are set on an upward economic trend while the majority are getting increasingly poorer.

In 1978 at the time of my study, altogether one third of Natunpur households were upwardly mobile, 48 per cent were getting poorer and the remaining 19 per cent continued along the same conditions as their parental household. Table 14 (A,B,C) show the increasing polarisation between the wealthier and the poorer villagers. Table 14 (A,B,C) show that all the rich households had improved their economic conditions, so had two thirds of the middle farmers, while hardly any small peasants or landless labourers managed to get better-off. Two thirds of these latter two categories are in fact set on a downward economic trend.

It is difficult to extrapolate the future trend of the economic dynamics from the condition I found in Natunpur in 1978. Demographic accidents play a decisive role in this. My data indicate that those villagers who recently migrated and who diversify their economic activities are more likely to

Table 14A

Natunpur Residents Upwardly Mobile by  
Economic Categories (H/holds)

Economic categories	First generation		Second generation		More than 2nd generation		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich (6)	1	17	5	83	-	-	6	100
Middle (26)	5	19	6	23	6	23	17	65
Small (43)	7	16	1	2	2	5	10	23
Landless (35)	3	4	-	-	-	-	3	4
Total (110)	16	15	12	11	8	7	36	33

Table 14B

Natunpur Residents on Downward Trend by  
Economic Categories (Households)

Economic categories	First generation		Second generation		More than 2nd generation		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich (6)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle (26)	-	-	2	4	-	-	2	4
Small (43)	3	7	9	21	16	37	28	65
Landless (35)	9	25	4	9	10	28	23	66
<b>Total (110)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>48</b>

Table 14C

Natunpur Residents on Even Economic Keel  
by Economic Categories (Households)

Economic categories	First generation		Second generation		More than 3rd generation		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich (6)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle (26)	-	-	7	27	-	-	7	27
Small (43)	3	7	2	5	-	-	5	12
Landless (35)	9	25	-	-	-	-	9	25
<b>Total (110)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>

improve their levels of living as compared to longer settled households who concentrate solely on farming. These differences inevitably affect the role of women and their life styles. This I am going to discuss in the following chapters.

### CHAPTER III

#### KINSHIP AND SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

In the previous chapter the discussion of the processes and trends of economic change show how deeply these are connected with the kinship system, para and samaj organisation. Economic changes are imbedded in the social organisation of the village. In this chapter I have discussed and analysed the role of the family and kinship in the socio-political organisation. Taking the household as the unit of analysis, I have tried to find out the different kinds of relationships it has established within and outside the village. I have focussed on the different variables which influence the desires of individuals in a complex and changing social system. All social systems are composed of a number of interrelated and interdependent elements. The importance of these different elements and their inter-relationship, such as between the gusti, para and samaj in Bengali societies, has been emphasised in a number of recent village studies (see Bertocci, 1970; Bhuiyan, 1978; A. Chowdhury, 1978; Ellickson, 1975; Jahangir, 1979 and others), particularly in the context of the dynamics of rural social system.

However, in this section I have discussed the composition of household, and then have proceeded to explore the links between the household, gusti, para and samaj. Using detailed case materials I have attempted to show the socio-political

aspects of the different kind and neighbourhood units. A household is an unit where people eat and live together. It may consist of a single person or a complete family or a part of the family. The size of household in Natunpur varies considerably; the smallest one is composed of a single individual while the largest one has 22 members. The average number of members in a household is 6.99. The households mentioned here represent thus "a residential and domestic unit composed of one or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in a single kitchen" (Shah, 1973:8). In the study of the village Khawajapur, in the district of Comilla, Bangladesh, Bhuiyan uses the definition of a household as defined by Shah, but he mentions that it does not necessarily mean that the members of the same household live also in a same ghar (house). The household may have one or more than one house, depending on economic conditions and also life style. The household members eat food cooked on a single chula (hearth). Here again single chula does not necessarily mean only one chula. Bhuiyan stresses that the definition of a household does not refer to the literal meaning of the term. More generally it is a residential and domestic unit which centres round a cooking unit.

### 3.1 Household Compositions and Demographic Factors

In the study of Natunpur village I have adopted Shah's definition of a household, and have concentrated on the nature



of the households in the village. The married daughters are not counted in their parental households, because they are considered members of their husband's family. Widows and deserted daughters, who live in the household and take food from the same cooking unit of their parents or brothers are considered as members of that household. The girls of Natunpur, those who are married in Natunpur, are counted in their husband's households as wives. A few government officials live in the village. Their importance in local politics is only marginal, but they are involved in the socio-economic life of the village. In my 100 per cent census of the village, these households are also included. They have been staying in Natunpur for more than five years. Government officials who do not reside in the village, but work in different village offices; such as the Government medical officer, village extension workers and the people working in different shops, flour mill, post-office, sugar purchasing centre and the family welfare clinic are not counted in my census.

Chart 3 shows that among the 110 Natunpur households in 1978, 28 per cent were complex households and the rest were simple.

Chart 4 shows that most of the households consist of patrilineal kin groups, only in few cases affinal kin are also included. Besides these there are also some students living in a number of middle and rich households. They are lodgers

## Chart 3

Types of Natunpur Households

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Simple households i.e., parents and their unmarried children	72	66
Incomplete simple households i.e., one parent and his/her unmarried children	7	6
Complex households (see Chart 4)	31	28
	<hr/> 110	<hr/> 100

## Chart 4

Chart Sets Out the Different Types of Complex Households in the village NatunpurComposition of Complex Households

<u>Composition:</u>	<u>No. of H/holds</u>
Parents, unmarried children, one married son, his wife and children	11
Parents, unmarried children, three married - sons, their wives and children	1
Widower with three married sons, their wives and children	1
Father with children and one married son	1
Widow, children and three married son, their wives and children	1
Widow, children and three married sons, their wives and children	2
Parents, daughter, son-in-law and children	2
Parents, children and deserted daughter	2
Widow, children, deserted daughter	2
Parents, children and divorced daughter	1
Husband, his wife, children and husband's widow sister	3
Parents, children and wife's mother	1
Husband, wife, children and deserted sister	2
	<hr/>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>31 (28%)</b>

who take food and shelter in their landlord's houses and study in nearby schools or colleges. Some lodgers are even university students. These students often teach their landlord's children. The households that can offer lodgings to poor students are respected in the village and thus attain status. These lodging students are not counted as members of their landlord's households. In most of the cases they do not develop close relationships with the members of their host households. They are treated as outsiders. The duration of their stay as lodgers also varies. There are some cases where a close relationship developed between the student and his landlord's family. And to make the relationship permanent, marriage between the student and a young girl of the household was arranged.

From the Tables 15A, 15B and 15C, the demographic structure of Natunpur's population is reflected in the household composition. About two-thirds of the population are below the age of 20 and 66 per cent of households are of the simple type. A growing and youthful population thus seems likely to have less complex type households than an ageing population.

### 3.2 Households in its Residential and Kinship Setting

Kinship relations arise by descent and marriage. From the discussion of the household composition in Natunpur it is evident that patrilineal kinship and patrilocal residence represent the prevalent pattern in Natunpur village. In a virilocal setting most of the members of a household are related

Table 15A

Household Compositions in Natunpur in  
Economic Categories

## NATUNPARA

Economic categories	Complex		Incomplete Simple		Simple	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich	2	3	1	2	-	-
Middle	7	11	2	3	11	18
Small	5	8	1	2	16	25
Landless	4	6	2	3	12	19
<b>Total:</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>62</b>

Note: Total number of households = 63

Table 15B

Household Compositions in Natunpur in  
Economic Categories

## BEHARIPARA

Economic categories	Complex		Incomplete Simple		Simple	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich	2	6	-	-	1	3
Middle	1	3	-	-	4	12
Small	3	9	1	3	6	18
Landless	4	12	-	-	11	30
<b>Total:</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>67</b>

Note: Total number of households = 33

Table 15C

Household Compositions in Natunpur in  
Economic Categories

SATBHAGIPARA

Economic Categories	Complex		Incomplete Simple		Simple	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Rich	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle	-	-	-	-	1	7
Small	1	7	9		9	64
Landless	2	15	-	-	1	7
<b>Total:</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>78</b>

Note: Total number of households = 14.

by blood, except the wives who are grafted on by marriage. After marriage the wives are considered as members of their husband's gusti households. They have to perform the rituals of the family into which they are married. Among the Hindus, wives have to perform the ritual mourning at the death of male or female members of their husband's gusti. The members of a household in a polluted stage can neither perform any religious functions nor arrange any ceremony. The duration of the pollution phase varies with caste i.e., among Brahmins if a gusti member dies, all agnates and their wives have to observe ritual mourning for eleven days, in other castes it is thirty days. A married woman has to follow her husband's gusti's ritual,

because after marriage she becomes the member of her husband's gusti. Even if she becomes a widow she has to follow the rules of her husband's family. A married woman has to perform ritual mourning for three days in case of her parents or any other member's death of her natal family. Among Muslims also the woman after marriage becomes a member of her husband's gusti and thus has to perform the rituals according to her husband's gusti. Thus all women in Natunpur on marriage become members of their husband's gusti and have to perform the rituals of their husband's gusti accordingly.

From the analysis of the household compositions of Natunpur it is found that the households are mostly composed of close patrilineal kin. Sixty-six per cent are composed of husband wife and unmarried children, 6 per cent are composed of one parent and their unmarried children. In line with the domestic cycle married sons often form separate households leaving their parents and unmarried siblings in one household. Only 28 per cent are complex households, the composition of which indicates that even most of them are made up of patrilineal kin, deserted and widowed sisters and daughters who live either with their brother's father's family. Only in two cases does a son-in-law live with his parents-in-laws. Thus in Natunpur all households are composed of a patrilineal core, while the complex types also have a fringe of differently related kin. Kinship is, therefore, of crucial importance in the understanding of intra as well as

inter household relationships. In this context it needs to be mentioned that not only lineal and affinal relationships, but also fictive kin ties play an important role within and between households. As already mentioned, there are three paras in Natunpur, consisting of 70 household within gustis and 40 individual households (see Diagram I). These 40 households have not yet formed gustis. Here demographic factors play a decisive role. A household may provide the basis for a big gusti if the family has many sons, old enough to form separate households in the village. When a gusti is formed in a village, and all its component households live in the same village or para, it greatly influences intra-gusti relationships. It is stated earlier how different immigrants settled in Natunpur and formed different gustis and individual households.

The history of residential pattern of Natunpur indicates clearly how the villagers formed different groups and their complex relationships. As stated earlier the village consists of three para, namely, Natunpara, Satbhagipara and Beharipara, which again belong to four samajs. Two of these samaj consist of Natunpur people only; while the other two consist of Natunpur people as well as residents from nearby villages (Diagram I). A samaj is mainly a religious and political unit.

In the village, samaj means a little community. The Bengali term for 'society' is samaj. Actually society is somewhat abstract whereas community is more concrete. Every village as

a community has its own samaj. The concept of samaj as used in Natunpur means a socio-religious-political unit. The concept is so clear to the villagers that every body in the village can easily tell who belongs to which samaj. The samaj members may be gusti members, or individual households in the village. A kind of we feeling, i.e. community identity or sentiment is very strong in the village samaj. Samaj does not always restrict memberships to residents from the village only. It may also cut accross villages. There are altogether a few samajs in the village, among them two consist of only Natunpur people and the other two consist of Natunpur as well as other villagers. These nearby villages are those from where immigrant households originate. The households of the nearby villages are their kin. The whole village also forms one samaj. The village samaj controls the behaviour pattern of villagers. There are village leaders, who generally come from the prominent households of the village. If there is any problem in the village, like theft, partition of property, family quarrels and other issues, the village samaj leaders sit together and discuss and arbitrate. Other villagers and the parties of the specific dispute also join the meeting. These meetings are called, salish or bicharsava. If it is a serious and complex problem, then the Union Council Chairman and members and the leaders of nearby villages also attend the meeting.

The para samaj differs from the village samaj. It consists of fewer households, who may be gusti people, kin, neighbours or



un-related individual households. Mostly they are residents of the same para. Because in a village para musti, kin live together, the households grew and may form a para. The new settlers come and settle there afterwards. Often they become members of the existing samaj there, which has been there from the beginning with the old settlers. Thus, it is much closer in terms of relationships than the village samaj, and its functions are also more. It is a socio-religious-political group. Every samaj is named after the murubbi<sup>1</sup> of that samaj. They have a strong feeling of unity. Samaj membership is not compulsory, it is voluntary. There is no hard and fast rule that one member of a particular samaj cannot join other samaj. But one cannot be a member of two samajs at one and the same time, generally it is found that when there is conflict between two leaders in a samaj, then one of them forms a new one with his followers. For example, previously Abed Hazi was the member of Natunpara samaj, but subsequently he had conflicts with the other Natunpara samaj leaders, and as a result he left Natunpara samaj and formed a new samaj with his kin and followers.

Different recent researchers in Bangladesh villages have discussed samaj in different ways. Bertocci did his field work in two Comilla villages (a district in the eastern part of Bangladesh) where he found that "samaj is a multi-village political unit" based on sardars (influential persons of high

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<sup>1</sup> Guardian

lineage) and reyais (porteges). Within the village, reyais are loyal to one or other of several sardars. Outside the village, samaj acts as a 'multi-village political unit' and contributes 'to the formation of wider, territorially extensive community organisations', and sardars act as 'representatives in most cases of the dominant lineages in their respective bailiwicks' (1972:29-31). Bhuiyan in his study of a village called Khawajapur also in Comilla district mentions the reyai system. He says that "reyai (literally, proteges; those who are under the domain of others) is an informal social group in Khawajapur as in most villages of Comilla district. It has no legal authority. However, it has a sardar (headman) and a few matabars (village leaders; heads of strong families): they are the leaders of the reyai. These leaders are the watchdogs of norms and social activities in the reyai. Their principal function is to settle disputes." (1978:373). In the village which is called samaj (literally society) (Bhuiyan, 1983:87) he does not state whether or not the samaj is a multi-village organisation. Both these researchers specifically say that a samaj's main function is to arbitrate disputes.

By contrast Jahangir in his study near Dhaka states that the samaj in his villages is not a multi-village political unit. According to him in his two villages "neither the village nor the para samaj is based on sardars and reyais. The village people say: everyone who belongs to the village is a member of

the samaj and every one is equal" (1979:89). Jahangir also noticed that "all the villagers constitute a samaj, and through the samaj they perform certain ritual ceremonies such as religious celebrations or marriages, or try to regulate the behaviour pattern of the villagers (for example, controlling behaviour during the month of Ramadhan). Then again each para has its own samaj and within each para the rich peasants have their own samaj separate from that of the poor peasants" (1979: 88).

The samaj as discussed by Bertocci for Comilla villages is not found in the same form in Natunpur. In critical problems, village Matbars from nearby villages do sit together and decide matters but these are generally different kinds of disputes. Villagers call it a salish of a Panch Gramer or Sat Gramer when they sit together to settle a dispute. Literal meaning of panch gramer is five villages and sat gramer is seven villages. Here again panch and sat are not to be understood literally, it refers to several villages, which could be four, five, eight or ten villages. The numerical numbers here refer to the importance of the council. In this sense it could be called as 'multi-village political unit'. The system of sardar and reyal is not found in the sense as Bertocci and Bhuiyan have discussed it for Comilla villages. The village leaders in Natunpur are not like sardars, but specially the samaj leaders are more like Murubbis, they are the persons to be respected, and who are consulted whenever the samaj members are in any trouble. Most

of the time the samaj members follow their murubbis' advice. Thus it is a more informal and personal relationship.

Jahangir argues that in the village near Dhaka, which he studied all the village residents form one samaj and that there are also para samaj, which the poor in the para samaj belong to one samaj and the rich belong to another. The purpose of forming a samaj is more or less same in most settings. In Natunpur too, I found the same purposes for the formation of village samaj yet the situation is somewhat different in Nutunpur. In the succeeding pages I have explored the complex relationships between households, kinship gusti and samaj on a para basis.

### 3.3 Natunpara with its Gusti and Individual Households

Natunpara consists of 57 per cent of the total households of Natunpur, of which 40 per cent have been resident for more than two generations, 25 per cent are second generation and the remaining 35 per cent are first generation settlers (see Table 4). The majority of this para residents have been staying there for more than 50 years. Five per cent of Natunpara households are rich, 32 per cent are middle category, 36 per cent are small and the rest are landless (see Table 6). Eight gustis consisting of 39 households as well as 24 individual households live in Natunpara. Of the eight gustis only two have been living there for less than fifty years. One of these gustis settled there from a nearby village and the other migrated from India,

after the partition of the sub-continent. They bought lands from old settlers, who were becoming poorer day by day. These Indian migrants are two brothers Hakim and Omar who lost their father when they were young. Their mother's brother Abdul came to Natunpur with his widowed sister and her children together with his own family. Abdul's maternal uncle a village doctor had already settled in the village. His son Ismail is now an influential man in Natunpur. Even before the partition of India, he used to go there to conduct petty business and treat his patients. He bought lands for building a house. He also purchased some agricultural lands for cultivation. Thus, even matrilineal relationship in a predominantly patrilineal society, play an important part in bringing new immigrants to this locality. However, though all of them enjoy some kind of kin relationship only the patrilineally related brothers form a gusti. At first these two brothers worked as rakhal in a neighbouring middle peasant's house on a yearly basis. When they grew up they gradually accumulated money and bought land near that of their maternal uncle where they built their own house. The two brothers live with their mother in a single house. The elder brother married a girl from Satbhagipara, who belongs to the satbhagi gusti. He married into a family which is set on a downward economic trend. The younger brother married a girl from a village, within five miles radius of Natunpur. This girl also belongs to a family whose economic status is deteriorating. Both brothers recently formed separate households. Their mother

been formed between fictive kin (dharma atmiya). Fictive kin (dharma atmiya) is thus of great importance in village society. There are cases where a dharma atmiya can be more reliable than one's own blood relations.

Jebar was the only son of his father. His wife received her father's property in India which they sold there and with that money and the help of Jebar's wife's God-father they bought land in Natunpur near the houses of the Satbhagies who are all set on a downward economic trend. Jebar married one of his daughters into the Satbhagi gusti. Three of Jebar's sons got married and gradually formed three households (see pp. 250-52 ). In course of Jebar's domestic cycle they split up into three separate families and formed a gusti. They also belong to the Natunpara samaj. In both of these cases the gusti members are small in number, they are in fact members of a one generation complex family formed into different simple families. Their strength is not like that of other gustis who consists of more members and have greater depth. Due to the different conflicts within the complex family, it breaks up into different families and formed a gusti. Their gustis strength is like that of other complex families but not as great as that of long established gustis. Both of these recently formed gustis have established marital relationships with the old established and large gustis of the village; neither of the two gustis has any real political power in the

village. Neither of them belongs to any decision making group within the village. Hakim's gusti is gradually gaining status in the village as they are hard-working and are improving their economic condition. In Hakim's case the women are also hard-working which contributes to the families economic improvement. In Jebar's gusti, on the other hand, the situation is quite different. Jebar's wife is hard-working but she is sick most of the time. His sons have primary education, their wives also have some education, they come from families of high economic status unprepared to do much house work, nor they are efficient in managing agricultural products at home. As a result they had conflicts at home and, therefore, separated into different households. Jebar gave only small portions of his lands to his sons for residential and cultivation purposes. This made it impossible for them to live on the products of their land. They did not have the necessary implements for cultivation and at the same time, they needed more labour to help in the cultivation. All these factors force them to either sell the land or mortgage it. Thus their economic condition is deteriorating day by day. Their wives are not hard-working and at the same time they themselves are not hard-working either. Thus they are unlikely to form a strong gusti in the near future. By contrast Hakim's gusti is increasing their economic conditions and is keeping good relationship with the rest of the villagers particularly with the powerful people of the village. As a gusti they are not yet strong but economically and socially they are going to gain respectability in the village.

The profiles of these two recently formed gustis in Natunpara indicate several things. First of all, even in predominantly patrilineal societies matrilineal kin is also important. Individuals tend to manipulate their different kin ties to their best advantage as was the case with Hakim's ancestors. Second, even fictive kin links as between Jebar's wife and her god-father are used as support in times of need. Finally, during the early stages of a household's immigration before it has sufficiently grown to form its own gusti, it is forced to rely more heavily on other than its patrilineal kin. This results in a complex network of multiplex relations. All the other six Natunpara gustis have been there for more than 50 years. One third of them are second generation immigrants and the remaining four have been living in this village for more than three generations. One of the gusti, i.e. the satbhagi gusti living in this village for three generations but two of the households belonging to the oldest Natunpur gusti in Satbhagipara have recently set up residence in Natunpara. All the other people of the Satbhagi gusti are still living in their old settlement, which forms a separate para.

There are eleven households in Kalimuddin's gusti which form eight homesteads (see Diagram I). Among these eight homesteads three consist of two households each. While the other five homesteads consist of one household each. Four of the five households are extended i.e., complex households, which means that they have every possibility of forming new households



in the near future. Table 16 shows the gusti households in economic categories and family compositions by para. In Kalimuddin's gusti, there is one rich complex, two middle complex, one middle simple, four small complex, two small complex and one landless simple. All the eleven households live in Natunpara. Only one son of a small farmer household formed complex household, married a woman from a nearby village and settled uxorilocally as ghar-jamai (husband living with his wife in wife's parent's households). Otherwise none of the members of this gusti have migrated to other places. They have not accommodated any families in their gusti. One household in this gusti consists of two brothers, another consists of two complex families. These two complex households are father and eldest sons family. The third one again is two brothers, of whom one lives into a simple family and the other in a complex household. Both of them are small farmers. In the homesteads where father and son are living, the father is a rich farmer, while the son is only a small farmer. Because the son has formed a separate household, while this father is still alive and lives with his other sons, he received only a small portion of land from his father. This is not enough for his family's maintenance. Two of the middle category households are complex. In the future when they will break up, they will deteriorate into small farmers. Recently one of these middle-stratum households has broken up into three small category households. This seems an inevitable continuous process. But they still live in a single

Table 16

Gusti of Natunpur in Economic Categories and Family Compositions by Para

Economic Categories & Family compositions	Natunpara						Beharipara				Satbhagipara		
	Hakim Webar Gul- raher lah	Ak- bar	Kalim uddin	Para- manik bhagi	Sat- total	Total	Ka- rim	Para- mesh	Para- nim	No- tal	Satbha- gis	Total	
Rich complex	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	4	-	
Rich simple	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	
Middle complex	-	1	-	2	1	5	-	1	-	1	1	1	
Middle simple	-	-	1	2	-	10	3	-	1	4	-	-	
Small complex	1	-	-	4	-	5	-	-	-	-	1	1	
Small simple	1	2	2	3	1	12	2	-	2	3	7	9	
Landless complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	2	2	
Landless simple	-	2	2	1	-	5	1	-	-	1	1	1	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>

homestead. None of the marriages of this gusti took place within Natunpur or between affinal kins. Only one son of the rich category household married a girl from a village which is more than twenty miles away from Natunpur. This son has completed his secondary education; his wife also has secondary education. She is pretty and comes of a middle class family. Another small farmer household head of this gusti married a girl from Comilla at the time of the partition of India. At that time a number of Natunpur men married Comilla women. After that no people from Natunpur married girls from Comilla. Even those who have migrated from Comilla are arranging marriages with the people of Natunpara and those of nearby villages. Except for these two men all other members of this gusti married within ten miles radius of the village. No cross-cousin or parallel cousin marriage within gusti members or among affinal kin has taken place in this gusti. None of them have any dharmā atmiya or kin other than patrilineal living in this village.

This is one of the old established gustis in the village. Only one household (9%) of Kalimuddin's gusti belongs to the landless category; and one household (9%) belongs to the rich category households; 27 per cent are middle farmers and the remaining 55 per cent are small farmers. The richest household head is also the oldest man of the gusti; the people of his generation such as his brothers are all dead. He is the one who was able to increase his father's property. He took land from

the then Zamindar and invested his money in business. He owns one of the oldest grocer's shops in the village. The present gusti is named after Kalimuddin. He is a prominent village leader; he is regarded as one of the paramaniks (leaders) of the village samaj. He is an executive member of every organisation located in the village, both voluntary as well as Government institutions. He is also one of the most honest and hard-working man of the village. He compelled his eldest son to form a separate household because his grandson turned out to be a thief. Recently he asked his second son to form a separate household because he has become an addicted drunkard. Not only economic status but also moral considerations are important pre-requisites for leadership positions. Kalimuddin had them both. Among these in Kalimuddin gusti households, no other man has shown the potential of becoming a leader in the village. Kalimuddin is the oldest and most respected man not only of the gusti but also of the village. He is considered as the murubbi (guardian) of the gusti and also of Natunpara samaj. The term murubbi refers to a person who is elderly, respected and obeyed by all. At the same time he has the power and authority to enforce his will and commands in the community. If a murubbi is not himself in a position of power, he has links with the leaders of the local power system by whom his views are respected. Thus a murubbi can belong to a household, a gusti, a samaj or of village. A murubbi's sphere of influence may extend even beyond his own village.

The difference between a murubbi and a leader or paramanik is very subtle. A murubbi relationship is of a personal nature and involves the respect and obedience from his subordinates either in age or property. He is the advisor and often helps to protect his subordinates from undue pressures. A leader of the community, on the other hand, may not be respected like the murubbi of the group. The relationship between a leader and his followers are not always close and personal. Kalimuddin is regarded as both leader and murubbi of the village community.

Fifty-five per cent of Kalimuddin's gusti households are set on an upward economic mobility; they have improved their economic conditions over what they inherited from their forefathers. Among these households which are improving economically, only two are not engaged in trading. All the others are engaged in some kind of trading. Kalimuddin owns the biggest grocer's shop of the village, his eldest son has started a new shop in the village. Moyej has got a tea stall, Aber has a petty business of preparing turmeric powder and selling it around the hats of Natunpur. The two middle households which have made economic improvements without trading have only few members: one among them is complex, while the other consists of Murshid his wife and his only married son, who is a primary school teacher. Both husband and wife are hard-working. The wife sold some of her gold ornaments and bought lands; at the same time both the families have agricultural implements.

