

**A STUDY OF POWER AND POLITICS AT  
THE LOCAL LEVEL IN RURAL BANGLADESH**

*A Thesis Submitted For The Degree of*  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**IN**  
**POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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**UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

1997

**A STUDY OF POWER AND POLITICS AT  
THE LOCAL LEVEL IN RURAL BANGLADESH**

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**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA**

**MARCH, 1997**

## 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.

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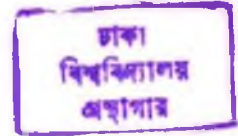
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CHAPTER-1

✱ INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER-1

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The Problem**

This is a study of Power and Politics at the local level in Bangladesh. It deals mainly with the power structure at the village level. Two villages belonging to two different cultural zones of Bangladesh have been selected for the purpose of present study. Of the two villages, Kamalpur belongs to Patuakhali district<sup>1</sup>, while Jamalpur belongs to Comilla district<sup>2</sup>. The present research proposes to investigate into the power structure, both formal and informal, the existing power relations, the sources of power and the emerging pattern of leadership in these two villages. This will give us an opportunity to understand the pattern of power structure rather the whole gamut of power-relations at the local level of Bangladesh.

So far, a few studies on the village level power and politics have been conducted by the scholars of different disciplines. Their contributions are no doubt very important to understand the present phenomenon. But none of these studies is a full length study in the field of local level power and

- 
1. Patuakhali district lies in the southern region of Bangladesh.
  2. Comilla belongs to the eastern part of the country. Therefore, there is regional and cultural variations between the two villages under study.



politics basing on a multi-disciplinary approach. The study of the present phenomenon from a multi-disciplinary approach might give us more light about it and there is scope for further study in this field in the context of Bangladesh. The present research is an humble attempt towards this direction.

In this chapter, we propose to discuss the meaning of power, the distinction between power and authority, the sources of power both formal and informal with particular reference to rural Bangladesh. We shall also make a review of the relevant literature and deal with the objectives and methodology of the present research in this introductory chapter.

### **Theoretical Framework**

By the term 'Power' we mean here political power. We are not concerned here with economic power, money power, or any other kind of power. We deal with only political power here. In understanding power here we have relied on major political and social scientists.

The term 'Power' has been defined by different scholars in various ways. But all these definitions are not very relevant for the purpose of present study. The most relevant and important definition of power is the definition of Max-Weber. Weber defines 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" (Weber, 1947, 52). He further points out that "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" (Ibid. : 153).

We shall examine in the present research how qualities of persons and combinations of circumstances put persons in a position to play an important role in local level politics with reference to Bangladesh. In this study, the concept 'Power' has been used more or less in the same sense as implied in Weber's definition of power. One of Max Weber's major contribution is the multidimensional (class, status and party or power) analysis of society. He is found more concerned with what exists in a society, rather than attempting to understand what a society could be (in contrast with Marx's attempt to understand how a society will change for better). Hence, Weber maintained that the social scientist's task is to understand human societies without the interference of political objectives. He was also aware of the limitations of one dimensional (historical-material) approach of Marx.

Weber observed that many varied and differing group or individual interests-viz. economic or material, social, political, etc. form the basis of conflict-relationships in human societies. Weber's multidimensional approach is important to understand the bases of power in a society like Bangladesh. Max Weber, who was the first to present a comprehensive

alternative to Marx's theory of social stratification, provides a different conception of social and political power. Weber, unlike Marx, does not see political power to be primarily a function of economic factor. According to him, there are three bases of power viz. economic, status honour and political parties (Weber, 1967 P:21-28). To Weber, economically determined power is not always identical with political power. On the contrary, economic power may be a consequence of power derived from other sources. He contends that the three bases of power, though may be interrelated, are independent of one another and thereby he rejects Marx's view that social and political dimensions of power are ultimately dependent upon economic dimension. (That the primary focus of power conflict theories is that the people have conflicting interests in the society.) And for fulfilling such interests power is exercised mostly by those who are on the top of the hierarchy. This power, is generally understood by all in the line that of Weber's definition as the chance of a man or group of men to realize their own will in communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.

Power has different meaning to Marx. According to him, power is primarily based on economic factor. In Marx's view social order exists because the dominant class is able to maintain social order through its power over the weaker economic classes. Here, the superstructure is an organized and oppressive force and the substructure is a latent and oppressed force. However, the potential of the latent group interests to

become manifest is always present. Marx believed that this potentials will create more just and human societies.

Even though dominant class and its ideology in a society is shaped and maintained by this powerful group (because it serves its interests); the superstructure is not only completely determined. It is influenced and shaped by the substructure or by the general mode of production. In the long run, the influence of the substructure over the superstructure was seen as primary in Marx's theory. Marx considers class struggles (conflicts) of the two basic classes as the moving force in the history. The root of class conflict is differing class interests. In the class society, one basic class owns and controls the means of production and another basic class does not own the means of production. Thus, the dominant and powerful class exploits the dominated and powerless class.

Marx's theory of class and the idea of economic determinism which also reflect his view of power relations, have been subjected to criticism by several authors. Dahrendorf (1959:18-71,177-154) and Aron (1965:111-182), in their critique on Marx's ideas, maintain that some of the empirical generalizations of Marx are too sweeping and some of his hypotheses about the future state of affairs have not been fulfilled.

More recent political thinker like Dhal (1957) explained power in a somewhat different manner. He thinks that " A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that he would not otherwise do"

(Dahl 1957 : 201-215). According to Lasswell and Kaplan power means "Participation in making decision" (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950:74). Peter Blau defines power as the "ability of persons or groups to impose their will on others despite resistance through deterrence either in the form of withholding regular supplied rewards or in the form of punishment, in as much as the former as well as the latter constitute, in effect, a negative sanction" (Blau, 1964 : 177).

The above mentioned definitions of power are important to understand the local level politics with reference to Bangladesh. Power often leads to influence, dominance and authority. Power is not however, authority. There is marked differences between power and authority. According to Max Weber, when power gains legitimacy it becomes authority. He mentions three types of authority viz. the traditional, charismatic and the legal authority and maintains that each type of the authority is different from the other. According to Weber, in traditional authority, obedience is owed to the traditionally sanctioned positions of authority. In charismatic authority, obedience is based on the personal trust in leader, trust in his exemplary qualities, his heroism and his revelation; and in legal authority, obedience is based on legally established impersonal order (Weber, 1965 : 628).

Power, in the final analysis, simply means the ability to compel (through force, rewards or other means) another individual or group to do

what the power wielder wants, even if it is against the other person's or groups' interests to do so. Wright Mills (1956), in his famous work **The Power Elite** concluded that there is a power elite that dominates the country in its own interests. While analyzing power, Mills notes it not as faculty for getting what one group, the holders of power, wants by preventing another group, the outs, from getting what it wants. Mills saw people as primarily striving for power and material wealth for personal interests. Russell (1938) too observes that of the infinite desires of man, the chief are the desires for power and glory. In his famous work- **Power A New Social Analysis**, Russell finds in power the key to social dynamics, as Marx found it in wealth. The fundamental concept in social science for Russell is power. He understands power as influencing individuals and control over materials (P-25). Primary concern of political elites and parties are struggles for power at individual and organizational levels.

With regard to the bases of power, Lenski's view is more or less a synthesis of the Marxian and the structural functionalists views. Lenski (1966 : 57-58) holds that different forms of power have different sources and that the two most important foundations of institutionalized power are: (i) social roles or organizational positions with authority or influence and (ii) ownership of private property.

In favour of his argument about the ownership of private property as one of the important bases of power, he holds that since property is

something which is in short supply and hence of value, its owner controls a resource which can be used to influence the actions of others. The more he owns the greater is his capacity to influence and the greater is his power.

It may not be irrelevant to mention here the elite theories of Pareto, Mosca and Michels. Pareto's theory of elitism is based on his conception of inequality of individual endowments in different spheres of life. Regarding the nature of distribution of power, Pareto maintains that in most societies an individual's position in the hierarchy of political and social power would be in the same place as his position would be in the hierarchy of wealth (Bottomore, 1964 : 2). Pareto also speaks of circulation of elite. According to him, one 'elite' class will be replaced by another 'elite' class to rule the society. Therefore, he maintains that human history is the graveyard of aristocracies.

Mosca (1939 : 50), like Pareto, is of the opinion that in all societies two classes of people exist - a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The ruling class which is always a minority performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys all advantages that power brings, whereas the majority class i.e. the non-ruling class is directed and controlled by the ruling minority in a more or less violent and arbitrary manner. Michels's view about elitisms is broadly the same as of Pareto and Mosca. In sum, it can be said that all the three authors emphasized on the virtual

impossibility of democratic alignment of classes and believed in the iron law of oligarchy.

The pluralist thinkers, however, analysed power and politics in a different way. The pluralists like Dahl (1961), Polsby (1983), Wolfinger (1960), Dahl (1955) and several others believe that in a modern democratic society as America power is widely shared by many groups and institutions. In his study of New Heaven, Dahl holds that New Heaven has undergone a change from oligarchy to pluralism. He further states that the 'ex-plebes' completed the transition from the old pattern of oligarchy based upon cumulative inequalities to new pattern of leadership based on dispersed inequalities (Dahl 1961:1). Also Polsby in his *Community Power and Political Theory* (Polsby, 1983:30) concluded that there was no power elite in New Heaven. From his study he also rejects a number of propositions that uphold the elitist conception of power.

All these definitions, concepts and theories of Power have definitely helped us in understanding and analysing power and politics at the local level of Bangladesh, although we have not totally relied on one single definition or theory. In the present study, we have tried to reveal the realities in connection with local level power and politics and tried to examine these realities in the light of the concept and theories mentioned above.



## **Objectives**

The main objective of the present study is, therefore, to understand the present power structure at the local level in Bangladesh, to investigate into the sources of power at the local level (Village level) and to reveal the socio-economic and political background of the power wielders, to know the relationships between the power-wielders and the rest and finally, the pattern of emerging leadership at the local level as one sees it at present. To achieve these objectives, I have dealt with the gradual evolution of the informal and formal political institutions at the local-level. I have also tried to describe the changes that have taken place in the traditional pattern of leadership in the context of Kamalpur and Jamalpur, the two villages under study.

## **Methodology**

As mentioned earlier, the present research has not been confined within the boundary of Political Science alone. The approach is rather multi-disciplinary in the sense that it has involved the theories and methods of other disciplines like Public Administration, Sociology and Anthropology. I not only conducted household census and sample survey in the study of villages but also followed the anthropological method (intensive fieldwork) for collecting relevant data and in-depth information. The methodology of the present study is primarily the anthropological one.

I conducted intensive fieldwork in two villages of Bangladesh for the purpose of present study. Regarding methodology of village studies Chowdhury (1978) suggests - " anthropological method, which involves direct participation and observation in the field seems to us the most useful method for the study of village communities in contemporary Bangladesh. Because we can gain deep insights into the society and culture of the people whom we are investigating through intensive field work". (Chowdhury, 1978: 12 ).

Intensive fieldwork is a method of social anthropological research. The social anthropologists were the first to use intensive fieldwork as a method of inquiry in their attempts to understand human society and culture. They have been using this method in their investigations since the beginning of the present century. Today, this method is also used by the scholars of a wide range of disciplines.

Social anthropology was at first associated with two scholars, namely Malinowski (1884-1942) and Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). It emerged as an empirical science with intensive fieldwork as its method of investigation. "It was not to deal in conjecture, it was not to reconstruct history. It was not concerned with the evolution of institutions or with the diffusion of beliefs and artifacts. The social anthropologist was to take living societies as his objects, he was to treat them as natural phenomena

to be studied with all the rigour of the natural sciences and to be studied at first hand” (Pocock 1975:4).

Malinowski saw the essence of fieldwork in what he called participant-observation. But such participation implies involvement in the social life of the people. Malinowski’s method of intensive fieldwork (ethnographic fieldwork) inspired the later researchers in the same field and discipline. This tradition of fieldwork was further flourished by Evans Pritchard’s fieldwork among the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard : 1940). Following this tradition, anthropologists have been conducting innumerable studies all over the world in the course of the last fifty years or so. They have been investigating into the society and culture of their own people and also the society and culture of the so-called backward people (alien to them).

This method of inquiry is now being followed by the scholars of other branches of social science if and when necessary and not only by the anthropologists. For my present research, I have followed this method by being a participant-observer. However, although anthropological method was the principal method of investigation, I also collected information from secondary sources and to some extent I followed the historical-analytical method. Besides, I had to depend on key-informants for some of the basic data. I had to conduct a household census. Therefore, it was not a single method but the combination of several methods which I followed for the purpose of present research.

During my stay in the village, I was a participant observer. Although initially I was a stranger to them, finally I became a friend of them. In fact, sitting, asking and listening were my techniques. We know, sitting implies lack of hurry, patience and humility; asking implies that the outsider is the student; and listening implies respect and learning. However, as a helping tool, an interview schedule for village census was used but the interview was conducted in an informal way and in an informal atmosphere. I collected the information mainly by gossiping with them and through group discussion. I was first identified as a woman NGO worker by the villagers of both Kamalpur and Jamalpur. People thought that I was there to give them credit or some other help as given by the NGO's. So, they expected such help from me. When I began to carryout household census in Kamalpur, I was repeatedly requested by many people - both men and women - for help. But I explained to them the purpose of my visit and I was able to convince them about my intention and could establish rapport with them. Finally, they helped me in my work. But in Jamalpur, this problem was not acute. They thought that I had some connection with BARD, Comilla and they had respect for BARD people. Therefore, it was easy for me to establish rapport with people of Jamalpur.

### **Review of Literature**

So far very few systematic attempts have been made to study power and politics at the local level in Bangladesh. A few studies dealt with local

power structure and local level politics but the main focus of none of them was on power and politics at the local level as envisaged by the present research. Even then, some of these studies provide us with important information about local-level politics. We have, therefore, tried to discuss these works in the following paragraphs:-

✓ Bertocci (1970), while studying social structure and community organization in two villages of Comilla district, finds that the *sardars* (leaders) mostly come from the economically or numerically dominant families with prestigious titles. The *sardari* lineages being superior to other in respect of land ownership and numerical strength exercise dominance over the non-*sardari* lineages.

According to Bertocci, allocation of status and distribution of political influence in those villages generally correlate with difference in wealth. He further observes that the power and influence of the *sardars* are not restricted to the indigenous political system only but extend to the formal and official organs of the local government institution viz. the Union Council.

Islam (1974), in his anthropological study of politics conducted in the late sixties in a village of Dhaka district, observes that the village leaders, for obtaining the support of the majority villagers, depend on several devices such as appealing to the sense of village patriotism,

exploitation of affinities and division and manipulation of *gushthi* (lineage) loyalties. He also finds factional divisions in the village and contends that factions are activated and organized mostly by kin groups. Islam also gives a broad view of the *zamindari* system and devolution of leadership in the hands of the peasant proprietors.

Wood (1976) examines the power structure of a Comilla village focusing primarily on the relations of production and exchange. He observes that the social groupings in the village exist alongside a structure of pervasive class domination. The rich peasants, according to Wood, through the process of money lending and taking land on mortgage from the poorer peasants acquire more land and thereby gain and reinforce their economic and political dominance. Besides, the members of the richer peasant families comparatively have more access to the non-agricultural employment such as business, professional jobs and certain types of service occupations in the city, which provide them access to various items of patronage of the state and thereby enhances political authority of these families in their village (P.145).

The *sardars* (leaders) of the village mainly come from the richer section of peasants. The main characteristics of the *sardars*, as described by wood, are that they have an extensive economic influence, respected social status, and have a reputation for making decisions which maintain and reinforce the social order. Wood (1978), in his anthropological esquire

into the rural power relations in a village, pseudonymed Bondogram in Comilla district, observes a new generation of power holders have been emerging in the rural areas by virtue of their access into trade, irrigation, construction and other state sponsored activities. However, they are sons and close relations of traditional *sardars* and thus they do not intend to challenge the traditional leadership.

Chowdhury (1978) in his study of social stratification in a village in Dhaka district finds that control over men by manipulative skills, ownership of land and contact with high officials are the bases from which power is acquired in the village. He mentions that as in the past, political power is still largely concentrated in the hands of *khandan* (high status lineage) land owners. However, some non-*khandan* landowners are also emerging as powerful persons in the village politics. Another important finding of Chowdhury is that the same set of people in the village provides leadership both in informal as well as the formal bodies.

Arens and Beurden (1980) in their study in a village in Kushtia district, mention that the present leaders of the village mostly come from the surplus farmer categories. As discussed by the authors; beside land ownership, money, tact, education and physical strength also contribute in acquiring power in the village. Like Wood, Arens and Beurden are of the view that the poorer class are always being dominated and exploited by the richer peasant power wielders.

In their research work, Arens and Beurden (1977), a Dutch couple, after a long fieldwork in a village pseudonymed, Jhagrapur, in Kustia district observes that the leadership of the old (traditional) leaders of influential lineages is increasingly being put under due to the emergence of young leaders. These young leaders are the educated members of wealthy families who are trying to assert themselves in the leadership roles. These emerging leaders also have physical force at their disposal. The researchers observe that economic and physical strength are not enough for asserting power. An influential lineage (status) and education are also necessary. The educated youths have also linkages with political parties and hence, can influence local administration. Thus, Arens and Beurden claim that the educated and politically conscious youths are the potential power holders of the village, And only they can put an effective challenge to the traditional power holders.

In his study in the village named - Dhononjohpasra and Gopalhati of Rajshahi district, Karim (1987) notes a change in the pattern of leadership. This is due to the declining importance of traditional institution in the village; while the modern institutions backed by the state are getting prominence. The real political power of *samaj* is usually demonstrated in settling village disputes. This traditional function of the *samaj* has been taken over by the village court established with Union Parishad Chairman as its judge. It has undermined the power and traditional role of *samaj*.



Karim also finds that the educated youths, originating from influential lineages, are coming forward to take the formal leadership positions. It is education which has given a new strength to young members of the traditional lineage in getting an access into the local modern institutions. However, Karim sees no structural change as such in the power structure.

In this connection, Rahman's (1989) latest study, based on 50 selected *madbars* from six different thanas, is significant. This study exhibits that rural power structure centers around the transition of power from informal to formal structures (Rahman, 1989:74). Rahman also notices that the importance of agriculture as the principal occupation of the power holders is also declining. Most of these leaders (27%) have secondary occupations with agriculture. Business is emerging as the next important primary occupation (28%). The above findings indicate the following trend of rural leadership:

Although some new faces are seen in the leadership role of both informal and formal institutions; but they belong to the traditionally wealthy families. Thus, no much structural shift in the power structure is expected.

- The emerging power holders have more than one source of income.
- In general, the proportion of non-agricultural income is increasing, especially among the young leaders.

- The study of Blair (1978), Sobhan, Adnan and Jahangir have especially focused on the contribution of the State in forming particular type of rural structure. It is clear from their studies that the state has been consciously pursuing a policy of supporting the rich peasantry for its own class interests. Rahman calls this as generous spoon-feeding (Rahman 1989 : 37).

As discussed earlier fundamental and structural changes in the rural power structure are expected through developing a countervailing power and countervailing moral force of the grassroots masses. It is expected that this countervailing power will place (i) an effect challenge to the traditionalized rural leadership; (ii) bring a positive change to ensure participation of the rural masses in the power process; and (iii) create resisting force of the poor in their class interests.

In view of the above discussions on different aspects of power and politics contained in the existing literature, I think that there is enough scope for a full length intensive micro-level study on local level power and politics in Bangladesh. The present research is an humble attempt to this direction. The primary justification and importance of the present study lies in the fact that where most of the existing studies deal with some aspects of local politics, the present study is a comprehensive multi-dimensional and intensive investigation of all aspects of local level politics. No systematic, intensive empirical study is as yet made in this area; hence the present work will attempt to satisfy the demand of the time.

CHAPTER-II

- ❖ **Rural Society of Bangladesh: The Pattern of Social Structure, Stratification and Physical Environment.**

## CHAPTER-II

### **Rural Society of Bangladesh: The Pattern of Social Structure, Stratification and Physical Environment**

Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign independent nation in 1971. It lies on the northeastern part of the South Asian Subcontinent roughly between 20° 30 and 26°45 north latitudes and 88° 00 and 92° 56 east and longitudes and is bounded by India on the west and north and Myanmar on the east and the Bay of Bengal on the south. It comprises an area of 56,126 sq. miles. Except the hilly region in the northeastern part, the country consists of low, flat and alluvial soil enriched by heavy silts from a number of rivers and streams that cover the whole country flowing down to the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh has a tropical monsoon climate with six seasons of which winter, summer and monsoon are prominent. During the monsoon season, the average rainfall accounts for 80 per cent of the total rainfall of the year which is approximately between 100" and 130". The rainfall makes the entire riverine network the most important means of communications.

