

**ROLE OF 'SAMAJ' IN A TRADITIONAL VILLAGE
COMMUNITY OF BANGLADESH:**

An Anthropological Study

M. Phil Thesis



384623



S. M. Ghulam Hilali
Registration No. 166
Session : 1993-94
Department of Anthropology
University of Dhaka.

M.Phil.

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Declaration

The material embodied in this thesis is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any other diploma or degree of any University

M. GHULAM HILALI

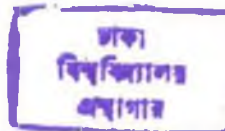
A. Chowdhury.

Dr. Anwarullah Chowdhury
Professor of Anthropology
University of Dhaka

And

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Supervisor



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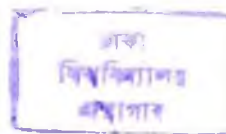
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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. The Problem

This is a village study with a focus on its *samaj* groupings in the Munshiganj district of Bangladesh. I became interested in this problem while I was a student in the Sociology Department of Dhaka University. I read a course on social structure of Bangladesh. Afterwards as a M.Phil. student I decided to study *samaj* more intensively. I have, therefore, made an investigation into the role of *samaj* in a rural community for the purpose of present research. The village of Batabaria (my study area) is a typical village of Bangladesh. *Samaj* means *society* in English. *Samaj* as cohesive social group, widely exists in the rural society of Bangladesh. This group is bonded with kin ties and it has a common socio-political identity and territorial boundary. This is a brief and broader meaning of *samaj*. I shall discuss elaborately the role of *samaj* in Batabaria in the pages to follow. In other words, it is an ethnographic study of rural community (known as Batabaria) with emphasis on traditional role of the institution of *samaj* and the recent changes in the role of this rural institution.

1.2. Objectives and Importance of the study

The study is essentially an ethnographic account of a village community in Bangladesh with an emphasis on the role of *samaj*. It is true that the role of *samaj* is now being replaced by other social and political institutions at the local level. Nevertheless, the study of changes in

traditional role and functions of this traditional institution will help us in better understanding the rural society of Bangladesh. There are few studies so far that have focused on the *samaj*. Therefore, a micro level empirical investigation needs to be carried out. The present study is an humble attempt towards that direction.

It is an intensive study on the changing aspects of *samaj* the related issues with reference to Batabaria. The study will also focus on the co-operation and conflicts between the role of *samaj* and those of other institutions.

The main objectives of the present research are as follows :

- (a) to prepare the ethnography of the people of a rural community – Batabaria;
- (b) to investigate into *samaj* grouping;
- (c) to know the traditional role and function of *samaj*;
- (d) to know the changing role and function of *samaj*.

1.3 Scope of Study

Samaj plays an important role in rural communities, but this institution is disintegrating today. In the portion of literature review researcher tried to review some most important account of village study ranging a period over 30 years. It helped to form an idea of *samaj* and leads the researcher to elaborate and find out insightful issues on *samaj*.

In the village under study section I have described the village with its demographic, religious educational picture. And after that the economic

life of the village under study is taken into consideration. Its agriculture, major crops, land ownership pattern, occupational and income pattern have been discussed. Agrarian classes and role of production have given a required emphasis.

In the next chapter I have discussed the power structure of the village. Source of power has been discussed. Politics and the role of *samaj* leaders have also been taken into consideration.

In the next chapter I have discussed role of *samaj* in Batabaria village community. It deals with social group versus occupation as well as basis and features of *samaj*. *Samaj* leaders and the functions of *samaj* are also discussed. And finally changing pattern of *samaj* has also focused in this chapter. I sum up the findings in the concluding chapter.

1.4 Methodology

Mainly participant observation method is followed to get an ethnographic account. Some other techniques have been used to get information for the purpose. To built the theoretical framework it is tried to focused on social solidarity as described by Durkheim. By relating the theory it could understand better what *samaj* so in the rural society.

The study is an anthropological one. I followed the method of intensive fieldwork or participant observation in the village under study. My fieldwork began in late August 1999 and continued up to April, 2000.

About village study, Chowdhury suggests “anthropological method, which involves direct participant and observation in the field, seems to us the most useful method for the study of village communities in contemporary Bangladesh. Because we think we could gain insights into the society and culture of the people whom we are investigating through intensive fieldwork”. (1978:12). This method was most effectively applied by two scholars namely Malinowski (1884-1942) and Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). Brown stressed the need for “an intensive investigation of each culture as an adaptive and integrative mechanism and a comparison one with another of as many variant types as possible”. (Chowdhury:1987:2). According to Malinowski, the aim of the ethnographer is “to grasp the native point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world (Chowdhury:1987:2). Founded by these two social anthropologists, many other scholars adopted this method to understand the society with its innate nature. Inspired by them, I followed this method as a primary one for the present investigation.

While establishing rapport with the villagers I have discussed about the issue to start my study. I got enough help from my key informant. He introduced me as an academic researcher with the villagers. Initially my key informant accompanied me regularly in rapport building process. After when I was confident enough to go alone, then I asked my key informant to meet me occasionally and when needed in my place of stay.

I stayed in a poultry firm house in the village. Though a *samaj* leader owned it, its position and isolation from village homesteads helped me a

lot to be a neutral academic researcher. Some influential persons of the area invited me to reside in their houses, which I refused modestly by convincing them that the firm house would be the best for my research work. They arranged me a local boy to shop and cook for me. Sometimes I intentionally took my meal at the nearby bus stop cum bazaar hotel for better interaction with the cross section of peoples.

Initially it was a bit tough to convince the people and to make them understand about this academic research. From the very beginning I disclosed my identity. My key informant played a great role in this accord.

During my stay in Batabaria, I was a participant-observer and a learner among the people. It was rather more informal way of collecting information about the subject matter of the study. These informal techniques include gossip, group discussion and discussion with individuals. Gossiping implies that the researcher is not in a hurry; he has patience and sympathy as well. Gossiping was an informal event and took place generally in market place, bus stop, tea stall and play ground. I used to verify the information came out from gossip with group discussion and individual personal level discussion. In group discussion some important issues came out, as one mistaken something other corrected the facts.

My intimate observation of the village was another technique to formulate my idea of the society as a whole. I participated in day-to-day activities of the people under investigation. I participated many in

programmes and rituals of the village. This helped me to develop intimate relationship with the people under study. This approach provides me with much information about their inner view of the *samaj* as well as society.

Since the aged people informally govern the entity of *samaj*, I emphasised the information provided by the older generation. It was a very great opportunity to get information from the experienced people about past history of the village society.

A census schedule was used to collect information. The census schedule helped me to draw a socio-economic and demographic profile of the village.

During my fieldwork I used a tape recorder to tape the discussion with individuals. The taped information was kept into diary afterwards. Although the study was primarily based on intensive fieldwork, there was a significant role of libraries. Library books helped me theorise the study, form the approach of the study and review the relevant literature.

I faced some difficulties in the field. While collecting census data I had to face sceptic attitude from influentials. But my friend from this village and a trusted person to them helped me to overcome the problem. Then the village people were also convinced of my academic intention and helped me in my work.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

To understand the rural social structure of Bangladesh it is needed to study social phenomena. And here I have taken a classical definition of MacIver from his book *Society*, “Society is a system of usage and procedures, authority and mutual aid, or many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever-changing complex system we call society. It is the web of social relationship. And it is always changing. (MacIver:5). This definition leads us to take our selected village as a society though it is a part of a greater society.

In MacIver’s word “... the community we are referring to a form of social organisation which may be distinguished from other forms. We are interested in common characteristics and in describing its various types. We are interested again not merely in this crowd or in that crowd, not merely in the description of a particular crowd at a particular time.” Actually in here community goes with the society side by side. It is hard to differentiate both terms in a typical Bangladesh village. By traditionally I tried to focus a tradition bound society, where changes are not frequent and visible enough.

To understand *samaj* I take the approach of solidarity within the society. Solidarity is the basis of society. *Samaj* grouping reflects a form of social solidarity. In *samaj* group there are interrelationships among its members. In societies, there are age-old institutions depending on which society and community evolves. These are the bases of society.

In Durkheim's view society changed from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. "In Durkheim's thought, the two forms of solidarity corresponds to two extreme forms of social organisation. The societies which in Durkheim's day were called primitive and which today are more likely to called archaic are characterised by the predominance of mechanical solidarity." (Aron:22)

Aron says " the opposition between these tow forms of solidarity is combine with the opposition between segmental societies and societies characterized by modern division of labour. In Durkheim's terminology, a segment designates a social group into which the individuals are tightly incorporated. But a segment also a group of locally situated, relatively isolated from others, which its own life. The segment is characterized by mechanical solidarity, a solidarity of resemblance; but it is also characterized by seperation from outside world. The segment as self sufficient, it has little communication with what it outside. By definition, so to speak, segmental organization contradictory to those general phenomena of differentiation designated by the term organic solidarity"(Aron:22).

Following Durkheim it seems to us that *samaj* has mechanical solidarity and at the same time as a part of greater modern society it has organic solidarity also. A large numbers of sociologists and anthropologists said that kinship is the most important element of society. In this study it is tried to understand whether *samaj* group has any relationship with kinship

ties or not. Generally it is seen that in any village society *samaj* group, where does it exist, formulates ties and bondage depending on kinship.

In this study I have tried to observe whether the kinship bond is creating solidarity in the village society or not. It is needed to understand how this kinship network works within the society. It is one of the major objectives of the study to find out how many *samaj* are playing role in the said community and how they interact with each other.

Chapter - II

Literature Review

Important and Relevant Literatures

While studying Bangladesh society we came across some important literatures which focused on *samaj*. Those studies have not given much emphasis on *samaj* groups. We would like to have a review of those important studies to conceptualise *samaj*, the main focus of our research.

‘*Samaj*’ is a commonly used term in Bangladesh Society. It is a social group mostly seen in rural societies. This social group can be defined as “... a group of people living together generally on the basis of kinship which has a territorial boundary and which has common socio-political identity.” (Chowdhury:1982:44-45).

The unique feature of *samaj* has not drawn much attention academically with importance and significance. In this process of literature review, it was found that some studies observed the entity of *samaj* as a small unit of their research. The relevant part of their study would be helpful as our study guideline.

We came to know about the *samaj* grouping in the rural society of Bangladesh from an anthropological study by Peter J. Bertocci. His study *Elusive Villages: Social Structure and Community Organization in Rural East Pakistan* is a milestone in this field .

The purpose of Bertocci's study was "to close the gap of lacuna in field of the then East Pakistan anthropological literature. At the same time he putted up in this way '... I merely express a strongly felt obligation to perform something of the traditional ethnographer's task and ... to provide to the extend of its relevance to a more specific set of problems, a reasonable modicum of culturally descriptive. (Bertocci: 1970: 1)

Bertocci's major aim of the study was to analyse the relationship between community organisation and social Structure. "By Community Organisation," Bertocci meant, "... the complex of groups, associations and institutions related to kinship, economics, politics, and religion which both organisationally and normatively shape interaction between *members of a residential population.*" (Bertocci: 1970: 2)

According to Bertocci, “Among Bengalis, there is a form of social organisation denoted by the word *Samaj*, which implies a cultural concept of community. Etymologically, *Samaj* is footed in the notion of “doing together”, although in its modern usage, it is rightly translated as “society” in general or, in more limited context, “association”... while the *Samaj* continues to regulate intra-caste marriages and delimit marriages circles for rural Bengali Hindus today, nearly everywhere for Bengali Muslims the *Samaj* form is not a symbolic and as organisational referent for the political and religious community. Its leadership consists of a sort of council of elders, a group of men from differing homesteads, perhaps even different villages, under whom a subgroup of other homesteads is at least nominally united in loyalty and under whose sponsorship various religious activities take place” (Chowdhury:1982:46-46).

Bertocci pointed out that there were three levels of community organisation in his study area namely *reyai*, *village* and *samaj*. “... rural social organisation” as Bertocci describes, “... can be seen both structurally and processually as involving the following stages of steps. Its minimal unit is homestead-based patrilineage, which in turn builds into ... homestead clusters, constellation of lineages grouped around the

most powerful, wealthy or otherwise influential (*sardari*) lineages. At the first stage, the group is formed is known as *reyai*, its formal leadership vested in *sardars*. Where both geographical and interactional variables suffice to encompass the bulk of individuals' collective activities at this level, such an entity is also described as village (*gram*); where conversely both geography and collective interaction link the *reyai* homestead cluster with other like entities, the agglomeration of these units becomes the relevant village and thus becomes a second or intervening stage in the elaboration of social organisation over a wider area. the final stage in both structure and process is the linkage of individual *reyais* to the *samaj* grouping, ... ” (Bertocci:1970:13). According to him (Bertocci), *samaj* is a “multi level political unit” based on *Sardars* (influential persons of high lineage) and *reyais* (proteges). Within the villages , *reyais* are loyal to one or other of several *sardars*. Outside the village *samaj* acts a “multi level political unit” and contributes “to the formation of wider, territorially extensive community organisation.”

It is needless to say that this form of *samaj* organisation cannot be found in all typical Bangladesh villages. We would later discuss about some studies, which did not have found *samaj* as described by Bertocci. *Samaj*

grouping does not exist in Meherpur, the village studied by **Anwarullah Chowdhury**. In his findings, Chowdhury in his book **A Bangladesh Village : A Study of Social Stratification, (C.S.S., Dhaka, 1978)** tells us that a form of *samaj* was present before but during his research period in late seventies the entity was completely non-existent. “In my study of Dacca village, I found that the *samaj* groupings were almost non-existent in that village during my fieldwork. I could gather some information about the traditional role of the *samaj* in about three decades ago, but these groupings had totally broken down in Meherpur in the early seventies.” (Chowdhury: 1982: 50).

It can be described the way that the role of *samaj* is fading out for different factors of social change.

Bangladesh rural social structure has been described by *Anwarullah Chowdhury* in his book *Agrarian Social Relations and Development in Bangladesh*.

In the description of ‘*Social Organisation of samaj*’ the author gave us a vivid pictorial features of *samaj*, which helped us to understand the social

group typically existed in Bangladesh society. Chowdhury stated that *samaj* was a group of people with a common identity of kinship base and having a territorial boundary. Comparing with the Hindu Caste System, the author, elaborated *samaj* as a caste or sub-caste group of Muslim society. We could understand that it has an innate nature of religion basis. According to Aziz, “the *samaj* pattern is taken as the basic frame of reference for social activities. The *samaj* has the authority to award punishment if anyone deviates from the established social norms. Every individual is conscious about the controlling authority of *samaj*. Social control of individuals who are involved in activities against the social and religious tradition of the society is an important function of *samaj*. From area to area the *samaj* pattern varies from high cohesive to loosely informal” (Chowdhury: 1979: 26).

Samaj is a traditional association of people of the same status and same kin-group (atmiya-savjan) having a fixed territory within a village community. Usually there are a number of *samajas* in a village but very rarely, there may be one *samaj* in a village. A *samaj* may consist of one or more lineages, the character of which is usually homogeneous. Normally, a *samaj* grouping does not extend over a larger territory than a

village. On the other hand, a village contains several *samaj* groupings within its territory.

