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Maloney	Bangladesh Prehistory
Khan	Barua Community in Bangladesh
Husain	Women in Medieval Bengal
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# Bangladesh and its People in Prehistory

Clarence Maloney

You may think it presumptuous for anyone to discuss the prehistory of Bāṅlādesh<sup>1</sup> when hardly any prehistoric archeology has been done here. But from the wider viewpoint of anthropology we can make certain assumptions, particularly regarding the following: the position of Bangladesh amongst the evidence of early man in South and Southeast Asia ; the process of the Neolithic revolution ( beginning of cultivation ) on these plains ; the process of peasantization of these plains ; the confluence of linguistic and ethnic elements in Bengali ( Bāṅlā ) language and culture ; and the directions we may look for further data. The evidence is archeological, linguistic, ethnological, and cross-cultural understanding of the evolution of complex societies.

A new theory on the origin of the Bengali language and ideas on the racial substratum in Bangladesh are presented in the latter half of this paper. (I use the terms Bāṅlā for the geographical region, Bāṅālī for the people, and English word Bengali for the language.)

## The Early and Middle Stone Ages

The terms Lower, Middle, and Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic as applied in European prehistory have been found inappropriate for South Asia, and Indian archeologists have adopted the terms Early, Middle, and Late Stone Ages for this subcontinent.<sup>2</sup>

For more than a century now people have been picking up "hand axes" and cleavers of the Early Stone Age over central and peninsular India. The hand axe ( not a real axe ) is a fist-sized tool of stone chipped to a point, and made after a clear culturally-determined pattern originating in East Africa about one million years ago. This tool type

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read at a seminar on Bangladesh prehistory at the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rājshāhi University, on April 4, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> The main works summarizing the Indian archeological data are : Raymond and Bridget Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization*, Penguin Books, 1968 ; V. E. Misra and M. S. Mate (ed.), *Indian Prehistory*, 1964 (this work explains the terminology for Indian paleolithic periods) ; H. D. Sankalia, *Prehistory and Protohistory in India and Pakistan*, Bombay, 1963 ; Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Early India and Pakistan*, London, 1959. These should not substitute for the many excavation reports, and studies of archeological regions and topics published by the Department of Archaeology in Delhi and its regional circles, the state departments of archeology, universities, and several foreign scholars.



and the associated stone cleavers diffused through the Mediterranean, Near East, Panjāb, and thence continued down the Deccan to the Tamiṇ Nāḍu plain where many elegant specimens have been found. They spread from Africa with *Homo erectus* beginning a million years ago and may be dated in India to the Middle Pleistocene ( "ice age" ).

But not one specimen has been found in the Gangā-Bāṅglā plains, nor in the Himālayas to the north, nor in all of Southeast and East Asia. These tools diffused as far eastward as the hilly western corner of West Bengal, where they are found in 32 sites<sup>3</sup> and there they stopped. The reason was the Gangā-Bāṅglā plains were heavily forested and early man did not like that environment. He preferred the mixed savanna with sparse wooded areas of the Deccan, which are like the parts of East Africa where *Homo erectus* evolved and which also prevailed over parts of the Near East then. More than half a million years ago, then, Bāṅglā was the great impenetrable wilderness, which with the Himālayas and the deserts to the north, separated the East from the West. From then until the historical period, virtually all cultural influences entering India from the west diffused *as far as the edge of the Bāṅglā plain and stopped there without reaching Southeast Asia.*

The tools used by *Homo erectus* in East Asia by Jāva man (one million years ago) and Peking Man (800,000 years ago) were simple forms of pebble tools. Such tools have been discovered in Central Asia, in Panjāb in Pleistocene river terraces in the lower western Himālayas, and recently in three locations around Assam. This is called the Soan industry in India.<sup>4</sup> Also related is the Anyathian industry of hand adzes and double-sided choppers made on fossil wood, of the lower Himālayas of Burma. The Soan tool tradition diffused around the edge of the Bāṅglā plains a half a million or more years ago. While pebble tools were made in peninsular India too, these remained the prototype of all stone tools of East Asia through most of the Pleistocene because the Gangā-Bāṅglā plains separated East from West.

Middle Stone Age tools, smaller but still crude, are mostly side scrapers, hollow scrapers, points, borers and burins. They are found over much of India,<sup>5</sup> and they may be typologically derived from the Mousterian

<sup>3</sup> Sankalia ( 1963 ), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> H. de Terra and T. T. Paterson, *Studies on the Ice age in India and Associated Human Cultures*. Washington DC, 1939 ; B. B. Lal, "Paleolithis from the Beas and Banganga Valleys, Punjab," *Ancient India* XII ( 1956 ) ; T. T. Paterson, *Soan, Karachi*, 1962 ; the review of this work. H. D. Sankalia, *The Anthropologist* XIV ( 1967 ) ; Hallam Movius, *The Stone Age of Burma*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series XXXII ( 1943 ).

<sup>5</sup> V. N. Misra. "Paleolithic Culture of Western Rajasthan", *Bulletin, Deccan*



culture of Neanderthal Man in Central Asia 100,000 to 40,000 years ago.<sup>6</sup> But in South Asia they are later, and there was nothing like the European Upper Paleolithic in this part of the world. These tools seem to have diffused from Panjāb by our now-familiar Deccan route to South India, and also eastward to central India, and 400 of them have been picked up in Orissa. Many have been found too, in the Purulia hilly area of West Bengal.<sup>7</sup> Some folk who used these tools ventured to live on the edge of the Gangā plains; a few of them have been found east of the Hooghly near Diamond Harbor, but they are small and probably tools of a later phase. No Middle Stone Age tools have been found in all Assam nor in the Indo-Burma hill zone. Nor is any such clear tool industry found in Southeast Asia, where the Hoabhinian tool tradition had little more than roughly sharpened pebbles. Again, the Gangā-Bānglā forest and river barrier separated the *Eastern World* from the *Western World*.

### Advanced Hunters of the Late Stone Age

At the end of the Pleistocene (c. 10,000 years ago) and after, hunters with advanced techniques, having the bow and arrow, entered India from the west. Their tools were microliths, tiny stone chips often like a thumbnail. The tools were hafted in wood, and some were arrow points. Microliths, classified into several types, have been picked up in great numbers over central India (Joshi got some 25,000 of them from a site on the Narmadā, datable to about 5500 B. C.),<sup>8</sup> They too diffused up to the edge of the Gangā-Bānglā plain, and Bridget Allchin recovered over 850 of them from two sites in Mirzapur District, Uttar Pradesh.<sup>9</sup> For Bānglā the most interesting site in Birbhanpur in the Damodār Valley, where several thousand tools and waste flakes were found covering a square mile.<sup>10</sup> This

*College and Research Institute XXI* (1960) and *XXI* (1963); H. D. Sankalia, *Godavari Paleolithic Industries*. Pune, 1952; R. V. Joshi, *Pleistocene Studies in the Malaprabha Basin*, Pune, 1961.

6 V. A. Ranov. "Paleoliths from Soviet Central Asia." in Asok K. Ghosh (ed.), *Perspective in Paleanthrology*, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 171-84. One site yielded as many as 30,000 Mousterian artifacts, and 78 sites are known; p. 175.

7 Sankalia (1963), pp. 93-96; G. C. Mohapatra, *The Stone Age Cultures of Orissa*, Pune, 1962.

8 R. V. Joshi. "Stone Industries of the Damoh Area, Madhya Pradesh." *Ancient India XII* (1961); F. R. and B. Allchin, (1968); A. P. Khatri, "Rock Paintings of Adamgarh (Central India) and their Age." *Anthropos LIX* (1964); Sankalia (1963), p. 129 ff; Lawrence Leshnik "More Microliths from Gujarat and some Thoughts on Langhnaj." in A. Ghosh (ed.) (1974). pp. 249-50.

9 Bridget Allchin. "Sigghapur and Barkachha: Two Stone Age Factory Sites in Uttar Pradesh." in A. Ghosh, 235-48.

10 B. B. Lal, "Birbhanpur, a Microlithic Site in the Damodar Valley," *Ancient India XV* (1958).



indicates increased population and doubtless more complex society, like that of the Vāddāhunters of Sri Lanka, who had the domesticated dog. I have discussed the way of life of such advanced hunters elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> These microliths did get onto the Bānglā Plains on the western edge, for they have been found near Gidni in Midnapur District and at the excavation in Paṇḍurajār Dhibi in Burdhwān District.

One may argue that such tools would get lost in the alluvium of this plain and that negative evidence is not enough. Of course, the alluvium will swallow anything in time. But it is quite clear that microlithic tools never crossed this plain. *Not one* has been picked up north or east of the Gangā, nor in Assam, nor in any part of the Indo-Burmese hill area, nor did the tool tradition disperse to Southeast Asia. Australian aborigines made microliths, but they apparently invented the techniques, and the late stone tools of hunters in Malaysia, the Andamans and elsewhere do not show a clear borrowing of the Indian microlithic tradition. So for the *third* time, the Gangā-Bānglā Plains formed a vast barrier to cultural diffusion if not to human dispersal.

### Who Were These Advanced Hunters?

The bow and arrow was probably invented in North Africa and diffused to India. It did get to Southeast Asia, but not to the Australians, who were isolated in their continent by then. The microlithic tools of advanced hunters of Africa are probably related to those of India by the intervening cultures,<sup>12</sup> for microliths have been picked up in numbers in Somalia, Yemen, northern Arabia, northern Iran, and southern Pakistan. It is fairly clear that there was dispersal of populations from Africa to India at the end of the Pleistocene when the climate of the Near East was wetter. But we have no skeletons associated with this culture phase in India.

There seem to be three racial categories<sup>13</sup> of these advanced hunters, and all, I believe, have been absorbed to some extent into the populations of Bānglā. First, there are the pygmy peoples having some Negrito or Negrito features: the Andamanese, the Aeta of the Philippines, the Semang

<sup>11</sup> Clarence Maloney, *Peoples of South Asia*, New York, 1974, pp. 72-77. But it is not clear that all the microlithic users were hunters. There is evidence some of them might have kept cattle (see also Leshnik, p. 258).

<sup>12</sup> A creative comparison of advanced hunters in Africa, India, Southeast Asia, and Australia in Bridget Allchin, *The Stone Tipped Arrow*, London, 1966.

<sup>13</sup> Despite some opinions to the contrary, I follow the viewpoint of Carleton Coon, that the existing races have antecedents in roughly their own geographical areas bearing antecedent physical features. Carleton Coon, *The Origin of Races*, New York, 1962.



of Malaysia, and, I venture, the Juāngs and Bhūihers of Orissa. Dalton a century ago described Juāng men as under five feet on the average (and therefore they are classifiable as pygmies), and the women under 4' 8"; he said these were the "most primitive" of all the tribal groups he had seen.<sup>14</sup>

The second racial group of advanced hunters is characterized by the Vaddās of Sri Lanka, who are sometimes said to be proto-Australoid in race, having some resemblance to Australian Aborigines. This idea has been around a long time, but now genetic resemblances can be shown in finger and palm prints, hairiness of the ears, head and skeletal forms, and blood type (particularly with certain central Indian tribes having mostly O and A<sub>1</sub> blood, no Rh, no S, and no abnormal hemoglobins).<sup>15</sup> The mouth tends to be large and the face prognathous (projecting lower face). The Australian Aborigines diffused from one point in Southeast Asia about 11,000 years ago and are remarkably homogeneous. But we do not know if the Australoids and the proto-Australoids of South Asia are related by diffusion across eastern India and Southeast Asia, or if both are descended from a sort of proto-Caucasoid group in Central Asia, as has recently been suggested. In any case, this racial element is clearly submerged in the Bangladesh population.

The third racial group of advanced hunters is the Negro-like people who apparently diffused from Africa eastward and gave rise to the oceanic Negroes, the Melanesians of New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, etc. They moved eastward after the Australoids, and are darker than Australian aborigines, with a measurably higher cranial capacity. Traces of somewhat Negroid features such as frizzly hair have been noted even in South China and South Vietnam in recent centuries, and they must have been connected in origin with the tribal people in central and southern India who from time to time have been described as being somewhat Negroid.<sup>16</sup> The traits include frizzly hair (though in India never as tight as in Africa), broad nose with low root, everted lips, very dark color, and the sickle cell and abnormal hemoglobins which are malaria-adaptive, and, I suggest, a recessive trait

<sup>14</sup> Edward Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, (1872) Delhi, 1973. pp 152-158.

<sup>15</sup> A. A. Abbie, "Indian and the Australian Aborigines, in A. Ghosh, 87-94. On the Vaddās, see also Kenneth Kennedy. "The Paleo-Demography of Ceylon: A Study of the Biological Continuum of a Population from Prehistoric to Historic Times," A. Ghosh, 95-112.

<sup>16</sup> Dalton mentions somewhat frizzly hair as regards the Būiher, Juāng, and even the Orāons (p. 250). The Kādār of the Western Ghāts in Kerala have more noticeable frizzly hair, and tightly curly hair is even noticeable among some of the Nagas and allied people.



of having six fingers and also sometimes six toes, which I have noticed is unusually common in peninsular India as it is in certain parts of Africa. These suggest a continuity of Late Stone Age hunting peoples between Africa and India, and present populations isolated in Dhofār on the Arabian coast and on the southern Iranian coast seem to be remnants of this historic racial continuum. Inasmuch as central Indian tribes having these traits have been absorbed in Bāṅlā, as we shall note, I believe these traits are also submerged in the population here.

We are not sure if Mongoloids came to the Indo-Burma hills as hunters or only later as cultivators. In any case I would like to point out that the four major racial categories of the Old World, Mongoloid, Australoid, Caucasoid, and Negroid, form a great rectangle, and South Asia is directly in the midst. Naturally it has elements of all four, and especially Bāṅlā which has more Mongoloid influence than the rest of South Asia. Indian anthropologists now tend to the view that there is too much study of racial incursions and not enough of local racial adaptation, and prefer Garn's concept of geographical races.<sup>17</sup> But the fact remains that the extreme racial types developed at the geographical extremities of old world, and not at its nexus, which was South Asia.

The study of advanced hunting peoples teaches us another lesson pertinent to Bangladesh prehistory. The African pygmies of the Ituri Forest of Congo did not inhabit that dank region until they were pushed there by diffusion of Negroes who were ecologically more efficient because they had agriculture. And the forest hunters of interior Malaysia, the quiet Semang people, did not occupy those forests until pushed there by the Malays. And the hunting people now occupying the vast upper Amazon in Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, seem to be an earlier racial type than the more Mongoloid cultivators who cultivated on the Andes. The Amazon hunters, perhaps, were also pushed there. The terrain of the upper Amazon resembles that of Bangladesh, and the population there is only two per square mile.

Birbhanpur in Damodār Valley of West Bengal must have been a factory site for stone stools because so many waste flakes and cores were left there. Since no stones occur naturally on the plains, perhaps the advanced hunters who ventured on the plains got their tools from there. Bridget Allchin suggests that her site in Mirzapur District also supplied hunters on the Gangā plains, for it too was a factory site,

<sup>17</sup> Stanley Garn, *Human Races*, Springfield, Ill. 1965. The most comprehensive work on race in India so far is D. N. Majumdar, *Races and Cultures of India*, Bombay, 1961, but it is out-dated, and also hastily put together. But see D. K. Sen, "Racial Studies in India: Recent Trends," *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society* II, No. 1 (1967).



and is located on the last escarpment south of the Gangā alluvium. But in any case microliths have been found only on the fringes of the Bānglā plain, in West Bengal, and the hunters who ventured there may have been pushed into that unfavorable environment by later arrivals in Chotā Nāgpur. But their number would have been exceedingly few, and they never crossed the plain to leave their tools in the hills to our east—the fourth time Bānglā was a barrier to diffusion of more advanced culture eastward.

### Neolithic Revolutions, East and West

The story of the Neolithic Revolution originating in the Near East is well known: achievement of production of food by cultivated plants and domesticated animals, pottery, textiles, polished stone tools, and above all, *settled village life* with all that implies for social structure. This was indeed a revolution, the most significant in human history. It began about 10,000 B.C. with cultivation, and large villages developed in the Near East by 8000 B.C. The Neolithic spread to northern Iran 6000 B.C., to northern Afghanistan 5000 B.C., to southern Afghanistan 3500 B.C., and into the Indus plain where it quickly led to the Indus Civilization, which flourished 2300 to 1700 B.C. The Neolithic revolution immediately sped down the Deccan route as had every preceding intrusive culture, and evolved there as a cattle-keeping culture in Karnāṭaka and Āndhra from 2300 B.C. Excavated Neolithic villages in Mahārāshṭra show that crops grown were wheat, lentils, black and green gram, grass peas, and peas. This set the stage for the pattern of village subsistence in the Deccan to this day.

But *again* for the fifth time, the Bānglā plains were left out. This Western Neolithic took root in Madhya Pradesh, but not in the Gangā-Bānglā plains because they were heavily forested and because the crops were more suitable for semi-arid regions.

To find something deeply influencing Bangladesh, we now turn to Southeast Asia. And the recent evidence from there is startling. It has long been suspected that Southeast Asia was a primary hearth for the domestication of plants. The most important crops botanically attributable to Southeast Asia are: rice, banana, two of the millets, several kinds of taro, yam, sugar cane, bread-fruit, coconut, sago palm, areca nut, betel leaf, certain gourds, certain legumes, pepper, ginger, cloves, nutmeg, and as for animals, the buffalo and may be the chicken.<sup>18</sup> The vast menu this

<sup>18</sup> "Symposium on the Origin and Distribution of Cultivated Plants in South Asia," *Indian Journal of Genetics and Plant Breeding* II (1), pp. 1-125 (1951); Kwang-Chih Chang,



provides spread from the Southeast Asian hilly flanks northward into China and westward into India.

And now we have dates for it. A site called Spirit Cave in northern Thailand near the Burma border is datable to over 12,000 B.C. and possibly earlier.<sup>19</sup> The crops were certain legumes, bottle gourd, a kind of cucumber, areca nut, and probably pepper (domesticated varieties have edible parts larger than in wild varieties). This startling data is now confirmed by two carbon-14 dates from Taiwan averaging 9000 B.C. for horticulture. And even in 10,000 B.C. in Taiwan there is evidence from pollen analysis that there was some small-scale clearing of the forest.<sup>20</sup> And cultivation in Japan is now dated to as early as 9000 B.C. Now, too, we have evidence that hill rice was grown in northern Thailand as early as 5000 B.C.,<sup>21</sup> which lays to rest the question of the origin of that crop.

But we should understand that this horticultural revolution did *not* lead to the settlement of large villages and development of complex culture as did the Neolithic Revolution in the Near East. This was "horticulture" in the sense that the main crops were roots, beans, and fruits, easily grown in the humid tropics. Still, pottery was invented early in Southeast Asia too, and it was made by beating the malleable pot with paddles wrapped with cords, hence it is called Cord-Marked Pottery. Polished stone tools came too, as we shall see, and they were distinctive. And textiles came too, but later. There was much emphasis on use of fibres as for fishing gear, nets, and baskets. This horticultural revolution diffused northward to the Yangtze Valley of China, where it took root and became the Lungshan Culture, well known as the first fully Neolithic way of life in China, in the 4th and especially in the 3rd millennium B.C., leading to a grade of cultural complexity we may call *civilization* by 1700 B.C. in North China. It set the stage for later Chinese expansion which drove Mongoloid peoples to the frontiers of Bangladesh.

This horticultural revolution diffused eastward across Burma, Assam, Bānglā, and into central India. Now at last there appeared a more

"Ancient Farmers in the Asian Tropics: Major Problems for Archaeological and Paleoenvironmental Investigations of Southeast Asia at the Earliest Neolithic Level," in A. Ghosh (1974), pp. 273-86.

<sup>19</sup> Chester Gorman, and also William Solheim, recent editions of *Asian Perspectives*, Hawaii.

<sup>20</sup> Chang, "Ancient Farmers in the Asian Tropics," in A. Ghosh, pp. 278-279; see also his bibliography for references on the origin of cultivated plants from Southeast Asia, particularly rice, taro, and banana.

<sup>21</sup> Chester Gorman, see the various articles on Spirit Cave in recent issues of *Asian Perspectives*, Hawai; R. S. Griffin, "Thailand's Ban Chiang," *Arts of Asia* 3, No. 6 (1973), Hong Kong.



efficient means of subsisting on the humid lands of eastern South Asia. At present there is no evidence this came into India before the 3rd and 2nd millennium B.C., but it must have come by then, for rice was adopted from 2000 B.C. as a crop by the Indus Civilization which had been transplanted to Gujarāt.<sup>22</sup> Most of the rest of the plants from Southeast Asia in the above list diffused to India in prehistoric times, though some of the spices came in historic times. By the time this culture diffused into India it had developed into several fully Neolithic regional cultures in Southeast Asia:<sup>23</sup> the Ban Kao in west-central Thailand, the Sa-Huynh in Viet Nam, and the Kalanay in the Philippines, had more elaborate and distinctive pottery, polished stone adzes and axes, burial jars, megalithic burial monuments, and even bronze by the latter 3rd millennium B.C.

What passed into eastern South Asia was *not* complex village culture, however, but simply the technology of the Southeast Asian horticultural revolution. It did *not* lead to formation of complex society in India. Yet, I believe that as regards South Asia the total contributions of the Southeast Asian Neolithic was as great as that of the Neolithic derived from the western side.

### Intrusion of the Southeast Asian Neolithic

What can we say about Bangladesh now? First, we should note that the evidence of this Neolithic culture all *around* the Bangla plains is quite abundant. Neolithic tools are ground or polished, in contrast with the chipped or flake tools of earlier "stone ages", because Neolithic people are more sedentary. Such tools around Assam and all over the Indo-Burmese hills are made of flat stone slabs from stream beds, which seems somewhat unique to this area. A. H. Dani has classified these tools into an elaborate typology.<sup>24</sup>

First, there is the type of stone adze with faceted sides having a ground convex cutting edge and gently tapering rectangular butt. The cutting edge is toward one side, which implies that these tools were inspired from Southeast Asia, for in India the stone adzes have

<sup>22</sup> S. R. Rao *et al.*, "Excavation at Rangpur and Other Explorations in Gujarāt," *Ancient India* 18-19, 1962-63, p. 172. At Rangpur rice was cultivated along with pearl millet, which seems not to be a crop of Southeast Asian origin.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Solheim, "Prehistory in Southeast Asia, in A. Ghosh (1974), p. 288; Per Sorensen, *Ban-Kao: Neolithic Settlements with Cemeteries in the Kanchanaburi Province, Archaeological Excavations in Thailand II* (1), Copenhagen, 1968.

<sup>24</sup> A. H. Dani, *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1960. see also G. C. Mohapatra, *The Stone Age Cultures of Orissa*, Pune, 1962; T. C. Sharma, "A Note on the Neolithic Pottery of Assam," *Man* 2, (1967), 126-28; also H. D. Sankalia who follows Dani's classification for the eastern Neolithic tools, with comments, pp. 225-245.



a median cutting edge. These faceted-side adzes are found over the Nāga and Gāro Hills, Kāchār, and Chittagong Hills, but not in the Assam Valley or the Bānglā plains, as far as I know.

Second, there is a distinctive stone hoe with sawn shoulders, a type of tool common in Burma, southwest China, and other parts of Southeast Asia. These are found in the Nāga and Khāsi Hills, and especially in Kāchār, but not in the Assam or Bānglā plains. But this tool type crossed over these plains and reached central India where it has been found in several sites, and as far west as Nāvḍāṭolī in Mahārāshṭra, where an excavation yielded one associated with Neolithic tools of western origin; the level is datable to 1800 B.C.<sup>25</sup> These sawn-shoulder hoes seem to be made from bronze prototypes in Southeast Asia (though the stone can be sawn with fiber and abrasives even without metal), and therefore this tool type did not enter India before the late 3rd millennium B.C.

Third, there is the rounded butt axe or adze, a type of polished tool found in Southeast Asia and in the Nāga and Gāro Hills, Kāchār and the eastern end of the Brahmaputra Valley. This type also crossed the Bānglā plain and in central India it evolved into the pointed butt polished axe found in a great number of Neolithic sites. It diffused to the southern extremity of Tamiḷ Nāḍu, probably with rice cultivation, and as far westward as Panjāb, where a few have been found. A fourth tool type is a sort of axe with broad cutting edge found in Kāchār and the Nāga and Gāro Hills. A fifth tool type is the splayed axe with narrow butt. This also was probably copied from a copper prototype and is found in Yunnan in southwest China datable to about 2500 B.C.<sup>26</sup> It is found in Kāchār and the Gāro Hills. A sixth type of tool is a tanged axe made of a small pebble with a small tapered butt, probably for hafting in bamboo for digging, found only in the Nāga Hills. A seventh type is a thin wedged blade, triangular with rounded butt, also found only in the Nāga Hills. These tools indicate that the Eastern Neolithic took root in this subcontinent only in the 3rd—2nd millennium B.C.

An excavation in Kāchār yielded the Cord-Marked Pottery (beaten when half-dry by cord-wrapped wooden beaters) such as evolved with the Neolithic in Southeast Asia; along with it were small shouldered adzes,

<sup>25</sup> This tool was a shouldered one with splayed or crescentic cutting edge, and it was found in the same stratum as flat celts having straight profiles and derived from the west. B. Subha Rao, "Studies in some Cultural Impacts at the Formative States of India's Culture," in *Studies in Asian History*, Proceedings of the Asian History Congress, 1961, Bombay, 1969.

<sup>26</sup> Sankalia (1963) p. 236. See also Mortimer Wheeler (1959).



and rounded ground adzes. Another site, Daojali Hading in the Gāro Hills, had ground and flaked unspecialized tools, of Southeast Asian inspiration.

As regards Bangladesh, we have noted that faceted Neolithic tools were found in the Chittagong Hills, and a Neolithic tool of some sort seems to have been found near Mymensingh.<sup>27</sup> In West Bengal stone axes were found with some ill-fired pottery below historic levels at the site of Tāmluk, and they persisted into the later Neolithic phase, as found at Paṇḍurājar Dhibi, Burdhwān District. Such polished tools, including some rectangular ones, were found with coarse gritty red pottery in Kuchai, Māyurbhanj District, Orissa, and other such Neolithic tools were found at Jaugad in Orissa, Sonpur in Bihār, and in many other places in the hills of east-central India.

This Southeast Asian Neolithic was the *first known culture phase to have diffused across the Bānglā plains* and become fully established on the other side. We can only guess about settlement in Bangladesh, but my guess is that since this was ecologically adaptive to Southeast Asian humid and heavily forested lands it could become established in these plains. Probably population was very light, with a settlement pattern of small scattered hamlets which shifted with the ever-moving slash-and-burn or *jhum* cultivation. Even now, all over upper Amazon, such small hamlets of shifting cultivators are found scattered throughout the rain forest; after the land is cleared and burned, crops are grown for two or so years, then the people move on to another place. They do not cultivate one place continually because tropical soils lose fertility after the forest cover is cut unless they are fertilized.

Such shifting cultivation techniques were ideal to early human adaptation to the humid forests of Southeast Asia and eastern India. Even now all the indigenous people of the Indo-Burma hills have cultures that evolved with a subsistence based on shifting cultivation. But here this did *not* lead to heavy population growth, large and complex villages, nor cities, as did the Neolithic Revolution of the Near East. I might add that the settlement pattern of small scattered hamlets has persisted in Bānglā from the 3rd millennium to the present.

### The Mundas and Aborigines of Bānglā

The people who created this Eastern Neolithic and brought it into India form the ethnic substratum of all of eastern South Asia. *They*

<sup>27</sup> Sankalia (map) We are not told the exact find spot of these tools, nor the type. See also *Pakistan Archaeology* No. 3 (1966), p.1



are the cause of most of the features distinguishing *Bāṅgālīs* from people of the upper Gangā plains, and also the features distinguishing East from West Bāṅglā. This point has been neglected in favor of popular mythical history venerating whatever came to Bāṅglā from the west, and fixation on "Āryans."

The Muṇḍa languages are spoken by some 10 million tribal people in east-central India. In order of numerical strength the tribes are : Santāl, Muṇḍārī, Ho, Kherwārī, Khāsī (not in central India but in Meghālaya), Savara, Korku, "other Muṇḍa," Khārīā, Karmālī, Kol, Gaḍaba, Bhūmij, Mahili, Korwā, and Juāṅg. The Khāsīs, east of the Bāṅglā plain, form a tenuous link between the Muṇḍa family of languages and the rest of the Mon-Khmēr Phylum of languages in Southeast Asia. The latter include Mon of southern Burma which prevailed widely there before the intrusion of Burmese, Khmēr in Cambodia, Nicobarese, and the substratum of VietNameese. These languages originated with the horticultural revolution in the hilly flanks of Southeast Asia and spread east and west, meanwhile pushing Malay speech southward to the islands. But the Mon-Khmēr languages themselves were pushed southward and fragmented by the appearance of the Thai, Lao, Shan, and Burmese languages from South China, which in turn were propelled by the expansion of Chinese Han people and their civilization.

The Muṇḍas with their horticulture were the first people in a technological position to occupy these humid plains, and they crossed them, taking to central India their languages, crops, Neolithic tools, and cultures, of which evidence will be presented below. Such languages also occupied the middle Gangā plains, for there is evidence of Muṇḍa linguistic influence in the Tibetan-like languages all along the Himālayan foothills in the languages in which pronouns are added to other parts of speech : these include Metś (Mecch) of northern Bāṅglā, Limbū of Nepal, and even languages in the Himālayan part of Uttar Pradesh, as shown by Grierson.<sup>28</sup> In India intrusive Indo-Āryans drove a wedge between Muṇḍa and Khāsī, while in Southeast Asia in medieval centuries Burmese, Shan, and Thai drove wedges separating the Mon and Khmēr languages.

These Muṇḍa languages may have had precedence over Dravidian languages in central India, and I have shown elsewhere why I think Dravidian speech diffused through most of South India only in the Iron Age, after 1000 A.D. having been pushed from western India

<sup>28</sup> George Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903), 11 vols., reprint Delhi, 1968. This, of course, was the bench-mark work on classification of South Asian languages.



during and after the Indus Civilization.<sup>29</sup> Some of the pre-existing hunting peoples of earlier racial type picked up these languages, probably forming the South Muṇḍa group; the North Muṇḍa group, which presumably came later, has Muṇḍārī, Ho, and Korwā, according to a recent classification of Muṇḍa speech.<sup>30</sup> While Khāsī and Savara (Saora) lack retroflex consonants the other Muṇḍa languages picked them up in central India. But that may not have come from Dravidian, for the Orāons assert that they arrived in Central India rather lately. Rather, Muṇḍa, Dravidian, and Indo-Āryan all probably picked up retroflex consonants from the earlier, now lost, speech of the advanced hunters of central and western India, I would think. There are structural similarities between Muṇḍa and Dravidian, even in kinship terms, and I think the former had precedence.

The Eastern Neolithic thus diffused throughout central and Peninsular India, and evidence for this is the wide distribution of the pointed butt polished stone axe, a type which originated in Southeast Asia but developed anew in central and peninsular India.<sup>31</sup> Even the ubiquitous South Indian pot burials of the Iron Age may have antecedents in jar burials of Southeast Asia (as in the Plain of Jars in Laos), and I have seen Cord-Marked Pottery similar to the Southeast Asian Neolithic ware in parts of South India. A book needs to be written about this eastern influence into India; I will mention a few particulars regarding Bangladesh below.

### Preconditions to the Peasantization of Bangladesh

Under inspiration of the Western Neolithic, an agricultural way of life developed on the upper and middle Gangā plains in the mid-2nd millennium B.C. Its archeological marker is the Ocher Colored Ware, a crude pottery found over Uttar Pradesh, southern Bihār, Madhya Pradesh, and into Orissa. Associated are copper tools, often in hoards (37 such hoards have been found so far; it may be suggested they were buried with the dead). No Ocher-Colored ware is found in the Bihār plains nor in the Bānglā plains. But the associated types of copper tools have been found on the fringes of the Bānglā plain, in West Bengal.<sup>32</sup> As for Bangladesh, as far as we know it still remained

<sup>29</sup> Clarence Maloney, "Archeology in South India: Accomplishments and Prospects." *Essays on South India*, (ed.) Burton Stein, Hawaii, 1976.

<sup>30</sup> Norman Zide, "Munda and Non-Munda Austroasiatic Languages". *Current Trends in Linguistics*, vol. 5 *Linguistics in South Asia* (ed.). Thomas Sebeok, The Hague, 1969, p. 412.

<sup>31</sup> Wheeler (1950).

<sup>32</sup> See B. and R. Allchin (1958), pp. 200-04. A copper hoard was found at Tajampur, West Bengal. For earlier reviews of this culture phase see Wheeler (1950) and also "Further Copper Hoards from the Gangetic Basin and a Review of the Problem."



unaffected by this Neolithic, another major prehistoric phase ( seven have been given here) of culture influence from the west that failed to penetrate it, and never reached the Indo-Burma hills.

The next culture in North India is that of Painted Gray Ware, which diffused to Gujarāt and also down the Gangā: it had iron and rice and may be dated from 1000 B.C., the beginning of the epic period. Here was a culture that at last learned to efficiently utilize the fertile Gangā plains, so that cities and empires ( true civilization ) arose, seen in such archeological sites as Hastināpura, Kausāmbī, and Ahichhatra.<sup>33</sup> But not a shred of Painted Gray ware has been found in Bāṅglā, which was more of an ecological challenge than the Gangā plains and still remained undersirable. This was another major phase of prehistoric ecological adaptation, as I have traced it, that failed to adapt to the environment of Bangladesh. Of course, there might be unknown evidence buried here, but it is clear that none of these seven crossed Bangladesh and become fully established on the other side; only the Southeast Asian Neolithic did.

A full Neolithic culture did get established in West Bengal, which came from the west. The evidence is from two sites. Paṇḍurājar Dhibi, Burdhwān District, has two pre-iron periods; the Neolithic has a carbon-14 date of  $1012 \pm 120$  B.C.<sup>34</sup> There was Black and Red Ware, some painted white, and also a black-on-red ware. The Black and Red Ware is a famous ware traceable through central India to Rājasthān and Gujarāt from 2000 B.C. It diffused to all South India where it characterized the Iron Age. The bowls and dishes at Paṇḍurājar Dhibi have open channel-spouts resembling some found at Sonpur, Gāyā District, Bihār, ultimately from Rājasthān. There were also copper fish hooks, stone blades, and ground axes, but no iron yet. An upper stratum yielded terra-cotta plaques and animal figurines and is datable to a later phase of village life.