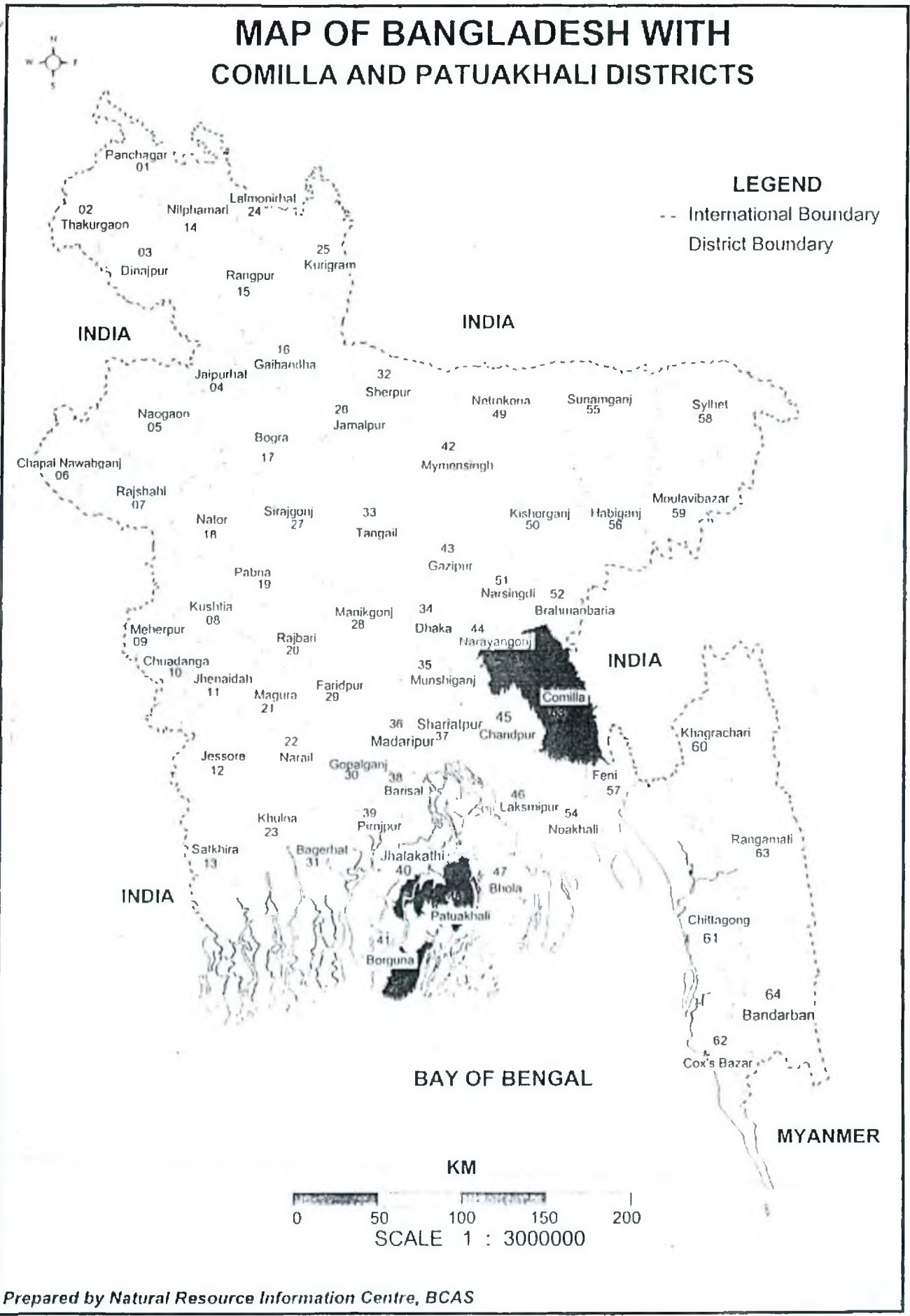
“The vast majority of Bengalis, Hindu and Muslim alike, are classic peasant wet rice cultivators of the Bengal Delta. There is an economy adapted to both the blessings and vicissitudes of monsoon agriculture, grounded on an endlessly fertile terrain, but forever buffeted by a fickle

climate, bearing storms one year, drought the next. The region has traditionally had three rice crop seasons, one of them, the monsoonless winter, relatively unproductive until the recent advent of mechanized irrigation. Rice, in myriad varieties, is the staple food, served at every meal, supplemented by vegetables, spices, and fish when available. Muslims also eat fowl, goat meat (mutton), and beef when they can afford it. Bengali cultivators also grow jute throughout much of the region, in addition to other cash crops such as sugar-cane, betel nut, and betel leaf. The peasant economy is also served by a variety of artisan craftsmen, most of whom, even in Muslim-majority areas, are members of the relevant Hindu caste groups" (Bertocci, 1978:90).

The whole country is a delta and is one of the densely populated countries of the world. The average human density is above 1,500 persons per square mile. The local community is organized as settled villagers in the rural areas. Each village consists of two or more wards (*paras*) or hamlets. From Moghul times onward, the countryside has been divided for revenue, and since British days for Census purposes into officially designated village units (*mauja*). But the groupings which peasants themselves socially recognize as village (*gram*) may or may not reflect these administrative boundaries and are the product of the proximity of peasant homesteads. Such closeness facilitates intimate social relations among the locally resident kin groups. Bangladesh is linguistically and culturally homogeneous.

As mentioned above, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries of the world. An area of only 56, 126 sq. miles housing more than 115 million would indeed exhaust the possible living space. In 1961 the density of population of this region was 922 per sq. mile whereas in 1974 it has increased to 1,291 per sq. mile and today the density of population is more than 1,500 persons per square mile.

# MAP OF BANGLADESH WITH COMILLA AND PATUAKHALI DISTRICTS



Prepared by Natural Resource Information Centre, BCAS

## Population

In this section we have discussed the present demographic situation of Bangladesh. " According to the Population Census 1991, the total population of Bangladesh is 111,455,185 of which 89,000,111 persons live in rural area, 12,801,266 persons in municipalities and 9,653,808 persons in other urban areas. This shows that 79.95% of total population live in rural area and 20.15% in urban area. The growth of urban population during the last decade is shown in table-1.

**Table 1**

### Population change during 1981-1991

(Pop. in Million)

Sex	1991			1981			% Change		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
Both Sex	111.45	22.45	89.00	89.91	14.09	75.82	23.96	59.33	17.38
Male	57.31	12.20	45.11	46.29	7.86	38.43	23.81	55.22	17.38
Female	54.14	10.25	43.89	43.62	6.23	37.39	24.12	64.53	17.38

Source : Bangladesh Population Census, 1981 and 1991.

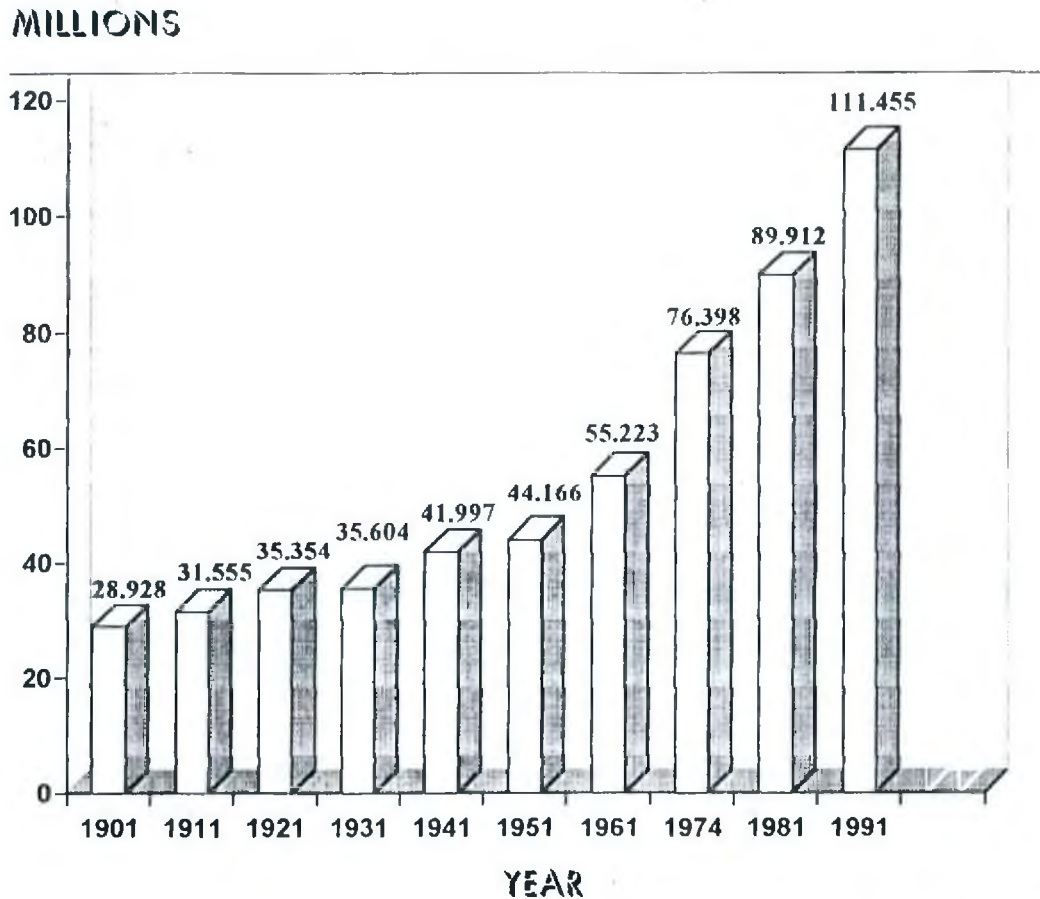
The table shows that there is sharp increase (59.33%) in urban population during 1981-91 whereas rural population increased slowly (17.385%) during the same period. The rapid growth in urban



population may be due to rural to urban migration as well as area re-classification". (B.P.C 1991, Vol.1:43).

The information regarding the population growth during 1901-1991 has been shown in the following figure.

**Figure 1 POPULATION GROWTH DURING, 1901- 1991.**



Source : B.P.C 1991 Vol.1. A.R. September 1994

It can be seen from the figure that in between 1901 and 1991 population of Bangladesh increased by about 285 percent with some significant irregularities between census years. These irregularities are due to differentials in growth rates in between census years migration and due to differentials in rates of under enumeration in the census population.

Bangladesh Population Census of 1981 and 1991 show that the average size of household in Bangladesh is 5.7. It has increased from 5.3 persons in 1960 to 5.6 in 1973, 5.7 in 1981 and decreased to 5.5 in 1991. The average size of household in urban areas has consistently been higher than the in rural areas. The higher average size of household in urban areas could be attributed to the inclusion of non-family members such as relatives and domestic servants. However it is noticed that average household size for dwelling household in all the areas had an increasing trend till 1981. The household size in 1991 for the country rural and urban areas has decreased as compared to the previous census. This particular situation may be attributed to the division of joint families in recent years. The following table shows the average household size by residence.

**Table 2**

**Average Household by Residence 1960-1991**

Residence	1960	1973	1981	1991
Bangladesh	5.3	5.6	5.7	5.5
Urban	5.6	5.9	5.9	5.5
Rural	5.3	5.6	5.7	5.5

Source : Bangladesh Population Census, 1981 and 1991.

The population of the country in March 1974 was 76.2 million. This represent an addition of 47.3 million between 1901 and 1974 despite massive transfer of population to India in 1947 when the British left the subcontinent with partition of India and Pakistan and again in 1971 when Bangladesh became a sovereign country breaking away from Pakistan. The following table shows enumerated population of Bangladesh and growth rates for the period 1901-1991.

**Table 3**

**Enumerated Population of Bangladesh and Growth Rates 1901-1991.**

Census Year	Population	Growth rates
1901 March 01	2,89,27,786	...
1911 March 10	3,15,55,056	0.94
1921 March 18	3,32,54,096	0.60
1931 March 26	3,56,04,170	0.74
1941 March 01	4,19,97,297	1.70
1951 March 01	4,20,62,610	0.50
1961 March 01	5,08,40,235	2.26
1974 March 01	7,14,79,071	2.48
1981 March 05	8,71,20,119	2.35
1991 March 11	10,63,14,992	2.17

Source : Bangladesh Population Census 1901-1991.

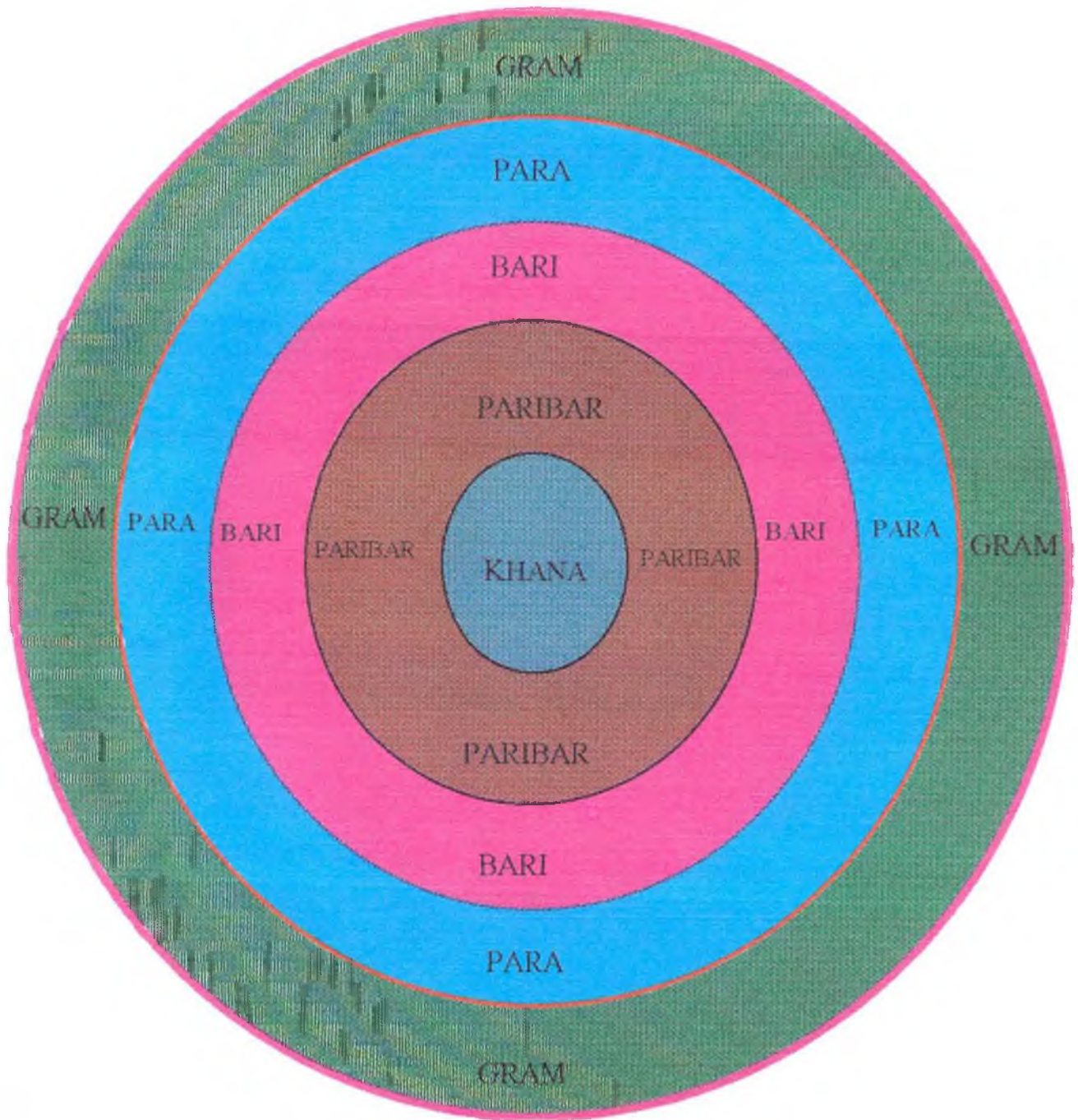
Population classified by sex shows that there has been excess of males throughout the period of 1901-1974. One of the reasons of the excess is a possibility of under-enumeration of females by the Censuses (Slade, E.H., Census of Pakistan, Vol. I : Reports and Tables, P-54). It may be noted here that there has been a tendency to under-report young and marriageable girls, and women in the early ages of married life for the fear of substantial payment that one may have to make as part of the marriage contract. This may be said to have prevented the enumerators from ascertaining the actual number of women.

It has also been argued, "the protective tradition which results in the *purdah* system of keeping all females from infancy to old age concealed from male persons outside the prohibited degree of consanguinity is more general and naturally results in an attitude of secrecy regarding them. However, while there is a consensus that under-enumeration of females exists, it could not have taken place to such an extent as to account fully for the observed differences between the sexes" (Sattar, 1981). It appears from above table that, although there is an increase in the growth rate from 1961 to 1974 but subsequently it decreases slightly in 1981 and further decreases in 1991.

### **Social Organization**

The smallest unit of social organization in Bangladesh is *khana*

PATTERN OF SOCIAL/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION



(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), specially in winter.

A *paribar* or a family may consist of one or more household in Bangladesh. There are different types of families in Bangladesh. Different scholars categorized 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 later section in this chapter.

Several linked families live together in a *bari*. There exists kin relationship among the members of almost all the household in a *bari*. In a recent research in the Matlab thana of Comilla district, Aziz showed that in 75.4 percent *baris* (in this sample village) heads of household were patrilineally related; in 18.03 per cent, at least lone head of the household was a finally related to the rest; and in 6.55 per cent, at least one head of household was unrelated to the rest (Aziz 1979:23).

There are several *baris* in a *para* and there may be one or several *paras* in a *gram* (village). Most of these *baris* in *para* might have strong kinship links among themselves. 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 acknowledge 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 recognized 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 land holding and land 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* or socially defined villages. The residents of a *gram* identify themselves with the *gram* to which they belong and not with the *mouza*; for, *gram* is the basic social, political and economic unit for its resident members. A village community contains household's 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 patrilineage. 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 *gusthi* membership of her husband and at the same time, she retains her parental *gusthi* membership by retaining the rights of inheritance and asylum with her natal *gusthi*. But a Hindu woman after the marriage does not retain the *gusthi* membership of the father and becomes the member of her husband's *gusthi*.

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 individuals are known as *atmiyasyajan* or kinsmen. A common ancestor is not necessary to become an *atmiyasyajan*, it is a very wide term which may include several *gusthis* and may extend over a number of villages.

*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 is 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 (*atmiyasyajan*) having a fixed territory within a village community. Usually, there are a number of *samaj* 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 large 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* as of high status and also by the traditional low status occupational groups among the Muslims like *jhola*, *baddis*, etc.

About the social organization of Bangladesh, Bertocci comments: "Among Bengalis, there is a form of social organization 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* forms both a symbolic and an organizational referent for the political and religious community. Its differing homesteads, perhaps even different villages, under whom a sub-group of other homesteads is at least nominally united in loyalty and under whose sponsorship various religious activities take place" (Bertocci, 1978 : 90-91).

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 organizing some of the social and religious festivals. With the *samaj* the members try to settle their own internal conflicts and disputers. The leaders of the *samaj* play a pioneering role in this respect.

The first and foremost duty of a *samaj* in Noakhali villages is to decide whether a particular member of that *samaj* should arrange a *jeafat* (feast) on the occasion of his son's or daughter's wedding. It does not depend upon the will of the individual whether he would hold a *jeafat* or not on such occasion; rather it depends on the *samaj* leaders who decide whether the individual should hold a feast or not and if he is to hold it, on what scale he should arrange it. The *samaj* leaders, however, take such a decision on the basis of the economic position of the individual concerned.

If a member of *samaj* arranges a marriage for his son or daughter, he is required to inform his *samaj* leaders about it. The leaders would then meet at his house and after a prolonged negotiation would decide about *jeafat* to be offered by him.

In the case of an exemption from holding the *jeafat*, he would be required to beg excuse publicly in small gathering of the prominent

members of his *samaj* for not being able to afford a feast. If he does not do so, he would be punished.

In the event of a decision to hold a *jeafat*, the *samaj* leaders would also decide the list of invitees. The individual must abide by their decision irrespective of his personal difficulties. In case the individual concerned disobeys such a decision he would be socially boycotted by the rest of the households of that *samaj*. Nobody would co-operate with him, nobody would talk to him, no one would visit him and he would not be allowed to visit others. Nobody would come to his help or rescue him in distress. He would thus be punished through social ostracism.

The fellow-members assist the host in the organization of the feast. Each *samaj* has its cooking utensils which are kept preserved for use on such an occasion. So, the individual would be provided with all these utensils so that he can smoothly hold the *jeafat*. Some persons from among his *samaj* would be in charge of the cooked dishes with the consent of the *samaj* leaders. There may be controversies and differences of opinion among the prominent members of the *samaj* as to who should serve from the big *deg* or *deksi* (very big cooking pot). This is considered to be an important function in the *jeafat*. The controversies in a *samaj* sometimes arise out of factionalism in the rural society.