Each *samaj* has its informal council of elders whom as the leaders of that *Samaj* exert enough influence over its members. Sometimes, one *samaj* is extends over a *Para* in the village. For example, if a village has five *Paras*, it may so happen that the five different *Paras* are inhabited by five different *samajas*, which are quite distinct from one another in status and life-style. Again, a *samaj* may also be an endogamous group. Endogamy is specially practised by the *samajas* of high status and also by the traditional low status occupational groups among the Muslims like *Jolas*, *Baddis*, etc. (Chowdhury: 1982: 45).

After defining the characteristics of *samaj* the author detailed the functions of *samaj* subsequently. “Traditionally, a *samaj* used to perform a variety of functions such as the approval of marriage negotiations, conducting the marriage ceremony including the invitation and cooking arrangement, serving food to the guests, etc. and organising some of the social and religious festivals. Within the *samaj*, the members try to settle

their own internal conflicts and disputes. The leaders of the *samaj* play a pioneering role in this respect. (Chowdhury:1982:46)

Taking reference from Bertocci's *Elusive Village*, Chowdhury then compared the *samaj* of Noakhali and the *samaj* of Comilla districts. He gave his comment, "Bertocci found *samaj* groupings in two villages of Comilla district and he described them as multi-reyai groupings. In these two villages (Hajipura and Tinpara), Bertocci mentions that *samaj* is composed of a number of territorially contiguous reyais and it functions there as a kind of "Council of Elders". The main activities of *samaj* are primarily related to the settlements of disputes and little else. Bertocci noted that the manifest function of *samaj* was largely one of social control but its latent function was to channel political relations between the prestigious Sardars and the groups they represent when those relations are thrown into open conflict. But the *samaj* is not an administrative body, nor does it meet regularly. The Government do not recognise it as a body of local government, although on some occasions *samaj* leaders consulted by government officials when they deem their services useful for certain purposes. It is an institution evolved by local villagers when little external authority was present to perform such functions mentioned

earlier. (Bertocci:1970:12-13). Bertocci, in the context of Comilla villages, calls a constellation of patrilineages a *reyai* and a *samaj* there consists of several such *reyais*. (ibid..13). A *reyais* is then only a constituent part of a *samaj*. Bertocci's *samaj* (as found in the Comilla village) is then larger in respect of territory (and therefore, in population too than what I have seen in Noakhali village. The term *reyai* is also often used for *samaj* in Noakhali village. It means that in Noakhali both the term's *reyai* and *samaj* carry the same meaning. As found by Bertocci, a *samaj* consisting of several *reyai* groupings may cut across the boundary of a village which is unlikely in the context of Noakhali villages."(Chowdhury:1982:48-49).

In defining "Social Organisation" Chowdhury concluded that the role of *samaj* was disintegrating. According to him, "The influence of the *samaj* as an agency of control is now diminishing. In my study of Dacca village (Chowdhury:1978), I found that the *samaj* groupings were almost non-existent in that village during my fieldwork. I could gather some information about the traditional role of the *samaj* in about three decades ago, but these groupings had totally broken down in Meherpur in the early seventies. In contrast to the Noakhali village, there was absolutely

no control *samajas* in the in Dacca village (Meherpur) in the same span of time. The main reason fir which the *samaj* is losing control is perhaps gradual emergence of other local agencies of control and due to the presence of some external authorities at the local level in recent times. This may be an interesting area of future anthropological research, especially to investigate why such traditional groupings are on the verge of disintegration and to what extent and in what form kinship bonds can still make a claim on people's loyalties in the context of rural Bangladesh." (Chowdhury:1982:49-50).

Another village study *Jhagrapur : Poor peasants and women in a village of Bangladesh* were made by *Jenneke Arens & Jos van Beurden* a couple from Holland during 1974-75. Their objectives was to know, "the condition of rural women and for research on moneylending, sharecropping, agricultural wages, land quarrel, etc. ... We had the interest of the poor families or women at heart."(Jenneke Arens & Jos van Beurden,1980, p-1). It was an intensive fieldwork, which provide us a vivid picture of exploitation of rural women and poor peasants.

To describe the *Samaj* in Jhagrapur researchers tried to take reference from Zamindari system from 1793. Before division of 1947 *samaj* was formed as a village society. And after 1947 the ties of larger *samaj* has broken down and a single *samaj* is formed in Jhagrapur. Village *samaj* used to do the formal rituals, general law and order and general other things of the *samaj* in the village which is continued its role till to date. A major job of village *samaj* is to play the role of court for general disputes and disorders.

Dalem Ch. Barman's main objective was to find and analysis the emerging leadership in a typical Bangladesh village, and to achieve the goal it was necessary to define different concepts and formal and non-formal institution and entities of the study area. And privileged from his study we could find an approach to elaborate a Bangladesh village in his study title *Emerging Leadership Patterns in Rural Bangladesh: A Study*. Dalem describes a Bangladesh village as “gram, gaon, geram” and it is a small community, which is composed normally of two or more paras. He identifies a Bangladesh as “a non-corporate non-legal body.” And “It acts as the basic socio-economic and political unit for its residents but is far from the description of Sir Charles Metcalf who would

treat the village communities as little republic having nearly everything they meant within themselves, almost independent foreign relations . . .” (Dalem:1988:3) Adnan and Dalem defined a functional village “seemed to be determined by nothing other than social acceptance.” (Dalem: 1988:5).

Samaj is not in the main focus in the area of Dalem’s study, but a concept and features of a Bangladesh village has been tried to given by him. We could find a common and general view of the *Samaj* in his study, which is our focus of study. Dalem describes “*Samaj*”, (quoting from Prafulla Chandra Sarkar, Aspects of Caste and Social Structure in a Rural Community of Bangladesh {unpublished M.Phil.Thesis} Rajshahi: Institutate of Bangladesh Studies 1976:131), as “. . . a kind of association, in it is general sense means a group of people living together on the basis of kinship, jati, religion, immigration and territory having a common socio-economic identity” (Dalem:1988:57-58).

To Dalem “A “*Samaj*” is composed of a number of households represented by their heads and provides advice and sanctions formal approval for social ceremonies, such as marriage, initiation etc. The

members find in it security is times of danger, shelter in times of distress and they also settle their internal conflicts and disputes within it. This is an old institution but still runs without any written rules and regulation” (Dalem:1988:58).

Dalem finds an extra ordinary feature of a village that there were eight *samaj* in his study area, what he elaborates as “People in the village under study are grouped into eight such “*Samajes*”. Of these one is composed of the Hindus and the rest of the Muslims. The Muslim *samajes* are usually known by their heads such as Hakim Uddin Sarkarer *Samaj*, Haranuddin Sarkeer *Samaj*, Madan Sikderer *Samaj*, Chairmaner *Samaj* (Led by local union parisad Chairman, Barkat Ali Sikdar), Echimail Matbarer *Samaj*. Hussain Ali Sarkarer *Samaj*, Kunbaghta *Samaj*. The later four *Samajes* cannot be called the *Samajes* of the village, as they are formed outside the village by outsiders. But 21.05% households of the village have got affiliated with them. The lone Hindu *Samaj* is known by its caste title and called “Barman *Samaj*, which also includes from an adjacent village,” (Dalem:1988:57-58).

According to Dalem , there are some more formal organisations existing in the village, these are: school committee, hatt committee, cultural organisation (e.g. Sinaba Sabuj Sangha, Sinaba Shishu Sangha, Agni Beena Natya Sangsad), gram sarkar or village government and gram pratraksha dal or village defence party.”

Dalem finds the *samaj* leaders’ power came from both internal and external sources. “Internal sources are those sources that are available in the village itself and objective properties. The objective properties are very much personal and cannot be separated from person *per-se* – the status or all other attributes is of a person like simple honesty and so on.” (Dalem:1988:73). He has divided internal sources of power is from material sources and from human (non-material), lineage, kinship sources. The external sources of power, as Dalem, “ ... refers to factor that help one acquire power and control over community affair from outside it and stand for two meanings. First one may engage in an activity or attain a position elsewhere other than his own community and get prominence in the village. Secondly one may also be imposed as leader by outside body or power though he may not have any influence and acceptance.” (Dalem:1988:77-78).

Dalem's study leads us as a to verify and evaluate the nature and role of *Samaj* in our study area with an inner view. The *Emerging Leadership Patterns in Rural Bangladesh: A Study.*, is a very guideline literature to our study.

Kinship is one of the bondage that keeps *samaj* alive. Lineage based kinship is playing the role as a factor in social organisation. *K. M. Ashraful Aziz's* study title *Kinship in Bangladesh* stated, "The basic social structure and values of rural Bangladeshi societies are anchored in a system of kinship relations. (Aziz:1979:29).

To define social groupings in typical Bangladesh Aziz finds his study area that they are segmented in "... *ghar, bari, gushti or svajan, atmiya and atmiya-svajan.*" (Aziz:1979:21). Here *ghar* means household, *bari* is a homestead, *gushti* has a common ancestry, and *atmiya-svajan* means kinsmen.

To elaborate *samaj*, Aziz put in this way, "Next to *badi* membership, *samaj* membership is most important. Every *samaj* has a territorial boundary. Whoever is a resident within that boundary automatically

becomes member of that particular *samaj*.” (Aziz:1979:26). Here *samaj* is not the entity that we are thriving for. Here it can be seen as a rural society. But Aziz said that *samaj* has the authority to award punishment if anyone deviates from the established social norms. Social control of individuals who are involved in activities against the social and religious tradition of the society is an important function of the *samaj*. Between areas the *samaj* pattern varies from highly cohesive to loosely informal. The *samaj* territory where rights and obligations tend to be clear-cut and social opinion effective, the role of *samaj* becomes curtailed.

From Aziz it is evident that the village *samaj* is a part of the greater rural society and kinship plays a supreme role in the social activities of *samaj*.

John P. Thorp studied a Bangladesh village from a very different perspective, how religion play an important part in the power structure of a typical village. In the title of *Power Among the Farmers of Daripalla-A Bangladesh Village Study*, Thorp writes that primary arena of the public domain is *samaj*. “The members of this brotherhood celebrate the major Muslim festivals together. This group is supposed to band together in the face of a threat to one or all of its members from the outside. This

group is also supposed to settle all the disputes that arise between its members.”(Thorp:1979:39).

Thorp sees that *samaj* is found in a revenue unit of the area. “The brotherhood of the *samaj* in Daripalla is basically a complex of geographically contiguous families (*paribar*) which are formed into a voluntary association. These families’ household compounds are usually all located within a single revenue unit (*mauza*) or village (*gram*).” (Thorp:1979:39). But it can be located in different parts of a village. Thorp putted it in the way, “There is variation in the settlement patterns of the brotherhoods of *Daripalla*, nevertheless, common residence is a fundamental criterion for membership in a brotherhood. No matter how minimal or limited a share in the earth (*mati*) a *malik* might have, the act that he has his own household compound (*bari*) in a particular place qualifies him and his family to be members of a particular brotherhood.”(Thorp:1979: 40).

It is common to Thorp also that “Residential brotherhoods (*samaj*) in *Daripalla* are the fundamental units of public social activity. They are made up, for the most part, of contiguous households, and each

brotherhood recognises a particular leader and a number of other rich *maliks* as the unit's influential members. Each brotherhood attempts to settle its own disputes, and to mediate the tensions between its members in such a way that disputes can be avoided. Each of these brotherhoods plays an important role in the familial celebrations of its constituent households, and as a corporate whole each brotherhood celebrates the annual religious festivals together." (Thorp:1979:68).

Samaj to Thorp "... exercise social control over their membership, and although they have a role to play in the social and religious life of their members, nevertheless, they do not have a significant role to play in the economic life of their members. Economic activity is an individual enterprise... ." (Thorp:1979:69).

In his book *Differentiation Polarisation and Confrontation in Rural Bangladesh*, B. K. Jahangir saw the members of the whole village belong to a *samaj*. That *samaj* is extensive in character and different from kin groups. "All the villagers constitutes 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.

Then again each para has its own *Samaj* and within each para rich peasants have their own *Samaj* separate from that of the poor peasants”(Jahangir:1979:87-88).

Here Jahangir finds the *Samaj* as a rural society in broader perspective. In his study area of Mirabo and Nayapara Jahangir writes, “I did not observe a *Samaj* as described by Bertocci. Here the village constitutes *Samaj* and within the village *Samaj* there are different para-based *Samaj* and those based on different social categories. Here again neither the village nor the para-based *Samaj* is based on *sardars* and *reyais*.” (Jahangir:1979: 89).

To describe the function of the *samaj* Jahangir observed that although every villager was equal in *samaj* but their economic stratification did matter in those villages. And that economic stratification patterns are shaped by land ownership and land relations. Jahangir further describes the function of the village *samaj* as complex. “Another complexity arises in the functioning of *Samaj* when some households of the same lineage belong to one economic category and other households belong to a different category. In such cases the affluent households and poor households have their own *Samaj*. These different *Samaj* operate with the

larger *Samaj* of the village. *Samaj* organisation and *Samaj* ideology are weak in the case of the poor peasants, sharecroppers and labourers. They do not have authority to enforce decisions of the village as a whole. *Samaj*, thus functions within different types of social structure (economic, political, administrative and all possible combinations of these play a strategic role in the organisation of *Samaj*. (Jahangir:1979:90-91).

Shapan Adnan and others in their paper *Differentiation and Class Structure in Village Shamraj* reveal the class differentiation and class structure in a Bangladesh village. They identified *samaj* as a dominant and no-dominant one. They stated, "... the notion of dominance (in economic, political and/or virtual terms) possesses an implication which is relevant Dominance implies a bipolar relationship, the coexistence of the dominant and the dominated." (Shapan Adnan and others:1977: 9-10). They identified *samaj* as a 'residential contiguity' and 'neighbourhood'. And the *samaj* plays the role for conflict resolution or 'salish bench' in the society. Though it was not focused much on *samaj*, we could understand that the study area has a *samaj* and it is playing typical role as other villages do in Bangladesh villages.

A. K. M. Aminul Islam in his book *A Bangladesh Village Conflict and Cohesion – An Anthropological study*, made a significant anthropological study in a village prior to the independence of the country. His study in pre-liberation Bangladesh village is, “... to analyse the process of change in a particular East Bengali village and the manner in which it relates to the process of change in the wider community and in the country as whole.” (Islam:1974:3).

The study showed how and why political loyalties in the village vary from one situation to another, and effect of governmental or nation-directed policy on local polity. He stated, “... the wider political changes have opened up possibilities of communication about national issues within the village context. But politics within a changing village remain in many ways the same as always; politics is composed of small political units which are connected to the people by kinship, friendship, and sect lines.” (Islam:1974:163).

It is observed that *Islam* did not find any *samaj* groupings. However he found village society as a whole. The anthropological approach he has taken strengthens my approach to study intensively the village society.

By focusing primarily on the political conflict and cohesion *Islam* observes that changes are taking place and kinship ties, economic development, political modernisation play a significant role in the society.

Chapter - III

The Village under Study

3.1 Location, Area and Demographic Features

In this chapter I would like to describe physical structure of the village, by which we would be able to understand physical setting and population distribution. This sort of discussion is required to get an idea, by and large a proper understanding of its social structure.

Batabaria, the village selected, is situated about 26 kilometre from Dhaka city centre, to its south-east. This village is mainly connected with the city centre by road and indeed alternative means of communication is waterways. Bus communication is more regular and frequent. Regular launch or country boat service is available from Sadarghat. The road from Zinjra to Nababganj Thana Headquarter is the main life line to the villagers as a communication way. A village road is connected with main road. The village road is not connected with the whole village. Low lands, ditches are main obstacles for roads. Most of the part of year these low lands and ditches are submerged in water, than main means of communication depends on *Keraya Nauka* (small covered ferryboat) and *Kosa Nouka* (small open ferryboat). In dry seasons some areas are accessible with cycle-rikshaw but it is not always so.