The other site is Mahiḍāl, Birbhūm District, which has the same two-period sequence. The lowest level has three carbon-14 dates from

*Ancient India* 7 ( 1958 ), 20—39. For a review of this culture phase in central India, see K. D. Bajpai, "New Light on the Early History of Central India", *Nalini Kanta Bhattacharya Commemorative volume*, ed. A. B. M. Habibullah, Dacca, 1966, pp. 66—73.

<sup>33</sup> The type site for this is Hastināpura, a site of the *Mahābhārata* epic. The lowest levels had rolled fragments of the Ochre-Colored ware. Above that was the painted Gray Ware, burned Brick fragments, iron slag, stone weights, glass bangles, charred rice bones of horse, pig, cattle, and terra-cotta animal figurines. The next year, 6th-3rd century B. C. had Northern Black Pottery, houses of large bricks, ring-wells, punch-marked coins, an iron arrow head, and chisel. B. B. Lal, "Excavations at Hastināpura and other Explorations in the Upper Ganga and Sutlej Basins 1950-52," *Ancient India* 10-11 ( 1954-55 ), pp. 5-151.

<sup>34</sup> B. B. Lal. "A Picture Emerges : An Assessment of the Carbon-14 Datings of the Protohistoric Cultures of the India-Pakistan Subcontinent." *Ancient India* 18-19 ( 1962—63 ), p. 221.



1380 to 855 B.C. The same Black and Red Ware with channel-spouts was found, copper celts, stone blades, and charred rice. There is evidence of simple huts of plastered reeds. A second level had iron and iron-slag, and has been given a date of 690 A.D. Iron is the key factor here.

Two phases of the Neolithic from the west then, nibbled at the Bānglā plain in West Bengal, but the rest of the forested alluvium of Bangladesh was too much for them. We have seen, though, that Bangladesh meanwhile would have been at least lightly occupied by the horticultural tradition from Southeast Asia, which was better adapted to it. The infusion of masses of people had not yet begun.

Real peasantization of Bānglā began only about 700 B. C., and man quickly came to master this distinctive environment efficiently. For this, four prerequisites had to come together here: iron, oxen, the plow, and wetland rice. Once these four came together this remarkably productive land could be utilized, and it became settled fairly quickly. Let us consider these four factors.

Iron appeared in Northwestern India about 1000 B.C. and as far south as Kārṇāṭaka at the same time.<sup>35</sup> Iron diffused down the Gangā and reached Bānglā by the 7th century B. C. The evidence is the date of 690 B. C. at Mahiṣḍāl Level II where iron slag shows that the metal could be worked in Bānglā. Having iron axes made it possible to tackle these vast forests and subject the land. (Stone and copper axes are not good enough, and there was no bronze period).

Rice would have been grown around eastern India from the late 3rd millennium B. C. at least, but it was dry rice or hill rice. Puddled rice enabled a growing population to live in the Gangā plains after 1000 B. C. and it diffused to the tip of South India by about 700 B. C. It was this crop that enabled peasantization of Bānglā, not the wheat, barley, and millets used farther west.

The plow made full peasant life possible, having diffused from the Near East, along with the ox cart. It is a labor-saving device which enables more efficient production than the hoe cultivation of the Muṇḍas, so that a surplus can be produced and towns can grow. And the oxen, which drew the plow and the cart and ate rice straw, returned their dung to the land to re-fertilize it.

<sup>35</sup> The earlier data on iron in India has all been gathered in N. R. Banerjee, *The Iron Age in India*, Delhi; 1965. See also B. and R. Allchin. 1968, p. 193. But an idea recently put forth is that iron technology might not be imported into India; it might have evolved in western India, or at least been brought in very early by itinerant smiths. See Dilip Chakrabarti, "Beginning of Iron in India: Problem Reconsidered" in A Ghose (1964), pp. 345-56. Itinerants such as the Raberi, still set up camp and do local iron work in Madhya Pradesh.



This is a perfect symbiosis, and it accounts for the population growth that led to the rise of the classical Indian civilization in the middle Gangā, so that the political focus of North India moved from Panjāb to Kosāmbī in Uttar Pradesh, then to Magadha in Bihār, where it remained from the 6th century B. C. to medieval times.

This symbiosis of peasant village society, oxen, plow, and wet rice, with iron, accounts for the progressive peasantization of Bānglā from 700 B. C. to 700 A. D. The horticultural Muṇḍas were so much less efficient that they were absorbed or pushed into the hills east and west of Bānglā as we shall note. The importance of puddled rice is that the land retains fertility while producing abundantly which may be seen if we compare India with the Congo basin, which is only somewhat smaller than India. Congo people traditionally had iron, but no plow, no oxen, and no wet-land crop. Their population is now 18 million, 1/36th that of India, though the land is similar. Again, the Amazon basin is larger than all South Asia. But it has only scattered hamlets of horticulturalists, and is only now being invaded by full peasant (Portuguese) society.

### The Peopling of Bangladesh

The peasantization of these plains, which began 700 to 500 B.C., allowed for the settlement of people from the Gangā plains, who were already a mixture of Indo-Āryan and Muṇḍa speaking peoples who had earlier assimilated aboriginal hunters probably of the three racial types described above. In Bānglā the aboriginal Muṇḍas were also assimilated; I shall give below evidence that such people were here, at least scattered, before they were absorbed by Indo-Āryan speaking peoples.

Cross-cultural analysis shows that peasant cultures generally are only part-cultures, for they quickly lead to concentration of population in towns, and that makes what we call civilization. That happened in north and west Bānglā fairly quickly, the literary evidence for which has been collected by historians such as R. C. Majumdar.<sup>36</sup> By Mauryan times peasant-urban culture had become well established as far as the Karatoya River, which then drained the Brahmaputra. Shahanara Hussain supports the suggestion that even now the Karatoya forms something of an ethnic frontier, and it is an ancient holy river;<sup>37</sup> on its west bank was the city of Puṇḍravardhanā. And to the north the ethnic frontier was the old channel of the Kosī, beyond which were the Kīrāṭas and Kots.

<sup>36</sup> R. C. Majumdar, "The Early History of Bengal," *Dacca University Bulletin* No. 3, 1925 also R. C. Majumdar (ed.) *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I: *The Hindu Period*, Dacca, 1945.

<sup>37</sup> Shahanara Hussain, *Everyday Life in the Pala Empire*, Dacca 1968, pp. 9-15.



Archeological evidence suggests that within these boundaries western Bāṅlā was fairly well settled in Mauryan times, for Northern Black Pottery is found in 8 sites. This pottery, datable 500 to 200 B. C., spread in the Mauryan period as a luxury trade item over much of India (even to the extreme south of Tamiḷ Nāḍu, according to evidence in a recent excavation).<sup>38</sup> It diffused eastward to Vaiśālī and Rājgir in Bihār, and is found at the vast Mauryan fort excavated by B. B. Lal at Śiśupālgarh on the Orissa plain.<sup>39</sup> In Bāṅlā it is found at:

- Chandraketugarh in 24 Parganas
- Tamlūk in Midnapūr District
- Tildā in Midnapūr District
- Bangar in Māldā District
- Gaur in Māldā District
- Mahāsthān in Bogrā District
- Khadar Pather Mound in Dinājpur District
- Śitākoṭ in Dinājpur District

Tamlūk on an important ancient Gangā distributary was the primate port of eastern India, according to early Buddhist literature; excavation there has yielded varied pre-Mauryan, Mauryan, and śuṅga materials. As in other parts of Bāṅlā, the absence of stone encouraged creativity in clay items, particularly terra-cotta plaques.<sup>40</sup>

In Bangladesh the site of Śitākoṭ, 2 miles northwest of Nawābganj was excavated in 1968. There were 7 levels in 4 occupational periods, and the excavators dug down 10 feet but did not go to virgin soil. Northern Black Pottery was found inside a monastery cell.<sup>41</sup> The monastery was 215 feet square, which suggests that Buddhism was well established on the western edge of Bangladesh in the Mauryan period.

<sup>38</sup> Maloney (1976): this pottery diffused to the Deccan overland, but probably reached Korkai on the coast of Tamiḷ Nāḍu by sea.

<sup>39</sup> B. B. Lal, "Śiśupālgarh 1948: An Early Historical Fort in Eastern India," *Ancient India* 5 (1949), pp. 62-105. The fort had walls 3/4 mile long on each side, and is located only three miles from the Asokan rock edict in the Dauli Hills.

<sup>40</sup> Y. D. Sharma, "Exploration of Historical Sites," *Ancient India* 9 (1953), pp. 116-169. Regarding Bāṅlā, he says, "the few illustrations that have appeared in different publications make it abundantly clear that only a very limited range of North Indian types has analogues in material from Bengal...In the absence of stone the craftsmen of Bengal had to fall back on clay, their terra-cotta plaques revealing a unique continuity of development and unsurpassed skill from the seventh to the eighteenth century." Since then, terra-cottas have been found in earlier sites such as Paṇḍurājar Dhibi, Chandraketugarh, and Tamluk. On Bāṅgār, see, Kunja Gobinda Goswami, *Excavation at Bangarh*, Calcutta, 1948; the excavation was done 1937-41.

<sup>41</sup> The evidence from this site is summarized in the context of Bangladesh prehistory by M. A. Ghafur, "Archaeological Research in Bangladesh *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* XVII, No. 1 (1972), p. 21. Ghafur has summarized a number of archeological reports on protohistoric and early historic sites in the country and to my knowledge it is the only such attempt in print,



The only other excavation of early historic times in Bangladesh has been at Mahāsthān and the nearby mound of Khadar Pather near Bogrā, excavated by the Pakistan Department of Archeology, 1960-61 and 1964-66.<sup>42</sup> At this site, virgin soil was encountered only after digging down 25 feet and through 17 habitation layers. In the earliest layers were pieces of Northern Black Pottery and many punchmarked silver coins. These coins are also probably of Mauryan origin, though such coins were in circulation before and after that period, and found all over India; they are flat rectangular coins with punched symbols. Also at Mahāsthān in early layers were fractional burials (of bones taken up after exposure or cremation) in jars, which I believe *suggests a synthesis of earlier culture with that of these Indic peasants*. There were no structures from the Mauryan period.

This site also yielded an inscription in Brāhmī script like that of Aśoka edicts, relating to the posting of a governor at Puṇḍra and the welfare of the people in a famine. If there was a famine on these fertile plains in the Mauryan period we may conclude (supported by the finding of Northern Black Pottery at 8 sites) that the Indic peasants very quickly increased in number and fanned out over western Bānglā, subjecting the land to the plow; for 2300 years famine has been a means of keeping population growth in balance with the ecosystem.

In West Bengal influences from the rest of India continued to get established, and the archeological records at Tamlūk, Bāngar, and Chandrakeṭugaṛ show continuous development from before the historic period to medieval centuries. A ware that appeared probably around the time of Christ was Rouletted Ware, found in profuse quantities in Tamlūk.<sup>43</sup> This ware in South India has been shown to have been inspired by Roman trade contact, but recent opinion is that it may be an earlier Indian style.

But this Indic peasant-urban culture did not extend across Bangladesh to the natural boundaries of the Bānglā plain for several more centuries. The rainfall in eastern Bānglā is double what it is on the western side, and there is danger of yearly flooding. Even with iron axes and puddled rice cultivation eastern Bānglā would have been difficult to settle and utilize. And of course the southern delta has remained a frontier up to this century.

But by the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. full peasant-urban culture arose on the eastern edge of the Bānglā plain, as Indic peasants extended

<sup>42</sup> Nazimuddin Ahmed, Mahasthan, Department of Archaeology, Karāchī, 1964 also *Pakistan Archaeology* 3 1966, p. 2 : *Pakistan Archaeology* 5, 1968, pp. 101-15 has a summary of the findings.

<sup>43</sup> B. B. Lal, *Indian Archaeology Since Independence*, Vārāṇasī, 1964, p. 32 ; B. and R. Allchin (1968), p. 174.



themselves over the terrain and absorbed the Muṇḍas. The ethnic frontier and the contour of the foothills coincide remarkably well. East of that frontier plow-cultivation of wet rice did not become established except in the lowlands as in Burma, and milking never did extend farther eastward.

Mention must be made of two noteworthy historical sites of medieval Buddhist culture excavated in Bangladesh: Pāhārpūr<sup>44</sup> and Maināmatī.<sup>45</sup> These impressive temples are prototypes of later temples built in Jāva and other parts of Southeast Asia. The Khadgas, Devas, Chandas, Pālas, Senas, and other empires pulsed and declined over the Bāṅglā plain, and the cultures within the natural frontiers began to get consolidated into Bengali culture. On the southeast corner, however, there was continual struggle between Bengali and Burmese expansionism. M. A. Ghafur has found some suggestive archeological evidence, a stūpa and a monastery, at Rāmkoṭ Banasrām near Rāmu north of Cox's Bazar.<sup>46</sup>

The rest may be left to historians. I wish to add a postscript, however. There is an idea popular here that the Sinhālas of Śrī Lankā came from Bāṅglā in pre-Mauryan times. Without giving the evidence here I wish to simply say that my own extensive research into early seafaring around South India and Śrī Lankā, and the conclusions of most scholars of the issue, refute this claim.<sup>47</sup> The Vijaya myth represents something coming from northwestern India to Śrī Lankā, but after conversion to Buddhism the Sinhālas adapted this myth to the setting of eastern India. This does not deny some influence of Bāṅglā on Śrī Lankā and other littoral areas during the period of Buddhist expansionism and subsequent commercial intercourse.

### Racial Composition of Bāṅgalis

We come now to the questions asked of anthropology by common people, out of curiosity about themselves, their origins, and their ethnic affinities.

<sup>44</sup> K. N. Dickshit, *Excavations at Paharpur*, Bengal, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No. 55, 1936; Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Report* 1925-26 pp. 107-13 (based on exploratory excavation only); Y. D. Sharma (1953), pp. 155-57 the latter mentions the finding of 3000 terra-cotta plaques, and the finding of 63 niches for stone images of Brāhmaṇical deities in the basement and mixing of Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical deities in the upper terraces of the structure. The temple itself was a massive cruciform brick structure 100 feet high, dated c. 800 A. D., though there is a copper plate dated 479 A.D.

<sup>45</sup> Three sites were excavated: See *Pakistan Archaeology* 5 (1968), pp. 161-75 also comments by Ghafur (1972), p. 23. A number of other possibly important Buddhist sites in Bangladesh are listed in *Pakistan Archaeology* 1, 1964, p. 3

<sup>46</sup> Ghafur (1972), pp. 24-26.

<sup>47</sup> Maloney (1976); also Clarence Maloney, "The Beginnings of Civilization in South India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 No. 3, 1970; see also H. C. Ray (ed.) *History of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Part 1. Colombo, 1959 pp. 89-111.



First, the air must be cleared of the utter nonsense heard even around this university regarding "Dravidians" in Bāṅlā. *The word Dravidian may be used with precision only as a language group and it has nothing to do with race.* Any student of mine who refers to Dravidians as an aboriginal race will get an "F" in my course! The Dravidian languages spread through India from the west and the people speaking them were, if anything, Mediterranean in race. After the Indus Civilization these languages diffused to central and southern India. I have shown elsewhere that Dravidian languages spread through much of South India probably only during the Iron Age in the first millennium B. C. Gujarātīs spoke Dravidian languages until maybe 800 B. C. when Indo-Āryan displaced them, so the issue as to whether they are "Āryans" or "Dravidians" makes no sense at all. And even as regards language, there is no direct Dravidian influence in Bengali, which I shall discuss presently.

This confusion is due to two factors. First, there is an ancient prejudice in the North Indian plains about central Indian peoples, mostly tribal, which is thereby extended to peninsular India too. Second, Herbert Risley in his work on peoples of India in 1915 used names of languages to classify the people of the subcontinent according to anthropometric measurement.<sup>48</sup> He cited copious measurements of cephalic index, nasal index, and height, which are valuable today. *But I cannot emphasize strongly enough that we must totally reject the nomenclature of Dravidians, Turks, Āryans, Scythians, and Turanians for racial or sub-racial categories.* Race is measurable human variation, and inherited; language is learned, and cultural.

Now, Bāṅlā has the distinction of having more sets of anthropometric data than any other part of South Asia: thousands of heads and noses have been measured with calipers, sitting height taken, blood samples analyzed, and such. Apart from Herbert Risley, we have the extensive works of B. S. Guha, D. N. Majumdar, C. Radhakrishna Rao, A. K. Mitra, and D. K. Sen.<sup>49</sup> D. N. Majumdar made his measurements of Bāṅlāīs just before partition so his data applies to Bangladesh too.

<sup>48</sup> Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (1915), Delhi, 1969. His discussion of anthropometry and physical types is pp. 1—58. People are sometimes unaware of the other content of his book, on caste, proverbs, and other subjects, but he has been damned for his use of linguistic categories for racial types, which somehow got stuck in the popular mind.

<sup>49</sup> B. S. Guha, *Census of India, 1931 I, Part III* (a synthesis of anthropomorphic data); D. N. Majumdar, *Races and Cultures of India*, Bombay, 1961, pp. 24—120; D. N. Majumdar and C. Radhakrishna Rao, *Race Elements in Bengal: A Quantitative Survey*, Bombay, 1960; A. K. Mitra, "Racial Stratification in the Caste Hierarchy of Bengal," *The Anthropologist* XI, 1964; D. K. Sen, "The Racial Composition of Bengalis," in T. N. Madan and Gopala Sarana (eds.) *Indian Anthropology* Bombay, 1962; D. K. Sen,



What can we learn from a summary of this data ? First, I have already referred to three racial categories of advanced hunters in Asian tropics: Negrito, proto-Australoid, and the quasi-Negroid, as I see it.<sup>50</sup> These are all submerged in the populations of India, and of Bānglā too, and mixed with Mediterranean and other Caucasoid, and some Mongoloid.

Earlier researchers emphasized cranial index (ratio of breadth to length) and tried to explain why Bāngālīs have less long heads, with tendency to flattened occipit, in contrast with people of the North Indian plains. Some traced it to "Alpine" or "Armenoid" immigration from the west which is said to have arrived with the first wave of Indo-Āryan speech; later Indo-Āryan speakers who arrived had longer heads, and some of them became the higher Hindu castes of West Bengal. But Risley and other researchers thought the roundheadedness of Bāngālīs was due to Mongoloid admixture. Indeed, the Chākmās have very broad heads. But then Guha threw out this idea saying the Nāgas and some other Assam tribes who are Mongoloid have long heads, and Majumdar concurred. Hutton<sup>51</sup> pointed out long ago that Negrito or maybe Australoid traits were submerged in the Nāga population, with some tendency to tightly curled ( but not frizzly ) hair. We do have to agree that among the various hill peoples to the east of Bānglā there is a fusion of proto-Australoid and Mongoloid traits. Certainly there is some submerged Mongoloid element in the Bānglā population, for it is found more pronounced in some of the Muṇḍa-speaking tribes of central India; some essentially Mongoloid traits, such as the blue spot in babies, are found frequently enough even in peninsular India.

The discussion of head shape later gave way to the study of blood types. Bāngālīs are quite homogeneous in blood type. The noteworthy point is that 40% or even 50% of people in some areas have B blood. It is also high in the Gangā plains, especially among the Camārs and Doms. and it is high among the proto-Australoid small tribes of the South Indian hills. But Nāgas, Lushais, and other peoples of the Indo-Burma hills have very low B and more A blood. B is higher in China than in Europe, but highest in eastern South Asia. In Bānglā the bulk of the Muslims and also the lower

"Racial Studies in India : Recent Trends," *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*, II, No.1, 1967

<sup>50</sup> There is bias in some of these works against the idea that Negroid-like peoples lived or live in parts of India. However, if the Melanesians are classifiable as Negroid in which most anthropologists agree, the term may also be justifiably applied to describe certain features found among some groups in India.

<sup>51</sup> In addition to his survey of race in the *Census of India, 1931*, Hutton has more to say on the subject in his *Caste in India* (1946), 4th ed., Oxford, 1969.



Hindu castes such as Māhisyās, Rājbañsis, and Pods have equally high B, about 40%. This suggests that the earlier horticultural Muṇḍa populations of the Bāṅglā plain had considerable B blood (or else it is an adaptive mechanism that developed among the agricultural populations of this plain).

Ability to taste the chemical PTC is remarkably high among some Central Indian tribes ( 54% among Parojas of Orissa ). This trait is also high, as much as 40%, among Bāṅgālī Muslims and Rājbañsis, which further suggests that the bulk of the peasant population is of partly pre-Muṇḍa tribal origin.

Several studies show correlation of measurements with rank or caste in Bāṅglā.<sup>52</sup> As regards stature and forehead breadth, tribal groups cluster, and not far from them is a cluster of lower castes such as Namaśūdras, Bāgdīs, and Telīs, while the three high caste Hindu groups also form a separate and distinct cluster. D. N. Majumdar found that sitting height correlates well with caste in Bāṅglā. The Santāl, Māhāto, Goālā, and Mājhi have sitting height of 79.0–81.3 cm. while Muslims and Namaśūdra Hindus have only a slightly higher average sitting height. At the other end of the scale are the high caste Hindus: Baidyā, Baiśyā, Kāyastha, Brāhmaṇ, and those styled Kshatriyas, in that order. This lends support to the above suggestions that most Muslims in East Bāṅglā are more related in origin to the Namaśūdras, and that genealogies tracing Arab descent are mostly fanciful (whereas the Muslims of western India tend to show some evidence of their claims to descent from immigrant groups from the west ).

Regarding cephalic index, Muslims of Khulnā, Dinājpur, and Rangpur are low (longerheaded), the only lower figures being for Māhāto and Mājhi tribes. Other Bāṅglā districts have Muslims with broader heads, increasingly in this order: Barisal, Mednipur, Burdhwān, Nadiyā, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Tripurā, and Dacca. The cephalic index in these last two areas clusters with high-caste Hindu Kāyasthas, Baiśyās, and Brāhmaṇs. Maybe the Dacca Muslims show more broadheaded immigrant influence, and the Tripurā Muslims more Mongoloid influence. But the mean for Muslims clusters with the middling-low Hindu castes such as Kaibartā, Śankāri, and Telī, which suggests what groups they were originally converted from.

Regarding nasal index (length to breadth), the broadest noses are found in Gāro, Mājhi, Santāl, and Māhāto groups, in that order, then come Mednipur Muslims and to some extent Khulnā Muslims. Then

<sup>52</sup> Clarence Maloney. *Peoples of South Asia*, New York. 1971 ; I have summarized some of this data on Bāṅgālīs, pp. 52-56.



come Goālā, Murshidābād Muslims, Māhishyās, Rājbaṅsis, the Muslims of Rangpūr, Dinājpur, and Māldā, then Namaśūdras, and then a cluster of higher caste Hindus and some other Muslims. The Muslims of Bariśāl, Nadiyā, and Tripurā have the narrowest noses. This data suggests that Muslim conversion was from diverse groups, and that those of Mednīpur and Khulnā have some submerged elements like the Gāros.

Skin color data are available for West Bengal only. On a scale ranging from 10 (very fair) to 26 (dark brown) and more, the Rādhiy Brāhmaṇs cluster in the highest bracket, at 14. Rādhiyā Kāyasthas are at 15, and Pods of the 24 Parganas cluster from 15 to 27, Namaśūdras are the darkest, but also have a wider range. Tribals mostly have rather narrow ranges of pigmentation. Riāngs of Tripurā range from 17 to 23 and Orāons and Muṇḍas cluster at 28, fairly dark. There are no surprises here. Majumdar and Rao conclude that "anthropometric findings do support the scheme of social precedence"<sup>53</sup> despite whatever claims may be advanced against such sorts of study.

Such work has fallen into disfavor these days, both because it is linked with racial prejudice, and because earlier conclusions about race based on a single trait such as head shape were quite misleading. Nevertheless, when large samples are taken clusterings of traits can be seen.

### Ethnic Substrata of Bangladesh

Putting together this data from archeology and physical anthropology, and adding some from ethnology and linguistics, I think we can trace the sequence of building up the population of Bangladesh. The following ethnic elements may be identified in turn: Negrito, advanced hunting tribes, Muṇḍa-speaking horticulturalists from Southeast Asia, the Boḍo groups, the Kuki-chin groups, early cultivators from the Gangā, later arrivals from the Gangā, and some coastal intrusions. The ethnological information collected over a century by British officers is most useful, and special mention is to be made of Edward Dalton,<sup>54</sup> whose *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* dealing with the tribes on both the Assam and Central India sides, was based on many years of direct experience. Of these major ethnic groups, I have little to say about the possible Negrito substratum. We can only assume that the Juāng, Bhūiher, and Kisān tribes, who are pigmy in stature, represent such an element which was picked up by the major peasant populations throughout South and Southeast Asia. Dalton

<sup>53</sup> Majumdar and Rao (1960), p. 101.

<sup>54</sup> Edward T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), recently republished under the title *Tribal History of Eastern India*, Delhi, 1973.



found the Bhūiher most aboriginal-looking among all these tribes,<sup>55</sup> they reminded him of the Andamanese, who are a sort of Negrito people. Bhūiher and Juāng men are under five feet, which means they are classifiable as pygmies.

I think we can isolate a number of tribes living now who are remnants of the early Niṣāda or Kirāntī peoples ( Pre-Dravidan, Pre-Muṇḍa, and Pre-Āryan, these being linguistic categories ) whose languages have now been lost. I would suggest the following tribes : Bhūiher, Juāng, Birhor, Bhūiya, Boyār, Kharwār, Korwār, Kaur, Savara, Santāl, Orāon, Kotś, the miniscule South Indian hill tribes such as Cencu and Kādār, and Vāddā of Śrī Lankā. The latter three represent the Proto-Australoids best, and the first two the Negrito. Dalton observed that several of these tribes had somewhat Negroid features and were dark; the Hill Bhūiya especially, he said, have a tendency to frizzly hair, large mouth, and everted lips. He was right in asserting that these tribes were different from the Ho and Muṇḍāri tribes who look more Southeast Asian and have cultural features which they brought along with their horticulture from the Indo-Burma hills across Bānglā.

All these tribes have lively traditions of hunting ( the Boyār still have hunting dance rituals, and the Santāls till recently cherished their bows and arrows ), but they yielded to the Neolithic and to the three major language groups. These hunters may have occupied part of the middle Gangā plain. The Kharwār were probably the Kirāntī, said in ancient literature to be "black as crows," and perhaps became a substratum in the foothill populations north of the Gangā plain. Moreover, some of them, especially the Santāls and Birhor, have funeral ceremonies like those of Brāhmaṇism, which might have given rise to Brāhmaṇical rituals on the Gangā plain. Dalton makes an ingenious suggestion that the Mahābhārata war was fought between intruders and indigenous people, the latter being the Kurus or Kauravas, may be related to the Kaur, Korwār, or Khariā tribes; Kuru allies in the war occupied most of the Gangā heartland.

I also think it was these people who contributed the series of retroflex consonants picked up by the Muṇḍa languages ( Khāsī lacks

<sup>55</sup> Dalton describes these peoples more frankly than is permissible today. "The Buihers are about the lowest type of human beings that I have come across in my wanderings, and I have had more opportunities than most people of seeing varieties of race. They are very dark (41, about the average), faces, or rather heads, altogether round as bullets, projecting jaws, scarcely any prominence of nose, pig's eyes, large bodies, and small limbs, no muscular development, very short of stature, not one of them more than five feet....." His further remarks about their culture are inappropriate in a discussion of race (p. 133). Despite Dalton's descriptive flourishes of this sort, his insights into cultural affinities of tribal people are worth noting.



them, as does Savara ), and also picked up by Indo-Āryan before it reached Bāṅlā, and perhaps picked up before that by Dravidian languages. The Ocher-Colored ware culture found in the Doāb and central India was probably a Neolithic culture these people picked up. If so, the presence of the copper tool hoards on the western Bāṅlā Plain would suggest that they settled there too.

The peasant population of Bangladesh on the Western side of the country absorbed some of these pre-Muṇḍa tribes. I think we can distinguish at least three of them. The Bhūiyas, whom Dalton described as swarthy and black ( 41 on the scale ) and having "coarse Negro-like features" numbered as many as  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million a century ago,<sup>56</sup> and must have contributed a substantial proportion of the present gene pool. They were all along the South-Western frontier of Bāṅlā and in the hills westward. A branch of them was in northern and eastern Bāṅlā, especially around Dinājpur. They generally performed common labor, though some assumed titles such as Kṣatriya, Khandait, or Śūdra. They had 12 chiefs, it is said, who ruled Dinājpur, and some also seem to have ruled in Assam. These people never spoke Muṇḍa languages, but were earlier aboriginals who picked up Bengali or Magadhan speech, and those in Choṭa Nāgpur were subjected by the Muṇḍa-speaking Ho tribe. This all tends to support the archeological evidence of a Neolithic culture in western Bāṅlā whose people were absorbed in the later peasant culture.

Another large tribe, the Kotś ( Kocch ), numbered as many as  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million in Cooch Bihar a century ago, where they formerly ruled. They were also in Rangpur District and western Assam. Dalton described them as "the most eastern of the dark primitive races" who had receding chins, and they must have been horticulturalists, for they have matrilineal traditions. This large tribe became peasantized as the Rājbañśis of Bāṅlā and Assam, as earlier ethnographers agree. In Rangpur many of the Rājbañśis became Muslims. This general pattern is supported by the anthropometric data given above.

The third tribe we mention is the Santāls, who number  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million in India today and are scattered over Bangladesh. Most of them here now came to these plains during the British period, but long ago Santāl-like people were absorbed into the Bāṅgālī population, for their home seems to have originally been in the Damodar Valley area, before some moved to the Santāl Parganas and fanned out over the plains in British times. While Santāls now speak a Muṇḍa language they were probably aboriginal hunters and horticulturalists who picked up Muṇḍa speech. They do not

<sup>56</sup>Dalton (1872), pp. 139-48



have youth dormitories, nor weaving in tradition, their music is indigenously Indian, and their religion is essentially worship of a grove, a remnant of the ancient forest. They might have lived on the plains of southern West Bengal too, for in their tradition they know of the ocean, and put the remains of their dead in the Damodār to go to the ocean. The Santlās thus seem to be those aborigines of Western Bāṅglā who became acculturated by Ho and Muṇḍārī peoples rather than by Bāṅgālīs.

The peasantization of tribes by the mechanism of caste has been the main process by which caste society was built up in India, and probably in Bangladesh too. Such Bāṅgālī groups as Namaśūdra, Bāḡdī, Kaibartā, Māhāto, and to a large extent Muslims, derive most of their genes from this earlier pre-peasant population stratum.

### The Muṇḍa Substratum

The distinctiveness of Bāṅgālī language and culture, and more so East Bāṅgālī language and culture, is due to the substratum of Muṇḍa-speaking intruders from Southeast Asia, together with the earlier tribals who picked up Muṇḍa speech and horticultural ways. The languages of the Muṇḍa family in central India got separated from Khāsi and the other languages of the Mon-Khmer phylum rather recently, for the wedge of plains peasantry separating them did not come before roughly 700 B. C. as we have shown. Even in the Gangā Plains this separation might not have begun before 1000 B. C., if it was the Painted Gray ware people who severed the Muṇḍas of central India from the tribes such as Rāis and Limbūs speaking pronominalized languages in the lower Himālayas. The Thāru caste-like tribe along northern Uttar Pradesh is probably an ethnic remnant.

In Bāṅglā the fusion of the Muṇḍa-speaking horticulturalists with the earlier aboriginal population may have produced some peoples mentioned in ancient literature. The Purāṇas and Jain books mention the Muruṇḍas, whom Ptolemy says were on the left bank of the Gangā down to the top of the delta.<sup>57</sup> I do not know if the names Muṇḍa and Muruṇḍa are related, though the names Muṇḍa and Mon (in Burma) may well be. Gangā, however, is a word of Muṇḍa origin. The "Gangaridae" were a people mentioned by several early Greek geographers, whose eastern boundary was the Gangā, and Ptolemy said they occupied the country about the mouth of the Gangā. Whether or not they spoke Muṇḍa languages then, the Savaras ( Saoras ) must have. The Savaras, now a hill tribe in Orissa, are probably a people of

<sup>57</sup> This was pointed out by R. C. Majumdar (1925), pp. 9-11.



indigenous origin who picked up Muṇḍa speech, and they were a strong enough force in Orissa to have been mentioned by Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D.<sup>58</sup>

Influence of the Muṇḍas on Bāṅgālī subsistence, kinship, language, and culture, has been considerable. First, of course the crops that could grow here were those mostly brought from humid Southeast Asia. Rice and certain millets are prominent in the fertility rituals of the hill peoples practicing shifting cultivation today, such as Gāros (whom I consider to be an indigenous people affected by Muṇḍa culture and later by Boḍo language). Rice beer figures in the creation myth of the Ho, in wedding engagements, and is indispensable to the Santāls in central India. It is the key feature in hospitality of shifting cultivators such as Chākmās and Gāros today. The importance of rice beer in the earlier peasant culture may be judged in that it is used as an oblation even by Brāhmaṇas in Kālī pūjā, which is not done in Western or Southern India.

There is a practice in Bāṅglā of keeping a fire in the room where a mother is recovering after delivery. This is from Southeast Asia, where anthropologists refer to it as "bed-roasting," and it is done today by Thais, Philipinos, and others. It is not found, to my knowledge, in other parts of South Asia (except in the Maldiv Islands), and its purpose seems to be to dispel evil influence and evil spirits.