Forty-five per cent of Kalimuddin's gusti are set on a downward economic trend. Except one none of these households has farming implements. The one complex unit that has got farming implements lacks initiative to work hard and improve its economic condition. This complex household consists of four brothers. Three of them are married. Their widowed mother is also living with them. All the family members feel that they cannot continue to live together and soon will form separate households. The wives of three brothers sell their ornaments and invest the money in buying lands and keeping lands by mortgage which they are doing in their individual husband's names. Thus no man or woman of this family feel the need to improve their common family assets. Recently the family has split into a several households. Their paternal property is divided among the brothers making each of them a small farmer. Though this household recently divided into four households; they continue to live in the same homesteads. There is one plough, and thus one set of farming implements which they have to share. Four household units cannot use it at the same time. So some of them have to hire implements from time to time. All this makes it hard for them to improve economic condition.

Thus it seems that though this is one of the old village gustis, it is gradually losing its importance. They do not have marital relationships within their own gusti to reinforce intra-gusti relationships; while differences make them form separate

households, which put them on a downward economic trend. Moreover, because of their personal character they are losing their hold in the village samaj. After Kalimuddin none of the gusti man is going to become powerful and thus become a leader in the village community. Households within a gusti are not dependent on each other. It seems they do not help each other economically. They do not give free labour to others within the gusti on a reciprocal basis. Only Kalimuddin gave three bighas of his land for sharecropping to members of his kin group in a nearby village, where the land is situated. Another small farmer household, Aber, Sharecrops four and half bighas of land near his own land. The owner of the land is not a relative of Aber's, he is a resident of a nearby village. Only Khabir sharecrops six bighas of his son-in-law's land (Afzal's), because he does not have farming implements and he is the only man in his family who can work on the land. Thus his son-in-law needs to hire both labour and farming implements, which is not a profitable proposition. His wife is also the only woman in his family, so they have to hire female labour as well. Therefore, the only thing they can do is to give their land to a sharecropper. He does not have a gusti member in Natunpur. His father-in-law, Khabir, a small farmer has farming implements. Khabir told me himself that he is eager to cultivate more land because he has implements and labour in his house, but does not get much land for sharecropping. He thinks that the rich people do not like to give sharecropping to the poor, even his

rich kin group does not like to give him land for sharecropping. He says that they do not like to help their poor relatives. He also complained that the Natunpur Agricultural Club gives land on contract basis to the villagers but one has to pay a fixed rate to the club committee in advance for each bigha of land. Poor people cannot afford this and, therefore, do not get the benefit. Only two people from Kalimuddin's gusti received land from the club, both of them have ready cash as both of them have shops in the village. One is the eldest son of Kalimuddin and the other is the gusti member. Kalimuddin is one of the executive members of the committee. He also does not like to take risk and plead on behalf of the poor, or to give the land on a credit basis.

In Kalimuddin's gusti there is no preference on the part of the rich and middle farmers to employ labourers from their own gusti nor do they give their agricultural products to be processed in a neej system. The rich and middle farmers of this group employ labourers from Satbhagipara or from a nearby village for a payment in cash or kind. Men within this gusti are not obliged to work for their own group. In case of women the situation is somewhat different. On socio-cultural and religious occasions gusti members still play an important role: for marriage negotiations and marriage performances, birth and death rituals, gusti members assemble together. Samaj leaders and influential people are also invited. At least the gusti household heads are always invited. In case of a marriage where the family is not



solvent enough to invite all gusti household heads, they may invite the murubbis of the gusti and the leaders of their samaj. For arranging a marriage the consent of the gusti is not enough; one has to take also the permission of the samaj. The role of the samaj is very important in this regard. Kalimuddin as murubbi of the gusti still commands some respect in the community and thus he can play an important part in solving many problems of the gusti. As for example, while the middle category household breaks into separate households, Kalimuddin's view regarding the partition was respected. None of the other households heads of the gusti were asked to settle the dispute. When Kalimuddin's first and second sons were separated, he never asked any other people of his gusti or samaj. At first Kalimuddin's first son did not want to form a separate household, but he was asked repeatedly to do so. Kalimuddin's son Amjad called his wife's brother to settle the matter. At first Kalimuddin wanted to give Amjad one bigha of land for cultivation, but afterwards with the request of Amjad's brother-in-law Kalimuddin decided to give some more land. In case of his second son the situation was the same. Kalimuddin asked his son to form a separate household, but his second son Basir did not want to do so. Basir's wife did not cook and became very sad. Basir's mother gave them food without the knowledge of her husband. Then Basir's father-in-law got the information from his daughter through a messenger, he with his wife visited Kalimuddin's house and made arrangements for their daughter to

cook separately. He convinced their son-in-law to live separately. In none of these cases gusti member or samaj members took any important part, rather the affinal kins persuaded the families concerned to form separate households. Samaj's influence in these cases was quite considerable in as much as the samaj condemned Kalimuddin's sons for their misbehaviour which in turn helped Kalimuddin to enforce his decision. Though Kalimuddin's gusti is the biggest in Natunpur it does not provide a supporting network for its members.

The next biggest gusti of Natunpara used to be the oldest and most powerful one of Natunpur village. But after the death of Azu Paramanik, it lost its importance. As stated earlier paramanik means the leader in local terms. When Azu Paramanik was alive, he was the only leader in the village. Everybody followed him. He was very powerful; he had a charismatic personality. In any salish everybody used to follow his verdict. He used to give several punishment (physical) and also fined the guilty persons; often the guilty person was socially ostracised. He was not only a paramanik in Natunpur but he was also asked to arbitrate disputes in other villages as well. None of his sons are as prominent as he was. After his death there was nobody within his gusti to follow their father and become a paramanik. However, they are using the paramanik title. Berek, the third son of Azu Paramanik, is now regarded as the paramanik in the village. He is honest, polite, and has some education. The

eldest son of Azu Paramanik died and his second son is somewhat simple, not at all interested in political problems. He and his wife are hardworking and are improving their economic condition. Only the third son has relations with other villagers and with people outside Natunpur. Because of his personality and contacts with others he is regarded as paramanik of the village. But he is not the only one to settle the disputes or problems in the village. There are, in fact, now about five major leaders and four minor leaders. A younger generation is coming into power. Berek is a major leader, but he never takes any decision by himself; he always consults Kalimuddin and Akbar who he considers as his murubbi. They have a good relationship with Berek's father and are considered as honest; they all belong to one village faction; they are all old settlers and live in the same para.

Berek's gusti is known as paramanik's gusti. Azu Paramanik was the only son of his father. Only his sons formed the gusti. The one household now split into four homesteads. Azu Paramanik married three times. The first wife is dead. He has only one son by his first wife; two sons by his second wife, who he divorced, and then married a third time. The rest of his children are from the third wife. She is still alive. His second wife married again a poor man of a neighbouring village. Paramanik's first three sons formed separate households during his life time. These three sons formed two homesteads. Azam and Berek lived in one homestead and Azu Paramanik's son with his family lived in a separate homestead.

Recently after Azu Paramanik's death his first son by his third wife formed a separate homestead with his family. His name is Sattar. Except one married daughter the two married sons of his third wife together with the unmarried sons and daughters formed one homestead. Thus are now four homesteads in a large compound, which was previously an undivided homesteads. The one family, living in one household, gives rise to six households who are living in four homesteads. Each of these homesteads has its separate fencing to separate each unit from the other. One of Sattar's sisters got married to a tailor who works in Rajshahi town. His father has a house in Rajshahi town, where all his brothers and sisters are living. The girl's name is Rasida. She asked her mother to have her share from her father's land. She lived with her husband and children with her mother for about two years. She feels that her daughter is helpful; she helps her mother in doing her household chores; her husband is a favourite of his mother-in-law; he does whatever she asks him to do. He helps her in buying and selling agricultural products etc. By contrast her two married sons do not listen to their mother and do not take good care of their paternal property. One of them is a habitual drunkard and the other likes to gossip and loiter about in the village and does not do any agricultural work. The mother, therefore, finds her son-in-law also very helpful. Her own sons do not like this situations. Accordingly, when Rasida asked her share from her father's property, she was not given a portion of the homestead; instead

she got a plot of agricultural land near the primary school, which is situated in the middle of the village. It is a plain land in Natunpara; and there is a residential settlement near that plot of land. Rasida and her husband have set up home on that plot. Thus Paramanik's daughter settled in Natunpara even after her marriage. But she does not belong to her father's gusti anymore; after her marriage she became a member of her husband's gusti. Among these six households, three belong to the middle stratum. All these three have improved their economic conditions by now. Azam and his wife are very hard-working and the other two, Sattar and Rahman, are also hard-working, Rahman's mother works from morning till night in the household. She organises and controls the products of her land. Her eldest son was a kid when her husband died; and from then on she has acted as the head of the family supervising everything. She takes the help of Azam and Berek and her parent's family, i.e., her own brother and other relations also help her. Sattar also improves his economic position because, he works as a truck driver for the Sugar Mill near Rajshahi. But Berek, Khalil and Islam could not improve their economic conditions. Berek and his wife are not hard-working, nor are they of good health. Khalil and Islam are not hard-working and not even bothered about improving their economic condition by giving more attention and labour to the development of agricultural lands. Each of them has quite a big family. In Berek's case his eldest son stole a considerable amount of money from his father's purse and

left the village twice. Berek's wife is very fond of her son; she was very worried about him and did not allow her husband to take any action against the son. When their son returned home they were so happy that they asked him to live with them again and work for the family. He was in the middle of his secondary education and his father asked him to continue his studies. So, Mati (Berek's son) accepted this opportunity. He still frequently asked his mother for money. To meet her son's requests she used to accumulate money from different sources. She even sold agricultural products, which many women do in the village. At the same time they also accommodated students in their house. In return for food and shelter these students are supposed to give private coaching to the children of the household. Berek was very keen that his children should get higher education. As he has educated people as his friends, he knows how important it is to be educated. He spends lots of money on the education of his son, but in vain. Thus keeping those student was not a profitable investment for Berek. However, to keep students as lodgers also helps to improve one's social status. Paramanik's family always observed this tradition. Among the six households five keep students as lodgers. Among them two are Rajshahi University students and three are school and college students. Though these students are not related to their landlords, they develop a fictive kin relationship with the family with which they are staying. They have ready access to the inner compound of the house where they freely meet the

female members of the household. Paramanik's family though being respected is gradually declining in socio-economic terms.

Only three of paramanik's gusti households belong to the middle stratum and three are small farmers. When it was still a single household, it rated as rich. Increasing members and the domestic cycle meant that the family formed into several separate households each of lower economic status; one household led to the establishment of six households. One of these households is a complex type where internal conflict has already started and in near future it is going to split up into separate households. The account of paramanik's gusti indicates how the internal dynamics set in motion by population pressure and the domestic cycle results in a fragmentation of households with deteriorating economic conditions. There thus appears an inherent paradox in the development of the gusti: politically, it needs many members while increasing numbers usually result in declining economic status. All this is encapsulated in a generational conflict; the senior generation within a gusti needs many children, particularly sons to enhance its political influence; while the junior generation resents having to share the ancestral property with too many siblings.

After Azu Paramanik's death they arranged three salish regarding the partition of the ancestral landed property. In the salish there were leaders of Natunpur village as well as leaders of different samajs of neighbouring villages. Elderly

and respected relations of the families involved in the dispute, the Chairman of the Union Parisad (council), one member of the Union Parisad, who is a resident of Natunpur also were present in the salish. They argued the matter out and the dispute was solved. But Sattar did not accept the decision of the meeting. At the time of the salish he did not object, but afterwards he did not accept the decision. Then the village samaj sat again to reconsider the matter, but they took Sattar's violation of the decision of the salish to be a great offence. So they decided to punish him i.e., boycott him socially and economically. Thus he is not allowed to talk with any villagers, cannot employ any local labourers, he is not even allowed to take drinking water from Akbar and Kalimuddin's tubewell. There is a tubewell in paramanik's house, but it was out of order at that time. After two days Sattar came to the leaders of the samaj and apologized for his offence and promised to abide by the council's decision. The village samaj leaders, Natunpara's samaj leaders all sat together again and asked Sattar to pay a fine to the Natunpara samaj for his disobedience and for showing disrespect to the decision of the council. Afterwards Barek, Azam and Rahman asked each for their share and requested the village samaj and Natunpara samaj together with the Union Council Chairman to settle the matter. They all sat together and settled the matter. As Barek, Azam and Rahman had called the samaj to settle their dispute regarding the partition of their lands. They gave a feast to the samaj leaders afterwards; and the three families



shared the expenses. But Khalil, Islam and Sattar's mother was not happy with the decision of the samaj. She asked the samaj to sit again and listened to their problems and resettle the dispute. Last time the council sat together and decided on the share of property to be given to each member, even the unmarried daughters' shares were also separated. It was decided at first that the unmarried daughters' shares shall be with their mother since she was looking after them. Subsequently, Sattar's mother asked for some more land because she had to maintain such a big family, and she had to arrange the marriages of her young sons and daughters. All this required a large amount of money. She organised a big feast for the people attending the meeting. (I also attended the meeting and joined the feast). Sattar's mother sat inside the room and the other people sat on the varanda. She told her grievances herself to the Council and begged for more land for the maintenance and marriage of her young children. Her brother also supported her pleas. The Chairman was one of Berek's close friends and so were the other leaders also. Most of them did not approve of paramanik's wife asking for a salish against her sons, though they were only her step sons. They did not even like the woman talking loudly from inside so that the council may hear her pleas and grievances nor did they like her brother's views in her support. Her brother is not a renowned man in the area. So, when the salish came to the samaj, her brother was regarded as an outsider and his arguments were not respected at all. They started the salish at about

to improve Berek's social status. On the other hand, Gopal gained security by having Berek as a friend. As a member of a minority group, they need support of the influential majority group for their survival. Thus while the household within Berek's gusti do not all get on well with each other and do not have affinal kins in the village, Gopal's and Berek's family who are linked by bandhu ties act as strong support to each other. The bandhu relationship cuts across even religious barriers.

Berek's own mother's brother lives in the village, in Natunpara. This is known as Mullah's gusti, sometime ago they were an influential group in the community, but now they are on the downward economic trend. Another man called Badar, is also related to Paramanik's gusti. Badar was a young boy when both his parents died. At that time his cousin brother (mother's sister's son) Azu Paramanik brought him up as his own son. He also gave a portion of his land to Badar, who built a house on the plot for his wife. He married the only daughter of a middle farmer of the village; she inherited a big amount of landed property. Badar settled in the village and formed a new household. Though Badar did not belong to Paramanik's gusti, they are closely related. They live in the same para and belong to the same samaj. When Badar's wife was young she lost her father, and her mother got married with Khodabox of Satbhagipara. Khodabox got two sons and two daughters by this wife. Thus Paramanik's gusti developed relationship with Satbhagi gusti. On the other

hand, Badar's daughter got married in Beharipara. Satbhagi, on the other hand, developed marital relationships with Abed Hazi and many new immigrants of the village. If all these various links that Paramanik's gusti has with other village paras it becomes obvious that this gusti is deeply imbedded in Natunpur's social system. Paramanik's gusti saw all live closeby. They meet each other regularly and discuss each other's problems together. They all live adjacent to each other's residence, and all belong to the old established residential families. Berek, Khodabox and Mollah are regarded as leaders of the samaj.

Azu Paramanik had ten sons and four daughters. Except for those who are engaged in profitable businesses or services, and the families where both the husband and wife are hard-working, it is inevitable that the individual families are set on a downward economic trend. In the next generation unless things improve some of them are going to become landless, because like others they may not find it profitable to cultivate economically unviable plots of land. Lack of agricultural implements and labour makes small landholding unprofitable. Some may sell the lands and try to enter petty trading. Sattar's two younger brothers are already pressuring their mother to give them their shares, so that they can sell the land and start trading. But their brothers as well as the family's murubbi are objecting to their demand, because they consider that since they are unaccustomed to business, they may not be able to make any profit and

then will lose the little they have. They are not hard-working and do not have the aptitude of doing business.

Mullah's gusti is another kingroup based in Natunpara. Aser Mollah came and settled here from the nearby village. He had three sons. Quadir, Iman and Boyen. Quadir Mullah married three times and has six daughters and no son; Iman has only one daughter and Boyen has four sons and one daughter. None of the families are experiencing economic improvements. Two of Quadir's daughters are married to men from Comilla. They reside in Quadir's house as ghar-jamai. Iman's daughter is married to a man from a nearby village; only Iman's widow still lives in Natunpara. Boyen's two sons are living in the village. One migrated to his wife's residence as she got some land from her father, and the other lives in his mother's village as she received land from her parents. When his mother became a widow (after the death of Boyen) he went with his mother to her mother's parents' residence. The two sons, living in the village, are notorious, they drink liquor excessively and do all sorts of illegal things in the villages. Gradually, they sold all their lands. They even sold their homestead to a middle stratum farmer who lives next door to them. They now live in their brother's homestead. They are the poor and landless. Quadir Mollah's second wife is from Comilla. She is hard-working and dominant in the family. When her two daughters got married with two landless labourers from Comilla, she was happy and both the sons-in-law started to live with them. They worked in their

father-in-law's lands. But the girls thus married do not admit that their husbands are ghar-jamais because they think that the situation lowers down their own social status. The girls tell that whenever their husbands will be able to buy some land or achieve some economic stability, they are going to form separate households. The immigrants from Comilla live near their promoter's households. Some of the village property has been acquired by people who came from India, Comilla and other palaces. Alim, one Natunpur farmer sold quite a lot of land and is now landless. The new settlers could thus buy lands in the old settlement.

Mullah's gusti is loosing its socio-economic status. After Boyen's death there is nobody who can be respected in the gusti. Boyen Mullah's two sons Asek and Kalim are the most condemned persons in the village. They belong to the landless category. There is no possibility of their being able to buy land in the near future.

Taher Mondal's gusti is also declining in socio-economic status. Alim's and Taher's father Lalu Mondal was a rich man in this area. Mondal also means leader. Even while Lalu Mondal was still alive, he started loosing his landed property. Ismail's father, Iman's and Sarif's maternal uncle who migrated from India bought land from him. Thus outsiders could establish their residence in this para where most of the households are living here more than two generations. Among the three households,

only one belong to the middle stratum and the other two are landless. All the three are simple households. Taher, the middle farmer, is the only able bodied man in his household to work in the field. His wife is the only woman to work in the family. Their elder son is studying in the secondary level and the elder daughter, who studied upto primary level, recently got married. A middle farmer needs at least two or three men to work and at the same time two or three women to work in the household. This family does not have any other dependents to live with them and work in the field. Alim's father brought up an orphan named Kurani, got him married. Both Kurani and his wife worked in the house of Lalu Mondal with Taher and others. They took meals with them and were considered as members of their family. Asgar another Comilla boy who came with his sister who married a man of Satbhagipara also stayed in Lalu's household. Lalu promised to give a portion of land to Kurani as a gift, so that after his death Kurani can live on it and would not have to depend on Taher. Kurani was brought up as Taher's brother, but even then he did not belong to the gusti. They were very close to each other and work for each other whenever needed. But after Lalu's death, Taher and Kurani's families were in conflict and separated into two households. The relationship between the two houses is similar to that of gusti households, but Kurani is not yet fully incorporated in to Taher's gusti. Asgar was not treated as a servant but as a member of Taher's household. Eventually Asgar got a job with the

surveyor in this area. He got married and bought a piece of land, made his own residence and started doing petty business. He and Kurani, thus have improved their economic conditions. Asgar did not get any land from Lalu or from Taher, but developed a very close relationship with them. He is still not regarded as a gusti member, while he behaves like a gusti member. They all belong to the Natunpara samaj. Taher is also related to Badar, because Badar married Taher's first cousin. In this way they are related to Paramanik and Mullah. They also maintain close relationship with Kurani, Asgar and Mullah's family, while their relationship with Alim's family is rather strained. Alim sold away most of his lands to Mahiuddin (new settler) who settled here after the liberation of Bangladesh. Mahiuddin built a house adjacent to Taher's residence. Taher could have filed a pre-emption case, but decided not to do it because he did not have the money to buy the land and because Ismail's father was negotiating the case. Ismail's father was an influential man in the village. Ismail's father brought up Mahiuddin like a son. He turned out to be very intelligent. Mahiuddin went to school with Ismail and his other brothers. While Ismail and his brothers could not proceed at school, Mahiuddin progressed well and continued his studies. He got a job outside Natunpur. He married a girl from a respectable family of Dinajpur District, and for many years did not even visit the family where he had been brought up, though he maintained connections with Ismail and others of the family. When Bangladesh became

independent he retired from service and came to Natunpur. At first he stayed with his family in Ismail's house. But eventually he brought land in an around Natunpur village and built a house for his family.

Taher's gusti developed closer relationships with other people than their own agnates and the next door neighbour. Alim, on the other hand, developed a close association with his neighbours who are poor immigrants from Comilla. Alim, his son and wife work in other's houses as labourers. As Alim is not very hard-working, the villagers do not like to engage him as labourer. Thus his economic condition is deteriorating day by day.

As mentioned earlier there are also two gusti households residing in Natunpara belong to the Satbhagi gusti. They moved from Satbhagipara, but the other members of this gusti still live in Satbhagipara. Mowla Box is the father of Ayub. The father is a middle farmer, living in a complex household, while the son is a small farmer residing in a simple household. He manages to maintain his economic status but Ayub's condition is deteriorating. Ayub mortgaged one bigha of his land to a middle farmer, an immigrant from India living in Natunpara. Ayub does not possess any farming implements. None of them are leaders of the gusti or of the village samaj. Ayub's eldest son is a Matriculate, and he is asked to join all kinds of new associations formed in the village by different governmental and non-governmental



organisations e.g., the Youth Club and a Night School. He is also a member of the Juba (youth) Complex. Though he is loosing economic importance, he is becoming involved in different kinds of organisations that give him some prestige and influence. He is an honest and sincere worker but could not get a job; and now he works as an agricultural labourer. All the Natunpara gustis so far discussed belong to Natunpara samaj.

Akbar's gusti belongs to a separate samaj. Akbar is one of the important village personalities. He is respected because he is honest and can give sound decisions; he has good connections with the villagers and with different government officials. Though he belongs to a different samaj, he is asked to participate in affairs of Natunpara samaj.

Akbar's gusti consists of eight households. Abul Hussain was the post master of the local Post Office. His brother Akanda also lived in Natunpur. Abul Hussain has four sons. He and his four sons formed five households. All these five households formed one homestead, and the three sons of Akanda, formed another homestead. Akanda's first wife died; and he married a second time. His second wife inherited her father's property in a different village. Akanda gave his property in Natunpur to his children and went to live with his wife in her natal village. His three sons form one homestead in this gusti. There is only one case of intra-gusti marriage; a daughter of Akanda married the son of Abul Hussain. All the other members married women

from different villages. Though there are all together eight households in this gusti living in the same para, they live in only two homesteads. All the eight households in this gusti are of single family only recently one of the households, i.e., Akbar became a complex family, as his eldest son got married and was staying with him. Among these eight families six are middle farmers and two are small farmers. Abul Hussain divided his land among his four sons. Only two of them improved their economic conditions. They bought new lands and their wives also inherited cultivable lands from their parents. The two small farmer families are working; one in school and the other in a sugarmill. They failed to look after the land properly and could not progress.

Akbar's gusti has been living in Natunpur for more than fifty years and are the second generation settlers. Though their main occupation is agriculture, except for Akanda's three sons, all the other male members of this gusti are engaged in different kinds of subsidiary occupations, i.e., teaching, service etc. One of them is a village doctor. Whenever they find time, they work in their own field with the help from labourers. Only Rahimuddin, one of the gusti's poor relations who has settled in Natunpur recently on his wife's land, works in the lands of Akbar and other people of Akbar's gusti. They hire labourers from the village and from nearby villages as well. Akbar's father gave a portion of his land to each of his sons. His own portion was rented out to his sons on sharecropping basis,

because he is an old man and can not look after his land himself. Their relations from the village of their origin, Rahimuddin and two families from Satbhagipara and the people of Akbar's gusti form one samaj. For any religious and social purposes they assemble together and if there is any problem, they try to solve it by themselves.

Akbar's gusti hold a respectable position in Natunpur and in the nearby villages. Akbar is the head of the gusti though he is not the senior most man in it. He is also a murubbi of the village community. Akbar's eldest son has an M.A. degree and works as a teacher in a nearby college. He is a member of the village club, but not active in village politics. He does not take an active part in village salish and similar problem, he tries to maintain a neutral position in the village affairs. In absence of Akbar there is no other individual in the gusti who may be regarded as murubbi. They are giving emphasis on education. Girls of this gusti are also going to the primary school. Two girls are attending secondary school. Though these gusti members are not part of Natunpara samaj, Akbar holds a high social status in the country. He is an honest and religious man, and has connections with different officials and murubbis of different villages. He is asked to arbitrate different problems in different villages. Even in Natunpur everybody seeks his advice on different kinds of matters.

Besides the eight gustis of Natunpara so far discussed, in the same para, there are also 24 individual households, which do

not yet form gustis. They do not have patrilineal relationship with other local households, but many of them develop affinal and fictive relationships among themselves as well as with different gustis. Among these 24 individual households, eight households settled here more than fifty years back. Four of them formed a gusti in 1983, i.e. their domestic cycle stage enables them to form separate households from the original households. Some are in the process of breaking down. Among these old established individual households only two have developed affinal relationships with two old established gustis of Natunpara. Another old established individual household i.e. Ismail's household has fictive kinship relationship with Jebar's gusti, (see p. 122 ). Thus these two families have developed a fictive kinship relationship. On the other hand, Mahiuddin was the adopted son of Ismail's father. Even after Mahiuddin's death both the families were still maintaining good kinship relationships. As stated earlier both the families are economically interlinked. Mahiuddin's family holds a high social esteem in the village. All his sons and daughters are highly educated, though they do not themselves take any active part in the village politics. Ismail is a second category murubbi in the village and a member of Natunpara samaj.

Of the 16 Natunpara individual households who have settled in this village less than fifty years ago, five came from Comilla; six settled there on the basis of their wife's connections, two of the family heads were brought up by two old

established families of the para, two came for service and the other one came from India. None of them has yet developed into a gusti. These individual households, in most of the cases developed very good and close relationships with the families who helped them come and settle in the village. Some of them are affinal kins. For instance, Akkas developed a close relationship with Abed Hazi's family. Akkas married Hazi's daughter. As their economic condition is not good, Hazi gave his daughter's share of property to them, so that they can live there. Akkas also received a portion of land from Hazi for sharecropping. Thus Akkas's family gets economic and social support from Hazi's family.