## **Class Structure**

The "different categories of persons associated with agriculture and their interrelationships constitute the agrarian class structure". (Beteille, 1966, P-103). The agrarian social structure of the rural Bangladesh consists of three agrarian classes: landowners, sharecroppers and landless labourers. This classification of the agrarian population is based on the ownership and non-ownership of means of production, their position in the organisation of production. Since the principal means of production in rural Bangladesh is land, these three classes are based upon the ownership and non-ownership of the land. There may be many groups and categories in each of the class divisions mentioned above. There are many definitions of class and one may talk of different sorts of classes following those definitions. The class differences may vary in different regions of the country. But the division of agricultural population into landowners, sharecroppers and landless labourers is based on the findings of a study of a village community in Dhaka region (Chowdhury, 1978). In this village, the agricultural population divide themselves into these three broad classes on the basis of ownership and each class occupies a particular position in the organisation of production.

## **Status Hierarchy**

The three agrarian classes roughly corresponded to the status and power groups in a village community (Chowdhury, 1978). The high status muslim groups are *khandans* and the low status muslim groups are

*girhastas*. Both these groups are endogamous and they can be identified by a particular life style, education, traditional ownership and control over land. There are, of course, many sub-groups both among the *khandans* and *girhastas* but these sub-groups are not endogamous. The Hindu caste divisions are based on ritual purity and pollution sanctioned by Hindu religion. Status and caste can be considered as one of the bases of social organisation in rural Bangladesh. Social distance exists between the low muslim status groups and upper, lower and Scheduled Castes. But the differences of the inequalities which exist among the Muslims do not follow the Hindu caste pattern.

It would be correct to state that there is no caste hierarchy among the Muslims of Bangladesh simply because Islam propagates egalitarianism. It is true that Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim society, Muslims constitute more than 80 percent of her total population, it is also true that the nature of social hierarchy among the Muslims of Bangladesh is different from the Hindu caste system, nevertheless there are clearly defined strata among the Muslims of Bangladesh and they are arranged hierarchically. The social hierarchy among the Muslims of Meherpur, a village studied by Cowdhury (1978), did not follow the Hindu caste pattern.... They were stratified mainly on the basis of traditional ownership and control of land, wealth, education and on the differences in the style of life.

Even in the Hindu dominated Indian society, the social hierarchy among the Muslims is not like the Hindu Caste pattern. Though stratification among the Muslims in India is comparable with the Hindu caste system, there are also important differences. Caste exists among Indian muslims but it is not like that of the Hindus because some of the characteristics of caste are not found among the Muslims. Nevertheless, caste among the Muslims in India has been directly influenced by the Hindu caste system (Ahmed,1973). Such an influence is not found in the case of the Muslims of Bangladesh.

### **Traditional Occupational Groups**

In almost every village, there are some people who are not directly associated with agriculture, commonly the weavers, carpenters, potters, barbers, washermen, fishermen and milkmen. So when we take ownership and non-ownership of land as the basis of agrarian classes, it becomes difficult to classify the non agricultural population as many of them are not connected with agriculture and land. But one can surely discuss the relationship to determine their position in the agrarian society. For example, the fishermen are a section of the non-agricultural population in Meherpur and after examining their socio-economic relationships with the three agrarian classes, one can come to the conclusion that their income and standard of life are similar to those of the land less labourers and they are more close to them in the agrarian hierarchy of Meherpur. Fishermen catch fish, potters make various kinds of earthen pots, blacksmiths are

engaged in iron work and the carpenters are wood workers, milkmen have cow and they prepare various milk products, washermen and barbers do their traditional work and weavers make cloth by their looms. These various occupational groups enjoy low status and they are low-income groups in our society. In most cases, they practice endogamy. Previously the washermen, barbers, fishermen were mostly Hindus but the Muslims are now gradually adopting these occupations. The washermen and barbers are now paid in cash, although previously they were paid in kind.

### **Mortgages, Loans and *Dadan***

A third major form of economic transaction within rural Bangladesh rests on the dependence of the majority on obtaining cash money requirements from the minority of leaders. This linkage involves the mortgage of land, cash or mortgage of standing crops (*Dadan*). Villagers need money for a variety of reasons, production and non-productive purpose throughout the year, but their main occupation is agriculture and they have to invest in production and wait for income from sale of output. The landless are faced with similar problems of transaction of something. They therefore resort to borrowing in cash and kind from the richer section of the village. The money lender meets an immediate demand for cash or grain against a guarantee, in most cases either of agricultural land or standing crops. A large part of the rural population are in this way dependent upon the money lenders (*mahajan*). Wood (1976) found in one village that at least 60 percent of the population were indebted in this way. The enforced migration of the Hindu *mahajan* has merely provided an



opportunity for others to fill these vital but exploitative roles within the community. The new *mahajans* are mostly found in the landowning class.

### **Exchange of Gifts (*Jautuk*)**

The agrarian classes mentioned above exchange gifts among themselves as patrons and clients. A client will make compulsory gifts to the patron on the occasion of births and weddings in the latter's' family. A patron may also make voluntary gifts. These practices are now less common and not thought to be a major form of transaction in rural Bangladesh.

### **Patrons and Clients**

The important social relationships in rural Bangladesh are strongly patron-client relationships. The landowning, money lending, labour hiring class are the patrons whilst the sharecroppers and landless labourers, due to various forms of unequal relationships with the former, are clients (Majumdar, 1976; Chowdhury & Haque, 1978; Chowdhury, 1978).

There are other elements in social relationships of a Bangladeshi rural community of which kinship is the most important.

## Kinship and Lineage

In rural Bangladesh kinship patterns are diverse and complex as these patterns arise out of inter-marriage. This family tie or linkage also plays a very important role in social relationships. The villages are divided into *para* and are bound together by kinship ties. Sometimes, kinship relations may extend over several *paras*. Recent studies have established that the pattern of sharecropping and hiring of labour to some extent follow the kinship lines in the agrarian society of Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 1978; Arens and Beurden, 1977).

Bertocci (1970) distinguished between *sardari* lineages (having traditional high status) and non-*sardari* lineages (having no traditional status). The non-*sardari* lineages 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. Bertocci (1970) and Wood (1976) also found that the villagers themselves discriminated between 'Uchobansho' (high status lineage); 'madhyabangsho' (middle status lineage) and 'nichubangsho' (low status lineage) families. Ownership and non-ownership of land are also very important factors in understanding ranking in Bangladesh villages, and individuals after acquiring land and power may also acquire high status over the years.

Leadership in rural Bangladesh sometimes is based on kinship-groups and lineages. The support of a kinship-group or lineage helps an

individual to become a leader. Bertocci (1970) found the dominance of *sardari* lineage over non-*sardari* lineages in the two villages of Comilla district. In one of the two villages studied there were three *sardars* (leaders), each heading his own lineage.

### **Brokers and Advisers**

In Bangladesh, most rural people due to the hierarchical nature of relationships and their lack of education depend upon the advice of some educated and influential persons in matters, such as marriages, payment of revenues dealing with governmental agencies and obtaining loans. This creates a web of relationships and linkages. These linkages, an essential element in the general patron-client relationship, often resolves into rival factions and groups who vie for the control of human and material resources of the village. In Kushtia it was found that two such groups led by their respective leaders established two KSS's in a single village (Chowdhury & Haque, 1976). Factionalism is an actor that influences the developmental process in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

### **Adjudicators**

Disputes and quarrels are often resolved at the village level through the *shalish*. The *matbar* or *sardar* of the village or neighborhood (*Mahalla*) usually presides over the *shalish*. It has been found that a single village may contain more than one such cluster of propel, having a particular individual (*matbar* or *sardar*) as its nucleus.

## Leadership

It is useful to distinguish between formal and informal leadership in rural Bangladesh. Formal leaders, the holders of various offices, usually lead or dominate some groups or take action within the rural community; so do the informal leaders, the *matbar* or *sardar*. Often, too, the role of the latter is as positive and important as that of the former. These leaders along with their followers and supporters constitute a major factor to reckon with as far as the formal developmental efforts of government are concerned.

The sources of power in a Bangladesh village are two-fold: internal and external. The internal sources of power are the ownership and control of the means of production, high status, physical and intellectual capabilities of the individual, social service, threats and use of forces. Externally, the sources of power are the political parties, influences of political figures (especially the member for the constituency), control over the agencies or the distribution of relief, contacts with high administration and police officials.

It is through control over land and money and by the use of manipulative skills, that power is acquired and maintained in the village. There is competition and conflict between persons and between groups, for whoever can gain control over human and material resources, gains political power. Power is one of the major dimensions in which rural communities are stratified, power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and the rest have little political power and influence.

CHAPTER-III

❖ **Local Level Political Institutions in Bangladesh  
and Their Gradual Evolution**

### CHAPTER-III

#### **Local Level Political Institutions in Bangladesh and Their Gradual Evolution**

There are two major types of local level political institutions in Bangladesh namely, (a) the formal institutions and (b) the informal institutions. The present formal institution is called the Union Parishad and the informal institutions or bodies are known as *salish* or *shava*. These are the major formal and informal institutions through which power is exercised at the local level.

These institutions did not emerge suddenly. They emerged through a process of change and evolution. The process of this evolution has been discussed in the following paragraphs.

Before we discuss the Union Parishad, we should know what a union is. A union is the lowest tier or unit of administration. A union is a group of village and the formal political institution at this level at the time of the partition of India in 1947 was known as Union Board. It was replaced by Union Council in 1959. After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Union Council was replaced by Union Parishad. The different constituent villages of a union have representations in the Union Parishad. All the three types of political institution at the union level (Union Board, Union

Council and Union Parishad) are elected bodies, though there were differences in their constitution and functions. These were the formally constituted political units at the lowest level of rural Bangladesh.

The administrative pattern of the local self-government is the legacy of colonial rule. In 1870, Lord Mayo issued a resolution on financial decentralisation. In that resolution it was observed that local interest, supervision and care were necessary to succeed in the management of funds allotted to education, sanitation, medical relief and local public works. The resolution, thus intended to extend opportunities for the development of local self-government. In response to Lord Mayo's resolution, the Bengal village *Choukidari* Act was passed in 1870 which marked the beginning of some form of local self-government in the village areas (Ahmed Ali : 1979). Under the provision of this act, the countryside was divided into unions. Each union comprised about ten or twelve square miles. A *panchayat* was constituted for each union which consisted of five members, all of them, appointed by the District Magistrate (now called Deputy Commissioner). In 1882, Lord Ripon adopted the famous resolution on local self-government. The objectives contained in the resolution were three-fold: first, that the policy of financial decentralisation should be carried to the level of local bodies; second, that the administration of local bodies should be improved; third, that the local bodies should be developed as instrument of political and popular education. Under this resolution, Local Self-Government Act of 1885 was

passed which provided for a union committee for each Union. These committees were elected by resident villagers. In 1907, the decentralisation commission was set up under the chairmanship of Lord Hobshouse to enquire into the relationship between the Central and the Provincial Government and the authority subordinate to them.

The commission recommended that the members of the *panchayat* should be formally elected and the functions of the *panchayat* should be gradually extended giving responsibility for minor community works. The functions of the *panchayats* and those of the union committee were merged. In 1917, the Secretary of State for India announced the government policy of increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-government institutions. In 1919, the Bengal Village Self-Government Act was passed which significantly changed the structure and functions of the local bodies at the union level. The *panchayat* and the union committees were integrated and only one local body was formed at each union which was called Union Board. The Union Board was to be composed of elected and nominated members; two-thirds of members were elected and one-third nominated. In 1946, the system of nomination was abolished and the Union Board became fully a representative body.

Under the act of 1885, District Boards were constituted having two-thirds of their members elected and one-third nominated. The main



functions of the District Boards were concerned with primary education, construction of roads and bridges, public health and medical aid, and sanitation etc. The process of constituting the District Board was not democratised. In adopting a policy there was often lack of harmony. One reason for this was the presence of the nominated members who always tried to safeguard the interests of the government while elected members had to look after those of the voters.

The District Boards could not function properly due to excessive government control. The control was exercised in all walks of the boards in constitution, policy-making, financial matters, etc. Government had the power to suspend both District Board and Union Board. Centralised control did not allow the Boards to develop as the self-governing bodies. Such was the foundation of local government institutions in Bangladesh.

We have just mentioned that at the time of the partition of India in 1947, the political institution at the union level in the then East Pakistan was known as Union Board. The next higher political institution at that time was the District Board which was at the district level. The Union Boards were set up under the Local Self-Government Act of 1919. Before that, there was a *panchayat* in each village or a group of villages as provided by the *Chaukidari* Act of 1880. The Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885 provided for the establishment of District Boards at the district level and Local Boards at the sub-divisional level. Since

then, the District Board at the district level, the Local Boards at the sub-divisional level, and the village *panchayat* at the village level were functioning for the maintenance of local affairs. But the first change in this system came with the setting up of union Boards at the union level, replacing the village *panchayat* by the Local Self-Government Act of 1919.

After the establishment of the Union Boards, the Local Boards at the sub-divisional level were abolished in 1938 and the Union Boards were entrusted with the responsibility of performing the functions of the District Board at the village and union levels. The Union Boards were to manage local affairs such as maintenance of peace and of *chaukidars* (village police) for that purpose, and settling minor disputes in the village. As a subordinate body of the District Board, it had to carry out development works in the village, and sometimes, it had to distribute food, clothing and such other essential commodities as sanctioned by the government.

It also had to maintain a primary school in every union. The elections of the president and other members of the union were direct on the basis of adult franchise and the term of office of this body used to be three years. The president had wide powers in the affairs of the administration of the union. However, there was a great change in this system when General Ayub Khan took over as the President and Chief

Martial Law Administrator of the then Pakistan in 1958 by a military coup. He abrogated the Pakistan constitution of 1956 and dissolved the national and provincial assemblies (central and provincial legislatures). The Union Boards and District Boards were also dissolved in the process.

President Ayub Khan introduced a new political system in the country. The new structure of Local Self-Government was based on Basic Democracies introduced under the Basic Democracies Order of the 27th October, 1959. Under this system, the Union Boards were replaced by the Union Councils and the District Boards by the District Council. The Union Councils was the basic and lowest tier of Basic Democracies (East Pakistan Government Press, 1964).

The system of Basic Democracies consisted of four tiers. The first was the organization for villages. In rural areas, a number of villages grouped together constituted a union and a Union Council was set up for it. The first election to the Lebukhali<sup>1</sup> and Joypur<sup>2</sup> Union Councils were held early in 1960.

The second tier was the Thana Council, which was a unit of administration in the district, and consisted of both elected and appointed

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1. Kamalpur belongs to Lebukhali Union.

2. Jamalpur is one of the villages of Joypur Union.

members. The Chairmen of all Union Councils of a thana were ex-officio members of that Thana Council.

The third tier was the District Council, which consisted of official and non-official members. Official members included the chairmen of all Thana Councils, and vice-chairmen of Municipal Committees in the district and representatives of the development departments of the government in the district. Out of the non-officials, one-half were chosen from amongst the chairmen of the Union Councils and the other half represented minorities, women, and other special interests.

The fourth tier was the Divisional Council constituted like a District Council and consisting of the chairmen of the District Councils, chairmen of important Municipal Committees, and representatives of certain government departments working in the division as well as the non-officials representing certain special interests.

The Union Council was responsible mainly for local administration, both executive and judicial. It had to maintain the village police. It was also responsible for petty agricultural and industrial developments, social welfare and national reconstruction. The construction of roads, bridges and canals under the works programme was one of the main functions of the Union Council. One bridge was constructed in Kamalpur by Lebukhali Union Council and one road was constructed in Jamalpur by

Jamalpur Union Council under this scheme. I collected this information when I was doing fieldwork in Kamalpur and Jamalpur in 1994 and 1995. Union Councils and District Councils had also been vested with powers of taxation and were entitled to government aid and subsidy. Thana Councils and Divisional Councils, being co-ordinating bodies, had no such powers and were, therefore, wholly financed by the government.

The members of the Union Councils were called basic democrats. President Ayub Khan gave the country a new constitution in 1962. The new constitution provided for forty thousand basic democrats from East Pakistan and forty thousand from West Pakistan. The total of eighty thousand basic democrats constituted the electoral college for the election of the president and the National and Provincial Assemblies.

The number of the basic democrats was later raised to sixty thousand in each province. As the basic democrats were to elect the Chief Executive of the country and the legislatures, they emerged as very powerful. The Ayub regime depended solely on the basic democrats for being in power, since they were the creations of the Ayub regime. The policy of the Ayub government was to satisfy these people by all means. His administration gave them all concessions and, therefore, it was possible for the Ayub government to continue in power for ten years.

The basic democrats were a new group of rural elite which emerged under the direct patronage of the then government. Almost all of them had rural background. They replaced the old members of the Union Boards of the pre-Ayub era most of whom were rural *khandan* muslims or landed aristocrats. The new rural elites under the direct patronage of the Ayub government included only a small number of the old *khandans*.

An examination of the system of basic democracies clearly reveals that it was simply a replica of the earlier local government system introduced in British India. There were, however, some fundamental differences with regard to the organization and functions of the Union Councils and the previous Union Boards. The spirit of democracy worked to some extent in case of both these bodies. The members of the Union Councils were elected directly on the basis of adult franchise unlike the president of the Union Board. The chairmen of the Union Councils were elected indirectly from among the members of the Union Councils. The other fundamental difference between these two bodies was that unlike the members of the Union Board, the members of the Union Councils did actually form an electoral college for electing the President of Pakistan as well as the members of the National and Provincial Assemblies. It seems, therefore, that they were more powerful and had more important functions to perform than the members of the former Union Boards.

Under the 1962 Constitution of Pakistan the members of the Union Councils were the Basic Democrats - forty thousand from East Pakistan and forty thousand from West Pakistan - who, in reality, constituted the electoral

college. Since the Basic Democrats were the electors of the Chief Executive of the country and the legislature, they became quite powerful. The Ayub regime depended solely on these Basic Democrats for being in power and as such gave all sorts of patronage to them. The creation of such a system may be accounted for President Ayub's continuance in power for a decade.

Although the system of Basic Democracies introduced by President Ayub may be subjected to lot of criticisms yet it may be said to create a new group of elite in the rural areas of the country. Nourished and nurtured by corruption, favouritism and nepotism, the system thrived on the exploitation of the rural masses. The works programme initiated by the regime entailed the undertaking of huge number of development projects and the expenditure of huge sums of money. The chairmen and members of the Union Councils were entrusted with this gigantic task it created an opportunity for them to become rich and wealthy overnight by misappropriating the development funds.

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, new political institutions and new political forces emerged. The new constitution prescribed the re-organization of local self-government. The Union Parishad elections were held in 1973 and with that, local self-government was re-organized. The Union Parishad replaced the Union Council with regard to the organization and structure of the Union Parishad and Union Council. There are certain differences between them. Unlike the members

and chairmen of the Union Councils, the members, chairmen, vice-chairmen of the Union Parishads do not form an electoral college for electing the president, legislators or any other body of pre-Bangladesh era. Unlike the Union Council, the Union Parishad has a Vice-Chairman in addition to the chairman. The members are elected directly on the basis of universal adult franchise (Chowdhury, 1978:111-118). The Union Parishad is organized in a democratic process on the basis of adult franchise although two women members are nominated. The women in Bangladesh are shy and conservative and are not usually interested to participate in the affairs of the Union Parishad through election. This system of nomination of women members has been introduced to provide opportunity to rural women.

The method of taking decisions and conducting business are not different from the past. It is true that the functions of Union Parishad remained the same except curtailing voting power for the election of President and members of Provincial and National Assemblies of Pakistani days. Centralised control is visible in all the parts of the Union Parishad. The conditions for qualifications, disqualifications, resignation, vacation and removal of chairmen and members are determined by the government and ultimately subject to the approval of the government. The government have firm control over the financial matters also. Appointment, transfer, pension and gratuity on retirement and all other service conditions are prescribed by the government. The government can conduct inquiry into



the affairs of the Parishad and supersede it if it is found not discharging its duties or if it persistently fails to discharge its duties.

A Zila Parishad consists of such number of elected members, official members and women members as may be fixed by the government (Faizullah, Mohammad : 1987). The composition of the Zila Parishad under local government ordinance 1988, is not democratic. The Deputy Commissioner who is a civil servant is a nominated member and all other women members are nominated by the government. It is feared that there may be clear domination of official members as they are more educated, experienced and knowledgeable over the elected members destroying the cardinal principles of democracy.

The ordinance also provides for extensive centralised control over the Zila Parishad. The provisions for the constitution, composition and election of Zila Parishad and number of official members and nominated members and their qualifications, removal, vacation etc. are determined by the government officials. The Secretary and other Principal Officers are also appointed by the government. The terms and conditions of service of local government are regulated by the rules prescribed by the government.

In the recent past, long felt administrative reform was made in Bangladesh and democratisation of the decentralised administration in Bangladesh pledged to solve many age old issues that have plagued the

country for centuries. Thanas existed in the past also but now they are designed as a basic unit of development administration, which would perceive the development need, plan and allocate resources for execution. The Thana Parishad with elected, nominated and official members headed by an elected chairman is a powerful forum. Organically linked both with Union Parishad and the district administration, it is entrusted with rural development activities (Hyder, Yousuf: 1986).