In kinship too the underlying Southeast Asian influence seems to make Bāṅglā distinctive as regards South Asia. The Bāṅgālī kinship system has separate sets of terms for paternal and maternal kin. I suggest this arises from the exogamous clans nearly universal among Muṇḍa-speaking peoples. These tend to be totemistic clans, and I think they gave rise to the system of gotras among the peasant peoples of the Gangā and Bāṅglā plains. Bāṅgālī kinship is essentially bilateral in practice, much more so than would be expected from either Hindu or Muslim kinship ideals. This accords with Southeast Asia, where the Malay and Thai systems are bilateral, with little lineage depth. Many of the shifting cultivators of the Indo-Burma hills are matrilineal, though with little lineage depth. In particular, the Khāsis are, and we may suppose that other early Mon-Khm̐r speakers were. Matriliney tends to go with a horticultural economy in several parts of the world. In central India most of the Muṇḍas have taken to plow cultivation, so matriliney has been lost, but its relics are there in Kol society and perhaps in some other tribes. In Bāṅglā a relic of this may be the special position accorded to mother's brother; the term *māmā* is used not only in North India but in Dravidian languages too. In this and

<sup>58</sup> Ptolemy, *Treatise on Geography* vii; see also his map.



several other respects the precedence of Muṇḍa before Dravidian in peninsular India is suggested.

The early horticulturalists of Southeast Asia were skilled in bamboo work, basketry, fishing, pottery ( Cord-Marked ), and use of fibers. The technique of making houses of flattened and plaited bamboo originated with the Southeast Asian Neolithic. For fishing cords and nets, fibers were worked and these were also made into items of adornment. The fibers used among some Indo-Burmese hill peoples are nettle fibers. But cotton was added to the crops cultivated, for it is indigenous to South Asia, and the use of the waist loom became common. It is used today not only by hill people such as Chākṃās and Gāros, but by Assamese and Rājbanṣīs.

The Pre-Muslim people of Bāṅglā cremated their dead, as do all the Muṇḍa peoples, in contrast with Orāons and many of the castes of peninsular India who bury their dead. The belief in rebirth of souls seems to have taken root first in eastern South Asia, and in Hinduism through Muṇḍa influence. Khāsis erect stone menhirs and stone-slab benches in their rites of the dead. Monuments exactly of this type are erected by the Ho and Muṇḍari tribes in southern Bihār. This tradition may or may not have stimulated the South Indian cults of the dead which left us so many megalithic monuments in Tamiḻ Nāḍu, Keraḷa, and Kaṇṇāṭaka. But the Indian eastern megalithic tradition originated in South-east Asia. Also, Southeast Asia has jar burials, as in the plain of Jars in Laos. It is significant that in the excavation in Mahāsthān in Bangladesh, in the lowest levels fractional jar burials ( interred after exposure or cremation ) were found. Even now some Muṇḍa peoples collect the bones of the dead and inter them in pots, particularly for children, and this was formerly done all over South India in the Iron Age cultures.

The Muṇḍa tribes have some emphasis on interment of goods with the ashes of the dead, which is the background in which *sati* arose, whereas Dravidian tribes have more emphasis on human sacrifice and mutilation of the body in religion. The Muṇḍa tribes do not have priests, while the Dravidian ones do, as in Hinduism. The Muṇḍa tribes generally have the institution of the youth dormitory, also found among many peoples of the Indo-Burma hill area; some Dravidian tribes have this, but they might have borrowed it from the Muṇḍas. There are many other differences thus distinguishing the early peoples of eastern India from those in the West and the south.

I would like to make the further suggestion that Buddhism arose in the middle and lower Gangā as a set of Muṇḍa-derived beliefs catalyzed by



the intrusive Indo-Āryan speakers and their state systems. Now it is clear that Brāhmanical Hinduism evolved from elements mostly not found in the Vedas (rituals of pūjā, ablutions, the deities, idols, asceticism, beliefs about animals) which came from the remnants of the Indus Civilization and were catalyzed into Hinduism by the Indo-Āryan speakers in northwestern India.

By contrast, Buddhism was originally something of a cult of the dead, and while it is difficult to distinguish Muṇḍa from pre-Muṇḍa elements, cults of the dead seem the chief features in tribal religions in both central India and the Indo-Burma hills. We may note that the Gāros (whom I consider to be Bodo-ized aboriginals) collect the bones of their dead after cremation and put them in a bamboo box filled with dirt over which they erect a canopy of white cloth,<sup>59</sup> maybe a prototype of the *stūpa* and *harmika*. Early Buddhism lacked emphasis on priests, temples, pantheon of anthropomorphic deities, icons, pollution, ablutions, texts, and sanction of social differentiation, which all more or less came into Hinduism from the early religions of Mesopotamia and the Indus. Instead, early Buddhism had reverence for the dead, reverence for nature and trees, belief in rebirths, the sort of power anthropologists call *mana*, and idealized behavior of not hurting others. These stem from basically egalitarian societies, and seem to me to have evolved from belief systems rather like those of the cults of the dead and the present grove worship of the Muṇḍa and Khāsi tribes. Even more so, Tantric Buddhism seems to express the pattern of male-female relationships in societies of the Muṇḍa speakers. These points all call for further elaboration. But I suggest that whatever dialectical process there was in the history of religions here, it arose from the predispositions of earlier cultural entities incorporated into the evolving peasant-urban society. The fit of this sort of religion to Bangladesh prehistory and ecology may explain why Buddhism persisted here as late as the 14th century.

### Other Underlying Ethnic Elements

The intrusion of Indic Peasants from the Gangā need not be dealt with further, except to point to the anthropometric evidence that the earlier waves of them were largely Indo-Āryanized aboriginals with physical affinity to proto-Australoids. Later arrivals, in medieval centuries, gave rise to the Brāhmaṇ, Baidyā, and Kāyastha castes, and also brought orthodox Hinduism.

The arrival of later waves of Mongoloid-looking peoples in the Indo-Burma hills, the after-effects of Chinese expansion, seems to have had less effect on Bangladesh than either the aborigines or the Muṇḍas. But we

<sup>59</sup> Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, London, 1909, pp. 110-11.



are uncertain about the chronology of these peoples' arrival there. First came waves of Boḍo-speakers, probably from Tibet. They are, in numerical order of size: Gāro, Tripurī, Boḍo, Rangdānia, Mikir, Kāchāri, Riāng, Jamātia, Rabhā, Dimāsā, and Lālung. The Kotś (Kocch) and Boḍos of northern Bānglā and lower Assam got absorbed by Indic-speaking peasants, as did some of the Miri and numerous other groups in Assam. But as regards Bangladesh there has been little intrusion of these Mongoloid peoples beyond the contour of the foothills above which they can practice their shifting agriculture. In the lowlands of Kāchār and Tripurā, however, Bengali language and culture has somewhat prevailed, and some of the Boḍos have been absorbed on the plains of Sylhet and Mymensingh.<sup>60</sup>

These Boḍo-speakers absorbed earlier aborigines. Only the Khāsīs and their relatives the Pnārs retained their earlier languages. The Mikirs were probably a Khāsi-like people, but picked up Boḍo speech, and the Gāros likewise comprise some earlier ethnic element. Later, farther east a wave of related peoples, the Nāga groups, came down and settled toward the Burma border, but did not affect Bangladesh. In medieval centuries as the Burmese pushed southward into the Burma lowlands their relatives the various Chin groups, Maṇipuris, Mīzos, and Ārākānis, pushed westward to the fringes of Bangladesh, where they remain today as Buddhists with cultural affinities to Burma. They dislike Bāngālīs who call them Maghs. But one such group, the Chākmas, has picked up a dialect of Bengali speech while retaining much of their tribal culture. The temporary political dominance in Assam of the Āhoms, a branch of the Shāns, also seems not to have effected Bānglā culture.

The effect on the population composition of Bānglā of the people who came by sea has not been studied. There were probably Malays in the centuries before and after Christ, Tamiḷs and Telugus, Arabs from the 10th century or so, Portuguese, and other Europeans, mostly around Chittagong and having negligible effect on Bānglā population biologically. The effect of the Islam that came by sea, though, is another matter, which I leave to the historians.

### Formation of the Bengali Language

I wish now to present a view of the development of the Bengali language. First, I have to dispose of the opinion that it is derived from

<sup>60</sup> Barrie Morrison, "Social and Cultural History of Bengal: Approach and Methodology," *Nalini Kanta Bhattacharya Commemoration Volume*, ed. A.B.M. Habibullah, Dacca, 1966, pp. 324-50.



Sanskrit, an idea heard often enough. Sanskrit was a liturgical and literary language, and the fact that Bengali was enriched by words from it does not mean that Bengali was derived from it any more than English was derived from Latin.

A second opinion is that Bengali is Indo-Āryan that got modified by Dravidian. *This is altogether false.* I may say that I have lived in South India for many years and know Tamil well, but I see no direct Dravidian influence in Bengali whatever that is not there in Hindī or Sanskrit. Indo-Āryan picked up a huge quantum of Dravidian influence in western India which came down the Gangā to Bāṅglā. But I do not think any Dravidian-speaking tribals or peasants underlie the formation of Bāṅgālī language or culture in this plain.

Dravidian speech got pushed from western to southern India in the aftermath of the Indus Civilization, and it reached Choṭā Nāgpur rather late. Orāon, the main tribal Dravidian language, has moved northeastward by Orāon tradition; the Orāons were probably an early hunting or horticultural tribe that picked up Dravidian speech in Gujarāt or Mahārāshṭra and got pushed into the east-central hills. Kaṇḍh got pushed as far east as the Orissa hills. Mālto is the northernmost Dravidian language, spoken in the Rājmahāl Hills of Bihār, but it did not spread to the plains. Recently I came across some hamlets of Mālto-speakers near Rājshāhi, tribals who had settled on the plains here for work a century or two ago and still speak their Dravidian language, and it is said that there are some Khaṇḍh and Orāon laborers. But their languages have not influenced Bengali. The Muṇḍa languages must have been established in Choṭa Nāgpur before Dravidian-speaking tribes got pushed there.

A third opinion, made popular by Grierson, is that there is an outer band of Indo-Āryan languages which are older; these are Bengali, Assamese, Uṛiyā, Marāṭhī, Gujarātī, and Sindhī; inside these are the more recently evolved forms such as Hindī, Panjābī, and Nepālī. He suggests that the languages of these eastern plains derived from an early Magadhan Prākṛit. Such a view is only partly correct and fails to explain the structural differences between, say, Bengali and Marāṭhī,

Bengali must have arisen as a pidgin language on this plain. A pidgin language is a skeleton sort of speech used for trade and as a second language (not in the home) for communication among diverse peoples. The grammar is always very simplified compared with the parent language and is greatly affected by the syntax of the indigenous languages, but the vocabulary may be mostly from the parent language. For example, Pidgin Portuguese was widespread around the Indian Ocean. Pidgin English is the



only speech now unifying New Guinea and other Melanesian islands, and in fact has been adopted for use in schools and newspapers; the words are mostly derived from English but altered phonetically and put together by a simple syntax mostly derived from the local languages. Swahili in eastern Africa arose as a pidgin trade language, with much Arabic vocabulary on an essentially Bantu syntactical base. Such a language can develop quickly; in Surinam Pidgin Portuguese was replaced by a sort of Pidgin English which got stabilized in 30 years<sup>61</sup> and remained as a slave language while the Dutch occupied the colony.

The application of this principle to understanding the formation of South Asian languages is fruitful. Not all languages originated as pidgin tongues; Pashto, for instance, retains a highly complex grammar and is directly descended from earlier Indo-European speech. Hindī, as it has been spreading through India in recent centuries is not a pidgin but a modified form of Prākṛit, as is Gujarātī too.

Marāṭhī became established as a pidgin language of Dravidian-speakers. A detailed study of this has been made by Southworth, who shows that Dravidian influence in syntax and even in phonology is massive, while most of the vocabulary is Indo-Āryan. What happened is that proto-Marāṭhī as a pidgin formed from western Prākṛit and became a trade and contact second language to various tribes. After some time it got to be spoken in the home and transmitted as a first language. Thereupon it became what is known as a creole. Southworth shows that Marāṭhī is a developed creole.<sup>62</sup> In time it gained new grammatical complexities, a literature, and respect as a language.

Bengali must have got established by this process by speakers of languages like Muṇḍa and Khāsi and earlier lost ones. A variant of Bengali (technically a dialect of Bengali) is Assamese. But Assamese has given rise to a Pidgin in Nāgaland. Pidgin Assamese is spoken by most men there as a contact language, but has not replaced the Nāga languages as anyone's first language. Bengali itself has given rise to another pidgin which has become established as a creole, if I am not mistaken: that is Chākṁā "dialect," which might be classifiable as a separate language were it not for political factors and acceptance of literary Bengali as the standard.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin, "Some Coastal pidgins of West Africa," *Social Anthropology and Language*, London, 1971, p. 134.

<sup>62</sup> Franklin Southworth, "Detecting Prior Creolization: An Analysis of the Historical Origins of Marāṭhī," in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, ed. Dell Hymes, London, 1971; see also Franklin Southworth and Mahadev Apte, "Contact and Convergence in South Asian languages," *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics* 3:1, 1974;



Bengali got vastly simplified in comparison with its antecedent Indo-Āryan languages in the upper Gangā plains. Sanskrit had 10 tenses, Pāli 3, and Old Bengali only 2 basic ones.<sup>63</sup> Bengali lost voices and some verbal nouns, while compound verbs got reduced, and epenthesis in verbs got simplified. Most post-positions got dropped, as did case endings. Gender and number got dropped (which often happens in pidgin languages). Ordinal numbers got dropped. Thus, the skeleton grammar was extremely simple. On the phonetic level, consonant clusters got reduced, some retroflex phonemes got merged with palatal ones, the sibilants got merged, and nasals and nasalized vowels got reduced. Of course as Bengali got established as a creole, then as a literary and official language, other complexities appeared so that it became complex enough, with added synthetic elements and classifier particles from Muṇḍa, new tenses and the like, built on a simple skeleton grammar, with the original basic vocabulary vastly complemented by Sanskrit borrowings. The discussion of pidginization in South Asia by Shapiro and Schiffman suggests to me that Bengali must have arisen as a pidgin, but the language needs to be studied by a qualified linguist to ascertain the point.

But many of these trends in early Bengali were there in the ancient Magadhan Prākṛit and Pāli, and continued in Maithilī, Assamese, and Uṛiyā. Grierson finds reason to classify these languages all together.<sup>65</sup> But contrary to his opinion Bengali is demarcated by a clear linguistic boundary from the Magahī dialect of Hindī in Bihār.<sup>66</sup> I suggest that all these eastern plains languages arose as pidgin languages, and while some similarities were borrowed from ancient Magadhan Prākṛit,<sup>67</sup> others are due to the common substratum of Muṇḍa languages in these eastern plains. S. K. Chatterji has analyzed the distinctives of early Bengali, and while he recognized the influence of Muṇḍa and Boḍo languages, he accounted for the final success of Indo-Āryan speech by a "policy of non-intervention with

Thomas Sebeok. (ed.), *Current Trends in Linguistics*, Vol. 5, *Linguistics in South Asia*, The Hague, 1969.

<sup>63</sup> Aitindra Mojumder, *Bengali Language Historical Grammar*, Part II, Calcutta, 1973, P. 256.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Shapiro and Harold Schiffman, *Language and Society in South Asia*, Department of HEW, Washington, 1975; Rev.ed. in Press, Matilal Banavsidass, Delhi. This work summarizes all existing research on sociolinguistics in South Asia, as well as much of the theory on historical linguistics. No discussion of Bengali as a pidgin or creole is presented, as no linguist seems to have worked on it from this viewpoint.

<sup>65</sup> G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, V, Pt. 1 (Eastern Group), (1903), Delhi, reprint 1968. pp. 4—13.

<sup>66</sup> L. P. Vidyarthi, "Cultural Linguistic Regions in India: Bihar, a Case Study", in *Language and Society In India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1969, P. 129.

<sup>67</sup> S. K. Chatterji, *Origin and Development of Bengali Language* (1926), reprint London, 1970; Subhadra Jha, *The Formation of the Maithili Language*, London 1957.



reference to the non-Aryan languages" on the part of the speakers of other language groups<sup>68</sup> as well as its prestige and the strength of its culture. But historians and traditional linguists have always looked at the formation of peasant-urban culture in South Asia from the pinnacles of Sanskrit or Islam downward ; I suggest *we need to look from the tribal perspective.*

### Muṇḍa-Khāsi in Bengali

The noted Bangladesh linguist Muhammad Shadidullah did a small study on the influence of Muṇḍa in Bengali.<sup>69</sup> He identifies three grammatical features which he thinks came from Muṇḍa, and gives a list of a dozen words. He concludes that relations between Bengali and the Muṇḍa languages he compared ( Mundāri and Santālī) must have been "very intimate." But he does not raise the possibility of Bengali originating as a pidgin language. S. K. Chatterji also discussed Muṇḍa influence in Bengali, but he mixed up language and race and suggested that the Niṣādas spoke Muṇḍa and went to Southeast Asia, while he later conceded that Muṇḍa came from Southeast Asia.<sup>70</sup> Thus linguistics is much too rarified a subject to operate without access to supporting archeological and ethnological data.

The wealth of agricultural words in Bengali from Muṇḍa languages supports the evidence given above of the precedence of the Eastern Neolithic here. Especially important were the large sickle ( *dā* ), axe ( *kurāl* ), and also ( *koḍāl* ), the chief Muṇḍa tools whose names entered Bengali and also Dravidian languages. They cultivated rice ( *cāl* ), banana ( *kolā* ), taro ( *ol* ), turmeric ( *holud* ), pumpkin ( *alābu* or *lāu* ) and coconut ( *nārikel* ). They called water streams ( *gang* ), whence the word Gaṅgā. Among other Muṇḍa words in Bengali are shield ( *ḍhāl* ), clay lump ( *ḍhelā* ), fat ( *moṭa* ), stuttering ( *toṭlā* ), and hamlet ( *pārā* ).

Shifting cultivators even now rely on the digging stick for planting; in hill languages that is *lak*, *lang*, *ling*. I suggest that this evolved into *linga*, which became fraught with symbolism in Hinduism, as it pierced Mother Earth. Interestingly, over central India there are found stone rings in several Neolithic sites, probably weights for digging sticks, and I suggest further that this is the prototype of the *yonī* in which the *linga* is inserted.

<sup>68</sup> S. K. Chatterji, as quoted in Shapiro and Schiffman, P. 180.

<sup>69</sup> Md. Shahidullah, "Munda Affinities of Bengali," *Proceedings of the Sixth Oriental Conference* (1931) Patna, pp. 715-21. I was unable to find this article in Bangladesh, but I am indebted to Md. Shahidullah's son, Md. Safiyulla for finding the essence of the article in a Bengali source. See also his "A Brief History of the Bengali Language," *Dacca University Journal* VII (1932), pp. 93-114.

<sup>70</sup> S. K. Chatterji, "Indo-Aryan and Hindi," *Eight Lectures*, 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1960, pp. 36-42.



After plow cultivation came, because of this symbolism it was tabu for a woman to touch a plow, which is but a *linga* pulled by oxen. In Bangladesh this tabu has been extended to prohibit women from even entering standing fields, for there is the underlying fear of ritual pollution.

West Bengal, and even North Bengal, was at least somewhat settled by Neolithic peoples from central India, as the archeological evidence shows; these were such as the Bhūiyas, Kots (Kocch) and proto-Santāls as we have described, large tribes that became peasantized and lost their original languages completely. There is no evidence such people occupied East Bengal, and the only cultural substratum would have been the Muṇḍa-Khāsi. This is the chief cultural factor distinguishing East from West Bengal.

But I would suggest it is not so much Muṇḍa but the related Khāsi-like language and culture that underlies East Bāṅgālī language and culture. Khāsi has some affinity with Bengali, such as an incomplete series of aspirated consonants probably borrowed from Bengali, and has tended to become monosyllabic under Tibeto-Burmese influence. I suggest though, without having done much detailed research, that the following are some of the features in Bengali derived from the underlying Khāsi-like language: loss of final consonant clusters, reduction of retroflex consonants, reduction of nasalized vowels, broadening of the ā, fusion of long and short *i*, and also ā, and in grammar, loss of the passive, and addition of classifier particles; this last feature is clearly derived from Southeast Asia.<sup>71</sup> (But Bengali must have borrowed the phoneme ä from Muṇḍa speech, which has it, though it is not found in Khāsi today; also the tendency to addition of synthetic particles must be from Muṇḍa).

The eastern dialects in Bangladesh show the Khāsi-like features even more. In Bengali generally retroflex phonemes have weakened as ṇ, ṛ, and ṛh have merged with their palatal forms, but in the eastern dialects so have ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, and ḍh.<sup>72</sup> (Sino-Tibetan languages also have no retroflexion but were probably not spread out on the plains before Bengali came). In Khāsi ṭ and ṭh became palatal, and ḍ became l. Qualified linguists may add more data and correct these suggestions.

A more striking proof of the Muṇḍa-Khāsi substratum in Bāṅglā is the use of 20 as a base number, a feature which came from Southeast Asia. This occurred in Magadhan speech too, in the middle Gangā region,

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Bengali *ekian* etc. Murray Emeneau, "India as a Linguistic Area," *Language in Culture and Society*, ed. Del Hymes, New York, 1964, pp. 647-50, and further bibliography.

<sup>72</sup> Grierson (1903), p. 6



suggesting a Muṇḍa substratum, which agrees with all the foregoing comments. In Bengali 20 is *kuri* ; counting 20 is done on the segments of the fingers of one hand, whereas people in western and South India count with the whole fingers up to 10, using two hands. Use of 20 as a base number is supplemented by use of 4 as a standard unit for handling or selling objects, also of Muṇḍa origin. I am informed that there are rural people who *still* count only to 20, then start over, toward the eastern part of Bangladesh, especially. This suggests that Muṇḍa-Khāsi people not only lived there, but were absorbed relatively late.

This supports the above-mentioned cultural evidence from rice beer, bed-roasting, kinship, settlement pattern, and the like, of Southeast Asian influence in the population substratum, and could be further amplified by discussion of house types and even modal personality. But this article is long enough.

In summary, all this shows why 1) the Gangā-Bāṅglā plains are culturally different than central India. 2) the Bāṅglā plains are culturally different than the Gangā plains, 3) and Eastern Bāṅglā is culturally different than Western Bāṅglā. The roots of Bangladesh culture need not be sought abroad nor far away. They lie right here, buried, awaiting rediscovery.

<sup>73</sup> I am indebted to Md. Safiyulla of Dacca for this information.



# The Barua Community in Bangladesh : A Study of their Origin

Abdul Mabud Khan\*

Bangladesh is the home of a considerable number of Buddhist population.<sup>1</sup> The Buddhists of Bangladesh are divided into three distinct communities namely, (1) The *Baruas*, (2) The *Chakmas*, and (3) The *Marmarakhaines*. In this paper, an attempt is made to trace the origin of the *Barua* community.

The *Baruas* are mainly concentrated in the rural areas of Chittagong. They are scattered over the following areas : Unainpura, Kartala, Panchuria, Tekota, Mukutnait, Satbaria, Maitala, Hashimpur and Naikhaine in the Patiya Police Station, Shakpura, Baidyapara, Sreepur, Kadurkil, Gomdandi, within Boalkhali Police Station, Pahartali—Mohamuni, Aburkil, Binajuri, Gohira, Guzra within Raozan Police Station ; Jobrapara, Mirzapur within Hathazari Police Station ; Silonia, Dharmapur, in Fatikchari Police Station; Ghatcheck, Saiyedbari, Silak in Rangunia Police Station ; Sailkup and Jaldi in Banskhali Police Station; Ramu and Merongloa in Ramu Police Station. A small number of *Baruas*, however, are at the moment residents of Noakhali and Comilla districts. According to the census of 1951 there were 85,691 *Baruas* in this country ; the census of 1961, however, puts the figure at 78,370. There has therefore, been a slight fall in the number over the last ten years.

There is no positive historical evidence regarding the ancestry of the *Baruas*. However, a knowledge of their oral tradition that has been handed down from one generation to another and their social customs and usages constitute for us, important source materials.

The origin of the term *Barua* goes back to the remote past. Scholars are divided in their opinion about the etymology of this word. According to B. M. Barua, the word *Barua* is derived from *Vajji*, a tribe that lived in Vaisali and that they are, in fact, identical with the *Vajji* tribe itself<sup>2</sup> but he does not give any evidence in support of this conjecture.

In northern India, at the beginning of the sixth century B. C. there flourished a confederacy named *Vrijan* or *Vijjian* consisting of eight or nine

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<sup>1</sup> According to census of 1961 their number was 3,16,000.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Dharmatilak Sthabir in *Sadherma Ratnakar*, Rangoon, 1936, p-439



clans among which *Vedchans*, the *Licohhavis*, the *Jnatrikas* and the *Vajjis* were the most prominent.<sup>3</sup> Vaisali was the capital of that confederacy. Besides these tribes, there were others such as *Sakyas*, *Mollas* and *Boriyas*. Buddhism successfully collected from these peoples a large number of its adherents.<sup>4</sup> According to one Buddhist oral tradition, these clans neither separately nor jointly could counteract the persecution of Ajatsatru and Birurba.<sup>5</sup> In the movement of population that followed the persecution, the *Vajji* tribe was not the only one that was involved. As such, it is doubtful if the term *Barua* originated with the *Vajji* tribe of Vaisali.

Umesh Mutsuddy, another Buddhist scholar says that the word *Barua* is a derivation of *Batuk*, a Sanskrit word which means the greatness of a race.<sup>6</sup> It is generally believed by the *Chakmas* and the *Marma-Rakhaines* that the status of the *Baruas* is superior compared to other Buddhists of this country because, the ancestry of the *Baruas* is traced from the land where Lord Buddha attained Enlightenment. Mutsuddy argues that the word *Barua* derives its origin from the term *Bara-Arya* which means great Aryan.<sup>7</sup> According to Dharmatilak Sthabir even today, in many *Barua* families, a daughter-in-law addresses her father-in-law and mother-in-law as *Bour-aga* and *Hajma* respectively.<sup>8</sup> These two terms, according to him, signify the Aryan father and mother. It is, thus, argued that the *Baruas* are the descendants of the Aryans.

In *Viswa Kosa*, the *Baruas* are described as the descendants of the royal Kshatriya race.<sup>9</sup> The term *Barua* denotes a person of high status. In the earliest time, the term was used as title of a military commander of the highest rank.<sup>10</sup> The use of the word *Barua* is found in the *Padabalis* of Chandidas a famous *Sahajiya* poet of Bengali literature. Chandidas used this term to mean the greatness of a race.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>3</sup> R.C. Majumdar, A. Pusalkar and other (eds.) : *The History and culture of Indian People : The Age of Imperial Unity*. Bombay Bharatya Vidya Vhavan, (4th ed.) 1968, p-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p-17

<sup>5</sup> Dharmatilak Sthabir : *Op.Cit.*, pp-450-51

<sup>6</sup> Umesh Mutsuddy : *Barua Jati*, Chittagong, 1959. p 7 বড় + অরিয় > বড় আৰ্য্য > বড়ুয়া

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Dharmatilak Sthabir : *Op. Cit.*, p-439 বউড়গা > বড়ুয়া ; হাজমা > আৰ্য্যমা ।

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Umesh Mutsuddy ; *Op. Cit.* p-2

<sup>10</sup> Amitava Chowdhury : "The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan" 2500 Years Buddha Joyanty Souvenir, Lanka Buddha Mandalaya, 1956, p-46

<sup>11</sup> "বড়ার বহুয়ারী আক্ষেদ বড়ুয়ার জি"

—চণ্ডীদাস ও শ্রীকৃষ্ণ কীর্তন কৃষ্ণ পদ গোস্থায়ী (সং)

টি. কে. ব্যানার্জী এণ্ড কোং কলিঃ ১৩৭০, পৃ. ১৬

When Sree Krishna approached Rādhā for winning her love the latter claimed that she was the daughter-in-law of a person of high status and also a daughter of *Barua* i.e. a person of superior status.



Again, the *Baruas* are designated as *Mrammagri* by the Arakanese ; the word *Mramma* refers to the inhabitants of Burma and the word 'gri' means great.<sup>12</sup> As such, the status of the *Baruas* is superior to those of the Burmese, because, they claim that the ancestors of the *Baruas*, were originally the residents of Magadha, the place of Buddha's Enlightenment. Further, the *Baruas* are also known as *Magh* since the term *Magh* is a derivation of Magadha. Surprisingly enough, even to day, a certain section of the *Baruas* introduces themselves as Magadha Kshatriya on the belief that their ancestors were Kshatriya prince of Magadha.<sup>13</sup> In course of time, the term *Magh* became mixed up with the Arakanese pirates that infested land and sea of South-eastern part of Bengal and the word *Magh* is used frequently to mean the Buddhists residing in Arakan and Bengal on ground of religious kinship.<sup>14</sup>

Again, it is found that some *Baruas* claim that they are the descendants of the king of Arakan who had migrated from Magadha. The foundation of a kshatriya dynasty in Arakan by one Indian prince is not, however, supported by any historical evidence but according to one legend, a Brahman married a native princess of Arakan whose descendants reigned there for a considerable period of time. The ancient kingdom of Arakan was founded by a son of a king of Benaras named *Sakhawadi*.<sup>15</sup> The dynasty was Buddhist by faith. On the basis of this oral tradition, some *Baruas* try to introduce themselves as *Rajbanshi* i.e. a sicon of the royal race. However, the name *Rajbanshi* has been adopted by the members of this community to assert their importance as belonging to the same race as that of the legendary king of Arakan. The use of the term *Rajbanshi* by some *Baruas* has created confusion among the scholars since there is a tribe in northern region of Bangladesh bearing this identical name. The *Baruas* are Buddhists by faith while the *Rajbanshis* of north Bengal are Hindus. However, we do not find any connection between the two groups of peoples.

After the death of Sri Sudhamma, king of Arakan in 1638, one of his ministers named Narapati (i.e. Nga Ra Padi) captured the throne by killing several nobles and members of the royal family. According to a Burmese historical work, *Maha-raja Wang*, during the troubled time in Arakan, some members of the royal family along with some nobles left for Kantha, a place in Chittagong and settled down there;<sup>16</sup> although the

<sup>12</sup> Chittagong District Gazetteer ( New edition ) Dacca, 1970, p. 117

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Amitava Chowdhury : Op. Cit.,

<sup>15</sup> A. Phyre : History of Burma, London, 1883, p. 47

<sup>16</sup> Chittagong Gazetteer ( New edition ) Dacca, 1971, p. 117



place has not yet been identified. On the basis of this story, William Hunter says that the *Baruas* are of mixed origin, the descendants of the Arakanese.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the *Baruas* are the off spring of Bengalee mother by Arakanese father. The *Baruas* reject this view on the ground that thier physical appearance and complexion are quite different from those of Arakanese although they belong to the same religious group. However, the Arakanese had profoundly influenced the cultural life of the whole population of south-eastern region of Bangladesh particularly of the *Baruas*. The latter have adopted a good number of social customs and usages from the former. For instance, the Arakanese dialects such as *Pongyi* (monk), *Kyaung* (monastery), *Sowaing* (food of the monks given by the laities), *Maisaing* (novice monk) etc. are used frequently by the *Baruas* in their daily life; even some clans of the *Baruas* bear the names of the Arakanese clans such as *Mulaing*, *Chadaing*, *Hassagri Anna-kkha Pongyi* and *Labaing*.<sup>18</sup>

All the above facts go to explain that the ancestors of the *Baruas* were not, perhaps, the sons of this soil.

The rivalry between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas was one of the factors behind the rise of Buddhism. From the very beginning of Buddhism, the Brahmins were hostile to Lord Buddha and his teachings. Coupled with Brahmanical hostility, there arose Brahmanical revivalism which gained strength gradually from the Post-Asokan period and culminated into a mighty force in the seventh and eight centuries. During this period, Kumaril Bhatta, Sankaracharya (788-820 A.D.) and many others started crusade against the Buddhists with a view to wiping out the last remnant of Buddhism. For example, once Sankaracharya described Buddha "an enemy of the peoples."<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Brahmins became active to revive their position and power in the society which had been checked by the rising tide of Buddhism. Sankaracharya and Kumaril Bhatta were the two typical representatives of the Anti-Buddhist Movement.

Not only the Brahmins but also some monarchs of ancient India like Pushyamitra Sunga (187-151 B. C.), Mihirkula and Sasanka (606-638 A.D.?) also upheld the cause of vedic religion at the cost of Buddhism. Sasanka king of Gauda was a famous Buddhist persecutor. Huen Tsang, a Chinese pilgrim has recorded numerous acts of oppression perpetrated by Sasanka against the Buddhists, such as expulsion of the Buddhists from

<sup>17</sup> W. W. Hunter : *A Statistical Account of Bengal* Vol. VI, London, 1876, p. 143

<sup>18</sup> Dharmatilak Sthabir : *Op. Cit.*, p. 441

<sup>19</sup> L. M. Joshi : *Buddhistic culture of India*, Delhi, 1967, p. 397



a Vihara in Kusinara, throwing into the Ganges a stone containing foot-print of Buddha and cutting down the *Bodhi* tree.<sup>20</sup>

At the beginning of the 8th century Bengal and Bihar were the two last strongholds of Buddhism. The *Palas* who were Buddhists by faith ruled north-eastern India for several centuries. With the fall of the *Palas*, misfortune for the Buddhists, it appears, came from all directions, because, Buddhism progressed by the support of the kings. By the beginning of the 13th century, Bakhtiyar Khilji, a general of Kutubuddin Aibak laid siege to Nalanda, a famous monastic University mistaking it to be a fort. According to Minhaj-us-Siraj, Bakhtiyar Khilji captured this fortress without any opposition ; the greater number of residents of that place were shaven headed Brahmans who were all killed.<sup>21</sup> The shaven headed Brahmans were no other than the Buddhist monks and the fortress was a Buddhist monastery. Thus, the Buddhists were ruthlessly and cruelly expelled from upper India. H. P. Shastri rightly says, "in making excavation at Kucinara, ashes were discovered after certain depth plainly indicating that fire was one of the agencies in the expulsion of Buddhism. At Saranath...the excavations laid open cooked rooms containing half boiled rice rotten there for centuries. The catastrophe was so sudden that the poor *Bhikkhus* could not even complete their meal."<sup>22</sup> In this triangular fight, the Buddhists failed to withstand against their enemies since the Buddhists believed in non-violence and had lost the royal support.