The same kinds of things happened with Ramen, Asim and Anil's households. Once Ramen Mistry (carpenter) came to Haradhan's house to make a khat (wooden cot). Due to flood at the Padma, Ramen lost all his properties. He was married before, but his wife died and there were no children by his first marriage. He is good looking, has primary education and his behaviour shows that he comes of a good family. Ramen started living with Haradhan's family and made wooden furniture. Haradhan liked the man and asked him to marry his widowed sister-in-law who along with two daughters was living with him. He agreed and the marriage was performed. Ramen's wife and Haradhan's wife are two sisters. Haradhan is one of the rich men in the village. Haradhan's wife and her sister received a portion of land from their father. The land is suitable for a homestead. So, Ramen

and his wife with the two girls by her previous marriage made a house on this land and started living there. There is also one son and one daughter from this marriage. Thus they got three daughters and one son. One of their daughters left for India after marriage. The two others built houses in the same plot and live there. They are all landless. Ramen's sons-in-law are petty traders. During the Liberation War Ramen sold his homestead to Abed Hazi, the richest man in the area. After independence, they returned from India, where they took shelter during the war, and wanted back the land from Abed Hazi, but Abed Hazi did not agree. The price of land is now very high and this land is on a strategic place. Abed Hazi told them to build a house on their previous land and live there, without paying any rent. Ramen's two daughters built a house on this plot, which now belongs to Hazi and started living there. Ramen's eldest son-in-law now worked in Hazi's flour mill in the village. They had become highly dependent on Abed Hazi. But Ramen built a house on his elder sister-in-law's land where they are still living. Recently Ramen's youngest daughter was able to buy a small plot of land near their present residence. Anil, the eldest son-in-law is the poorest of the lot; he works in Hazi's mill and is altogether Hazi's client. Ramen does not have enough funds to enable him to buy a portion of land to make his residence. He, therefore, continues to live on his elder-sister-in-law's plot of land. They are not economically interdependent. But they have close kinship relationships among

themselves. They take part in all different kinds of socio-religious activities conducted by the families. Haradhan's family is one of the richest and best educated families in Natunpur. They have high status and respect in the society. Ramen's family considers it to be prestigious to be associated with Haradhan's family. Once Ramen's wife told me that her three classificatory sons are well established; one is a doctor, one a teacher and the young one is in the army. In actuality, Haradhan's first son was a doctor who recently died, the second son is a school teacher and Ramen's son works for the army. Ramen's wife always likes to stress the close relationship between the two families. But Haradhan's family is not so eager to do so. In most societies there are individuals or groups who like to emphasise their relationship with stronger parties, thereby wanting to reflect on themselves some of the latter's importance. Kinship plays an important part in this context by showing socio-religious relationships.

In Natunpara there are also three families who though not related by blood or marriage with any other old established families, yet they behave like close relations. Among them, Asgar and Kurani are two small farmers, while Mahiuddin is a middle farmer. As stated earlier, Asgar came to this village with his sister when he was a mere child, worked in Taher's house and was treated as if he were a member of the family. The same thing happened with Kurani, who married and stayed with

Taher's family, later on Taher's father gave a portion of his agricultural land to Kurani. Eventually he built a house of his own and started living separately. Though these two families are not related with Taher's family by blood or marriage, and are not exactly grafted into Taher's gusti, they behave like a gusti. They form a close unit and look after each other's problems. By contrast Mahiuddin was the adopted son of Ismail's father, while economically Ismail's family is now rich and Mahiuddin is a middle farmer. Ismail's family is respected in the village because Ismail is a murubbi of the village and also of Natunpara samaj. As regards education Mahiuddin's family is much more educated. They enjoy high status in the village and in nearby areas. There is considerable social distance between the two families. But they continue their economic relations. Mahiuddin bought agricultural lands with the help of Ismail's father. Ismail still sharecrops Mahiuddin's land. In any kind of agricultural transactions Mahiuddin's family takes help and advice from Ismail. But social status-wise they belong to different groups. As regards their education, marriage, service and in matters like that, each takes its own decisions. Both the families maintain their kin relationship; specially Mahiuddin needs the support of Ismail's family in the village. Otherwise it would have been difficult for Mahiuddin's family to live there with four marriageable girls. The girls behave modestly. Even if they go outside the village for education and jobs, yet they are all respected in the village. Nobody dares criticise them



simply because Ismail's family always supports them strongly.

Thus in Natunpara eight gustis and twenty four individual households developed different kinds of relationships. In some cases economic causes play an important part in maintaining different kinds of relationships, in others, it is the social status which play the most important part.

### 3.4 Beharipara with its Gusti and Individual Households

Beharipara is situated on other side of the road with 33 households. There are four gustis and sixteen individual households in this para. In Beharipara there are 18 per cent Hindus and 82 per cent Muslims of whom 9 per cent rich, 15 per cent middle and 30 per cent are small farmers, while the rest are landless (see Table 6). Thirty six per cent of Beharipara people are first generation settlers, 58 per cent are second generation and the remaining six per cent have been there for more than two generations (see Table 4). Thus it is not an old established para. We have also noticed that the people of Beharipara have taken up different kinds of occupations. They have diversified their economy (see Table 13B). The majority of Beharipara people are new settlers, landless and engaged in diversified economic activities, because it was not easy for the newcomers to get land for cultivation. Among the four gustis, Karim's one is the oldest and the largest. There are altogether nine households in the gusti, which live in six homesteads. Among these nine households,

one is rich, three are middle and two are small farmers while three are landless. Both Karim and Zahir have managed to gain high socio-economic status in the village. Another man, Emaaj, is trying hard to maintain his socio-economic conditions, while Rahman has improved a little. All the other five households are on their downward economic trend. They are the paternal classificatory brothers of the first four, discussed here. They have lost their properties while their father was still alive. They came from agricultural background. Most of them are engaged in agriculture in some way or other. The poorest ones are agricultural labourers specially for their rich and middle farmer gusti households. The poor members cannot meet all the demand for labour of the rich and middle category people of this gusti. They also employ poorer relatives from the next village and also others. Here in this gusti I noticed that the poor are all the time working for their rich counterparts. They get remuneration both in kind and in cash, whichever the employer wants to offer. Thus there developed a patron-client relationship among members of the same gusti. They look after each others well-being as is indicated by the following case.

Once Babar and Nasir, two brothers of the landless category, were engaged in fighting with their next door neighbour. As a result, the neighbour's wife was injured. She was related to Abed Hazi's brother. Abed Hazi is the richest man of the village and at the same time, he is also politically powerful.

Abed Hazi is the partner of Karim in a business venture. A good portions of Abed Hazi's land is cultivated by Karim on a sharecropping basis. These two families have close connections in economic fields. On the other hand, Abed Hazi is an immigrant to Natunpur. He considers his relationship with Karim as an important means of his establishing socio-political power in the village and in the area. Babar's offence was serious; he has beaten his next door neighbour's wife on the forehead with a bamboo stick. As a result there was heavy bleeding from her forehead and medical treatment was necessary. Beating anybody is a crime, but beating a woman of one's mother's age is considered a most severe crime. Abed Hazi's brother came from Rajshahi town and was furious. Abed Hazi and his brother are not on good terms. Abed Hazi used to make so many problems for his brother Azahar, that the later could not live in the village. He sold away his land to others and left Natunpur. Villagers thought that Abed Hazi would also take serious action against Babar and Nasir. Abed Hazi told the villagers that what had happened was very bad. One should take serious action against it. But he tactfully kept himself out of the dispute. When the village salish was called, he did not attend the meeting and sent a message that he was sick, and thus could not attend the meeting. He indicated that he would accept what others would decide. In the meantime, Azahar went to the thana and filed a case. Zahir and Karim wanted the case to be solved in an amicable way between the two parties. But when it failed, Zahir went to the police

station and managed to get the complaint withdrawn by the victim. The victim then noticed that Abed Hazi did not take active part in solving the problem while Zahir and Karim, two influential people in the community took the side of Babar and Nasir. Azahar coming from outside found it difficult to go on pursuing the case against Babar and Nasir. Even the victim and her husband did not like to continue the quarrel against the will of some of the most powerful parties of the village. Then a salish was called, where Babar and Nasir were asked to pay a fine to the woman. They explained that they were too poor to pay the fine. Then they were asked to take a loan from others and pay the fine. Zahir paid off the fine on behalf of Babar and Nasir. As a result, Babar and Nasir will work on Zahir's land free so long as the money for the fine is realised.

This illustrates how as a gusti member Zahir helped Babar and Nasir in emergency. But he did so not without self-interest. Babar and Nasir were thereby bound to work on Zahir's land and became his obedient clients. On the other hand, Abed Hazi found it wise not to take sides with his kin and tried to keep away from the dispute. He is in no way obligated to his kin, rather he is much more obliged to Karim and Zahir, with whom he has economic links.

As stated already the landless and poor members of this gusti do not have to look for work outside their gusti. The poorest of this gusti do not have farming implements, the

wealthier households of the gusti do not always let them have their implements free. They have to pay for hire. The rich give mortgages on land to their kin as well as to others who are not relatives but live in the village or nearby. Kinsmen do not appear to favour giving economic support to their gusti members. Rather they try to maintain economic relationships with as many villagers as possible on a reciprocal basis. Zahir helped Babar because he secured ready labour and other support from him; on the other hand, Abed Hazi did not help his relation because, he is not obliged to him in any matter. On the other hand, even Zahir does not give his plough and bullocks to Aynal for cultivation free of cost. In this gusti members developed economic relationships with other people of this village and/or nearby settlements.

However, kinship plays an important role in the context of socio-religious matters among gusti members. No marriage is held between the members of the same gusti not even a marriage is held between the boys or girls of Karim's gusti and other villagers. Most of the marriages represent links with neighbouring villages. It seems villager want to extend kinship relationship outside the village. All the marriages of the parties concerned, the consent of the bride-groom and the bride has to be taken, but only formally. If the guardians agree, no boy or girl ever say no. This gusti does not have any close affinal kin in the para or in the village itself. At the time of marriage, no dowry is asked by the members of this gusti nor

do they give any dowry. Zahir told me that in this area everybody knows them, there is no question of getting or giving dowry. Yet it is a convention in their family that when giving daughters in marriage, they present to the bridegroom a watch, and a bi-cycle and three pieces of gold ornaments to the girl. At the time of Karim's and Rahman's daughter's marriage, the parents did not give the presents alone by themselves, but rather jointly as members of the gusti, i.e., one parental uncle of the girl gave the cycle, another gave the watch, while someone else gave a radio and the parents gave the ornaments. Often in case of socio-religious matters they unite in taking decisions. When unexpected problems arise the people of the gusti help each other. Some of Zahir's relations live in a nearby village. Once while I was in the village, a fire broke out there and their house was burnt down; a small child sleeping in the house died; no body could save him. At that time Karim's gusti people took the initiative and collected money, rice, bamboos and many other necessaries to the family in distress. In such difficulties gusti people take initiative to help the sufferers. Both Karim and Zahir are considered as leaders in the village, and as murubbi to most of the people of their samaj. A small proportion of this gusti is engaged in service. All the small farmers and landless live at a subsistence level. Zahir's profile (see Chap. 2) shows how he managed to improve his economic condition. This has clearly illustrated the different kinds of economic relationships that have developed between Zahir and other kinds of people. From the analysis of economic relations it is found that kinship

is less important in economic relations than it is in socio-religious matters. The murubbis of the gusti are always conscious to safeguard gusti members' socio-religious status.

Rahim's is another gusti in Beharipara. Father and two of his sons form three households and one homestead. As they have divided their property, each is a small farmer. One son is engaged in service. Another son works in agriculture as well as also seasonal service in the local sugar mill. None of them is able to improve their economic conditions. Rahim is a first generation immigrant having been settled there less than fifty years ago. Rahim's son married Badar's daughter from Natunpara. They thus have developed affinal relationships in the village. They also have close connections with Lutfar's family, as family friend Lutfar is in turn closely linked with Karim's gusti. He stayed with Karim's brother's family and worked for him, he received a small plot of land from them and started his family in Beharipara. Lutfar is, therefore, obliged to Karim's gusti and he is a member of Karim's samaj. Rahim also belongs to Karim's samaj. None of the members of this gusti is a leader or murubbi in the para or village. Though only recently settled there, this has already been formed a gusti because of the three sons. There is now a good possibility of their becoming important persons in the para or in the village before too long.

There are also two Hindu gusti in Beharipara. Ramesh's gusti's three families live in one homestead. They are three

brothers. All are loosing out economically. Among them one is a middle and two are small farmers. The two small farmers are engaged in petty business. Ramesh is the Union Council member. He works as Dalil lekhak (deed copyist). He has given his land on sharecropping to Zahir. He mortgages his land to Zahir whenever necessary. He thereby developed economic connections with Zahir and also Karim. They liked to be linked with Karim's gusti because it can give them support when they need help. The lands of the other two brothers were also mortgaged to Zahir and Hazi, which they eventually had to sell. Recently, Ramesh has sold a portion of his land to Gopal, his next door Hindu neighbour. Previously Ramesh's father had good relationships with Khodabox of Satbhagi. His name was Khudiram. Khudiram and Khodabox were bandhu (friends). Khudiram sold a good portion of land to them. That block is still named as Khudiram's Daq, meaning the plot of land belonging to Khudiram. After Khudiram's death, even now Faruk, the man who is improving his economic conditions still keeping on good terms with Ramesh's family. His brother's brother-in-law Paresh, lost lands in his own village and moved to Beharipara. He built a small house by the side of Gopal's house. He is also doing petty business. They do not have affinal or other kinds of kinship relations with others in the village. Ramesh is a member of the Union Council no doubt, but he is not that powerful. As a neutral person, he was elected. He always used to do what the village matbars (leaders) want him to do. Once he called a meeting in the village directed by the



high authority of his office to discuss forming a Gram Sarker (village government) in line with the programme of the previous Sarker (Government). But villagers did not turn up. Ramesh then told the village matbars about the matter and asked them to call a meeting in the village. The matbars themselves were present in the meeting, and a good number of villagers attended the meeting and a committee of the Gram Sarker was formed. Thus it is seen that though Ramesh is the Union Council member, he does not hold much power in Natunpur. The situation may be different in other villages. (Recently Ramesh died from sudden heart attack). They have friendly relations with their Hindu neighbours as well as with the three Hindu households of Natunpara, which are situated on the other side of the road. They are the old settlers of the village. Their father was a rich businessman in this area. But within three generations they have lost most of their property and business. Their relations left for India after partition in the year 1947. Thus they have also lost much of their moral support. Whenever there is any political crisis in the country, they feel insecure and want to leave the country. However, they do not have any property or anything to support them in India, and they remain in Natunpur. They feel insecure when their girls grow up. It is difficult to find marriages within their own community and caste. They are afraid that their daughter will marry Muslim boys, which would be a disgrace to their community.

Haradhan's is the other Hindu gusti of Beharipara. This is one of the oldest gusti in the village. They are the rich and influential people of the village. There are two families and one homestead where gusti members live. Among them one is rich and the other is a middle farmer. Both of them are complex households. They have agricultural backgrounds, though their forefathers first settled here with the intention of doing business. Recently they gave up their grocer's shop. One of the sons was a doctor and they run a medical store. Recently the doctor died and his two sons are looking after the medical store. They gave most of their lands to sharecroppers; their lands are in the village from where they have shifted to Natunpur. Their sharecroppers are not related to them. Both the families have bought more lands, some of which they cultivate under their own supervision, employing labourers. They again get the person who mortgaged his land to sharecrop it. They have developed close economic relations with neighbouring people within Natunpur and also in other villages. Gusti members discuss each other's problems and are on good terms with each other. The doctor was always sociable and helpful to villagers. He was a singer as well and used to sing over Rajshahi Radio. At the time of his death I was in the village. In the mourning period I stayed with his family for a few days. Women and children of the household liked my presence there at that time. ~~Menfolk of the household liked my presence there at that time.~~ Menfolk of the household requested me to stay with them because I could console them and ask them to take their food etc. I also felt obliged to the family

because it was this doctor who encouraged me to conduct study in the village. He gave me shelter in his house and helped me to get acquainted with the villagers. He used to inquire about my food and any other problems I faced in the village. His sister used to accompany me while I visited the homes in the village. This family enjoys high social status in the village and in the surrounding areas. Under their protection I felt secure while doing my field work in the village.

Besides the four gustis there are also sixteen individual households in Beharipara. Among these sixteen households, four, have been staying there for more than fifty years, while the rest have been living in Beharipara less than fifty years. Abed Hazi, though he has not yet formed a gusti, the seven households around his house are related to his family. They help each other whenever asked to do so. They all originate from the same place, and all of them have been related to each other even before coming to Natunpur. Abed Hazi's father was the first settler among them. They form a small community in the para itself. One household in Satbhagipara and another household in Natunpara are related to them by marriage. Otherwise they do not have any more blood ties or affinal relationships with any other person in the para or in Natunpur altogether. As stated earlier Abed Hazi developed economic and social relationship with many other people of Beharipara and also of Natunpara. Abed Hazi is the leader of the group. Among these eight households only Abed Hazi's one is

rich, two are small farmers and all the rest are landless. As most of them are recent immigrants they are not able to purchase lands in the village. None of them have agricultural backgrounds, their ancestors used to be petty traders. Thus they are also engaged in petty business. None of them is pleased with Abed Hazi, because he has improved his own economic conditions while refusing to give his relations lands in sharecropping. I heard his family members saying that it is better to help others than your own relatives, because they (others) work harder. Whereas relations work only casually while wanting more benefits. However, most of his relatives are engaged in petty business. It is more efficient to employ in agriculture those who are familiar with agricultural works. We have seen already how Abed Hazi gives his lands in sharecropping to different people of Natunpur and nearby villages, particularly those who are old established settlers or those who are somehow or other powerful in the society. Thus his strategy is to establish good relationships with other powerful people of the local society, disregarding kinship connections.

Among the other five individual households, only one has been staying in Beharipara for more than fifty years. The household head is an old man; they are not much involved in the socio-economic life of the village. They are doing petty business and are living from day to day. Their strategy is to survive in the society. Two are service holders, working in the Family

### 3.5 Satbhagipara with its Gusti Households

All the people of this para belong to the Satbhagi gusti. As stated earlier it is one of the oldest gustis in the village. There are altogether 14 households in the para. Satbhagi gusti consists of sixteen households; two of these households have recently settled in Natunpara. Like many others, long ago, Hazi Khusi Pramanik came here from the nearby village. He got seven sons, each of whom formed a separate household. They are the seven bhagis (sharers) after whom the gusti is called Satbhagi. At first all these households belong to Natunpara. But recently their residential area has come to be called Satbhagipara. Among these fourteen households, four are complex; and it is likely that soon these households will split up into more households.

This para is situated on the north-west side of Natunpur. On the north-west side there are paddy and sugarcane fields, on the eastern side of the para lives Ismail, one of the rich farmers of Natunpur. Paramanik's house is located on the southern side. In Paramanik's homestead, there are already six households. On the south-east corner there are the houses of Akbar's gusti. Then comes Kalimuddin's gusti household. Thus all the old established households are situated in and around Satbhagipara. No new immigrants are living in and around the para. Thus there exists long established relationships among neighbours.

All these 14 households form three homesteads. Among them one is a middle farmer, three are landless and the rest are small

farmers. Only one of the 14 households is a second generation settler, while the rest have lived there for more than two generations (see Table 4). Among them only 14 per cent have improved their economic conditions, seven per cent have maintained economic stability, while 79 per cent are going downwards economically. They are the oldest traditional agricultural group in the village. All of them came from agricultural backgrounds. Table 13(c) shows the occupational pattern of the population of Satbhagipara. They are engaged in agriculture and some are also petty traders of agricultural products. Only two small farmers have ploughs and bullocks; they are the two who have improved their economic conditions. One middle farmer also has farming implements. All the others are found on a downward economic trend. Previously when anybody in the gusti wanted to sell property, a solvent gusti member bought it. Now only Faruk and Nader, the two households, moving upwards economically are in a position to buy land; otherwise none of them have the funds to do so. All except two i.e., eight small farmer households mortgaged their lands. Only Nader received a portion of Eman's land in mortgage, all the others mortgaged their lands to their neighbours. They are not blood relatives but developed close fictive ties. Gradually, they may lose the lands, they have mortgaged. There is every likelihood of their becoming landless in the near future. They generally exchange labour among themselves. They also engage agricultural labourers on a neei basis from among members of their gusti. They supply

labour to the neighbouring rich, middle and small farmers throughout the year. Thus there exists closely-knit inter-relationships among themselves. Recently some of the young men of this gusti together with other young men of the village are doing jobs in other areas on a contract basis. The jobs are of different types, such as agricultural work, earth cutting for roads, construction works, making mollasses from sugarcane etc. These are some of economic trends found in the village.

As regards socio-religious functions, they belong to the Natunpara samaj. Previously Satbhagipara was a part of Natunpara. Now as it developed into a separate para, and all its members are members of the same gusti, they also have their own socio-religious grouping; it is like a little samaj within the larger samaj of Natunpara, which is again a part of the village samaj. As a Satbhagi gusti they share common identity and sentiment; when an outsider says or does anything against them, they form an united front. But among themselves they are always divided. They are known for their quarrelsome nature. Children beating each other, the spoiling of seedlings by goats etc. are some of the factors giving rise to conflicts within the gusti. By contrast on the question of prestige they all unite together. Once, while I was in the village, a girl of the Satbhagi gusti was insulted by a labourer of Paramanik's house. When the gusti came to know the matter, they all united together and wanted to punish the person. Paramanik's gusti heard about it and gave the man money asking to leave the village immediately. They

even helped him to leave the village. The man left and the problem was solved in this way. At that time I heard Satbhagi gusti saying that how daring the man must have been that he dared insult a Satbhagi girl. They were determined to resist such insults. When united they are the biggest group in the village. Thus it is found that in case of a woman's lijat (honour) they can be stricter than others. Women are to be protected by the men of the community. One deserted Satbhagi girl used to help me in my domestic work when I lived in Natunpur. For that also she has to take the permission of her parents, and also of the family of Natunpara, whom they consider as their murubbi. In case of men taking jobs, no body is expected to ask anybody else's permission.

All the Satbhagipara residents are Muslims. There is a mosque in the para. The mosque was made by Khusi Paramanik, the forefather of the gusti. It is the oldest mosque in the village. Recently Abed Hazi has made a new mosque in the village. Before that everybody used to say their prayer in the Satbhagipara mosque. Now the mosque is maintained by the Natunpara samaj. Prominent people of the Satbhagi gusti are included in the committee for the mosque. There are no problems regarding this. Marriage and things like that are held in the gusti where the consent of the gusti leaders and murubbis of the Natunpara households specially the neighbouring households and patron households are taken into consideration. I have not seen marriage being held between the boys and girls within this gusti.



According to them marriage within the gusti means more tentions. There developed quite a few marital relationships between the Satbhagi gusti and recent migrants into the village. Hazi's sister's daughter was married to a Satbhagi man. Two girls of Satbhagi gusti married two sons of Fakir, a middle farmer, who has been staying in Natunpur for more than fifty years, but has not yet formed a gusti. Another girl of this gusti married a recent migrant who is staying there less than fifty years. Most of the marriages occurred within a 10 to 15 miles radius of the village. Marriage links within the village extend the gusti relationships with other families. Through these marriages Satbhagi girls are placed in a better economic position and at the same time get more security as their relations are within the same village. The boys from new migrants' families manage thereby develop relationships with old established villagers. It helps outsiders to become the accepted members of the village community and also the village samaj.

Faruk, a Satbhagi school teacher is one of few local men who has improved his economic condition considerably. He has farming implements and bullock-cart. He kept land mortgage from a person from a nearby village. He managed to buy some lands as well. He even bought a portion of land by the side of the main road. He told me that he would shift to the place near the road side. He feels that if he stays in his present house in this environment, he will not be able to educate his children properly. Because no body there bothers about education.

He is becoming more status conscious day by day. He has connections with the murubbis of the village, but he has not yet become a first category murubbi or leader of the village. But he is respected within their community because he is educated and has connections with the officers and renowned people of the village and also outside the village. Satbhagi-para and Satbhagi gusti though are mainly known for their agricultural labour supply, the households are too poor to offer hospitality to any outsider; they therefore, put most of their emphasis on intra-gusti links, while working for other households.

From the analysis of the situation in the three Natunpur paras, it emerges that among kin groups economic relationships are not that strong. That is to say that the rich kin group members are not always bound to take their poor kins as agricultural labourers, and at the same time poor kin are free to take jobs from any person in and around the village. We do not find any preference by the rich for employing poorer kin men. Wage labour is taking the place of the neej and also the exchange systems. From Tables 13A,B,C, it is evident that more and more people are engaged in cash earnings. Thus the economic bond previously binding together kingroups are losing in importance. In the whole village, only one girl is married within their own gusti. Even marriage within the kingroups is also rare.<sup>1</sup> Most

<sup>1</sup>Note- though cousin marriage is permitted among Muslims, it is rare in Natunpur. It seems villagers want to extend kinship relation outside their kingroup and also of the village. According to them marriage within kingroup increases tensions among themselves, because people get into each others problems more easily which often lead to unpleasantness.

of the marriages are arranged between families living within 10 to 15 miles radius of Natunpur. Only in the context of socio-religious matters is kinship still important. In negotiating marriages, in arranging a marriage feast, in death ceremonies of a villager, kin as well as other villagers take an active part. Kin participate fully in their relatives' socio-religious problems.

### 3.6 The Role of Samaj in Natunpur

In the analysis of the village social organisation, I have already mentioned that Natunpur village consists of four samaj, 12 gusti and 40 individual households (Diagram- 1). In the beginning of this chapter, I have discussed the para-wise distribution of the gusti and individual households. All the three samaj, are named after the prominent and influential man in the samaj. The villagers use these names while expressing their membership in the samaj. Only one samaj is named after the name of the para, i.e., Natunpara samaj. This is the largest samaj in the village. Of the 110 households in Natunpur four in Natunpara and two gusti consisting of five households as well as five other households in Beharipara do not belong to any particular samaj in the village. Altogether 14 households do not belong to any samaj in Natunpur. Of these 14 households, nine are Hindus who belong to two castes. They have their own caste people in different villages, who they contact in case of any religious and other ceremonies. Three households are engaged

in service, and are not considered as members of any samaj. The other two are Muslim households, one who has been staying there more than fifty years and is engaged in petty business and has remained outside the samaj. The other one is a new migrant, who does not consider himself as a member of any para-based or other samaj. All the boys and girls in this household are highly educated, they have their own way of life. Of course, though they do not all belong to the larger village samaj.