Administratively Batabaria belongs to Nababganj thana of Dhaka District. Batabaria is surrounded by Hajirhat to north, Kazirhat to south, Pashamimpara to west and Mandari to east. River Ichamati is flowing after one village to east So no direct waterways connection with the village is available. Batabaria is one of the villages under Agla union.

Agla is one of the eleven unions of the Nababganj thana. Agla union has an area of 3702 acres of land and a population of 12,898 according to 1981 census.

The selected village is under Batabaria *mouza*. Each union is divided into several *mouzas* for the purpose of revenue administration. Some *mouzas* are divided into grams i.e. village as we say it. Though the village is not wholly revenue unit in land settlement record, the Batabaria gram under study is just a constituent unit of Batabaria *mouza*, and under this *mouza* another gram is situated namely Dighali. These villages are social units so are the residents. *Mouzas* are revenue units and grams (village) are social units in a typical Bangladesh village.

The village Batabaria does not have any official boundaries. Any village of Bangladesh is not shown separately in the census report and settlement records. These villages have officially no separate records but as far as the people of these villages are concern, they belong to villages, which are separated from one another.

During flood *Kosas* and *Kerayas* are only means of communication in the village. These boats are needed to go to market, houses, ghats, main roads and bus stops.

The surroundings of the selected village do play important role in the village society. The village of Hajirhat is situated north to Batabari. It is mostly inhabited by cultivators and service-men. Usually a large number

of cultivators take leased land from Batabaria. Other than cultivators major professional group is service-men, who serve in Dhaka and other cities of the country.

Mandari is situated to the east of Batabaria. The people of Mandari is mostly cultivator. They also take lease land from Batabaria's landlords. After Batabaria's last homestead a big field starts to east and next homestead starts with Mandari village. In this filed both the villages have agricultural lands. And land lease is practiced by both villagers.

Kazirhat is situated to the south of Batabaria. The villagers are mainly cultivators and service-men. Their main economic activities are cultivation and service. They also take lease land from Batabaria's landlords and some of them give a tiny part to the lease taker from Batabaria.

Pashimpara is situated to the west of Batabaria. Major occupational group in this village is cobbler and weaver. Batabaria has a group of weaver which maintains economic relationship with the weavers of Pashimpara. During the market days hey usually go to Ruhitpur in group irrespective of village to sell *Lungi* and purchase thread.

By and large, these surrounding villages are some how related to each another. They interact under an integrated greater village society by agricultural activities or participating in the different religious and social festivals

Batabaria is not a very big village. Even then it is divided into a number of different homesteads (locally known as *hati*, typically it is known as *para* in Bangladesh) separated from one another by narrow strips and lanes. Other than professional group-based homestead there are four location based *hatis* in Batabaria, known as *uttar hati*, *dakshin hati*, *pubra hati* and *pashchim hati* (north homestead, south homestead, east homestead and west homestead respectably). All cross section of people reside on these homesteads. This is an integral nature of Batabaria. Different occupational, economic and status group reside in every homestead with peace and harmony. Other than these four homesteads two separated homestead can be found in the village, these are *jelehati* and *tantihati* (fishermen homestead and weaver homestead). These occupational groups reside as a cluster; their social and religious difference as well as for their professional utility advantages they are generally live together. This feature is found not only in Batabaria, but also in other typical Bangladesh village.

The housing pattern of Batabaria village is typically like any other Bangladesh village. Most people make their house with tin sheet on wooden frame. This pattern is seen with a combination of *do chalas* and *char chalas* (e.g., two sliding roof and four sliding roofs) and widely used in the village. Some of the rich families use brick and tin combined house for better look and durability. But poor families are not in a position to afford this sort of housing. Usually they build their house with *chan* (a kind of thin and long grass, about 3 to 4 feet) on the bamboo frame. This

housing pattern reflects the economic condition of the households. Generally a household owns a single house, but affluent families built multiple house to meet their growing needs. Some of the houses have their separate drawing room, but this is not a general feature in the village. Only the affluent families can afford to do so. This feature of modern urban attitude is a new one which came after the flow of foreign currency earning.

The population of the village was 913, when I conducted a census during the initial stage of my study. The total number of households in the village is 195. The average size of the household is 4.68. Of the total population 506 are male and 407 are female population.

Table-1
Population

Gender	Population	%
Male	506	55.42
Female	407	44.58
Total	913	100.00

3.2 Religion

The village is inhabited by Muslims and Hindus. Out of 195 households 128 are Muslims, which comprises 65.64% and 67 households are Hindus comprises 34.36%. (Table-2).

Table-2 **Religious Group**

Religious Group	Household	%	Population		
			Male	Female	%
Muslim	128	65.64	322	262	63.96
Hindu	67	34.36	184	145	36.04
	195	100.00	506	407	100.00

From religious point of view Muslims and Hindus comprise the total population of Batabaria. The historical and traditional caste system is not actively playing its role in Batabaria. Because there is only one caste in the village, i.e., *Sudras*. Under the *Sudra* caste there are two groups, viz., Rajbangshi, (as locally called) i.e., fishermen and lower caste residing in the same village. No *Brahmins* and *Kaisthas* are found in Batabaria. Rajbangshis do their rituals with their own *purohit* (clergy), but lower caste Hindus generally bring *Brahmin purohit* from elsewhere to do *puja* (Hindu religious prayer) for them.

In Muslim segment of population of the village they are mostly *Sunni Muslims*. Other than these there is a group of *Tanti* (weaver). There are about 9 households residing in a cluster. Locally they are called as lower caste Muslim. It is widely told that this group of *tanti* has its own culture and rituals with Hindu dominated features. They are not taken as inter-marital groups. *Samaj* families do not make any marital relationship with socio-religious group. This sort of sectoral culture in Batabaria does not encourage any communal disorder. Occupationally this group still holds their traditional weaving jobs but change is being seen in recent years. Some of the members have changed their occupation by getting educated and by going abroad.

There is a mosque and a temple in the village. The temple is *Kali Mandir* and it is only used by the fishermen community in *jelepara*. Though there are differences in rituals among Muslim and Hindu families, they are

living in a religious harmony. Not a single evidence of communal conflict has been heard since long.

3.3 Education :

Batabaria's 36.04 % people do not have their primary or elementary level of education. A significant feature is that 51.12 % people have access to primary education. That means basic education opportunity have reached to most of the families. Findings regarding education can be seen from the table-3 given below.

Table - 3

Education

Education Level	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Non-Literate	169	33.40	160	39.31	329	36.04
Primary Level	256	50.59	202	49.63	458	50.16
S.S.C Level	56	11.07	31	7.62	87	9.53
H.S.C. Level	15	2.96	10	2.46	25	2.74
Degree and Above Level	10	1.98	4	0.98	14	1.53
Total	506	100.00	407	100.00	913	100.00

In its school system and its level of literacy, Batabaria has features unlike other typical Bangladesh village. Land is not the determinant factor for the villagers, which leads the villagers to diverse their profession other than agriculture. As a result education level reached better than national level. During the British rule, particularly at the beginning of it all the Muslim leaders of the Indian sub-continent declared any sort of western education anti-religion and thus anti-Islam. As a result the Muslims of this part of British India, particularly the villagers of whole Bengal were reluctant to send their children to school, which led to adult illiteracy.

There is only one government primary school and a *maktob* (non-formal institution for religious teachings) based in the mosque in the village.

Since nineties it has been a growing concern about education even among the village farmers. Although many of them need their children's help in the field, in the shop and in cattle grazing, still almost all send their children to the school now.

The GOB and NGO programme on non-formal education is not found in the village. It can be said that this sort of educational approach could lead the villagers to abolish their non-literacy among the aged male and female people.

3.4 Social Organisation

The smallest unit of social organisation in Bangladesh is *Khana* (household). It is the primary unit of production and consumption. It is also the basic unit of kinship group in rural Bangladesh. The members of a household are usually accommodated in a *ghar* (residential house). A wealthy household or a family may have two/three *ghars* particularly in Noakhali region. Their *paker ghar* (kitchen) is separated from their main house in which they rest and sleep. But for a poor household the kitchen is the part of their only *ghar*. Sometimes, poor households use open space as kitchen in their *uthans* (courtyards), especially in winter.

A *paribar* or a family may consist of one or more households in Bangladesh. There are different types of families in Bangladesh.

Different scholars categorised family in different ways. On the basis of the information supplied by them we may classify the families in Bangladesh as nuclear, joint, and extended. We shall discuss about the classification of family in a later section in this chapter.

Several linked families live together in a *bari*. There exist kin relationships among the members of almost all the households in a *bari*. In a recent research in the Matlab Thana of Comilla district, Aziz showed that in 75.4 per cent *baris* (in this sample village) heads of households were patrilineally related; in 18.03 per cent, at least one head of the household was affinally related to the rest; and in 6.55 per cent, at least one head of household was unrelated to the rest (Aziz 1979: 24). In a *bari*, therefore, the heads of households are related either by affinal connection or by blood. Of course, certain heads of households in a *bari* may not be related in either way.

There are several *baris* in a *para* and there may be one or several *paras* in a *gram* (village). Most of the *baris* in a *para* may claim membership of the same patrilineal descent group but there are also exceptions to it. Even if they belong to same patrilineal descent group, the social distance exists among them. Each *paribar* (family) has a family head and most *baris* have an acknowledged head.

A *gram* (settled village) is a small community which is normally composed of one or more *paras* (hamlets or wards). A village community is the basic socio-economic and political unit for its resident members.

Officially recognised villages are called *mouzas* which are nothing but revenue villages. The *mouzas* are the basic and smallest units of revenue administration. Each *mouza* has a *tahsil* office, which keeps and maintains the records of landholding and tax of that particular *mouza*. It also provides the details of *naksha* (map of revenue village) of the *mouza*. The land, houses, ponds, etc, are shown on the *naksha*. Every plot of land, every house or every pond can be located on the *naksha*.

The *mouzas* are usually larger units than those of *grams* called villages. The residents of a gram identify themselves with the *gram* to which they belong and not with the *mouzas*; for, *gram* is the basic social, political and economic unit for its resident members. A village community contains *households*, *homesteads*, *lineage*, *samaj* and *atmiya groupings* within itself. Kinship plays an important role in the formation of these groups.

A group of households or families may again comprise a *gusthi*. In such a case, all these households or families are agnatically related with the exception of in-marrying wives and out-marrying daughters. A *gusthi*, therefore, consists of all the male patrilineal descendants of a great-grandfather. Common ancestry provides a sense of belonging that binds together the members of a *gusthi*. A *gusthi* is, therefore, a partrilineage. Members of the lineage can trace their common origin to a single deceased male ancestor. After marriage, a woman may acquire the *gusthi* membership of her husband. In a *gusthi* all members have a common ancestor, traceable by a genealogical tree.

Ellickson (1972:26) found that a Muslim woman in rural Bangladesh, after her marriage, acquires almost dual *gusthi* membership. Because upon marriage, she acquires the *gusthi* membership of her husband and at the same time, she retains her parental *gusthi* membership by retaining the rights of inheritance and asylum within her *natal gusthi*. But a Hindu woman after the marriage does not retain the *gusthi* membership of her father and becomes the member of her husband's *gusthi*.

Samaj is a group of people living together generally on the basis of kinship which has a territorial boundary and which has a common socio-political identity. Among the Hindus, a caste or subcaste group in a locality may be regarded as a samaj. "The *samaj* pattern is taken as the basic frame of reference for social activities. The *samaj* has the authority to award punishment if anyone deviates from the established social norms. Every individual is conscious about the controlling authority of samaj. Social control of individuals who are involved in activities against the social and the religious tradition of the society are an important function of the samaj. From area to area the samaj pattern varies from highly cohesive to loosely informal" (Aziz:1979:26).

Samaj is the traditional association of the people of the same status and same kin-group (*atmiya-svajan*) having a fixed territory within a village community. Usually, there are a number of samajas in a village. A *samaj* may consist of one or more *gusthis* (lineages), the character of which is usually homogenous. Normally, a samaj grouping does not extend over a

larger territory than a village. On the other hand, a village contains several *samaj* groupings within its territory.

Each *samaj* has its informal council of elders who as the leaders of the *samaj* exert enough influence over its members. Sometimes, one *samaj* is extended over a *para* in the village. For example, if a village has five *paras*, it may so happen that the five different *paras* are inhabited by five different *samaj*, which are quite distinct from one another in status and life-style. Again, a *samaj* may also be an endogamous group. Endogamy is specially practised by the *samaj* of high status and also by the traditional low status occupational groups among the Muslim like *jholas*, *baddis*, etc.

Among Bengalis, there is a form of social organisation denoted by the word *samaj*, which implies a cultural concept of community. Etymologically, *samaj* is rooted in the notion of “going together”, although in its modern usage, it is rightly translated as “society” in general or in more limited context, “association”. While the *samaj* continues to regulate intra-caste marriages and delimit marriage circles for rural Bengali Hindus today, nearly everywhere for Bengali Muslims the *samaj* form is both a symbolic and an organisational referent for the political and religious community. Its leadership consists of a sort of council of elders, a group of men from differing homesteads, perhaps even different villages, under whom a subgroup of other homesteads is at least nominally united in loyalty and under whose sponsorship various religious activities take place” (Bertocci:1978:90-91).

We have discussed above the general feature of social organisation in rural Bangladesh. Same features of social organisation are present in Batabaria.

Now we will focus on the family as a significant part of social organisation. The families in Bangladesh may be divided into three categories, namely (a) joint, (b) extended and (c) nuclear.

In joint families, the kin of three or more generations live under one roof and share all land and property. Such family normally consists of brothers, their parents, unmarried sisters, wives and children. All the males here are co-owners of land and property. The cook at a common hearth, store grain in a common granary and so on. The head of the joint family is the eldest male member or some other responsible male member of the family.

The extended family is a group of nuclear families and related individuals from several generations who reside together in the same household, but their chulas (hearths) are separate. In this type of family, the constituting household units do not own land and property commonly. On the other hand, their land and property are held separately, although they live in the same bari. Each independent unit of the extended family is practically free from the control of the other units. Major decisions are, however, taken in consultation with the senior members of other units.

A nuclear family consists of a husband and a wife with or without children. It may also be a family of a widowed mother living together with her unmarried sons and the like. In some cases, one or more individuals may reside with them. They usually live in one house and always have a common hearth. Nuclear families become extended through the addition of daughters-in-law and their children, and other lineals or collateral.

The traditional joint family structure in rural Bangladesh is breaking down over the last few decades due to poverty, attitude of self-interest, quarrels, maladjustment and so on. These are gradually being replaced by nuclear families. Normally, a joint family breaks up after the death of the father, when the brothers seek separation and division of property.

The emergence of concept of self and growth of individualism as products of modern education and urbanism gradually eroded the traditional values associated with the family, which emphasised self-sacrifice and family solidarity. No longer the neighbours were treated as members of the same kinship grouping were. Urbanisation destroyed ties of joint family and people began to prefer nuclear family. War, inflation, increasing urbanisation, expanding industrialisation have according to Karim, replaced the extended family by nuclear family. Family planning programme has also affected the size of the nuclear family.