After such a wholesale massacre and burning, it is logical to presume that the Buddhists of northern India who were alive in and around Nalanda left their settlements. Dwijendranath Tagore holds the view that the Buddhists moved to eastern India during the 12th and 13th centuries.<sup>23</sup> In such circumstances it would seem possible that some of the Buddhists took the road through the Rajshahi Division and proceeded to the east until they had taken shelter in Assam.<sup>24</sup> During this period, Brahmanism was in ascendancy in Assam. Kamakhya, a hillock near Gauhati, was the main seat of Brahmanical activities. The followers of Brahmanism, it is believed, caught many of these absconding Buddhists and adopted measures

<sup>20</sup> R. C. Majumdar ( ed. ) : *History of Bengal* Vol. I, Dacca University ( 2nd ed. ) 1963, p. 67

<sup>21</sup> H. M. Elliot & J. Dowson ( Trans. ) : *The History of India As Told by its own Historians* ( Reprint ) Vol. II, Allahabad, 1969, p. 306

<sup>22</sup> H. P. Shastri : "Buddhism in Bengal Since Mohammedan Conquest" *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 64, 1896, p. 55

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Umesh Mutsuddy in *Barua Jati* p. 4 from *Tattabodhini Patrika*, Chaitra, 1815.

<sup>24</sup> Dharmatilak Sthabir : *Op. Cit.* p. 437



for their conversion and many of them obviously did so.<sup>25</sup> Even today, there are considerable number of peoples in Assam who write *Barua* at the end of their name ; probably, they are the Hindu descendants of the said Buddhists.<sup>26</sup> Thus, a portion of the Buddhist population in the process got absorbed in the Hindu society. The Brahmans of some parts of eastern India retaining the surname *Barua* prove this contention.<sup>27</sup>

The other section of the northern Indian Buddhist population that did not reconcile itself with Brahmanism in Assam, succeeded in averting the attacks of the Brahmans. They moved to the south and gradually advanced as far as Chittagong region where they settled finally.<sup>28</sup> The Arakanese ruled south-eastern part of Bengal for several centuries with occasional lapses. In such circumstances, the forefathers of the *Baruas* might have come to this region where the atmosphere was congenial for maintaining their religious identity.

Tracing the origin of the *Barua* community is, indeed, a difficult task but scholars have not given up investigation. Some scholars have discovered peculiarities in social customs and usages of the *Baruas* which are not common with the rest of the Buddhist population of this country. These peculiarities, may perhaps, help us to form some idea about their origin and process of immigration.

First, from time immemorial, at the time of taking meal, some of the *Baruas* use the term *Ti-po-cho* (i.e. *ti-po-cho*), a pali word which denotes the qualities of Lord Buddha.<sup>29</sup> This practice is not found in any other Buddhist community of Bangladesh but is, however, prevalent among the Buddhist population of northern India.

Secondly, names of some clans of the *Baruas* are identical with the clans that are found in Magadha. For instance, *Barua Bahu*, *Barua Chomra*, *Barua Bouchi* are important clans of this group of people.<sup>30</sup> Modern scholars have discovered these terms in a limited area in modern central Bihar.

Thirdly, even fifty years back, the *Barua* women folk used to adorn themselves with heavy jewellery, most of which were family heirlooms of the Buddhists patterned in the style prevalent in rural areas of Bihar.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Dharmatilak Sthabir : *Op. Cit.* p. 337

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> The popular belief is that Late Pramathesh Barua, a famous film actor, Mr. Deva kanta Barua formerly President of the India National Congress are the descendants of the northern Indian Buddhist immigrants.

<sup>28</sup> Dharmatilak Sthabir : *Op. Cit.*, pp. 437-438.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 439

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 441

<sup>31</sup> Amitava Chowdhury : *Op. Cit.*



Fourthly, in Chittagong there is a canal in Roazan Police Station named *Baghdair* which reminds us of the people of Magadha. It is interesting to note that the *Baruas* are still found residing on both sides of the stream. It is believed that the canal was dug by migrants from Magadha.

Fifthly, the worship of *Bagadheswari*, the presiding deity of Magadha is prevalent in Mahira-Kestrapal, a village 13 miles West of Patiya. This was, perhaps, introduced by the northern Indian immigrants, particularly of Magadha in memory of their original home. According to one oral tradition, "this goddess was originally introduced here by the Mahayamist Buddhists of Magadha."<sup>32</sup> Even today, some of the *Baruas* worship *Bagadheswari* with a view to removing the barrenness of women and the influence of evil spirits. They invoke the blessings of *Bagadheswari* by reciting "Ah-ray mā Maghim rā-jar jhee".<sup>33</sup> Thus the claim of their ancestry from northern Indian population, particularly of Magadha, by the *Baruas* may not appear to be totally ill-logical or unfounded.

The origin of the *Baruas* has still remained a problem which demands further investigation. The above discussion regarding the history of the *Baruas* is not totally conclusive.

<sup>32</sup> P. R. Barua : "Buddhist shrines and Monasteries in Chittagong" M. E. Hoq (ed.), *Abdul Karim Sahitya Visarad Commemoration Volume*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1972, p. 173)

<sup>33</sup> English translation : "Come O'mother,, *Maghini*, daughter of the king of Magadha."







# Role of Women in the Religious Life of Early Medieval Bengal

Shahanara Husain

During the early medieval period (c.700-1200 A.D.) Buddhism and Brahmanism were prevalent side by side in Bengal. The Pālas, Candras and other contemporary dynasties were Buddhists. With their active support and patronage Buddhism in Bengal gained international prestige, from Tibet in the north to the Islands of the Malay Archipelago in the south.<sup>1</sup> Buddhist *Vihāras* such as Somapura, Traikūṭaka, Devikoṭa, Paṇḍita, Vikramapurī, Jagaddala, Paṭṭikeraka, and Sannagara were centres of Buddhist religion and learning, and here resided celebrated Buddhist *ācāryas* who wrote numerous works on Buddhist religion. These *vihāras* received patronage from royalty and *vihāras* like Somapura and Jagaddala were founded by Dharmapāla and Rāmapāla respectively. According to Tāranātha, Dharmapāla founded 50 *vihāras*.<sup>2</sup>

It appears that of the two religions, Buddhism and Brahmanism, the former's position was dominant between the 9th and 11th centuries A.D. when the Pālas and Candras ruled over Bengal. But this general view is not accepted by P. C. Bagchi who believes that "the patronage of the Pālas no doubt gave an impetus to Buddhism and saved the religion from the fate which overtook it in the rest of India, but does not seem to have materially affected the dominant position of the Brahmanical religion. For it is worthy of note that by far the large majority of images and inscriptions which may be assigned to this period between 750 and 1200 A.D. are Brahmanical, and not Buddhist."<sup>3</sup> But N. R. Ray<sup>4</sup> points out that the way of worship followed by the Vajrayāna Buddhists was a mystical one, involving the worship of the concept of a deity without the use of an image. This explains the numerical minority of the images of the Buddhist gods and goddesses in comparison with those of the Brahmanical deities, though the Buddhist works of the period are full of descriptions of Buddhist deities some of whose images are still not found in Bengal.

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The History of Bengal*, University of Dacca, First Edition, p. 417.

<sup>2</sup> N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgālir Itihasa, Ādi Parba*, Calcutta, 1359 (B. S.), p. 633. For details about the Buddhist *Vihāras* of Bengal which existed during the early medieval period see Nalini Nath Das Gupta, *The Buddhist Viharas of Bengal*, I. C., I. pp, pp. 227-233.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, I, p. 425.

<sup>4</sup> N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgālir Itihasa, Ādi Parba*, p. 649.



Buddhism, though a catholic religion, did not at first place women on a level with men. According to Buddhist traditions Buddha taught his followers to look on women with great suspicion and to put no trust in them; and his preaching encouraged all married men to abandon their wives and children for the religious life, in order to become monks.<sup>5</sup> If we are to believe the Pāli texts Buddha thought women to be inferior to men and at the first stage of his career he refused to admit women into the holy order of *Bhikkhus*. But his aged foster-mother Mahāprajāpati wanted to take the vows of *Pravrajyā* and enter the *saṃgha*. At first Buddha did not give them permission, but later he yielded and instituted the Order of Nuns at the request of his favourite disciple Ānanda. But he told Ānanda, "If our Dharma would have survived for 1000 years now it would last only 500 years as women are given permission to enter the *saṃgha*."<sup>6</sup> We find it difficult to believe that this story is historically true, since the prophecy that the doctrine would only last 500 years in its purity suggest that the account was concocted ( by an anti-feminist monk ) when Mahāyānist ideas were making rapid headway. Moreover the attitude of the Buddha in this particular is quite inconsistent with the picture we are given elsewhere of the wise leader of the Order, who had completely transcended all sentimental and emotional ties. Nevertheless this story throws important light on the attitude of early Buddhism towards women.

Buddha made many strict rules regarding the conduct of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* towards each other. A *bhikkhu* could not give instructions to a *bhikkhuni* without the permission of the *saṃgha*. Even with the permission of the *saṃgha* he could not give instructions to her after sunset. There are similar rules infringement of which would have entailed penance for the *bhikkhu*.<sup>7</sup>

Even after women got permission to enter the Order the rules of their Order made the nuns rank lower than the monks. Even a 100 years old nun is to worship a new monk and a nun is to receive instructions from a monk twice a month.<sup>8</sup> There are other similar rules.<sup>9</sup> The rules for the

<sup>5</sup> *Mahāvagga*, I, trans. from the Pāli by T. W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg, in *Vinaya Texts*, Part I, S. B. E., XIII, pp. 112 ff; 116-118; *The Sutta Nipāta*, Trans. by V. Fausvell, S.B.E., X, II, pp. 6-11, 33-35; Ramendra, *Avadāna Kalpalatā*, Trans. in S.C. Das, *The Place of Woman in The Buddhist Church, Research and Review*, Vol. I, Part I 1908, pp. 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> *Cullavagga*, *Tenth Khandaka*, trans. in *Vinaya Texts*, Part III, S. B. E., XX, pp. 320-326.

<sup>7</sup> *Vinaya Texts*, op. cit., I, S.B.E., XII, pp. 35-37.

<sup>8</sup> *Cullavagga Vinaya Texts*, III, S.B.E., XX, pp. 322-323.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323-324.



guidance of the *bhiksuni saṃgha* are also very strict.<sup>10</sup> However, the Order of Nuns never became very popular and the number of nuns was always small.<sup>11</sup>

We have seen that in the early medieval period there were many Buddhist monasteries in Bengal, some of which were very famous. In these monasteries nuns seem to have resided and tradition gives us the name of *bhiksuni*, Mekhālā who resided in the Devikoṭa *Vihāra*.<sup>12</sup> That women of Bengal sometimes renounced worldly life and became nuns is also evidenced by the records left by I-tsing who came to Tāmralipti in 673 A. D. and Sheng-Chi who was in India about the time of I-tsing. I-tsing stayed in the Po-lo-ho (Varāha?) *Vihara* of Tāmralipti for some time and has left an account of the life of the residents of that *Vihara*.<sup>13</sup> *Bhikṣus* and *bhikṣunis*, when they met, observed all the rules laid down by their religion. Whenever the *bhikṣunis* went out they went in pairs: but to a layman's house they went at least in a company of four. Sheng-Chi, while describing the condition of Buddhism in Samatāṭa, speaks of 400 *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣunis* in the capital city.<sup>14</sup>

The Buddhism of early medieval Bengal was largely Tantric in character. According to Tantric Buddhism *prajñā* or supernatural wisdom resides in every woman and hence participation of women is required in the Tantric rites for the emancipation or attainment of *siddhi* by a *sādhaka*.<sup>15</sup> In choosing female partners the Tantric Buddhists are enjoined not to make any distinction between women of higher and lower castes and there can be no doubt that some Buddhist women of early medieval Bengal took part in these Tantric rites. Traditions reflected in the folk literature of Bengal give us the name of Queen Maināmatī or *Madanvatī*, the wife of King Mānikacandra and mother of Gopīcandra who acquired *Mahājñāna* by means of Tantric practices.<sup>16</sup> In the Bengali ballads she is said to have

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341-343, 344-345, 359, 368, 369; *Mahāvagga, Vinaya Texts*, II. p. 271; see also B.C. Law, *Women in Buddhist Literature*, Ceylon, 1927, pp. 81 ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. i, S.C. Das, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Pag-Sam-Zang*, ed. by S.C. Das, Calcutta, 1908, Index, pp. IXII, IXXVI; N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgalir Itihasa*, p. 728.

<sup>13</sup> I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malaya Archipelago*, Trans. by J. Takakusu, Oxford, 1896, pp. 63-65.

<sup>14</sup> P. E. Edouard Chavannes, *Les Relegieux Eminents*, Paris, 1894, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup> See B. Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, Oxford University Press, 1932, pp. 34, 39, 42; D. L. Enellgrove, *The Hevaira Tantra, A Critical Study*, London Oriental Series, Vol 6, Part I, Introduction, pp. 11 and 33 ff, Text (in trans.) Part II, ii, c—d, iii, 6; Part I, vii; Part II, iv, vii, b.

<sup>16</sup> T. C. Das Gupta, *Aspects of Bengali Society from old Bengali Literature*, Calcutta, 1946, p. 160.



spent seven days and nights in the fire without being burnt.<sup>17</sup> In these ballads many other miraculous feats are ascribed to her.<sup>18</sup> She was the disciple of Gorakṣanātha and her son Gopicandra was the disciple of Haḍipā,<sup>19</sup> the latter sometimes being identified as Jālandhari.<sup>20</sup> Gorakṣanātha and Jālandhari were two of the 84 *siddhas* who were connected with the Tantric cults and who most probably flourished sometime between the 10th to 12th centuries A. D.<sup>21</sup> Maināmatī was no doubt an early medieval Bengali woman and the ballads centering round her leave no doubt that the place of her activities was in Vaṅga and most probably that part of Vaṅga which is now known as Comilla district.<sup>22</sup> The Buddhist archaeological site of Maināmatī and the Maināmatī hill range adjoining it also remind us of her.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from participating in the Tantric Buddhist rites and sometimes becoming nuns the women of early medieval Bengal presumably also participated in the worship of Buddhist divinities.

In the succession lists of *gurus* and disciples of Tantric Buddhism we find names of two women of the early medieval period who may have been Bengalis. One was Bhagavati Lakṣmī or Lakṣmīnkāra, the sister and favourite disciple of Indrabhūti, King of Uḍḍiyānā, who was a great authority on *Vajrayāna* and *Tantra* and wrote a large number of works.<sup>24</sup> Uḍḍiyānā, according to some scholars, may be located in Bengal.<sup>25</sup> So Lakṣmīnkāra may have been a Bengali woman. According to Buddhist traditions she attained *siddhi* after being initiated by Indrabhūti. In her work the *Abhayasiddhi* she boldly preaches the doctrine of non-efficacy of austerities, ceremonials, and worshipping of images of gods and enjoins that one should worship one's own body which is the residence of all gods.

<sup>17</sup> *Mūṇikacandra Rājara Gāna*, in D. C. Sen, *Vaṅga Sāhitya Parichaya*, University of Calcutta, 1914, Part I, pp. 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40 ff.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> *The History of Bengal*, I, p. 344, fn. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344-345, and 419.

<sup>22</sup> T. N. Ramchandran, *Archaeological Discoveries Along Mainamati and Lalmai Range*, B. C. Law Volume, Part II, Calcutta, 1946, p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> The powerful Candra dynasty which rose in East Bengal in c. 900 A. D. had a king called Govindacandra (c. 1020-1050 A. D.). But whether there was any connexion between the Gopicandra of Maināmatī Gopicānd legend with the Govindacandra mentioned above we cannot say definitely.

<sup>24</sup> For details about Indrabhūti see B. Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, op. cit. pp. 74-75.

<sup>25</sup> See S. Husain, *Social Life of Women in Early Medieval Bengal*, Thesis submitted in the University of London, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 1965, Appendices, I, pp. 233-237.



Again, she says that because women are the embodiments of the concealed *prajña* no hatred should be shown to them.<sup>26</sup>

Another woman important in the history of Tantric Buddhism was a female ascetic called Sahajayoginī Cintā. As she was a disciple of *siddha* Dārikapāda, who was a Bengali,<sup>27</sup> she may have been a Bengali herself. Her work called the *Vyakṭabhavanugatattvasiddhi* is written in Sanskrit and a translations of it in Tibetan exists.<sup>28</sup> Indrabhūti's daughter Līlavajra was also a woman of learning and had interest in Buddhism. She, together with the Tibetan *Śramaṇa* Punyadhvaja translated a Tantric work in the Tibetan language.<sup>29</sup>

The heyday of Buddhism ended with the ascendancy of the Senas and other Hindu dynasties who were champions of orthodox Brahmanical religion. The lay worshippers of Buddhism were gradually merging themselves in the Hindu community even before the end of the Pāla period and gradual fusion and assimilation of Buddhist mysticism and Brahmanical Tantricism were also taking place. All these no doubt greatly weakened the position of Buddhism and a further blow was the loss of royal patronage when the Pālas fell from power in Bihār and Bengal.

Though Buddhism was dominant during the Pāla period the Brahmanical religion had also great following and it became dominant during the Sena period when there was a revival of orthodox Brahmanical religion. Among the cults of Brahmanical religion Vaisnavism and Śaivism seem to have been most important. But other cults like the cults of Mātṛkā and Sūrya were also practised.

The religious rights of women in the Brahmanical religion were curtailed by certain limitations. No *upanayana*<sup>30</sup> ceremony was performed for girls.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See B. Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>27</sup> N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgālir Itihāsa, Ādi Parba*, p. 723.

<sup>28</sup> B. Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgālir Itihāsa, Ādi Parba*, p. 633.

<sup>30</sup> *Upanayana* is the ceremonial initiation into Vedic Studies of a twice-born. This is regarded as one of the most important sacraments, when they are invested with the sacred thread. For details about this *Saṅskāra* see P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Vol. II, part I, Pune, 1958, pp. 268 ff. See Halayudha, *The Brahmana Sarvasva*, ed. by Durga Mohan Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 238 ff.; Bhattachavadeva, *The Karma-anusthanapaddhati*, quoted in the *History of Bengal*, I, pp. 593 ff. Also see *Ibid.*, 595, f.n.1.

<sup>31</sup> Manu lays down that *upanayana* for girls may be performed but no sacred texts should be recited on the occasion (See *The Laws of Manu*, trans. into English by G. Buhler, S. B. E. XXV, Oxford, 1896, II, 66). Again Manu says that the nuptial ceremony is the Vedic sacrament for women (see *ibid*, II, 67). Kulluka agrees with Manu and says that the nuptial ceremony is the *upanayana* for women (see Kulluka, *On Manu*, II, 67.) The *Manusmṛiti*, Edited with a Bengali translation by Bharatachandra Siromani, Calcutta, 1923, p. 56). That *upanayana* of girls was performed is also evident from the *Brahmana Sarvasva*, op. cit., pp. 238 ff. and the *Karmasthanapaddhati* quoted in *History of Bengal*, I, pp. 598 ff.



For women there was no sacramental rite with sacred texts.<sup>32</sup> They could not offer sacrifices<sup>33</sup> and Vedic and *Śruti* studies were banned for them.<sup>34</sup>

But in spite of these limitations women participated in the religious activities of their husbands. According to Manu the husband should employ the wife in the performance of his religious duties.<sup>35</sup> But Kullūka regards these religious duties as the service of the fire and of the husband.<sup>36</sup> Again Manu lays down that due performance of religious rites depends on one's wife alone,<sup>37</sup> and he observes that religious rites are ordained in the *Veda* to be performed by the husband, together with the wife.<sup>38</sup> Kullūka agrees with Manu but according to him the religious duties of a wife relate only to the oblations and the *agnihotras*.<sup>39</sup>

In comparing the prescriptions of Manu with Kullūka's explanation of them, we can see clearly that the commentator finds some difficulty in admitting to the wife the rights in religious ritual accorded by the original text, and definitely restricts them in some particulars. This is evidently a reflection of changing times, and the growing inferiority of women in medieval India as compared with the earlier period.

A wife could not do religious acts independently of her husband or without his consent. Manu lays down that "No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart, (from their husband); if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven."<sup>40</sup> Kullūka agrees with him.<sup>41</sup> Again, the daily business relating to the acts of religion should be assisted by a wife of equal caste only.<sup>42</sup> In case of distress a Brāhmaṇ could perform religious rites with a wife of the caste immediately following, but a Śudra wife could never perform any religious function with a regenerate person.<sup>43</sup>

The Brahmanical religion which prevailed in Bengal during the early medieval period was paurāṇic in character. This is evident not only from the inscriptions of the ruling dynasties but also from the images of deities

<sup>32</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, IX, 18, p. 330.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 205-206, XI, 36-37, pp. 205, 437.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 18; Kullūka, On Manu, IX, 18, the *Manusamhitā*, pp. 423-424.

<sup>35</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, op. cit., IX, II, p. 329.

<sup>36</sup> On Manu, IX., II, *The Manusamhitā*, op. cit., pp. 421-422.

<sup>37</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, IX, 28, p. 332.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, IX, 96, p. 344.

<sup>39</sup> On Manu IX, II, 28, 96, *The Manusamhitā*, pp. 422, 426, 444.

<sup>40</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, op. cit., v, 155, p. 196.

<sup>41</sup> Kullūka, *The Manusamhitā*, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>42</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, IX, 36, 37, pp. 342-343.

<sup>43</sup> Jimūtavāhana, *Dāyabhāga*, Trans. into English by H. T. Colebrooke in *The Hindu Law of Inheritance*, Calcutta, 1810, XI, I, pp. 176-177.



discovered.<sup>44</sup> In the *dharma* preached by the *purāṇas* *vratas* or vows occupy a very important place.<sup>45</sup> The *vratas* seem originally to have been non-Āryan religious practices but later on were incorporated in the paurāṇic Brahmanical religion.<sup>46</sup> According to the *purāṇas*, *vratas* are to be observed by all without any discrimination of class or sex<sup>47</sup> and the observance of these is said to be capable of conferring both *bhukti* (objects of enjoyment) and *mukti* (final release) and of destroying all sins.<sup>48</sup>

Generally a *vrata* consists of the following main component parts : Selection of a proper *tithi*, determination of taking the vow, lying on the ground, bathing, appointment of Brāhman as a priest, worship, muttering (*japa*), offering oblations to the fire (*homa*), fasting, abstinence (especially from food), making gifts, feeding Brāhmaṇs, keeping awake during the night, and listening to tales.<sup>49</sup>

In the *Kālviveka* of Jīnūtavāhana we find mention of numerous *vratas*. In the *purāṇas* we read of many other *vratas*. But it is difficult to determine which among these were practised in Bengal during the early medieval period.

All the *purāṇas* allowed women to perform *vratas*; moreover the *Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa*<sup>50</sup> regards women as forms of the Mother Goddess. In *vratas* like the *vīravrata* and *Navarātri vrata* we find the worship of a maiden (*kūmari pūjana*) included as one of the rites.<sup>51</sup> In the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa*<sup>52</sup> rules of *Kumārīpūjā* are laid down. The maidens to be worshipped should be from two to ten years old. Only healthy, graceful and beautiful girls born in wedlock are to be selected for worship. Maidens belonging to the Brāhman *varṇa* can be worshipped by all the four

<sup>44</sup> See *The History of Bengal*, I, pp. 398 ff., N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgālir Itihāsa, Ādiparba*, pp. 615 ff., and 655 ff.

<sup>45</sup> The *Purāṇas* contain at least twenty-five thousand verses on *vratas* (see P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, V. I. p. 57) and these works extol the performance of *vratas* to the skies as a means of crossing the deep ocean of hells, and a means for the poor man to reach God, and certain *vratas* are even said to be more purifying than holy places, and Vedic sacrifices are not equal to them. See *The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, Uttara 7. 1*; *The Varāha Purāṇa*, 39, 17-18, 23-24; *The Brahma Purāṇs*, 29, 61; see also P. V. Kane *History of Dharmasastra*, V, I, pp. 43-45.

<sup>46</sup> N. R. Ray, *Bāṅgālir Itihāsa*, pp. 531 ff.; A. B. Thakur, *Vāmilar Vrata*, *Visvavidya Samgraha*, 1350, (B. S.), pp. 4 ff.

<sup>47</sup> *The Matsya Purāṇa*, A. S. S. 74, 70, 32, See also *History of Dharmasastra*, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55; R. C. Hazra, *Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, University of Dacca, 1940, p. 256.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>50</sup> *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Trans. by F. E. Pargitor, Calcutta, 1904, XCI, 5, p. 512.

<sup>51</sup> *The Matsya Purāṇa*, 101, 27-28; R. C. Hazra, op. cit., p. 260; *The Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Trans. by Swāmī Vijayananda, S. B. H., II, XXVI-XXVII, pp. 228-230.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*,



*varṇas*. When victory is desired Kṣatriya maidens are to be preferred, when profit is wanted Vaiśya maidens, and when general welfare is wanted Śudra maidens are to be selected. In the *Navarātri pūjā* nine maidens should be worshipped. The Brāhmaṇ worshippers should select maidens from their own *varṇa*. The Kṣatriyas can select maidens from their own *varṇa* as well as from that of the Brāhmaṇs. The Vaiśyas can select maidens from their own *varṇa* as well as from any of the two higher classes. The Śudras can select from all the four *varṇas*. But artists and artisans should select maidens from their own families and tribes respectively.

Trantricism, which had profound influence on the Buddhism of early medieval Bengal, also made itself felt in the contemporary Brahmanical religion though probably none of the *Tantras* were written before the 12th century A.D.<sup>53</sup> The *Tantras* exalt women as forms of the Mother Goddess.<sup>54</sup> They can receive initiation<sup>55</sup> and can even serve as spiritual preceptors.<sup>56</sup> The *Tantras* also speak highly of the worship of maidens.<sup>57</sup> The *Vāmācāra Śāktas* practise *yoga* together with women. Their ritual requires five *tattvas* or elements of *madya* (wine), *māṃsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudrā* (parched cereal) and *maithuna* (union with women). The ritual is to be performed individually or collectively in a *cakra* (circle) under the guidance of a *guru*.<sup>58</sup> The *Devi Purāṇa*, composed about the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century A.D.<sup>59</sup> gives evidence of the existence of *Vāmācāra Śāktas* during the early medieval period in different places in Rāṭhā and Varendra.<sup>60</sup> We can easily presume that some women took part in the ritual of these *Vāmācāra Śāktas*.

There is epigraphic as well as archaeological evidence of the religious zeal of the women of early medieval Bengal. A land grant was made by Vijayasena to a Brāhmaṇ called Udayakaradeva Śarman as a fee for conducting *homd* in the great gift (*mahādāna*)<sup>61</sup> of his chief queen (Mahāmahādevī)

<sup>53</sup> R. C. Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, I, p. 407. See also S. B. Das Gupta, *Bhārater Sakti-Sādhanā O Śākta Sāhitya*, Calcutta, 1367 (B. S.), pp. 7-8.

<sup>54</sup> Kṛṣṇānandana Agānavagisa, *Tantrasāra*, quoted in Chintaharan Chakravarti, *The Tantras—Studies on Their Religion And Literature*, Calcutta, first edition, p. 61, f.n.3.

<sup>55</sup> *The Great Liberation (Mahā Nirvāṇa Tantra)*. Trans. by A. Avalon, Third Edition, Madras, 1953, XIV, 184, 187, p. 458.

<sup>56</sup> *Tantrasāra*, ed. by Panca-Sikha Bhattacharyya, Calcutta, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Ramatosana Mdyalankara, *The Pranatosani*, quoted in Chintaharan Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 81, f. n. 4.

<sup>58</sup> M. P. Pandita, *Lights on the Tantra*, First Edition, Pondicherry, 1957, VI, pp. 30 ff.

<sup>59</sup> *The History of Bengal*, I, p. 407, f.n.6.

<sup>60</sup> *The Devi Purāṇa*, 39, 14-15; 42. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Certain kinds of gifts, usually enumerated as 16 in the *Purāṇas*, are called *mahā-dānas*. For details see *History of Dharmasastra*, II, II, p. 362.



Vilāsadevi, in which the golden *Tulāpuruṣa*<sup>62</sup> was given away in the palace of Vikramapura on the occasion of a lunar eclipse.<sup>63</sup> During the reign of her son Vallālasena queen Vilāsadevi gave away a golden horse during a solar eclipse on the banks of the Gaṅgā and the Brāhmaṇa Śrī Ovasudevasarmman was granted land by Vallālasena as a fee for performing this ceremony of the Great Gift (*Mahādāna*).<sup>64</sup> On the occasion of the lunar eclipse observed by the Queen Mother, Viśvarūpasena granted 3 plots of land to *Pandita* Halāyūdhā Śarmman.<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes images of deities were also made by the munificence of the pious ladies. An image was made to the order of Vikramadevi, the chief queen of Rānaka Yaśahpāla.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes both husband and wife are mentioned in the inscribed label at the base of a sculpture<sup>67</sup> which seems to indicate that both were its donors. Some sculptures represent on their pedestals both male and female devotees.<sup>68</sup>

Certain popular cults of non-Āryan origin which were later on accepted in the Brahmanical religion seem to have been popular among the women of early medieval Bengal. These are the cults of the goddesses Manasā and Śaṣṭhī.

The cult of the snake Goddess Manasā evolved in Bengal, from the time of the Palas onwards and by the 15th century Manasā became a goddess accepted among all classes of people.<sup>69</sup> As is evident from the *Manasā Maṅgala Kāvya*s of medieval Bengal the cult of Manasā was first practised by lower classes of people such as cowherds, farmers, fishermen<sup>70</sup>

<sup>62</sup> One of the *maḥādānas* mentioned in the *Parānas*, in which a person is weighed against gold or silver which is then distributed among Brahmins. See *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Barrackpur cp. of Vijayasena, Lines 31-43, N. G. Majumdar (Ed.) *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III (I. B.). Rajshahi, 1929, pp. 63, 66-67.

<sup>64</sup> Naihati cp. of Vallālasena, V. 14, *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74, 78-79.

<sup>65</sup> Sahitya Parishat cp. of Viśvarūpasena, Line 52, *ibid.*, p. 147. See also *ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>66</sup> Lai Ins. of Vikramadevi, *E.I.*, XXX, pp. 82, 83. This inscription is written in *Gaudiyā* characters of about the 12th century A. D. and is found in the Monghyr district of Bihar on the broken pedestal of a lost image. Rānaka is a well known title of feudatory rulers and Rānaka Yaśahpāla may have been a scion of the imperial Pāla dynasty. See *Ibid.* In a village called Beduibadi in the Dacca district of Bangladesh are the ruins of a royal palace traditionally believed to be that of Yaśopāla, a local chief of pre Muslim days. See N. K. Bhattashali, *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, Dacca, 1929, p. 52. But whether there is any connexion between Yaśopāla of Lai inscription and this Yaśopāla we do not know.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87, pls. xxxii, xxxiii, xiixb.

<sup>69</sup> P. K. Maity, *The Early History of the Cult of the Goddess Manasa*, thesis submitted in the University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, pp. 258-270, 331.

<sup>70</sup> Vipra Dasa, *Manasā Vijaya*, Ed. by Sukum Sen, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1953, pp. 58-63; Narayana Deva, *Padma Purāna*, ed. by T.C. Das Gupta, pp. 23-27; Vijaya Gupta, *Padma Purāna*, ed. by B. K. Bhattacharya, Barisal, pp. 51-54, 14-16, 101-164.



and then the cult spread among the women of the upper classes. According to the Manasā legend Sanakā,<sup>71</sup> the wife of the merchant Cāndo, was a devotee of Manasā and so were also her daughter-in-law Behulā<sup>72</sup> and the latter's mother Sumitrā.<sup>73</sup> But Cāndo himself did not consider Manasā to be a Goddess and only when Behulā restored the lives of her husband and his five brothers who were killed by Manasā and when Sanakā, Behulā and others urged him, and after Manasā had further displayed her power, did Cāndo worship Manasā.<sup>74</sup> Thus we see that women had a great part in the spread of the cult of Manasā. That Manasā was worshipped in early medieval Bengal is also evident from the *Kālaviveka* of Jīmūta-vāhana.<sup>75</sup> But Manasā does not seem to have been known at that time in icon form<sup>76</sup> and in the *Manasā Kāvya*s she is symbolized by an ungraved pot or pots and a twig of *si*j which is still the commonest form of her worship.<sup>77</sup>

Another folk divinity of non-Āryan origin who was later on accepted in the Brahmanical religion was the Goddess Śaṣṭhī.<sup>78</sup> The cult of Śaṣṭhī, who is a giver and guardian of children and who assists women in childbirth,<sup>79</sup> seems to have been practised by early medieval Bengali women. The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* glorifies Śaṣṭhī and narrates a story about her

<sup>71</sup> Vipra Dasa, op. cit., pp. 87, 89, Vijaya Gupta, op. cit., pp. 64, 65, 102, 108.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 232; Narayana Deva, *Padma Purāṇa*, Ed. by T. C. Das Gupta, 2nd Edition, University of Calcutta, 1947, p. 241; Vipra Dasa, op. cit. p. 188.

<sup>73</sup> Narayana Deva, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>74</sup> Vipra Dasa, op. cit. pp. 220 ff; Ketaka Dasa Ksemananda, *Manasā Mangala*, ed. by Yatindra Mohana Bhattacharya, University of Calcutta, 1949, pp. 399, ff; P. K. Haity, op. cit., pp. 290 ff.

<sup>75</sup> Ed. by Pandita Pramathanatha Tarkabhusana, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1905, p. 414.

<sup>76</sup> Images of a snake-hooded Goddess found in Bengal have been identified by scholars such as N. R. Ray and J. N. Banerjea, and N. K. Bhattachali as the snake Goddess Manasā (see N. R. Ray, op. cit., p. 528; *History of Bengal*, I, pp. 460-461; N. K. Bhattachali, op. cit., pp. 225 ff.). But P. K. Maity does not agree with them and gives the following main arguments for his disagreement: The *dhyanas* of Manasā cannot be assigned to a date before the 13th century whereas almost all the images identified as Manasā are dated from the 9th to 12th centuries A. D. Again, many deities such as Visnu, Balarāma, Parśvanātha, the Nāgas and Naginis, the Jaina Padmāvatī and other Jaina deities are found in iconographic forms and described as having a canopy of snake hoods or as being associated with snakes in some other way. Moreover in the *Manasā Kāvya*s the Goddess is nowhere depicted as having been worshipped in the form of icon. See P. K. Maity, op. cit., pp. 332 ff.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>78</sup> Asutosa Bhattacharya, *Bāmlā Mangala Kāvya Itihāsa*, 3rd revised edition, Calcutta 1958, pp. 707 ff; P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, V., 1. P. 434; N. R. Ray, op. cit., p. 591; S. R. Das, *A study of the Vrata Rites of Bengal*, Man in India, 32. 1952, p. 236.