The thana administration is organised with an elected chairman, as its Chief Executive. On the official side, there is the Thana Nirbahi Officer, a Staff Officer to the chairman. Then there are ten other mid-ranking departmental officers dealing with subjects relating to development. These subjects have been transferred to Thana Parishads. The government retains the direct responsibility for regulatory functions, such as Accounts, Police, Magistracy, Ansars and Village Defence Force and statistical function. The administration of these retained subjects will, however, be exercised by the respective departmental officer under the direction of the chairman. The underlying idea of thana administration is that the people in the villages should undertake the responsibility for governing themselves and be their own masters.

Development oriented rural administration is not a new idea in Asian context. But as long as the thana's dependence on the 'borrowed bureaucracy' continues, the thana will continue to pass through a stage of

conflict. Dependence on the government grant instead of self help is another factor which is bound to weaken the autonomy and low down the pace of development. The Thana Parishads have generated a new kind of educated and capable local leadership. The bureaucracy, still inhibited by the traditional ideas of supremacy over the local government leaders, no longer finds the thana an attractive place to serve, which is a disastrous attitude. The chairman and the Nirbahi Officer are the two most important functionaries of the thanas. It is important that these two enjoy a lot of mutual understanding, one holding the other in mutual respect. The reality may be different due to 'dirty' politics which embitter their relationship. The rural administration suffers from a special kind of politics borne out of a particular kind of socio-economic political condition that dominates rural activities. Political ideologies often clash with each other. The Central Government ought to have real authority and use it unsparingly on the chairman who breaks such code of conduct and acts as an agent of a political party. For the survival of any decentralised administration particularly through the institution of Thana Parishad, the existence of a strong Central Government is an indispensable precondition. It is the real dilemma for the Central Government to be strong and be the epitome of autonomy to achieve self-reliance.

There exists conflicts of status and personalities between Thana Parishad Chairmen and Deputy Commissioners. In pursuance of the provision laid down in local government ordinance 1982, Deputy

Commissioners should co-ordinate, support and guide thana administration. While Deputy Commissioners are civil servants, the Thana Parishad Chairmen are elected representatives. It is conceptually wrong to put elected peoples representative under a government servant. There is also a similar kind of strained relationship between Thana Parishad Chairmen and Members of Parliament, both being elected peoples representative.

The Union Parishad is the lowest tier of the Local Government system in the rural areas of Bangladesh. An average union consists of about ten to fifteen villages covering an area of ten to fifteen square miles. The Union Parishad is a ten-member body directly elected by the local people on the basis of adult franchise. The development works of the Union Parishads were mainly confined to the construction and repair of roads, bridges and canals. Those works were carried out under the government aided Rural Works and Food For Works Programmes. The contribution of the Union Parishad from their own revenue income in those projects was virtually nil. The Union Parishads have been found to be completely dependent on the Central Government grants to finance their activities. Such a phenomenon cannot, however, be an encouraging sign for the healthy growth of the Union Parishad as a self-governing organisation.

In 1976, the Zia Government passed the Local Government Ordinance (Ord. No. XC of 1976) with a view to reorganizing the local

government bodies. According to the provision of the ordinance a three-tier system of local government was created i.e. the Union Parishad, Thana Parishad and Zila Parishad. The Zila Board was renamed as the Zila Parishad. A Zila Parishad shall consist of such number of elected members, official members and women members as may be fixed by the government. Government provided that the total number of the elected members shall not be less than the total number of official and women members, and the total number of the women members shall not be more than one-tenth of the total number of elected members and official members. The elected members shall be elected by direct election on the basis of adult franchise. The holders of such offices specified by the government shall be the official members. The women members shall be nominated by the prescribed authority from amongst the women of the district. A Zila Parishad shall elect one of its elected women member to be its chairman another of its elected women member to be a vice-chairman<sup>1</sup>.

After the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman on March 28, 1982, the new military government took the decision to re-organize the administrative structure of the country. Then the government also decided to increase the powers of the local self-governing institutions. Under this programme enormous powers had been transferred at the Upazila level. To

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1. The term of the Parishad shall be a period of five years. (The Local Government Ordinance-1976, Dacca: Bangladesh Government Press, 1976, The Commissioner is the controlling authority of the Zila Parishad).

that end, necessary statutory amendments were made which include interalia, provision of elected chairman for the parishads, posting of senior government officials at that level, establishment of judiciary and magistracy empowering the Upazila Parishads for raising revenues etc. The prime aim of the programme was to introduce a system of development administration in rural area, where the local people would avail enormous scope of effective participation and thereby further the cause of rural development (Zaman, 1983:1)

In that system the principal decision making authority lay formally with an elected body known as the Upazila Parishad headed by an elected representative, the chairman. The UNO and government officials and the professionals were required to respect the decisions of chairman and his parishad. Before the elected chairman, there was the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) who was appointed by the government and hence, a non-elected figure. Thus, for the first time people's representatives became the principal decision makers in development administration at the local level. The past development strategies were too centralized and the development approaches were based towards growth-based urban industrial sector.

## Reorganization of Local Self Govt. in 1991

The B.N.P government decided to abolish the Upazila system and on 24th November, 1991. The government formed a commission to review the Local Government structure. It recommended for the establishment of a two-tiered local government structure - the Zila Parishad and the Union Parishad. It further recommended for a *gram shova* at the grassroots level as complementary to the above two parishads. The underlying purpose was to ensure mass participation in administration and development especially participation of women through direct elections, the active role of public representatives in implementing development plans at the local level, mobilization of resources from the respective areas and to make the local government institutions answerable to the public.

With a view to achieving these goals, the commission has recommended for the continuation of the Union Parishad at the village level and Zila Parishad at the Zila level. It has recommended that each and every unit of the local institutions will have their own separate legal identity and entity. They will work within their specific jurisdiction and enforce their rights and authorities without interfering with the activities of another institution. Each unit will have its own manpower personnel to carry out its own activities. Their relationship would be one of healthy coordination, not of stratified control. The Union Parishad shall be the local point in the whole system of local government administration.

The Lebukhali Union Parishad<sup>1</sup> and Joypur Union Parishad<sup>2</sup> have undergone transformation like all other Union Parishads of the country. No doubt, in both the study areas, these Union Parishads were the focal point of local administration and therefore, power and politics in Kamalpur and Jamalpur centered around these focal level political institutions during the last four decades or so.

In Kamalpur, politics were rather volatile as there were ups and downs in power politics. Traditional power-structure disintegrated there to a large extent and new trend of leadership emerged. The power-wielders or the power elites of Kamalpur village largely controlled the Lebukhali Union Parishads<sup>3</sup>. But there were qualitative changes in the leadership pattern of Kamalpur over the decades.

On the other hand, Jamalpur village remained unimportant politically at an earlier time as there were no traditional leaders from this village. It had practically no representation in the Union Board and Union Council of Joypur. But with the flourishing of cooperative organization and cooperative movement in the seventies, leaders began to emerge here from grassroot level and they eventually captured Joypur Union Parishad.

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1. Kamalpur village is in Labukahali Union.
  2. Jamalpur village belongs to Joypur Union Parishad.
  3. The power elites of an earlier time controlled the Lebukhali Union Council and prior to that the then power elites of Kamalpur controlled the Union Board of Lebukhali.



## CHAPTER-IV

### ❖ The Village Kamalpur: Changing Power Structure

## CHAPTER-IV

### **The Village Kamalpur: Changing Power Structure**

I have already mentioned in the introduction that it is a study of power and politics at the local level. I have conducted fieldwork in two villages in two different cultural zones of Bangladesh. One of these villages belongs to Patuakhali district in the Southern Bangladesh and the other belongs to Comilla district in the Eastern part of Bangladesh. I am presenting here a socio-economic profile of Patuakhali village.

The name of the village is Kamalpur<sup>1</sup>. It is located in the north-eastern part of the district. Once upon a time waterways was the only means of communication between Kamalpur and outside world. Country boat and motor launch were the two kinds of vehicles by which people used to travel to and from Kamalpur. But now a days one can travel to Kamalpur by road (bus) also. It takes about an hour to reach Kamalpur by bus from Patuakhali district headquarter. The village is divided into two parts namely North Kamalpur and South Kamalpur. A narrow canal has divided the village into north and south. It is, therefore, a dispersed village. Kamalpur belongs to Lebukhali union of Dumki thana under Patuakhali district. There are four unions under Dumki thana and Lebukhali is the largest of them. It is located near the thana complex.

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1. This is not the real name of the village. This pseudonym has been given by the researcher.

# MAP

## PATUAKHALI DISTRICT



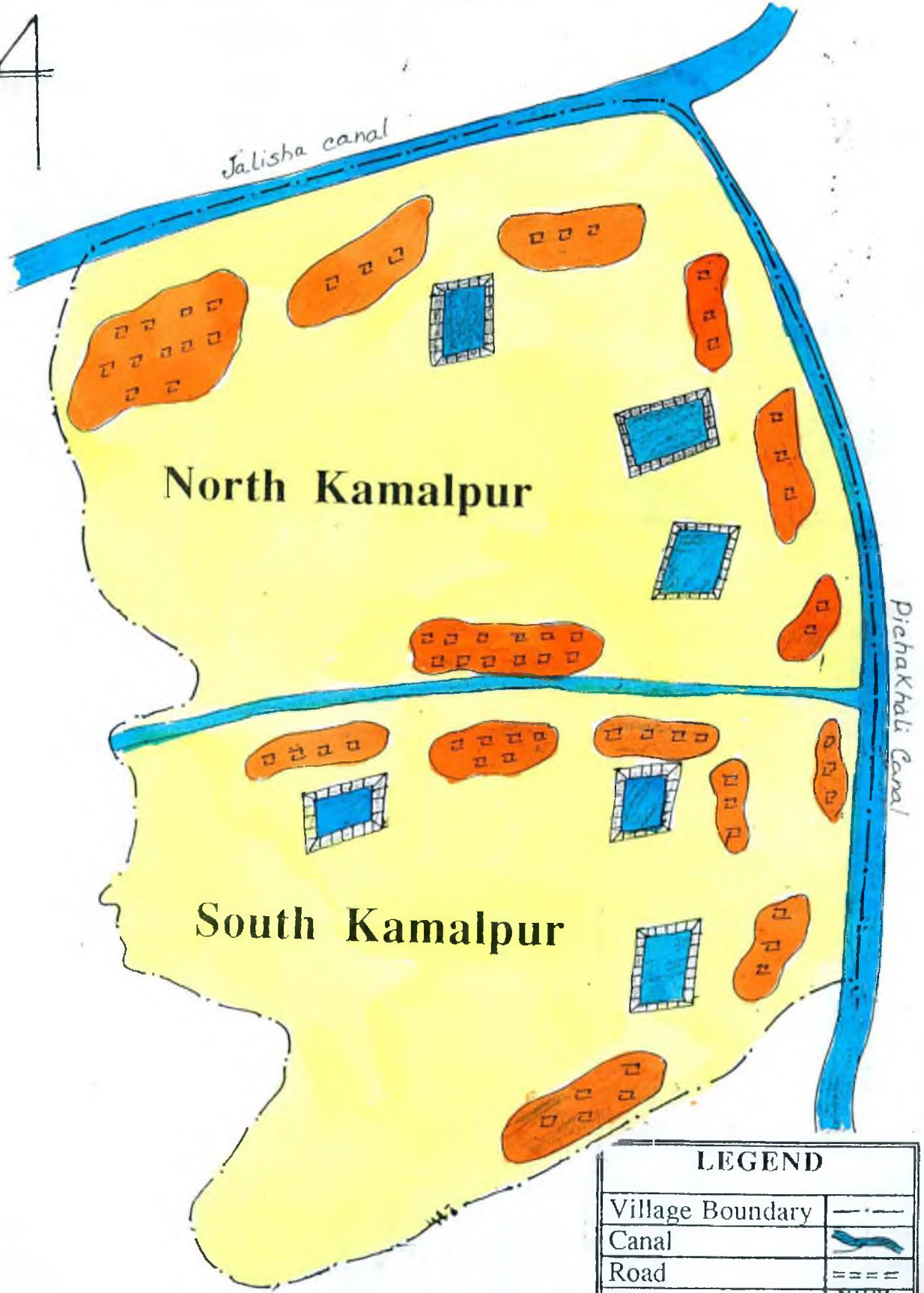
Two canals namely Pichakhali and Jalisha run towards the east and north of the village respectively.

The Patuakhali-Bowful road runs upto the center of the village. There are some *kacha* roads in and around the village. The Union Parishad office, Dumki Krishi College and Janata College are also situated near the village. Although this is a low-lying area in southern region of the country, normally it is not inundated by flood-water. Water enters into the paddy field in and around the village through canals during the rainy season.

The total population of Kamalpur taking north and south together is 8256 divided into 1591 households. The average size of household is 5.1. Out of the total population, 4261 are males and 3995 are females. It shows that the number of male population is slightly higher than that of female population in this village. Although the village is predominantly inhabited by the Muslims, it also contains a small population belonging to some other religions.

# MAP OF KAMALPUR VILLAGE UNDER DHUMKI THANA IN PATUAKHALI DISTRICT

4



LEGEND	
Village Boundary	---
Canal	—
Road	==
Pond	■
Cropfield	■
Settlement	■

The population of Kamalpur by religion has been shown in the following table.

**Table 4**

**Population of Kamalpur by Religion**

Religious groups	Population	Percentage
Muslim	8012	97.05
Hindu	240	2.90
Buddhist	01	.02
Christian	03	.03
<b>Total</b>	<b>8256</b>	<b>100</b>

Source : Fieldwork in Kamalpur.

This table shows that besides a small percentage of Hindu population, one Buddhist and one Christian household also live in this village.

There are social cleavages among the population of Kamalpur on the basis of ownership and non-ownership of land, high and low lineage (*bangsha*) status and on the basis of power and influence. Land is the principal form of wealth in the village. Almost all the households of the village are directly or indirectly associated with agriculture. Even the small differences in the ownership of land lead to the significant

differences in the life-style and standard of living of the people under study.

The landownership pattern of Kamalpur has been shown in the following table.

**Table 5**

**The Pattern of Landownership in Kamalpur**

Categories	No. of House holds	Percentage
Landless (Having no cultivable land)	398	25.02
Marginal Farmer (0.1 to 1 acre)	763	47.96
Small Farmer (1.1 to 3 acres)	239	15.02
Middle Farmer (3.1 to 7 acres)	162	10.18
Rich Farmer (7+ acres)	29	1.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>1591</b>	<b>100</b>

Source : Fieldwork in Kamalpur.

It shows that landless and marginal farmer households constitute more than two thirds of the total households of the village. Land is

concentrated in the hands of rich and middle farmers. Agriculture is the dominant element in the economy of the village. We have already pointed out that our village belongs to the low-lying part of Patukhali district which is very fertile. The village is flooded in every monsoon by river waters, and every year new silt is deposited which makes the land fertile. This high fertility of the soil is suitable for agricultural production.

The village has large agricultural fields which are scattered all over it. Many people of Kamalpur own agricultural lands in the neighbouring villages. Paddy and jute are the main agricultural products of the region. *Aus* and *aman* (varieties of paddy) were grown on the village land in the past whereas *irri*<sup>1</sup> and *boro* varieties of paddy are grown now in the village. Jute is also cultivated in the village. It is mainly the rivers, rains and floods which determine the agriculture of this village like all other villages of the region.

*Aus* paddy is grown on the elevated land of the village during summer. It can be grown on the land which is not totally submerged by flood water in the beginning of the rainy season. The plant of *aus* paddy grows to a height of three to three and a half feet. The crop is planted on the soil that has been ploughed not more than four times and is easily refined by harrow. The seed of *aus* paddy are sown broadcast, and they

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1. *irri* is the abbreviation of "International Rice Research Institute" The seeds are supplied by the Institute. They are now cultivated in many parts of Bangladesh. This variety of paddy is named after the name of the Institute.



germinate in four or five days. Weeding is done with *anchra* or rake when the seedlings have reached the height of a few inches. A second weeding is required in the years when excess of rain produces an exceptional amount of weeds.

Sometimes *aus* and *aman* are grown together on the same plot of land, and sometime *til* (sesamum) is also mixed with them in order to make a triple harvest. The month of *Ashar* (June-July) is generally the harvesting time of *aus* paddy.

According to a rough estimate, of the total area under paddy cultivation in the village, about 60 percent produces *aman*. It is called the *agrahani* crop as this crop is harvested in the Bengali month of *Agrahayan* (November-December). There are two main varieties of *aman* crop. These are *roa aman*<sup>1</sup> and *chita aman*<sup>2</sup>. Both these varieties are grown in Kamalpur.

Broadcast *aman* is sown in the village in the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) after the land is ploughed and harrowed. When the seeds are germinated a ladder is dragged over the field in order to level the ground. When the plants are four or five inches high the soil is loosened with *Kachi* (*rake*). Then, only weeding is required to be done. This is an

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1. *Roa aman* is transplanted *aman*.

2. *Chita aman* is broadcast or long-stemmed *aman*.

operation which is omitted as the cultivators cannot always afford that much labour. This results in a poor yield.

The principal danger to which *aman* paddy is exposed in a village like Kamalpur is the too high and sudden rise of water which may either drown the plants altogether or wash them away. This is why *aus* paddy is some times sown in conjunction with long-stemmed *aman* paddy in the hope that if one crop fails the other may prove successful. In these cases, the sowing takes place a few weeks earlier and the *aus* is reaped towards the end of *Ashar* (July) before the water begins to rise very high. Want of showers in *Falgun* and *Chaitra* (March) or excessive rain in *Baishakh* and *Jaistha* (May) injure the crop. Excessive rain or continuous cloud in *Agrahayan* (November and December) is liable to harm the *aman* crop. Only the ears of the plant are cut at the time of harvesting. The remainder of the stalks, are gathered into heaps and burnt on the field for use as fuel. Kamalpur area is comparatively free from insect pests.

There are a few *boro* fields in the village. As soon as the rains are over, the seed is sown on a piece of soft land. Ploughing of land is not always necessary for *boro* cultivation. In exceptional cases, one or two ploughings are necessary.

*Boro* paddy is also grown by transplantation. The seeds are sown on the *vita* or elevated land near the houses in the months of *Kartik* and

*Agrahayan* (November). After a month when the plants are about 6 to 9 inches high, they are transplanted on the soft mud left behind after the floods recede. Irrigation is sometimes necessary for *boro* cultivation. The crop is harvested in the month of *Baishakh* (April and May). The cultivation of *boro* paddy is simpler than the cultivation of other types of paddy. Broadcast *boro* is not cultivated in Kamalpur.

*Irri* cultivation is becoming very popular in the village now-a-days. A number of cultivators, especially those who have cultivable land in the low lying area cultivate *irri* paddy. The transplanted *irri* is cultivated on soft land and *boro* is sown in the month of *Poush* (December and January). This type of paddy is cultivated in comparatively low land so that it can always get water. It is grown in more abundance in the neighbouring *beel* of the village itself. *Irri* cultivation needs extensive irrigation. Kamalpur has two power pumps which irrigate the *irri* paddy during droughts. There are twenty-one varieties of *irri* rice and each of them has been given a number, starting from 1 to 21. Usually, *irri* 9, 20 and 21 are produced in the village. It is harvested in the month of *Baishakh* (April and May).

The Kamalpur area is also a jute producing area. Jute is cultivated in almost all the land along with *aman* paddy. Jute and *aman* paddy are sown together on the same land. Either *aus* or *aman* paddy is grown together, or *aman* paddy and Jute are grown together on the same land. On 60 percent

of the total cultivable land of Kamalpur, *aman* and jute are cultivated together.

Seeds of both *aman* paddy and jute are sown together in the month of *Chaitra* (March and April) after rainfall. Jute is harvested in the month of *Sraban* (July and August) whereas *aman* paddy remains in the field and grows rapidly keeping pace with the rising of flood water and is harvested only in the month of *Agrahayan* (November-December).

If two-thirds of the jute plant is immersed in the flood water, it dies. Jute requires a period of 5 months for its full development. It is harvested ordinarily at the time of flowering. If it is cut earlier, the fiber becomes weak. If allowed to remain until the pods have formed, the fiber becomes coarse and heavy. Frequently, an early flood necessitates the premature cutting of the crop, with considerable loss to the cultivator in the quantity of the produce. On the other hand, lack of water for steeping occasionally delays the cutting of the crop, the result of which is a big crop of coarse quality. After cutting is over, the stems are tied together in large bundles and placed in water in order that the fibers can be extracted from the stalks without difficulty. The bundles are placed one over the other in a *beel* or *khal* (ditch of water) and are covered over with leaves and weeds. After the completion of this rotting process, the period of which varies from ten days to three weeks according to the stage of the plants development, the fiber is separated from the stick by the cultivator or women labourer hired by him. They hold the sticks in one hand and draw the fibers by the other.

The fiber is then washed clean in running water by a process of beating against the surface of the water. After the water has been wrung out, the fiber is exposed to the sun for drying and bleaching. The colour of the finished fiber depends largely on the purity of the water in which the washing is done. The golden fiber is then made up into bundles and got ready for sale. The bi-products consist of the sticks of the plants which in the village are ordinarily used for fuel or for fencing.