There has been large scale of migration from rural to urban areas in recent times. This has led to the disintegration of family and in some

cases disorganisation of family. There has also been large scale of migration from Bangladesh to Middle Eastern and European countries in the recent time, which has seriously affected family organisation in Bangladesh. This phenomenon has a disorganising effect on the family so far and there has a disorganising effect on the family so far. It is, therefore, suggested that studies should be undertaken on the above mentioned aspects of family in the rural areas as well as urban centres covering different regions of Bangladesh.

In Batabaria nuclear family is the frequent one and there are some extended families also. But no joint families have been seen. People residing abroad for job has been playing a significant role in process toward nuclear family. Their high income, urban attitude and mental set-up are internally eroding the joint and extended family ties, which results in nuclear family.

Among both Muslims and Hindus, there are three main features in the traditional, form of marriage. These features are as follows: (1) the proposal of marriage is initiated by the bridegroom's party, (2) the marriage usually takes place at the bride's home and (3) marriages are arranged by the parents, other relatives, friends or acquaintances of parties to be united. In the Muslim and Hindu marriage practices, however, there are certain differences. Among the Muslims *mahar* or a certain amount of payment under specific conditions is to be made by the bridegroom or his family to the bride in every case of marriage. Such an agreements for payment is given to the bride symbolising her worth as a

person to the bridegroom. Among Hindus in certain cases the bridegroom is required to pay a certain amount known as *pan* or price to the father of the bride. The amount *mahr* as well as *pan* is fixed through negotiation by the parties of the bride and bridegroom. The payment of *mahar* amount may be made either in cash or kind or both. In the case of *mahar* partial deferred payment is allowed. In the case of *pan* the whole amount is paid in cash at the time of marriage.

A priest performs a Hindu marriage. The Muslims have no priests in the strict sense of the word; any educated person is qualified for performance of priestly offices, and can perform rites of a marriage. The designated person is a *ukil* with two witnesses to complete marriage registration. Among Muslims marriage is a contract and usually the terms of the contract are formally documented. The Hindu marriage is a sacrament and needs no formal documentation.

The features that have been mentioned above are universal in the study area. Both endogamous and exogamous marriages are practised in Batabaria. Members of *samaj* in Batabaria practice mostly endogamous marriage. They do it within their *samaj*. If matchmaking is not possible in the village then they go beyond their village with distinct upper status families. Hindu families of Batabaria belong to lower caste. They are interconnected by marital relationship.

Kinship is the main focus of basic structure in a society. It also plays an important role in value system, rites and customs. In rural Bangladesh, if

an individual or a group of individuals is related to another individual or individuals either by blood or by affinal connection, these individual are known as *atmiya-sajan* or kinsmen. A common ancestor is not necessarily to become an *atmiya*. *Atmiya-svafan* is a very wide term, which may include several *gusthis* and may extend over a number of villages. Every Muslim and Hindu household belongs to a *gusthi* within the *samaj* or village. This general feature of kinship is common in the study area.

“Kinship bonds make a claim on people’s loyalties. A common language and a common dietary experience make members of a household feel more comfortable with one another. They understand one another. They feel they can count on one another for support. Caste, samaj and kinship form the core of village social organization and this splits the village in to different social groupings.”(Aziz:1979:31).

Chapter - IV

The Economy of the Village

4.1. Agriculture

Agriculture is not the dominant economic activity of Batabaria village. It has already been stated that the study area is situated in a low-lying area of *Nababganj Thana*. The village is flooded every year by the river *Ichamoti* river in the monsoon and new silt makes the land fertile.

Land in Batabaria is scarce and classified into two categories: *uchu zami* and *nal zamai* (raised land and low land). About twenty to twenty five years ago the villagers used to cultivate *aman* paddy in the *nal zami* and *rabi* crop (winter crops namely pulse, oil seed and vegetable) in the *uchu zami*. *Aman* was sown usually in the month of *Chaitra* of Bangla year (March April) and harvested in the month of *Agrahayan* (November December). *Rabi* crops and vegetables are cultivated in the month of *Agrahayan* (November December) and harvested in the month of *Falgun* (February March). This was the feature of the past (of agriculture) in the village. Now a days, for about twenty years, the advent of *irri* paddy (a high yield variety researched and distributed by International Rice Research Institute, and named it as well) people of Batabaria generally cultivate only one crop in the year, and that is *irri*.

These days only *Irri* paddy is cultivated in Batabaria. Peoples of Batabaria have about 125 acres of cultivable land. And those who have the cultivable land in the village and who take lease from neighbouring village do cultivate only *irri* paddy. It is the main crop and every farmer will cultivate it in his best available plot. Economically paddy is

less profitable. But rice is a food crop, most of which may be used for family consumption and stored for future need, while surplus amount can be sold in local bazar for cash to meet daily necessities. In a sense paddy is the cash crop for the people of Batabaria as because no other crop is cultivated in the village.

Paddy is mostly transplanted in the paddy field of Batabaria. Some cultivators grow the paddy seedlings in one part of their land and then transplant them in to the field. Some of them purchase the *irri* seedlings from the market for their convenience.

The transplanted *irri* is cultivated on soft and clay-like land in the month of Poush (December). Generally cultivators plough the land and harrow it (*moi*) to plane and smooth the land. *Irri* is a low height paddy and it is usually cultivated where irrigation facilities are available. The water required for *irri* cultivation is supplied by water pump. The people of Batabaria use water pump from Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation's thana level office. A unique system of water pump arrangements is being practised in Batabaria. Generally a group of people offers the cultivators for BADC water pumps. Usually they agree and with the consensus of the cultivators they organise the BADC pump, but at the time of irrigation the cultivators need not to pay anything. They have to pay for irrigation after the harvest at the rate of 2% to 5% of harvested crop value. The groups, which organise the irrigation facility, arrange the pump with nominal government fees and some other informal additional expenses. This is their investment which would be paid back

after harvest. Generally this arrangements of irrigation is locally known as *scheme*. From when the *irri* cultivation started this system emerged. Cultivators have accepted the system as they get the services, so no complain on it. *Rabi* crop cultivation is a significant feature of Bangladesh agriculture. This *rabi* crop includes pulses, oil seeds, potatos, peepers etc. Some other vegetables are also cultivated as *rabi* crop. Generally *rabi* crop and vegetables are grown after the aman harvest is over. “The cultivators start cultivating *rabi* crops in the month of Argahayan (November-December) and continue up to Falgoon (February-March).”(Chowdhury:1972:53). But this feature is not found in low-lying areas. As we have discussed before, Batabaria village is situated in a low-lying area. That’s why no *rabi* crop or vegetables are cultivated here. But the people of Batabaria used to grow vegetables like pears, beans, pumpkin etc. in their house yards. This is a common feature, which is found everywhere in Bangladesh.

Agriculture is not the major occupation of the people of Batabaria. From the table-8 it can be seen that the major occupation in the village is service. It can be understand that agriculture do not play any vital role in the social and economic life of the village. Typical landlords are not seen in the village. So for the lack of agricultural land people have to diverse their occupation to a wide range from service to business and others.

4.2. Land ownership pattern

The present land system of the village is similar to land system of Dhaka District, which evolved through many reforms. Way back in 1793, the

Permanent Settlement Act made the zamindars the proprietor of the land and they were given all property right. With the gradual extension of cultivation and increase of population, the zamindars began to prosper. In the Permanent Settlement Act the position of tenants was kept vague and undefined. Landlords did not invest money for the development of land. As a result exploitation emerged and agrarian discontent and no-rent campaigns were started which leads to pass the Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885. After the Act is passed several important amendments mostly in favour of tenants. This pattern of land tenancy is practised until partition of India and Pakistan. In 1948 a Bill was moved and the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act was passed in the year of 1950. This act abolished the 150 years old Permanent Settlement and envisaged a system of direct payment of land revenue by the actual owners and the titles of the soil, by eliminating all intermediary rent receiving interest groups. It can be said that the village has under gone these changes by the advent of century.

Even then it is needed to understand the typical Bangladesh village in the form of land based picture. Businessmen, fishermen, weaver, carpenter, teacher also inhabit the village and most of them do not have connection with land. Land ownership pattern will not give us the agrarian structural picture of the village, because the mode of livelihood is not dominated by land.

As a low-lying area, agricultural and non-agricultural land is scarce in Batabaria. Most of the households about (71.25%) do not have any

cultivable land, in other words they are landless. Our finding shows that there are no rich farmer having more than 7.1 acres of cultivable land. There are 12 middle farmer households, who have land ranging from 3.1 acre to 7 acres. Like other agricultural based society they are the key role players in Batabaria. Generally they lease out their land for sharecropping.

Land was the traditional icon of power in Batabaria, but in recent time remittance from foreign jobs weakened the features. Because without having any agricultural land people leading their life with modern amenities They usually come to city (here in this case Dhaka) for having a posh haircut, buying video and audio cassettes, brand shirts, electrical home appliances, jeans and son. They spend money in religious and social festivals and functions. So in this village landholding is not the only source of power. It has a traditional effect over the village, which is decaying over periods of time.

Table - 4

Landholding Distribution

Landholding Distribution		# Household	%
Landless	with no cultivable land	140	71.65
Marginal Farmer	upto 1 Acre Cultivable Land	23	11.86
Small Farmer	1.1 Acre to 3 Acre Cultivable Land	20	10.31
Middle Farmer	3.1 Acre to 7 Acre Cultivable Land	12	6.19
Rich Farmer	7.1 Acre +	0	0.00
		195	100.00

From the Table-6 below it is seen that most of the Batabarias' land is owned by servicemen and businessmen occupationally.

Table – 5
 Occupation vs. Landholding against households

Occupation	# Household	Land holdings	%
Day Labourer	2	1.5	1.20
Agricultural	7	14	11.19
Service	27	67.6	54.04
Business	14	36	28.78
Carpenter	3	3	2.40
Weaver	1	2	1.60
Others	1	1	0.80
Total	55	125.1	100.00

Both these occupational groups own 54.04% and 28.78% of total land. The influential section of local people resides in these groups. Most of the traditional landholder family disintegrated due to family expansion and this land is divided accordingly. But as a traditionally well off group, they had the opportunity for education and business, which results present landholding pattern.

Table - 6
Landholding according to Place of Residence

Landholding Distribution	H/H Reside Village	% of Land-holdings	H/H Reside Town	% of Land-holdings	H/H Reside Foreign	% of Land-holdings	%
upto 1 Acre Cultivable Land	10	18.18	4	7.27	7	12.73	38.18
1.1 Acre to 3 Acre Cultivable Land	6	10.91	4	7.27	12	21.82	40.00
3.1 Acre to 7 Acre Cultivable Land	2	3.64	3	5.45	7	12.73	21.82
7.1 Acre and Above Cultivable Land	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0.00
Total	18	32.73	11	20.00	26	47.27	100.00

It is significant to observe that 47.27% of total landholdings are in the hand of foreign service holder. Only 32.73% landowner residing in the village and 20% residing in the town. It has been found that people with no land earlier started buying the same with the money they earned from foreign jobs. People living in town and having less amount of land are selling these lands to the foreign currency earners. The change in land ownership pattern is now affecting social changes.

Land leads significant characteristics to the village people. The same feature is common in Batabaria as seen by Islam in Badarpur of Narayanganj district. "Most of the households in the village consist of extended families with successive generation dwell together with their

wives and children. Most frequently siblings, those who are not yet married, as well as some who are, will live together- at least until the death of their parents. After this event, as long as the siblings live together they will cultivate the land together and enjoy the procedure in common. This joint ownership of their property allows them security in case of sickness or any kind of incapacity.

This common utilisation of the landed property is an institution which ensures right of equal share to all brothers, and enables the youngsters to receive education as a right during the period that the elder brothers are looking after the family.”(Islam:1974:44-45).

4.3. Occupation and income

There are four major occupations, which constitutes the economic life of the village. These are service (salaried job), business, daily labouring and agriculture.

Table-7 : Primary Occupation

Primary Occupation	# Household	%
Service	60	30.77
Business	28	14.36
Day Labourer	27	13.85
Fisherman	25	12.82
Agricultural	21	10.77
Carpenter	13	6.67
Weaver	9	4.62
Others	12	6.16
	195	100.00

Service i.e., salaried job, is the main occupation among the villagers of Batabaria. Out of 195 households 60s is engaged in service. Of 60 household 26 own agricultural land. Their ownership varies from 0.5 acre to 7 acres of land. Although they are in service their family members are involved in supervising the agricultural land and production.

Other than foreign service holders, there are people engaged in service who do go regularly to the village. Mostly they are serving in Dhaka and thana headquarters. This group of service holder is directly and indirectly involved in local issues. Whenever necessary they come to the village. They still feel attached to their village. One of them, Aminur Rahman, serving in Dhaka in a foreign firm told the researcher that he felt attached with the village because he was prominent in the village. People consider him as a village resident and whenever necessary speak to him over telephone from nearby bazar and ask him to come, and the next weekend he rushes to the village.

About 28 households in Batabaria are engaged in small trade and business. They have shops in nearby village market and some of them supply goods to local and adjacent village shops. Out of 28 households 14 households own land in the village ranging form 1 acre to 6 acres. These businessmen cum landowner generally cultivate their land by their own means and hired agricultural workers. Some of these landowners are wealthy landowner and one of them is the holder of highest landholdings.

Another major occupation in the village is wage labouring. Twenty-seven households are engaged in this occupation. Usually they serve in the agricultural field as cultivating worker. Some of them work as porter in the nearby bazaar. After the harvesting season these wage labourer take rental boat for ferrying in the village and some of them go to other areas of the country, such as, Mymensingh and Kishoreganj to work as agricultural worker. Out of these wage labourers 2 households own a small amount of land which they cultivate by their own means.

Besides, these occupations fishing is another important economic activity in the village. It is the only source of livelihood for 25 fisherman households of the village. No fisherman households own any agricultural land. Fishermen community usually does fishing spontaneously in the Ichamoti river, canals and homestead ponds, ditches, by request or order. For homestead service usually they get the 50% catch as their service charge. They use different types of net *namely jhaki jal, ber jal, chapa jal, koi jal etc.* They also use different types of traps for subsidiary fishing.

Agriculture is not the major economic activity in the village. Twenty-one households have agriculture as their primary occupation. Of these only 3 household take lease land for agricultural production. It is to be noted that all 44 household of sharecropper do not own any agricultural land nor their primary occupation is agriculture. It is seen that most numbers of household's primary occupation is service, business and fishing. As a group, servicemen and businessmen are the owner of chunk of

agricultural land in Batabaria. As a result, agricultural professionals do not have any significant role in the village.

There are 13 households, whose primary occupation is wood works. Out of these 13 carpenter households only three owns small piece of agricultural land which is not in a sense significant. They usually give their service to build tin houses, shops, furniture and produce different types of country boats.

Nine weaving family households in the village are different social group besides their professional identity. Locally they are called *tanti* (weaver) and their social activities are organised within themselves and weavers of the adjacent villages. They generally produce *lungi* (a very common part of casual wear for men in Bangladesh). This *than* of *lungi*, which they weave, is about 24 feet long and this whole unit is divided into 4 *lungies*. Usually they weave minimum of 4 (one unit of 4 *lungi*) and maximum to 16 *lungis*. In most of the cases the whole family take part in different stages of weaving. Price varies depending on the thread grade ranging between 240 to 1200 taka per unit of 4 *lungies*. They sell the *lungi* in weekly market of Ruhitpur famous for weaving products near to next village.