<sup>79</sup> Wilkinson *Hindu Mythology*, Calcutta, 1882, p. 397; The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, Ed. by Jivananda Vidyasagara, Calcutta, 1888, II. 43, 3-72; Asutosa Bhattacharya, op. cit. pp. 711, 712 and 715 ff.



worship on the 6th day after birth lying in the chamber.<sup>80</sup> Images of Śaṣṭhī have been found in Bengal<sup>81</sup> and though the *Śaṣṭhī Maṅgala Kāvya*s were only written down in the 17th or 18th centuries A. D.<sup>82</sup> like the *Banasāmaṅgala Kāvas* they probably narrate traditions of a much earlier period. The Śaṣṭhī cult is still very popular among Hindu Bengali women.<sup>83</sup>

In the development and practice of the cult of Dharma, another cult of non-Āryan origin, Bengali women of our period seem to have played a special role. This cult, though later influenced by both Buddhism and Hinduism, is probably derived from a cult of the Sun God as practised by the primitive people of Eastern India.<sup>84</sup> The origin of this cult was in Raḍhā region of West Bengal and its originators were Ḍoms who were one of the earliest inhabitants of Bengal and spoke an Austric dialect. Later on Buddhists and Hindus mixed some elements of their own religions with the cult of the Sun God of the Ḍoms and accepted the Dharma cult as their own.<sup>85</sup> Even now the priests of Dharma or *Dharma Thākur* are generally drawn from the Ḍom caste.<sup>86</sup> The word *Dharma* in this context may also have been of Austric origin, a sanskritized form of a non-Āryan word such as *durom*, *durem* or *daram*, *darom* meaning tortoise.<sup>87</sup> The tortoise (*kūrma*) is a symbol under which Dharma has been and is still worshipped in Bengal.<sup>88</sup>

The cult of Dharma was widely practised in southern and western Bengal during the medieval period, as is evidenced by the *Dharma Maṅgala Kāvya*s written between 15th to 18th centuries. The stories that are narrated in these *Kāvya*s were no doubt current in pre-Muslim period and the cult of Dharma was also practised at that time, although probably only as

<sup>80</sup> The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, II, 43. 3-72.

<sup>81</sup> N. R. Ray, op. cit., p. 666.

<sup>82</sup> Asutosa Bhattacharya, *Ramla Maṅgala Kavyer Itihāsa*, pp. 713-715.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 710-711; S. R. Das, *A Study of the Vrata Rites of Bengal*, op. cit., pp. 235-236.

<sup>84</sup> Asutosa Bhattacharya, *Bāmlā Maṅgala Kāvya Itihāsa*, op. cit., pp. 353 ff. Haraprasad Sastri's view that the cult of Dharma is but a living relic of Buddhism has been refuted by modern scholars like Asutosa Bhattacharya, Sukumar Sen and S. K. Chatterji, who agree that it is of non-Āryan origin. See *Ibid.*, pp. 501-502, 538-583; Sukumar Sen, *Is the Cult of Dharma a Living Relic of Buddhism in Bengal*, B. C. Law Volume, I, pp. 670 ff. S. K. Chatterji, *Buddhist Survivals in Bengal*, B. C. Law Volume, I, pp. 76 ff. For Haraprasad Sastri's views see *Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1897, pp. 9-30.

<sup>85</sup> Asutosa Bhattacharya, *Bāmlā Maṅgala Kavyer Itihāsa*, pp. 576-583; Sukumar Sen, op. cit., p. 673.

<sup>86</sup> Asutosa Bhattacharya, *Bāmlā Maṅgala Kavyer Itihāsa*, pp. 511-512, 576-577.

<sup>87</sup> S. K. Chatterji, *Buddhist Survivals in Bengal*, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79. But according to A. Bhattacharya only in those places where through the influence of Hinduism Dharma Thākur is worshipped as Viṣṇu is the former connected with the *Kūrma āvatāro*. Originally the cult of tortoise had no connection with the Dharma cult. See *Bāmlā Maṅgala Kavyer Itihāsa*, pp. 507 ff.



a disorganised religion of non-Āryan origin.<sup>89</sup> One of the specialities of *Dharma Thākur* is that he gives children to barren women<sup>90</sup> and in the *Dharma Maṅgala* poems we find tales of Queen Madanā and Queen Rañjāvatī who were given the boon of sons by the God Dharma when they worshipped him.<sup>91</sup> In the rituals of *Dharmapujā* women devotees can take part. In the ceremony called *gharabhara*<sup>92</sup> or *ghrabharana* women have a special part. It can be observed in the months of *Phālguna* (February-March), *Caitra* (March-April), *Vaiśākha* (April-May), and *Jaiṣṭha* (May-June). It starts on the 3rd lunar day of the bright half of any of these months and ends in the morning following the *pūrṇimā* (full moon) night. The performance of the rituals required 12 devotees, of which four must be women. They are called *Āminīs* and they can take part in all rites of the *gharabhara* ceremony. The ceremony is marked by the following special features ; (1) Songs are sung from *Dharma Maṅgala* ; (2) Dharma Thākur's wife Kāminyā is also worshipped along with him ; (3) the devotees practise austerities such as fasting, swinging with head downwards from poles under which a fire burns; (4) on the 15th of the bright half a branch of the *gāmār* tree is cut by the chief devotee; (5) a black goat called Luye or Luyā, dedicated before to Dharma Thākur, along with another black goat called Kola Luyā are sacrificed. The head of Luyā is kept in a pot which is to be kept in the laps of a woman for a whole night. It is believed that if a barren woman thus keeps the pot containing Luyā's head she will have a son. In the morning this pot is ceremonially dropped in a tank.<sup>93</sup>

As a giver of the boon of sons to barren women Dharma is still a popular deity among the women of West Bengal, and we can presume that Dharma Thākur was sometimes worshipped by Bengali women during the early medieval period and that the tales of Queen Madanā and Queen Rañjāvatī found in the *Dharma Maṅgala* poems of the medieval period are based on traditions of pre-Muslim Bengal.

Apart from the cults of various deities the tales from the *Mahābhā-*

<sup>89</sup> S. K. Chatterji, *Buddhist Survivals in Bengal*, p. 77.

<sup>90</sup> *Rupa Rāmer Dharma Maṅgala*, Ed. by Sukumar Sen and others, Calcutta, 2nd edition, 1956, Part 1, pp. 29, 51.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-81.

<sup>92</sup> All the details about this ceremony given here are to be found in Mayura Bhatta, *Sri Dharma Purāṇa*, Ed. by B. K. Chattopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1337 (B. S.), Appendix, pp. 1 ff ; K. P. Chattopadhyaya, *Dharma Worship*, J. R. A. S. B., 1942, pp. 110 ff ; Asutosa Bhattacharya, *Bāmlā Maṅgala Kāvya Itihāsa*, pp. 534 ff.

<sup>93</sup> For more details about *gharabhara* ceremony see *Sri Dharma Purāṇa*, op. cit., Appendix, pp. 1 ff. *Dharma Worship* op. cit., pp. 110 ff ; *Bāmlā Maṅgala Kāvya Itihāsa* op. cit., pp. 334 ff.



*rata* seem to have been very popular among the women of early medieval Bengal.<sup>94</sup>

In Bengal during our period traces of Jainism, which was a dominant religious sect in this region down to the 7th century A.D.<sup>95</sup> are very few. Only a few Jaina images dateable to the Pāla period have been found in the archaeological sites of Pahārpur<sup>96</sup> and Maināmati<sup>97</sup> and these appear to be the only evidence of the existence of Jainism in Bengal during the early medieval period.<sup>98</sup> But these images found in sites of Buddhist monasteries may reflect the eclectic attitude of the Buddhists rather than the existence of Jainism in Bengal. Hence we may conclude that Jainism had almost disappeared from this region. But if some followers of the Śvetāmbara sect still existed in Bengal then their women no doubt enjoyed a better social and religious status than women of any other communities.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Madanapāla made a grant of land to a Brāhmana scholar named Vatesvara Svāmi as a fee for reciting and explaining the texts of the *Mahābhārata* at the instance of Madanapāla's chief Queen (*Pattamahādevi*) Citramatikadevi. See Manjali op. of Madanapāla, *J. A. S. B.*, LXIX, pt. 1, p. 72.

<sup>95</sup> Samuel Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, 1906 II, pp. 195, 199, See also *History of Bengal*, 1, pp. 410-411.

<sup>96</sup> K. N. Dikshit, *Excavations at Paharpur*, M.A.S.I., 55, p. 76.

<sup>97</sup> T.R. Ramchandran, *Archaeological Discoveries Along Mainamati and Lalmai Hills*, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>98</sup> Cunningham reports about a battered Jaina statue which is found at Mahasthan-garh, but he does not say anything about its date. Probably its date cannot be fixed because of its battered condition. See *A. S. I.*, A. R. 15, p. 108.

<sup>99</sup> For details about the status of Jaina women see A. S. Altekar, *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Banaras, 1956, pp. 207 ff. Indra, *The Status of Women in Ancient India*, 2nd edition, Banaras, 1955, pp. 253 ff.







# Some Aspects of Muslim Politics and Personalities in India in the later Nineteenth Century

Abu Imam

Politically the last quarter of the nineteenth century in India was eventful. It saw the birth of several *Sabhas* and Associations—almost all with moderate political objectives. The most important of them were the *Mahajana Sabha* of Madras ; the *Sarvajanik Sabha* of Poona, and the Indian Association of Surendranath Banerjea. This movement ultimately culminated in the foundation of the Indian National Congress, initially beginning as an annual conference of representatives of these parties.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even before the birth of the Congress, these parties had been issuing under their joint auspices, leaflets<sup>2</sup> on various political and administrative questions concerning the country. The resolutions of the first few Congresses were largely the reiterations of the causes canvassed by these leaflets—such as economy in government expenditure, the question of widening the scope and activities of the legislative councils by the introduction of elected members, the question of holding competitive examinations simultaneously in India and England, the condemnation of the wars in Afghanistan and Burma and so on.

The Muslim affairs in India during this period were mainly dominated by three personalities—Nawab Abdool Luteef and Syed Ameer Ali in Bengal and “the grand old man” of India, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, in the Upper Provinces. The Indian National Congress faced Muslim opposition from its very birth in 1885. The great Syed, Ali and the Nawab had their differences with each other but were all united in opposing the Congress.

Nawab Abdool Luteef, born in 1828<sup>3</sup> ( death 1893 ) and a commoner<sup>4</sup>, represented the generation that had first known the advantages that could

<sup>1</sup> Surendranath Banerjea missed the first sitting of the Congress as he was holding his own National Conference ( the second session ; First session, 1883 ) at Calcutta at the same time : “While we were having our National Conference in Calcutta, the Indian National Congress, conceived on the same lines and having the same programme, was holding its first sittings at Bombay. The movements were simultaneous ; the preliminary arrangements were made independently, neither party knowing what the other was doing until on the eve of the sittings of the Conference and of the Congress.” Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making*, Oxford University Press, 1963 (first published 1925), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Preserved in the India Office Library, London.

<sup>3</sup> In Faridpur in Bengal.

<sup>4</sup> His title was bestowed on him by the British government in later life.



be gained from an English education. He rose to high office in government on the strength of this education. As one of the first English educated Muslims, his counsels on muslim affairs were highly respected by the Government and at the same time he was trusted by his community because of his orthodoxy and conformism. He thus ideally played the role of a linkman between the government and his community.

He had done all that he could for bringing English education—the education that brought material advantages—as near the reach of the Muslims—notorious for their lack of enthusiasm for this education—as was then possible. He also started in Calcutta in 1863 a Society of his own, the Mahomedan Literary Society, even a little before Sir Syed's Scientific Society. It was a body of old-world aristocrats and high government officials. It was primarily dedicated to the task of disseminating modern western knowledge to the muslim community through holding monthly lectures of which the ones delivered in the English language used to be translated to the audience in Urdu by Abdool Luteef himself.<sup>5</sup>

However, the Society also devoted much of its time to holding periodical *conversazioni*—which were grand affairs where sometimes more than two thousand guests assembled and where Viceroys,<sup>6</sup> Governors and chiefs of the princely states came—and to welcoming and bidding farewell to Viceroys and Governors in eloquent terms and addresses replete with professions of loyalty and gratitude to the *Raj*.<sup>7</sup> These occasions no doubt served the Nawab well in building up his career.

When the Government was being troubled by the *Wahabis*<sup>8</sup> it was Nawab Abdool Luteef who was mainly responsible for extracting the famous *fatwa*<sup>9</sup> in 1870 from Maulana Keramat Ali of Jaunpur that assured “that according to Muhammadan Law, British India is *Darul Islam* and that it is not lawful for the Muhammadans of British India to make jihad.”<sup>10</sup> It

<sup>5</sup> “The object of the Society is to impart useful information to the higher and educated classes of the Mahomedan community by means of Lectures, Addresses, and Discourses on various subjects in Literature, Science and Society, which are delivered, at the monthly meetings, in the Oordoo, Persian, Arabic and English languages”, *A Quarter Century of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta*.

<sup>6</sup> Calcutta being the Indian Capital of the time.

<sup>7</sup> For details see *A Quarter Century of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta*, *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> For the Wahabi movement in India see Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1866.

<sup>9</sup> An authoritative pronouncement on a social, religious or political question by the Muslim doctors of law (i.e. the *ulema*).

<sup>10</sup> *Abstract of Proceedings of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta*, Calcutta 1871.



was therefore natural that he would be reluctant to get involved in the Congress activities which might be interpreted as anti-British. When invited to attend the third Congress at Madras in 1887 the Mahomedan Literary Society's reply was : "The Committee of the Mahomedan Literary Society of Calcutta regret their inability to accept your invitation, as they do not anticipate any benefit to be derived from further present discussion of difficult and momentous questions likely to occupy the deliberations of the Congress."<sup>11</sup>

Syed Ameer Ali was born in 1849 (death 1928) in Hugli in Bengal in a family that had settled there from the Upper Provinces. He was the second<sup>12</sup> Indian Muslim barrister-at-law, became a Judge of the Calcutta High Court (1890) and later won fame for giving to the western world the first liberal interpretation of Islam in his celebrated *The Spirit of Islam* (1891).

Although born in Bengal Ameer Ali did not really have his roots here. During the years he lived here (he settled in England after 1904) he lived as a stranger and not as a Bengali. He said that in so many words in Viceroy's farewell dinner on the occasion of his retirement: "...thirtyone years ago I came to Calcutta almost as a stranger, as I am not a native of this place—scarcely a native of this province"...Also he said: "...Fifteen years ago I was elected as the first Mahomedan Judge of the High Court to succeed many distinguished Judges of another nationatily...", meaning the Bengali hindus.<sup>13</sup> However it is to be noted that the poignancy that this fact has assumed with the rise of Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan/Bangladesh was largely absent during the period with which we are concerned here.<sup>14</sup>

Ameer Ali was modern and sophisticated and was aware of the great political changes coming over India and had tried to impress upon Sir Syed the necessity of some kind of political grouping on the part of the muslims for safeguarding their interests and for making their voice heard. "Both in England and in India", wrote Ameer Ali, "I had frequent opportunities of

<sup>11</sup> Extract of a letter of Mr. (later Sir) Mahomed Shafi of the Panjab to the "Pioneer"; See *Syed Ahmed on the Present State of Indian Politics*, Allahabad, 1888, p.v.

<sup>12</sup> Syed Mahmood (later Justice), son of Sir Syed, being the first.

<sup>13</sup> *The Moslem Chronicle*, April 9, 1904, p. 197. *The Moslem Chronicle* was the only English language newspaper (weekly) of the time of the muslims of Bengal. It was published from Calcutta from 1895 to 1905 and edited by Mr. Abdul Hamid. Preserved in the India Office Library, London. Forms an invaluable research source. The author is preparing selections from this newspaper for publication.

<sup>14</sup> In this connection also see Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876-1940*, Columbia University Press, 1974, First Indian Edition, Manohar Book Service, Delhi, 1974, pp. 60-61.



discussing with Sir Syed Ahmed the position of the Muslims in the political economy of British India, and of their prospects in the future. Syed Ahmed Khan pinned his faith on English education...I admitted their importance but urged that unless as a community their political training ran on parallel lines with that of their Hindu compatriots they were certain to be submerged in the rising tide of the new nationalism."<sup>15</sup> But Syed Ahmed was then in no mood to listen to counsels advocating political action, and more so when such pleading came from a mere youth.

So Ameer Ali founded in Calcutta in 1877 the National Mahommedan Association—the first muslim organisation that did not have, like Abdool Luteef's Literary Society or Syed Ahmed's Scientific Society, a programme that was purely literary or social or scientific. In obvious reference to the Mahomedan Literary Society and the Aligarh Scientific Society and also in obvious disapproval of them the *Aims and Objects of the National Mahommedan Association* declared: "It may safely be affirmed that until the establishment of the Central Mahommedan Association, there existed no political body among the Indian Mahommedans...The few Mahommedan Societies which had been formed were in the main literary and scientific...The absence of a really representative political institution occasionally forced the government to consult these societies upon questions affecting the Mahommedan Community...The opinions thus elicited hardly represented, however, the views of the leaders of thought among them, who were alive to the exigencies of the times." Ameer Ali claims that he respectfully invited Sir Syed to give his support to the new organisation but he declined.<sup>16</sup>

Ameer Ali felt that great changes were impending in the structure of Indian government and that unless the muslims prepared themselves they would be outstripped in the political race. However, although the programme of his Association was primarily to protect and safeguard muslim interests and help their political training it did not preclude encouraging English education among the community.<sup>17</sup> The idea of the Association spread rather quickly and within a year some 34<sup>18</sup> branch organisations

<sup>15</sup> Ameer Ali, "Memoirs", *Islamic Culture*, vol. 5, 1931, pp. 540-541.

<sup>16</sup> Ameer Ali, "Memoirs" *op. cit.* p, 541,

<sup>17</sup> Broomfield's description of the Association as "a Calcutta organisation...that had formerly concerned itself primarily with Muslim education..." is not quite correct. See J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, University of California Press, 1968, p. 116.

<sup>18</sup> Amalendu De in his *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 34-35 states the number to be thirty three which is inaccurate. This book suffers from other inaccuracies as well. For instance among others



were formed many of them being outside Bengal. With the establishment of these branch organisations its name was changed, in 1878,<sup>19</sup> to the Central National Mahommedan Association. Towards the end of its career it had over 50 branches.

In retrospect, however, it seems that its achievements had been rather moderate. It was successful in voicing the grievances of the muslim community but not in removing them. It memorialised the Government several times on different issues—the most celebrated being the Memorial submitted in February 1882<sup>20</sup> to Lord Ripon, the then Viceroy. These petitions always led to pious resolutions on the part of the Government but never to any real action. The preferential treatment for the muslims asked for in this particular memorial was practically refused by Lord Dufferin who finally dealt with it in 1885. Dufferin's Resolution<sup>21</sup> coldly stated "...Nor can special favours be shown them in open competitive examinations of any description. It is only by raising their own educational qualifications to the level already attained by other races that the Muhammadans can hope to win appointments that are awarded as the result of examination. But there are a large number of appointments the gift of which lies in the hands of the Local Governments, the High Courts, or local officers. The Governor General in Council desires that in those provinces where Muhammadans do not receive their full share of State employment, the Local Governments and High Courts will endeavour to redress this inequality as opportunity offers, and will impress upon suborninate officers the importance of attending to this in their selection of candidates for appointments of the class last referred to....."

The concession granted in the last part of the resolution actually came to nothing. Although Ameer Ali called this the "Magna Charta" of the Muslims of India he could hardly conceal his disappointment at the outcome of Lord Dufferin's directives: "In spite of the progress in English education made within the last quarter of a century, their (i.e. the muslims)

mentioned by me made of the statement (*ibid.* p. 34) that in 1880 Syed Ameer Hossain became the Secretary of the Association. He also gives a confusing account of the date of the foundation of the Association (*ibid.* Notes and references no. 88, p. 91).

<sup>19</sup> Anil Seal in his *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, 1968, wrongly states the date of change of the name to be 1883, p. 312 fn.

<sup>20</sup> It can be most conveniently looked up in K. K. Aziz's *Ameer Ali; His Life and Work*, Lahore, 1968. Pt. II, p. 23 ff. Amalendu De, *ibid.* mentions the year of submission of the Memorial as 1883 which is wrong. Ameer Ali himself falls into error when he writes in "An Indian Retrospect and some Comments", *The Nineteenth Century and After*, Oct. 1905, vol. 58, p. 617: "...the Central National Mahommedan Association, of which I was secretary at the time, presented in 1883 a memorial to Indian Government."

<sup>21</sup> "The Government of India's Resolution of 15 July, 1885" available in C. H. Philips, *The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858 to 1947; Select Documents*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 185-187.



share of public offices is neither comparable to their numbers nor to their legitimate aspirations. If the Government of India were to insist on a strict compliance on the part of the local authorities with the principles and provisions of Lord Dufferin's resolution it would contribute to a material improvement in their position."<sup>22</sup>

Towards the middle of the year 1883 the Association submitted another memorial, this time to the Calcutta High Court, praying for certain temporary concessions in favour of the muslim candidates with regard to the higher grade pleadership and attorney's examinations. The Association reported with regret however that their prayer had not met with success.<sup>23</sup> According to their own admission the Association's attempts to run a night school for the muslim boys failed, nor could they successfully implement their various schemes for scholarships for muslim students. It continued to exist in a moribund state well into the 20th century even after the birth of the Muslim League. So did the Mahomedan Literary Society.

However, the founding of the National Mahommedan Association was also the beginning of the rift between the traditionalists led by Nawab Abdool Lutteef and the forward looking group led by Ameer Ali and his Association who were ridiculed as "reformers" by the Nawab. It must be noted that those who have dealt with the Indian muslim history of the period apparently do not seem to be aware of this conflict between the two rival camps or of its significance.<sup>24</sup>

The Government, as they were wont to do on all muslim problems, sought Nawab Abdool Lutteef's views on the demand of the Central National Mahommedan Association—as contained in their 1882 Memorial—that the huge resources of the Mohsin Endowment should be withdrawn from maintaining Madrassahs—thus abolishing old style traditional muslim education which served no purpose in modern life—and should be used for maintaining English colleges instead. The Nawab resolutely opposed this suggestion and wrote : "If now, these Arabic Madrassahs are closed for the sake of providing funds for an English college, even though the said English College be one meant exclusively for the benefit of

<sup>22</sup> Ameer Ali, "An Indian Retrospect and some Comments," *op. cit.*, pp. 617-618.

<sup>23</sup> "Report of the Committee of the Central National Mahommedan Association for the year 1883-84", India Office Library Tract 634, pp. 83-84.

<sup>24</sup> There is only a passing notice in Leonard Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 65. The lack of this awareness is most conspicuous in one of the latest publication on the subject viz., Sofia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912*, Dacca, 1974, an otherwise notable work. She only once mentions about hatred between Abdool Lutteef and Ameer Ali (p. 206) following Blunt (Wilfrid Seawen Blunt, *India Under Ripon*, London, 1909, p. 134,) but actually this is a misreading of Blunt in this particular passage where he does not refer to the hatred between these two personalities but to the hatred between the two groups.



Mahomedans, the Mahomedan Community would still have very good grounds for complaining that Government was diverting the entire funds of the Endowment from its original objects to purposes not contemplated by the endower." And then he finally appealed that "in the opinion of gentlemen of the advanced school, styling themselves "Reformers", my advocacy of the view of the orthodox Mahomedans may appear as too conservative and therefore not entitled to any consideration; but I am aware that I am addressing an enlightened and parental Government, one that is always disposed to respect the cherished feelings and revered institutions of its subjects, and I feel no apprehensions as to the result of my appeal."<sup>25</sup>

In oblique reference to this rivalry the National Mahommedan Association's first quinquennial report observed: "Your Committee regret, however, to mention that the suggestions to ameliorate the condition of the Mahommedans have been assailed by some Mahommedans themselves..." and the report also regretted "the tactics of a small faction opposed to the Association, as well as to the interests of the community."<sup>26</sup>

The pages of *The Moslem Chronicle*, dominated as it was by the liberals of the Ameer Ali stamp, are filled with bitter accusations against the obscurantism of the Abdool Luteef faction and the Mahomedan Literary Society. It accused the Literary Society of offering "opposition to every measure of reform and progress..."<sup>27</sup> It charged that "the exertions of Mr. Justice Ameer Ali" in remodelling the Madrasahs to make them really useful as places of training and education for the muslim boys "met with a clandestine but active opposition from the so-called Literary Society."<sup>28</sup> It observed that Abdur Rahman, the son of Nawab Abdool Luteef who ran the Literary Society after the Nawab's death, will never be able "to play the same game of bluff with his father's consummate shrewdness and tact."<sup>29</sup> Ameer Ali's clarion call for the education and emancipation of muslim women in his presidential speech at the Muhammadan Educational Conference must have shocked the men of the Literary Society.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Nawab Abdool Luteef Khan Bahadoor, C. I. E., *The Present Condition of the Indian Mahomedans, and the best means for its improvement, being a memorandum on the memorial of the National Mahomedan Association of Calcutta to His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General, Calcutta, 1883*, pp. 12 and 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Committee of the Central National Mahommedan Association for the past 5 years, 1883*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *The Moslem Chronicle*, March 3, 1900.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, August 4, 1900.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Jan. 14, 1900. This speech has not been included in K. K. Aziz, *op. cit.*



Blunt,<sup>31</sup> as mentioned earlier, had also noticed this hatred between the men of the two camps in Calcutta. Ameer Ali's European way of life, his hat, probably also his English wife, were intensely disliked by the orthodox section. They looked on Ameer Ali as a "renegade" and his close friend Syed Ameer Hossain was considered an "unbeliever." Also they were "necharis"—the same term of reproach that used to be applied to Sir Syed. And of course they disapproved Sir Syed's ideas too. According to Abdool Luteef these young men who "posed as reformers" were "out of all sympathy with the mass of the Mohammedans."<sup>32</sup>

Syed Ameer Ali and his Association joined as a convener in Surendranath Banerjea's second all-party National Conference held in December 1885.<sup>33</sup> Banerjea writes: "It was like its predecessor a Conference of all-India...But in the meantime the ideal had made headway. This time the Conference was convened by the three leading Associations of Calcutta—the British Indian, representing the landed interest, the Indian, the Association of the middle classes, and the Central Mohammedan Association, of which Mr. (now the Rt. Hon. Mr.) Ameer Ali was Secretary."<sup>34</sup>

However with the rise of the Indian National Congress Ameer Ali changed his position. In 1885 A.O. Hume met Ameer Ali at Simla where he was drafting the Bengal Tenancy Act and asked him to preside over the opening session of the Indian National Congress. This Ameer Ali refused.<sup>35</sup> His Association also declined to join the Madras Congress (1887) saying: "The Committee think no possible advantage will result either to their community or the country at large by assuming an attitude of uneasiness towards the Government and the steps it has taken, and intends to take, in order to achieve the objects we have in view."<sup>36</sup> Instead, as it appears from one of his letters to Badruddin Tyabji the Congress leader of Bombay,<sup>37</sup> Ameer Ali was trying to organise an all-India Muslim conference sometime in 1888. In so doing, he assured Tyabji, their main object was to bring about "some degree of solidarity among the disintegrated masses of Mahomedan Society" and that the Conference was not intended to be a forum against the hindus. This conference, however, seems never to have

<sup>31</sup> Wilfrid Seawen Blunt, *op. cit.*, *Supra*, p. 9 fn. 3.

<sup>32</sup> For all this Blunt's Diary *op. cit.*, pp. 85-122,

<sup>33</sup> Referred to *supra* p. 1 fn.

<sup>34</sup> Banerjea, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Information supplied by Waris Ameer Ali, son of Ameer Ali, to K. K. Aziz, *op. cit.*, pt. I, p. 188 fn. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Mahomed Shafi, *op. cit.*, p. v.

<sup>37</sup> He presided over the Madras Congress.



taken place. Indeed in 1883 also he had tried in vain to convene a conference of this kind in Calcutta and other principal cities.<sup>38</sup>

Syed Ahmed Khan, born in 1817 (death 1898) in Delhi and brought up in Mughal courtly circles, represented the old aristocracy. Since the Mutiny and particularly after his visit to England his main preoccupation became the winning of British favour by whole-hearted co-operation with them. He determined to start a college of his own for imparting English education to the members of his community<sup>39</sup> and thought that once this was done everything would be all right with the muslims. He established his college at Aligarh in 1875 and its foundation was laid by Lord Lytton, the Governor-General, in January 1877.

Sir Syed's fanatic faith in education and his distrust of muslims meddling in politics and particularly Congress politics are well known and have been alluded to above. He entered into a long controversy with Badruddin Tyabji over this question. Badruddin Tyabji wrote a letter in the *Pioneer* of the 2nd April, 1888 in which he had pleaded that if the muslims must oppose Congress let them join it and oppose it from within rather than from without, an appeal that was in effect the same that he had made earlier in a personal letter to Sir Syed dated 18th February of the same year. Sir Syed published a long letter in the *Pioneer* in reply to Tyabji's and also in defence of his Lucknow speech.<sup>40</sup> In both speech and letter the main point he made was that if the Congress demand for elected members of the Viceroy's Council were accepted then "whatever system of election be adopted, there will be four times as many Hindus as Mahomedans...and the power of legislation over the whole country will be in the hands of Bengalis or of Hindus of the Bengali-type, and the Mahomedans will fall into a condition of utmost degradation. Many people have heaped curses and abuses on me on account of my Lucknow speech; but no one, not even my friend Budruddin Tyabji, has answered it."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ameer Ali, "Dawn of a New Policy in India," *The Nineteenth Century and After*, Nov. 1906. K. K. Aziz, *op. cit.* pt. II, p. 221.

"To obtain some amelioration of the situation, a scheme was set on foot for holding in Calcutta and other principal cities of India annual conferences of representative delegates to discuss questions affecting the material and educational development of the Mussulman community under the auspices of the British Crown, to advise Government as occasion arose with regard to their needs and requirements, and to give it every assistance in the promotion of the general well-being. ...The scheme came to naught, owing to the opposition of some leading Mahommedans, whose eyes were fixed in a different direction. Two years later came the 'National Congress'..."

<sup>39</sup> This was his chief objective. However his College was open to the hindus as well,

<sup>40</sup> For further reference to his Lucknow Speech see *infra*, p. 17

<sup>41</sup> *On the Present State of Indian Politics*, *op. cit.* p. 61.



Indeed Tyabji was in great despair as all the three leaders, Sir Syed, Ameer Ali and Abdool Luteef, had united in declining to join the Madras Congress. Immediately after the Congress he had addressed identical letters to all the three leaders. He wrote ( This is from the copy to Ameer Ali ) : "You are no doubt aware that I took a somewhat leading part in the last Congress at Madras and I have observed with pain and regret that valued friends like yourself, Syed Ahmed Khan and Nawab Abdul Latif have thought it their duty to keep aloof from the Congress. I have not been able thoroughly to understand the grounds on which this abstention is sought to be justified but does seem to me to be a great pity that on matters affecting all India as a whole, any section of the Mussalman Community should keep aloof from the Hindus and thus retard the national progress of India as a whole..."

Sir Syed's reply to this common letter was :

24 January, 1888

"My dear Budruddin Tyabji,

...The fact that you took a leading part in the Congress at Madras has pleased our Hindu fellow subjects no doubt but as to ourselves it has grieved us much.

We do not mean to 'retard the national progress of India' or 'to prevent other people from enjoying rights for which they are qualified'...but at the same time it is not obligatory on our part to run a race with persons with whom we have no chance of success.

I do not understand what the words 'National Congress' mean. Is it supposed that the different castes and creeds living in India belong to one nation, or can become a nation, and their aims and aspirations be the same ? I think it is quite impossible and when it is impossible there can be no such thing as a National Congress, nor can it be of equal benefit to all people..."

Hume in desperation wrote to Tyabji : "...Of course if by any chance it should be possible to convert Syed Ahmed into even a neutral that would be best..."

Tyabji really lost heart and felt that the current of muslim opinion was going against him and in his bewilderment made the astounding proposal of proroguing Congress for five years to Hume :

27 Oct., 1888

"My dear Hume,

...We are all of opinion that having regard to the distinctly hostile attitude of Mahommedans, which is becoming daily more pronounced and more apparent, it is time for the friends, promoters and supporters of the



Congress to reconsider their position and to see whether under the present circumstances it is or not wise for us to continue holding Congress meetings every year. .. The Nizam and all the principal men of the state such as Salar Jung, Munir-ul-Mulk, Fateh Nawaz Jung and above all Syed Hussain Bilgrami have joined the opposition led by such well known men as Syed Ahmed, Ameer Ali and Abdul Latif. ...Against this array it is useless saying that the intelligent and educated Mahommedans are in favour of the Congress. ...and I already find that even in Bombay we are not able to act in the same way as we did before... I should then like the Congress to be prorogued, say for at least five years..."<sup>42</sup>

The Muslim oppositions was initially raised against the two early demands of the Congress e.g., (1) simultaneous examinations both in England and in India for appointments to the civil service and (2) adoption of the elective principle for the legislative councils. Of the two, the opposition to the first lost force gradually as more and more muslims acquired English education. But the opposition to the second never really abated and with the passage of time it only become more intensified. In the language of Ameer Ali, "the chief objection on the part of the Mahommedans to make common cause with the 'National Congress' is based on the conviction that tied to the wheels of the Juggernaut of the majority they would in the end be crushed out of the semblance of nationality."<sup>43</sup> Muslim mind never really ceased to be haunted by the spectre of four hindu votes as against one muslim—as Sir Syed put it : "It would be like a game of dice in which one man had four dice and the other only one."<sup>44</sup>

The basic difference between the standpoints of Sir Syed and Ameer Ali was that although Ameer Ali was against the Congress yet he was firmly convinced of exerting political pressure on the government for realising muslim demands—Sir Syed on the other hand was against all political activities. As we have already seen, Ameer Ali could never convince him of the necessity of political organisations.<sup>45</sup> Ameer Ali never forgot this

<sup>42</sup> For all these letters *Tyabji Papers*. Also *Source Material for the History of the Freedom Movement in India* vol. II ( 1885-1920 ), Bombay, 1952.