In Natunpara there are two samaj, i.e., Natunpara samaj and Akbar's samaj. In Natunpara samaj there are seven gusti consisting of 45 households, as well as 19 individual households. All these 64 households belong to Natunpara samaj. Of the seven gusti, only one has been staying there for less than 50 years. Among the 19 individual households eight are old established and the remaining 11 are new settlers. Among these 11 households only one is a middle farmer, five are small farmers and five are landless. Among the eight individual old established households, one is rich, three are middle and two small farmers while two are landless. These small and landless old established households were previously better off, but are now on a downward economic trend. As stated earlier some of the new settlers have developed affiliation with old established households, they cannot be members of that gusti, but developed close fictive kin-relationships. Thus they become members of the samaj, where there fictive kin live or of the residential area where they live.

Generally different gustis and non-gusti individual households become members of the residential area where they live. It is found that in Natunpara samaj the households live in the same area. Kalimuddin is the head of the gusti called Kalimuddin's gusti. He is the old man in the community; he is honest and is involved in different kinds of organisations in the village. He is the first category murubbi and leader in the samaj as well as in the village and also in the larger samaj as well. Berek is a small farmer, his father was the village head, therefore, since his father's death he is considered as paramanik or leader in the samaj and also of the village and the large samaj as well. He is also honest and has good connections with the villagers and also with other officials at the thana and union levels, but he is not regarded as murubbi, he considers Kalimuddin as his murubbi. Ismail is also regarded as murubbi and leader in the village. Khodabox the oldest man of Satbhagi gusti and mullah, the old man of mullah gusti are considered as murubbi in the Natunpara samaj, yet they are regarded only as second category leaders in the village samaj, and are not considered as leaders in the larger samaj. Faruk, a teacher of the Satbhagi gusti is also considered a second category leader in the Natunpara samaj. The important role the samaj leaders play in Natunpara samaj is that during the Ramadhan month they collect the fetra money. Every year government decides the amount each has to pay as fetra. In Natunpara, Muslim households pay the money to the committee of the samaj. The samaj then decides how to divide the money among the poor

people of their samaj. Some of the money is paid to the Imam (priest) of the mosque and also to other very poor people of different villages. The committee decides whom to give how much money and keeps an account of it. They also buy cloth and distribute it to the poorest people of the village. At the marriage of any girl in the samaj the bridegroom has to pay an amount of money to the committee of the samaj. This money is used for the well-being of the poor people of the samaj and also for the general well-being of the samaj as such. If there is any small disputes among samaj members, then the samaj leaders arbitrate the dispute. Often if the accused party is fined, the money thus earned is kept with the samaj leaders. If the fine is for any misconduct then it is not used for the management and repairing of the mosque, but is given to the poor for helping with a daughter's marriage for instance. Those people who do not pray regularly are not regarded as good Muslims, their fetra money is not accepted by samaj leaders. They are often fined. It is a shame to a person if his fetra money is refused by the committee. Their decision is respected by the samaj members, if the accused person does not respect the decision of the village samaj then the villagers boycott the accused person.

While I was in the village in the year 1978 Sattar in Paramanik's gusti was ostracised (ek ghore kora) by the villagers, in line with the decision of the Natunpara samaj, Sattar, had asked the samaj leaders to settle the dispute among brothers

regarding the partition of their paternal property. Samaj leaders asked for a meeting, (bicar sava). But Sattar ignored the decision of the samaj leaders. For this the leaders of the samaj decided to ostracise Sattar. Accordingly villagers refused to work on his land or in his house. Sattar's family could not come out of their house as it was surrounded by their qusti households and other people of the village. Nobody in the village allowed them to pass through their land or road. They could not get drinking water as it was in their next door neighbour's residence. When this was the situation, Sattar came to the samaj leaders and asked for the meeting again and promised that he will abide by the decision given by the committee. They had to pay a nominal fine to the committee and the restrictions were removed. (see pp.140-43). Thus the samaj decision was respected by Sattar. As stated earlier the village leader and murubbi's son was convicted once for alcoholic drinking and was fined heavily. He had to pay the fine and his father asked him to live separately. But there are cases of violations to the samaj decisions. Abed Hazi was not satisfied with the samaj verdict and started a new samaj (see p. 188 ). Rich and influentials of the samaj often exploit the mass through motivated actions guided by their own interests e.g., the dispute between Babar and Rahimuddin (pp.160-62), and the case of the settlement of a murder case through illegal gratification to the police (see pp.190-91).

Most of the households of Natunpara are old established and have agricultural backgrounds. Rich, middle and small farmers and landless people are living closeby for a long time and have long established socio-economic relations, even the new comers soon developed close socio-economic and religious relationships among themselves. Very recently the young people complain that they do not like the samaj leaders because they are not progressive. In response the old and established samaj leaders say that the young generation do not respect the society's norms and values, they drink and gamble and do not want to work for the family. They declare that after their death there will be a problem to find suitable samaj leaders in the village.

Akbar's samaj is also in Natunpara. Eight households of Akbar's gusti and one of their kin, a new settler are member of Akbar's samaj. This samaj cut across the village boundary, i.e., some of Akbar's relations from the neighbouring village are members of his samaj. They give the fetra money to their poor relations directly. In arranging a marriage all resident kin are consulted. In all matters concerning the Natunpara samaj, Akbar is considered as murubbi and a powerful and respected leaders. Barek and Kalimuddin, the first category leaders of the Natunpara samaj attach much importance to his views. He participates actively in all aspects of the Natunpara samaj. Akbar is a first category leader in Natunpara samaj,



in the village samaj and also in the greater samaj. Akbar's gusti is widely respected in the village. They are educated, i.e., majority of them are educated. Even the girls are also being educated. The girls observe purdah. They do not move around the village in day time. If they have to pay a social call to any house, they visit it at night time. They always do with an escort; do not quarrel loudly and only work within their household compound. None of the Akbar's gusti members ever asked the samaj to settle any dispute regarding their own family problems.

The para-based samaj is mainly concerned with the different aspects of personal relationships (see pp.185-87). On 15th of June 1978 there was a meeting in Natunpara. Natunpara samaj leaders and Akbar also attended the meeting. The other Natunpara villagers also attended the meeting. It was held at night in the varanda of Boyen Mullah. Generally Natunpara samaj problems are talked out in such a meeting. It is generally held on the Mullah's varanda. There is no house in Natunpara where there is a place for all villagers to sit together. Most of the houses are close to each other and there is a boundary fencing, there is no banqlaghar i.e., baithak-khana or drawing or visitor's room in any of the Natunpara houses. In this context Jahangir states that in village society for a man to get izzat (honour) he has to try to fulfil the following four factors, i.e., "(1) whether he can provide his family with food (khawa-pora), (2) whether he can maintain the privacy of women (purdah),

(3) whether he has a separate room to entertain guests (kachari-ghar), (4) whether his womenfolk bathe in others ponds or not" (1979:86). According to Jahangir all these factors are important in determining ones and also ones family's status. In Natunpur I do not find even the richest man having separate entertainment rooms kacharibari or baithak khana. That is why villagers sit in the Mullah's varanda for any kind of discussion.

There is an agricultural club in the middle of the village. There are chairs and tables and space for holding meetings. Only formal or official meetings are held in the club room. Otherwise all village samaj or larger samaj meetings or salish take place in the village in Mullah's varanda, Paramanik's varanda and in places like that. The meetings are held at night, because this is the free time for all. The agenda of the samaj meeting of June 1978 was the following: measures should be taken so that the crops in the field should not be spoiled by goats, cows etc. Most of the Natunpara and Satbhagipara residents attended the meeting. Because they all live in the same adjacent area and their problems are the same. The following resolutions were taken in the meeting:

- 1) From tomorrow, those who have goats cannot take them to the fields where there are crops. If a goat does any harm to crops then the owner has to pay taka ten per goat to the heads of the samaj and has to take a receipt for paying the fine from the person to whom he paid it.

- 2) In case of a cow, the fine will be taka 20 per cow. After submitting the fine to the samaj leader, one has to take a receipt from him.
- 3) If any one cut the crops from any other's field for fodder, then one will have to pay a fine of Taka 10 (minimum) to the head and get a receipt (amount of taka as fine is determined on the report of the enquiry committee).
- 4) In case of buffalow, the fine will be Taka 20 per buffalow. The same process regarding the fine is applicable here.
- 5) An enquiry committee is formed with five people from Natunpara samaj i.e., Kalimuddin, Barek, Ismail, Ansar and Badar and with Akbar. All are from old established households. Among them Akbar, Kalimuddin, and Barek are first category leaders in Natunpara, among the other three one is from Satbhagi gusti and another two are a second category leaders.

If the convicted person do not follow the leader's decision, then the plaintiff can easily go to the Union Council or the court for judgement. All the members present in the meeting agreed to this consent. Twenty-eight persons present at the meeting, among them 23 signed and the other five put their thumb impression on the resolution of the meeting.

The above resolution showed what important role samaj plays in the well-being and control of the society. Other examples of samaj decisions show similar features.

<u>Offence</u>	<u>Fine</u>
Stealing of a goat	Tk. 100
Stealing of paddy from the house by the son	Tk. 100
Stealing of bananas from the tree	Tk. 25
Gambling in the sugarcane field	Tk. 100
Stealing lentils from a house	Tk. 100
Quarrel between wives of neighbours	Tk. 50 for gave Tk. 20
Buying things from a thief	Tk. 50
Stealing date juice from neighbours	Ostracized for two days, then on request to the <u>samaj</u> leaders to perdon to be fined Tk. 5.
A woman stole her neighbour's ornaments	The <u>samaj</u> decided that her husband should beat her with shoes twenty five times*
A man entered his neighbour's room where the man's wife was sleeping, and assaulted her	The culprit first fled then afterwards surrendered and was fined Taka 200 and got beaten fifty times.

(\*Beating by shoes is regarded as very humiliating and disgraceful).

Money thus obtained by the samaj is used for helping the poor, if a house is burnt down then the victims are helped from the samaj fund. They do not use this money for the maintenance of the mosque.

In Beharipara there are two samaj: Abed Hazi's and Karim's. In Hazi's samaj, there are eight individual non-qusti households. Previously they were with the Natunpara samaj. Then Hazi was charged for misconduct, and he was fined. He was greatly offended and decided to form a new samaj. He did not pay the fine to the samaj leaders, instead he used the money to cement the surroundings of the big pond. Samaj leaders agree to this. He is the richest man in the village, which no doubt helped him to get his proposal accepted. Once the place was cemented the area will be used by all the villagers. Thus the dispute was settled and Hazi formed a new samaj. He also built a new mosque on the south-western side of the pond. Eight households including Hazi's house form his samaj. All the other seven households live in the neighbourhood of Abed Hazi. All of them are related. Half of Hazi's samaj households have been living there for more than fifty years. Among this group of eight, only Hazi is rich and two are small farmers. The rest are all living there less than fifty years. It is interesting to note, all these seven households got direct help from Abed Hazi when they first settled in Natunpur. They lived on Hazi's land first. But none of them got any economic help from Hazi, they do not get any land for sharecropping from him or things like that. None of them is wholly dependent on agriculture, they are engaged in petty business, peddling etc., they do not even have an agricultural tradition. In Hazi's samaj the affiliation of the members to it is not that strong. This samaj

members suspect that Abed Hazi is not really sincere. They told me openly that he only looks after his own interest, and makes friends only with the rich. None of his economic clients are from his own samaj. The case referred to before (pp. 160-62) shows how Abed Hazi is avoiding to help his kin and samaj members. They collect the fetra money and distribute it among their poor relatives. Hazi's samaj does not play an important part in Natunpur. Yet Abed Hazi is extremely powerful in the village and also in the larger society. Abed Hazi's strategy is to gain wealth and power and respect in the village and around. He seeks out relationships that will promote his aims.

Things are different in Karim's samaj. Two gustis and three individual non-gusti households of Natunpur belong to this samaj. Some of their poor kin living in adjacent villages are also members of Karim's gusti. The villagers belonging to this samaj are not all related. In Karim's gusti there are nine households and in Rahim's there are three households. The three individual households are not related. Actually they settled there initially with Karim's gusti's help. Even now they get help and support from them all the time. All the people in this samaj have purely agricultural background. There exists both an economic and a socio-religious relationship among them. When Idris's house caught fire, Karim's samaj members gave maximum help. Of course, at that time all the villagers also helped but Karim's samaj took the initiative. Even their kin

from neighbouring villages come and work for them. They also collect their fetra and distribute the money among the poor.

The village samaj on the other hand, is not concerned with collecting fetra money. They are concerned with the social control in the village. Leaders from all the four samaj and other influential persons sit together and decide disputes. Money collected as fine from accused person is kept in common fund, generally in the Agricultural Club of Natunpur. They also judge criminal offences. A young boy of Akbar's custi, the son of Ali, a middle farmer was found dead near a pond in the village. He had disputes with his uncles family and their sons. So the villagers thought that they murdered him. But his custi people did not want to go ahead with investigation and did not take the case in the thana authorities. The Union Council Chairman came and also told them to bury the deadbody, otherwise if they took the case to the thana, the dead body will be cut into pieces for investigation. In any case Ali will not get back his son. So what was the utility of going to the thana, they buried the dead body. His other kin did not like that the matter to be further discussed in the village. The village is generally considered as an area having less of crime and for that the Union Council Chairman is credited, because he is able to control the villages effectively. In the year 1980, the Chairman was praised publicly at National level as one of the best Chairman in Bangladesh and was awarded a gold medal. Any way a few days after the body was found, somehow the matter came to the notice of the thana authorities. They came to the village and wanted to investigate

the matter to which the samaj and village leaders objected. Ali, the father of the dead boy told the police that he does not suspect any body nor does he have a complaint against anybody; he does not like to have the issue arised in the court. Akanda, the father of Ali came from his village to help find a solution to the problem. Then Akanda and his three sons, together gave money to the police for not proceeding with the case. Thus this criminal case was dismissed in the village. The pressure from gusti and samaj played an important part in the settlement. This case also shows that social status concerns outweigh the need to punish killers. Village leaders were of course, also important in the way the case was handled; they supported the attempts to settle this matter out of court, otherwise it would have been difficult to settle it the way it was done. Thus the rich and influentials of the samaj settle things in favour of them.

The larger village samaj consists of the leaders of the villages situated in the same area. There is no hard and fast rule as to who could be the member of this samaj. The dispute discussed before regarding the partition of property in Paramanik's gusti shows how it works and the role of the larger samaj. A case of arrears in payments should further help to illustrate how the larger samaj operates. On March 1980, Kohinoor Mullah of Banpara village (within five miles radius of Natunpur) complained to the leaders of Natunpur to arrange a Dichar sava and help him to collect the money due to him from



Abul Miah of Natunpur. In what follows I reproduce the application for bichar sava and the resolution taken by the village leaders.

Application for Bichar Sava

Respected leaders of Natunpur village

Sir,

Plaintiff

Kohinoor Mullah  
Banpara, Rajshahi

Defendent

- 1) Abul Miah  
S/o. Khaeruddin
- 2) Khaeruddin  
S/o Late Elahibox  
Natunpur, Rajshahi

With due respect I would like to state that I am a resident of Banpara request you to realise Taka 2,503.00 from Abul Miah and Khaeruddin of Natunpur village. They have owed me this money for more than two years. Every time I ask for the money they give me dates but could never keep their words.

In the aforesaid circumstances, I request you to kindly make an arrangements so that I can get back my money.

Yours faithfully,

( Kohinoor Mullah )  
Vill. Banpara

Resolution taken in the Bichar Sava on 21 March 1980

Plaintiff

Kohinoor Mullah  
S/o. Md. Salamuddin  
Banpara, Rajshahi

Defendant

- 1) Abul Hussain  
S/o Khaeruddin
- 2) Khaeruddin  
S/o Late Elahibox  
Natunpur, Rajshahi

We, the undersigned are the defendants, the complaint is true. As our economic condition is very bad now, we asked the plaintiff to forgo the claim of Taka 1,503/-. He agreed. We are grateful to him. Now we appear to the Bichar Sava that we will pay off the rest 1,000/- in instalment, i.e., 84/- taka a month of which 42/- taka in two weeks. If we do not pay off the money every fortnightly, the plaintiff is free to take any action and he can go to court as well. The defendants are,

- 1) Abdul Hussain (Signature)
- 2) Khaeruddin (Thumb Impression)

Witness are:

- 1) Wazed, 2) Maejuddin, 3) Azizul Haque, 4) Akbar,
- 5) Kalimuddin, 6) Barek, 7) Karim. Among these seven witnesses first three are from different villages and the last four from Natunpur village.

This is how the different types of samaj play their role in controlling the behaviour of its members. There are households in the village who are not members of any of the para-based samaj in Natunpur. But no doubt they are members of the village samaj.

In this chapter I have discussed in detail of Natunpur's social organisation and how the criss-crossing links of gusti, samaj, para and village membership all help to ensure the perpetuation of socially acceptable behaviour. The cases presented here indicate that landless households, as well as those who pursue petty trading as a secondary source of income depend less on kinship ties in their economic activities than do those households who are full time agriculturists. Petty traders have to have more links with people outside their narrow social confines and are, therefore, more village-extroverted than are their farming counterparts who remain village-introverted (see Epstein, 1972:48). The extension and strengthening of economic links reaching outside Natunpur is likely to trigger off changes in the village society. The group of young men who do contract work in the region and who object to the conservatism of their elders represent an example of things to come. For the time being, however, the gusti as a kinship centred social grouping is likely to provide the model for social relationships among Natunpur villagers. The strength of a gusti depends on its size and the economic status

of its members, which indicates a paradox in village development. For a gusti to grow in numbers its member households need to have many sons, while on the other hand, many siblings bring about the continuous sub-division of land and the consequent deterioration in economic status. Therefore, the gusti as a social institution is under present conditions saddled with an inherent conflict, and the samaj as a means of social control is thus likely to lose its importance due to the change in socio-economic condition. Yet, kinship will maintain its central position in village life, particularly in the context of women's roles and status. The next chapter focusses on the women of Natunpur and how they fit into this male-dominated social structure.

## CHAPTER 4

### ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN NATUNPUR

#### 4.1 Women as Symbol of Household Honour

The social values regarding the status of women within and outside the family are more or less uniform among most of the categories of people all over the sub-continent. It is generally held that a woman has to be protected by male members of her family at every stage of her life: during her childhood, she has to be looked after by her father, after marriage, by her husband and in her old age by her son. The family, which can protect and maintain its female members with honour, is still seen as an ideal family. Women themselves also have to comply with this tradition. "... the central virtues for women involved patience, humility and self-sacrifice. Muslim and Hindu culture also shared a preoccupation with the chastity of women because the reputation of the entire family depended on the purity of its women." (Altekar, 1962:167-172 also quoted in Gelle & Smock, p. 83). Yalman in his study of the Women of Ceylon and Malabar also found the same type of value system prevailing there regarding the position of women. The protection of female purity is the fundamental concept in these societies. Sinhalese always used to say, "it does not matter where a man goes; he may sleep with anyone, but the women must be protected. Men, in other words, can have sexual commerce with women high or low, but women's pleasures are curtailed." (Yalman 1963:41).

The dual morality is even more extreme in Bangladesh. "Men may have extra-marital sex; prostitution is condemned but tolerated. A girl having premarital sex is highly condemned. Her parents are also condemned and often boycotted. If one party is coerced into pre or extra-marital sex, every body tries to keep it a secret." (Nath, 1981:20). During the 1971 war of liberation in Bangladesh, "Women who were in army camps were not acceptable because the fact of their violation was known by the samaj, but in many cases women whose violations were not publicised were accepted back by their husbands after performing secret abortions. If a woman is raped and it can be kept secret from her social circle, she is acceptable. The family is more concerned with a loss of face than with their daughter's physical and mental health." (Jahan, 1974:29).

Thus, the position of a woman in her family is extremely vulnerable. Women have to be womanly: their socialisation differs from boys. They are taught to be good sisters, obedient wives, loving mothers and to be always polite and gentle in their nature. They are taught to sacrifice their personal happiness for the well-being of other members of the family. Throughout her life time, a woman is expected to look after the well-being of the male members of her family. At the same time she has to live in seclusion. She must not come in front of any man who is not closely related. There exists an avoidance relationship among different members of the family. In both Hindu and Muslim communities women have to observe pardah. Purdah exists in different

forms and also in different styles, it's strictness often differs in degree among different people in the same community. Even in the same family, the observances of pardah differ among various female members.

Pardah has two aspects, physical and behavioural. As regards the physical aspect a woman has to cover herself up adequately before others. Borkha is a type of loose garment which covers her body from head to feet. With some of the borkhas, the portion which covers the face is a separate piece of cloth, which can be tugged into the rest; as a result, the face of the individual concerned can be seen by others. The face is uncovered. This is a moderate type of borkha. But there are other borkhas which cover the whole body and the face, with only two holes, where two small pieces of nets are attached, through which the individual wearing it can see the outside world. Except these two types there are some called half borkha, which cover only half of the body from top to waist. This type now is more in common in Bangladesh. No woman wears a borkha within the compound of her house. Those who observe strict pardah, use the borkha when they go out of their house to see neighbours, relatives or while travelling. But after reaching her destination the woman takes off her borkha. The borkha is used only by Muslim women. But both Hindu and Muslim women use ghomta to cover their heads with the anchal (end of the saree). The new bride covers almost all of her face with the ghomta. The degree of covering head and face depends on the age and status of the women concerned.

As they attain status in the family the degree of covering the head and face diminishes. Ghomta is not always used in the context of purdah rather it is used to show respect and honour to others; also it is considered a symbol of modesty. Young Muslim girls also cover their heads with the end of their orna. Orna is a piece of cloth, which is about one yard wide and two to two and half yards long. In Bangladesh specially unmarried young girls wear salwar, kamij and orna. Salwar is a loose trouser and kamij is a kind of frock to wear over it. In Bangladesh, specially in villages, married girls never use this type of dress. Even the marriageable girls do not wear it. Marriageable girls wear sarees. A saree is considered a modest dress for Bengali girls both in villages and towns.

Previously unmarried Bengali Hindu girls were not used to wearing salwar, kamij and orna; it was considered a Muslim dress. When a child, a Hindu girl usually puts on pant and frock and when grown up, she wears saree. But in recent times in Bangladesh unmarried Hindu girls also wear salwar, kamij and orna like their Muslim counterparts, but they do not cover their heads before their marriage. Only married girls use the ghomta but this also varies according to the status within her family. Married Hindu girls do not use the ghomta in their natal home. Only in front of affines and male strangers do Hindu married women use the ghomta. By contrast Muslim grown up girls in the village, whether they are married or not, have to cover their heads with either the end of their saree or their orna, whether they are in their



natal home or not. Even when they go to the river or pond for bathing their heads remain covered. They are trained from their childhood in such a manner that while doing all sorts of jobs, their ghomta remains in tact. It is not a problem for them. They rather feel uneasy if their head cover drops off. Most of the poor women are not in a position to buy blouses, even many middle and rich grihasta<sup>1</sup> household women do not use blouses while they are in their own compound doing domestic jobs. They wear only a saree but they cover their heads with the end of their sarees. Women also use ghomta in front of other women with whom they have a relationship of avoidance.

Purdah not only separates the female from the male world, but more important, it represents a prescriptive system of behaviour for women. In short, it is a system of keeping women in seclusion, giving them a separate identity; at the same time for the women concerned it is a show of dignity and also of respect and submissiveness to others. It restricts their mobility in and outside their home and family.

As stated earlier a woman's behaviour is influenced by the socio-economic status of her family. Often the social and religious status of the household determines woman's mobility and how she will behave within and outside her home. Natunpur's poor and middle stratum households can afford only that their women folk observe the behavioural aspects of purdah. Various kinds of adjustments and adaptations have taken place in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cultivator gentleman.

context of pardah in Natunpur. Women are, however, still conscious that their behaviour affects the status and honour of their households. The village judgement of woman's behaviour is influenced by the household status. In addition, some personal qualification often allows more mobility to the person concerned; as for example, educated women who are engaged in income earning activities enjoy more mobility than the uneducated housewives who are engaged only in household work. In general, however, pardah for women is still considered a matter of great notional importance.

We have already noted that the village consists of three paras. In the previous chapter it was discussed, how a household is related with nearby homesteads, gusti, para and samaj, and how the household develops its relationships within the village and outside it. Now, in this section we shall analyse the behaviour pattern of women of the three paras separately.

#### 4.1.1 Women in Natunpara

The women of Natunpara live within the village and are mostly confined to their own para. The households of the para are adjacent to each other. While doing their housework or bathing or bringing drinking water from tubewells neighbouring women meet. Poor women often visit their neighbours passing on all kinds of news and gossip. Even those women who do not go out of their house, came to know this way about what was happening

in the village and around. Thus it is not true that village women who are secluded, do not know much about their surroundings. During my stay in the village I noticed that news and rumour spread very fast among women. They passed on from mouth to mouth. There is a sharp difference in the way of life of men and women in Natunpur. Women live indoors and men outdoors. This can explain why male field workers fail to mention much about women in their village. Women have their own circle of friends in whom they confide. They develop different kinds of joking relationships with different women and men in their village. These are the avenues for release of tensions, which help women to survive under difficult conditions. During festive occasions, like religious or social festivals women participate in different ways. They take an active part in merrymaking. They even visit in groups different shrines; specially Hindu women visit different village fairs within Natunpur and also outside. They visit these fairs either in groups or accompanied by kin. Very few Muslim girls, however, visit these fairs. Though women, and specially Muslim girls, have to observe purdah, there are still some avenues through which they can find release for their tension. Thus every woman seems to have her own world to live in; she becomes accustomed to the type of life she has to live; and accommodates to the situations according to her age, status and socio-economic condition.

As stated earlier among the eight gusti households in Natunpara, only two have been for less than fifty years. All

have agricultural background. They live in the same para and in the same locality, adjacent to each other's house. They do not differ much in their hereditary status, i.e., (bangsha-marjada). In the same gusti, there are people of different economic categories. But they have a common bond in the fact that they belong to the same blood group which cannot be denied. Women of the same para and living in the same gusti sit together and help each other whenever the situation arises. Generally poor women visit the richer, who are expected to be busy with supervising housework. I have already mentioned in previous chapters how inter gusti and intra-gusti members live and behave together. Here we are dealing mainly with women. Women of the same gusti, living in the same para try to keep up the honour and prestige of their own gusti. The standards are set by the influential families of the group. Middle aged and old women of different gusti households in the para visit neighbours while doing different household work. They move alone, often their grand-children accompany them. But the new bride and young wives do not go out alone even within their para or to their neighbours. If they have to visit other houses they go accompanied by elderly women or children or male members of the households. Women of high socio-economic group often call in lower status women at their residence, while their male members are not around. Thus they maintain contact with each other.