There are some other occupations in the village. These are teaching, masonry, tailoring, journalism, retired etc. We have classified them, as others and these 9 households are involved in different occupation. These are not significant and dominating features of Batabaria village. Retired

people have their sons in the foreign service, which lead them to run smoothly their family.

To subsidise their insufficient income 9 out of 195 households have secondary occupation. These occupations are agriculture, wage labouring, business and others. Their primary occupation does not provide enough

Table – 8

Secondary Occupation

Primary Occupation	# Household	%
Agricultural	5	55.56
Others	2	22.22
Wage Labourer	1	11.11
Business	1	11.11
Total	9	100.00

food for the whole year and that is why they have to choose secondary occupation. The secondary occupation helps them to alleviate their standard of living rather than tackling the issue of survival. The table below will tell the picture.

During the fieldwork an unique feature is found in Batabarias' income distribution situation. Of 195, 31 households' chiefs are serving abroad, and all of them are in Middle Eastern Countries. Their remittances are making significant changes in Batabarias' economic situation and as well as in the societal context. The high-income groups of these households are buying agricultural and non-agricultural land, which led to significant

landlessness. These people can avoid social norms and practices of the society, and sometimes it happens so. Their thinking pattern have changed a lot, they feel that they do not have to abide by the norms and practices of the society in traditional form, rather they are making modern changes in the life of the village. This feature will be elaborated in our finding portion. Outs of 195 households 24.10% have their income ranging from 2001-3000 monthly. In this rage most people are agricultural and daily labourer. So far the table-4's finding is concern it can be said that the people of Batabaria are not having their life in smooth economic situation.

Table – 9

Income Distribution

Income Distribution in Taka	# Household	%
Below 1,000	3	1.54
1,001 to 2,000	17	8.72
2,001 to 3,000	47	24.10
3,001 to 4,000	32	16.41
4,001 to 5,000	15	7.69
5,001 to 6,000	13	6.67
6,001 to 7,000	11	5.64
7,001 to 8,000	16	8.21
8,001 to 9,000	6	3.08
9,001 to 10,000	11	5.64
10,001 and above	24	12.31
Total	195	100.00

4.4. Agrarian classes and mode of production

As per our discussion and information above, we have seen that in Batabaria land is not the principal mode of production. Even then, land issue cannot be kept aside, because it is the traditional and typical sources of power in Bangladesh. On the basis of ownership and non-ownership of land population of Batabaria can be divided into three classes. These three classes are (1) Landowner (2) tenants or Share-cropper and (3) Landless Labourer

Out of 195 household 55 land-owning households in Batabaria at present. Of them 27 servicemen and 14 businessmen own 54 % and 28% of land respectably. Wholly agriculture based landowner households are 9 only. So other than these 9 households 41 households of landowner can be called as absentee landlord. They do not directly involved with the land. Some of them cultivate with hired labourer. But mostly they lease out the land for 50% produce share. Owner cultivator works on land either directly or indirectly by participating or supervising the cultivation. They also invest for the land. They supply seeds, plough, and give manure as necessary. The absentee landlords do not invest any capital for production. The tenants to whom they lease the land invest all capital. They only make payment of annual land revenue payable to the govt.

The old landowners of Batabaria are still landowners. Though land has been divided into smaller pieces according to Muslim law of inheritance due to increase of family members. In this way many of them now do not

own considerable amount of land to depend on. As a result they went for education and service to other places.

Some of the present landowners recently purchased land from other from their foreign remittance. So in this way land is transferred to a richer class. We can compare this losing and gaining land ownership with Bertooci's view. "... there is mobility between the high and low status lineages. There were marriages between titled and non-titled lineages. According to him, the villages themselves discriminate *between* "Ucho-bangsho" (high status lineage; "madhya bangsho" (middle status lineage) and "nichu bangsho" (low status lineages) families. He again distinguished between *sardari* lineages and (having traditional status) and *non-sardari* lineage (having no traditional status). The *non-sardari* lineage may acquire some economic strength over time and thereby become politically important and in some cases dominant through money-lending activities and other forms of patronage. The lineages after acquiring land and power, also sometimes acquire high status by marrying into *sardari* lineages. Bertooci refers to this process as "cyclical kulakism." (Chowdhury:1982:29).

Bertooci maintains that in a monsoon climate like that of Bangladesh, where demographic pressure is extremely high, no family is able to possess good amount of land and wealth unless land is consistently accumulated. "... it is unlikely that a family member can maintain superior wealth over along period of time without some difficulty. Over time, unless land is consistently accumulated a given lineage taken

collectively becomes vulnerable to the inexorable problems of agriculture in a monsoon environment, in that as its property is progressively divided into smaller shares, the size of its 'individual segments' holdings progressively diminishes and renders individual members of the lineage each less capable of maintaining amounts of land sufficient to ensure adequate production. At the same time, other families with subsistence holdings or a little more may be rising, especially if they are able to engage successfully in lending activities, in particular the taking of land in mortgage, over a given period of time" (Bertooci:1970:63).

It means that there is a regular rise and fall of the families with the increase and decline of wealth (particularly land) and, therefore, there is a high degree of mobility of individual families between economic classes and status groups.

But Chowdhury and Wood highly criticised the concept. Gaining land by *Kulakism* is not a predominant feature of rural Bangladesh society. Chowdhury strongly comments on that, "Bertooci's thesis of cyclical mobility (or cyclical Kulakism) does not in fact accommodate the realities of class and status differentiation in rural Bangladesh." (Chowdhury:1982:30). This process may be called as landlessness or proletarianisation. This means the rich land-owning classes are becoming richer and poor or marginal classes are becoming poorer and landless. In other words, this may be describe as the process of pauperisation.

Wood also criticised Bertoooci's theory of circular mobility. In his study area he found that the surplus by the richer class was invested in non-agricultural activity like money lending, etc. In this situation, Wood suggests; a stable rich peasant class will emerge. This will "... reduce the vulnerability of families in that class to weakening process of fragmentation as other non-agricultural sources of income become available as a result of initial high productivity of holdings" (Wood:1976:49). Wood, therefore, argues that the possibility of circular mobility would decrease under the situation exists in Bandokgram, a village in Comilla district.

But Wood seems to agree that the higher status can be acquired through intermarriage with lineages of traditionally high status. He says, "Where the process of class differentiation is stimulated by new opportunities for the accumulation of wealth, rich peasants who come neither from titled lineages nor from *sardari* lineages can be incorporated into the traditional institutions of local power by acquiring status through intermarriage with lineages of traditionally high status. In this way the dimension of class and status will become mutually reinforcing" (Wood:1976:52).

Land gaining by marrying landowner high status family is not a regular feature in rural communities in Bangladesh. In the present study area, there was not a single case so long. But there is a prevailing process of loosing and gaining land in Batabaria. To go abroad for foreign jobs people do sell their land and after some time with their foreign remittance land is purchased again. It is not necessary that he would buy land in the

same area rather he would try to procure better agricultural, non-agricultural land in the village, in the Thana headquarter and sometimes in the big cities also. This transformation is happening rapidly in Batabaria village.

There are 42 households who take leased land for share cropping. But we do not classify them all as sharecropper. Only 31 households can be characterised as sharecropper. These 31 households comprise with 17 agriculture and 14 daily wage labouring occupation. Indeed they are based on agriculture and they hold very small agriculture holdings. They spent a lot of time on the land they take on lease. They usually take land from the landowners of the village. Generally tenants give 50% of their crop of the lease land as rent. There are 6 service holder households take land for lease cultivation, 4 carpenter households and one fisherman household take leased land for cultivation as a way of their supplementary income.

A tenant invests in the land he takes as lease. He has to supply everything necessary for the production, such as, labour, seeds, fertiliser, pesticides etc. Generally, land is given taken lease for one-year term. It is by far a traditional contract that creates on the verbal agreement. Generally landowner extends the tenure unless he is certain that he is loosing the portion of his crop.

It is seen that share cropper works of his own to maximise his return. Some of them have their own bullock and plough, those who do not take

this on a rental basis. Hiring is occasionally necessary for seed transplanting and harvesting time.

Some of the sharecroppers are local businessmen also. They take land as a supplementary to their income. Often they take leased land to cultivate along with his own land.

Table-10
Share Cropping

Share Cropping	# Household	%
Taken (in)	44	80.00
Given (out)	11	20.00
Total	55	100.00

There are 27 households who by profession daily labourer. Of them 2 house holds own small amount of land, but that land is not giving him the yearly subsistence. So we can call these 25 households as landless labourer for our discussion. Locally they are called *Kamla*. But the totals number of landless is far more than these 25 households. In Batabaria there are 140 households who do not have any land of their own. But here we are concerning only the landless daily wage labourer.

This landless labourer's employment is not permanent and secure. They use to work whenever they get any opportunity to work. They go to landowners and sharecroppers house to seek work. Sometimes some of them engaged for a seasonal work, which means, the worker will work the whole cultivation season. Generally they got agricultural work. Some of them who do not find agricultural work go to the market place for

other work like porter. During the harvesting time it is easier to get agricultural work. After the period some of them go to some other places like Mymensingh and Kishoreganj for work. Daily labourers generally engaged on a daily basis. The normal rate of daily wages is between 80/- taka to 100/- taka per day with mid day meal.

So far it is discussed the categories of the people associated with land and their relationships. Among the landless fishermen is the single largest occupational group of 25 households. In the hierarchy these fishermen are close to landless daily labourer. A daily labourer does not own any significant property other than his working tool and it to fisherman also. A fisherman owns only his net or trap. Whenever a fisherman wants to choose supplementary work he generally choose the work of a daily labourer and sometimes as a ferry boatmen.

Among the non-agricultural population there are 27 households whose heads are engaged in salaried job and 14 household heads that do business. But all of them have agricultural holdings in Batabaria. Some of them lease-out their land and some of them get their land cultivated by hired labourer. It is natural that a significant portion of their income comes from salary and business, but agriculture is the main income sources form many of them. So they are in a way associated with land and agriculture. Other occupational group like carpenter, weavers do not have any significant agricultural land. But their livelihood is better than landless labourer of the village is. Because they do earn more than landless labourer does.

So in Batabaria the serviceman and businessman landowner is at the top of hierarchy, sharecropper, weaver, carpenter is at the middle of the hierarchy and landless labourer and fishermen are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Chapter - V

Power Structure of the Village

Rural power structure is one of the key components of rural society. The traditional concept of Bengal village as self-sufficient “republic” or a “soico economic autarchic unit” (Dutta :1956) does not hold good. The very existence of the villages as homogeneous and cohesive units is considered as elusive since “behind the location of hands and *baris* no other feature seems to lend itself to any kind to social solidarity” (Bertooci:1970). On the other hand, production process in the village has been found to be highly stratified (Chowdhury:1978) and certain classes of people were found to have been exploited the other classes (including exploitation of women by men) and the villagers have been found to have been experiencing a total process of pauperisation (Westergraad:1983). Others observe that “a quieter violence also stalks the villages of Bangladesh the violence of needless hunger slowly, but surely as any bullet, and it is just as surely the work of man” (Hartmann:1983). Schendal observed an increasingly downward trend in household mobility. “The over all process was one of downward aggregate shifting of the peasantry as a whole, increasing economic differentiation of peasant households and household mobility mostly within the confines of peasantry” (Schendal:1981).

5.1 Elite and Non-Elite

“The word elite was used in the seventeenth century to describe commodities of particular excellence and usage was later extended refer to superior social groups such as crack military units or the higher rank of

the nobility” (Bottomore:1964:1). G. D. H. Cole said, “The term elite was used to indicate the superiority and exclusiveness pertaining to personal relationship” (Karim:1986:6). But that was precisely meant by elite is very difficult to discern. It seems to have been used to mean many different things. For instance, Pareto employed this term to designate a class, which held high status and commanded influence in a community. And he further divided that (elite into classes: a governing elite comprising of individuals who directly or indirectly play some considerable part in government and non-governing elite comprising the rest. Mosca explains the rule of the minority over the majority by the fact that the former is organised and he says, “. . . the domination of an organised minority, obeying a single impulse over the unorganised minority is inevitable. The power of any minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority” (Mosca:1939:53).

G.D.H. Cole in his book studies in Class Structure “... refers to elites as groups, which emerge to position of leadership and influence at every social level” (Karim:1986:7). From different viewpoint C. Wright Mills “... refers elite as those who occupy the command posts and also possess power, wealth and celebrity” (C. Wright Mills:1956:13).

Anrold M. Rose in his book *The Power Structure: Political Process in American Society* emphasises on another aspect and says, “... this position does not ignore the power of economic elite. Businessmen and those who control the excess wealth constitute a very important elite in our society” (quoted from Karim:1986:8).

Zehadul Karim looked into three main approaches, these are: “

1. ***The positional Approach:*** This was a very popular approach before 1953. . . . Holding positions and actually makes key decisions in the society.
2. ***Reputational Approach:*** Warner, Hellingshead used reputational approach. Weber and Lasswell provided theoretical formulation sometime heads of voluntary organisation.
3. ***Issue Participation Approach:*** It's also known as “Event Analysis”. It assumes that this influence occurs in the participation decision making process. Those who actively take part in the in the decision making as such elites.
4. ***Social Activity Approach:*** Beside these three approaches in one study of Syracuse, it was seen that elite status is achieved because of active participation in different organisation” (Karim.Z.1986:9-12).

Analysis of the rural societies focussed too much on economic variables. In the midst of all the exploitation, conflicts, pauperisation etc. the villagers, in some cases, were found to have been maintaining some balance and certain age-old values to hold their integration and community life. The institute of kinship has been playing its role (Aziz, 1979) and the villagers have been trying to live a “good Islamic life in an Islamic society” in the midst of their consanguinal, affinal and neighbourhood groups. (Ellickson, 1972). While it is true that “more land a farmer possesses or controls, the greater will be his enhances of being

influential -the kind of influence a person will have within his brotherhood is conditioned by his moral reputation An influential person's moral reputation colours the acceptance his influence receives from his fellow brotherhood members. The morally upright influential man is listened to more willingly than the rich but reprobate individual" (Thorp, 1978). While it may be true that the rural societies have undergone considerable changes 'with various old elements losts and new elements introduced' (*quoted from Sociology of Bangladesh : Problems and Prospects, ed. by Anwarullah Chowdhury and others, BARD, Comilla, 1987: 80: Ali, 1960*).

The rural elites and the village 'samaj' exercise social influence and political power and they own 'what is ownable and control what is controllable. But how do they maintain their superiority?

Ownership of land very conventional that the rural elites retain their power through the ownership of larger lands holdings. Wealth and people are the two fundamental sources of power. A large family of *kinship* group enjoys the strength of muscle. If they are also wealthy, they acquire a dominant position in the village. The leaders of such *kinship* groups from the village *samaj*, which combines in itself an all embracing role and acts as a watchdog of social norms and values. This samaj sets the standard, settles the dispute, preserves social discipline, offers informal advice, guides and controls feasts, encourages observance of religious rites and manages and regulates community work.

The large landowners in Bangladesh have been generally found to have large size of families and *multiple sources of income* from farm as well as off-farm sources. Off-farm source is important not only in terms of income but also in relation to its security, its ability to a strategically useful occupation. A joint family provides the scope to find employment and income in both farm and off-farm sources.