<sup>43</sup> Ameer Ali, "India and the New Parliament", *The Nineteenth Century and After*, August 1906, p. 257.

<sup>44</sup> Lucknow Speech, 28 December, 1887. See Shan Mohammad, *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, Bombay 1972, p. 210

<sup>45</sup> However, later on Sir Syed himself founded two ephemeral anti-Congress political organisations : (1) the Indian ( United Indian ) Patriotic Association ( 1888 ) and (2) the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Defence Association ( 1893 ). Indeed even as far back as 1866, when he was still a government servant, Syed Ahmed initiated the formation of the British Indian Association of the N. W. Provinces, the idea of which was according to Syed Ahmed Khan, to bring the Indian affairs more prominently before the British Parliament and thus make their wants known better. See *A Speech by Syed Ahmad Khan on the Institution of the British Indian Association*, N. W., Provinces, Allypurch, 1867.



and when significant political initiative was shown at Allyghur by Mohsin-ul-Mulk<sup>46</sup> in organising the famous Simla Deputation<sup>47</sup> which met Minto the Governor General on 1st October 1906 and obtained the first assurances of the institution of separate electorates for the muslims, he could not help comment sarcastically, "...By an irony of fate the necessity for a constitutional movement on the part of the Mahommedans to obtain in some measure a restoration of the balance seems at this juncture to be appreciated most at Allyghur. It has taken a quarter of a century to enforce the lesson that, even under fairly progressive Governments, in the struggle for existence and race for progress, no nationality can allow itself to be lulled into sleep. ..." <sup>48</sup> He further urged—foreboding in a striking way the birth of the Muslim League<sup>49</sup>—that for ensuring the eventual success of the constitutional movement inaugurated by the Simla Deputation the muslims "should have permanent and influential associations in every district and in every province acting in conjunction with and under the guidance of a central organisation located in some place like Allyghur, which focuses at this moment the intellectual life and political activity of the Mahommedans of India."<sup>50</sup>

By the first decade of the 20th century political life in India took somewhat unexpected turns—the hitherto moderate Congress became increasingly virulent, particularly after the partition of Bengal in 1905. Its annulment, which to him came as a betrayal by the British Government at the pressure of the hindus, made the muslims farther recede from nationalist politics. The language controversy, the Bande Mataram and Shivaji festival<sup>51</sup> had done further damage to hindu-muslim relations. In the

<sup>46</sup> Nawab Mehdi Ali Khan who had succeed Sir Syed to the Secretaryship of the Aligarh College.

<sup>47</sup> See Syed Razi Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement 1905 to 1910*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 61. ff. However Wasti is to be used with caution for he is sometimes careless about his dates. For instance he wrongly says that Abdool Luteef's Literary Society was formed in 1865 (p. 6).

<sup>48</sup> Ameer Ali "Dawn of a New Policy in India", *The Nineteenth Century and After*, November 1906, p. 825.

<sup>49</sup> Nawab Salimullah of Dacca sent round the circular proposing the creation of the party in November 1906 and the resolution to establish the party was adopted on 30 December 1906.

<sup>50</sup> Ameer Ali, "Dawn of a New Policy in India", *op. cit.* p. 834. Abdul Hamid in his *Muslim Separatism in India*, Oxford, 1967, on pp. 77-78 suggests that this exhortation from Ameer Ali directly led to the birth of the Muslim League which however seems to be rather an oversimplification of facts. Nawab Salimullah sent round his circular proposing the creation of the party in November, 1906 and the date of publication of Ameer Ali's article is also November, 1906. It is nearer the truth to assume that this idea was in the air for sometime and the need for an organisation of the muslims was in the mind of every thinking muslim at the time.

<sup>51</sup> Its pernicious effect has been alluded to in Ameer Ali, "The Unrest in India—Its Meaning", *The Nineteenth Century and After*, June, 1907, p. 878.



meanwhile, as we have seen, the Muslim League had come into existence. Muslim politics ever since flowed through its own separatist channel, first creating the system of separate electorate and finally creating the separate state of Pakistan. The separatist current was halted only during the brief interlude of truce—first after the mediation of Jinnah and second during the Khilafat agitation.

Ameer Ali meanwhile in England devoted himself, since 1908 to the task of making the voice of the League heard there through the London Branch of the Muslim League. He led a vigorous agitation in favour of the system of separate electorate.<sup>52</sup> A few years later, in 1912, Jinnah, the great ambassador of hindu-muslim unity that he was at the time, tried to modify Ameer Ali's views and offered him the Presidentship of the Congress. But Ameer Ali firmly refused it and received a letter of approbation from Mahomed Shafi.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> See Wasti, *op. cit.* pp. 173 ff.

<sup>53</sup> Ameer Ali, "Memoirs", *op. cit.* July 1932, p. 350 fn.



meanwhile, as we have seen, the Muslim League had come into existence. Muslim politics ever since flowed through its own separatist channel, first creating the system of separate electorates and finally creating the separate state of Pakistan. The separatist current was halted only during the brief interlude of union—that after the creation of India's first and second Constituent Assemblies.

Amir Ali made his name in England devoted himself, since 1908 to the task of making the voice of the League heard in the British Parliament. He led a vigorous agitation in favor of the system of separate electorates. A few years later, in 1912, Jinnah, the great representative of Indian Muslims, met him at the time he was in London. Jinnah, who was then a member of the Council of the Government of India, was deeply impressed by Amir Ali's views and offered him the Presidency of the Congress. But Amir Ali firmly refused it and received a letter of appreciation from Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See Wain, op. cit. pp. 173 ff.

<sup>61</sup> Jinnah, in "Statement," op. cit. July 1932, p. 210 ff.



# The District of Dinajpur<sup>1</sup> and the Mutiny of 1857

M.K.U. Molla

The mutiny of 1857 had affected the areas of Bangladesh : Dacca and Chittagong were the scenes of serious mutinies—serious because they involved armed confrontations and loss of lives : at Chittagong on 18 November 1857 the 34th Native Infantry mutinied, released prisoners from jails by killing its guards and plundered the treasury.<sup>2</sup> Four days later on 22 November at Lalbagh, Dacca, the Indian artillery rose into rebellion and fought the British forces commanded by Lieutenant Lewis. But soon the mutineers were over-powered ; 41 of them were killed. On the government side, three were killed, 12 severely and three slightly wounded.<sup>3</sup> North Bengal had been comparatively less disturbed. Here the situation was better in that the mutineers did not put up a strong resistance. It was at Jalpaiguri that the 11th Cavalry mutinied on the nights of 4 and 5 December 1857 and went off spreading alarm throughout the district and its immediate neighbourhood.<sup>4</sup> This uprising caused temporary inconvenience to the district of Dinajpur, as in other areas adjacent to Jalpaiguri. How did this inconvenience affect the Dinajpur district administration ? What steps did the

<sup>1</sup> Dinajpur was the administrative headquarter of the district of Dinajpur. In 1857, the area of the district was 4,586 square miles. Its population at the census of 1911 was 1,687,863. Ashraf Siddiqui ( ed. ), *Bangladesh District Gazetteers : Dinajpur* ( Dacca : Bangladesh Government Press ; 1972 ), p. 262 ; also F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers : Dinajpur* ( Allahabad : The Pioneer Press, 1912 ), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The 34th Native Infantry comprised 1089 men of whom 505 were in Chittagong, the rest being in Barrackpore. It might be useful to record the racial components of this regiment. The race-wise distribution was given below :

	Subadar major	Subadars	Jama-dars	Havildars	Naiks	Drummers	Sepoys	Total
Brahmins	1	2	4	24	10	—	294	335
Lower Caste	—	5	5	25	26	1	406	468
Christians	—	—	—	—	—	10	2	12
Muslims	—	2	1	12	24	8	153	200
Sikhs	—	—	—	—	—	—	74	74

*Chambers' History of the Revolt in India* (London: W. and R. Chambers 1859), p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> C.E. Buckland, *Bengal Under the Lieutenant-Governors* (Calcutta : S.K. Lahiri & Co. 1901 ), p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> Colonel G.B. Malleeson, *History of the Indian Mutiny 1857—1858*, Vol.II (London : William H. Allen & Co., 1878 ), p. 426.



district officials take to face the threat of the mutineers? Did the mutiny provide, in any way, the causes for personal quarrels among the officials? In the present article I shall try to provide answers to these questions.

No research work has yet been published on this topic. *Chambers's History of the Revolt in India* devoted one sentence only to Dinajpur.<sup>5</sup> Colonel G. B. Malleson in his *History of the Indian Mutiny 1857-1858* wrote a chapter on the Bengal situation. He concentrated upon the other parts of Bengal more than the northern region of it. He praised the Collector of Dinajpur as "one of the ablest men in the Civil Service", paying no attention to the effects of the mutiny on the district.<sup>6</sup> Henry George Keene's *Fifty Seven : Some Account of the Administration of Indian Districts During the Revolt of the Bengal Army* sidestepped the happenings of Bengal. Colonel Malleson's splendidly edited *Kaye's and Malleson's History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58* made a brief survey of the conditions in Bengal with a casual reference to Dinajpur.<sup>8</sup> In *Bengal Under the Lieutenant Governors*, C.E. Buckland stated, in short, the course of the mutinies in Bengal, depending heavily on Colonel G. B. Malleson's account ; in the whole of his summary Dinajpur was mentioned twice as an important station where a group of European seamen could be sent as a precautionary measure against the possible revolt.<sup>9</sup> The inconveniences that the mutiny caused to the district administration of Dinajpur totally escaped Buckland's attention. The aftermath of mutiny was given no space in *Bangladesh District Gazetteers : Dinajpur*, edited by Ashraf Siddiqui, except for a factually erroneous statement that the mutiny "left the district undisturbed".<sup>10</sup> Hence the need of the present article.<sup>11</sup>

As stated, the 11th Cavalry rebelled at Jalpaiguri ; as they were unsuccessful in creating division in the other regiments, they decided to leave Jalpaiguri and made their way towards Dinajpur. On the way they were warned by some villagers that a British regiment stationed in Dinajpur "had got wind of their coming and was advancing to attack them. Whereupon

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> Colonel G.B. Malleson, *History of the Indian Mutiny 1857-1858*, Vol. II, p. 427.

<sup>7</sup> London : W.H. Allen & Co, 1883.

<sup>8</sup> London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1909, p. 347.

<sup>9</sup> C.E. Buckland, *Bengal Under the Lieutenant-Governors* Vol. I, pp. 145-47.

<sup>10</sup> Dacca ; Bangladesh Government Press, 1972, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> In preparing this article, I have drawn on hitherto little-known and inaccessible sources—Frank Owen Bell's *Private Papers*—available in London. Bell was the Settlement Officer of Dinajpur during the 1930s. His *Private Papers* contained an account of the mutiny compiled from the Dinajpur district officials' correspondence.



the *sowars*, thinking discretion the better part of valour, sheered off towards Malda and were no more heard of.<sup>12</sup>

The news that the mutineers were advancing to Dinajpur alarmed the district officials. Francis Austrather Elphinstone—Dalrymple, the Collector of Dinajpur, called a meeting of all the high officials—Grant, the Judge, Drumond, the Magistrate, Brown, the Assistant Magistrate, Herald Holm, an indigo planter. They decided to defend the government treasury to the last—“to die rather than abandon the trust confided to them”.<sup>13</sup> He sent to the Commissioner of Rajshahi a lengthy report on the measures that he took to defend the Collectorate if it were attacked by the mutineers. He wrote that long before the rise of the sepoys at Jalpaiguri, “I had endeavoured to come to a distinct understanding with the Judge of Dinajpur and Drumond, the officiating Magistrate, as to whether in the event of the troops at Jalpaiguri rising, we were to leave the station or try to defend the Collectorate, but I did not succeed in drawing a distinct and decided opinion from them, and therefore ultimately acted to the best of my own judgement. My opinion, often expressed, was that the cannon belonging to the Rajah ought to be taken and placed in battery for the defence of the Collectorate and the latter fortified against a coup-de-main and kept ready for all the European in the station to resort to in case of alarm, but I could not induce the other authorities to act on my suggestions, and the guns are still in the Rajah’s possession. Two of these guns are brass and I believe six pounders and had the *sowars* come to Dinajpur and possessed themselves of them we could not have held the Collectorate 48 hours even had we escaped to it, but as the mutineers were at Jharleary, only 24 miles from Dinajpur on the 6th December, and in consequence of my views not being supported, the residents only assembled in the Collectorate on the evening of the 7th. Nothing could have saved us had the *sowars* come through Dinajpur which I fully expected them to do...I attribute our escape to my having got rid of all the cash that I could, so that there were not more than seven thousand and seven hundred rupees in the treasury in silver and this, there is little doubt, was known at Jalpaiguri.”<sup>14</sup> Thus having said why the mutineers did not attack Dinajpur, Dalrymple narrated the probable effects had the mutineers visited Dinajpur. Had the mutineers marched at once from Jalpaiguri to Dinajpur, they would, in all probability, have murdered the British officials, broken open the jails to liberate the prisoners, so that they might aid them, seized the Rajah’s cannon and

<sup>12</sup> F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers : Dinajpur*, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Colonel G.B. Malleon, *History of the Indian Mutiny 1857-1858*, p. 428.

<sup>14</sup> F. A. Elphinstone-Dalrymple to Commissioner, 22 December 1857 : *Frank Owen Bell Papers* ( hereafter *FOBP* ) MSS EUR D 733/1



amunition "to storm and sack the Collectorate".<sup>15</sup> "Such", he told, "has been the course pursued by the rebels at other stations, but ignoring or pooh-poohing danger is often preferred to guarding against it. There were in my opinion but two courses open to the authorities, viz : to leave the station carrying off the government treasury or to take the Rajah's guns, fortify the Collectorate, and hold out till relieved".<sup>16</sup> Dalrymple gave details of what he did to secure the Collectorate against attacks : "As I could not exactly discover in what way the other civil authority intended to act in course of an attack by the sepoys, I took the initiative, fortified the Collectorate as well as time permitted by placing barricades of sand bags and faggots in the verandah above and in the windows, etc. and endeavoured unsuccessfully to have the Rajah's guns sent for. As I was doubtful of the Collectorate guard, I kept the muskets of all not actually on guard, with their amunition, in the upper storey of the Collectorate where the 14 European residents in the station and also the detachments of 25 Bhaugapur Hill Rangers assembled on 7 December, until we received news by the thana dak that the mutineers had been within 25 miles from Dinajpur the day before and were taking the direction of Purneah."<sup>17</sup>

The news of the outbreak of mutiny at Dacca and Chittagong caused the Bengal government great anxiety. They sent marine brigades to Rangpur and Dinajpur as a step to ward off troubles that might arise in those places. The brigade arrived in Dinajpur on 10 December 1857 under the command of Captain Fryer. The district Collector wanted to accommodate the troops in three different places : the school campus in the central place of the town, the Collectorate and the Magistrate's *cutchery*. But Captain Fryer raised strong objections to separating his command. As the Magistrate's *cutchery* was a small room and as the Collector "could not have located them 'enmasse' in the Collectorate without danger to the records and total interruption to the business of the court," he placed them in the school compound.<sup>18</sup> Other arrangements including the construction of temporary kitchens and toilets were also made.

The seamen thus cantoned in Dinajpur appeared to have created administrative problems. Dalrymple was confronted with making decisions as to how were the bills for the maintenance of the seamen to be settled and who was to furnish their supplies—the Collector or the Magistrate? He sought clear instructions from the Commissioner : "Since their (seamen's)

<sup>15</sup> F. A. Elphinstone—Dalrymple to Commissioner, 22 December 1857; *Frank Owen Bell Papers* (hereafter *FOBP*) MSS EUR D 733/1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



arrival here, I have supplied them with bread, beef and vegetable daily but I am not informed how the bills for these supplies are to be settled... My expenditures up to the present time are...Rs. 132-12. I cannot discontinue these supplies and your early instructions as to further disbursement are solicited and as to whether the furnishing supplies is to be under the control of the Magistrate or the Collector."<sup>19</sup>

The next day the Collector addressed another letter to the Commissioner on the same subject, as he did not want to spend more money without having prior sanctions from higher authorities.<sup>20</sup> Thereupon the Commissioner decided that it was the Collector, not the Magistrate who was responsible for supplying provisions to the troops. He sent a terse decision to the Collector : "you will be good enough to arrange for the supply of provisions for the seamen through some respectable contractors, pending the orders of Government."<sup>21</sup> The Commissioner added to the concluding part of his letter that the quality of food provided for the troops ought to be good : "The men should be supplied with mutton and poultry as well as beef and care should be taken that meat is of good wholesome quality."<sup>22</sup> Why did the Commissioner put much emphasis on the quality of food while the Collector had not asked for his views on it? Captain Fryer was not happy about the supply of food. He has already represented to the Commissioner that "the men have been fed entirely upon beef up to this, but I consider that to ensure health their food ought to be varied occasionally either with poultry or mutton whichever is available, although probably it may incur a slight additional expense."<sup>23</sup> This explained why the Commissioner took much interest in the quality of provisions given to the troops.

The presence of the troops in the town created some other problems. They were pressing the owners of the liquor shops to sell liquor to them

<sup>19</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 30 December 1857 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

The breakdown of the expenditure was :

(a) Erection of a mat kitchen and cooking range of bricks	Rs. 25
(b) Advance to the baker	Rs. 50
(c) Advance to the butcher	Rs. 54-12
(d) Advance for digging wells	Rs. 3

Total Rs. 132-12

<sup>20</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 31 December 1857 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>21</sup> Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, to Collector of Dinajpur, 22 January 1858 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Captain Fryer, Commander, Seamen at Dinajpur, to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 22 January 1858 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*



despite the Collector's standing order that the shops for the sale of spirituous liquors were to remain closed until Fryer "got his men settled in their quarters and well in hand."<sup>24</sup> Sometimes the army succeeded in forcing the shop keepers to sell liquor thus making them liable to punishment. The Collector did not take into account the fact that the shop-owners were utterly helpless in the face of the army using coercion. He fined two shop-owners—Srimanta Saha and Indra Nasan Saha—Rs. 200 each, for selling liquor in violation of the existing order.<sup>25</sup> This action proved most effective. Liquor was no longer available for sale in the town. This in turn enraged the army. On 5 March 1858, they pulled down a few wine shops, putting a building on fire. The Collector stood aghast at the terrible sight. He made a strong plea against the consumption of liquor by the troops on the ground that there might be deaths among them "if they have access to country spirits."<sup>26</sup> He moved the Commissioner for the complete closure of the wine shops as long as the troops stayed in Dinajpur.<sup>27</sup> Under the circumstances, the Commissioner authorised the Collector "to close the shop established in the town of Dinajpur for the sale of spirit, so long as the European seamen remain at the station."<sup>28</sup> It could not be ascertained as to how long the European seamen remained in Dinajpur. But it was certain that there was a fall in the excise revenue of the district. It was estimated, on 9 August 1859, in the balance sheet for the last quarter of 1857/58, that the non-realisation of Rs. 309-5 "is owing to the licensed spirit shops... having been closed."<sup>29</sup>

During the progress of the mutiny, some Zaminders of Dinajpur, at least two of them, tried to win advantages for themselves from the disturbed-state of affairs but failed to score from the redoubtable Dalrymple. Lal kanta Baghchi, the *ijardar* of Kishmat Pargunah, submitted a prayer to the Collector stating that the mutineers, on their march westward from Jalpaiguri, invaded his and his master's house and plundered away a total of Rs. 24, 300 which was intended for remittance to the Dinajpur treasury.<sup>30</sup> Likewise Tripura Sundari Chaudhurani of Kalorah petitioned the

<sup>24</sup> F. A. Elphinstone—Dalrymple to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 22 December 1857 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>25</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 11 March 1858 ; *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, to Collector of Dinajpur 19 March 1858 ; *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>29</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 9 August 1858 ; *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*. The total revenue of the district of Dinajpur collected in the financial year 1859—60 was Rs. 17,71,976-3-6. Of this, the amount of excise revenue was Rs. 48, 555-4-0. F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers : Dinajpur*, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 28 December 1857 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*



Collector that the Jalpaiguri mutineers forcibly entered her dwelling house, broke open her treasure chest and took Rs. 4005-9.<sup>31</sup> Because of these losses, they applied separately to the Collector for a refund of revenue. The Collector did not take cognizance of the contents of their applications and informed the Commissioner that "I attach no credit to the allegations of these two zamindars and cannot recommend that any refund of revenue should be granted."<sup>32</sup> No further record was available on the sack of the two Zamindars' houses. From the subsequent silence one might infer that the petitioners were trying to fish in troubled waters. If the mutineers had plundered them, it seemed certain that the Zamindars would have moved either the Commissioner or the Governor or both for compensation, and there would have been references to the Collector for enquiry and report. But no more correspondence on this issue could be traced.

The Collector who was thus defending the government interests resolutely was soon found involved in a personal quarrel with one of his colleagues, S.C. Amesbury, the Civil Assistant Surgeon of the district. The quarrel owed its origin to the mutiny. When the news of the Jalpaiguri uprising reached Dinajpur, it was thought advisable that the European ladies living in the town of Dinajpur should be sent to Rajshahi in order to ensure their safety. Amesbury told the Collector that he would like to send his wife to Rajshahi too but he had no money as he had not yet received his pay for the months of October and November 1857. He requested Dalrymple to offer him an advance of about five hundred rupees to be repaid out of his salary, and Dalrymple agreed. Called upon by his superior to explain the case, Dalrymple noted : "As the case was most urgent, I took it upon myself to direct the treasurer to advance him the sum required which was accordingly done...I made this advance on my own responsibility on account of the pressing exigency of the case."<sup>33</sup> Amesbury undertook to repay the money—on the receipt of his pay bills for the months of October and November 1857.

Later on it appeared to Dalrymple that Amesbury had not repaid his loan in full. As a result, Dalrymple directed the district treasury to hold up Amesbury's pay until his loan was recovered. Thereupon Amesbury went to see the Collector at his office on 16 June 1858. The Collector received him coldly. Amesbury pleaded that he had already liquidated his loan by a draft on the Collector from the paymaster of the Fort William

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 28 December 1857 : *FOBP* MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>32</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 28 December 1857 : *FOBP* MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>33</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 17 June 1858 : *FOBP* MSS EUR D 733/1



and that the Collector was wrong to put off the payment of his pay. But the Collector was not convinced of either Amesbury's arguments or his honesty. The Collector believed that Amesbury had received payment in full for that draft. The Collector thought that Amesbury's behaviour was insulting.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Amesbury considered that the Collector's conduct was discourteous. He therefore brought the matter to the notice of the Governor of Bengal. He argued that although he had repaid his loan, Dalrymple endeavoured "to make it appear to everybody that my object has been to escape payment."<sup>35</sup> He was perplexed "to understand how the Collector could entertain such an extraordinary misconception on a matter so early decidable by reference to his cash balance".<sup>36</sup> He could only suppose that it was "attributable to his ( Dalrymple's ) having mislaid some documents bearing on the case".<sup>37</sup> Amesbury pinpointed Dalrymple's conduct was impolite in that he ordered him to quit his office. He stated that "I am quite at a loss to understand his motives for acting thus, unless it was his inability to give a satisfactory reason for having previously refused to cash my pay bill. It is against such conduct as this that I humbly beg to claim the protection of Government. My character has been maligned, and myself submitted to the greater inconvenience and insult, and I pray that His Honour will direct a strict inquiry to be instituted into the proceedings of the Collectorate with a view to clear me from the imputations which he has laid upon me, and to afford me such redress as His Honour may think proper".<sup>38</sup>

The Bengal government referred the matter to the Commissioner of Rajshahi. The Commissioner demanded an explanation from Dalrymple on two counts. First, whether he had held up Amesbury's pay. Second, whether Amesbury was subjected to "rebuff and insult" when he called on Dalrymple at his office.<sup>39</sup> To deal with the first point, Dalrymple rehearsed the circumstances that led to his lending money to Amesbury. He forcefully argued that as the money had been advanced by his order, he subsequently repaid the treasurer and brought the sum lent upon "my inefficient balance".<sup>40</sup> Although Amesbury agreed to repay his loan on the receipt of his pay bills for the months of October and November 1857, he did

<sup>34</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 17 June 1858 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>35</sup> S.C. Amesbury, Civil Assistant Surgeon, Dinajpur, to Secretary to Government of Bengal, 15 July 1858 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, to Collector of Dinajpur, 17 August 1858 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*

<sup>40</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 23 August 1858 : *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*



not appear to have done so. "Now", Dalrymple noted, "there was a difference about the payment of these bills in the pay office...certain it is that Dr. Amesbury did not pay for five months and that I was most unwillingly obliged to resort to the step" of stopping his pay.<sup>41</sup> He disclosed that the paybills for October and November 1857, which Dr. Amesbury had pledged for the repayment of his loan "never came into my hands at all, and the only portion of the proceeds of these bills which was paid into my treasury was in the shape of an order from the pay office for Rs. 200-11-11 which Dr. Amesbury sent with a letter on 1 April 1858 stating it to be his audited pay bill for the month of October 1857".<sup>42</sup>

To refute the charge that Amesbury was subjected to "rebuff and insult", Dalrymple gave his version of what had taken place at his office. He said: "On or about the 25 March Dr. Amesbury entered my court when I was engaged in public business, advanced on my left hand up to the side of the platform and without salutation or any of the observances usual among gentlemen accosted me with 'I say you can't, etc. etc. His address referred to the subject of the pay bill and he was exceedingly disrespectful, not to say impertinent, that it amounted to a contempt of court, I would have fined him had I not set his conduct down in some measure to ignorance. I therefore quietly requested him to cease his objectionable address and conduct and withdraw and in so doing I was particularly guarded in my manner and address that he might have no fair cause of complaint against me...My belief is that Dr. Amesbury's object on the 25th March was to provoke me to an altercation in court to be used against me to my superiors. My belief is based upon the animus shown in Dr. Amesbury's letter on the misstatements it contains and on his manner and behaviour in my *cutchery*, the intent of which could not be mistaken."<sup>43</sup>

Having received Dalrymple's explanation, the Commissioner straightway asked Amesbury two questions. First, whether Dalrymple's account of his conversations with Amesbury was correct? Second, why could not Amesbury repay his debt for five months? In answer to the first question, Amesbury denied that he ever entered Dalrymple's office on 25 March. He admitted that he went into Dalrymple's office on 16 June, nearly three months afterwards. He gave a *varbatim* report on their dialogues. Entering the office Amesbury addressed "If you please, Mr. Dalrymple, I shall feel obliged by your telling me why you refuse to cash my bill as you cannot ( or can't ) stop my pay and I require to send the amount by today's

<sup>41</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 23 August 1858 : FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



dak.”<sup>44</sup> Then Dalrymple turned round “frowningly” and said “I am engaged.”<sup>45</sup> Accordingly Amesbury waited until Dalrymple was at leisure. But Dalrymple refused to listen to him. Amesbury repeated his point : “I want to know if I am to receive my pay in full as I cannot conceive why you stop my pay.”<sup>46</sup> Dalrymple replied, “Will you leave my *cutchery* if you please, Sir, ( extending his hands towards the door ). I then said “I wish to have the matter settled if possible.”<sup>47</sup> Dalrymple asked again “Will you leave my *cutchery*, Sir, if you please ; I said, “certainly but I must report this matter to Government tomorrow as you will not listen to me.” I accordingly withdraw immediately.”<sup>48</sup> This was in Amesbury’s opinion, “Word for word what transpired” between them.<sup>49</sup> Amesbury stated most positively “that one of the reasons why Dalrymple did not try to answer” his query was the fact that Dalrymple was “rather deaf.”<sup>50</sup>

Regarding the delay in the repayment of his loan, Amesbury convincingly set out his reasons : “I was obliged to leave the station in consequence of sickness, in August last, and did not return until November. I was therefore transferred first from my civil to my military pay, and again on returning to my station I had to fall back from my military to my civil pay again; owing therefore to certain certificates which were required by the civil and military auditors my pay bills were detained in Calcutta for a considerable time, but when they did arrive I forwarded the same on the following day to the Collector, the whole amount having been liquidated by the first of April...It will appear then that as the money was advanced to me on account of my pay for October and November ’57 I could not properly have liquidated the amount advanced to me on these bills until they had reached me.”<sup>51</sup> Why did Amesbury contest Dalrymple’s statement? He put forward his *arriere pensee* in the concluding part of his letter : “I have no wish whatever that Government should be troubled with this matter ; far from it. All that I wish is that Mr. Dalrymple express his regret to me for having ( as I conceive ) insulted me in open *cutchery*, and secondly that he acknowledge me to be in the right with regard to the money having been paid in full by April last.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>44</sup> S.C. Amesbury, Civil Assistant Surgeon to F.A. Gouldsbury, Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 6 September 1858 ; *FOBP* MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



The Commissioner sent a copy of this letter to Dalrymple for "any further explanation" he might wish to offer.<sup>53</sup> In a forwarding note, the Commissioner pointed out that there were "discrepancies between your account of what took place and that given by Dr. Amesbury which are not so easily reconcilable".<sup>54</sup>

Dalrymple very firmly defended his stand. He flatly denied Amesbury's account of the altercation, emphatically stating that Amesbury never used expressions of courtesy such as "if you please Mr. Dalrymple".<sup>55</sup> Although Dalrymple accepted that "I am slightly deaf in the right ear" he made it plain that "I hear with the left as well as any man in India".<sup>56</sup> On the basis of his long administrative experience—long because he had been serving the government for twenty five years—Dalrymple distinctly averred that Amesbury was guilty of a gross contempt of court. He put on record that "I can only describe his behaviour in my court as an impertinence and studied insolence, intended to make me lose my temper, in which I am happy to say that he failed."<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile Dalrymple went on leave for three months on the ground that he had been in a bad state of health for some time past.<sup>58</sup> Dalrymple's withdrawal on leave from Dinajpur might have been planned by the Commissioner, for about the time Dalrymple went on leave, the government ordered a judicial inquiry into the affair.

The enquiry committee thus set up was headed by the newly appointed Collector of Dinajpur, G. N. Barlow.<sup>59</sup> Barlow's findings revealed that behind the bickering between Amesbury and Dalrymple there was a serious treasury irregularity and possible misappropriation of money. The Collector and the Civil Surgeon had been made the victims of their subordinates. Barlow confirmed that Amesbury sent his draft bill to the Collector through his *chaprasi*, Hoomar. The bill was received by the chief vernacular clerk of the Collectorate—Nichol. Though every stage of the payment could not be traced out, Barlow believed that the money was neither paid to Amesbury's *chaprasi* nor credited to his account. He had no doubt that the clerks of the treasury in collusion with the Collectorate

<sup>53</sup> Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, to Collector of Dinajpur, 10 November 1858: FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 24 November 1858: FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 21 September 1859: FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*



treasurer had misappropriated the money.<sup>60</sup> So Amesbury was right to say that he had sent his audited bills to the treasury for the repayment of loan. On the other hand, Dalrymple was correct in his statement that Amesbury's loan was shown unpaid in the treasury record. No further material was available on the case. Therefore it could not be said what action was taken by the government on Barlow's report.

In fine, it could be said that the district of Dinajpur during and after the mutiny, was put to inconvenience. Francis Asutrather Elphinstone—Dalrymple, the executive head of the district, faced the situation very boldly, patching up his differences with fellow officials. He himself planned the defence of the Collectorate. He was a soldier experienced in warfare; he had led the British force in the China War. It seemed that in spite of numerous civil preoccupations, Dalrymple still had plenty of fight left in him. He was ready to combat the mutineers in case they attacked the Collectorate. He took the anti-British elements on and dealt with them courageously. He carefully tackled the problem created by the naval brigade stationed in the town. Dalrymple in good faith attempted to recover the government money from the Civil Assistant Surgeon and found himself involved in a personal quarrel with the latter. This quarrel seemed to be the cause of Dalrymple's withdrawal from Dinajpur. Dalrymple in particular and his companions in general did show splendid resolution to defend Dinajpur. Although the mutineers never attacked them, they did deserve for their determination the praise and the credit which were perhaps not awarded to them officially.

<sup>60</sup> Collector of Dinajpur to Commissioner of Revenue, Rajshahi, 21 September 1859; *FOBP MSS EUR D 733/1*



# Gānjā in Naogaon—A Socio-economic Study

Md. Wazed Ali

Naogaon is a thānā (administrative unit) in Rajshahi district, Bangladesh. It has been famous for the cultivation and manufacture of gānjā (*cannabis sativa*). It was the greatest single producer of gānjā in British India<sup>1</sup> and its gānjā was of superior quality. For more than a century Naogaon supplied good quality gānjā to millions of gānjā smokers both in and outside British India. The present article deals with the cultivation and marketing of gānjā and its impact on the peasant society and peasant economy of Naogaon in the period 1917-1947.

## History of the Introduction of Gānjā Cultivation in Bengal

Gānjā grew wild in India from time immemorial, but the history of the introduction of its cultivation in Bengal is shrouded in obscurity. The earliest report on gānjā cultivation in Bengal was that of Westland, the Collector of Jessore, published in 1809. According to the report gānjā was extensively cultivated in the *Paraganas* of Ramchandrapur and Taragonea in the district of Jessore. The cultivation was concentrated in Keshabpur, Fakirhat, Noapara and Kushthea which was then a part of the district.<sup>2</sup> Westland estimated that Jessore manufactured 50,000 to 60,000 maunds of gānjā every year. The next report was that of Hemchandra Ker, a Deputy Collector who was deputed by the government of Bengal to investigate and report on the cultivation of, and trade in, gānjā in Bengal. The report was published in a supplement to the Calcutta Gazette of April 30, 1873. At the time of writing this report Jessore was not cultivating gānjā while it was being grown in Naogaon.<sup>3</sup> According to the report in 1853-54 export of gānjā from Naogaon amounted to 19,000 maunds. In 1858-59 it rose to

<sup>1</sup> Gānjā has also been grown in Madras, Ahmadnagar, Berar, United Province and Central Province. See *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Committee of Management of the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society* (hereafter *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee*) held on February 7 and March 7, 1923 and November 12, 1926 (Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society Records hereafter NGCCS Records, published). Bihar also started cultivating gānjā from the 1930s. See *A Note on the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society Ltd.* by Khan Bahadur Maulavi Choudhury Afsar Ali, Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bangal, hereafter *Deputy Registrar's Note* (Calcutta : Office of the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bengal, 1942).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. VIII (Delhi : D.K. Publishing House, 1976), pp. 61-63.