Ordinarily the whole of the crop of each field is cut at the same time. However, a small portion of the crop of the best field is allowed to remain until the pods have fully developed. From this sufficient seeds are retained for the next sowing and it is only on very rare occasions that excess seeds are kept for purpose of sale. Apart from the injury caused by insufficient or excessive rain, much harm is occasionally done by crickets which bite the plants near the ground.

It is difficult for me to ascertain the total yields of the major crops of the village because the landowners did not want to disclose their total yield for various reasons. Some big and middle landowners did not admit to even half of the yield they got. Various contradictory reports and fictitious figures were given by them about their total yield. However, according to a rough estimate, the village produced about 3000 *maunds* of *aus* paddy, 7000 *maunds* of *aman* paddy, and about 1000 *maunds* of jute in the year 1995. There was a fall in the jute production in 1995 compared to

the previous year because of the sudden increase of water in the field during jute harvesting in that year.

The village also produces pulses, oil seeds, and potatoes, and some other vegetables during winter. These are called *rabi* crops and *rabi* vegetables. These pulses and vegetables are grown after the *aman* harvesting is over. The cultivators start cultivating *rabi* crops in the month of *Agrahayan* (November-December) and continue upto *Falgun* (February-March). By that time the monsoon will start and the cultivators must prepare the land for sowing rice and jute. Thus, the period of cultivation of *rabi* crops and vegetables is between (December and April).

*Khesari* (a variety of pulse) and *maskali* (another variety of pulse) form the principal pulse of the village. Besides, matar (pea) is also produced in the village, *khesari* and *kalai* are generally grown in the elevated land of the village, two or three ploughings are required for sowing. The seeds are sown broadcast on the soft soil after the flood water recedes. The seeds of *matar* are also sown broadcast on the soft mud when the flood water recedes. The plants of these pulses are pulled out in the month of *Falgun* (February-March) and grains are threshed by bullocks and sometimes by men as well.

The village produces a good number of winter vegetables. These are brinjal, many kinds of cucumber, turnips, tomatoes, pumpkins and some varieties of beans. *Lalsak*, *palag sak* are among the leafy vegetables grown in the village. The brinjal and tomatoes require transplantation and careful

cultivation. Many villagers grow some varieties of vegetables around their homes.

Besides agriculture, fishing is another very important economic activity in the village. It is the only source of livelihood for twenty fishermen households of the village. Only two fishermen households have small agricultural holdings which they get cultivated by hired labourers, because they themselves are not well acquainted with agricultural work. Almost all of them have nets and fishing boats to catch fish. There are five households whose members own neither nets nor boats, but they work with other fishermen on a daily wage basis.

*Jaki jal*, *besal jal* and *ber jal*<sup>1</sup> are three varieties of nets which are used by the fishermen of Kamalpur to catch fish. The rich fishermen families possess at least one of each variety of nets. The poor fishermen families have either a *jaki jal* or a *besal jal*. Some of them have both.

The fishermen of Kamalpur catch fish in the nearby rivers and in many narrow streams and ponds of Kamalpur and neighboring villages. The small and big ponds of the region and its vast stretches of low paddy land are abodes of various kinds of good food fishes. The fishermen of

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1. *Jaki jal*, *besal jal* and *ber jal* are the three kinds of nets made and used by the fishermen of Kamalpur. They purchase yarn from the market and make the nets at home during leisure hours. *Jaki jal* is small whereas *besal* and *ber jal* are large in size.

Kamalpur catch fish in the low lying area and in the river throughout the year.

The fishermen sell fish in Kamalpur and in nearby markets. They also take their fish regularly to some other markets including Patuakhali town in order to get a better price. A fisherman sells fish and buys rice and vegetables before he returns home. This is the usual practice of every fisherman of Kamalpur. The day he cannot catch fish, and cannot get any work on land, he does not come to the market and usually goes without food. However, there are five or six fishermen families in the village who can store food for the periods of crisis.

### **Power and Politics in Kamalpur**

As mentioned earlier, Kamalpur is a traditional and ancient village. It was once largely inhabited by wealthy landowning and educated people. Today, we do not find the existence of *zamindars* and *talukdars* in Kamalpur. People living on rent in cash received from land through subinfeudatory rights are no longer found there. Before the abolition of the *zamindari* system in 1950, there were two muslim *zamindar* and *talukdar* families in Kamalpur and a Hindu *zamindar* family in the adjacent village. The Hindu *zamindar* family subsequently migrated to India and some members of the muslim *zamindar* and *talukadar* families migrated to the cities. The remnants of their houses are still seen there. They are known as



*avijat*. They do not work in the field, but live on the toil of others. They possess a high social status. Chowdhury [1978] called them *khandans* in the context of Meherpur. They are very conscious of their high status. Land is their main source of income and power. They send their children to schools for education. They have been able to retain power and even today, they exercise power and influence at the local level. Eleven out of twenty [i.e. 55%] village leaders come from the rich farmer category and six out of twenty (i.e. 30%) leaders come from middle farmer category in Kamalpur. This means that almost total power and decision making of the village is under their control. Some of the *avijat* households have moved to the cities for education and jobs. Some have houses for residence in the towns as well.

In a traditional village like Kamalpur money-lending is considered as one of the highly profitable business especially by the rich farmers. Wood [1976] in his study of a village (Bondokgram) in Comilla District found that the surplus of agricultural income of the rich farmers is invested in non-agricultural activities like money-lending. He also found that in Bondokgram the class differential is dominated by usurious capital. In many cases, credit is provided by public. In Kamalpur also, moneylending by some rich farmers made them politically important. Some of the leaders belonging to middle and rich farmer categories work as moneylenders in the village which is an additional source of their income.

Table 6

**The Pattern of Landownership of the Leaders of Kamalpur.**

Categories	No. of L.House	Percentage
Landless (No Land)	-	-
Marginal (0.1 to 1 acre)	-	-
Small (1.1 to 3 acres)	3	15
Middle (3.1 to 7 acres)	6	30
Rich 7+ acres	11	55
Total	20	100

Source : Fieldwork in Kamalpur

It appears from the above table that none of the leaders of Kamalpur belongs to landless and marginal farmer categories. The member of formal and informal leaders (taken together) are 20 in Kamalpur. Of the 20 leaders, 11 (55%) belong to rich farmer categories, while only 6(30%) are middle farmers. There are only 3 (15%) leaders who belong to small farmer category. The three small farmers emerged as leaders because they are connected with political parties. They are activists of the political parties and, therefore, the source of their power was not the land they owned but the political parties to which they belong.

The leaders belonging to rich and middle farmer categories (11+6=17) virtually gained power from their land (owned by them). These

landowning leaders can manipulate things in the village and in the locality. As pointed out earlier, some of these leaders are also engaged in money-lending business. The rate of interest is very high for a borrower in this kind of transaction. So moneylending is an additional source of income for these leaders of Kamalpur.

**Table 7**

**Land Owned and Land Under Operation by the Leaders of Kamalpur.**

Categories	No of L.House	Land Owned	Land Under Operation
Landless	-	-	-
Marginal	-	-	-
Small	3	8 acres	12 acres
Middle	6	37 acres	52 acres
Rich	11	186 acres	216 acres
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>231 acres</b>	<b>280 acres</b>

Source : Fieldwork in Kamalpur.

The above table shows that the present leaders of Kamalpur own 231 acres of land while they control even more land i.e. 280 acres. These 280 acres of land are under their operation<sup>1</sup>. It means that they also leased in and mortgaged in lands besides what they owned. It can, therefore, be said

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1. Land under operation = (Land owned+Land leased in+Land mortgaged in) — (Land leased out+Land mortgaged out).

that the leaders of Kamalpur own and control more than 50% of cultivable land of Kamalpur.

The most influential leader of Kamalpur is the owner of about 90 acres of land and he controls more than 100 acres of land. He is not only a big landowner, he is also highly educated who obtained Masters degree from Dhaka University. He is young, energetic and very much reputed for his social service in the locality. Although, he is not affiliated with any political party, he was elected as Chairman in the last Union Parishad election of Labukhali Union.

Before the partition of India, the local *zamindar* used to reside in this village. The *Zamindar* family, their relatives, and their heirs subsequently left the village. But the remnants of *zamindar bari* are still seen there. Among the remnants, the *kachari ghar*, *dighi*, mosque, bridge and the grave of *zamindar* Kala Khan and his wife are found in the village. I was told by the villagers that the archaeology department has taken some steps to preserve the remnants of *zamindar bari*. Some of their buildings are as old as 350 years. It seems to be a historical place to a visitor<sup>1</sup>.

Kamalpur is one of the largest villages in Lebukhali Union. It is very

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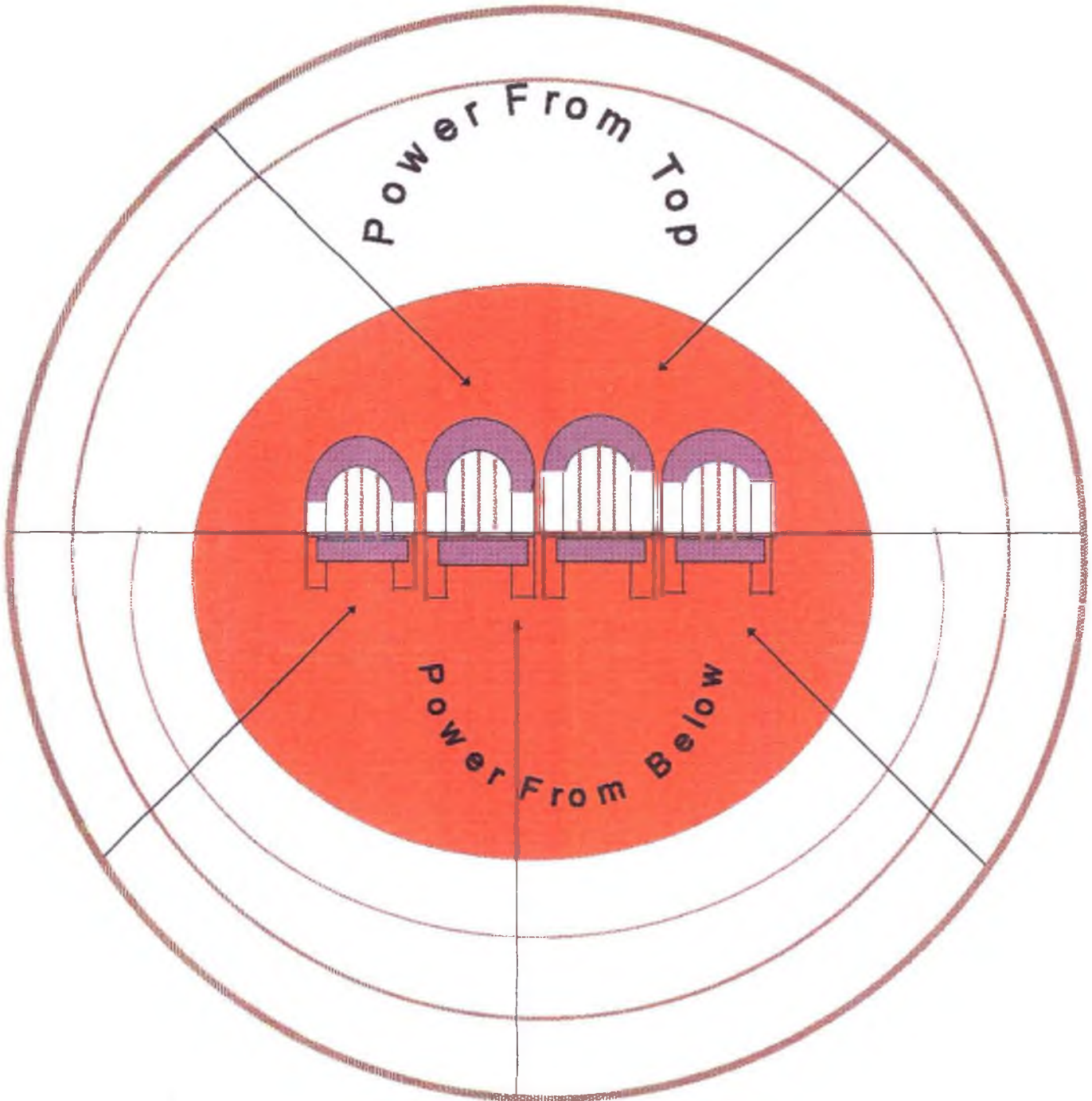
1. These information were gathered by the researcher during her fieldwork in Kamalpur in April - 1994.

densely populated. It can be termed as the nerve-center of Lebukhali union and Dumki thana. The local *zamindar* and local *talukdar* families were the residents of Kamalpur village. This was one of the reasons why the village became so famous even at an earlier time.

These families disintegrated in course of time and some of them left the village over a period of time. The *mia* and *khandoker* families are considered as *avijat* (aristocrat) in the locality. The *mias* however claim to be the descendants of the *zamindar* family. The *zamindar* and *talukder* families and their descendants used to control the politics of the locality. They were the power elites for centuries. They exerted control and influence not only on Kamalpur but also on the neighboring villages for generations. The heads and other adult members of these families were traditional leaders of the locality.

These families were also the big traditional landowners of the locality and they had traditional control over land. *Zamindar* Kala Khan and some of his relatives were the tenure holders during the British rule. They were the intermediaries between the king or state on the one hand and the tenants (vast peasantry) on the other. They were, in fact, the revenue collectors and had intermediary rent receiving interest in land.

POWER BASE IN KAMALPUR (PATUAKHALI VILLAGE)



Therefore, the source of power for them was their traditional ownership and control over land. The landed gentry represented by the *zamindars*, *talukders* and their kith and kins were, therefore, the power-elites in the context of Kamalpur. They were the owning class and they used to enjoy the highest status in the village community. They were educated, although they had no formal education as such. They had religious education and some of their family members also attended schools and *maktabs*<sup>1</sup>. The rest of the villagers were never politically important. They had almost no say in village politics. The vast peasantry<sup>2</sup> of the locality were the non-elites in relation to the landed gentry of Kamalpur.

The power elites of Kamalpur were not, however, isolated in the sense that they had good interaction with their tenants and both the groups were inter-dependent. The non-elite tenants needed the patronage of the elite landed gentry for their survival and well-being. Similarly, the elite (gentry) needed the support of the non-elites (tenants)<sup>3</sup> in their day to day life. This relationship was feudal relationship and in this kind of relationship, the landed gentry was at the top of hierarchy and the peasants were at the bottom of the hierarchy at the local level. The political scene at the local level has

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1. *Maktab*- It is an educational institution where religious education is imparted formally.

2. Peasantry- They are locally known as *girhastas*.

3. Tenants- They were not the owners of lands. They used to pay revenue for their land-holdings regularly, failing which they could have lost their land.

changed to a great extent if we take the example of Kamalpur. The scene has changed as a result of the abolition of *zamindary*<sup>1</sup> in this country.

With the abolition of *zamaindary* system, the feudal system was abolished at least theoretically. But the remnants of feudal relationships and feudal structure are found in Kamalpur even to-day. The landed gentry has disintegrated to a great extent and, therefore, weakened to-day. Even then, the descendants of the old landed gentry still play an important role in village politics. It is true that new elements have emerged into local level politics since the time of *zamindary* abolition of 1950 and change is taking place in the power structure. Nevertheless, the traditional power structure of Kamalpur has not yet undergone rapid or drastic changes and it has not yet totally disintegrated.

The high lineage status (*ucha bangsha marjada*) is another source of power for the traditional leaders of Kamalpur. As mentioned earlier, the *avijat* of Kamalpur have long been controlling politics of the village. The *zamindar* and *talukdar* families belonging to *khan*, *mia* and *khondoker* lineages have acquired high status by birth and thereby became politically important in the village community.

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1. *Zamindary* Abolition- *Zamindary* was abolished in the then East Pakistan in 1950. The East Pakistan Estate Acquisition and Tenancy Act was passed by the then East Bengal provincial legislature to end the 150 years old *zamindary* system.



Table 8

**Lineage Status of the Leaders of Kamalpur**

Lineage Status	No. of L. Households	Percentage
High Status Lineage	14	70
Middle Status Lineage	3	15
Low Status Lineage	3	15
Total	20	100

Source : Fieldwork in Kamalpur.

It appears from the above table that 70% leaders of Kamalpur belongs to high status lineage, while only 15% of them come from low-status lineage. The rest 15% belongs to middle status group. The thin (15%) low status category leaders have emerged as leaders only for their political affiliation. So, membership of political party is their source of power. On the other hand, the large majority of the leaders of Kamalpur have gained power from high status lineage.

We do not find the intervention of any cooperative organisation or any other non-government organisation in Kamalpur. Thus, leadership never emerged there centering around these organisations as found in Jamalpur. Nevertheless, a new trend of leadership pattern has emerged in Kamalpur and this new leadership exercise control both at formal and informal level.

The basis for the present emerging pattern of leadership is not high lineage status. Big landownership, higher education, social service and good reputation have contributed to this new emerging pattern as we have seen in the case of present chairman of Lebukhali Union. He hails from Kamalpur and remains active in the main currents of village life.

**Table 9**

**Educational Qualification of the Leaders of Kamalpur**

Educational Qualification	No of Leaders	Percentage
Illiterate	-	-
Can read and write	3	15
Read upto class X	3	15
Passed SSC	5	25
Passed HSC	5	25
Passed BA & MA level	4	20
Total	20	100

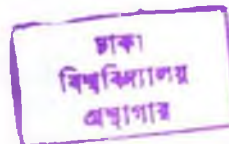
Source : Fieldwork in Kamalpur.

As shown in the above table, all the leaders of Kamalpur are educated and none of them is illiterate. Not only that, 14(70%) out total 20 leaders of Kamalpur are highly educated in the sense that they have atleast

passed SSC level and above. Four of them (20%) have attained Bachelor and Master degree. The newly elected chairman has a Master degree. It can, therefore, be concluded here that education is an important factor for making someone politically influential in Kamalpur and in the locality.

There are three small farmers who belong to power-elite group of Kamalpur. They are neither rich or middle landowners, nor they have high lineage status. The two factors which contributed to put them into power elite group are (1) the large numerical strength of their lineages and (2) their affiliation to the political parties. One of them belongs to Jatiya Party (JP) another is affiliated with Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). These are also the sources of power at the local level as found in Kamalpur village. If we consider high lineage status and traditional ownership and control of land as the traditional power base, we are to consider higher education, social service, good reputation, affiliation with political party as the modern or new bases of power. If traditional power base is considered as power acquired from the top, then new bases of power mentioned above can be considered as power acquired from the bottom. Both these sources of power or both these trends of leadership are found in Kamalpur today.

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CHAPTER-V

- ❖ **The Village Jamalpur: Emerging Pattern of Leadership**

## CHAPTER-V

### **The Village Jamalpur: Emerging Pattern of Leadership**

#### **Households and Population**

In Jamalpur<sup>1</sup> village, the entry was easy for me because of its nearness to BARD<sup>2</sup> Comilla. I first went to BARD and met the officials there and explained the purpose of my going there. With their active help, I selected the village and I named it as Jamalpur. This village is not far from BARD, Comilla. It is only about 3 kilometers away from the Academy to its east. It is an old and remote settlement but it came under modern influence in the late sixties with the establishment of Rural Academy near the village. Moreover, the Dhaka-Chittagong highway was constructed near the village which also influenced the village life. The village is divided into four *paras*, namely *uttar para*, *dakhin para*, *purba para*, and *paschim para*. There is an unmetalled road from north to south which runs through the middle of the village.

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1. Jamalpur - This is also a pseudonym given by the researcher.

2. BARD-Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development at Comilla.

# MAP COMILLA DISTRICT



Table 10

**Population of Jamalpur by Religion**

Religious Groups	Households	Population	Percentage
Muslim	225	1350	89.46
Hindu	27	159	10.54
Total	252	1509	100.00

Source : Fieldwork in Jamalpur.

The total population of Jamalpur is 1509 distributed in 252 households. The average size of household is 5.9 in Jamalpur which is higher than that of Kamalpur.

Jamalpur village contains only 252 households with a population of 1509 only. It is, therefore, much smaller than Kamalpur village. The Muslims constitute about 90% while the Hindus constitute about 10% of the population in Jamalpur. The landownership pattern of Jamalpur has been shown in the following table.