Patron client relationship within the villages the poor majority have a sense of obligation to the comparatively rich neighbours. The poor members need employment and their rich neighbours provide the bulk of this employment either directly or through leasing out land. When the poor families need loan it is their rich moneylender neighbours who offer them the needed money after their friends, relatives or kinsmen refuse them any such service.

A family having *economic and political access* to authorities to urban administrative, industrial and service sector acquire additional power and education facilities. Thus the families having educated persons working in the cities enjoy greater *economic and political power* and these are the people who can influence the government offices, lobby for the state patronage for themselves as well as for their area and protect their **ownmen** from any difficulty. An educated man in the family is an asset, if not in terms of economic returns, at least for the elevation of status and retention of authority of the family.

Power may be derived from the ownership and control of the means of production. Knowledge is also considered as the source of power. The theologians view power as something vested in God only. The community development experts will like to focus the institutions or system as the sources of power and will like to locate the sources of institutional power in the norms. Thus there are various ways to look at the concept of power.

Mere possession of land is not enough. A powerful rural elite needs access to the political, administrative, and other urban sectors of services and supports. Education helps them acquire this privilege. A powerful elite also needs a large kinship and clientele support. The availability of land for leasing out cashes for loaning out and access to market mechanism provides him the scope to enlist client-support. A powerful elite needs access to diversified sources of income. A joint family with multiple earners members facilitates putting different members in different occupations. Above all an elite member of family in order to acceptably influential needs to maintain a high moral order. His family background and religious orientation gives him an added status.

From the above discussion we have come to know that every society is broadly divided into two major groups on the basis of elitism. These are elites and non-elites. In case of Batabaria *samaj* group is featured with elite characteristics. Actually they are not a group of elite as per strict sense of the term, but they are elite in a sense that they hold the status, economy and resource of the village.

The members of the *Sheikh Gushti* are elite in the village. They were traditional *Matbars*, enjoyed high status and obtained better economic strength as well as better education. So as a group we could identify them as elite in the village.

Chowdhury observed, “. . . by and large the Union Parisad leaders still belong to the rich land owning class. The traditional high status families no longer monopolise their control and influence on Union Parisad. Nevertheless, they still remain some control over local bodies. The emerging big landowners irrespective of their status and gaining more power and influence to control the Union Parisad. The political power is then in the process of shifting from the traditional high status group to the emerging wealthy land-owning group, irrespective of high and low status. Land ownership may thus be considered to be the most important source of power in the context of rural Bangladesh.

In the present power structure, a few power wielders - many of whom are Union Parisad leaders, politically dominate the vast majority of the rural population. This gives the leaders the opportunity to become wealthier and more prosperous by accumulating more land in their hands.

The Union Parisad leaders accumulate lands through the exploitation of weaker economic classes that normally do not possess any political power and influence. Political dominance thus leads to economic dominance” (Chowdhury:1982:65).

The picture above describe by Chowdhury is by and large same to overall rural rural Bangladesh. But in case of Batabaria, it is not the core village of the Union Parisad; as a result local level Union Parisad leadership is not found here. But it is inevitable everywhere that, “the formal leadership corresponds to the informal leadership in our rural society” (Chowdhury:1982:66).

In Batabaria the formal leadership is absent but an informal leadership is seen in the village. This informal leadership is based on *samaj* leadership. *Samaj* leaders are power elite. A very simple form of society exists in Batabaria. There is only one *samaj* group in Batabaria and their status based traditional leadership still accepted by the villagers.

Village politics generally are linked with the larger society or political parties of the country. The most important external link is the link with the political parties. By linking oneself with the political party or becoming a member of a political party, one may acquires the power and influence in the village and in the Union context. In Batabaria six peoples are involved in the national level politics. Though they are from the village but they are mostly involved in the Thana level. The *samaj* leaderships in the village overrule their leadership. Because they are the members of the very *samaj* group exists in the village. And in case of *samaj* the eldest *Sheikhs*’ leadership is unquestioned.

Other than *Sheikhs* of the village, fishermen, weaver, carpenter, Hindu lower caste groups are in the group of non-elite. But change in economic

status is playing a vital role to be identified as elite. From eighties peoples from Batabaria village went to Middle Eastern countries and started to remit foreign currency to the village. This foreign currency created a buying power in the village. By this buying power people are buying commodities as well as status of rich. This transformation of elite is a unique feature in Batabaria. From non-elite to elite – this is a noticeable change effecting the broader social change.

5.2 Background of power Elite.

Indeed power has not been distributed equally among the various groups peoples of the village. “This inequality in the distribution of power is, to a large extent, related to the inequality of ownership and control of land and to the inequality of status. The distribution of power again influences the ownership and control of land and the status system” (Chowdhury:1978:109).

By power we do not mean political power in the village. Though the village is geographically near to Dhaka, political wave is not strong in Batabaria. From the table we could see that political involvement in the village is insignificant. Though some of the people are involved directly or indirectly, they also belong to the *samaj* group. No one from weaver or fishermen community is involved in politics and consequently they do not have any political power.

Power in Batabaria is concentrated on *sheikh gusthi*. Traditional status, economic strength and a sort of political power acted behind *sheikhs*’

power in the village. Max Weber said, "All conceivable qualities of a person and all conceivable combinations of circumstances put him in a position to impose his will in a given situation." (Chowdhury,1978:109).

It is said that, *Baish (twenty two) Matbars of baish gram* (twenty two villages) had governed Nababganj Thana for about three generations. One of them was Wahed Ali Matbar. He resided in Batabaria. He was the recognised rural leader in Batabaria. For any rural societal problem peoples of Batabaria was depended on Wahed Ali Matbar. So far it is known that he has got this status and power from his predecessor with the traditional acceptance. Economic solvency and major land holding character made it possible.

Present *Sheikh Gusthi* is a descendant from that Wahed Ali Matbar So it is found that *Sheikh Gushti* can be treated as power elite. They exercise different nature of power in the social life of Batabaria. But at the same time some new power elite is emerging in the village, whose background can not be generalised. They got power from foreign currency or education or social acceptance.

5.3. Source of Power

Generally in every society sources of power originated from two fold sources, namely internal and external. "Internal sources are those sources that are available in the village itself and objective properties. The objective properties are very much personal and cannot be separated from the person "*per se*" – the status or all other attribute of a person like

simplicity honesty and so on” (Dalem:1988:73). Taking Nicolas’ classification Dalem classified these sources as material and human (non-material) lineage, kinship. “As Nicholas rightly observed ‘the resources for political action . . . are of two kinds: material and human. Material resources are the economic factor – money, machines, goods, lands mines, etc, that an individual may use in social action to help bring about the outcome he desires . . . “ (Dalem:1988:73).

A human resource is a man, some aspect of whose behaviour is under the control of resource holder.’ (Chowdhury:1978:110).

“External sources of power refer to factors that help one to acquire power and control over community affair from outside it and it stand for two meanings. First one may engage in an activity or attain a position elsewhere other than his community and get prominence in the village. Secondly one may also be imposed as a leader by outside body or power though he may not have any influence and acceptance.” (Dalem:1988:77-78).

“The external factors”, as Dalem described, “that have been found helpful in the acquisition and exercise of power positions in the village are as follows:

- (i) political linkage
- (ii) role and influence of local union parisad chairman
- (iii) role and influence of local Zamindars

- (iv) prestigious jobs outside for self and family members connection with the upazila level government officials and
- (v) Dealership of fertiliser.”

But the source of power in Batabaria village is single-fold i.e., internal. No external source is seen as a factor for external influence of power. The internal sources of power are the ownership and control of means of production, high status, high income, physical and intellectual tact, educational capabilities of individual, social service. It is found that control over human and material resources in Batabaria helps one to accumulate power in the village.

5.4 Power, Politics and *Samaj* Leaders

From the above discussion we have come to know that Batabaria village has its own modest nature of power and politics. No extreme situation is prevailing in the village. Direct political involvement in the village is insignificant. As a result no political alignment acts as the source of power.

“Due to this differential access situated the inflow of state resources into rural sector has brought with more tension and inequalities amongst the peasantry. The rich peasant dominates the various institutions /committees/organisations through which government insistence is channelled. And they are in a position to appropriate most of the resources conveniences with the bureaucrats and the elite. The ruling elites depend on the rich peasants for the mobilising the peasantry for

their political and power in the village because of their economic dependency, which they have enforced on the rural over the years” (Rahman:1986:205).

Due to the extent of rural Bangladesh there are two types of structures/institutions through which power (i.e., capacity) to mobilise resource – human and non-human) is articulated:

- a) *Informal*
- b) *Formal*

Informally leaders are normally known as Matbar/sardar/Prodhan/Mondol (varying terms from region to region). They are the village influential/elders and normally run the *samaj*. As Atiur describe in the note – A *samaj* meaning society is under the leadership of council of influential. Elders who have the function of moral arbiters of community life and who play an important role in dispute settlement.) Union Parisad – (unin council) the first tier is the administrative unit of formula power structure.

Beside these administrative elites, there have recently emerged some economic elites. There are the leaders (mostly young and well connected) who dominate various institutions/ committees. Organisation co-operatives, various developments committees etc.(Rahman:1986:207)

The power in Batabaria is generated within itself. They are from their status, wealth, and education of *samaj* leaders. Power and *samaj* leaders are synonyms in Batabaria. Any dispute over land, family quarrel, and

financial disagreement and so on would go to *samaj* leaders first. It is quite unnatural that internal disputes go beyond *samaj* for desolation. Rather for better integrity everyone like to *samaj* leaders for the devolution of the issue.

Traditionally *Sheikhs* are the power elites in the Batabaria *samaj*. They had the land as a status symbol, they had the cattle herd over 300 cattle and they are the first to step into the education system. Beyond that they were the descendent of Baish Garamer Matbar. Another Hindu family was played the role of elite in mid sixties. They were the *Majumdars*. They left the land and migrated to India during 1960 to 1965. So presently the older and the younger member of *Sheikh* are playing the role of *samaj* leader for any dispute and organiser for any festival of the *samaj*.

5.5 Class, Status and *Samaj*

Regarding the concept of power Marx takes a very objective stand from the viewpoint of class and considers the political power as the organised power of the dominant class (the upper class) for oppressing the other (the bottom). In Marx's view, social order exists because the dominant class is able to maintain it through its power over the lower classes. The dominant class is an organised and oppressive force while the power of the lower class is in a dormant state and as such it is still an oppressed social category. Marx focuses on both the organised (or manifest) and the unorganised (or latent) group interests to understand the more fundamental aspects of social stratification and power. He considers class

struggles (conflicts) of these two major classes in terms of conflicts and class-consciousness with rest to the organisation of production. According to him - “the organisation of production provides the necessary but not a sufficient basis for the existence of social classes. Repeated conflicts over economic rewards. Ready communication of ideas between members of a class, the growth of class consciousness and the growing dissatisfaction with exploitation” were also necessary prerequisites for the emergence of social class. The root of class conflicts has been based on different class interests. The Marxian theory suggests that the change in the lower class through organising the unorganised and exploited groups for new relations of production, leads to more total or revolutionary social change, i.e., collective ownership of the means of production. Marx’s theory of social change is mainly about capitalist societies, and as such it is a single class or economic dimension approach.

I have found the above –mentioned Marxian analysis quite useful in the present study because the households of study village are classified as owner and non-owner of the means of production. Though land is not the principal means of production in my study villages even then the people living in the village have been categorised on the basis of ownership and non-ownership of land.

The widely accepted definition of power seems to be provided by Max Weber. He has defined power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests”. By this

definition Weber actually indicates that for a man or a group of men, power is meant as the chance to realise his or their own will in actions within a community even if others oppose in doing it, while participating in the action. Thus, in the final analysis, it simply means that power is the ability to compel (through force, rewards or other means) another individual or group to do what the power-holder wants, although it goes against the interests of other persons or a group.

It may be argued, as has done, a well-known social researcher of Bangladesh, that the Weberian concept of power is quite appropriate in the context of a developing country like Bangladesh. In such a context, 'groups' of the dominating ones are realised even without the resistance of others, primarily due to the fact that the others [masses] are either (a) not in a position to participate in the community activities or (b) are not properly organised to put up any resistance.

As a matter of fact, Weber's concept of power is actually multidimensional, which is expressed in his triadic notions of class, status, and party in his analysis of social stratification. Weber appears to be more concerned with what existed in a society, rather than attempting to understand what a society could be [in contrast to Marx's attempt to perceive how a society is being changed for the better]. Hence, Weber maintains that a social scientist's main task is to understand human societies without any value judgement. He observes that different groups or individuals' interest, viz. economic or material, social, political, etc. might form the basis of conflict-relationship in human societies.

Property and lack of property are basic aspects of all class situations, which are determined by market forces. According to Weber, classes are not communities. But it is the economic interest, which creates class. And an economic interest is involved in the existence of markets. Weber's definition of class is also useful to understand the class hierarchy of the study village. The principal form of property is land in the village, which is unevenly distributed. The landowners' own property (land) and the landless or the land-poor do not. Thus, the concept of class as provided by Weber is considered more useful in the analysis of class structure in Batabaria.

Weber's conception of status is also pertinent in order to observe scientifically the status in the village. It is quite interesting to note that the presence of social status group and non-status group is relatively very observable in Batabaria village.

In case of Batabaria we observed that, *samaj* group is closely related with class and status. They are the major shareholders of the land-owning class and sole shareholder of traditional status identity. The *samaj* group in Batabaria is a high class group of land-owner and it has a reputed traditional status.

Chapter - VI

Role of *Samaj* in Batabaria

6.1 Social groups vs. Occupation

There are seven major occupational groups in Batabaria. Among them, 30.77% household are engaged in different jobs in the village and outside the village. Other than service, business, day labourer, fishing, agriculture, wood works, weaving, teaching are the occupations can be seen in Batabaria. From these occupational groups four groups are identified with different names like *Rajbangshi* (fisherman) *Jola* (weaver), *Majhi* (boatman).

Rajbangshis are mainly dependent on fishing occupation and they are Hindu by religion. Endogamous marriage is prevailing among *Rajbangshi* communities. Their own *Purohit* (Clergy) offers religious worship. Ashutosh Chakrabarty is the *Purohit* who is conducting the worship for a quite few years.

Some of the members attained higher academic achievement and subsequently left the traditional occupation for a dignified occupation like teaching. This trend is common now days among the different occupational groups in Batabaria.

Another major occupational group in Batabaria is *weaver* community. They are Muslims by religion, but in Batabaria, weavers do not hold the position of high status Muslim. It is found that, their rituals are more

acquainted with Hindu religious activities. For instance, during the Bangla month of Ashar and Shraban (June – July), there is a religious ceremony among the Hindus to float a raft in the name of '*Behula*'. The Weaver community of Batabaria has participated in this ceremony. This symbolic ritual is holding by the community every year.

Another feature is seen among them, each year, they hold a ceremony of religious offerings to their ancestors; locally, it is called as *Uras*. In general, the *weaver* community practices '*Marfat*' rather than '*Shariah*'. Community life of weavers' dominate different sort of music based rituals. They practice religious music during raft floating of '*Behula*' (a Hindu mythological practice), during the '*Uras*' (a Muslim sectoral practice), and also in other religious festivals like Sabe-barat, Eid-e-Miladunnabi. It is clearly seen that, though weavers' community is Muslim people, they do not practice typical Islam and rituals. But this difference never ever ignited any communal conflict. Communal harmony in Batabaria has been prevailing for a long period.