In Natunpara all the women keep up more or less good relations among themselves. Only rarely do they visit other paras.

Only Gopal's wife and other girls and women of Haradhan's gusti visit households of Paramanik's gusti, specially Barek's house, because Barek and Gopal are bandhu i.e., friends. They call each other bandhu. This is an institutionalised relationship. As both the families are attached to each other, Gopal's wife, his mother and sister visit Barek's house quite often. For any kind of social occasions, they visit each others homes, but not so much on religious occasions. Gopal's and his mother's land is cultivated by Barek; the crops are processed in Barek's house. Gopal's mother and his wife go there to supervise these jobs. Thus during the time of crop processing, they visit them more frequently. The women of Gopal's house freely meet the people of Paramanik's house without any hesitation. Only married women use the ghomta. Unmarried girls move freely among them. But Barek's wife comes to Gopal's house only on some social occasions, e.g., marriage festivals, funerals etc. but always only at night. At that time also she is accompanied by men, children or elderly neighbouring women. Since she is a Muslim woman, her movement is more restricted. It is readily accepted in the village that the female members at Gopal's visit more frequently the Bareks than the female members of the Barek household do to the Gopals; nobody is offended by this imbalance.

Among the gusti households in Natunpara, I saw a widow of the Paramanik (late Azu Paramanik) wearing borkha while visiting others in different villages. Nobody else among the households discussed so far in Natunpara uses a borkha. Usually women

visit their relations in the nearby villages in the evening with a male escort. Sometimes they use a chadar (swal), a piece of cloth to cover the body over their saree. Even the unmarried young Muslim girls use a ghomta both in and outside the village.

The people of Akbar's gusti are of high socio-economic status. As stated earlier, among the eight households in this gusti, six are middle category and two are small category households; most of them are educated, and at the same time are known as strict followers of Islam. Women of this gusti do not interact much with other villagers. They work in their own compound. They bathe in a pond adjacent to their house, bring drinking water from their own tubewell. None of their gusti people are that poor that the women have to work for other houses. Rahimuddin, head of a poor landless household is related to Akbar's gusti and settled close to the latter's residence from a nearby village. Women and men of Rahimuddin's household work in Akbar's household, whenever they are asked to do so. Some Satbhagi households are also located in the adjoining area. Women of those landless households also work in the houses belonging to Akbar's gusti. Women of Akbar's gusti meet other women who pass by or come to their houses. They visit their natal homes once or twice a year. None of them goes out shopping. They observe stricter pardah compared to other women belonging to other gustis in Natunpara. Though they do not use the borkha, they cover their head and body and are very particular in not showing themselves in front of male members other than their close relations, i.e.

specially consanguinious kins.

All the individual households of Natunpara follow more or less the same type of behaviour. Of the four individual households who do not belong to any specific samaj in the village, the three Hindu households are landless; one is the father (Ramen) and two are the households of his daughters. One of them is a small trader, another a carpenter and the third one, a worker in a flour mill. They keep good kinship relations with Haradhan's family and neighbourly relations with Ramesh's family. As Hindus they share a group identity; but they do not form a samaj like those of the Muslims. Hindu girls are more mobile and free to move in and outside the village. Even then they have to maintain a certain standard.

Girls enjoy much more freedom of movement in their natal village than if they settle elsewhere. Ramen's two daughters are staying next door to their parents with their husbands even after their marriage. The girls move in and out of the village without any restriction. One of his daughters, Daba is a poor woman. She even went to a neighbouring village asking for help for her daughter's marriage preparations. She brings drinking water from other's house. Soma the younger daughter, quite often comes and stays with her mother, as she often quarrels with her husband. This kind of behaviour is not approved in the village, nor is she boycotted. She stayed with her mother for about one year, leaving her husband and children the next door.

The children and the father cooked their own food and stayed in their house. The neighbours tried to intervene but failed. Villagers blame Soma's mother for inciting her against her husband. Muslim neighbours used to say that if she were a Muslim girl, her husband would not have shown such tolerance, he might have married again and deserted the first wife. Soma's husband is a simple man, living in his in-law's place; and not being well off economically he is not in a strong position to exercise his authority. Soma's only brother works in Dhaka. He did not like the way she treated her husband. He came home and brought about a reconciliation between Soma and her husband. Now the family is living happily.

Malini, the wife of the brother, has to live a restricted life. She is a pretty young girl, married eight years ago and has not yet given birth to a child. This is regarded as disqualification for a married girl. She is largely confined within the four walls of the house. Her husband comes home whenever he can avail of leave or during vacation. Malini's mother-in-law brings drinking water, picks leafy vegetables outside the house. Malini cooks the food inside. She meets only close male kin and her husband's close friends; and that also only when her mother-in-law is present or close by. Her mother-in-law talks with her husband's and also her son's friends in the house with her ghomta on. Malini is not allowed to visit neighbours alone. On some religious and social occasions if she is to go somewhere, generally her mother-in-law accompanies her. There also she plays



a secondary role. But whenever Malini goes any where with her mother-in-law, she wears nice sarees, ornaments, cosmetics and carries a vanity bag the way educated city girls do. She also wears her saree like a city girl. All her clothes and the way she wears them indicate that she comes of a respectable family. Her mother-in-law is very keen on this. She herself likes Malini to wear nice clothes while she goes out with her. She regards Malini as an ornament, whose existence enhances the status of her son as well as her family. Malini also wears a wrist watch when she goes out. She does so not so much to observe time but as a piece of jewellery. This is more an indicative of a higher status. Recently I have noticed that well-to-do girls and wives wear wrist watches when they go out even within the limits of Natunpur.

The way one dresses is very much an expression of socio-economic status. Women of different households often borrow their friends' and kins' dresses, ornaments etc. when on social outings or even when they go to the cinema or go out shopping. Generally the middle status people and people with lower socio-economic status trying to show off their high position, borrow things from others and dress like city girls. These women do not use the borkha but use the ghomta, specially as long as they are in town. Poor people also borrow sarees from their friends, when going to other villages on social occasions.

One individual household of less than fifty years standing does not belong to any casti in Natunpur nor does it belong to

any samaj. Members of this household have fictive kin relationships with those of Ismail's household only. They do not participate actively in any village matter. Children of the household irrespective of whether they are male or female are getting education. Women also work outside the village. They travel regularly by bus and rickshaw to their working place. Girls even go out shopping to Rajshahi town. In this household, the widowed mother, an elderly member of the household comes of a respectable family. She never visits anybody in the village. If she has to go to Dhaka, Rajshahi or any other part of Bangladesh, she wears the full borkha, and takes a male escort with her. In her case not moving around and wearing a borkha are considered as a mark of respectability. If any village woman wants to meet her, she comes to her residence. In her household, daughters received higher education. Two have completed university education and are now gainfully employed. These girls do not wear borkha, nor do they put up the ghonta. They are modest in their behaviour; but if required, they talk with men in and outside the village. They visit friends in the village also; sometimes alone and sometimes the two together or escorted by a small boy working in the house. They do not go out shopping within the village. That job is done by their brother or by the small boy working in the household. They wear modern clothes, wrist watches etc. but fewer gold ornaments. They are modern in their outlook and behaviour in contrast with most other girls of the village. Only Ramala, the Hindu girl and her brother's daughter in the village behave likewise. If any villager, specially a

woman, has to consult a doctor in Rajshahi or wants to go out shopping, it is more often than not, Ramala, who accompanies her. Ramala's family, though Hindu, is old established in the village. Villagers feel more at home with them. They share the same values and experiences. Natunpur girls are sent to the school where Ramala teaches. Villagers allow their daughters to study in a school outside the village because they go there in a group together with Ramala.

#### 4.1.2 Women in Beharipara

In Beharipara there are old settlers as well as new migrants. Old settlers are found to be more attached to tradition. Table 4 shows, only six per cent of the households are old settlers. None of them belong to any khandan family. Even then the women of two samaj leader's households have to maintain pardah in its physical and also behavioural aspects. To observe pardah is considered to judicate the keen following of Islam. The samaj leader's households have to be ritually observant. To keep the honour and prestige of the household, women have to behave accordingly.

One of the samaj leaders belongs to a second generation household. It has not yet been able to form a gusti, but has improved its economic condition and formed a samaj in Natunpur. The behaviour of the womenfolk of samaj leaders as well as other influential people of the samaj is considered a model for others

in the village community. For instance, Hazi's father was a poor migrant from what is now India. Hazi's mother never wears a borkha; they could not afford it. She used to work hard with her husband to maintain their family. She could be seen by neighbours though she had to behave modestly. Gradually Abed Hazi became the richest man of the region. He has a pond in the inner compound of his house. His wife and other female members of his house and the women of their samaj who live around their house bathe and do their washing in Hazi's inner pond. Children of the household bathe both in the inner and also in the outer compound pond. The outer compound pond is situated on the other side of the main road connecting Rajshahi with Dhaka. This is the biggest pond in the village, by the side of which the mosque of Hazi Shahab is situated. The water of the inner compound pond is not very clean. There is a tube-well in the background of Hazi's house, so the women do not have to leave their compound to fetch water. By contrast most other women in Natunpur have to go out of their compounds to fetch water for cooking, drinking and for also their domestic animals, if they have any. In Hazi's house there is a latrine within the inner compound. His wife takes part in the processing of paddy and other crops within the inner part of the household. From the situation discussed above it is evident that a woman in a family like Hazi's can easily live without meeting any outsider. All the necessities of their lives and their work are met within the four walls of their compound.

It is interesting to note the differences in the behaviour of the various female members of the household referred to above. One deserted and one widowed sister of Hazi Saheb live with his family. They are more than fifty years of age. They use a short ghomta, move around the village even unaccompanied, look after goats and cows and do all kinds of jobs as part of crop processing for which they have to meet others outside their compound. Moreover, these two women also take care of different kinds of fruit trees like, palm, mango, jackfruit, date, coconut etc. owned by the Hazi. They move freely within the village and visit others in the neighbouring villages. They even accompany the married daughters of the household to the girl's in-law's residence. When they do this, they take some seasonal fruits and cakes; they enquire after the well-being of the members of the in-law's family and reciprocate good wishes. In this way the relationship of the two families improve and the girl gains status and comfort in her husband's home.

Hazi's widowed sister wears plain white saree all the time. For a widow to wear white saree both in Muslim and Hindu communities is considered proper. Hazi's sisters are religious; they pray and fast. This is essential for acquiring social prestige.

Abad Hazi lives with his fourth wife. Though among Muslims one man can have four wives at a time, polygamy is not practised in Natunpur. If a man marries more than once or divorces his wife, this may be tolerated yet it is not praised in the society.

But if his wife dies, it is considered as normal that a man should marry again, only in case of a very old man this norm does not apply. Abed Hazi deserted one wife, two others died, and then he married again. As he has deserted his wife without any reasonable ground, he is treated with disdain. His fourth wife comes from a middle category household. Since she arrived in her husband's house, she has to look after his children by his previous wives. It is very difficult for a step mother to be able to gain prestige and honour in the society, because everybody is keen to find fault with her behaviour. Abed Hazi's present wife is a clever, active and hardworking sincere woman. She even seems keen to maintain good relations with the affines of her step daughters, she makes arrangements to send all kinds of seasonal fruits to them. She loves and gives presents to her grand children and also to her step daughter's husbands. To the neighbours also, she is kind. She observes purdah by supervising the household work within the four walls of their house. Once ——— when a village quack doctor came to treat their cow, she was asked to tell the problems of the cow from inside the room so that he could hear what was wrong. Her husband and other male members of the household do not know much about their livestocks. They are cared for and looked after by direct and indirect supervision of the female members of the household.

After the liberation of Bangladesh, Hazisaheb was jailed for a year, because during the period of liberation war he participated in killing some of the freedom fighters. His sons were

small at that time. He had an oil pressing mill and a flour mill in the nearby market place which is about two miles off from Natunpur. His wife used to go to the mills wearing a borkha and collect money from the workers. She managed the business and looked after farming as well. Her son-in-law helped her in business and farm management. None of the villagers objected to her working in her husband's absence. When in 1972 the Government forgave all collaborators, Hazisaheb came out of jail and resumed his normal life. Since then his wife never went to the mills again. She fell back to her traditional role of a housewife. Whenever she now visits her parents-in-law or other relations or any other people within the village or outside, she wears a borkha and is accompanied by male members of her family. On one occasion I noticed that the wife of Hazi Saheb visited a doctor in Rajshahi town (which is about 15 miles away from Natunpur) with Ramala, their next door neighbour, who is a school teacher and a Union Council member. Afterwards she visited Rajshahi together with her married daughter who lives next to her house. If she visits any body in the village she generally calls on them in the evening with her ghomta on and does not use a borkha. Even in the village she never goes to other's house without any escort.

There is a television set in the club house of the village, which is right opposite Hazi's house. People of different age and sex groups assemble there in the evening. Women are comparatively less in number; often a few women from one para decide

beforehand that they will come and watch the television in the evening. Women who attach importance to their status and family do not usually come. In the year 1978, when I was doing my field work, I found the wife of Hazisaheb in the gathering in the club, where a programme regarding 'Haz' (pilgrimage to Mecca) was shown on television. Since it was a religious programme, her presence in the television room was well appreciated. For women to watch television and go to the club is approved only when it is in tune with the existing value system of the society. Women who belong to lower status families can move more freely around than those who belong to high status group.

Two of Hazi's daughters are married by now. Margina, one of them did not have much education and was married to a tailor, whom Hazisaheb gave a portion of his land, i.e., the girl's property, so that they can live without much hardship. Her sister Rebeka who has college education married an educated rich man of the nearby village. Margina moves freely around the village. She even goes to the cinema and also to Rajshahi town to purchase sarees and other dress materials. When she goes to the town she is accompanied by Ramala or other young village woman. She does not wear borkha, but covers her head with a ghomta. She has to go by bus to Rajshahi. Her behaviour is tolerated by the society, but is not respected and not held up as a model to other women of the village. Her socio-economic status is lower than that of Rebeka. Because Margina lives in



her parental village and her in-laws are not present in the same village, she is much less respected than Rebeka. Rebeka always wears a borkha when coming to her natal home from her own house. While she is on the bus, she uses a borkha but within the village she never uses it. She also moves freely around Natunpur. But when she visits the market in Rajshahi, she always uses a borkha. Doing so is considered a status symbol for her husband's family. She has not taken her share from her parental property. This also is seen to increase her status in her natal home and her husband's family. She gets presents and invitations from her father's home much more than her sister in Natunpur. Thus the behaviour pattern of women, their purdah observance and mobility in the village are directly related to their socio-economic status. The other younger girls of Hazi's family are going to school. Except Rebeka, none of the women of Hazi's samaj has as yet received secondary education. Hazi is the richest man in the village. But within his samaj all excepting two are landless villagers. They are all immigrants to this village of whom 50 per cent have been staying in Natunpur for more than fifty years. The women of this group move freely within their own samaj. None of them observes purdah in its strict physical sense, rather they are more concerned with the behavioural aspect, i.e., avoiding the contact with strangers and non-kin villagers. They live their lives within the village itself. Their husbands are engaged in small trading etc. and they are not engaged in agricultural

work within their own or other's houses. They talk and gossip with the people of the same homestead or people of the same para. Whenever they go to visit relations in other villages, they are accompanied by male members or children. For a woman to go to a place with a minor child is sanctioned by the society. But young women going out accompanied by elderly women is the most accepted form of behaviour. Elderly, specially widowed women are the most mobile among the women in the community.

Karim's samaj with its rich, old established, traditional and respected families consists of two gustis and three individual households within Natunpur village. Some other people of Karim's kin group living in the neighbouring village also belong to the same samaj. None of the women in Karim's samaj has passed secondary level of education. They are not keen on the education of girls.

The people of Karim's gusti consider themselves as stricter followers of Islam than most other people including the Hazis in Natunpur. Karim is one of the religious leaders of the village. In his gusti women's movement is highly restricted. Even the poor and landless women of this gusti work or move only within their own gusti households. If they have to visit their relations in other villages, they have to be accompanied by male kin. They use the borkha or chadar for this purpose. Only very recently Basana, the Hindu girl converted to Islam while

marrying Zahir, has started going to Rajshahi occasionally to shop or consult a doctor there. She does not cover herself with a borkha, but only puts up a ghomta like most other Muslim and Hindu married women in the village. This is a very recent phenomenon. None of the other female members of this family as yet gone to Rajshahi to shop or for any other purpose. None of their women whether rich or poor ever has come to watch television in the club house. None of them is a member of any of the women's organisations in the village. If they are to participate in any social ceremony they come in the evening or night. During Abed Hazi's son's marriage, the women folk of Karim's household came at night to see the bride. Only the landless women of Karim's gusti, who live just next door to Hazi's household came during day time to work.

Thus a woman's behaviour is both influenced and regulated by the socio-economic condition of the family and also the gusti and samaj to which she belongs. When Basana was unmarried and as daughter of a rich Hindu family (Haradhan's daughter), her movement was not so much restricted within and also outside the village. But once she was married to Zahir, her movement was completely restricted; she became member of a rich and religious Muslim household. After her marriage, Karim's gusti people did not have any workable relationship with Haradhan's family. The other Hindus also developed a strained relationship with them. However, during the period of liberation war, Karim's family and specially Zahir took great care that Haradhan's family and their

property were saved. They helped also the other Hindus in Natunpur. This helped to break the ice between the two families. They are now on an agreeable relationship with each other. They invite each other on social occasions, but not formally on religious occasions. Children of both the families visit each other informally on religious festivals. But elderly members still avoid them. On social occasions such as a marriage in any one of the families, all the family members are invited. In Zahir's house Basana's brother's young children even take food, but parents of Basana and her brother's wives do not accept any cooked food in their house. Basana's family give then uncooked rice, fish and other things required for the preparation of the feast. Cooking takes place in her parent's house. Food so prepared is not considered polluted. The same pattern is followed by Karim's family. Basana, her children and husband, Zahir take cooked food in Haradhan's house but they do not take food in the kitchen. Even Basana herself tactfully avoids this; of course, none of her parent's family would want to entertain her in the kitchen. In actuality the closely related people do take food even in the kitchen. A kind of distant and formal relationship has developed among themselves.

Muslim women are supposed to conform more strictly to the rules of Islam. Fasting women are more in number than men in Natunpur during the month of Ramadhan, (the month of fasting). The sama leaders refused to take the fetra money from the

households where the men are not fasting. Even then the rate of men not fasting has been increasing. By contrast women's behaviour has not changed much. Even small girls are fasting. The three individual households, which belong to Karim's samaj, follow the traditions of their samaj. Among them women of the two landless households are members of local women's organisation, whereas the landless poor women of Karim's gusti have not yet joined any of these organisations. Individual households seem freer than those belonging to a gusti. Even then the women of the same samaj try to keep in conformity with the traditions of the samaj to which they belong.

In Haradhan's family girls are getting education, their movement within and outside the village is not so much restricted. But the girls have to behave modestly both inside and outside the households. Unmarried girls go to shops in Rajshahi, married women's movement is more restricted. They do not come in front of strangers, nor in front of non-relatives without their ghonta on. They are not expected to talk loudly or even gossip with others. After she has become the mother of a few children and attains middle age, her position is somewhat more stable. She gains a little more freedom. Ramala's mother goes to her neighbours to exchange greetings, she keeps the social relations with others in the village. She has two daughters-in-law, the elder one generally does not visit any household, the younger one goes to neighbouring households. She visits with her sisters-

in-law and also with the children of the household. She generally visits the households with whom, her husband has friendly relations. As a result of Basana's getting married to a Muslim boy, their social status in the Hindu community of the nearby villages has gone down considerably. The Hindus of the neighbouring villages first boycotted them. Ramala was getting older but no marriage offer was made. They were very much worried. Ramala got a teaching job in a nearby school, which is about two miles away from their house. She has to travel either by bus or by rickshaw. But as her family was rich and educated with high social status having good social contact with different influential people around, nobody dared criticise her in the public. She has a good moral character which is seen as an asset in any woman. She also became a member in the Union Council. The marriage of her younger sister to a Muslim boy diminished her own chances of a match. Recently, however, an Arts graduate of Natore, a place about fifteen miles off from Natunpur, agreed to marry her. He received a motorcycle, and taka ten thousand in cash from Ramala's father as dowry. Wristwatch, fountain pen, dresses for both the bridegroom and the bride, ornaments (gold) for the bride, gold ring for the bridegroom, utensils, umbrella, bed and furniture were also given as marriage gift for the couple by Ramala's father. A bride-groom's party usually demands dowry according to its own economic and social status. Previously dowry system was prevalent largely among the Hindus. Of late it has spread

among Muslims in villages as well. Hazisaheb in his son's marriage asked the bride's father for a television set, which cost six thousand taka. The woman whether Hindu or Muslim, who can bring a good amount of dowry at her marriage is likely to get more attention in her husband's house.

Ramesh's gusti consists of three households, who live in one compound i.e., in one homestead. They are three brothers. In these families also women are busy with household work. The three wives of the three brothers and their daughters are the only women in the families. There is no old or elderly women in the three households. Often they go next door, i.e. to Haradhan's house. Rarely do they visit the two other Hindu households on the other side of the road. Very occasionally they visit their relatives in other villages. The women with their children go to different village fairs on some religious festivals or to different temples or pandals for worshipping the deities during the pujas ceremonies. The case of Basana had a severe impact on other Hindu families in the village. Ramesh's family did not allow their daughters to go to school even when they were small children, their movements were restricted, and they were not allowed to move freely around the village. Their parents were worried that they might follow Basana's example. They were desperately trying to arrange their marriage even before they reached puberty. Another Hindu girl on the other side of the road finished her primary education in the village,

was a good student and wanted to continue her study at a secondary school. Her parents, however, did not like to take the risk and stopped her studies. Thus a case like Basana's often brings adverse effect not only on the family concerned but also on the whole village community.

The other individual households in the para try to keep to the general moral standards so that they may not be criticised. This is in short the situation in Beharipara.

#### 4.1.3 Women in Satbhagipara

In Satbhagipara, women are not educated, only one woman, the wife of a school master has been educated upto the secondary level. She is the one who gains status in the society. Her husband is educated and is teaching in the local primary school. She also comes of a respectable family. She does not move frequently around the village nor within the para. Poor kins come and work for her. This middle category household does not show any preference for modernisation or Islamization in the behaviour of its womenfolk. They are a grihastha household, women also busy themselves doing household work. Poor women of the para work in neighbouring households. They move freely within and also around the para. They all belong to the same gusti. Their immediate neighbouring households are also old established households i.e., Paramanik's gusti, Akbar's gusti and Kalimuddin's gusti. Ismail's house is also adjacent to their



residence. All are old established and with agricultural background. Among them some are economically better off than their counterparts but ideologically and socially they are not dissimilar. They do not feel restricted within the four walls. They meet each other and exchange views. They have their own circle of friends, their movements and behaviour are very much influenced by the socio-economic status of the household. Women have to protect and comply with the ideas of the households. Their behaviour determines the household's prestige.

The preceding detailed account of the behaviour of Natunpur women belonging to different socio-economic strata clearly indicates that women are seen as symbolising the prestige and honour of their family and social grouping. Traditionally, female seclusion represented the ideal life style for women. However, with increasing educational opportunities for girls' 'modernisation' provides an alternative venue for women and their families to gain and/or reaffirm their social status. However, even those girls who follow the 'modern' way are expected to behave modestly in line with traditional style behaviour; i.e. covering their heads etc. It is too early to say whether the 'modernisation' of women's behaviour will continue to be embedded in the traditional system or whether it will altogether establish a new option for women.

Present indications suggest that the Islamic presence in Natunpur is sufficiently strong to exert a dominant influence.

A common past in the village and shared experiences establish a village identity which overrules the differences between Hindus and Muslims. Natunpur women seem to live in a 'woman's world' disregarding whether they are Muslim or Hindu; they all belong to the same social and gossip network. To the outsider female seclusion may appear a great hardship while most Natunpur women prefer to live in a woman's world rather than to worry about matters that concern men.

#### 4.2 Women and Property

Under Muslim laws a woman has the right to inherit property; daughters inherit half of their brothers' share of the ancestral heritage and a widow is entitled to one eighth of her dead husband's property. A Muslim woman also has the right to purchase land in her own name. However, the social reality differs considerably from the theoretical Muslim laws regarding women's property rights. As long as the parents are still alive daughters married and unmarried alike - do not claim their share in the ancestral property. There are a few instances though in Natunpur where fathers handed over to their married daughters their heritage. This happened in two Natunpur households where the daughter married and settled patri-uxorilocally with a husband unable to support his family. In some cases where there are a few sons in a family, the father, not being sure whether they will honour the daughters' claim after his death, hands over to his daughter her share of inheritance. In most of the cases when the daughter gets her property share before her father's death she in fact asks for it at the instigation of her husband.

Normally when the parental property is divided among heirs after the father's death, daughters either take their share or leave it in the care of their brothers. Young married women are expected to visit their parental home at least once or twice yearly and stay with their brothers as naior.<sup>1</sup> The frequency of these visits decreases with the age and years of married life of

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<sup>1</sup> Married woman's visit to her natal home.

the women. As she progresses through the different phases of the domestic cycle a woman gets increasingly more absorbed in her husband, children and affines affairs while being weaned from her natal family. When she becomes the senior female member in her household she becomes so busy that she can no longer find time to go on a naior. She then reaches the "apex in her status progression. Simultaneously and gradually she loses her old connections with her parental home" (Nath, 1981:15).

Among small farmer households husbands often pressurise their wives and sometimes torture them to get them to claim their parental heritage. Mostly in cases where the daughter's husband is considerably poorer than her parental household she tries to exercise her legal rights to get her share of ancestral property. If the land to which a daughter is entitled exceeds the area her husband possesses then the latter is usually keen to sell his land and settle patri-uxorically (i.e., in his wife's father's place of residence), so that he can cultivate his wife's lands. I discovered three Natunpur households who recently moved for this reason to the wife's natal village.

By contrast women from wealthier households usually leave their hereditary property in the care of their brother/brothers for at least a few years after the father's death. It is generally considered as a demeaning and shameful act for a woman to ask for her share in the ancestral property immediately after her father dies.