## Landownership Pattern

Table 11

### The Pattern of Landownership in Jamalpur





Categories	No. Households	Percentage
Landless (No cultivable land) 30	30	11.90
Marginal Farmer 0.1 to 1 acre	80	31.75
Small Farmer 1.1 to 3 acre	98	38.89
Middle Farmer 3.1 to 7 acre	32	12.70
Rich Farmer 7+ acre	12	4.76
Total	252	100.00

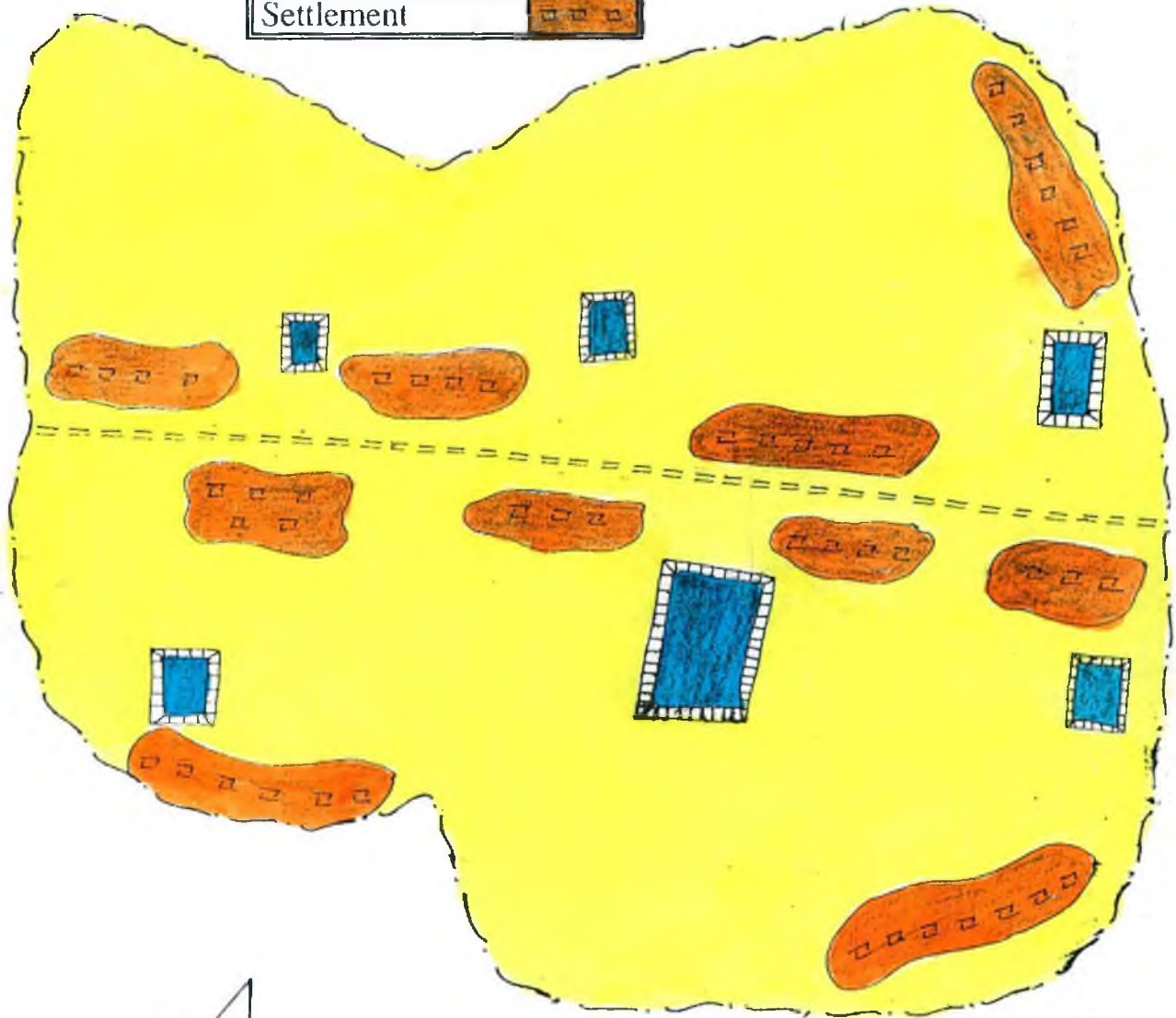
Source : Fieldwork in Jamalpur.

There are about 12% landless households in Jamalpur which is much lower than the national average. The average size of landless household in Bangladesh is about 50%. But in the Comilla Kotwali thana, the percentage of landless is much lower. Nowhere in Kotwali thana the percentage of landless will be higher than 20. Due to the impact of successful cooperative movement in Kotwali thana, landless households have not increased here fast, rather it is being halted here. Jamalpur belongs to Kotwali thana of Comilla and, therefore, the low percentage of landless households is found here.



# MAP OF JAMALPUR VILLAGE UNDER JOYपुर UNION OF COMILLA DISTRICT

LEGEND	
Village Boundary	---
Canal	
Road	==
Pond	
Cropfield	
Settlement	



Moreover, Jamalpur has now come under CVDP<sup>1</sup>. It has replaced old cooperative institution and comprehensive development programmes are now being implemented here under new cooperative. It is an experimental project monitored by BARD, Comilla.

The above table shows that land concentration is not very high in this village. About 70% households belong to the marginal and small farmer categories and only about 5% are rich landowners. None of the rich landowners of Jamalpur village do not own more than 10/12 acres of land each. The richest landowner owns 12 acres of land only.

After the formation of cooperative society in this village, irrigation has been introduced here. As the farm land have been brought under irrigation, the village now produces three crops without any difficulty. The overall production has increased tremendously. Therefore, a farmer household of six members is self-sufficient in food if he has 2 acres of land. Land concentration is not very high in Jamalpur as compared to that of Kamalpur. We know that the richest landowner of Kamalpur owns about 90 acres of land.

The village has large agricultural fields which are scattered all over it. Households of the Jamalpur village also own one third of their arable lands outside the village. Paddy is the main agricultural product of the

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1. CVDP - Comprehensive Village Development Programme.

village. Besides, Pulse and vegetables are also grown there. Very few households cultivate jute in small plots for their own consumption only. The farmers of Jamalpur have completely lost their interest in producing jute, which once was the main cash crop of this village. Seasonal vegetable production, especially the winter ones and the *rabi* crops, viz. various pulses, wheat, etc. are also getting more and more importance now-a-days.

### **Changing Agriculture and Income**

The general crop cycle was to grow paddy twice [*aman+irri*] and vegetables or *rabi*-crop once in the same plot of land before the introduction of irrigation system. The land of this village has now come under irrigation and, therefore, three crops are grown in Jamalpur to-day without any problem. Farmers use deep tube-wells to raise ground water for cultivation, especially for producing *irri* and *aman* paddy.

The agricultural labourers (landless farmers) fully live on selling physical labour as day labourers, locally known as *kamla* for wage earning. The small farmers occasionally sell physical labour, but not as an occupation. The *kamlas* are always in the search of work. In the peak season, there is no dearth of agricultural work for the landless farmers but during the slack season, they do non-agricultural work which are available in and around the village.

Thus, it is clear from the above analysis that all the households of Jamalpur village are directly or indirectly associated with agriculture for their livelihood.

Most of them, cultivate their own land, without hiring much of the outside labour [except in the peak season]. The rich farmers usually do not work in the field. They hire a few permanent labourers to do agricultural work for them.

As mentioned earlier, Jamalpur had low per-acre yield when it was under traditional agriculture. But the per-acre yield increased substantially<sup>1</sup> with the mechanization of agriculture in Jamalpur. Mechanization means here nothing but introduction of irrigation in this area. The farm-land of Jamalpur and neighbouring villages came under deep-tubewell irrigation in the early seventies. Since then, the farmers learnt to cultivate high yielding varieties of various crops and began to use chemical fertilizers. Thus, production increased substantially and with this, the income - level and standard of living of the people of Jamalpur increased.

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1. For example, the per acre yield was about 16 to 20 *maunds* of paddy on an average during traditional agricultural period. But it increased to a level of 50 to 60 *maunds* (per acre yield) of paddy after the introduction of irrigation in this village.

We have already mentioned before that Jamalpur has been producing three crops since the introduction of irrigation here. In some of the arable lands, one *aus-irri* crop is produced and another *aman* crop is cultivated. The third crop is a *rabi* crop of pulse or potato or vegetables.

Jute production has fallen in the village as the farmers do not get a good price now-a-days. There is a drop in the price of jute in the world market and it has, therefore, affected the jute-farmers of Jamalpur like many other villages of Bangladesh. We find a growing tendency of potato cultivation in Jamalpur over the last few years. More and more land are now coming under potato-cultivation. Jamalpur is also producing many varieties of pulses, mustard and different varieties of vegetables for their own consumption and for marketing. Potato can, however, be considered as a main cash crop. In some other plots of cultivable land, all the three crops produced are paddy. They are *aus*, *aman*, and *irri* paddy of high yielding varieties. Traditional fertilizers are being gradually replaced by chemical fertilizers.

The efficiency level in the management of irrigation water has increased with the establishment of CVDP in Jamalpur. CVDP gave the farmers of Jamalpur an opportunity to learn more about modern method and modern technology of agriculture and farming. It also provided an

opportunity of adult-education there. Therefore, the literacy rate is much higher<sup>1</sup> in Jamalpur than that of the other places.

As we find a change in the agriculture of Jamalpur, we also find that change has been reflected in the standard of living and in the educational aspects of the villagers. The rich and middle farmers of Jamalpur are surplus farmers. They normally diversify<sup>2</sup> their economic activities with their surplus. They reinvest the part of their surplus in agricultural production. But a major portion of their surplus is being invested in small trade, education of their children and other productive economic activities.

Average land-ownership per household between Kamalpur and Jamalpur villages varies significantly. The average size of landholding in Kamalpur village is higher than that of Jamalpur. The pre-dominant mode of production in Jamalpur is family labour and wage-labour, although share-cropping is also present there. But the major mode of production is share-cropping in Kamalpur as production is being mainly organized by share-cropping in Kamalpur village.

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1. The literacy rate of Jamalpur is as high as 70% whereas the national average for it is slightly above 30%.
  2. This phenomenon was also observed by G.Wood in Bondokgram, another village of Comilla studied by him.

The reason for such a high percentage of share-cropping system in Kamalpur may be due to the presence of more landed gentry and land-rich households in that village. They also encourage the system of share cropping. This is because, the landed gentry do not work in the field by themselves. Usually, the landless and near landless households go for share-cropping.

A few rich landowners of Kamalpur sold land in the village to buy landed property in the cities and towns. The right of inheritance also plays a great role for the loss of land. Some rich households had to give part of their shares of land to women, who after marriage went to their husband's house. The above noted losses of land do not mean that there were only losses and no gain of land by any household. This loss is the net loss of land by the villagers.

In Jamalpur land concentration only in the hands of top households is not found. This is, first of all, because of the last many years' direct involvement of the supportive agencies like cooperatives among the bottom category households. Secondly, easy availability of credit facilities out of group savings and supportive agencies credit programme had helped stop the selling of land and other assets in disasters and times of urgent need. Thus, in disaster situations, be they natural or man-made, households get institutional support. It becomes easier for them to re-build and re-start without much loss of valuable asset.

### **Social Differentiation and Power-Relations**

A comparison of land-mobility in last 10 years in Jamalpur village illustrates that institution building of the bottom majority can help create an environment to reverse the trend of land concentration on the top. Hierarchy in landownership is not very sharp in the context of Jamalpur. However, small differences in landownership also lead to social cleavages and create social distance.

Land is an important source of livelihood and key to power in the rural society. This changing trend in Jamalpur indicates that the power bases are also gradually shifting.

Except the landless category, other bottom categories, viz . marginal and small farmers, are also gaining power in Jamalpur. The households of the upper strata possess most of the valuable assets and articles while the landless and the near landless categories hardly own such goods.

The average size of land ownership in Jamalpur is less than the national average. There was no presence of any old landed aristocracy or *avijat* status group in this village. The biggest landowning is 12 acres and there are only 12 households with more than 7 acres of land; while in Kamalpur there are 29 households having more than 7 acres of land, with 90 acres as the biggest ownership.



Although 12 households own more than 7 acres of land each, it is difficult to identify them as *borolok*. The villagers also don't call them *borolok*. Strictly speaking, there is no presence of *avijat* and old landed aristocracy in Jamalpur. The land ownership records show that all land-based categories except the landless gained land in the last ten years.

The *kamlas* are the lowest in social status in Jamalpur. Hartmann and Boyce in their study found that the *kamlas* were called *chotolok* in *kanti*, a village studied by them. We found in the present study, although the rich are called *borolok* the *kamlas* are called *kamlas* but are not known as *chotolok*.

The settlement and structural pattern of the villages also indicated socio-cultural aspects of the households. It is clear from such patterns that Muslims, Hindus live quite different lives, having distinct socio-cultural and religious rites and practices. The Muslims of Jamalpur village have two mosques where they say their prayers. In Jamalpur village there are *jamat*<sup>1</sup> for 225 muslim households. The head of a *jamat* is called a *sardar*, which means leader. While an Imam of a mosque is the prayer leader, the *sardar* is to lead and guide the *samaj* (community) in all its social functions, including *salish* [informal body to settle disputes]. All muslim households of both the study villages, including almost 98% Muslims of

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1. *Jamat* - It means *samaj* in Jamalpur and in the locality. Jamalpur has one *samaj* unlike many other villages.

Bangladesh, belong to the Sunni sect. Most households of the villages are not sure about such origin; but a few religiously enlightened persons could explain that they acknowledge the first four Khalifahs to have been the rightful successors of Hazzrat Mohammed [SM] and they belong to one of the schools of jurisprudence founded by Imam- Abu Hanifah, Malik, Shafii or Hambal. Religion seems to work as an important unifying factor among the Muslim households of both villages and it gives shapes to socio-cultural behaviour and practices of the Muslims. A strong unity among the Muslims of Jamalpur village exists, which is primarily centered around the mosque and the *jamat*.

Regarding the social status of the Muslim household, two different situations are prevailing. In the Jamalpur village, only socio-economic classes seem visible. The Muslim households of the village are primarily divided into a number of socio-economic classes. Thus, the social status groups, viz. high or low status, are not so noticeable, which is very strongly and visibly present among the Muslim households of Kamalpur village. The Kamalpur village was once inhabited by large and wealthy, landowning and educated people. The housing pattern of the *zamindars* and *talukders* which are mostly one or two storied old buildings, exhibits a few islands of prosperity in a sea of adversity in Kamalpur. But status-groups on the basis of lineage status are not found in Jamalpur.

The high status families of Kamalpur definitely fall under the *khandan* category as claimed by Chowdhury [1978:40]. Their *khandani*

status is still visible and once was highly obvious, as most households expressed during the discussions. However, such *khandani* status is gradually declining. Still, then, the formal leadership of the union council viz. [Chairmanship and the quota of UP membership] rotates among those few households of Kamalpur. Moreover, the informal leadership of the total village is completely centered among those listed few leaders and they more or less decide who should contest to the formal leadership. It is quite impossible for others to join this informal leadership group, the formal one is yet beyond the imagination of others.

For settlement of any household or *para* level disputes the households have to come to the informal and formal leadership of the village. The group has an excellent team work and trust, which they maintain for their own individual and class interests.

All the 27 Hindu households of Jamalpur village claim themselves to belong to the *kshatriya* caste. All of them except one household use the caste title "Roy" and one household uses the caste title *barman*. There is no *brahmin* [the highest status caste] and other lower castes [*sudras* and *namasudras*] in this village. Two *brahmins* of the next village are invited to help in the religious ceremonies during such occasions. The *kshatriyas* consider themselves of high status socially, after the *Brahmins*. But, in reality, because of their middle and lower economic class position, they seem not to categorise themselves in the high status socially. In the Jamalpur village the social status group of the Hindu households, like the Muslims, is not noticeable and seems not so important to them. Thus,

based on the socio-economic situations of the Jamalpur village, it may be concluded that the absence of extreme economic classes help establish a social relationship where equity of social status is maintained to some extent, although social distance exists among the socio-economic classes.

The leaders of Jamalpur are almost evenly distributed among the various socio-economic categories except the fact that no leader comes from the landless category. This is a hard reality not only for Jamalpur, but also for many other villages. In Kamalpur, most of the leaders, however, belong to rich and middle farmer categories. But here in Jamalpur majority of the village leaders belong to small and marginal farmer categories.

**Table 12**

**The Pattern of Landownership of the Leaders of Jamalpur**

Categories	No of Leader Households	Percentage
Landless (No land)	-	-
Marginal Farmer 0.1 to 1 acre	3	25.00
Small Farmer 1.1 to 3 acre	4	33.33
Middle Farmer 3.1 to 7 acre	2	16.67
Rich Farmer 7+ acre	3	25.00
Total	12	100.00

Source : Fieldwork in Jamalpur.

The above table shows that there are a total of 12 (twelve) formal and informal leaders in Jamalpur. Of them, three leaders (25%) belong to marginal farmer category and another 3 of them belong to rich farmer category. The rest six leaders belong to small and middle farmer categories. The leaders of Jamalpur are, therefore, almost evenly distributed in various categories of farmers irrespective of their class hierarchy. It is not related to the hierarchical situation. However, no landless person could be a leader.

The leaders here are not moneylenders, although we have seen the domination of moneylenders in Bondokgram, another village of the same thana (not very far from Jamalpur) studied by Wood. The leaders of Jamalpur emerged as leaders in recent times for their initiatives to organize cooperatives in their own village.

The landownership pattern of the leaders of Jamalpur has been shown in the following table.

**Table 13**

**Land owned and Land under operation by the leaders of Jamalpur.**

Categories	No of L. Households	Land owned	Land under Operation
Landless	-	-	-
Marginal	3	3 acre	3 acre
Small	4	10 acre	12 acre
Middle	2	11 acre	18 acre
Rich	3	30 acre	36 acre
Total	12	54 acre	69 acre

Source : Fieldwork in Jamalpur.

## Sources of Power

The average size of landownership by the leaders of Jamalpur is 4.5 acre and average size of land under operation is 5.9 acre. These figures are much smaller than those of Kamalpur. The average size of landownership and land under operation by the leaders of Kamalpur are much higher. We have already mentioned that agrarian hierarchy in Jamalpur is not as sharp as we find in Kamalpur.

The above table indicates that the 12 leaders of Jamalpur own 54 acres of land in total while they control slightly more i.e. 69 acres of land. It is because that some leaders belonging to rich and middle farmer categories have leased in some lands and thereby these lands have come under their operation. Even a leader belonging to small farmer category operates little more land besides what he owns. They are the sharecroppers who have leased in lands from others.

As mentioned earlier, the leaders of Jamalpur neither own, nor control a large size (amount) of land. Ownership and control of land is not, therefore, the major source of power in this village. On the other hand, all the 12 leaders of Jamalpur are directly associated and involved with the management of local CVDP. They played an active role in organizing cooperatives there. This gave them the opportunity to gain power locally. Therefore, cooperative leadership is the main source of power in the context of Jamalpur.

It is true that in Kamalpur village the hierarchical situation is mainly land-based. Leadership of the village is very much concentrated in the hands of a few landed households. The lower land categories have little chance to enter into the traditional power circle. As noted earlier, the traditional leaders of the Kamalpur village come from the two traditionally influential lineages of high status. The leaders are moderately or highly educated and they control different political activities in the village.

As per the data shown above and my empirical observations, power and leadership is highly decentralized in the Jamalpur village. The only formal leader [UP-member] also very much depends on several informal leaders for making major decisions. A 70-year old informal leader who himself was a UP-member twice said “now a-days people don't want to hear the leaders; but during Pakistan time and also before that nobody dared to say anything against the leaders. It seems to me that today everyone is a leader”. Another 62-year old respected informal leader, who claims to be the first matriculate in the village, and a school teacher for 18 years, said, “today leaders can't make decisions by themselves alone”. It suggests that leadership is not centralized in the context of Jamalpur village.

We have already pointed out that lineage status (high or low) do not play any significant role in the power politics of Jamalpur. It is rather difficult to rank the villagers of Jamalpur on the basis of high and low status. For the same reason, it is difficult to rank the leaders of Jamalpur

hierarchically on the basis of high and low status. Status distinction is not sufficiently clear here.

**Table 14**

**Educational Qualification of the Leaders of Jamalpur**

<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>No. of Leader</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	-	-
Can read and write only	2	16.67
Read upto class X	3	25.00
Passed SSC and HSC	6	50.00
Passed BA level	1	8.33
Total	12	100

Source : Fieldwork in Jamalpur.

The above table shows that all the leaders of Jamalpur are educated, although their level of education varies in degree. The most highly educated person of the village is the most influential leader of the village. This shows that there is a positive correlation between education, specially higher education and power as we see it in the leadership pattern of Jamalpur today. It is interesting to note here 50% of the leaders of Jamalpur have good educational background with their SSC and HSC



degrees and 25% of them read upto class X. Therefore, education is a source of power in Jamalpur.

My empirical observations suggest that there are two distinct trends of leadership process present in the two villages which are as follows:-

Kamalpur village has the highly centralized leadership process and practice. This is more "top-down" and "leader-based". It is difficult to hear the voices and the views of the villagers, especially the poor and the disadvantaged ones in this village. People almost have no voice in the matters that affect their lives. Present organizations in the village [viz. a hat, 2 schools-Government Primary and a High school, a Mosque, a Eidgah, *Gram Sarkar*, a non-functional socio-cultural Youth Club, etc] are all run by the existing leaders and their near-relatives. They are in different committees and in different positions of those village organizations. People hardly have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. They are "good" listeners and doers in such organizations.

The opposite of the above is the trend of Jamalpur village. The leadership is highly decentralized here. This is more "bottom up" and "people-based". Here, leaders cannot decide on major issues alone. They realize the need to go to the people and discuss matters with them. The poor and the disadvantaged have also some say in the village matters. In

Jamalpur village the present organizations including CVDP are managed by the village leaders. Most leaders and rich farmers of Kamalpur invest their surplus in money-lending to the landless, marginal and small farmers, with exorbitant interest rates. Money-lending is also used by the leaders and the rich farmers to get the allegiance and support of the borrowers.