The *weavers*, who have not yet changed their profession, are still dependent on traditional '*Tanti*' (weaving equipment). The weaver usually lends money from the wholesaler of Shibrapur for buying thread. Then, they weave a '*than*' of four '*Lungis*' weekly five to seven units and sell these in the Shibrapur market. This makes their livelihood.

Hindu lower caste is another major social group in Batabaria. Mostly, they are carpenters by profession. But in recent times, they are changing their profession from business to overseas jobs. As a result, their overall economic condition elevated from traditional position. Geographically, they do live in a separate area in Batabaria. Mostly, in a clustered form of homestead. Their main religious deity is 'Kali' (a Hindu Goddess). 'Majhi' community is another social group in Batabaria. About 50 households belong to this community. They live mostly in a separate area. They are Muslims by religion.

During the economic and social transformation, their professional life shattered a bit. More than 50% of these professionals have changed their professions from business to overseas jobs, and from daily labour to shallow engine based boat driver.

In Batabaria, occupational groups and social groups are cohesive. By religion they also showed the harmony of humanity. No communal conflict had ever occurred in Batabaria. These groups co-existed with harmony and peace for long period.

6.2 Basis of *Samaj*

Samaj always cut across the boundaries of class and it is based on lineage. The same situation prevails in Batabaria. In Batabaria, *samaj* evolved as a traditional entity in the society. The 'Sheikh' lineage played the role of *samaj* as a whole in the village. They are the descendants of *Baishgeramer (22-village) Matarbar* family. Present *samaj* leaders are the

descendants of *Wahed Ali Matbar*. After him, three generations have succeeded the *samaj*. They were the traditional landlords and traditional status group of the village. Their economic condition was very well. It is said that, there was a herd of three hundred cattle under '*Sheikh*' family. They belong to higher status group of Muslim. All of these combine the basis of *samaj* lead by '*Sheikh*' family in Batabaria.

The membership of *samaj* in Batabaria is an informal membership in the community. Though it is a phenomenon of ascribed, but recent years some of the members of the Batabaria achieved the membership of *samaj*. A family of *Khan Lineage* whose occupation is teaching in the village has been observed for long time. He asked the *samaj* leaders to give him chance to enrol in the council of honours of *samaj*. *Samaj* leaders observed for about 15 years whether he should be taken as a member of *samaj*. After a consensus he is permitted to attend the *samaj* groups. It happened in the British period for a group of *Cook* family. It is called that they were the famous *Cooks* of Calcutta. They had high status, money and migrated from provincial capital. So it is easier to take them into the *samaj* group of Batabaria.

Unlike this feature of *samaj* incarnation, people get into *samaj* by marriage. Indeed it is depended on the permission of the *samaj* leaders. So it can be said that it is not an extremely close group rather a form of openness is prevailing in to the *samaj*. A sense of change can be observed here.

Generally *Sheikh* family members do not make any marital relationship with new entrant like *Khan families* in to the *samaj*. They are treated as second graded *samaj* member in the group.

6.3 Features and functions of *Samaj*

We have learned earlier, *Samaj* “A kind of association in its general sense means a group of people living together in the basis of kinship, jati, religion, immigration and territory, having a common socio-economic identity” (quoted from Dalem:57-58).

A ‘*samaj*’ is a group represented by their heads, provides suggestions, and sanctions formal approval for social ceremonies, such as – marriage, initiation, etc. The numbers find in its security in times of danger, shelter, in times of distrace and also settle their internal conflicts and disputes within it. This is an old institution but still runs without any written rules and regulations. (Dalem:58).

In Batabaria, there exist only one *Samaj* named as ‘Batabaria *Samaj*’. Batabaria *samaj* consist of 42 households. They are mostly descendants of ‘*sheikh*’ lineage. This is a traditional association of people of same status and same kin-group (*atmiya-svajan*) having a fixed territory in the village. Batabaria *samaj* has homogenous character and having a same origin of *sheikh* lineage.

Batabaria *samaj* has its informal council of elders led by *Hamid Hossain* and his brother *Rabiul Hossain*. Traditionally this *samaj* used to perform variety of functions such as the approval of marriage negotiation, conducting marriage ceremony including the invitation and cooking arrangements, serving foods to the guests, organising a socio-religious festival *Shinny* and etc. As a typical *samaj* in a traditional village community in Bangladesh, Batabaria *samaj* play some significant functions. These are as follows-

Judicial Functions: In rural society, *samaj* play a vital role in maintaining the law and order and disputes of its members and overall disputes of the village. *Samaj* impose some sanctions if its member's family do not obey its traditional norms. Last twenty years, there were two incidents. Two young people married without consent of their family as well as without informing the *samaj* leaders.

Case-1: In the year 1973 *Abul Kalam Azad*, a member of Batabaria *samaj* as well as a descendent of sheikh lineage, fell love with a young lady named *Monakka* without consent or approval from *samaj*. This deliberate action of anti norm to *samaj* makes them isolated from the *samaj*. They were ignored from all social activities and privileges. They are not been provided *samaj* utensils; meat of religious sacrifice and other *samaj* offered activities and privileges. This situation prevailed for about two years, until they applied for a mercy and wish to come back to *samaj*.

Case-2: In the year 1975 another influential member of *samaj* *Farhad Hossain*, married *Delwara Begum* from the same *samaj* group avoiding *samaj* norms of marriage. They fled away and got married. In this case marriage is not the serious offence rather fleeing away from the *samaj*. The brother of *Farhad Hossain* was the *samaj* leader during that time; even then he had not been spared from the sanction of *samaj*. The punishment was the same as case one. But within a year it had been eased to normal. *Samaj* members were not that much rigid to keep anybody out of their *samaj*. Because it is continuous pressure to the *samaj* leaders that *samaj* is not doing well to its members, it should relax the punishment. Afterwards it was done so.

The clear avoidance insults their family members as well as the *samaj* leaders. Their affair marriage within the *samaj* or beyond the *samaj* is not a punishable offence. But without informing and taking permission it can be treated as a punishable offence to the *samaj*. As a result, they had been isolated from the *samaj*. But this sanction is not for ever. They come out by apologising and inviting the *samaj* leaders for a feast. At the same time they have to contribute money to the *samaj* common fund.

Samaj also act as a judge for local level small disputes. These are as follows-

- a) Dispute over property;
- b) Division of property among the heirs of deceased person;
- c) Quarrel leading physical assault centring some petty matters;
- d) Dispute over the recovery of loan and interest;

- e) Dispute over marriage and divorce;
 - f) Negotiation over marriage and dowry;
 - g) Dispute arising out of theft;
 - h) Stealing paddy from one's paddy field;
 - i) Dispute over fruit bearing and other trees and likes.
- (Chowdhury:1979).

The above disputes can also be seen in Batabaria, which has been resolved by the *samaj* leaders. The way *samaj* leaders resolve these disputes; people do not need to go beyond village.

Economic Functions: *Samaj* itself is not a very economic entity. It is rather a social entity. There is no economic activity for income generation. But *samaj* does some social work that involves money. We will discuss later its social activities, which involve a substantial amount of money.

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Generally, *samaj* leaders occasionally contribute for different functions. General members of the *samaj* contribute fund for specific occasions like – feast arrangement during Ramadan.

Samaj leaders also arrange a *shinni* (a weeklong religious musical festival originated from *nabannya* with a grand feast) and high quality feast during the traditional ceremony of first eating new grain held at the last Friday of Kartik. In the present days, the Nabanna is transformed as the function of preventing the evil power of epidemic (Cholera). *Samaj*

members contribute funds for this festival. Generally *samaj* leaders fix the contribution for the event. This contribution could be in cash or kind. In the menu generally *Khira* (quality rice and milk made paste like food) is the prime food. *Samaj* leaders order a group of member to organise certain quantity of milk for the item. This system is used for other items too.

The *samaj* of Batabaria has its own sums of utensils, mats, and shamianas for different sort of social and family festivals. These are as follows: -

- *Satranji* (Mat) 10 pieces
- *Hajak Light* (Kerosene lamp) 5 pieces
- *Dekchi* (Large Cookware) 8 pieces
- *Samiana* (Covering Cloth) 15 pieces
- Plate (Tin plate) 150 pieces
- Spoon 25 pieces
- Glass (Aluminium) 30 pieces
- Jug (Tin) 10 pieces

People can hire them, which generates fund for the *samaj*.

Another special activity is blowing whistle (*siren*) for fasting declaration during the month of Ramadan. Special temporary *Iftari* market is also founded in front of the local primary school.

Other social activities: There are some other social activities found in Batabaria. These are namely – Milad, Kurban, Chehnam, Kulkhani, Religious Jalsha etc. Common *samaj* fund bears the expenses to organize

these activities. Whenever a household of *samaj* organises a milad or chehnam (kharach kara - a local term) he has to invite all of the *samaj* members. This feature of *samaj* is a traditional one. Everybody has to abide by the norms.

A *samaj* member has to invite *samaj* leaders to take decisions regarding his son or daughter's marriage ceremonies. This includes from engagement to wedding reception. *Samaj* leaders decide how many persons will be invited to the ceremony. If the person is unable to do so, then he will have to apologise for the usability and should give a certain amount of money. Range of this amount will be from 1000 to 2000 taka. This amount also fixed by the *samaj* leaders.

A *samaj* member, who sacrifice animal at the event of *Eid-ul-Azha* (a religious festival), he has a social obligation to distribute meat equally to all other *samaj* members. So any member of the Batabaria *samaj* wishes to sacrifice in *Eid-ul-Azha*, he must think about the distribution of meat from the sacrifice. This is a norm in the Batabaria *samaj* and every member practices the system.

6.4 Changes in the function of *Samaj* :

In present Bangladesh, *samaj* is not seen every village community. But its existence is seen in some part of Bangladesh. *Samaj* has its own social value and norm system. It is not clearly in the national legal system. Historically village community was to some extent self-sufficient. So,

village community usually led their life with resources, which are available within their reach. This trend was unchanged up to 1980's. People of Batabaria *samaj* want to demarcate their changes beyond and after 1980's.

Present *samaj* members generally do not hire *samaj* utensils for their own ceremonies. They do prefer to hire professional decorators from Thana headquarter.

Judicial powers of *samaj* leaders have been also declining during the last decades. But religious part of the *samaj* is still working as before. It is seen that strong discipline of the previous *samaj* has been loosening one.

The change in the *samaj* of Batabaria is largely effected by the migration to the Middle Eastern countries. About 60% to 70% male members of the village, have migrated to Middle Eastern countries. This phenomenon of migration effected the rural society significantly.

“From the point of view of the rural areas, the economic drives as a rule operate centrifugally to force men and sometime s women outwards to a distant labour centre where they are able to earn cash wages to use in order to satisfy their various wants. The social system operating particularly through the net work of social relationships, trends to act centripetally to hold a man within its hold and to resist the influence pulling him away” (Islam:1982:2-3).

After 1980's it is seen that, people of the Batabaria *samaj* also migrated to Dhaka, Chittagong and others areas of the country. As a result, *samaj* bondage has loosened its integration. The *samaj* leaders were not present in the village when required. As a result, different internal disputes placed to formal legislative bodies, like Union Parishad. *Samaj* is being treated as less important body in rural community for its reluctant role in the society.

Economic enhancement of the rural people encourages them to ignore the rules of the *samaj*. It is responsible for breaking out the *samaj* norms. On contrary, it is also seen that the *samaj* members wanted to live in a united entity under the level of *samaj* bondage. Because they wanted to secure themselves under the banner of the *samaj*. It also helps them to get better job opportunity overseas.

Like the *samaj* of Batabaria, *Rajbangshi* and *Majhi* communities have their own form of social group. These are not as organised or integrated as Batabaria *samaj*. These are more likely cohesive groups. As occupational community they are culturally integrated within their heritage. But taking examples from traditional *samaj* they usually keep *some utensils and samianas* for their community, social and family programmes. This form of social cohesiveness never has been conflicted with the mainstream *samaj* of Batabaria.

Chapter – VII

Conclusion

The study is concerned with *samaj* of Batabaria. Especially the role, function and nature of this traditional social group. Impact of changing activities of *samaj* in the process of social change is also viewed.

The village community of Batabaria is deceptively simple, highly complex and heterogeneous in nature. As a total contrast of Bangladesh society Chowdhury observed “After partition of India the Hindus, especially the wealth and land owning Hindus, begun to migrate to India. Such a large scale of migration did not take place in most of the villages in Bangladesh. This migration of the Hindus affects not only the physical structure of the village but also various aspects of social life in it. As a result of migration the land of the emigrants were transferred and redistributed. This process of migration and settlement of new member and transfer of land continued up to the mid sixties in Meherpur” (Chowdhury:1978:138).

Though land has been redistributed in Batabaria, but that was not the result of Hindu migration to India. Change in occupation and generated fund flow from overseas acted behind this. In fact arable land is very insignificant in Batabaria. Those who have own land are mostly residing outside Batabaria.

Professor A. K. Nazmul Karim observed Muslim hierarchy as a superimposed classes or groups in his study area Nayanpur during fifties.

These are 1.Chowdhuries 2.Khundakars 3.Muhuri 4.Bhuiyans 5.Agriculturist 6.Land less agricultural labour 7.Wage of other sort, 8.Woodcutter and 9.Slaves. "These classes are hierarchically arranged probably on the basis of their social status."

In contrast "neither Bhuiyas nor Chowdhuries of Meherpur constitutes a class. They are landowners and thereafter belong to the landowning class along with other landowners of the village." (Chowdhury:1978:159).

To understand the village rankings, Bertooci suggests that although there is low variation in the size of landholding in these villages, it is very significant in understanding ranking among the villagers. He says, "Absolute smallness in form size should not obscure the importance of small differences in land ownership and associated economic activities with them as these reflect clear variations in class, status, lifestyle and power. (Bartooci:1972:37).

According to Bertooci villagers treated themselves as Uchu, Madhya and Nichu (Higher, Middle & Lower) lineages. Again he stratified villages on the basis of traditionalism, i.e., lineages. *Sardari* lineages are at the highest status and rest in the lower status. There was a transformation, Bertooci saw in Hazipur and Tinpara.

The non-sardari lineage may acquire some economic strength over time and there about become politically important and in some cases dominant through money lending activities and other forms of patronage. The

lineages after acquiring land and power also sometimes acquire high status by marrying into *Sardari* lineage.

Chowdhury found in Meherpur that the villagers were divided into groups on the basis of high and low status and particular lineages enjoy more status than that of the others.

According to our study in Batabaria, villagers are divided into groups on the basis of high and low status. *Sheikh* lineage has a high status in the society. Economically Batabaria society is also divided into groups. These groups are transforming in nature that can be visible over periods of time.

Our study agree with Chowdhury and Bertocci that land holding is very important in understanding ranking pattern in Bangladesh villages and individual acquired land and power may also acquire high status over years. In Batabaria it is not that much identical as far as land holding is concerned. Because land is scarce in Batabaria and foreign jobs playing an important role in the economic life of Batabaria.

We shall now discuss major social forces, which were responsible for bring about changes in the traditional society of Batabaria. Batabaria was and is a predominantly Muslim populated area. War of independence in 1971 indeed acted as a transitional event of societal progression in Batabaria. As a close society Batabaria did not change much up to

eighties. During 1980s foreign employment created a significant impact on Batabarias' social and economic life.