The following account of the distribution of a man's wealth after his (Ismail's father's) death is typical of better-to-do families in Natunpur. This household head has two wives; the first of whom is already dead but left three daughters and one son, while the second wife has two sons and one daughter. When the old man died the three sons convened a meeting to which they invited their brother-in-law, the village matbars as well as other kin to advise on distribution procedures. There it was decided that the widow will get one eighth of her husband's property, while her classificatory son gets not only his own share but also those of his three sisters for however long they agree for him to look after their lands. In return he is expected to offer his sisters hospitality whenever they decide to visit the parental home. The second wife's elder son received only his own share. Because of his incompetence and his large family, he was not given the option for looking after his sister's share. His mother decided to move in with her younger son, who was entrusted with looking after his sister's lands, until she might decide to claim her property. She however, could come in her own right and stay with her brother whenever she might so desire. The elders present at the meeting asked the widow to give one of the three bighas she got to her elder son, because he was the weakest member of the family. She agreed to let him cultivate one of her bighas and keep the produce from it while she passed over the other two bighas to her youngest son with whom she was going to live.

Some studies of Bangladesh societies mention that Muslim girls forego altogether their claim to their parental property. Ellickson in her study of a Rajshahi village refers to a case where two sisters left their hereditary share in the care of their brother but claimed it after their brother died. They had no objections to their brother keeping their shares, but did not want his son to do so. An eight year court case ensued (1972:52/3).

Hardly any of the Natunpur women are prepared to forego altogether their parental heritage, though as already mentioned women married into wealthier households allow their brothers to keep their share of the parental property for some years after the father's death. I encountered only one woman in Natunpur who said that she had no intentions of ever claiming her land entitlement. She explained that her parental home is far away (i.e., about 200 miles from Rajshahi) and therefore, it would be difficult for her to exercise her title. Moreover, she comes from one of the respected khandan families and her husband, a recent immigrant to Natunpur is also a highly respected villager. She stressed that it would be considered disgraceful in her family if she even only thought of asking for her parental property share. All other Natunpur women made it clear that even if they allowed their brothers to keep their own shares for a few years after the father's death, they are determined to stake their rightful claims sooner or later. When they would

actually ask for their shares would depend on the economic status of their husbands as well as the domestic cycle phase of their brothers' households.

Even though Natunpur women invariably stake claims to their shares of ancestral property it is their husbands who control not only whatever land is involved but also whatever is derived from it. If for instance a woman sells her parental heritage to her brother the money thus realised is simply added to the household budget without her being able to earmark it for any specific expenditure. One Natunpur woman arranged for her brother to sharecrop her land: she receives half the produce, which is used to help feed her family. Only one middle-farmer's wife stated she sells the produce of her  $1\frac{1}{2}$  bighas and with the money realised she purchases things of her own liking, such as sarees, ornaments, etc. All other Natunpur women made it clear that their parental heritage is used by their husbands to help the household become or remain solvent.

As already mentioned Muslim women are entitled to buy land in their own name. Yet in practice it is rare for a woman to have sufficient funds for such purchases. Though many Natunpur women earn an independent income either by petty trade or service the small amounts they thus earn are usually spent on items for their family; only sometimes do they invest their earnings in chicken or goats, but never in land. The poverty and economic dependence of Natunpur women is in line with the national scene.

In Bangladesh as a whole only 3.7 per cent of women over the age of 10 are in the civilian labour force according to the 'refined rate' of economic participation<sup>1</sup> (Pilot Manpower Survey, 1979). This rate indicates a negligible proportion of women who are engaged in income earning activities. Of course, it is obvious that a much larger number of women participate in economic activities, but they do so without monetary remuneration and, therefore, their work remains unrecorded and unrecognised. Therefore, hardly any village woman in Bangladesh ever accumulates sufficient funds to acquire land. Even if she ever gets into the fortunate position to do so she still faces the problem of who will buy the land on her behalf and who will look after it and control its produce.

The benami system of land purchases offers an opportunity for a woman to acquire land. Benami, a persian word, means literally: 'no name'; i.e., the purchase of the land remains anonymous. Benami transfer takes place whenever "a person buys property with his own money but in the name of another person or buys the property in his own name subsequently transfers it into the name of another without any intention in either case to benefit such other person, the transaction is called benami and the person in whose name the transaction is effected is

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<sup>1</sup> The 'refined rate' is the ratio of persons 10 years of age and older found in productive activity during the survey period over the total population within this age category.



called benamindar" (Mulla, 1960:681). In most instances when property is recorded in a woman's name it is in fact a benami property. The husband or son buys the land under the benami arrangement and the woman has no control over the property nor does she hold the legal documents relating to it. Thus even if village land records show some women as owners of purchased or inherited land this does not indicate that they are the factual owners of it. For a woman to buy land in her own name and to be designated as land owner is not a common phenomenon in Bangladesh villages.

There are a few cases in Natunpur where husbands bought property in their wives' name. Abed Hazi bought six bighas and one rice mill in the name of his wife, but her title to this property is purely fictitious. Zahir too bought land in his wife's name, yet she personally gets no benefit from it. Even poorer households use women as frontage in the property scramble. Akali, the wife of a Natunpur landless labourer received Taka 100 instead of the one bigha of her father's property which was her share at that time. Her husband failed to find a profitable investment outlet for his money and so it was used to help the household maintenance. In Natunpur most women are married within a radius of 15 to 20 miles from their natal home. Therefore, there is little problem in arranging to look after their parentally inherited land.

So far I have discussed the venues through which women can legally acquire property and have shown that in most cases

women's property ownership is fictitious: either her father or brother or husband controls the land to which the woman has legal title. In the succeeding section I outline the conditions under which women are able to generate property.

The poorest women have hardly any scope to generate income; whatever they earn they usually spend on immediate necessities. However, even among poorest Muslim families in Natunpur there is now taking place an inflation in dowry payments. Until not so long ago only Hindus in this area used to give dowry, whereas Muslims had a bride-wealth system. Now the Muslim system has turned full circle and they too pay dowry on the marriage of a daughter. Even among landless Muslims a bi-cycle, transistor radio set and ornaments for the bride have come to be the minimum expected as dowry by the bridegroom's family. These days poorer parents encounter more and more difficulties finding grooms for their daughters. The wealthier the woman's parental and marital household, the greater the chances that she can profitably invest at least part of her rightful property. The following account demonstrates this point.

Before the partition of India in 1947 Jebar's wife received three bighas in India; her husband sold the land and bought eight bighas in Natunpur. In the year 1958 she bought a goat, which enabled her to accumulate money with which she bought a small calf. The cow begot calves nine times and then they slaughtered

it during the time of korbani (Muslim yearly festival) when they are supposed to offer sacrifices in the name of Allah. The meat of the cow was divided into three shares, one for the poor, another for neighbours and relations and the third they kept for personal consumption. It is considered a religious act if one can sacrifice in korbani one's own domestic animal. Jebar's wife told me that she sacrifices one of her own goats or cows in korbani every year thereby she increases the prestige of her family. She also gave Taka 1,000 to the father-in-law of her eldest daughter to invest the money in his jute business, from which she now receives part of the profit. With her income she acquired ornaments and bought clothes and gave things to her children. She now has gold chains, bangles, ear-rings and rings. Altogether she was able to buy six tolas<sup>1</sup> of gold (the market price of that amount of gold was Taka 12,000 in the year 1978, but she bought it earlier when the price was not so high). For her daughter's marriage recently she gave gold from her own stock. Her daughter Belly got married to a bus conductor in Rajshahi. They had to give the son-in-law Taka 3,000 in cash and to her daughter three pieces of gold ornaments, the weight of which was 1½ tola. This account indicates not only that wealthier Muslim women can be entrepreneurs, but also that dowry has become the practice among them.

Another trend among Natunpur Muslim women is worth mentioning here; they invest money in goats and cows, which they keep in

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<sup>1</sup>One tola is equal to 11.66 grams.

their parental homes. At the time of marriage during different marriage rituals Muslim women are given money. Just before marriage, a date is fixed when the relatives and neighbours come and give thubra. This term is used in Natunpur while in other parts of Bangladesh it is called gae halud i.e., it involves putting turmeric paste on the body and face of the girl and the boy as well.

At the time of thubra the villagers go to see the girl with some sweets, make her eat some of the sweets and put some turmeric paste on the face of the bride in her house and on the bridegroom in his house. The people thus assembled also give money to the bride. Generally they prefer to hold thubra on a market day for then one can ask men to bring some sweets from the market; also on market days one usually has more ready money. In Natunpur I noticed that girls get Taka 400 to 500 during this ceremony. They are the girls of rich and middle category households. The amount varies according to the economic position of the household concerned. This money is the property of the girl, who is going to get married, and is generally kept in her parent's house where it is invested in goats or calves. She can claim it all together with its offspring whenever she wants. Women often keep money with their parents, even after their marriage. When Ismail's family was divided his younger brother was given a bullock. However, one cannot plough with only one cow. Subsequently, his wife asked her father to give her the Taka 2000 which she had accumulated and kept with her father. Her father gave

her the money with which they bought a bullock that they required badly to help cultivate the land. It seems that women specially in joint households try to generate property with the help of their parental kin. Their husbands know about all this, often they do it with the help of their husbands. They are keen to generate assets with the intention that one day while the family will be separated they will make use of this independent accumulation. One elderly Natunpur woman who was the wife of an only son told me that she never tried to invest her ornaments or to put money aside for improving the economic condition of her family simply because she never had to fear a future partition in the family. In joint households families fear the ultimate division and, therefore, co-sharers try to keep money separately and pursue different strategies to increase own fortune. A woman is usually concerned solely with the well-being of her immediate family; she cares a lot less for the other families which make up the complex household. I have not found a single household in Natunpur where the wife invested her property for the common benefit of the house.

No woman ever sold her ornaments and invested the money for the benefit of the complex household. By contrast there are lots of cases where Muslim women in complex households have invested the money in their parental home even by selling personal ornaments for the sole purpose of ensuring that they will have a base for their own household unit after partition of the complex household. For example, a Natunpur middle peasant

complex household was made up of a widow and three of her married sons. The eldest son's wife sold her  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tola gold ornaments with the help of her husband and bought about  $\frac{3}{8}$  bighas of agricultural land. The land was bought in the name of her husband. Its product is not included in the complex household but accumulated separately. The second son's wife has two cows and two goats in her father's house on a share basis. The widow had a gold tabiz (locket) which she sold and bought two goats with the money. Subsequently, one goat was slaughtered at the time of her eldest grandson's Akika or name giving ceremony. This case shows that only the widow of the household head spent her own property for the cause of the joint family. Her other goat also was sold afterwards for the maintenance of the whole family. The younger generation tried to increase their own property and thus to improve their future. For the widow, to be able to spend for the family is regarded as prestigious, specially her contribution to the Akika of her eldest grandson is very much appreciated in the society.

Basana, wife of Zahir, the rich peasant bought three bighas from Ansar, a small villager with Taka 2000 and at the same time sold a gold ring and a gold chain for Taka 3000 with which Zahir bought a good plot of land in his own name. Basana says it is all the same to her whether the land is bought in her name or in her husband's name. It is their family property, that is all that matters to her.

Majeda, another Natunpur woman received on her marriage Taka 570 for thubra, ornaments worth Taka 2,700, utensils costing 2,700 and Taka 2,123 in cash from different people. This all came from her parental home. She received also Taka 360 and ornaments worth Taka 1,800 from her father-in-law's house. Immediately after her marriage the utensils and her ornaments were sold and they bought a big pond as well as land with that money. One of Majeda's relations works in a government office; he is concerned with khash (government property) land. He is the person who advised Majeda and her husband to buy the land, and helped them get it. Majeda's father and her father-in-law also approved of it. Thus even before starting their conjugal life, the young couple acquired profitable assets with the wife's property; connections and relations from the wife's side helped this development.

Hindu women in Natunpur too have certain rights to inheritance and property. There are two distinct arrangements by which Hindu women can own property, (a) women's estate and (b) Stridhan. There are five categories of women who can inherit property; they are the sapinda, i.e., those people who according to religion are permitted to perform the sradha, offering for the peace of the soul of a person who died. These five categories of women are: the widow, daughter, mother, grandmother and great grandmother. Such women can inherit property, but it is limited to their own lifetime; they are not entitled to sell or transfer the property to anyone else and after their

death the ownership of the property returns to the nearest sapinda, the person from whom they had inherited the property. Stridhan, on the other hand, means the property of which women are sole owners such as ornaments, dowry and other gifts. However, as long as her husband is alive she has to seek his consent if she wants to sell or give away part of her stridhan. This constraint over the use of a Hindu woman's property may account for the fact that in Natunpur there has not been a single case of a Hindu woman selling her ornaments to invest in productive assets, like many Muslim women have been doing.

Hindu marriages even more so than Muslim ones are associated with high dowry. For instance, Aruna, the daughter of a middle peasant married a shopkeeper with sufficient income to maintain a family. So Aruna's father gave in dowry Taka 3,500 and 2½ tolas of gold ornaments (the market price of gold in 1978 was Taka 2000 per tola) and clothes for both the bridegroom and the bride as well as bed and utensils. Aruna's father had to sell land to pay for all this. Aruna also got a considerable amount of presentation given by guests invited to the various marriage rituals. Similarly, Ramala got married in 1979 to a graduate of Natore. He is a petty trader. Ramala's father had to give his son-in-law a good amount of dowry. They received many valuables as presents; because respectable people of the area along with the villagers were invited. Ramala's husband invested the money thus realised in his business. Thus even if the girl is educated or earning an income this does not diminish the amount



of dowry. Ramala's father did not have to sell land to arrange the marriage of his daughter. He had ready money for that. From the two examples above the situation in Hindu society is evident. The ornaments are her stridhana but even then she is not allowed to sell or give them to others without the permission of her husband as long as he is alive.

Hindu girls and women like their Muslim counterparts also generate wealth. Ramala's mother sells crops in small quantities and also at a concessional price to her poor kinsmen and to a few villagers with whom she has close relations. Ramala's elder brother's wife also sells crops. These women thus manage to accumulate some money, a portion of which is spent on their children; children always ask for money from their mothers whenever they want something. Ramala earns a small income from the school and the Union Council. All these women keep land in kot which has a mortgage connotation. When a villager is in desperate need of cash, he pledges his land to moneyed men and women of the village in return for a loan. As soon as the debtor is able to repay the loan he does not have to return more than the amount of the original money. Ramala, her mother and sister-in-law kept land in mortgage from a Natunpur Muslim who is close to their family. The debtor preferred to give his land to these women because he could continue to cultivate it and had to surrender only half of the produce to the creditor. The three women also have goats which they have given on a share basis to

other villagers, because they themselves do not have people to look after these animals. Even young girls make some money in this way. Ramala's eldest brother's daughter, Namita received a goat from her father's sister. With that goat she earned Taka 250 by selling its kids. She gave the money to a friend of her brother to buy sugarcane, and received Taka 410 net excluding the cost of transportation to the mill and other expenses. She still has goats on a share basis with other villagers. From the profit she made on sugarcane and goats, she has made Taka 600 which she again wants to invest in purchasing sugarcane and also in paddy business with the help of her father's sister's family. Her father's sister got married in the Barind<sup>1</sup> area, where farmers take loans for paddy cultivation. If a farmer takes Taka 100 which is the price of one maund of paddy at the time of planting, he pays back two maunds of paddy at the time of harvesting. At the time of harvesting the price of paddy is low but the creditor generally sells the paddy when the price is again high. It appears that the women in Ramala's family are quite enterprising. They not only invest their money in their village but also spread their business ventures out over different villages wherever they can find suitable opportunities. Kinship plays an important part in all this. Thus in this situation the network of relationships is very important. Poor women lack access to such networks and,

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<sup>1</sup>Barind is a highland area with hard, reddish clay soil on which only winter rice can be grown.

therefore, often take goats or hens on a share basis from rich or middle category women. None of these women earn enough to buy land. The money they earn, they reinvest, and/or spend on their children or to meet personal necessities.

#### 4.3 Women and the Domestic Cycle

In rural Bangladesh where women live their lives mostly indoors and where their movements are restricted, it is necessary to know where and how they live. What relationships they have within their households and with their neighbours. This requires an examination of house styles. These vary with the economic condition and the cultural background of individual households. The ordinary village house consists of more than one room built on three sides of a courtyard. The remaining vacant portion is surrounded by a mud or bamboo wall. Most of the Natunpur houses are surrounded by mud walls.

When the first generation settlers build a house there may be only one room. Then as the family size increases more rooms are added. Even the poorest family builds a new hut or constructs a fence around the varanda before starting a new life.

According to M. Fortes the domestic cycle begins with a phase of expansion that lasts from the marriage of two people until the completion of their family procreation .... secondly ..... there is the phase of dispersion or fission. This begins with the marriage of the oldest child and continues until

all the children are married. The final phase involves the replacement, which ends with the death of the parents and the replacement in the social structure of the family they founded by the families of their children" (J. Goody, (ed.) 1971: 4-5). As the phases of the domestic cycle change so does the residential arrangement. Succeeding phases of the domestic cycle and their concomitant changing housing arrangements are particularly important for Muslim women, whose sphere of operation is by tradition restricted to the domestic area.

The range of social links of Natunpur women widens in successive phases of the domestic cycle. She enters her husband's household as a young girl, who is expected to show respect for her mother-in-law as well as older sisters-in-law. As she produces more and more children, particularly sons, her role changes. Her growing family necessitates an expansion in residential facilities. New rooms are built adjacent to the initial dwelling house. Even when the family disperses i.e., when the sons form separate households, they usually build houses near their parental home. Thus the dwelling house expands. Though the household disaggregates into separate units family members, particularly women, continue their reciprocal relationships. This is not always so. There are a few cases in Natunpur where the hived-off households moved to some other plot in the village where they built new houses; there are others

who because of intra-familial difficulties moved even to different villages.

The homestead or the bari is the dwelling house where a household consisting of a family or individual people lives. In Bangladesh villages it occurs frequently that a homestead contains more than one household (Diagram - 1). Generally the bari is known by its most respected or renowned person. It may also be known by the name of the youngest person of the house, whom everybody knows. The bari's prestige is determined by the behaviour of its most renowned person. All the households within a bari are jointly regarded as one unit in terms of prestige ranking. A bari's good name and prestige are also dependent very much on its women's behaviour.

According to customary inheritance patterns ancestral land is divided and distributed among the members of the household. Under existing conditions of population growth this subdivision of landed property among succeeding generations results in smaller and smaller land areas owned by individual households. Only those who can tap alternative sources of income can protect their levels of living against deterioration. Within a gusti where landed property is equally shared some households manage to diversify their economic activities and are, therefore, better off than those who continue to rely solely for their livelihood on cultivating their lands. There is thus considerable economic heterogeneity within a gusti. Yet as a kin group all its members

are concerned with maintaining or even raising their prestige ranking; they all loathe to go down a rank on the prestige ladder. Since women's roles are taken as symbols of the gusti's prestige ranking, they provide the pivot round which the intra-gusti relationships rotate.

While the household is the unit in terms of economic mobility the gusti is the unit which determines social rank. This results in intra-gusti conflicts, when necessity forces women from the poor gusti households to work for households outside their own kingroup. This adversely affects the whole gusti's prestige. Since women's behaviour is closely linked with prestige considerations not only for their bari, but also for their gusti, and their roles change in the course of the domestic cycle there exists thus a complex relationship between these different social variables.

Most of the non-gusti households live in separate homesteads. When their families begin to expand more than one household may live in one bari. In a gusti where there are always more than one household they live in one or more than one bari. Accordingly gusti households have a wider social network than non-gusti ones. On the other hand, prestige considerations affect a larger number of individuals and component groups in gusti rather than in non-gusti households.

In Natunpara there are eight gustis which consist of 23 homesteads and 39 households. Even the non-gusti households are

often situated by the side of gusti homes, so that they can benefit from relationships with gusti members. The gusti social network thus reaches out beyond its own borders. The close face-to-face relationships which exist among women within one bari result in continuous conflict and counterbalancing cohesion. Sixteen households of Satbhagi gusti that live in Natunpur two have moved into Natunpara. The whole village is situated on a plain. "The village homesteads consisting of clusters of huts are practically hidden in a thick growth of trees, bushes and shrubs ..... The picture is a little different in a small northern belt of the district where due to soil conditions trees do not grow so well. Houses are built close together and the villages are in a compact closely built area". (Rajshahi District Gazetteer, p. 65). Thus environmental conditions and the pattern of housing help villagers to live close to each other which results in a higher degree of interaction.

As a household passes through the various stages of its domestic cycle its social relationships also change. In Natunpur the three generation patrilineal/lateral unit is generally regarded as the ideal type of family. However, three generation households are rare. Grown up sons are supposed to look after the parental property as well as after the old parents. This is considered as one of the main reasons why Bengali families want sons. The domestic cycle is an ever continuous process. Sons marry and then gradually start living separately forming

single households. In turn their sons grow up, marry and form separate households. The duration of stay of married sons with their parents varies. Though the three generation joint household is considered the ideal type of family in the village context, it is not commonly found in rural Bangladesh. The prevalent custom previously was that after the death of the father his widow or eldest son becomes the household head and the family continued like that for at least a few years. Even in 1978 at the time of my survey I came across three complex families who after their father's death had stayed together for one year before sub-dividing their ancestral property. In all three cases the widow lives with the youngest son. The incidence of complex family living is rapidly declining. In most of Natunpur's complex families the process of separation has already started. It usually happens like this: at least one or two of the sons each starts his separate household even when the parents are still alive. If sons separate from the parental household while the father is still alive the latter has the discretion whether or not to give the son his share of the ancestral property. Accordingly, different kinds of family arrangements and property ownership designs have evolved in Natunpur.

In 1978 among the 110 households there were 72 (66 per cent) simple households composed of parents with their unmarried children; 7 (6 per cent) a incomplete simple households with



for instance one parent living with unmarried children and the remaining 31 (28 per cent) complex households of one kind or another. By 1980 two of the 31 complex households had split up into simple units, while 16 more already showed signs of breaking up: at least one son formed his separate household. Only three of the complex households continue without any indication of subdivision. All this may be explained in terms of the domestic cycle. But the fact that the incidence of complex households splitting up by far exceeds the formation of such complex units confirms the trend of disintegration of the complex household. Between 1978 and 1980 only one simple household developed a complex structure.

In this context it must be remembered that 64 per cent of Natunpur households have been residing in the village for more than one generation, while only 28 per cent live in complex units. The small proportion of complex households is particularly noticeable in Satbhagipara where all households have been for at least two generations. In 1978 only three (22 per cent) of the 14 Satbhagipara households had complex structure; two years later one of the three complex households had already broken up, while no new ones had been constituted.

The pattern of dissolution of complex households appears to be connected with an "apprenticeship" period of about one year of a newly established marital unit. For instance, a landless and a small farmer household in Satbhagipara each

had a son marrying. In less than one year from their marriage these sons separated from their parental units, because of disputes between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The separation in these cases began with the junior household cooking and eating food separately for a brief period. The mother-in-law complained that the younger woman did not pull her weight in domestic chores and was not sufficiently submissive. For some time the quarrel is patched up but like a festering sore it breaks out again. The gusti kin try to discourage the break-up of joint households in line with general social norms. But after about one year the younger couple usually decides to establish its separate house and the complex household structure breaks up.

When Natunpur complex households break up before the death of the father, usually the latter provides each of his sons with a small plot of land, while the parental unit keeps a larger share of the property. The crops produced on the parental share of the family property are divided among these sons. On the death of the father the total ancestral property is divided among the heirs. Among Muslims not only sons but also his widow and daughters have a title to a man's ancestral property. As a household passes through the various phases of its domestic cycle junior women move up into senior positions: the daughter-in-law becomes herself a mother-in-law. This process is best illustrated by means of individual household profiles.

Jebar is a rich Natunpara farmer; he is a first generation settler. His eldest son Rakib married in 1970 a girl from a comparatively wealthy family. The daughter-in-law did not participate in the housework as her mother-in-law and other members of the family expected her to do. The mother-in-law complained that her daughter-in-law liked to dress up nicely but did not want to do any household work. All this resulted in a lot of unpleasantness. Another bone of contention was Rakib's lack of interest in farming. After some years Jebar decided to ask his eldest son to live separately. He gave him 1½ bighas of cultivable land and a plot adjacent to his house to build a home to live peacefully. At first Rakib gave the land for share cropping to his neighbour, a middle farmer. Later he sold it to an outsider for Taka 10,000 with which he bought five rickshaws. He himself worked as a deep tubewell driver. At first he prospered, but because of his general negligence he lost the job. Soon he was forced even to sell the rickshaws as he did not maintain them properly nor did he regularly collect the rent from the rickshaw pullers. After he had sold his furniture and utensils he demanded of his wife that she should claim her share of her ancestral property. This was given in money equivalent. Within four years Rakib had lost all his property. His wife started teaching the Koran to six village women for which she gets Taka 60 per month. No villager not even her parents-in-law mind her teaching the Koran because this is considered a religious task. Recently Rakib got the job of a bus-driver and now gets paid Taka 200 monthly as well as Taka 10 daily for meals.

He lives six miles away from home while his wife and children live by themselves. Rakib sends money to his family and his parents also help them. Rakib learnt bus-driving after he had lost his job as tubewell driver. He considered bus driving as a more prestigious job than being an agricultural labourer or a rickshaw puller. The separation from his parental unit thus led to the sale of his land. He became landless and gradually acquired a new occupation.

Malek, Rakib's younger brother after his marriage also could not adjust to life with his parents. As in Rakib's case his father gave him  $1\frac{1}{2}$  bighas of agricultural land and asked him to live in his old homestead at Natunpara which was situated near Paramanik's household. Satbhagipara lies at the other side of the house. The house required repairing. Malek mortgaged one bigha of land to Paramanik. With the money he extended and repaired the house. His father-in-law helped him with work input, monetary support as well as gifts. Malek now works as an agricultural labourer, in Paramanik's house. He also works in Paramanik's house and sometimes also in her parents-in-law's though their house is at a little distance from her own home. When she works for her mother-in-law she gets food. Her help is not considered as work to be remunerated. But she helps her mother-in-law whenever she is asked. In return she gets all kinds of help at times of crisis. The one bigha land mortgage brought Malek Taka 2000. He has not yet been able to repay his

mortgage and regain his land even though he rented a portion of his house to a village level government official.