In terms of economic activities women groups are found better and more regular to pay loan instalments than the men groups in Jamalpur. Group savings and credit activities contributed significantly in the process. The groups and the support organizations like cooperatives create a base for social security and countervailing power of the poor. It is therefore, economic activities which are considered as the means to bring desired socio-political changes.

The Comprehensive Village Development Programme CVDP was perceived by the Comilla Academy in mid-seventies, and initially it was known as the Total Village Development Programme TVDP. Subsequently, the programme was renamed as CVDP in 1983. The project was included in the Annual Development Plan of the Government of Bangladesh in 1989 and the first phase was completed in June 1991. Academy is now entrusted with the responsibility of implementing CVDP in 40 villages of Dhaka and Chittagong divisions under the Fifth Five Year plan (BARD, 1994:29).

The Jamalpur CVDP was organized in 1973. It started to function as a primary society (i.e. KSS) with 17 members, and Tk.4.25 and 170.00 as savings and shares respectively. However, over time, it has covered almost all the families in Jamalpur. There are three types of membership in this CVDP, such as, male, female and children (6-18 years).

The major activities of Jamalpur CVDP are (i) irrigation through DTW, (ii) share-savings deposit and credit operation, (iii) income generating projects, (iv) social security and welfare projects. With regard to agricultural development, one DTW of Jamalpur CVDP has covered the total cultivable land i.e. 70 acres of its area. Besides, it supplies fertilizer, pesticides and other inputs through its own cooperative shop. It has a pisciculture project having 20 ponds around the village. It has provided loan for rickshaw, poultry and livestock projects. It is also operating a rice husking mill, a health clinic and a primary school. Moreover, this CVDP provides financial support in the crisis period for the poor girls and students, particularly for marriage and buying books respectively through its welfare funds (Annual Report : 1993-94, Joypur CVDP).

One of the major objectives of the present study is to see to what extent the participating members are being benefited from the CVDP's activities. In regard to economic benefits, most of the respondents referred to low-cost irrigation (Tk.400 per season), supply of fertilizer, seeds and pesticides, low-cost rice husking (Tk.8.00 per *maund*), loan for various

income generating activities, modern agricultural technology, development of saving habit and several welfare funds for the crisis period caused by natural disaster, accident, loss of livestock, marriage of poor and disadvantaged girls etc. It indicates that the CVDP is playing important roles for the economic development of its participating members. On the other hand, a great majority of the respondents (84 to 92 percent) referred to educational facilities for the children and solidarity among the villagers as the most important social benefits. And, more than 64 percent respondents referred to consciousness about food, health and nutrition and promotion of social status as the social benefits. And, below 50 percent of the respondents referred to prevention of early marriage and dowry systems.

In course of our investigation, we found that the lack of medicine for clinic and fertilizer crisis were the major problems for the villagers. And, about 40 percent respondents referred to insufficient loan-amount and lack of family planning and birth control contraceptives. On the other hand, lack of income generating activities for the landless labourers and women and improper dissemination of knowledge obtained through training were referred to by a negligible number of respondents. The leaders of the village stood by the villagers during this crisis. The leaders tried their utmost to remove these difficulties and thus they earned more confidence of the people.

Finally, suggestions for strengthening the CVDP's activities were sought from the respondents. In this respect, 80 percent of the respondents suggested to ensure the immediate supply of fertilizer and to provide sufficient medicines for the clinic. On the other hand, special projects for landless poor and disadvantaged women, dissemination of knowledge obtained through training, supply of contraceptives and increased amount of loan were suggested by a negligible number of responding members.

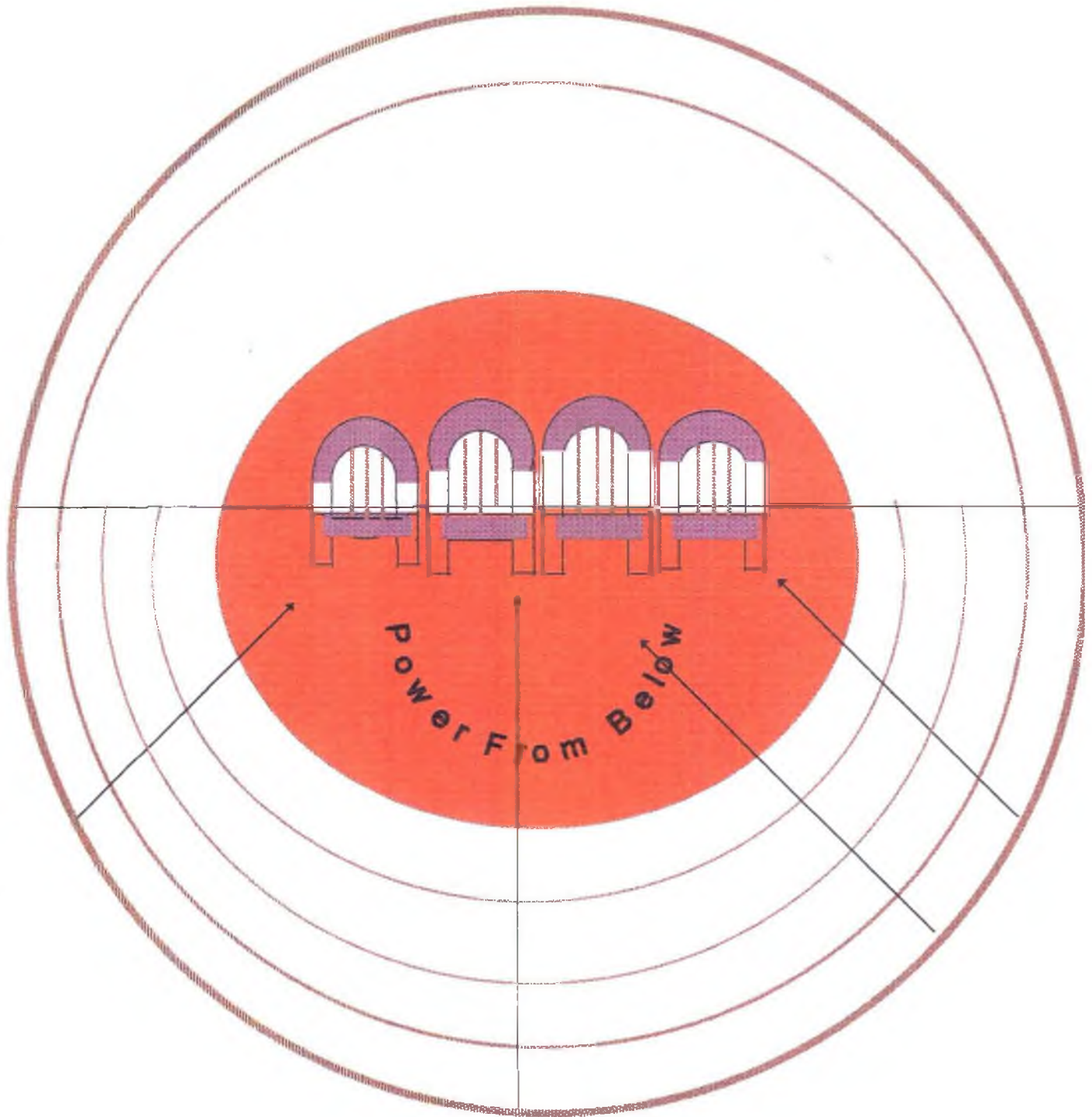
We have seen in the earlier section that in the Jamalpur village there is an emerging trend of leadership among the marginal and small farmer households, which is largely absent in the Kamalpur village. As the number of leaders among these households is significant more than one-third, it has been a matter of interest for us to know the reasons for such a trend. As this emerging trend is primarily due to the intervention of supportive agencies like cooperative so first we have described the nature of interventions by the supportive agencies here.

The Co-operative organization has gone a long way towards replicating their socio-economic programmes of exclusive option towards the rural poor and the disadvantaged households, who are the majority in number. Such efforts aim at awareness-raising and institution-building to serve the interests of the bottom majority population. The union, in which the Jamalpur village is located has 18 villages and K.S.S.<sup>1</sup> were formed in

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1. K.S.S. : *Krishi Samabay Samity*. The agricultural cooperative society. The society provides agricultural inputs and credit facilities to its members. The cooperatives were organized here on the basis of Comilla model.

POWER BASE IN JAMALPUR (COMILLA VILLAGE)



all these villages. Some of these villages have come under CVDP programme. Jamalpur is one of these villages. It appears from our in-depth investigation that none of the leaders of Jamalpur has any traditional high lineage status. None of them has traditional control over land. They are, of course, landowners of various sizes. But they became influential because of their active participation in the organizational and developmental activities of the village and the K.S.S. and CVDP gave them the opportunity to exhibit their leadership qualities.

In fine, we can, therefore, say that it is mainly through the cooperative movement (their activities in the supportive agencies like cooperatives) that the present leadership had emerged in Jamalpur. But their individual capabilities, goodwill and education also contributed to their climbing to leadership position in a village community like Jamalpur.

CHAPTER-VI



**Source of Power**



## CHAPTER-VI

### **Source of Power**

This chapter deals with the sources of power in Kamalpur and Jamalpur villages. In both these villages there are two types of leadership, namely, formal and informal. We shall examine in the following pages the sources of power of both formal and informal leaders. As mentioned earlier, the formal leaders are the chairman and members of the Union Parishad, the elected members of the other local bodies, the chairman and members of the cooperative organization like CVDP. Whereas the informal leaders are the *sardars*, *matbars* and other former elected members available in these villages.

### **Sources of Power of Informal Leaders of Jamalpur and Kamalpur**

Although the informal leaders are gradually becoming less influential, yet they still exercise influence and control in the context of Kamalpur and Jamalpur. Let us now see what made them powerful in the village community.

### **Large *Gusti* Support**

The most common feature of the source of power of informal leaders of Kamalpur and Jamalpur is their large *gusti* (lineage) support. All the informal leaders under study belong to such *gustis* (lineages) which are

very large in size. So, this is a kind of numerical support, or in other words, the large human support which made them powerful at the local level.

### **Former Elected Leaders**

The former elected members (but now they have been replaced by the newly elected members) are also considered as informal leaders. Because they are also called to sit in the *salish* or *shava* to settle disputes etc. Once they had the people support and, therefore, they were elected. This is considered as their sources of power. The formal leaders of the past are the informal leaders of the present time.

The *gusti* support (as mentioned above) is responsible for acquiring power. But only one or two persons, acquired power for their large *gusti* support. These one or two persons definitely possess some personal qualities like initiative, drive, tact etc. These personal qualities put them in the front positions of their lineages and this ultimately made them influential and powerful.

### **Ownership of Land**

Almost all of them are landowners. There are 16 informal leaders in Kamalpur and Jamalpur. Of them, about 20% do not own lands and the

rest 80% are landowners. Two of them are big landowners. This leads us to the conclusion that the informal leaders are landowners and landownership is a source of their power.

### **Social Service**

Social service can be regarded as another source of power for the informal leaders. They do social service, they look after the welfare of villagers and locality. They come forward in times of crisis of the individual households. Whether in marriage ceremony or in the funeral ceremony, they come forward to help the individual villagers and this is how they became acceptable to the villagers as their leaders. It is not only the source but also the process which helps one to acquire power at the local level.

### **Connection With Formal Leaders and Political Party**

The connection of informal leaders with formal leaders and their affiliation with political parties is nevertheless important for the acquisition of power in the context of Kamalpur and Jamalpur, the villages under study.

## Sources of Power of Formal Leadership in Kamalpur

We have seen the pattern of leadership in Kamalpur in an earlier chapter. It is the mixture of old and new leaders. The old are the traditional leaders and the new are the newly emerged leaders. We are going to discuss the various sources of power of these leaders of Kamalpur in the following paragraphs:-

### 1. **Landownership and Land Control:**

The ownership and control of land is a major source of power for the leaders of Kamalpur. The traditional leaders of Kamalpur were in fact the landed gentry who not only owned land but also controlled land for a long time. The landed gentry (aristocrats) had feudal connections and they were the part of feudal nobility. This landed gentry including the *zamindar talukdar* families of Kamalpur not only influenced and controlled the politics of Kamalpur village, but also controlled the politics of the entire locality. However, this landed gentry lost control and influence over politics when they began to disintegrate and weak after the *zamindari* abolition of 1950. But the major source of power of the new leaders is also the ownership of land in Kamalpur.

### 2. **Higher Education and Social Service:**

The higher educated people command respect in Kamalpur and we

know that most highly educated person of Kamalpur was elected chairman of the Union Parishad in the recent past. We mentioned earlier that this youngman received his Master degree from the University of Dhaka. Normally, highly educated person like him do not settle in the village and lives in the town with a white-collar job. But this youngman settled in his native village Kamalpur and decided to do social work. His social service made him all the more popular and this was the reason for his success in the Union Parishad election.

### 3. **Affiliation With Political Party:**

Affiliation with political party and political leaders is again an important source of power in Kamalpur village. The empirical evidences collected from Kamalpur show that the affiliation with political parties helped individuals to acquire power at the local level. We have seen in Kamalpur that the political activists have emerged as influential and powerful over a period of time.

### 4. ***Gusti* Support:**

*Gusti* support can also be considered as an important source of power in Kamalpur. The large *gusti* size helps *gusti* man to acquire power by mobilizing *gusti*-support in his favour. Because human resource is an important factor in a rural community like Kamalpur to gain political power. Therefore, human support plays an important role to make one influential as well as powerful.

## 5. High Status:

High lineage status (*Uchu bangsha marjada*) was also important for gaining political power in a rural community like Bangladesh. In the past, almost all the leaders belonged to the high status lineages. But, at present, this factor is not very important. Many high status families are now declining due to economic crisis.

### **Sources of Power of Formal Leadership of Jamalpur**

The sources of power in Jamalpur village are similar to those of Kamalpur but there are also some dissimilarities. Ownership of land matters in gaining power in Jamalpur but it is not as vital as found in Kamalpur.

Education and social service are also important to wield power in Jamalpur. The *gusti*-support is also an important factor for acquiring power in Jamalpur. But high status is not important at all to enter into the domain of power in the context of Jamalpur.

The most important factor for gaining power in Jamalpur is to earn importance in the cooperative organization and CVDP. The implementation of CVDP in Jamalpur had long background and we have described it in the following pages.

In the mid seventies the Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP) was for the first time, perceived by the Comilla Academy. At the beginning it was named as Total Village Development Programme (TVDP). But later on in 1983 it was renamed as CVDP. It started functioning from 1989 when it was included in the Annual Development Plan of the Bangladesh Government. Henceforth, the Academy started to show interest in implementing the policies of the CVDP under the Five Year Plans.

CVDP consists of three types of members -male, female and children. Its main activities center around irrigation through deep tube-wells, share-savings deposits and credit operation, income generating projects, social security and welfare project. It has got pisci-culture projects also. Moreover, it provides fertilizers, pesticides, loans for rickshaw, poultry and livestock projects. It further operates rice-husking mills, health clinics, primary schools and provides financial support for poor girls and students in times of their need.

In the villages of Bangladesh especially in the Districts of Comilla the CVDP has provided an opportunity for the development of leadership qualities among the marginal and small farmer households. The supportive agencies like cooperatives have accentuated the process. It would be worth mentioning here that in this villages the leaders have no traditional high lineage status i.e., no traditional control over land. They become

influential only because of their participation in the developmental activities of the villages. In fact, the CVDP along with its supportive agencies like cooperatives provides an opportunity to exhibit their leadership qualities. The CVDP was not developed in a day, rather it was the result of long experiment of BARD and it had background.

The BARD Comilla began its experiments on rural development in the early sixties. It evolved a new system of village cooperatives which was known as Comilla Model of Cooperatives. Later the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) cooperatives are now considered as a major institution of rural development in Bangladesh. I shall deal with its purpose of cooperative programme. Types of cooperatives, its impact and landholding pattern of KSS members.

There are various types of cooperative organizations in Bangladesh. But the most numerous and effective type of organization is the KSS (*Krihi Samabaya Samity*) under IRDP. The cooperatives under the IRRUPT are based on the experience from the Comilla project with the cooperative (KSS) at the village level and the Thana Central Cooperative Association (TCCA) at the thana level. The cooperative at the union level under the directorate of cooperative are known as Union Multipurpose Cooperative Societies.

Besides, there is another type of old cooperative under the same Directorate known as TIP (Thana Irrigation Programme) cooperatives.



The IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme) was created by the government as a central agency in 1970 to help implement the Comilla model of cooperatives in a phased manner throughout the country. The Comilla model, developed at the BARD, consists of a two-tier system with the KSS at the village level and TCCA at the thana level. The government want the older type of cooperatives like union multipurpose societies and TIP cooperatives to be replaced by the IRDP cooperative in the course of time. "There were in 1976 206 cooperatives with about 2000 member outside the IRDP system. Many, if not most of these cooperative are however native and exit on paper only. Out of more than 420 thanas in Bangladesh TCCA will have been established in 250 of them a of June 1978" (Appraisal Report, 1977). The TCCA are subsidized by IRDP as their income is insufficient to cover their expenses. The IRDP system based on Comilla approach emphasized the following aspect in formation of cooperatives.

**Purpose of Cooperative Programmes are as follows:**

- a. Cooperative societies will be organized with the farmers at the village level. After the formation of the cooperative the initial duties at the KSS are to select a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a manager and a model farmer who will run the society.

- b. Sufficient credit would be provided from outside to save the members of the society from the exploitation of money - lenders and each member would contribute a fixed amount into the society's account every week, no matter how small the contribution was. Loans would be distributed on the basis of members' investment in shares. The more shares one has, the more loans one receives.
- c. Inputs would have to be provided if the farmers were to implement new technologies for the required seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, water pumps and so on. Initially subsidies would be required to induce farmers to use the new input.
- d. The manger and model farmer would receive training at (separate) weekly meetings held at the thana training centre offered by the TCCA. The manager of the KSS would learn the techniques and practices of accounting, administration and management, while the model farmer was to learn new approaches to training which he would take beck to the primary society and teach to the members at their weekly meetings.

The principal objectives of the Comilla programme are modernization of the peasants' societies and subsistence farming through cooperattives, and raising of agricultural production by irrigation and suitable mechanization. The organized service elements to achieve these goals are:

- 1) Cooperative credit,

- 2) irrigation water, machines, and skilled training,
- 3) agricultural extension training and
- 4) marketing services, etc. (Manjur-ul-Alam, 1976)

To be more precise, the main purpose of the village cooperative can be listed as follows:

1. To organize the cultivators into a permanent cohesive disciplined group for planned activities aimed at agricultural development.
2. To build up capital through joint savings and to utilize institutional credit facilities offered and supervised by the central associations in order to escape from the exploitative credit system of the local money - lenders and traders.
3. To adopt agricultural innovation collectively and to promote the adoption of innovation by individual members.
4. To develop the local leadership through participation in training programmes organized by the central association and by organizing group activities in the village. The cooperative societies under this scheme was first organized in the Kotwali thana of Comilla district where the programme succeeded especially significantly in increasing the yields of the dry season *boro* crop (Blair, 1974:35). The member of the

Managing Committee were the leaders of the KSS. The Managing Committee consisted of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Manager/Secretary and three other members in the above mentioned KSS. All the members in the above mentioned KSS read up to class V. The Chairman and the Manager dominated the affairs of the society in most case.

The landholding pattern of the Managing Committee members of the KSS (mentioned above) has been shown in table. From this table, it appears that none of the Managing Committee members belonged to the below 1 acre category.

**Table-16**

**Landholding Pattern of Managing Committee  
Members of KSS in Comilla Village.**

Landholding Category	No of Member	Percentage
Landless	-	-
Below 1 acre	-	-
1-2 acres	1	17
2-5 acres	3	50
5 and above	2	33
Total	6	100

Source : Majumder, 1976

One of them owned between 1 and 2 acres, three of them owned between 2 and 5 acres and the rest two members owned more than 5 acres

each. It means that KSS leaders belonged to large landowning group of the village.

Manjur-ul-Alam recorded the impact of cooperative in five villages of Comilla district (Manjur-ul-Alam, 1976). He shows that these five villages had the traditional methods of cultivation before the introduction of cooperatives. The farmers had no knowledge of improved agriculture in the absence of proper training. They had no irrigation and credit facilities to utilize for productive purposes. "But after the introduction of cooperatives in these village, there were great changes in overall socio-economic conditions. The farmers were getting training for adoption of improved agricultural practices and thereby cultivating HYV having got other supplies and services through cooperatives" (ibid):

The members of the KSS were the first to adopt HYVs and that their rate of adoption was quite fast rising from 7 to 98 percent in only five years time in Comilla Kotwali thana. So, in respect of adoption of improved agricultural practices and adoption of the HYV cooperative as a rural institution played a pioneering role. Another study of 25 village cooperatives in Comilla found that leadership positions in these cooperatives have gone to the kinsmen and relatives of the traditional leaders and, therefore, there was no visible conflict between traditional and cooperative leaders (B.Ahmed, 1972). In another case study Rahim (1965-66) found that the most influential person in the village was also the

manger of the KSS and his leadership of the KSS was infact a weapon in village politics for furthering the interests and position of his lineage.