While studying the phenomenon of *samaj* it has been seen that the structural organization of the village placed in the national setting shown the typicality of the village in the greater context "...The study", as per Islam, "is roughly little mere than the confirmation of one of the great truths of anthropology: *Structures changes more slowly than functions, and after continue to be vessels in which very different wine is held.*" (Islam:1974:157).

It is found that increasing economic contacts with the outside world has opened up possibilities for new groups of *brokers* or *intermediaries* among the villagers. They (*brokers* or *intermediaries*) emerged as because *samaj* is not playing strong role as it did before on different village issues. *Samaj* leaders mostly reside outside the village. They come to the village irregularly. They can not follow up decisions of *samaj* for long period. As a result, *brokers* or *intermediaries* are taking position of the *samaj* leaders informally. They deal issues by taking money from both the conflicting parties. Another group of intermediaries has emerged; who plays the role of mediator for irrigation project in Batabaria. They organise irrigation from government's agriculture department from thana/district level. In exchange of this mediation the intermediaries get a share of produced crop. A typical *samaj* usually organise this sort of things for the whole society. But Batabaria *samaj* has

not any formal involvement with other bodies. The physical absence of *samaj* leaders changed its functions too.

Batabaria village is not in the center of the union. But disputes, which could not be solved within the village *samaj*, certainly goes to the union parisad. About 7 years back one incidence happened that went up to the chairman of the union parisad. A villager hit in child's eye, which caused the damage of an eye. The case could not be solved by *samaj* and subsequently went to chairman and chairman of the Union Parisad arranged a compensation package of 50,000/= taka. There was an internal deal from the convicted side to minimize for not going to the local police station. This sort of thing happens very rarely. Conflicts are mostly negotiated by the *samaj* directly or with the consent of the *samaj* leaders by the *intermediaries*. Some conflict issues could not reach to *samaj* leaders in consideration of the dignity of *samaj*. The *brokers* solve them. This system of resolving conflict is a changing phenomenon in the rural society. This system is not that much strong, but its existence played a grate role in the traditional harmony in the rural society.

We now try to sum up over findings of the present study.

The village of Batabaria is a low-lying area. Most part of the year, its low land submerged under water and homesteads become islands. The main means of communication during water dominated period is different types of country boats. Populations sparse in 6 homesteads (*paras*) of them 2 are occupational. Housing patterns are as usual typical

Bangladeshi. Buildings, tin houses and chan houses are generally seen in Batabaria. These housing are also reflecting the economic position of families of the villages.

As far as demographic information is concerned, we found that 55% of the population are male and 45% are female.

Religious setting is also typical like other Bangladesh villages. Of total population 66% are Muslims and the rest are Hindu. In Batabaria among the Muslims *Sunni* sect and among the Hindus *Sudra* caste is existent. As a result no religious conflict is ever heard. Occupational group of fisherman locally known as *Rajbangshis* indeed plays a supportive role in Batabaria's life. People of Batabaria have good number of primary education i.e., 51%. It is observed that basic education is available for the population.

Economic features of the village can be seen through its agriculture, land holding patterns and occupational situation. In Batabaria agriculture is not a predominant occupation. Land is scarce here and 72 percent of households do not have any cultivable land.

Though land is traditional icon of power in Batabaria, it does not play the most important role in the social life. Even then land differentiates the people of Batabaria traditionally. Traditional landholders are in higher status but not in the highest form of economic status. Comparatively they are less capable in economic aspects. On the basis of land ownership

people of Batabaria are divided into landowner, tenants or sharecropper and landless. The hierarchical picture of Batabaria is seen on the basis of land and occupation. The landowner, businessman landowner and sharecropper are at the top of the hierarchy. Sharecropper weaver, laborer and fisherman are in the bottom of hierarchy.

The significant feature of economic life of Batabaria is foreign employment. Compared to other typical Bangladesh village foreign remittance is a significant part in the economic life of Batabaria. It also affects society. This change has come after 1980s, when poorer family members went to Middle Eastern countries for jobs. Foreign remittance changed land holding pattern, brought electronics devices and westernized dressing in the village. Rural electrification helped to bring modern facilities into the village. And it brings satellites channels in the village too. Its intervention influenced the attitude pattern of young generation. Indeed it is obvious; this is one of the reasons that traditional social values and norms are not acting like before.

Every society is broadly divided into two major groups on the basis of elitism. These are elite and non-elite. In Batabaria there are no elite in the strict sense of theory, but some members of the *samaj* group and some other high-income people are elite. They hold the status, economy and resources in the village. Elites got characteristics from their traditional history as well as from present achievements. They own land, they have traditional social status and high income. In Batabaria, sources of power

of elite are internal, no external or political force empowered them as elite.

Our main thrust of the study was *samaj*. As a traditional non-formal entity in Batabaria it is a status based kin lineage group of *Sheikh* family. Though as time passes *samaj* is not as close as before. It now accommodates outsiders with some prerequisites. Batabaria as a small typical Bangladesh village has a lot of occupational groups. But as a social and mental body *samaj* still overrules every other occupational group. *Samaj* has its own rituals, own assets and own form of legal activities.

Samaj annually organise *shinni* (a weeklong religious musical festival originated from nabannya with a grand feast), organise different religious and other programs. *Samaj* has its own *utensils* and *samianas* for community use. And above all it has an informal legal coverage to its entire member for wrong doings. It is stated before that marriage without the permission of the *samaj* is a punishable offence. And before amnesty he has to suffer aloofness imposed by the *samaj*.

But the traditional character of *samaj* is loosing its strength over its members. High-income groups from Middle Eastern countries do not take *samaj* utensils for their family programs. They hire from Thana decorators. *Samaj* leaders are not that much strong to deal with the under cover adultery of the family member who are residing overseas. This is a quite happening issue, but formally no one is vocal about it.

Young male and female or young school or college boys and girls are moving around in the area, which is unprecedented in the village life. Disintegration of family also played vital role for loosing *samajs'* bondage. They do not come to *samaj* meeting regarding different issues; as a result *samaj* itself is not formed as a strong body to rule over out laws.

Samaj is loosing its firmness to dissolve disputes. As a result *brokers* and *intermediaries* and ultimately *Union Parisad's* chairman have taken the chance to dissolve these disputes. This makes *samaj* a loosely formed body in Batabaria. By the advent of modernisation, changes are taking place in the society; subsequently *samaj* is also changing its character.

But whenever social congregation is held, *samaj* still is the main portrayal in Batabaria. Though *samaj* is changing by the modern aspects of social change, *samaj* members still feel that this sort of informal body is needed for social integrity and social identity. Some one of Batabaria wanted to be called as a member of Batabaria *samaj*. He feels it's his proudness and security of sharing problems.

As a traditional group, *samaj* is not that much strong as before. After nineteen eighties the transition came into forces rapidly. A substantial number of people went for job in the Middle Eastern countries. Along with their money they brought some amenities from the modern world. People of Batabaria can use modern electronic equipments in the village in these days. They can have their social programmes without *samajs'*

utensils; those can be hired from thana headquarters. So there is no obvious dependency on the *samaj*. This also change the attitude of the family members. Presently they (family members of Middle Eastern jobholders) do not care *samaj* as much as their fathers and forefathers did. It might happen gradually over a period of time, but foreign jobs have accelerated the changes in the society of Batabaria.

Foreign employment has changed the whole structure of the village; the land holding system, the attitude system, the unsociable activities, and above all the *samaj* itself. The traditional close social system of Batabaria is relatively more open today and awaiting for more changes to come.

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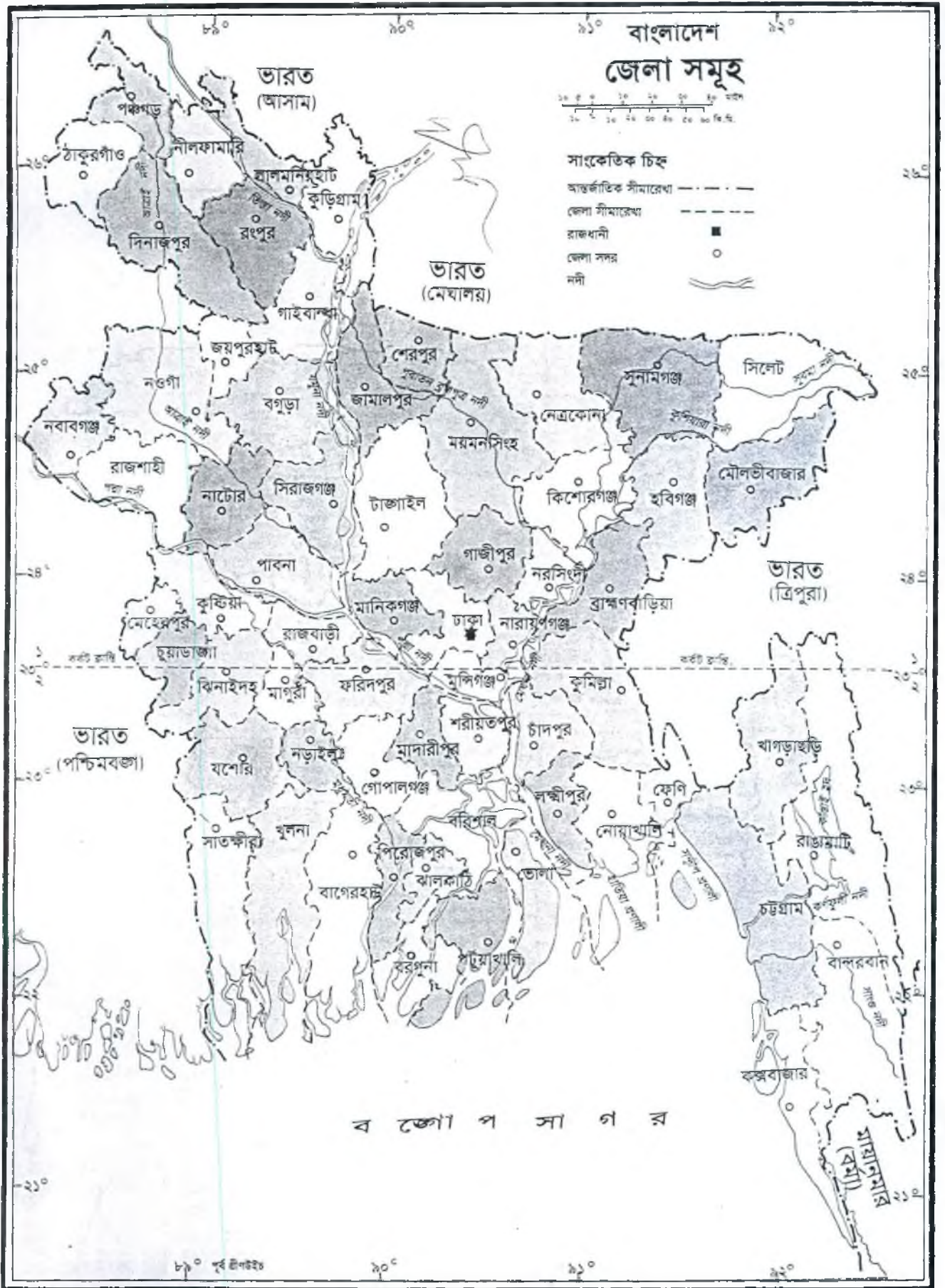
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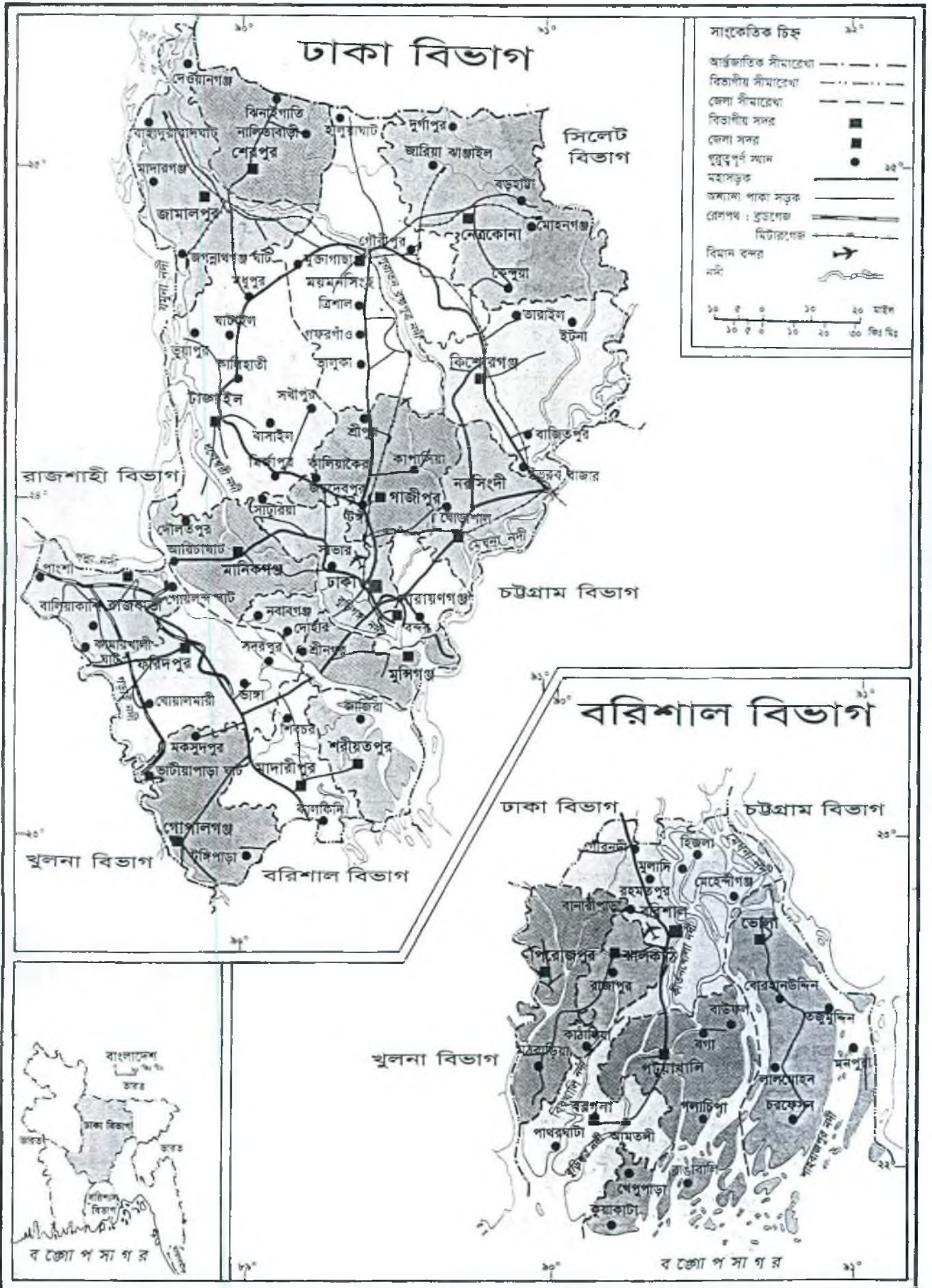
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DHAKA ZILA

MAUZA GEO-CODE MAP

62 -- NAWABGANJ UPAZILA

30 - DHAKA DISTRICT



LEGEND

TCGA BOUNDARY	—————
UPA BOUNDARY	—————
MAUZA BOUNDARY	—————
TCGA HEADQUARTER	●
UPA CODE NO	88, 79, 80