22,000 maunds and in 1971-72 it fell to 12,000 maunds.<sup>4</sup>

The reports indicate that Jessore was the cradle of gānjā cultivation and that gānjā migrated from Jessore to Naogaon. When was the cultivation of gānjā introduced in Jessore? If the growing of gānjā was in a flourishing state in Jessore in 1809 its cultivation must have started several decades before that year. It is known that gānjā migrated to Naogaon in the 1840s.<sup>5</sup> It thus left Jessore for Naogaon at a time when the Jessore peasants were growing indigo which was introduced in Jessore as well as in other Bengal districts in the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Why did gānjā cultivation disappear from Jessore in the 1840s? Probably the Jessore cultivators grew gānjā as free peasants, but the introduction of indigo gradually brought them under the clutches of the European indigo planters. By the 1840s the planters brought the peasants under their complete control and forced them to abandon gānjā in which they were not interested and to grow indigo in its place. If this view is correct, gānjā cultivation may have begun in Jessore before the introduction of indigo. Gānjā migrated to Naogaon probably because it was free from European agricultural entrepreneurs.

### Growing Gānjā

Gānjā thrives well on sufficiently high land where no rain water can accumulate and which is not subject to inundation by flood water.<sup>7</sup> The land should be loamy, i. e. mixture of sand and clay. The plot should be free from shade.<sup>8</sup> The land should be near water which is necessary for irrigation. Gānjā cannot be grown on the same plot consecutively for more than two years.<sup>9</sup>

The tract which grew and still grows gānjā is known as gānjā *mahal* or gānjā growing area. It covers an area of 30 square miles consisting of 180 villages.<sup>10</sup> This area has loamy land. Numerous plots of gānjā *mahal* are so flat and high that neither rain water can accumulate there nor flood water can inundate them. The plots, known as gānjā *bhita* or gānjā land, are specially suitable for gānjā cultivation. These are separated by ditches which are important for gānjā cultivation because of two reasons. First,

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal* Vol. VIII Delhi: D.K. Publishing House, 1976), pp. 61-63.

<sup>5</sup> *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> For details of indigo cultivation in Bengal see *Report of the Indigo Commission*, 1860.

<sup>7</sup> *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.



they constitute a source of fertilizer for gānjā plots.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, they provide water for irrigation.<sup>12</sup>

### Cultivation and Marketing of Gānjā before 1917

Before 1917 gānjā was grown under the system of *laissez faire*. The growers were free peasants—free to decide where it was to be grown and how much was to be cultivated. They manufactured gānjā in their own chosen place. They also disposed of their product freely. Gānjā was, however, not sold in any *haṭ* or village market where other commodities were bought and sold. The growers sold their gānjā to the local brokers called *dālāls* who in turn, sold gānjā to the licensed dealers who used to visit Naogaon during gānjā marketing season from various parts of British India.<sup>13</sup>

### Cultivation and Marketing of Gānjā since 1917

With the organization of the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society Ltd. in 1917 the principle of *laissez faire* was abandoned in favour of state control. The gānjā growers were under the dual control of Excise Department and the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society. The cultivation and manufacture were controlled by the former and marketing by both the former and the latter. Under the old system there were several difficulties. First, since the growers produced as much as they could without knowing market conditions, the supply was frequently greater than the demand. The glutted market gave the local brokers an opportunity to buy peasants' product at a low price. As a result the peasants did not get the expected return. Secondly, the peasants were denied opportunity of dealing directly with alien wholesale dealers. Between the peasants and the wholesale dealers stood the local brokers who did not allow the outside dealers to come to the gānjā growing area to make purchases directly from the producers. These men were brokers as well as gānjā growers. Since their number was limited, it was possible for them to unite and control the growers' price to their benefit. As a result the growers were always under their heels. There were a number of families of brokers, the most important of them being the Moṇḍāls of Saluka, Kirtipur, Mallikpur and Dhopaipur, the Sardārs of Mokharpur and Barsail and the

<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of the preparation of land fertile earth from the nearby ditches is taken away and deposited on the fields in small heaps. Ultimately the fertile earth gets mixed up with the soil as a result of ploughing and cross-ploughing.

<sup>12</sup> The gānjā plants require irrigation. Irrigation is done by the traditional method. Normally water from the nearby ditches is used for irrigation.

<sup>13</sup> Deputy Registrar's Note, p. 2.



Mridhās of Paharpur.<sup>14</sup> The brick-built houses which the descendants of some of these families still possess in the villages as well as in the Naogaon town bear testimony to the way they controlled the price of gānjā denying a due share to the peasants.

To save the gānjā growers from the clutches of middlemen and to assure them a fair price the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society was formed and registered in 1917 under the Co-operative Societies Act II of 1912.<sup>15</sup> The Society is granted exclusive privilege of purchasing and selling gānjā and bhang by wholesale.<sup>16</sup> The Society, in turn, is to abide by the instruction of the government with regard to the construction and maintenance of *catars* (manufacturing yards) and to contribute money towards the maintenance and housing of the preventive force in and about the gānjā *mahal*.<sup>17</sup> Another condition of grant is that the government would fix the wholesale as well as the retail price of gānjā and bhang.<sup>18</sup>

Membership of the Society is open to all bonafide gānjā growers.<sup>19</sup> The Society is to have a nominal capital of Rupees 100,000 divided into 10,000 shares of Rupees 10 each to be subscribed by the members only.<sup>20</sup>

The supreme authority is vested in the General Meeting of all members.<sup>21</sup> Subject to the control of the General Meeting the entire management of the affairs of the Society is vested in the Committee of Management consisting of the Collector of Rajshahi as Chairman, the Sub-divisional Officer of Naogaon as Vice-Chairman and 24 members, 21 being elected by the general members of the Society and 3 nominated by the government.<sup>22</sup> The office of the Society is run by a Deputy Chairman, a Manager, an Assistant Manager and an Accountant.

### Control of the Cultivation by the Excise Department

An intending grower, whether a member or a non-member is to apply to the Superintendent of Excise, Naogaon for license to cultivate gānjā.

<sup>14</sup> Information about the families of brokers has been supplied by some old gānjā growers of the British Period whom the writer interviewed.

<sup>15</sup> See *Bye-Laws of the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society Ltd.*, hereafter *Bye-Laws of the Society* (Calcutta : Office of Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bengal, 1924), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Bye-Laws of the Society*, p. 2. The Society was also a wholesale dealer in bhang which was imported from Bhagalpur in Bihar. See *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on March 3, 1918 (NGCCS Records, published)

<sup>17</sup> *Bye-Laws of the Society*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



The license, issued in April, is granted for a specific area. No fee is charged for license. Cultivation of gānjā without license is prohibited.<sup>23</sup>

After gānjā is transplanted, an officer of the Excise Department verifies the area to see whether it conforms to the area allowed in the license.<sup>24</sup> When gānjā plants begin to ripen the Excise staff patrols the gānjā *mahal* to prevent smuggling. The peasants also keep watch at night over their crop from small huts erected on bamboo platforms called *tang* or *kunrā* at the corner of their fields. For harvesting the growers are to take permission from the Excise Department. For administrative convenience the gānjā *mahal* has been divided into three circles—Kirtipur, Mruadpur and Govindapur.

Gānjā is manufactured in *catars* or manufacturing yards under the supervision of the Excise staff. These are constructed on lands which remain fallow after winter harvest. These are fenced by the growers with hedges, but the Society pays money to the growers at a rate fixed from time to time for fencing.<sup>25</sup> The Society erects temporary houses for the Excise staff<sup>26</sup> and provides gas lamps in the *catars*.<sup>27</sup> Each grower is allowed a specific area in the *catar* for manufacturing gānjā.

### Acreage and Output

Statistics of acreage and output are available for the years 1923/24—1940/41. Table 1 shows that acreage and output progressively declined. In

Table 1  
Acreage and Output of Gānjā  
(Five and three years average)

Years	Acreage in Bighas	% of change	Output in Maunds	% of change
1923/24—1927/28	2,057	—	6,251	—
1928/29—1932/33	1,695	—21.3	3,945	—58.4
1933/34—1937/38	808	—109.7	2,662	—48.2
1938/39—1940/41	802	—0.7	2,198	—32.3
1923/24—1940/41	—	—156.3	—	—185.0

Source ; Compiled from Deputy Registrar's Note, Appendix 8.

<sup>23</sup> Deputy Registrar's Note, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Deputy Registrar's Note, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on February 2, 1920 (NGCCS Records, published)

<sup>26</sup> Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on November 9, 1917 (NGCCS Records, published)

<sup>27</sup> Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on November 30, 1920 (NGCCS Records, published)



the first period the acreage was 2,057 bighas and the production was 6,251 maunds. In the second period the area shrank to 1,695 bighas and the outturn to 3,945 maunds. In the third period the acreage was reduced to 808 bighas and the output to 2,662 maunds. In the last period the decline of area was negligible while production decreased by 21.3 per cent. Between 1923/24 and 1940/41 the decline of acreage was by 156.3 per cent while that of production by 185 per cent. In the whole period the rate of decline of output was larger than that of acreage. The reason was that no attempt was made to increase the per acre yield of gānjā by the introduction of improved method of cultivation. Consequently upon continuous cultivation the productive power of the soil declined giving a lower yield.

The acreage declined not because the peasants were unwilling to grow gānjā but because the government controlled production. It was the government which fixed the area according to estimated demand.

### Marketing of Gānjā

After 1917 the Society was the sole wholesale dealer in gānjā and bhang in Bengal. There were 36 distributing centres in different parts of Bengal including one in Calcutta.<sup>28</sup> The centres were situated mainly at the sub-divisional and district headquarters. Every distributing centre had a warehouse which was in joint charge of the Society's paid agents and the Excise staff. The central warehouse at Nagaon made periodical supplies to these centres. The licensed retail vendors took gānjā from these warehouses and sold to the consumers. The central warehouse supplied gānjā also to the wholesale dealers of other provinces. No gānjā was issued to a retail vendor from the central warehouse. Some of the warehouses at the distributing centres were the properties of the Society,<sup>29</sup> while others belonged to the government. The government did not charge any rent from the Society for its warehouses. The distributors at the centres were the paid agents of the Society.

### Trade in Gānjā

Gānjā was consumed in Bengal as well as exported to Bihar, Orissa, various native states, United Province, Assam and Cooch Bihar.<sup>30</sup> Gānjā was also exported to Trinidad and some other countries outside India.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> For details see *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on March 10 and March 20, 1918 and December 12, 1919* (NGCCS Records, unpublished).

<sup>30</sup> See *Deputy Registrar's Note*, Appendices 8 & 11,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



Export to Trinidad amounted to 38.87 seers in 1938/39 and 6.32 maunds in 1939/40.<sup>32</sup>

Ganja was used mainly for consumption. But it was also used for the manufacture of chemicals. A few manufacturing chemists such as Messrs. Smith Stanistreet & Co., the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works Ltd. and B. K. Paul and Co. took occasional supply from the Calcutta centre for manufacturing "Tincture Cannabis Indica".<sup>33</sup> The total yearly supply was 3.50 maunds.<sup>34</sup>

Table 2 shows that in terms of quantity the consumption of ganja both in and outside Bengal was declining. Of the total consumption, however, the share of Bengal was increasing while that of the provinces outside

Table 2

**Total Consumption of Ganja, Consumption in and outside Bengal**  
(Five years average, in Maunds)

Years	Total Consumption	Consumption in Bengal	% of total	Consumption outside Bengal	% of total
1926/27-1930/31	3,911	1,599	41	2,312	59
1931/32-1935/36	1,675	942	56	733	44
1936/37-1940/41	1,590	910	57	680	43

Source : Compiled from *Deputy Registrar's Note*, Appendix 8.

Bengal was decreasing. The consumption of Bengal rose from 41 per cent in 1926/27-1930/31 to 57 per cent in 1936/37-1940/41 while that of other provinces declined from 59 per cent in 1926/27-1930 to 43 per cent in 1936/37-1940/41. It has been seen that Bihar, Berar, United Province, Central Province, Madras and Ahmadnagar cultivated ganja. The provinces which once imported ganja solely from Bengal took supply also from other ganja growing provinces of British India.

For the general decrease of the consumption of ganja in Bengal and other provinces two reasons may be responsible. First, since many ganja smokers smoked ganja without license, they were always afraid of being prosecuted by the Excise staff. Their strict vigilance might have led some smokers to give up their habits. Secondly, the smokers generally belonged to the poorer classes of society and the high retail price of ganja<sup>35</sup> might have influenced many smokers to abandon smoking.

<sup>32</sup> See *Deputy Registrar's Note* Appendices 8 & 11,

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For details see p. 12.



### Distribution of Ganjā Earnings between Production and Distribution Sectors

On the production side there were the growers and on the distribution side the Ganjā Society as wholesale dealer, and licensed vendors as retailers. The government was another element in the distribution sector. It charged excise duty from the retail vendors. Table 3 shows the prices given to the growers and the prices at which the Society sold ganjā in Bengal and in other provinces.

Table 3

#### Wholesale Prices in Bengal and in other Provinces and the Prices Paid to the Growers

( Prices are in Rupees per Maund )

Years	Wholesale Prices in Bengal	Wholesale Prices in other Provinces	Prices paid to the Growers	Its percentage of Wholesale Price in Bengal
1923/24	260	245	75	28.8
1924/25	260	245	94	39.7
1925/26	220	205	117	53.1
1926/27	220	205	161	73.1
1927/28	200	185	125	62.5
1928/29	200	185	103	51.5
1929/30	200	185	110	55.0
1930/31	200	185	103	51.5
1931/32	240	225	91	37.9
1932/33	280	265	94	33.5
1933/34	270	255	104	38.5
1934/35	250	235	93	37.2
1935/36	250	235	79	31.6
1936/37	190	175	58	30.5
1937/38	175	160	101	57.7
1938/39	175	160	70	40.0
1939/40	180	160	72	40.0
1940/41	180	160	70	38.8
Annual average	208	203.8	95.5	45.9

Source : Compiled from *Deputy Registrar's Note*, Appendix 8.

Table 3 shows that the wholesale prices in Bengal were higher than those in other provinces. This was due to the fact that the Society paid the packing charges for the drug in Bengal while the dealers of other provinces paid these charges.

Table 3 also shows that grower's prices were always far less than the wholesale prices and sometimes the former was less than half of the latter. The annual average wholesale price in Bengal was Rupees 208 per maund and the grower's annual average price was Rupees 95.5 per maund. In average the growers received 46 per cent of the wholesale price. But it does not



mean that the Gānjā Society made larger gains at the cost of the growers. It could not always sell all gānjā it bought from the peasants. The surplus was kept for a year or two to meet eventual demands or deficit. After two years the surplus gānjā was destroyed.<sup>36</sup> In Table 4 the distribution of the total income of the Gānjā Society between itself and growers is shown. The table shows that the annual average income of the Society was Rupees 5,99,800 of which the growers annually received Rupees 4,34,000. Of the total income the annual average share of the growers was 65.5 per cent.

The government fixed the retail price of gānjā. In 1940/41 the retail price was fixed at Rupees 105.00 per seer. The distribution of price was as follows:<sup>37</sup>

Wholesale price to the Gānjā Society	... ..	Rupees	5.06
License fee and government duty	... ..	"	53.94
Vendor's margin (including rent etc.)	... ..	"	46.00
		Rupees	105.00

Table 4

**Distribution of the Income of the Gānjā Society between itself and the Growers**  
(Figures are in 000's Rupees)

Years	Gānjā Society's total Income from Gānjā Sales and other sources.	Total Amount paid to Growers (including reward and bonus)	Its percentage of total income
1923/24	1,003	761	75.8
1924/25	1,098	816	74.3
1925/26	1,002	783	78.1
1926/27	972	741	76.2
1927/28	901	660	73.2
1928/29	795	624	78.5
1929/30	825	643	77.9
1930/31	497	457	91.9
1931/32	498	314	63.0
1932/33	486	317	65.2
1933/34	473	311	65.7
1934/35	413	268	64.9
1935/36	390	241	61.8
1936/37	292	176	60.3
1937/38	312	176	56.4
1938/39	264	180	68.1
1939/40	303	172	56.7
1940/41	273	172	63.0
Annual Average	599.8	434	69.5

Source : Compiled from Deputy Registrar's Note, Appendix 8.

<sup>36</sup> For details see Deputy Registrar's Note, Appendix 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.



A vendor was to spend Rupees 20.00 per seer on rent of shops and other charges. His actual margin per seer amounted to Rupees 26.00.<sup>38</sup> The license fee, however, increased on a sliding scale. The higher the sale the greater the rate of license fee with proportionate diminution in the margin of vendor's profit. If a vendor sold 10 seers of gānjā his actual profit would be Rupees 71.<sup>39</sup>

As seen in Table 4 the Gānjā Society enjoyed 30.5 per cent of the total income. With this share of income it maintained its office staff and organized institutions for education and public health in the gānjā growing area by which the growers were benefitted.

The greatest beneficiaries of gānjā cultivation were the retail vendors and the government. The vendors received a larger share from the sale proceeds of gānjā than either the Gānjā Society or the producers. The government enjoyed the largest share. It imposed heavy excise duty on gānjā. But it had to spend little for the Excise staff. The Gānjā Society contributed sums towards their maintenance and provided them free quarters.

It was a constant complaint on the part of the growers that the government gave them very low price while they sold gānjā at a very high rate.<sup>40</sup> To increase their price demands were frequently made by the growers. On one occasion they organized a strike not to cultivate gānjā in order to force the government to accede to their demands.<sup>41</sup> When the growers saw the government adamant they called off the strike and cultivated gānjā as before. The complaint seems to be not against the grower's price itself but against the grower's price relative to retail price. If the retail price would not have been so high, they would not probably have complained. They forgot the way they were cheated by the brokers before the Society came into being. If they had remembered the past there would have been no cause of complaint on their part.

### Profitability of Gānjā Cultivation

It is very difficult to say whether growing of gānjā was profitable relative to the cultivation of other crops. An estimate of cost of production and return to peasants has been made by Khan Bahadur Maulavi Chowdhury Afsar Ali, the then Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Bengal.<sup>42</sup> According to him in 1940/41 the cost of production per bigha of

<sup>38</sup> For details see *Deputy Registrar's Note*, Appendix 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> In 1940/41 the grower's price per maund was Rupees 70.00 while the retail price per maund was Rs. 4,200.00, See Table 3 and page 12.

<sup>41</sup> See *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> See *Deputy Registrar's Note*, pp. 19—20.



gānjā was Rupees 225.00, the average outturn in 1938/40 was 2.7 maunds per bigha and the average price paid per maund was Rupees 71.00. A grower thus earned Rupees 191.50 from cultivating one bigha of gānjā. He therefore sustained a distinct loss. On the contrary, if he cultivated jute followed by *rabi* (summer) crops instead of gānjā he would have enjoyed a profit of more than cent per cent. Likewise if he cultivated potato, his margin of profit would also have been more than cent per cent.

If gānjā cultivation was not profitable what incentive was there for a cultivator to grow it ? If the expenses of all the operations of gānjā cultivation are counted, the cultivation of gānjā might appear an unprofitable business. To a peasant, however, it was profitable because he spent very little cash money for its cultivation. He grew his own seeds. He ploughed his land with his own cattle and implements and by his family labour. Transplantation, harvesting and sometimes manufacture of gānjā were done by a system of *gāntā* or co-operation. In these operations all his neighbours and relatives took part. In return he had to feed them well for which he had to spend very little cash money. These operations of each peasant were so arranged that each peasant's work could be done alternatively. He used cow-dung of his own cattle. He spent money for the purchase of oil-cake, for employing *poddars* (sex specialists) for weeding out male plants and for irrigation. At the end of the year he got a lump sum which he could not get from growing any other crop. He could use the money for land purchase, land improvement, house-building etc. This was the greatest inducement for him for growing gānjā.

### Impact of Gānjā Cultivation on Peasant Society and Peasant Economy

For more than a century before partition gānjā had been cultivated in Naogaon, but its impact was visible only from the time of the formation of the Naogaon Gānjā Cultivators' Co-operative Society. In the nineteenth century gānjā could produce very little social and economic effect, because the profits of the peasants went into the pockets of the local brokers.

Gānjā played an important role in the creation of social harmony in the villages of gānjā *mahal*. The system of *gāntā* was a notable example of such harmony. Gānjā created among all classes of peasants a sense of belonging to an integrated society. Under the impact of gānjā there developed a compact peasant society consisting of rich, middle and poor peasants.

Gānjā undoubtedly led to the prosperity of the peasants. There were signs of improvement in the peasant's standard of living.<sup>43</sup> The dazzling

<sup>43</sup> Information about gānjā's contribution to the improvement in the standard of living has been supplied by some old gānjā growers of the British period whom the writer interviewed.



sheet iron roofed houses still in existence in the villages of *gānjā mahal* speak of the prosperity of the peasants. In the houses of rich *gānjā* growers all the huts had sheet iron roofs. Even a poor peasant had at least one hut with a sheet iron roof. Such houses of *gānjā mahal* were built with the income from *gānjā* sales.

New furniture appeared in the houses of the peasants. In the nineteenth century there was no furniture worth mentioning in their houses. From 1910's the peasants began to have furniture like *cauki* (wooden bed), bench, chair, table, etc. *Gānjā* gave them money to procure such furniture.

There were signs of improvements in other aspects of peasant's life. Many *gānjā* growers wore fine clothes instead of coarse ones. Many used shoes in lieu of wooden sandals. For lighting their houses hurricane lanterns replaced *kupi* (earthen lamp). Some of the rich *gānjā* growers possessed ponies.

The prosperity of the peasants is also proved by the fact that in 1951 the percentage of landless labourers in relation to agricultural labour force in Naogaon sub-division was lower than those of Rajshahi district and East Bengal. Secondly, Naogaon had the lowest percentage of landless labourers among the sub-divisions of Rajshahi district (see Table 4). Statistics of landless labourers of the Naogaon *thānā* are not available. However, one may presume that its percentage in this *thānā* would be lower than the sub-divisional average. *Gānjā* seems to have prevented many poor peasants from turning into landless labourers.

Table 5

**Percentage of Landless Labourers in relation to Agricultural Labour Force in East Bengal, Rajshahi District and Sadar, Nator, Nawabgonj and Naogaon Sub-divisions of Rajshahi District**

	1 Number of Agricultural Labour Force	2 Number of Landless Agricultural Labourers	Col. 2 as % of Col. 1
East Bengal	1,07,15,467	15,13,629	14.1
Rajshahi district	5,60,055	86,426	14.3
Sadar Sub-division	1,54,979	28,035	18.0
Nator Sub-division	95,214	13,256	13.9
Nawabgonj Sub-division	1,02,894	17,517	17.0
Naogaon Sub division	2,06,968	27,618	13.3

Source : *Census of Pakistan*, 1951, Vol. 3, East Bengal, Table 14.



### Gānjā Society's Contribution to the Development of Peasant Society and Peasant Economy

The gānjā growers enjoyed benefits of gānjā cultivation through the Gānjā Society in respect of treatment of their cattle, public health and education.

Cattle is the peasant's wealth and his prosperity depends upon the prosperity of his cattle. To prevent cattle epidemics and to maintain the health of cattle of the gānjā growing area the Gānjā Society established a veterinary hospital at Kirtipur.<sup>44</sup> Apart from making capital expenditure for the construction of a hospital building and quarters for the veterinary surgeon, the Society spent an annual sum for the purchase of medicine and implements. Table 6 shows that between 1924/25 and 1946/47 the Society, on an average, annually spent Rupees 1,610.00 for the veterinary hospital.

For providing facilities for medical treatment to the gānjā growers the Gānjā Society established three medical dispensaries in three circles, one each at Govindapur, Kirtipur and Muradpur.<sup>45</sup> The Society constructed buildings for the dispensaries and quarters for doctors and compounders. Table 6 shows that between 1924/25 and 1946/47 the annual average expenditure of the Society for the dispensaries was Rupees 6,978.00.

**Table 6**

#### Annual Average Sum the Society Spent for the Veterinary Hospital and the Dispensaries

( Five and three years average in Rupees )

Years	Average annual sum for the veterinary hospital	Average annual sum for the dispensaries
1924/25-1928/29	2,342	6,737
1929/30-1933/34	1,830	6,726
1934/35-1938/39	507	5,835
1939/40-1943/44	1,370	5,742
1944/45-1946/47	1,999	9,851
Annual average	1,610	6,978

Source : *General Ledger of the Gānjā Society*,

1924/25-1946/47 ( NGCCS Records, unpublished ),

The Gānjā Society contributed towards the spread of primary and secondary education in the gānjā growing area. For the spread of primary education the Gānjā Society made annual grants to more than 50 primary

<sup>44</sup> See *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on December 10, 1919 and May 2, 1923 ( NGCCS Records, published ).

<sup>45</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on December 10, 1919 and January 25, 1922 ( NGCCS Records, published )



schools, night schools and *madrāsās*.<sup>46</sup> To encourage the primary teachers it also granted them rewards.<sup>47</sup> Table 7 shows that between 1924/25 and 1946/47 the annual average grant of the Society for primary education

Table 7

**Annual Sum the Society Spent for Primary and Secondary Education  
and for Maintaing Roads and Bunds**  
(Five and three years average)

Years	Annual sums spent for pri- mary education in Rupees	Annual sums spent for secon- dary education in Rupees	Annual sums spent for roads and bunds in Rupees
1924/25—1928/29	3,478	5,842	4,911
1929/30—1933/34	3,185	7,503	463
1934/35—1938/39	2,586	5,710	611
1939/40—1943/44	2,350	8,812	596
1944/45—1946/47	3,103	7,801	733
Annual average	2,940	7,134	1,463

Source : *General Ledger of the Gānjā Society*,  
1924/25—1946/47 (NGCCS Records, unpublished)

amounted to rupees 2,940.00. For imparting secondary education to the children of gānjā growers the Society maintained one secondary school in each circle—Chak-Atita High School in Govindapur circle, Kirtipur High School in Kirtipur circle and Chakla High School in Muradpur circle. The annual average grant for secondary education, which is shown in Table 7, was Rupees 7,134.00.

In addition to its contribution towards the spread of primary and secondary education, the Gānjā Society granted scholarships to students of gānjā *mahal* for obtaining higher education. It granted three scholarships of Rupees 10.00 each per month for one year to three students to study the art of cultivation of tobacco in the Burirhat Agricultural Farm, Rangpur.<sup>48</sup> It granted two scholarships of Rupees 15.00 each per month for four years to two medical students studying in Calcutta Cambell Medical School.<sup>49</sup> The Society also granted one stipend of Rupees 8.00 per month and six sti-

<sup>46</sup> For details see *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Education Committee of the Gānjā Society* held on November 9, 1930 ( NGCCS Records, unpublished ).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on January 31, 1920 ( NGCCS Records, unpublished ).

<sup>49</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on July 14, 1922 ( NGCCS Records, published ).



pend of Rupees 6.00 per month for one year to seven students of gānjā mahāl studying in Rajshahi College.<sup>50</sup>

The result of the Gānjā Society's spending money for education was positive. Table 8 shows that in 1951 Naogaon sub-division had the highest percentage of literacy among the sub-divisions of Rajshahi district. Secondly, the percentage of literacy in the Naogaon thānā was higher than that in Rajshahi district and nearly equal to that in East Bengal. There can be no doubt that it was the achievement of income from gānjā.

Table 8

**Literate Persons as Percentage of Population in East Bengal, Rajshahi District, Sadar, Nator, Nawabgonj and Naogaon sub-divisions of Rajshahi District and Naogaon thānā of Naogaon sub-division in 1951.**

	1 Total Population	2 Number of Literate persons	3 Col. 2 as % of Col. 1
East Bengal	4,19,32,329	88,55,579	21.1
Rajshahi district	22,05,057	3,34,928	15.8
Sadar sub-division	5,82,147	86,983	14.9
Nator sub-division	3,81,866	54,548	14.2
Nawabgonj sub-division	5,00,531	59,349	11.8
Naogaon sub-division	7,40,513	1,34,050	18.1
Naogaon thānā	1,26,913	25,294	19.9

Source : *Census of Pakistan*, 1951, Vol. 3, East Bengal,  
Table 8 and Supplementary Table 1.

For protecting the peasant's crops from flood water of the river Jumna the Gānjā Society maintained and repaired embankments along both the banks of the river. For the development of communication in the gānjā mahāl the Society granted money to the local and district boards for construction, extension, and repair of roads and bridges. The expenditure on these items is shown in Table 7. Between 1924/25 and 1946/47 the annual average expenditure amounted to Rupees 1,463.00.

The gānjā growers were benefitted by the Society in various other ways. The Society supplied sugarcane saplings to the growers,<sup>51</sup> distributed clothes

<sup>50</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on August 13, 1934 (NGCCS Records, published).

<sup>51</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on March 10, 1920 (NGCCS Records, published).



among the poor growers,<sup>52</sup> and sold rice to the gānjā growers in time of scarcity, the price being deducted from bonus payable to them.<sup>53</sup>

### Contribution of the Gānjā Society to the Growth of Naogaon Town

The Gānjā Society made immense contribution to the development of the Naogaon town. It constructed buildings, dug tanks and built roads and bridges.

The most conspicuous structure which the Society built is the Gānjā Society mosque.<sup>54</sup> Its floor is built with marble. The mosque's floor reaches the concrete bathing pavement ( *ghat* ) of a tank belonging to the Society. The mosque still stands out as one of the finest structures in Naogaon. For the Hindus the Society built a fine temple near the municipality office.<sup>55</sup>

The Gānjā Society constructed two-storied residential quarters,<sup>56</sup> one for the Deputy Chairman and the other for the Superintendent of Excise, Rajshahi who had his headquarters at Naogaon. Constructed in an open area of the town the buildings are a class by themselves. In beauty they are still unsurpassed.

The Society also built a number of buildings for its sub-ordinate staff.<sup>57</sup> The office building of the Society is a magnificent structure.<sup>58</sup> Another important building is the Co-operative club.<sup>59</sup> The Gānjā Society ward annexed to the Naogaon Charitable Hospital ( now Public Health Centre ) is also an impressive structure.<sup>60</sup> The Co-operative High Madrasā Building now B.M.C. College ) is another important building.<sup>61</sup>

The Gānjā Society acquired from the district board two large tanks,<sup>62</sup> one in front of the mosque and the other near the quarter of the Deputy

<sup>52</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on December 12, 1919* (NGCCS Records, published),

<sup>53</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on September 19, 1919* (NGCCS Records, published),

<sup>54</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on June 1, 1921* (NGCCS Records, published)

<sup>55</sup> *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on December 10, 1919* (NGCCS Records, published).

<sup>58</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on November 17, 1919* (NGCCS Records, published).

<sup>59</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on August 1, 1923* (NGCCS Records, published),

<sup>60</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on January 3, 1920* (NGCCS Records, published).

<sup>61</sup> *Deputy Registrar's Note*, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee held on February 21, 1920* (NGCCS Records, published).



Chairman. The Society excavated them and constructed two concrete bathing pavements.<sup>63</sup> The tanks are an important source of income to the Society. Every year the Society earns money from fish cultivation in the tanks.

The Society also contributed to the development of communication in the town. It built a few miles of road and a number of bridges in the town area.<sup>64</sup>

The *gānjā mahal* still remembers its past glory and prosperity. With the loss of markets in West Bengal and India after partition, the cultivation of *gānjā* has been reduced to about 300 bighas. *Gānjā* is now cultivated under the block system, each circle cultivating for one year alternatively so that the peasants of each circle can grow *gānjā* once every three years. *Gānjā* is still a profitable crop and will be still more profitable if the government increases the grower's price. The peasants are very willing to cultivate it. It is learned from the *Gānjā* Society officials that all *gānjā* manufactured in a year is exhausted before the end of the first half of the season. It means that the production is less than half of the demand. The government should study the market situation and increase *gānjā* cultivation. The Society should arrange for chemical examination of the drug to discover its new uses. The expansion of cultivation would revive the old glory of *gānjā mahal* and also increase the revenue of the government.

<sup>63</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on June 28, 1920 (NGCCS Records, published).

<sup>64</sup> *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Managing Committee* held on October 10, 1923 (NGCCS Records, published).



Chairman. The Society expects to have a number of concrete plans for the future. The tanks are an important source of income to the community. Every year the Society earns money from the cultivation of the tanks. The Society also contributed to the development of communication in the town. It built a few miles of road and a number of bridges in the town.

The Gujarat Ministry will remember its past glory and prosperity. With the loss of markets in West Bengal and India after partition, the cultivation of kharif has been reduced to about 3000 acres. Kharif is now cultivated under the block system, each circle cultivating for one year alternately so that the peasants of each circle can grow kharif once every three years. Kharif is still a profitable crop and will be still more profitable if the government increases the grower's price. The peasants are very willing to cultivate it. It is known from the Gujarat Society officials that all kharif manures in a year is exhausted before the end of the first half of the season. It means that the production is less than half of the demand. The government should study the market situation and increase kharif cultivation. The Society should arrange for chemical examination of the dung to discover its new uses. The expansion of cultivation would revive the old glory of kharif and also increase the revenue of the government.

Proceedings of the Managing Committee held on June 26, 1920  
(Gujarat Record, published)  
Proceedings of the Managing Committee held on October 10, 1923  
(Gujarat Record, published)



# Employment and Labour Productivity— Implications for Disparity in Regional Growth

M. Azhar-Ud-Din

## Introduction

Inequalities in income and economic opportunities between regions of a country are a pervasive phenomenon. Regional disparities are found not only in developed countries like the U.K. and the U.S.A. but also in developing countries and perhaps the problem is more acute in these countries. Pakistan provides an ideal example of such disparities. The country was composed of two distinct regions of East and West Pakistan separated both geographically and culturally from one another. Not only were disparities in per capita income and economic well-being glaring between the regions but the non-resolution of such disparities could be held responsible for the break-up of Pakistan and the secession of East Pakistan as an independent country of Bangladesh.