The maldistribution of both loans and overdue payment in the KSS is the result of the control of the cooperative structure by the more affluent farmers who appear to be tied into the leadership structure and who stay in power year after year, despite, the minimum requirement for the once-a-year election of a manger and model farmer. Blair (1974:60-61), following the research report of the Comilla Academy, points out that a very powerful manager of the KSS can steal money, juggle the accounts, take the lion's share of the loan in his name and the name of his sons. He can cause the society to fall into arrears. He can show incompetence in organizing joint projects. The domination of the KSS by bigger farmers and their kinsmen is a real problem.

The cooperative programme based on the Comilla model expanded rapidly through the IRDP in several districts of the country. It had both successes and failures. The successes can be listed as follows:

1. It helped in increasing the agricultural production in many of the cooperative areas.
2. The programme had been relatively successful at mobilizing rural savings.

3. It saved some of the marginal farmers in the cooperative societies from the exploitation of money-lenders at least to some extent.
4. The farmers were exposed to improved methods of agriculture such as pump irrigation, shallow and deep tubewells and use of tractors in tilling the soil, etc.
5. The farmers were supplied with better varieties of seeds fertilizers, HYV and other inputs.
6. The farmers came to learn to certain extent the modern know-how and skills of agriculture.

However, the cooperative programme was not without failures. The greatest amongst these is that the cooperatives have been dominated and controlled by big landowners who used the credit facilities and other agricultural inputs for their own benefit (Chowdhury and Haque, 1978, Majumdar, 1976).

The benefits offered by the Comilla cooperative system thus went to the rich and influential farmers who normally controlled these cooperatives. As Blair says, "Despite the rhetoric of the Comilla programme... there is little evidence that rural development is promoting equity in distribution of either income or political power. In fact, the agricultural programmes

would appear to have lessened rural equity in no small measure, in the sense that the inputs have gone to the surplus farmers, as have the benefits of increased production" (Blair 19974: 107-108) There were other failures too. These are:

1. The cooperatives did not include as many marginal and middle farmers as possible. The size of the membership of the cooperatives could be increased to include more marginal and middle farmers.
2. The marginal farmers, in most cases, did not have a say in the management of the societies.
3. Credits and inputs were not distributed among all the members of cooperative societies on equal basis.
4. The programme expanded rapidly. As a result, in the majority of cases, the cooperatives could not be saved from the control and influence of village touts. If the rate of expansion was slow and steady, the cooperatives could include more marginal farmers and other low income groups.

But the inherent weakness in the IRDP system was that it had no provision to include the landless agricultural workers in cooperative societies and thus a large section of the impoverished rural population



remains deprived of the facilities offered by the cooperatives. Later on BRDB (Bangladesh Rural Development Board) was formed by the Government to undertake rural development activities throughout the country integrating all the existing programmes. BRDB had also both successes and failures in bringing about rural development. In the backdrop of all these happenings, the BARD, Comilla began new experiments and CVDP was undertaken by the Academy for rural development. Centering round the activities of CVDP, a new form of leadership began to emerge in the villages near the Academy. This emerging pattern of leadership became a threat to the old and traditional pattern of leadership. Jamalpur village under study is an example where such new pattern of leadership has emerged.

CHAPTER-VII



**Conclusion**

## CHAPTER-VII

### Conclusion

#### Findings

##### I

In the earlier two chapters (chapter IV and chapter V), we dealt with local level political power in two village communities of Bangladesh. These two villages are situated in two different zones of Bangladesh namely east (Comilla) and south (Patuakhali). On the basis of the information and data presented in the above two chapters, one can come to the conclusion that two different patterns of leadership are found in the two study villages. Both the villages have undergone socio-economic and political changes over a period of time and through these changes, two different pattern of political power-elites have emerged in two communities.

The power-structure is more or less similar in both the villages but the sources of power are not the same in these villages. In Patuakhali village (Kamalpur), we find the co-existence of traditional and newly emerged leaders, although traditional leadership disintegrated to a large extent. The sources of power in this village are, therefore, traditional ownership and control over land, high traditional lineage status, landed aristocratic background etc. But more recently higher education, social

service, large landownership and large lineage support helped individuals to gain power in Kamalpur.

The picture is somewhat different in the Comilla village (Jamalpur) where the trend is bottom-up. It means that the source of power here is not landed aristocracy or high traditional lineage status, but it is control over supportive agency like cooperative organization which is a major source of power in Jamalpur. Here, leadership emerged from grass-root level. Landownership whether large, small or marginal is a source of power here, but it is not a major source. Majority of the leaders here belong to small and marginal farmer categories unlike Kamalpur. But self-less dedication in organizing cooperative movement for the welfare of the people at large seems to be the most important factor for gaining power and influence in Jamalpur village. We have seen that connection with political parties is also a source of power so far Kamalpur village is concerned. But this is not important so far Jamalpur village is concerned. Rather it is the connection with BARD officials which is important to be influential socially and politically in the context of Jamalpur. It can, therefore, be concluded here that the present leadership pattern in Jamalpur is bottom-up and it is top-down as well as bottom-up in Kamalpur.

## II

In course of our discussion in the previous chapters and the information and data presented there, we have seen that power and politics are not static at the local level of Bangladesh. Changes are taking place in

the power structures and in the leadership pattern rather rapidly in the rural society in recent times. Our data show that although traditional leaders still control the power and politics in a village community called here Kamalpur, yet it should be mentioned that new non-traditional leaders are emerging there. Following Weber, we can conclude here that these new leaders of Kamalpur have been able to "carryout their will" because of their "qualities" and because of the "circumstances" (Weber, 1947:52,153) prevailing now in Kamalpur. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Weber's approach thus helped us better in understanding power-base in Kamalpur and Jamalpur. In both the village communities under study, the source of power was not economic factor alone as advocated by Karl Marx, rather the sources of power were manifold and therefore, multi-dimensional. Thus Max Weber's theory of power and politics accomodate and explain the political realities of Kamalpur and Jamalpur better.

In Jamalpur, there is almost no existence of traditional leaders. In this community leadership have emerged from grassroot level. But this has been possible because of a major intervention by BARD, Comilla which is neither a government nor semi-government organization. This intervention is nothing but the establishment K.S.S (*Krishi Samabaya Samity*) and later introduction of more intensive cooperative programmes like CVDP (Comprehensive Village Development Programme). This ultimately led to the empowerment of the marginal and small farmers of the village. Infact, this cooperative programme worked as a movement which increased the level of consciousness of the cooperators, increased rate of literacy and

level of consciousness of the cooperators, increased rate of literacy and level of education, increased the bargaining capacity of them, generated economic activities and encouraged women and youths to undertake income-generating activities. Such an environment helped the small and marginal farmers to acquire power along with middle and rich landowners. However, majority of the leaders of Jamalpur belong to the marginal and small farmer categories.

This is not a revolution through which power was captured as conceived by Marx in a modern bourgeoisie state but it is more or less a reform through poor people who were empowered in village community of Bangladesh, called Jamalpur. Here, power means "participation in making decision" for the development of all sections of village population as mentioned by Laswell and Kaplan (1950:74). Here, those who could participate in decision-making and who mattered for the implementation of those decisions ultimately emerged as leaders. So, they have been able to get others to do work necessary for village development and for collective interest. Therefore, they have emerged as power-wielders according to the explanation of Dhal (1957).

It is true that the village population of both Kamalpur and Jamalpur are divided into two clear segments as power wielders and the rest. The leaders are the power-wielder and the vast masses of population are the rest who remain out of the domain of power and politics. Following Pareto, the leaders are elites and the rest are non-elites. But the visible or

invisible conflicts between the Elites and Non-Elites are hardly seen in the village communities under study. The history of Kamalpur and Jamalpur is not the graveyard of aristocracy, because circulation of elite theory is inoperative in the context of these two villages. Rather, majority of the leaders have people support and democratically elected. Therefore, iron of law of oligarchy is inoperative there, rather power is widely shared in these communities as conceived by the pluralist thinkers.

### III

The present research shows that the traditional power-structure has not disintegrated totally at the local-level of Bangladesh. But after the partition of India in 1947 and after the abolition of *zamindari* 1950, the traditional leadership was challenged by a rising Muslim landowning class and the present leadership pattern is a mixture of old traditional and newly emerged democratic leaders as found in Kamalpur village. The study also shows that due to the interventions by the supportive agencies or establishment of new rural institutions an altogether new (alternative) pattern of leadership or power-structure has emerged at the local level of Bangladesh as seen in Jamalpur.

The present study further reveals that two different types of leadership have emerged in two different villages. It means that the pattern of leadership is not similar in both the village.

In Kamalpur, the present pattern of leadership is partly traditional and partly new emerging from below or bottom. So, if the traditional power derives from the top as found in Kamalpur, it is equally true that the newly emerged leadership in the same community has its roots in the bottom. The power bases in this village are, therefore, twofold: from top and from bottom as well.

In Jamalpur, on the other hand, there is no trace of any traditional leadership in its known history. Here leadership emerged only from grassroot level centering round the cooperative movement. More precisely, in the process of organizing the Comprehensive Village Development Programme (CVDP), some individuals have emerged as leaders. Therefore, it is mainly the organization of cooperative society which gave them power. However, they not only have emerged as leaders of the cooperatives, but also as the leaders of the entire village community and neighbouring areas. The Manager of CVDP has virtually emerged as the most influential leader in the entire locality. So, the power base in Jamalpur is at the bottom. It means that the leadership has emerged from the grassroot level.



A general awareness is beginning to grow among this bottom majority of Jamalpur that without the understanding of the main causes of their endemic poverty situation and without any decision-making power in their hands they will always remain in the vicious circle of poverty. A critical awareness in thinking, empowerment of raising their voices, and building self-reliant organizations to safeguard the interests of the bottom majority are seen as possible way to make a break through of this circle. This is more or less the situation in Jamalpur and this situation has been created by the intervention of BARD by organizing cooperative organization in Jamalpur and in the neighbouring villages. Although this process has its root in the Jamalpur village, it is absent in Kamalpur to a large extent. A new orientation almost exclusively began in the mid-'70s in the South Asian countries by the government and non-government organizations which led to awareness-raising of rural population. The Jamalpur village is a small dot of such coverage-areas. A preferential option, to reach the poor and the marginal households and groups, has been the core of the process and found effective to some extent to change the situations of the marginal and small farmers by following a multi-dimensional integrated development approach. Timm [1994] even calls this process a "Social Justice Approach" [PP.:133-114]. The rural poor, agricultural labourers, women, unemployed youths, tribals, etc. as being the most disadvantaged are largely attracted to such a process. The ultimate end of the process is to enable the small and marginal farmers to establish their most basic human rights of life and

livelihood. The people who are organized in the process work as a task force [Ibid:92-93]. As mentioned before, such a process through group formation as required by the cooperatives started in Jamalpur and therefore, we find a larger participation of small and marginal groups in the power-politics of the locality. Our investigation indicated that the villages under study have many similarities and also differences in several respects. Here, we are primarily concerned to draw major conclusions on the changing trends with respect to power relations and the contributory factors in the emergence of the new leaders. The following trends deserve a mention in this regard.

In Kamalpur village, leaders basically emerged from the households with big landholdings, larger households (members) and moderate educational qualifications. Traditional ownership and control over land and high lineage status were the major source of power in this village. However, in the Jamalpur village a new base is affecting, to a great extent, the leadership and village power relations. This base is the newly organized cooperative institution of the weaker socio-economic classes. This new source is affecting the village power relations in the following manners:

As the cooperative organization contains more than half of the village households as the voters they are able to affect local level elections. Concretely, the only member of the Union Parishad of Jamalpur

village and the Chairman of the Joypur Union Parishad acknowledge the support of the cooperative organization (CVDP). The *samities* can and will definitely affect the local level elections and will be able to elect persons of their choices, in most cases. A trend is also emerging among the group members (members of *samabaya samity*) to contest in the U.P. elections for membership depending on the support of local *samities*. This trend will continue to increase.

A change in the technique of local level election-campaigns has also been taking place. Unlike previous years, the contesting members need to contact the *samities* directly, instead of the few 'middle men' or *matbars*. In Jamalpur village, no individual member of the *samity* or CVDP hold the influence or control to decide who to vote and not to vote among the contesting villagers. Group discussions and consensus play vital role about such decisions. This also means that the importance of the role of *matbars*, as traditional leaders in influencing decisions in the village and their role in decision-making process have undergone major changes.

The above trend means that today in the Jamalpur village those, who have influence and control over the institutions of the poor and the marginalised households such as cooperatives, hold power to some extent. It appears that in future, for influencing *samities* the 'to be leaders' will try their best to identify some "middle men" in the *samities* or some mechanisms which will act in between the leaders and the *samities*.

The impact of the process of organizing cooperative is also evident in the over-all political awareness and practices in Jamalpur. The adult villagers, who are not aware and not interested about politics, are found more in Kamalpur village than that of Jamalpur. The difference is about 20%. From this, we can convincingly conclude that in Jamalpur the political consciousness among the adult villagers is about 20% higher than that of Kamalpur villagers. This is primarily due to the non-formal adult education offered by CVDP and continuous discussions and dialogues at group levels, as required by the existing cooperative institution.

Although the old traditional leaders are still playing a dominant role in the village politics in the Kamalpur, almost all the leaders have come from non-traditional households in Jamalpur. Barman (1983) observed that only 9.04% leaders have come from non-leader households in a Dhaka village and the source of their power was cooperative organizations. Thus, while the domination of the tradition at households continues, the new leaders from the non-leader households are also on the rise. Barman in his studies on the Emerging Leadership Patterns In Rural Bangladesh, called this as 'change and continuity', the key to the emerging leadership process in rural Bangladesh.

That leadership role is being played more and more collectively is very much evident in Jamalpur, but not in Kamalpur. In Jamalpur, cooperative organizations of the poor and marginalised households give

more collective leadership in the village. As found earlier, that the traditional leadership of Kamalpur, is highly “centralised”, “top-down” and “leader-oriented”, whereas the leadership pattern of Jamalpur is decentralized, bottom up and “people-oriented”. Members of the K.S.S and CVDP have greater participation in the decision-making process that affect their lives and livelihood in Jamalpur village. This also means that the more organizations like cooperatives present in the village, the more opportunities people will have to participate and to influence decisions that concern them.

It appears from the present study that an emerging trend is growing with regard to the expected functions of rural leaders. Villagers are, more and more, expecting their leaders to undertake developmental activities than the traditional social roles. Because of this expectation, those who do more developmental activities are also recognized as more active village leaders. This is why Wood (1994) emphasized on the understanding of the role of rural power structure with regard to rural development. Based on the trend in the Jamalpur village, we can assume that the villages of rural Bangladesh will increasingly be structured into different organizations, the majority of which are economic in nature. The grassroot majority population, due to their endemic poverty-situation, are attracted to those economic organizations and the trend is on the rise. Because of this trend, leadership positions in the villages will be distributed on organizational bases. Barman also found an increasing trend of the growth of such

organizational leaderships in his study (1988:186). The emergence of organisational accountability, relationship between the leaders and members of the cooperatives and groups are also positive changes in Jamalpur and these are on the rise.

Women of poor and marginal households are also increasingly attracted to the Comprehensive Village Development Programmes. They are gaining economic power by participating in such activities and adding strength to the countervailing power. In spite of those limited positive changes, the whole issue of women and gender is problematic and complex in the socio-cultural environment in Bangladesh. However, the emerging trend in Jamalpur is that women are coming out of the households for CVDP meetings, participating in money-earning activities and also affecting village decisions, to some extent, by the women groups collectively. Both the positive and the counter-trends are on the rise. Even after everything, a change is taking place towards leadership of women and greater views by women.

A new emphasis and hope is growing on creation of off-farm rural employment for the landless and marginal farmer households and opportunities for earning additional income by women in Jamalpur organized by the CVDP. It has been found among the members of the cooperative that by improving material or economic power of the marginalised grassroots, they are helped to build up their social dignity

and strength. The collective social strength of the *samities* help them solve their various socio-economic problems to some extent. The *samities* and their net-works have a few examples of joint social actions as a countervailing power. Resistance of local level injustices by single or several groups jointly can be seen as the challenge to the traditional oppressive power structure and a resisting force of the grassroot marginalised population to their class interests.

All concerned require more understanding on the changing trends as a whole and especially the changes in power relations in which social scientist can contribute significantly. In addition, the approaches of supportive agencies like cooperatives are short-term and welfare-oriented in nature. Long-term fundamental changes require multi-faceted interventions and active participation of the state, community and the supportive forces (Wood 1994:549-552). Nonetheless, historical evidences teach us that big changes of tomorrow start today insignificantly. The present study has been a modest effort to understand these insignificant changing trends of the rural power structure of Bangladesh today.

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### Glossary of Non-English Terms

This is not an exhaustive list. As far as possible an attempt has been made to explain a local word, whenever it occurred, in the thesis. Some words, however, though explained initially, have not been explained when they occur subsequently, and such words are included here. No attempt has been made to consistently follow any rigorous phonetic system.

adivasi	a tribal individual.
agrahayan	name of a Bengali month.
aman	a variety of paddy.
ashar	name of a Bengali month
atmiyasajan	relatives/kinsmen.
aus	a variety of Paddy.
avijat	old landed aristocracy
badla	landless labourer

baithakkhana	outer room of a house
bangsha	lineage.
bargader	sharecropper
bari	home stead
bauls	a small ascetic community of South-Western Bangladesh and adjoining West Bangle.
beel	big ditch of water
ber jal	a kind of net
besal jal	a kind of net
bigha	one bigha is equal to thirty three decimals which is about one third of an acre.
bondokgram	name of a village

boro	name of a variety of Paddy
borolok	high status people.
brahmin	the highest status caste
chaitra	name of a Bengali month.
chaukidar	village police.
chotolok	low status people
chula	clay made oven for cooking.
dadan	cash or mortgage of standing crops/interest.
deg	big cooking pot
deksi	small cooking pot
dingi	fishing boat.

eidgah	field for eid congregation
falgoon	name of a Bengali month
ghar	house
girhasta	farmer
gosti	lineage
gram	village.
grameen	rural or village-based.
gramsarkar	village government
haor	marshy land
irri	a variety of Paddy.
jadrel	powerful
jadrel neta	powerful leader

jaki jal	a kind of net
jal	net
jamat	samaj
jautuk	dowry
jeafat	feast
jele	fisherman
jhola	weaver
jotdar	very big landowner.
kacha road	unmettaled road
kachari ghar	rest room



kalai	a variety of pulse
kamla	landless daily labourer, wage labourer.
kamar	blacksmith
kanti	name of a village
khadim	cadre/follower
khal	ditch of water
khana	household
khandan	one who is long associated with the ownership and control of land and has at least some education and who can be distinguished from the girhastas and kamlas by a particular style of life.
khesari	a variety of pulse

kosha	small boat
krishi	agricultural.
kshtriyas	high status caste
lalsak	a kind of red leafy vegetable
madhya bangsha	middle status lineage
mahajan	money lender
maktab	religious school
maskalai	a variety of pulse
matar	a variety of pulse
matbar	informal leader of the village
maund	40 Kg is equal to one maund
mohalla	ward/hamlet

mohila	woman.
mohila samity	women's group/cooperative.
mouza	revenue village.
naksha	detailed map of revenue village
nichu-bangsha	low status lineage
pakerghar	kitchen
palagsak	leafy vegetable
panchayat	village council
para	neighborhood ward, part of village.
paribar	family
pardha	veil.

prodhan	leader of samaj, village leader.
samabai	cooperative.
samaj	village association
sardar	a leader of samaj.
shalish	village court/meeting for settling disputes between the villagers.
sraban	name of a Bengali month.
tahsil office	revenue office
talukdar	revenue collectors during British rule. Also owners of land.
thana	administrative unit of Bangladesh: similar to a sub-district.

uho bangsha	high status lineage
union parishad	local self-government body at the union level.
zamindar	one who lived on rent in cash received from land through subinfeudatory rights.

## Acronyms

ADAB	-	Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh.
AL	-	Awami League.
BARD	-	Bangladesh Academy For Rural Development
BIDS	-	Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies.
BNP	-	Bangladesh Nationalist Party.
BRAC	-	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee.
BRDB	-	Bangladesh Rural Development Board.
BSS	-	Bittaheen Samabai Samity (Assetless Cooperatives).
CARE	-	Cooperative American Relief Everywhere.
CTCA	-	Central Thana Cooperative Association.

CVDP	-	Comprehensive Village Development Programme
DTW	-	Deep Tubewell
GB	-	Grameen Bank.
HSC	-	Higher Secondary Certificate.
HYV	-	High Yielding Varieties (rice etc.)
IRDP	-	Integrated Rural Development Programme.
JP	-	Jatiya Party
JSD	-	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party).
KG	-	Kinder Garten.
KSS	-	Krishi Samabai Samity.
LOS	-	Land Occupancy Survey.

- LUO - Land Under Operation.
- NGO - Non-Government Organization.
- PVDOS - Private Voluntary Development Organization.
- UNO - Upazila Nirbahi Officer