Jebar's case illustrates that neither Rakib's nor Malek's wives could continue to reside with their in-laws, although more friendly relationships were re-established between them after their households had separated. This account indicates the fragility of agricultural fortunes in Muslim society when population is increasing rapidly. Although Jebar is a rich farmer his two elder sons are both landless and have to rely for their livelihood on a wage income. On Jebar's death his 25 bighas of land will be distributed among his heirs. However, since he has altogether five sons and three daughters their individual shares are unlikely to leave them with viable farm units. The major social cleavage in Jebar's household was thus between the senior and junior generations.

The profile of Fakir's household shows another cleavage, namely between the sexes.

Fakir, a first generation settler is a middle farmer with 17 bighas of agricultural land. He together with his wife and their two married sons with their wives and children compose his household. He has only one daughter who is now married and is living with her husband in a neighbouring village. The family is dependent only on agriculture. In Fakir's family the dividing line runs between male and female members. Here the allegations are that the mother-in-law together with the daughters-in-law sell a portion of the agricultural produce without the knowledge

of their menfolk. They buy sarees, blouses and ornaments with the money thus earned. Among village women this was an open secret. Ultimately even their own menfolk got to know about this. This led to complaints regarding differential labour input by the various household women and led to quarrels. Fakir then asked his sons to form separate houses. The property is still together. The men work together in the fields and divide the produce among the two households. Fakir eats with the eldest son and his wife with the younger one. Fakir's wife helps not only in the house of her younger son but also in that of her elder one. Fakir and his sons completely rely on farming for their subsistence. The landed property continues undivided while their household structure has changed.

There are several other cases in Natunpur which show similar features; for instance, Haradhan's land is mostly cultivated by sharecroppers. Haradhan himself looks after the lands, his eldest son was a doctor who died recently and the younger son is a school teacher in a nearby village. The doctor son had a big family; many guests used to come to his house to meet him, he was also a social worker and had connections with many organisations. The younger son, Gopal, the school teacher is short tempered. His wife used to complain that she herself has got only three children but she has to work for a big family day and night. There existed thus a lot of unhappiness and unpleasantness. At last the family was divided into two units. All the property remained under Haradhan the head of the family. He

All the others are engaged only in agriculture and make a meagre living.

These various examples indicate that even while the parents are alive, specially after the marriage of one or more sons, the family does not continue to live together for long. The common feature is that parents give a nominal portion of the land to each married son and ask them to live separately, while unmarried sons remain with their parents. This frequently leads to a deterioration in the sons' economic conditions; they then often rely on their wives claim to their ancestral property. Villagers now seem to take it for granted that sons after their marriage, will form separate households, or will quarrel over the division of the property after the death of their father. This had made Abed Hazi distribute his property among all his successors without yet handing it to them. After his death the property will be distributed according to his wishes, which he has made in an unofficial testament.

Even among the oldest village households complex units are now breaking up into simple ones. For instance, Kalimuddin, a rich farmer and one of the oldest settlers leads one of the largest village gustis comprising altogether 11 households and eight homesteads. In his original family two of his wives, four married sons with their spouses as well as their children and other unmarried children of his were all living together. Recently the process of separation started in his family.

is regarded in the village as a sign of bad character; once he was caught by the villagers and was fined by the samaj Taka 500. Recently he took a few of his friends to his house and drank with them and became drunk himself. This time Kalimuddin became furious and asked his son to separate. He was given some money and rice to live on for a few months. Basir has land of his own which he had bought with the help of his brother-in-law and also with the money he received from his wife (p. 238 ). His wife got the money from selling the utensils and ornaments she got at the time of her marriage. He also had started a new shop. Kalimuddin says that he knew both of his sons were alike. Two other married sons are still staying with him. Thus gradually his family is dividing into separate households. In the break up of Kalimuddin's family, prestige consideration appears to be the most important aspect while economic problems reinforce the prestige concerns.

Laterally complex households which survive the death of the original household head, may pass through different stages before the complex structure breaks up into a number of simple families. Zahir's household exemplifies this. He is a rich peasant belonging to Karim's gusti which is composed of nine households residing in six homesteads. When Zahir's father died his widowed mother continued to live together with her five sons and their respective families. Subsequently, a number of different problems arose between them and they decided to divide the family into two households: the eldest and the youngest



sons with their mother formed one unit and the other three brothers formed another one. Afterwards, Zahir, the youngest son, who by virtue of his own hard work was able to improve his position, formed a separate household. Gradually the other three sons also formed separate households.

Unlike many other families which immediately after the father's death divide into several separate households Zahir followed a different pattern. At first they formed different complex households and only then broke up into simple ones.

In tune with the domestic cycle not only the family composition changes but also the resource position of the household concerned changes, specially while the father is still alive. The examples discussed here highlight the plight of the families of junior generations, if there are many siblings and their father decides to partition his ancestral property even though sizeable before his death. During the expansion phase of the newly independent households they experience the greatest hardship. It is then that these families turn to the wife's kin for help and support. Therefore, this development sequence helps to strengthen a man's affinal ties during a period when he experiences most stress in his agnatic relationships.

#### 4.4 Women's Work Pattern

There exists a clear cut gender specific division of labour in Natunpur. Men work in the fields and women in the home compounds, whatever a woman does in the home compound is

generally considered as natural for her to do. Whenever a man is asked what work his wife does he invariably answers that she does nothing but housework (Bertocci, 1975). Since all men and women alike in the village consider all women's work as 'house work' it is essential to begin the analysis of women's work participations by examining the operations which are classified as 'housework'. The importance of housework is realised by the society but it is not recognised as productive work nor is it remunerated. Its importance is realised by men and women of Natunpur. If a wife dies before her husband, he tries to get married again soon as he needs a woman to look after the family. Previously a well-to-do man used to marry more than one wife because he was worried who will be looking after the housework. It is found and believed in the society that a household prospers only when the woman of the household is sincere and can work hard. A household with a hard working woman and with efficient female management can ensure a continuing upward economic trend. The examples which show thus have been discussed in earlier sections. In Bangladesh men usually work in the fields while women do the post harvest processing, storing etc. All sorts of such work is done by women themselves or with their supervision. Thus women's contribution and achievement in the household economy is very important. It is not denied by their menfolk, but they generally think that women are destined to do the specific work predetermined for them as a natural responsibility within the

household compound. These are like every day necessities of life which have to be performed regularly as part of a daily routine. Women's work is thus taken for granted and is not considered something to be valued or remunerated. As the work is not remunerated, it is not considered as productive. What women do is considered as only 'housework'. In what follows, I discuss what women actually do, and whether it can be termed as productive or unproductive.

Women perform a variety of different tasks within the household context. The following charts show what kinds of work women generally do in the household and who generally perform what type of work. Their work is divided into six categories. Childcare, food preparations, and cleaning may be labelled indirectly productive or domestic work, while post harvest processing, animal husbandry, sewing, mat making and such like activities rank as productive work. Though for analytical purposes it is useful to distinguish between these different types of female work it is important to remember that a woman frequently performs simultaneously several kinds of activity, for instance, she may put fuel into the earthen hearth, feed her child and keep an eye on the paddy in the compound so that it dries properly, all at the same time. From early morning till late at night village women are busy performing the different tasks. A. Farouk and M. Ali, (1975) in their study The Hard Working Poor also found that women work longer hours at productive tasks than do men.

Chart 5

Kinds of Work Done by Women in the Household

Indirectly Productive		Directly Productive	
Childcare	Food Preparation	Post harvest	Livestock
	Cleaning		Others
Feeding, washing, watching (directly or indirectly)	Fetching water, cutting veg. fish etc., grinding spices, cooking, washing utensils	Winnowing, threshing, pounding, storing, drying while drying or handling crops from birds, grinding if necessary	Give fodder & water to cows etc. Take them out in the morning, watch them, poultry raising
	Washing clothes, sweeping, mopping etc.		Collect fuel make mudgas with cowdung & jute-stick, swing, making mat, kantha. Kitchen gardens process rice & pulses.

Chart 6

Who Performs What Work Among Natunpur Women

Indirectly Productive Work	Who Performs it	Directly Productive work	Who Performs it
Fetching water for drinking and cooking	Daughter-in-law Daughter	Fetching water for livestock, give them fodder, make <u>Mutha</u> with cowdung, sweeping outer house	Widow, deserted wives, mother-in-law or other elderly women
Cutting veg., fish grinding spices, washing utensils	Daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, other members	Making <u>muri-chira</u> etc.	Daughter-in-law
Serving food cooking	Daughter-in-law, mother-in-law	Drying, threshing, pounding	Daughter-in-law
Sweeping inner house	Daughter-in-law	Boiling, processing	Daughter-in-law

It is not only men who are concerned about prestige implications of their women's work participation, but the women themselves also consider the effect of their work performance on their status. Women explicitly consider childcare and food preparation as personal and private tasks, which do not require going outside the inner compound of their home. By contrast directly productive work like post-harvest processing and animal husbandry necessitates more movement in and around the outer compound of the house. Therefore, it is regarded as less prestigious. Those households who can afford to employ other women to do such lower prestige productive work get it usually done by older women, widows and divorcees. To be able to keep women within the inner compound of their homes is still regarded as prestige symbol except in a few cases where educated women go out to perform prestigious tasks like teaching or other good salaried services. (Two women of Natunpur are engaged in teaching, one in a school and the other in a college.) For a woman to perform productive work in households outside her immediate kin is still regarded as the most demeaning work for her to do. Yet an increasing proportion of women from the poorest households are forced to undertake such work. They become kamla, wage-earning labourers. When a woman becomes a kamla, she becomes free to work any where or for anybody. Her status becomes low. Generally from a household, where the men have become kamla, the women also gradually attain the same status. Also deserted or widowed women from poor

households, work as kamla, whereas other women of those households do not work in others' houses as kamla. Kamla women, though they have only low status in society are the most mobile women in the village. They enjoy most freedom of movement. It is generally through them that village women of different households come to know of different things happening in and around the village. Jean Ellickson, in her study of the village Kolaidanga (pseudonym) found that women are dependent on male members throughout their lives. As regards the women of Bangladesh, she remarked, they "are raised as dependants and learn to fear independence, as well they might. The only relative independent woman is the middle aged or elderly widow and divorced or abandoned women without adult male sons to support them. Hers is a sad and desperate independence; her previous training and experience have prepared her only for dependence". (1975:82)..

If we examine what women do as housework in their own homes or in others houses, we can easily realise how difficult and hard their tasks are, and how efficient they have to be to manage them all. A household's prosperity depends very much on the efficiency of its womenfolk. From chart 5, it is evident that the indirectly productive tasks or the housework considered as more intimate and private or personal are those relating to child care and food preparation. For child care the main responsibility lies with the mother but caring for the child,

washing, feeding etc., are done by its elder sister, or the grandmother, if they live in the same household. The child when grown up a little, plays with the children of the homesteads or the neighbourhood. The members around keep an eye on the children while doing their housework. Mothers have to keep track of their children. Generally, women are not very worried or conscious about feeding their children regularly at particular times. For the very small child, when they are breast-fed, they give milk, whenever the child cries; they do not maintain any routine. It is often found that the child is sucking its mother's breast while the mother is cooking, drying crops or doing various other jobs. When the nursing mother goes to work in others' houses she often carries the child with her to the working place. The child lies while she works. If there is an elder daughter, she often looks after her baby sibling. If the child is already a little older then it plays with the children of the place, where her mother works. In a household with only one woman and not even children to help, it is difficult for the woman to do all the household work alone. Households without other helping women around, often keep a small girl to look after the child. Often the children of the neighbours play with the child and keep an eye on it while her mother is otherwise busy.

Generally for the first delivery, the woman goes to her natal home where her mother, sister, sister-in-law or other women look after her baby and also after her well-being. The



relative situation of both the households determines how long she stays with parents. If a woman is not able to go to her parents home for her first pregnancy, generally her mother or sister or any other close female relative comes and stays with her at least for a month or forty days after delivery. Among Muslims, the baby and mother and the clothes and things used by them are washed after 40 days of child birth and they are then considered pure. For Hindus, the rule varies among different castes and also different regions. But generally the polluted phase lasts 30 days for baby girl and twenty one days for a baby boy. For Muslims there is no such distinction between the birth of baby boy or a baby girl.

Food preparation is another female responsibility. In a complex household the daughter-in-law does the main cooking while her mother-in-law and other female members help her in cutting vegetables, fish and also washing and cleaning rice and pulses before cooking. Grinding spices and cooking are generally done by the daughter-in-law. Serving food to all the members of the household is also done by the daughter-in-law. Children and men are served first, the women eat afterwards. The daughter-in-law takes her food last. The elderly women of the household may supervise the work done by the daughter-in-law, they may instruct her as to whom to give what portions of food or what type of food at what time. The household head, other men as well as male children are given the

choicest items of food. Women, specially the mother eat what is left over by the children and the men after every body has finished eating. It is a great virtue if a woman can feed the members of her household according to their taste and preferences. In the poor households when men are not in a position to earn money or crops as remuneration for their work, it is expected that the women secure a loan or help of rice or money from neighbours or kin and cook food for husband and children. Women say that 'we cannot keep our children fasting'. It is the women who mortgage their brass plates, etc. in time of crisis to help the family survive, whatever income the poorest women earn from different sources, like selling muthas, (made of jute stick and cowdung used as fuel) paties (mat) or selling labour to other houses or from growing and selling vegetables etc., is spent on the basic necessities of life. Sweeping and cleaning the inner house is being done by the daughter-in-law. Washing of bed sheets, mosquito-nets, kantha (quilt) etc. are done by all the women of the household. Only in rich households they employ casual labour for doing these tasks.

Some jobs which can be termed directly productive are also done by the women. They are very important and are directly linked with production. Chart 5 shows how many types of tasks are done by women in the household and how crucial they are. Chart 6 shows who usually perform these jobs. In a complex household there are generally more women to perform

these indirectly and directly productive tasks, but in simple ones there are less women to do them. If the household possesses more landed property, then there is lot of work for women to do. They may employ outside women to help the female household members or if they are very status conscious, the household women members may only supervise while the actual work is done by outsiders. Thus the household's socio-economic condition helps to determine the nature of work for its women. Along with the economic factor, kinship, samaj and neighbourhood also influence what work the women do where they do and how they do.

The kind of work a woman does is influenced not only by economic considerations but also by the position she occupies in her life cycle. A young woman even among the poorest is much more constrained in what work she can do than an older woman, particularly if she is already a mother-in-law. Wealthier gusti households try to provide work within their gusti for women of their poorer member households. If a woman works outside the households of her immediate kin this reflects on the whole gusti. However, although gusti honour and prestige continue to represent strong social forces in Natunpur things have begun to change in this context. Extreme economic hardship and new opportunities brought in from outside Natunpur together appear to result in changing values regarding women's roles. In this context, it is relevant to relate the case of Karim's gusti; women of that gusti living in the adjacent

village come in groups at dawn and return at dusk, so that no villagers can see them. They work the whole day in different households of Karim's gusti. They bring their children with them and have their meals in Karim's gusti households. These women from outside Natunpur usually work there only during the harvesting season. Thus these women, even though they go to work in a neighbouring village, keep their status by working only for their own kin group. Moreover, they are not seen by many men as they travel at a time when it is dusk and there are but few people on the roads. These are the ways by which women are kept in the status trap.

But severe economic hardship and new opportunities brought some women to work even outside their kingroup. Hazi's grand daughter works in different households as maid servant, even in the households of the service holders who live in the village. She was not given work by her kins for her misconduct. So for her livelihood she has to take work in others homes, specially those, who are outsiders and service holders. Gradually she is again given work by her kingroup. She got an offer to get village defence training in Puthia, the thana head quarter. When she was selected for the training, Abed Hazi objected to her participating in the programme. He feared that if she did so his own social status would also diminish. However, since some other women of the village also attended the training, he did not object very strongly to the proposition. His grand

daughter also stressed that there is nobody to provide her with work or food there, but there are people who act as guardians of trainees. She attended the training specifically because during the training time, she received some maintenance allowance. As result of this training Natunpur women came in contact with several women from different villages, which broadened their horizons.

As already mentioned when the gusti is not able to provide its needy members with work or financial support they start working as kamla for their living. The poorest women have to work hard to ensure their survival. They work in others houses, make muthas (jute sticks with cowdung dried in the sun, used as fuel), prepare kanthas, mats made of date-leaves, grind spices and thereby earn money. Chart 7 shows what type of work women do and what remuneration they receive. A poor woman's earnings are still below her subsistence requirements. Most of them do not have any poultry, most of them do not have a place where they can grow vegetables to sell. Their children collect cowdung from roads and fields for making mutha, because most of them do not have their own cows either. It is not possible for a poor woman to support her family with the money she can earn throughout the year. Chart 7 indicates she does not have employment all the year round. Even if one were to arrange things so as to have some employment the whole year round, the problem would not disappear. The trouble is that her earnings payment are not only scanty but also irregular;

## Chart 7

Details of a Poor Woman's Income-Earning Work  
and Remuneration (1978/9)

Types of work	Bengali Months	Time used	Measure per day
Threshing, cleaning, drying wheat pulses, etc.	Falgun-Chaitra (Feb. 15-Apr. 14)	15 days is required to process 10 mds.	Tk. 1.50-1.75 (7 sheers per 10 mds. crop processed)
Taking jute from jute sticks	Sraban-Bhadra (July 15-Sept. 14)	One takes out jute from about 250 sticks a day	1.50 Tk.
Making <u>mutha</u> from cowdung for fuel	Aswin to Jaistha (Sept. 15-June 14)	6 <u>mutha</u> per day	1.50 Tk.
Making mats from date leave	Asar to Aswin (June 15-Oct. 14)	7 days are required to finish a medium mat	1.00-1.50 Tk.
Winnowing, cleaning, drying paddy	Bhadra-Aswin (Aug. 15-Oct. 14)	15 days	1.50-1.75 (7 sheers per 10 mds. crop processed)
Grinding turmeric in <u>cheki</u> (husking pedal)	Throughout the year (Jan. to Dec.)	4 people grind about 10 sheers a day	1.50-2.00 Tk.

a woman sewing a kantha is not paid daily, she may not get paid even when she finishes the order. The worker is paid according to the employer's convenience. She earns on an average about Tk. 1 to Tk. 1.50 per day. This hardly affords her one meal. Thus the poor women's earnings are meagre and marginal.

Women in rich and middle farmer households sell mutha, eggs, milk and vegetables grown in their own kitchen gardens. Wealthier women offer mortgage loans and often make forward purchase of sugarcane at half price before it is mature and sell it in its ripe state. In these transactions women depend on the intermediary service of their menfolk. They themselves cannot negotiate with suppliers and/or buyers from outside their own kingroup or the household, whichever is the larger unit. The money these women earn, they use for buying clothes and utensils as well as things for their children. They frequently also invest in goats and calves.

An examination of female work participation in Natunpur as a whole and three paras in particular should further help to illustrate the relationship between what women do on the one hand and the family type and kinship network in which they live as well as their households socio-economic standing on the other. Tables 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 show the distribution of female labour force participation in the village. The tables

here show the general work pattern of women and the relationship between the employer and the employee. I begin by discussing female labour force participation by economic categories and household composition for Natunpur as a whole. Women in rich and big complex households have more work to do. They have more agricultural products to be processed. They have to cook at least thrice a day and more varieties of food. They have to entertain more guests and at the same time on social and also on religious festivals, they have lots more to do than their poor counterparts. They have more utensils to clean and more clothes to wash. Over and above that they have kitchen gardens, poultry and domestic animals to be looked after and cared for. On the other hand, the poorer households with less or no agricultural lands have much less work to do in their household. Because they generally take in the morning the left over rice from the previous night or chapaties (bread made of flour at home) or puffed rice locally known as muri or chira (flattened rice) as breakfast. At noon they generally cannot afford to have any food at all. While coming back from work, menfolk buy rice and other necessities for an evening meal. The women then cook the food accordingly. They often try to keep one handful of rice as an insurance for a rainy day. This store helps them in case of any emergency, like if any unexpected guest comes or if on some days the main earning male member is not able to go to work or cannot find any work or does not receive his payment. On days like this the woman of the



house cooks if she has been able to keep a few handfuls in store. Women sometimes sell rice thus accumulated for buying other necessities for their children or themselves. As mentioned earlier these women generally cook only once daily. They themselves are not educated and there is no question of their teaching their children. They have less food to cook, less clothes for wash, practically no kitchen garden to look after, nor any poultry or other domestic animals. Thus they have much more time that can be utilised. Their daughters are also active in the household work.

Table 17 shows 17 out of 110 households, that is 15 per cent of the total in Natunpur do not have female labour relationship within or outside; they do not employ any woman nor do their womenfolk work for others. Table 18 shows that of these 17 households, 70 per cent are from Beharipara and the remaining 30 per cent are from Natunpara. All the households of Satbhagipara do have some kind of female labour relationship with the people of Natunpur. Seven per cent render work in other houses as casual labour in the form of processing crops frying muri, chira, washing clothes, etc. Rich and middle stratum women employ others. Of these eight employing households, 75 per cent are from Natunpara and only 25 per cent, from Beharipara.

Kinship plays significant role in women's work participation. Eight per cent of working women of Natunpur work in kins' houses only; on the other hand, six per cent employ kin women permanently and 24 per cent work for kin and neighbours reciprocally. Thus

Table 17

**Female Labour Force Participation in Natunpur  
By Economic Category and Household Composition**

Economic Category & Household Composition	Without outside Household Relationship (1)		Work as Casual Labourer in other houses (2)		Work only in kins house (3)		Employ kins permanently (4)		Work reciprocally among kins & neighbours (5)		Work in others house as kamla (6)		Employ Casual Labourers (7)		Total									
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.								
Landless simple	47	8	32	25	2	8	56	5	20	-	-	63	10	40	-	-	100	25	22					
Landless complex	29	5	50	-	-	-	11	1	10	-	-	25	4	40	-	-	100	10	9					
Small simple	12	2	6	75	6	12	33	3	9	14	1	3	56	15	46	-	-	23	6	18	100	33		
Small complex	6	1	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	6	60	12	2	20	4	1	10	10	9				
Middle simple	6	1	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	43	3	16	7	2	11	-	-	50	13	68	100	19		
Middle complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	3	43	-	-	-	15	4	57	100	7	7			
Rich simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	1	50	4	1	50	-	-	-	-	2	2			
Rich complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	2	50	-	-	-	8	2	50	100	2	2			
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100</b>

**Note:** Percentages used in the Tables indicate households within which women work. Though one household may have more than one type of female labour relation; here in the tables the main type of female labour relation is shown.

altogether 38 per cent have kinship connections in relation to women's employment. Women from 16 households (15%) of Natunpur have become kamia, i.e., wage-earning women. Among them only two are from the small farmer category and the remaining 14 are from landless households.

Twenty-four per cent of Natunpur households employ casual women labour. It is evident from Table 17 that 18 per cent of small simple farmers and 68 per cent of middle simple households employ women casually for household work. In simple households, women need extra hands, as they are not able to finish the work by themselves. There are six (18%) small simple and one complex, households who employ casual labour in Natunpur. It is interesting to note here that the heads of these households are engaged in salaried jobs. They employ others casually to work for them or rather to help their women. They consider their status to be high and do not want to work reciprocally. Though they fell into the small farmer category and have kin in the village, they employ casual labour; they do not need to have anybody permanently in their house nor could they afford to do so. The other one simple household also employs casual labour, because the wife is not very hardworking and at the same time her husband is one of the paramaniks of the village. The one small farmer complex household also employs casual female workers, because they have a business of turmeric powder. Though it is only petty trading the women of the household are not sufficient to do all the work. Three to four women always work together

to prepare turmeric powder. Kin neighbours and often also kamla women work casually for them. Though it is a complex household with more women of working age, their demand for labour is also greater. They are not in a position to employ permanent labour, so they employ casual labour.

Table 18 indicates that in Beharipara 30 per cent, in Natunpara, 38 per cent and in Satbhagipara 64 per cent of the households/<sup>have</sup> employed kin group women. Satbhagipara households are more concerned with employing kin women, as all the households of the para belong to an old established gusti. Those who have become very poor, work in other paras as well and have become kamla. Only few women from Beharipara work in kin houses. Most of the households there are recent immigrants who have not yet formed a gusti and many of them are not agriculturists. Thirty six per cent of the Beharipara households do not develop labour relationship with others outside their households.

In Natunpara (Table 19), three landless households have not developed women labour relationships. Two of those household have their heads, engaged in service sector, and one has it doing petty trading while the wife having primary education is trying to get a job in family planning or other like organisation (recently she has got a job with the social welfare department as trainer for the women of the village mother's club, she teaches them to knit woollen sweaters, etc. and to

Table 18  
Parawise Distribution of Women's Labour Force  
Participation in Natunpur

Names of para	Without outside household relationship		Work as Casual labourer in other houses		Work only in kins house		Employ kins permanently		Work recid- proccally among kin & neigh- bours		Work in others house as <u>kamla</u>		Employ Casual Labourers		Total									
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)																	
Natunpara	30	5	8	75	6	10	56	5	8	43	3	5	59	16	25	75	12	19	62	16	25	100	63	57
Behari-para	70	12	36	25	2	6	33	3	9	43	3	9	15	4	12	6	1	3	31	8	25	100	33	30
Satbhagipara	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	1	7	14	1	7	26	7	50	19	2	22	7	2	14	100	14	3
<b>Total:</b>	100	17	15	100	8	7	100	9	8	100	7	6	100	27	29	100	16	15	26	24	100	100	110	100

Note: As in Table 17.

Table 19

Female Labour Force Participation in Natunpara by Economic Category and Household Composition

Economic Category & Household Composition	Without outside Household Relationship (1)		Work as Casual Labourer in other houses (2)		Work only in kins house (3)		Employ kins permanently (4)		Work Recl- proccally among kin and neigh- bours (5)		Work in other houses as kamla (6)		Employ Casual Labour- ers (7)		Total						
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.					
Landless simple	60	3	23	-	-	40	2	16	-	-	66	8	61	-	-	100	13	21			
Landless complex	20	1	25	-	-	20	1	25	-	-	17	2	50	-	-	100	4	6			
Small simple	20	1	6	100	6	35	40	2	12	-	38	6	35	-	13	2	12	100	17	27	
Small complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	4	67	17	2	33	-	-	100	6	9	
Middle simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	67	2	15	12	2	15	-	-	56	9	70	100	13	21	
Middle complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	3	43	-	-	25	4	57	100	7	11		
Rich simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	100	1	2		
Rich complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	1	50	-	-	-	-	6	1	50	100	2	3		
<b>Total:</b>	100	5	8	100	6	10	100	5	8	100	3	5	100	12	19	100	16	25	100	63	100

Note: As in Table 17.

make blouses and dresses for small girls). The head of one landless complex household is a carpenter, his son is in the army. The household head of one small simple farmer household mortgages his land, they have to struggle a lot to secure a livelihood. His wife has some education and comes of a well-off family. When they were having bad days, she started teaching Koran to the village women and children. She used to go to the houses of her neighbours in the para for this purpose. Women from six i.e., 35 per cent small farmer households work in other houses as casual labour. Five out of these six households are new migrants. Though they have improved their economic condition, they do not have enough of kinship connections for reciprocal labour. Women from 16 households (25%) work reciprocally. Five per cent employ kin permanently; eight per cent work in kin houses only. Nineteen per cent households have kamla women, among the eight landless simple households in Natunpara with kamla women, only one is a recent migrant and all the other seven households are old residents who have been in Natunpara for more than three generations. They have relations, some of whom are middle or even rich farmers. They try to get work in their houses, but as the situation deteriorates, they are gradually compelled to become kamla. Their household heads are also kamla. The other two landless complex households having kamla women have more than one woman to work in other houses. In one immigrant house the wife's widowed mother is living and in another one there is a deserted daughter.

In Beharipara the situation is somewhat different with 36 per cent of the households having no labour relations among their women (see Table 20). Of those 12 households 9 are landless. Some of them are petty traders. Some others pursue different kinds of jobs. They do not need any female labour nor do their womenfolk work outside their own homes. In 30 per cent of households women's employment is effected purely on kinship basis. Women from nearby villages also come to work in their kin's houses. Only one woman, belonging to an immigrant household works as kamla, while 25 per cent employ women as casual labour. Of the four gusti households in Beharipara, two gustis (Hindu) lease their lands out on sharecropping. They do not need to hire much labour to assist them in their household activities.

As already mentioned, Satbhagipara is the oldest established para within which all the households belong to the same gusti. All of them have women labour-relations in one form or another. Fifty per cent of the households work reciprocally whenever they need the services of more female labour (see Table 21). Only one small complex household employs casual women workers. Mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law live together in this household. They need additional female labour to grind and process turmeric powder which they sell in local markets. Three households are landless in this para. The heads as also three women from these households work as kamla. Those women work not only within their own para, but also in other parts of the village. All the others have small plots of lands; they can manage to live working within their own para and gusti.



Table 20

Female Labour Force Participation in Beharipara by  
Economic Category and Household Composition

Economic Category & Household Composi- tion	Without Outside Household Relation- ship (1)		Work as Casual Labourer in other houses (2)		Work only in kins house (3)		Employ kins perma- nently (4)		Work reci- proally among kin and neigh- bours (5)		Work in others house as kamla (6)		Employ Casual Labourer (7)		Total						
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.					
Landless simple	42	5	46	100	2	18	100	3	27	-	-	-	100	1	9	-	100	11	36		
Landless complex	34	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	4	11		
Small simple	8	1	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	50	2	29	-	-	50	4	57	7	21		
Small complex	8	1	33	-	-	-	-	-	-	50	2	67	-	-	-	-	100	3	9		
Middle simple	8	1	20	-	-	-	-	33	1	20	-	-	-	-	38	3	60	5	15		
Middle complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Rich simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	1	3		
Rich complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34	1	50	-	-	-	12	1	50	100	2	6		
<b>Total:</b>	100	12	36	100	2	6	100	3	9	100	4	12	100	1	3	100	8	25	100	33	100

Note: As in Table 17.

Table 21

Female Labour Force Participation in Satbhagipara by Economic Category and Household Composition

Economic Category & Household Composition	Without outside Household Relationship (1)		Work as Casual Labourer in other houses (2)		Work only in kins house (3)		Employ kins permanently (4)		Work reciprocally among kin and neighbours (5)		Work in others house as <u>kamla</u> (6)		Employ Casual Labourers (7)		Total					
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.				
Landless simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	1	100	-	-	100	1			
Landless complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	67	2	100	-	-	100	2			
Small simple	-	-	-	-	100	1	11	100	1	11	100	7	78	-	-	100	9			
Small complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50	1	100	1			
Middle simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50	1	100	1			
Middle complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
Rich simple	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
Rich complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
<b>Total:</b>			100	1	7	100	1	7	100	7	50	100	3	22	100	2	14	100	14	100

Note: As in Table 17.

Natunpara women employ female labour from other paras as well. In Satbhagipara 22 per cent of women have become kamla, they work even in Natunpara. All others are absorbed in the para within the gusti. It is important to note that as long as the parents do not fall into the kamla category and as long as her gusti can absorb her, no woman will work as a kamla. For instance in Faruk's house (small farmer, who teaches in a primary school) one of his brother's daughters works on a permanent basis. No body in the village considers her a kamla. They say, "she only helps her aunt in household chores". In Beharipara 34 per cent of Beharipara households employ female labour while women from only 30 per cent households go out to work. There are not many kamla women in this para. Seventy-three per cent of the landless households in this para have diversified their economic activities and are engaged in petty trade and various other services, (see Table 13B). Women from these households, therefore, are not forced to take on low prestige work.

The preceding discussion indicates that though there is apparently a demand for female labour it is generally regarded as prestige loss if a women goes out to work. Yet economic necessity often forces women into the employment market. If possible they prefer to work within the gusti or samaj, a status which is considered less demeaning than becoming a kamla. Only those women whose households rank among the poorest, who have no local gusti or whose gusti cannot accommodate their labour

services, become kamla workers. The intra-gusti employment of women can thus be seen as a transitional arrangement. With increasing number of women seeking employment more of them are likely to become kamla. For these poorest women it is thus the 'push' that brings them into work participation. By contrast, for educated women coming from wealthier households, it is the 'pull' of prestigious occupations which attracts them and also allows them to work outside their own home or even village.

#### 4.5 Profiles of Three Village Women

Since real life situations are much more powerful illustrations of social process than all the sophisticated theorising I have decided to present here profiles of three village women each representing a different type of female labour participation in Natunpur.

##### Profile I

Ramala, (22 years old) a school teacher is the daughter of a rich Hindu family. As an undergraduate she is one of the very few educated village girls. Because of this her services are in great demand. She was not only selected as member of the Union Parisad (council) and secretary of the village Mothers Club but also acts as executive member of the thana level unit of Jatiya Mahila Sanstha (National Women's Organisation). She regularly attends the weekly meetings of the Jatiya Mahila Sanstha held at Puthia. She is also supposed to attend the

Union Parisad meetings, which are predominantly male gatherings. According to governmental regulations there must be at least two female members in every Union Parisad. This is the reason why this particular Union Parisad also has two female members of whom Ramala is one. She has been told by the Union Parisad Chairman that it is not necessary for her to attend meetings regularly; he assured her that he would inform her if her presence was required in case of visits from dignitaries and such like occasions. The Chairman regards Ramala as if she were his own sister, as he has been a close friend of her brother for many years. Therefore, his advice to Ramala cannot be taken to mean that he does not like her or that he wants to avoid her; rather it indicates his concern for her. He considers that her participation in meetings where mostly men attend would adversely affect her own social status and the prestige of her whole family. Moreover, he regards the matters discussed at Union Parisad meetings to be decided only by men.

Ramala married recently and now lives 15 miles from Natunpur. Though she already has a baby son she continues to teach in the same school where she taught before she got married. This means that she now has to travel daily 17 miles to the school and back home again. Neither her parents-in-law nor her husband object to her going out to work. There is generally high prestige attached to teaching. Therefore, her employment does not diminish her family's prestige ranking. Her income

is small and represents only a marginal addition to her family's resources; she spends it mainly on consumer goods.

The fact that Ramala has been able to maintain her reputation even after having been employed outside her village and also attending Union Parisad meetings has certainly had an indirect impact on other women's perceptions of their own roles in society. As long as Ramala offers to accompany any Natunpur woman or girl to Rajshahi for medical consultation, shopping or any other purpose there is no objection raised. Thus Ramala's prestigious job as a teacher not only 'pulled' her into employment outside her village but also helped broaden the horizon of an increasing number of other young Natunpur women.

### Profile II

Basanti, a fourteen years old domestic servant works for Gopal's family, who though not of the same gusti as her own is yet related to her mother. She does all kinds of work in Gopal's household and is formally considered as a family member; she is not treated like a kamla. She resides with Gopal's family, gets her food and clothing there, but no monetary reward. When once she was beaten for not doing a job properly she ran back home. Subsequently, her parents were contacted by a Rajshahi Hindu family who offered to engage Basanti for domestic work and pay her Tk. 20 per month besides her food lodging and clothing. Gopal became furious when he heard about this proposition and

threatened her parents, who were his clients, that he would withdraw all help from them; he stressed that he would not be prepared to contribute to Basanti's wedding expenditure when the time would come, if she went to work outside Natunpur. He was worried that her employment as domestic servant in Rajshahi would not only adversely affect the prestige of her family but would also reflect on his own. This threat made Basanti's mother approach Gopal with her daughter and arrange with him to take her back.

This shows that marriage chances are also important considerations affecting decisions in the context of female labour participation. If at all possible poorer households arrange for their unmarried girls to work for households within their gusti or those with whom they are somehow related. Often those girls who worked for related households before they got married, become kamla when they get older. Thus the prestige-saving decision by Basanti's family to forego the better terms offered her in Rajshahi is likely to result only in delaying her kamla status.

### Profile III

Amena, a kamla is the 55 years old wife of Samad, an elderly landless labourer. He is no more able to do much hard work. His wife as well as daughter called Maleka both turned to work as casual labourers within their gusti as well as in neighbouring households, to help secure a minimum income for their family.

They live in Satbhagipara where the one local gusti is not able to provide work for all its women within its kin-boundaries.

When Amena's son began working as agricultural labourer he asked her to stop working in other houses. Amena, therefore, stopped working outside her own house. Since neither her brother nor her father asked Maleka to do likewise she continued to go out to work. Recently when Amena's son married and established his separate household she began to work for others again, this time as a kamla being prepared to work for any household disregarding family connections. Neither her family nor the gusti could provide a livelihood for Amena. This finally forced her to become a kamla. Her son had tried to prevent her from becoming a kamla but when on marriage he separated from his parental household his mother was forced to trade in prestige considerations for a minimum of subsistence. Those women who are already regarded of low prestige, such as destitutes and widows as well as deserted and divorced women, thus find it easier to work as kamla. They need not worry about further loss of status, since they are already at the bottom of the prestige hierarchy.

#### 4.6 Development Projects for Village Women; A Mothers Club

In the preceding pages I have tried to discuss not only the factors affecting Natunpur women's labour participation but also their response to new opportunities. In this section I



outline and analyse the progress of the village Mothers Club, which is part of the Rural Social Service (RSS) programme. In 1978 the thana R.S.S. initiated a programme for rural development with the main objective of improving the conditions of the poorer villagers. On an experimental basis Puthia thana selected 10 villages from six Unions for the implementation of these first R.S.S. programmes; Natunpur was one of them. Therefore, the thana R.S.S. officers came to the village together with one male and another female extension worker. They selected 17 villagers (15 men and 2 women) to form a Project Committee. They also selected villagers to form one executive committee for each of four project activities, namely: a mothers club, a youth society, a society for the landless and a society for poor children. Since the mothers club is the only one of these four project activities, aimed at involving village women I focus on its progress in Natunpur.

The R.S.S. had its object "to organise the disadvantaged groups so as to give them the capacity to think for themselves, identify their problems, pinpoint their felt-needs and on the basis of these units of action to solve these problems, fulfill these needs, principally on the basis of self-reliance with the minimum of external (i.e. external to the community) assistance including government help". (Rahman, 1979:80). "Economic emancipation and economic participation are now generally recognised as two of the most important pre-requisites

for effective family planning programmes. Therefore, mothers clubs were established with the following objectives:

- (a) Involving rural women in gainful economic activities and help improving quality of life and thus achieving status in the family particularly and society at large.
- (b) Helping them develop leadership skills so that they can play the role of change-agent in society.
- (c) Equipping them with skills so that they can be self-employed and supplement family income.
- (d) Providing them with functional education so that they become aware of their problems and take necessary steps towards solving them.
- (e) Infusing the idea of family planning through information, education, motivation and communication and other supportive services, gradually motivate them to adopt small family norms" (Rahman, 1979: 80).

The Mothers Club movement, if well organised and well directed is undoubtedly one of the most effective programmes for rural women. Its formation and progress in Natunpur indicates the pitfalls into which a village mothers club may run. It also suggests a number of measures which may help to avoid these difficulties.

Jaheda and Ramala, two educated young Natunpur women from middle and rich farmer households respectively were selected as president and Secretary of the club. Both these women have been and continue to be selected for several other such administrative

positions, simply because of their higher education. The club's executive committee is composed of nine selected female villagers of whom the R.S.S. extension worker is one. All these nine women have at least primary education. Thirty-seven women joined the Club of whom two thirds came from Natunpur and the rest from nearby villages. Their age ranged from 10 to 60 years. Of the 24 Natunpur women 17 per cent were kamla workers, while the others were working only in their own homes. Thirteen of the Natunpur club members are unmarried of whom 64 per cent have had at least some education. Except for one married woman who belongs to a rich household in Natunpur all the others belong to the poorest strata. Of the 13 women from nearby village 23 per cent are unmarried, 38 per cent are deserted wives and 39 per cent are married women, all of them are from landless families.

A considerable proportion of the unmarried women joined because they thought that membership would enable them to learn sewing, knitting and such like skills which may enable them to earn some income for themselves. The parents of these unmarried girls did not object to their daughters joining the village Mothers Club simply because Kamala and Jaheda, the two educated and respectable young village women worked in it. Most of the unmarried girls who come from upper strata households also considered that sewing and knitting would be attractive qualifications for getting married. By contrast kamla and other poor women from

individual households without a gusti in the village joined the Club in the hope that it would help them get some work by which to supplement their family income. The various groups of women involved in the running of the Mothers Club, thus each had its specific expectations even though those were not properly articulated.

The thana office presented the Natunpur Mother's Club with a sewing machine. Since the Club lacked its own quarters the new sewing machine was placed in the home of Jaheda, the president. This arrangement enabled the domestic servant in Jaheda's family to learn sewing and subsequently to get small orders from villagers, thereby earning some cash. However, this servant remained the only Club member who until recently has utilised this machine to learn sewing. The problem here was that Jaheda's mother, who is a respectable widow made it known that she does not like all sorts of women to come to her home to learn how to use sewing machine. She particularly regarded women from recently immigrant households well below her own social status. All of Jaheda's brothers and sisters are educated; she herself teaches at a local private college. Within Natunpur Jaheda's spatial mobility is restricted like that of all other women. But she can readily go to Rajshahi in connection with her job and can also travel to Dhaka regarding her official responsibilities. Her family who belongs to the upper strata tries to keep aloof from other villagers.

Neither Ramala, the Club Secretary nor Jaheda its president had much idea about the precise programme the Club should follow, nor did the R.S.S. Project Committee know what should be done either. Therefore, before the Club ever got off the ground it fell into disarray. When the R.S.S. officers realised this they tried to help the poorest villagers directly by giving them small loans to help them initiate some income generating activity. Tk. 4,000 were thus distributed in Natunpur among 16 poor women, 13 landless men and 4 poor young men. This money was handed out to enable some of the poorest households to invest in goats or establish petty businesses. Though some of the recipients of these loans used the cash for purposes of consumption instead of investment, most of them did start one or the other new income-earning activity, which helped in improving their household income and levels of living.

To revive the Mothers Club a leadership training programme at Dhaka for Natunpur Women's Club was planned in 1980. For a number of reasons the date of this training had to be postponed at the last minute. Since the news of this postponement did not reach Natunpur in time two of the selected women set off from the village: Soma the 35 year old wife of a petty trader who is related to one the rich Hindu families in Natunpara and Safura, a 55 year old woman who belonged to a landless household but was related to Karim in the village, travelled together with two men (one village extension worker and one Project Committee

member) to Dhaka. On their arrival there, even though their training programme had been postponed, the chief of the women's development programme arranged an ad hoc programme for them. This included a visit to Karika (handicraft shop) as well as other places where women were making different kinds of craft articles, they were also shown women receiving training in poultry farming etc.

This experience helped to broaden their village horizon and enthused them so much that on their return to Natunpur they took the initiative to put new life into the local Mothers Club. As a result they were chosen a few months later to participate together with three other Natunpur women in a 'village Defence Training' programme which was held in Puthia, the thana headquarters. There they listened to talks on how to establish peace and maintain harmony in village society and also on the need of literacy and family planning. Subsequently, Sufura started a literacy programme for a group of women in Beharipara where she herself lives and Soma did the same in Natunpara, where she resides. They managed to raise some money and with it they bought two maunds of wheat when prices were low with the intention of storing the wheat and selling it when prices were to rise. They also procured from the Union Parisad a set of books which they had received from the UNICEF. Recently, Soma got a job as a trainer of Social Welfare work. She has now taken the Club's

sewing machine into her own home, where a number of the unmarried girls come to learn how to sew.

These two sub-clubs of the village Mothers Club have now been in existence for almost one year. Though they are still in their infancy they show promise of success. They are more likely to become accepted features of village women's lives simply because they are in tune with the established parawise social organisation in Natunpur. Also unlike Ramala and Jaheda, who were selected for their leadership roles because of their higher education without any training in how to run a Mothers Club, Soma and Safura spontaneously organised the literacy training for women after having learnt about various training programmes during their visit to Dhaka. Though Soma and Safura have had only primary education, while Ramala and Jaheda have tertiary education, the former two appear to have much more innate leadership qualities. In a village like Natunpur where women's behaviour is taken to symbolise their kingroup's prestige and where they are expected to remain within the inner compound of their homes it is not easy to find very many capable leaders for a Mothers Club.

The account of Natunpur's Mothers Club indicates that development programmes for rural women are more likely to succeed if they are designed within the framework of existing social institutions, (such as the para or samaj), if they

involve committed women with leadership qualities and lastly, if these women can broaden their horizon and are given the freedom to develop their programmes their own way.



## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I attempted to discuss the changing pattern of women's behaviour in rural Bangladesh. In analysing the field data I collected in Natunpur village, it soon became obvious that it is impossible to study women in isolation from the overall society of which they are an integral part. To understand why and what of women's activities I also had to investigate the dynamics of the overall socio-economic change in the village.

Natunpur's settlement history helps to explain present social patterns. There is a clear distinction between old established households who have been residing in Natunpur for more than two generations on the one hand and more recent immigrants on the other. The former have had time to develop a wider kinship network within the village and have formed minimal lineages, i.e., gustis. By contrast the latter usually reside in individual households without belonging to any larger kin group. Though the individual gustis are not economically homogeneous they represent groups that share a common identity and are concerned with their collective honour. As a steppingstone to full membership of the village society, individual immigrant households are grafted onto the local samaj.

Both old and new settlers in Natunpur consider land as the most important asset. A household that can produce sufficient

crops to meet its own staple food requirements throughout the whole year is generally regarded with respect. However, the distribution of land is highly skewed: six per cent of the wealthiest households own 40 per cent of the cultivable land, while 70 per cent are landless or small farmers. The changing fortunes of individual households appear to be a function of population growth and access to non-agricultural sources of income, which in turn is linked with a network of social relations that reach outside the village. This helps to explain why the oldest residential para, namely Satbhagipara represents the poorest area of Natunpur. Population growth over the generations has resulted in continuous sub-division of land among households there and consequently farm units are no more viable. Moreover, these longer established village households lack the contacts with the wider economy to ensure them access to sources of non-agricultural income.

In Beharipara most of the residents are recent immigrants with a trading background. They are engaged in a variety of occupations. Natunpur attracts these people because of its easy access to transport and a good communication network, and because it has a trading tradition, having previously been a market place.

Most Natunpur households that own land look after it themselves; only a few of the wealthier farmers have their land

sharecropped, while some small farmers also do so, simply because they lack the necessary farm equipment. A large proportion of those who sharecrop within Natunpur actually reside outside the village. Mortgages provide the process whereby land changes hands; contingencies or emergencies often force farmers to raise credit by mortgaging all or part of their lands. If the debtor is unable to repay the loan the mortgage is foreclosed and the land passes into the hands of the creditor (Bailey, 1971:82). Not only shortage of cash but also, in some cases lack of farm implements and/or labour is responsible for the economic decline of individual households. Reciprocal labour arrangements with kin and neighbours provide one possibility to overcome peaked shortages of labour, specially among the middle and small farmers. The larger farmers manage to engage casual labour and pay for it in kind or cash. Specially during paddy harvesting, middle and small farmers generally pay the remuneration in kind.

Those small farmers who lose their mortgaged land to their creditors, either continue their activities on land by sharecropping it or turn to petty trade. Two thirds of Natunpur small farmers and landless labourers are set on a downward economic trend. Only a small proportion of all the households are now better off than their parents were. However, even these households are likely to face declining fortunes in future when the next generation takes over and the property is subdivided among all the heirs.

It is specifically interesting to note that land has now a value over and above its economic contribution. Though non-farm income in these days is an essential addition to crop production by individual households, prestige is awarded mainly on the basis of landholding. Prestige and honour are concepts basic to both Muslim and Hindu societies. Those who do not have prestigious background attempt to gain status not only by acquiring lands on mortgages, but also by pious behaviour. This means going on pilgrimages to Mecca, establishing mosques in the village and, no less important, arranging for the women in the household to observe strict pardah. Women's behaviour reflects the status of the household. On the other hand, Hindu and Muslim women getting educated, are influenced by modernisation and urbanisation. They observe only the behavioural aspect of pardah.

Women's behaviour is seen to symbolise not only the prestige of their own household but also of their whole caste. It is the collective honour of the caste which is threatened by women's unacceptable behaviour. Thus when a Hindu girl married a Muslim boy, the whole Hindu community of the village and around were as a repercussion, shocked and their women's mobility in the society was curtailed. Some of the Hindu families even stopped their girls going to school for secondary education.

Thus kinship is a crucial component in the determination of the norms of women's behaviour. The young girl before her

marriage is a member of her paternal kingroup while on marriage she joins her husband's kingroup. When she does so the young couple usually live as part of a complex family. Therefore, the young wife has to adjust not only to her mother-in-law but also to her sister-in-law and other members of the household. She has to conform to the existing value system as regards women's behaviour. This often results in intra-familial tension and leads to its break up into individual households. During this time, the property she inherited from her parental source is added to the share in her individual household. Under Muslim law, a Muslim woman has the right to inherit parental property. Generally as long as father is alive daughters do not claim parental property. It is considered a disgraceful act for the daughter to take her share in parental property just after her father's death, whereas sons usually get their shares just after the division. Generally, the daughter vests in her brother the landed property she inherits after her father's death. In lieu of it the sister enjoys the right to come and stay for sometime at her paternal home once or twice a year. Whether or when she may claim her inheritance depends very much on the socio-economic condition she finds herself in after her marriage. A woman tries to keep her personal assets with her own parents until she establishes her own independent household. At that point in time a transfer often takes place of her property from her father's to her husband's household. She, therefore,

contributes considerably to the setting up of her husband's household.

However, it must be noted that women are not a homogeneous group; they are differentiated by age, socio-economic background etc. Yet the model role of a Natunpur woman is for her to remain within the shelter of her own home. Women are expected to live in seclusion and to observe purdah. Purdah system is a kind of mechanism through which the honour of the kingroup is observed. The extent of spatial and behavioural constraints on women decreases as they pass through their life cycle. On the other hand, the older women are expected to follow religious rules more firmly than young girls.

The 'bounded' world within which Natunpur women live forges strong ties among them. These ties often even cut across the religious division between Muslims and Hindus and friendship and/or fictitious kinship relations develop. Thus they move around among their own network of relationships. The pressure of economic hardship has, however, affected women's behaviour. Though the norms remain in tact, what women actually do now-a-days contains the seeds of change. The pauperisation of an increasing number of Natunpur households is forcing some women to work as casual labourers. As long as they can do so for their own gusti households the prestige of the kingroup remains unaffected. The gusti is regarded as the private domain within which women can move freely. In Natunpur the constraints on

women's behaviour are more linked with kinship rather than with spatial considerations. The case of the women of the nearby village who walk daily to and from Natunpur to work as casual labourers exemplifies this point. Since they work for one of their own gusti households the fact that they move between the villages is not considered as demeaning.

The emphasis on the collective honour of the gusti puts pressure on its wealthier members to help their poorer kin and thereby prevent their women from working for households outside their gusti. However, the increasing immiserisation of a growing number of Natunpur households forces more and more women to work as kamla, i.e. wage labourers in the open market. The daily wage of Tk. 1.50, a kamla woman earns hardly buys for her one simple meal. The poorest women who are kamlas use their income as addition to their otherwise deficient household resources. Without male support it is pretty difficult for a woman to maintain her family. This applies even to women of middle or rich families. The better-off women who are often engaged in offering credit on mortgaged assets or in buying and selling crops of sugarcane are also dependent on the mediation done by their menfolk. Only the few educated women who work as teachers are not in a directly dependent relationship with their male kin. Their education and occupation yield them and their respective households prestige. These professional young women are thus 'attracted' to take up employment as teachers

and the like. By contrast, the poorest women are 'pushed' by poverty into working as kamla.

There is thus the beginnings of a movement towards more formalised female participation in the labour force at both the extremes of socio-economic differentiation: the wealthier and educated women are 'pulled' into employment, while the poorest are 'pushed' into seeking additional income.

However, the large bulk of Natunpur women still live their lives within the domestic arena. Though women's mobility within and outside the village has increased, there exists still a distinct difference between a daughter and a daughter-in-law. A young woman faces fewer constraints in her own natal home than she does in her affinal household. Previously, only Hindus in Natunpur paid dowry on marriage. Now-a-days Muslims also do so and there is an increasing trend noticeable in this context. The bigger the dowry the higher the respect given to the young bride in her affinal home. Even the poorest households go into debt just to provide their daughters with a reasonable dowry. Without these, girls would be doomed to remain unmarried.

It is evident that all Natunpur women, except for the two well educated who work outside the village, live within a 'bounded universe' and venture outside the village only on social occasions when they are accompanied by their male kin



or older female relatives. This 'bounded universe' is continuously being re-inforced by intra-village socio-economic stratification which re-emphasises the existing prestige hierarchy. Moreover, it is perpetuated also by the lack of income earning opportunities outside Natunpur. Thus the study illustrates the complex inter-dependence between women's roles, their family and kinship setting with associated status concepts, as well as their socio-economic background. A change in one of these intricately intertwined variables results in ripples of changes running right through the village society.

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