The present paper deals with disparity of employment between the erst-while regions of East and West Pakistan during the period 1947/48 to 1969/70. It also estimates the regional per capita as well as sectoral labour productivity, and focuses on their implications for disparities in economic growth of the two regions. Throughout the paper, for the above regions, we shall use the terms Bangladesh or B and West Pakistan or W.

## Occupational Disparity—The Legacy

Occupational disparity between the incoming and outgoing refugees at the time of Partition of India in 1947 had a differential impact on the employment situation in the economies of the two regions. Most of the non-Muslim emigrants from Bangladesh to India were teachers, lawyers, doctors, landlords, businessmen, bankers, and other professionals. But the Muslim evacuees who came from India to B were mostly poor cultivators, petty land holders and landless labourers. As a result, the vacuum created in the fields of education, banking, commerce and other professions could not be filled for many years to come after partition.

Further, in the migration that took place in B by 1950, a large number of Muslim workers were affected. Most of the Muslim immigrant workers



were formerly working in the jute industries and collieries of West Bengal. As B was industrially very backward, the influx of these labourers on top of the already unemployed ones created a severe unemployment problem from which the economy has since then been suffering. As B's rural economy was already overcrowded with Muslim cultivators, very little land was available for immigrants. Nor did the latter possess industrial skills. Even the abolition of the Zamindari system in 1950 did not result in any significant benefits to the landless labourers.

In the case of W<sub>2</sub> on the other hand, the vacuum created by the exodus of non-Muslim businessmen and the capitalist class was easily filled by the influx of a similar category of people from India. Most of the immigrants into W were either settled as businessmen, civil and military servants,<sup>1</sup> industrialists, artisans, industrial workers, bankers and insurers, or rehabilitated as farmers on the agricultural lands left by the non-Muslims. Thus although the magnitude of the refugee problem was severe in W, the economy of that region in the field of employment was not as adversely affected as that of B.

### Employment Situation

There was a glaring disparity in the ratio of unemployment between B and W. As can be seen from Table 1, in 1949/50 while the ratio of unemployment to the total regional labour force was 25.6% in B, it was only 2.8% in W. The disparity in the growth rates of unemployment between the two regions widened over time. Despite the fact that the rate of growth of population was well as of labour force was higher in B than in W, the opportunities increased at a lower rate in the former than in the latter. Thus throughout the 1950s while the labour force in B increased by 3.5 million, job opportunities increased by only 1.1 million. During the same period in W, the increase in labour force was 2.3 million against the job opportunities of 1.6 million.<sup>2</sup> During the 1960s the situation did not improve for B in any way, despite the expansion of employment opportunities with the implementation of the Second Plan (1960/61—'64/65) and it continued during the Third Plan (1965/66—1969/70) period. Thus it is evident from Table 1 that at the end of the Third Plan 33.6% of the labour force was unemployed in B, whereas only 11.7% was unemployed in W.

<sup>1</sup> Out of 83 ICS Officers who opted to serve in Pakistan after partition, only one was a Bengali Muslim. Of the 100 Muslim military officers of the rank of Captains and above, almost all of them were either West Pakistanis or non-Bengalis from other parts of India. Cf. Kalim Siddiqui, *Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1972, pp. 68, 92.

<sup>2</sup> Mahbub-ul-Haq, *The Strategy of Economic Planning*, OUP, Karachi, 1963, p. 108.



Table 1

**Regional Employment Situation during 1949/50 – 1969/70**  
( In Millions )

Year	Region	Total labour force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployed as % of total labour force
1	2	3	4	5	6
1949/50	B	13.3	9.9	3.4	25.6
	W	10.7	10.4	0.3	2.8
1954/55	B	14.5	10.2	4.3	29.7
	W	12.0	11.5	0.5	4.2
1959/60	B	16.8	11.0	5.8	34.5
	W	13.0	12.0	1.0	7.7
1964/65	B	21.5	14.5	7.0	32.5
	W	15.2(a)	13.7	1.5	9.9
1069/70	B	25.9 + 4.3(b)			
	W	= 30.4	20.0	10.2	33.6
		18.0(a)	15.9	2.1	11.7

a) S.R. Bose, "Labour Force and Employment in Pakistan : A Preliminary Analysis 1961–1966", *PDR*, Vol. III, No. 3, Autumn 1963, p. 382.

b) 4.3 million was the additional labour force during 1965-70 ; see *East Pakistan Economic Survey, 1969-70* ; Planning Department, Govt. of East Pakistan, Dacca, 1970, p. 16.

Source for other figures : M. Haq, *The Strategy of Economic Planning—A Case Study of Pakistan*, OUP, 1963, p. 108. Govt. of Pakistan, *Census Report, 1961*, Ministry of Home & Kashmir Affairs, Bulletin No. 4, P. XXII ; GOP, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin*, Manager of Publications, Karachi, June, 1970.

### Labour Productivity

To discuss the implications of the regional employment situation for regional development through the increase in the sectoral labour productivity, let us consider a two-sector economy such that

$$L_a + L_n = L ; Y_a + Y_n = Y \text{ and } \frac{Y_n}{L_n} > \frac{Y_a}{L_a} ; \text{ where } L \text{ is}$$

labour force ( including employed, unemployed and under employed ),  $Y$  is income (output) and subscripts 'a' and 'n' refer to the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors respectively.

Then output per worker :

$$\frac{Y}{L} = \frac{Y_a}{L_a} \cdot \frac{L_a}{L} + \frac{Y_n}{L_n} \cdot \frac{L_n}{L} = \left( \frac{Y_a}{L} + \frac{Y_n}{L} \right)$$



On the basis of our two-economy hypothesis :

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{Y}{L} &= \left( \frac{Y^B}{L^B} + \frac{Y^W}{L^W} \right) \\ &= \left( \frac{Y_a^B}{L^B} + \frac{Y_n^B}{L^B} \right) + \left( \frac{Y_a^W}{L^W} + \frac{Y_n^W}{L^W} \right)\end{aligned}$$

If regional output per worker is raised solely through the shift of labour force, keeping  $\frac{Y_a}{L_a}$  and  $\frac{Y_n}{L_n}$  constant,  $\frac{Y}{L}$  becomes an increasing function of  $\frac{L_n}{L}$  only in both the regions :

$$\Delta \left( \frac{Y^B}{L^B} \right) = \left( \frac{Y_n^B}{L_n^B} - \frac{Y_a^B}{L_a^B} \right) \cdot \Delta \left( \frac{L_n^B}{L^B} \right);$$

$$\text{similarly, } \Delta \left( \frac{Y^W}{L^W} \right) = \left( \frac{Y_n^W}{L_n^W} - \frac{Y_a^W}{L_a^W} \right) \cdot \Delta \left( \frac{L_n^W}{L^W} \right).$$

If the level of  $\frac{Y_n}{L}$  is not very high, development through this course has very important implication which can be seen for B and W from Tables 2 and 3. To achieve an increase in  $\frac{Y}{L}$  in every Five Year Plan period, it would require that the non-agricultural sector should not only absorb the entire addition to the labour force, but also receive a net transfer of a considerable number of workers from the agricultural sector in order to achieve the income targets of the proposed plans.<sup>3</sup> It is evident from the results of our calculation show in Table 2 that with the pace of economic development of Pakistan under the centrally organised plans, the labour productivity  $\left( \frac{Y}{L} \right)$  in W had increased from Tk. 1176.00 per capita in 1949/50 to Tk. 1779.00 per capita in 1969/70 ; and the index of which

<sup>3</sup> However, the plan for a large scale transfer of labour force from agriculture to non-agricultural sector must have been extremely unrealistic and probably had no historical parallel at such an early stage of growth in an agrarian economy like B's, if not in a semi-industrial economy of W. Where marginal productivity of agricultural labour is positive, it may also imply an absolute decline in agricultural output as the labour force in that sector decreases. In other words, if marginal productivity of labour in agriculture rises, the agricultural sector may provide more employment. If agricultural productivity remains constant or declines, the employment opportunities for the surplus rural labour force depend upon increases in the productivity of non-agricultural sector.



rose from 100 to 151 in that period. On the other hand, B experienced a gradual decline of labour productivity per capita—which was much lower than that of W—from Tk. 912.00 to Tk. 736.00 throughout the fifteen years of planned development from 1954/55 to 1969/70 with a fall of its (labour productivity) index from 102 to 82 during the same period. It is, however, worth noting that there was only a slight increase of output per worker (i.e., from Tk. 896.00 to Tk. 912.00, see Col. 4) in B during the pre-Plan period (1949/50—1954/55) in which B's real income was also somewhat higher than that of W.

The labour force in B in 1969/70 was more than one and a half times greater than that in W. If regional per capita income was to rise significantly it is obvious that, together with inter-sectoral shifts of the labour force, an improvement of labour productivity in agriculture as well as in industry, would be required. During the period 1949/50 to 1969/70, W experienced an increase of labour productivity in both the sectors. As shown in Table 3, productivity per worker in W rose (only with the exception of the year 1954/55 in which agricultural productivity slightly declined) from Tk.929.00

**Table 2**  
**Per Capita Labour Productivity by Regions**  
(At 1959/60 constant prices)

Year	B				W			
	Y <sup>B</sup> (in Milli- on Tk.)	L <sup>B</sup> (Million Nos.)	Y <sup>B</sup> /L <sup>B</sup> (in Tk.)	Y <sup>B</sup> /L <sup>B</sup> (Index)	Y <sup>W</sup> (in Milli- on Tk.)	L <sup>W</sup> (Million Nos.)	Y <sup>W</sup> /L <sup>W</sup> (in Tk.)	Y <sup>W</sup> /L <sup>W</sup> (Index)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1949/50	11914.00	13.3	896.00	100	12588.00	10.7	1176.00	100
1954/55	13239.00	14.5	912.00	102	14677.00	12.0	1225.00	104
1959/60	14354.00	16.8	854.00	95	17118.00	13.0	1317.00	112
1964/65	17314.00	21.5	805.00	90	23734.00	15.2	1561.00	132
1969/70	22242.00	30.2	736.00	82	32024.00	18.0	1779.00	151
Increase in total								
labour force								
during		16.9	—	—	—	7.3	—	—
1949/50—1969/70								

Note: Y<sup>B</sup> and Y<sup>W</sup> refer to the regional GDP figures at 1959/60 constant prices taken from *Appendix Table E-1*, M. Azhar-Ud-Din, "Regional Dualism—A case Study of Pakistan: 1947/48—1969/70", an unpublished Ph. D. thesis submitted to the Department of Economics, Lancaster University (U. K.), January, 1975. Labour force figures for B and W are from Table 1.



to Tk.1215.00 in the agricultural sector, and from Tk.1665.00 to Tk.2517.00 in the non-agricultural sector. The constant increase in per capita income

in W seems to have been caused by the increase in  $\frac{L_n^W}{L^W}$  to 43% from 34%

(shown in Col.8), although the labour participation ratio (Col.9) was lower in that region than in B.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, with a comparatively lower agricultural labour productivity, experienced a sharp decline from Tk. 741.00 to Taka 466.00 throughout the period under review, although the output per worker in the non-agricultural sector grew more or less at the same rate as

in W (i. e., from Tk. 1600.00 to Tk. 2509.00) with the decline of  $\frac{L_n^B}{L^B}$  to

13% from 18% and a rise of labour participation ratio from 31% to 42% during the same period. The fall in the agricultural labour productivity in B must have been caused by the excessive increase in the number of rural labour force.

As can be seen from Table 3, the composition of labour force between the two regions was dissimilar. While in 1969/70 the labour force engaged in non-agricultural occupations in B was half of that in W (Col. 6), the labour force engaged in agricultural occupation in the former region was more than 2.6 times larger than that in the latter region (Col. 3) in the same period. The growth of labour forces in the non-agricultural sector over the period under review was faster in W than in B. Out of 16.9 million workers (Col. 2, Table 2) added to the labour force in B, only 1.6 million (Col. 6, Table 3) were absorbed in the non-agricultural sector, while in W, 4.2 million out of an increase of 7.3 million were absorbed in this sector. Given the values of  $Y_a/L_a$  and  $Y_n/L_n$  for Band W, the changes in over all labour productivity (Table 2) was largely determined by these shifts.

Since during the two decades, the labour force in agriculture increased by 15.3 million (140%) in B compared with a smaller increase of only 3 million (44%) in W, it is quite understandable that unlike W, B experienced a declining labour productivity in the agricultural sector. In the absence of sufficient alternative opportunities for employment in the non-agricultural sector, the excessive growth of rural labour force in B aggravated the problem of unemployment, underemployment, and disguised unemployment in the rural economy. This means that in the process of economic



development, B's agricultural sector benefited less compared to the non-agricultural sector. On the other hand, due to the balanced growth of the economy of W, the labour productivity of both the sectors increased in that region simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

Thus far we have explained the economic implications for the differential labour participation ratios between the two regions. It is evident from Col. 9 of Table 3 that the labour participation ratios in B were higher than those in W. But the lower proportion of children and higher masculinity ratio in W<sup>5</sup> should have been favourable to a higher labour force proportion in that region. More than 67% of the total population of W were in the working age group,<sup>6</sup> whereas in B only 63% of total population were in this group. Yet the average labour participation ratio in B was higher (23.4% see Table 3) than that in W (29%). This inconsistency between the demographic structure and the economic behaviour of the population can be attributed to the level of economic development and the social set up in the two regions. B being economically backward in relation to W, a greater percentage of population was typically reported in the labour force.

An aspect of the economically backward nature of B is that she was faced with a lot of unpaid family labour and, therefore, burdened with the problem of unemployment and underemployment which was not reflected in the census statistics of labour force. But as W was more industrialized and less agricultural than B, children, old people and females of the families did not drift easily to casual industrial employment. The lower labour participation ratio in W might also be the result of greater urbanization whereby social and economic pressures encouraged a larger number of boys and girls aged 10 years and over to remain in educational institutions as against the rural economy of B where they have been pushed to work at an early age. The higher child labour force participation ratio in B compared

<sup>4</sup> Tariff protection by keeping the relative domestic prices of importables higher, not only encouraged the domestic entrepreneurs to make investment in the manufacturing sector, but also facilitated the movement of agricultural workers to that sector in W. Because of the surplus labour in agriculture, the agricultural income did not decrease (rather increased) and the growth of output of manufactures enhanced the level of employment as well as income.

<sup>5</sup> The overall masculinity ratio for W was 115 as against 108 for B. Cf. GOP, *Census Bulletin No. 2*, Karachi, 1961.

<sup>6</sup> According to the definition used in 1961 census, the labour force consists of all persons aged 10 years or over who work (or are looking for work) for profits, wages, or salary or help any member of the family in agriculture, trade or any other profession. This age limit for inclusion in the labour force was 12 years in 1951 census.



**Table 3**  
**Sectoral Distribution and Productivity of Labour Force by Regions**  
 ( At constant price of 1959/60)

**Bangladesh**

Year	$Y_a^B$ (in Million Tk.)	$L_a^B$ (in Million Nos.)	$Y_a^B/L_a^B$ (in Tk.)	$Y_n^B$ (in Million Tk.)	$L_n^B$ (in Million Nos.)	$Y_n^B/L_n^B$ (in Tk.)	$L_n^B/L^B$	$L^B/P^B$ (Participation ratio)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1949/50	8074.0	10.9	741.0	3840.0	2.4	1600.0	0.175	0.310
1954/55	8704.0	12.0	725.0	4535.0	2.5	1814.0	0.165	0.300
1959/60	9042.0	14.1	641.0	5312.0	2.7	1967.0	0.154	0.312
1964/65	10115.0	18.5	547.0	7199.0	3.0	2399.0	0.139	0.342
1969/70	12204.0	26.2	466.0	10038.0	4.0	2509.0	0.132	0.417
Increase of labour force in 1949/50 to 1969/70		15.3	—	—	1.6	—	—	—

**West Pakistan**

Year	$Y_a^W$ (in Million Tk.)	$L_a^W$ (in Million Nos.)	$L_a^W/L^W$ (in Tk.)	$Y_n^W$ (in Million Tk.)	$L_n^W$ (in Million Nos.)	$Y_n^W/L_n^W$ (in Tk.)	$L_n^W/L^W$	$L^W/P^W$ (Participation ratio)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1949/50	6595.0	7.1	929.0	5993.0	3.6	1665.0	0.336	0.298
1954/55	6950.0	7.7	903.0	7727.0	4.3	1797.0	0.358	0.299
1959/60	7711.0	8.0	964.0	9407.0	5.0	1881.0	0.385	0.289
1964/65	9646.0	9.0	1072.0	14088.0	6.2	2272.0	0.408	0.291
1969/70	12389.0	10.2	1215.0	19635.0	7.8	2517.0	0.433	0.300
Increase of labour force in 1949/50 to 1969/70	3.0	—	—	—	4.2	—	—	—

Note : Regional income figures are from Appendix Table E-1, "Regional Dualism—A Case Study of Pakistan : 1949/50 to 1969/70", *op. cit.*, Non-agricultural income figures are arrived at by deducting the agricultural ones from the regional GDP figures shown in Table-2. Sectoral distribution of labour force has been made on the basis of the ratio of such distribution as shown in the Census Reports. From the Census Reports it is evident that during the inter-censal period 1951-1961, the proportion of civilian labour force in agriculture rose from 83.2 to 85.3 per cent in B, and declined from 65.1 to 59.3 per cent in W ; Cf. *East Pakistan Population Census 1961*, Vol. 2, Table 45, Vol. 54 to Vol. 71 ; and *West Pakistan Population Census 1961*, Vol. 3, Table 45, pp. V. 56 to V. 69 quoted in *Pakistan Statistical Year Book* ; 1967, CSO, Karachi, pp. 18-21. L/P for both B and W represents the participation ratio which refers to the ratio of the number of civilian labour force to the total population of the region concerned.



to W<sup>7</sup> is another indicator of the low level of development attained by the former region.

### Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of the present paper that throughout the period under review the problem of unemployment had been more acute in Bangladesh than in West Pakistan. In the process of economic development there was a shift of labour force from the agricultural to the non-agricultural sector in both the regions. It is, however, interesting to note that while labour productivity increased in both the sectors in West Pakistan, it declined in agricultural sector in Bangladesh over time. The fall in the agricultural labour productivity in B must have been caused by the excessive increase in the rural labour force in that region than in W. The backward nature of the economy of B compared to that of W seems to have been responsible for pushing a greater percentage of rural population to work at an early age.

From the above fact it is, however, difficult to conclude that the marginal agricultural labour productivity was zero or negative in W and positive in B; and that with the shift of rural labour force to non-agricultural sector led to an increase in per capita labour productivity in the agricultural sector in the former rather than in the latter. One possible explanation of such an increase in W rather than in B is the early introduction of modern technology (comprising irrigation, chemical fertilizers and HYV seeds) in agriculture and prompt response of the farmers to it in the former region than in the latter.

<sup>7</sup> While 38.2% (1,779,000) of children aged 10-14 years were reported in the civilian labour force in B, the percentage of the children of the same age group included in the labour force in W was 23.3 (886,000) Cf. GOP, *Census Bulletin No. 2*, 1961, Karachi.







# 1947 and 1971 in the Subcontinent : A Study in Parallels; the Second Partition of the Subcontinent

A.M.A. Muhith

## The first Partition

The developments in subcontinental politics leading to the partition of India in 1947 bear a close resemblance to the developments in Pakistan politics leading to the disintegration of the country in 1971. An exercise in historical analogy seems rewarding.

With the British conquest of India began the unhappy days of the Muslim community of India. They could not easily forget that they were the rulers the other day. They accepted the defeat with sullenness and developed a feeling of animosity towards their victors. They refused to accept the new cultural changes and the new educational system that flourished in the wake of British conquest of India. As a result they were not trusted and were systematically ousted from positions of prominence. As Ambedker very rightly pointed out, every move by the British government helped the Hindu community at the expense of the Muslim community.<sup>1</sup> Towards the later part of the 19th century, some British administrators, notably Hunter, called for a change of attitude towards the Muslims on the part of the rulers.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a Muslim loyalist movement spearheaded by Nawab Abdul Latif, Sir Syed Ahmed, and Sir Syed Ameer Ali also developed.<sup>3</sup> The enlightened sections of the Muslim community gathered together in 1906 in Dacca and established the Muslim League to achieve three objectives. Those three objectives were promotion of the feeling of loyalty among the Muslims, promotion of Muslim interests, and prevention of the feeling of hostility to other communities.<sup>4</sup>

Some modus operandi for adequate and sure representation of Muslim interests in the constitutional system and the body politic of India were all that the Muslim League was demanding right up to 1940. The demand for

<sup>1</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India*, Bombay : Thaker and Company Ltd., 1946, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> I.H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Karachi : Karachi University, 1965, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore : Ashraf Publications, 1963, pp. 3-8, 46, 47, 50, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Mahmud Husain (ed.), *History of Freedom Movement*, Karachi : Pakistan Historical Society, 1961, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 37-38.



separate electorate and weightage system in representation aimed at adequate Muslim voice in elected bodies all over the country. The demand for a large measure of provincial autonomy also sprang from the desire to promote Muslim interest ; governments dominated by Muslims could be formed in some provinces but not so in the center ever. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 brought about an understanding between the Muslim League and the Congress and thus between the two religious communities of India. This Pact accepted the Muslim demands.<sup>5</sup> The Hindu-Muslim honeymoon continued right up to 1928. That was the time new moves were being made for establishing representative government in India. The different attitudes of the two communities found expression in the Nehru Report of the Congress and Fourteen Points of M.A. Jinnah.<sup>6</sup> The differences were on provincial autonomy, reservation of seats in legislatures, and delimitation of provinces. The hopes for a compromise, however, were not given up. Both parties agreed to give a fair trial to the Government of India Act of 1935. After the elections of 1937 the Muslim League insisted on coalition governments in the provinces. Two years of Congress rule in the provinces between 1937 and 1939 spelt disaster for Hindu-Muslim unity. The majority community who were more advanced failed to demonstrate an attitude of accommodation. Instead systematic suppression of the Muslim culture in the Congress ruled provinces annoyed the Muslim community.<sup>7</sup> The platform of the Muslim League under these circumstances changed drastically. A new solution to the constitutional crisis of India appeared imperative.

While Hindu communalism was driving the Muslims to the wall, Muslim separatism found its chance to assert itself.<sup>8</sup> As early as 1930, poet Iqbal dreamt of a Muslim state in the federation of India. In 1933 Choudhury Rahmat Ali made the demand for Pakistan, it was to be a federation of the provinces of the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, Kashmir and North West Frontier. Several other schemes thought of a confederation of India with regions divided between the two religious communities. Kifayat Ali's "Confederacy of India" thought of five federations, two principally Muslim and three principally Hindu. He allowed two confederal subjects, namely defense and foreign affairs, and suggested that the confederation should get its revenue as contribution or assignment from the five federations. Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, Premier of the Punjab, drew up in 1939 another federal scheme based on seven zones, two predominantly Muslim and five predominantly

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-135.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 283-292, 298-300.

<sup>7</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, *Evolution of Pakistan*, Lahore : *All Pakistan Legal Decisions*, 1963. All the proposals for separate Muslim homeland are discussed in pp. 124-192.



Hindu. In his scheme the federal subjects were defense, external affairs, communications, customs, coinage and currency. The Aligarh Scheme, also expounded in 1939, suggested creation of three states, namely Pakistan in the northwest, Bengal in the east and Hindustan covering the rest of India. A defense treaty would link these three states together. Maulana Maudoodi, chief of Jamet-e-Islami party in Pakistan, gave another scheme in 1939 for two federal states of Hindus and Muslims under one confederation dealing with three subjects, namely defense, communications, and trade and commerce. In short, Muslim separatism was very active in the decade of the 30s.

As a result of this development there came the Pakistan Resolution of 1940. This resolution wanted that "the areas in which Muslims were numerically in a majority as in north-western and eastern zones of India" should be "grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units should be autonomous and sovereign."<sup>9</sup> From the original idea of two or more Muslim states ultimately the idea of one Pakistan evolved. Not until 1946, however, a clear cut position on the demand for one Pakistan was taken by the Muslim League. It was to be "a sovereign independent state comprising Bengal and Assam in the northeast zone and the Punjab, NWFP, Sind and Baluchistan in the north west zone."<sup>10</sup> The demand for Pakistan was first placed before the Cripps Mission which was sent by His Majesty's Government in 1942 to settle the constitutional future of India. This Mission recognized the possibility of Pakistan but did not accept it as the inevitable solution. It felt that power could not be transferred to a system of Government whose authority would be challenged by powerful elements of the polity or which would have to survive by coercing such elements. So the Mission proposed constitution making for the union with the provision that provinces and states could opt out of the union.<sup>11</sup> The Cripps proposals did not solve the crisis and the search continued for a different kind of solution. General elections were held in India in 1945 and 1946 and the demand for Pakistan was put to test. The Muslim League won all Muslim seats in the Central Legislature, formed governments in Bengal and Sind provinces, and made a good showing in Punjab province, but failed in NWFP.<sup>12</sup> Even after this massive endorsement of the concept of Pakistan, the Muslim League was prepared to make accommodation.

The Cabinet Mission of 1946 enunciated a plan for a confederation of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204

<sup>11</sup> K. B. Sayeed, *Pakistan—The Formative Phase*, Karachi : Pakistan Publishing House, 1960, p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, pp. 243-244.



India consisting of three groups of provinces plus the Indian states.<sup>13</sup> Groups B & C were to embrace the North Western and Eastern zones of Pakistan proposal, while Group A covered the rest of Indian provinces. The confederal subjects were to be foreign affairs, defense, communications and sufficient taxation powers to raise revenue for administration of federal subjects. The provinces in the Groups were also given the right to opt out of any Group after the first elections under the new constitution. This plan also provided for an interim government with 13 ministers, six from the Congress, five from the Muslim League and two from other minority groups. Although the plan did not fully meet the Pakistan demand the Muslim League accepted it. The Congress also accepted the important part of the plan but refused to participate in the interim government. Subsequently the Congress refused to accept the constitutional plan as settled and wanted to do away with the Grouping scheme even before it would be given a chance. Because of the intransigence of Congress leadership the last chance for a united India was frustrated.<sup>14</sup> The response of the Muslim League was "Direct Action" to achieve Pakistan, to assert their just rights, to vindicate their honour, and to get rid of the present British slavery and the contemplated future caste-Hindu domination.<sup>15</sup> Communal riots soon engulfed the country. In August 1946 Calcutta was in flames. In October of the same year riots spread in Noakhali and Tippera districts in East Bengal and in Bihar and United Provinces. In December riots broke out in NWFP and the Punjab. As the situation showed no signs of improvement, in a desperate bid the British government announced on February 20, 1947 its desire to transfer power in India not later than June 1948. A new Viceroy was also appointed and Lord Mountbatten took over charge on March 22, 1947. Meanwhile an interim government had come into being in September 1946 with Congress participation only. The Muslim League joined that government in the middle of October, 1946. But there never was any harmony between the Leaguers and the Congressites in the cabinet and the rift and bitterness became open after the presentation of the budget on February 28, 1947. Partition of India appeared to be the only solution to the communal and constitutional crisis in the country. On June 3, 1947, Lord Mountbatten announced the plan of transfer of power in India to two Constituent Assemblies, one for Pakistan and another for India. Khalid Sayeed very aptly remarked that "Pakistan like any other state is a product of both positive

<sup>13</sup> Pirzada, pp. 233-247.

<sup>14</sup> A. K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, New York : Longman's Green and Company, pp. 181-184, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Qureshi, p. 275.



and negative forces. It would be unfair to attribute its establishment entirely to Hindu communalism ; Muslim separatism, sometimes bordering on hostility towards Hindus, was perhaps even a more important cause."<sup>16</sup>

### Pakistan's Formative Years

The developments in Pakistan between 1947 and 1971 now appear as a repetition of events narrated above. East Pakistan like the Muslim League of old days was demanding a large measure of provincial autonomy and a greater share in administration and government. The demand for a three-subject federal government was first mooted in a convention in Dacca on November 4 and 5, 1950.<sup>17</sup> Pakistan inherited civil-services and defense forces in which Bengali Muslims had little or no representation. Twenty-four years of Pakistan did not result in any substantial induction of Bengalis in these spheres. A free political process which could give the numerically superior Bengalis an upper hand in the power structure of the country was set at naught as early as April 1953. The Prime Minister holding the confidence of the legislature was dismissed by the Governor General who had both the civil service and the defense services under his control.<sup>18</sup> The denial of participation in the political process to the Bengalis was made complete by the military take-over of Ayub Khan in October, 1958. The grievance of East Pakistan was against political domination by West Pakistan army and bureaucracy and economic backwardness of the region as a result of manipulation by West Pakistan dominated central government.

The constitutional formula for insuring the exercise of civic and economic rights by East Pakistan was put to test in the elections to the provincial legislature in East Bengal in 1954. The combined opposition parties known as the United Front whose principal components were the Awami League and the Krishak-Sramik Party routed the ruling Muslim League party completely. Out of a total of 309 electoral seats the United Front won 298 seats. The United Front wanted a federal government with responsibility for only defense, foreign affairs and currency.<sup>19</sup> The first constitution of the country which was prepared in 1956 did not accept such a federal scheme. This constitution was rejected by the Awami League initially but then attempts were made to try it out. This constitution provided for a federal government with a limited federal list of subjects, namely

<sup>16</sup> K. B. Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan*, Karachi : Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> The author attended this Convention on Draft Report of the Basic Principles Committee.

<sup>18</sup> Sayeed, *Pakistan : The Formative Phase*, pp. 416-418.

<sup>19</sup> Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan*, p. 192.



defense, foreign affairs, trade and commerce, currency, communication and taxation. The residuary powers were with the provinces but through the device of a concurrent list of subjects federal powers were extended to subjects like criminal and civil laws, research and two very important areas of economic and social planning and heavy industry.<sup>20</sup> Pakistan was governed according to this constitution for a little more than two years. This intense political manipulations of President Iskander Mirza who had the defense services to back him coupled with the rule of self-perpetuating politicians in West Pakistan gave the country four cabinets during these two years. General elections were planned under the new constitution for the winter of 1958. It was, however, decided to hold elections on February 15, 1959. The vested interests of West Pakistan such as the bureaucracy, the defense services and the self-perpetuating politicians felt that elections would erode their control of the country. The ambitions of General Ayub Khan seized the opportunity provided by political mis-management and economic problems to nullify the constitutional process and declare Martial Law in the country in October 1958. Eleven years of Ayub regime only widened the gulf between the two parts of Pakistan in many ways.

#### **The Ayub Rule in Pakistan**

Ayub established a constitutional autocracy ; his government was termed by Choudhury Mohammed Ali as the government of the President, by the President and for the President.<sup>21</sup> Though in 1953 Ayub advocated a large measure of provincial autonomy, when he usurped power he changed the name of the federal government into central government and established a unitary form of government in the country. All legislatures under Ayub's Constitution of 1962 became an unnecessary appendix of the governmental process. Franchise right was reduced to a farce through the method of indirect election and political corruption and coercion.<sup>22</sup> Provincial governments became totally subservient to the whims of the President who appointed provincial governors at his discretion and also approved their pick of provincial ministers as well as senior civil officials.<sup>23</sup> The Constitution provided a long list of central subjects leaving the unenumerated responsibilities with the provinces.<sup>24</sup> But central authority was fully established in

<sup>20</sup> *The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, Karachi : Ministry of Law, Pakistan, pp. 73-75, 206-221.

<sup>21</sup> Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan*, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> In author's knowledge in 1965 many members of electoral college were elected on the promise of voting Miss Jinnah to Presidency but under pressure from civil officials and on being bribed voted for President Ayub.

<sup>23</sup> *The Constitution of the Republic of Pakistan*, 1962. Articles 66 & 82, pp. 41, 47.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Schedule 3, pp. 129-134.



all spheres by the all-pervasive provision of central jurisdiction in national interest in relation to security, economic and financial stability of the country, achievement of uniformity, and planning or coordination.<sup>25</sup> Ayub appointed an equal number of ministers from the two regions in his Cabinets but they were chosen not for their competence or public support but on the sole criteria of their loyalty to the master. Their influence in decision-making was usually peripheral and certainly less than that of senior civil servants. Ayub's constitution laid down parity in all spheres of activities between East and West Pakistan as a principle of state policy.<sup>26</sup>

The performance against the promise by Ayub regime was as unfortunate as the performance of the Congress after the Lucknow Pact. East Pakistan continued to lag behind in economic development. While in the Plan large allocation would be made for East Pakistan through various devious means investment continued to be much larger in West Pakistan thus increasing disparity in income levels. Non-Plan expenditure would get preference to Plan targets, unattractive credits would fall to the lot of East Pakistan, institutional credit in the private sector would go to West Pakistan, administrative controls would discriminate against East Pakistan, and expenditure in the central capital with income effects primarily confined to West Pakistan would get priority. As a result development expenditure in East Pakistan throughout was far short of targets as also far less than West Pakistan. During the Second Five Year Plan (1960-1965) in East Pakistan public sector development expenditure was Rs. 6250 million within the Plan and Rs. 450 million outside the Plan and private sector investment was Rs. 3000 million against West Pakistan's programme of Rs. 7700 million, Rs. 2310 million, and Rs. 10700 million respectively.<sup>27</sup> During the Third Plan period (1965-1970) East Pakistan spent Rs. 11,060 million in the public sector and Rs. 5500 million in the private sector as against Rs. 13,700 million and Rs. 16,000 million respectively in West Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> The Plan projections in this case were Rs. 16,000 million for public sector and 11,000 million for the private sector in East Pakistan and Rs. 14,000 million and Rs. 11,000 million respectively in West Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> This was accompanied by heavy non-development expenditure in West Pakistan (about 75% of the total in the country)<sup>30</sup> despite revenue receipts from East Pakistan to the extent of 30%.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 131, pp. 68, 69.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the Panel of Economists on the Fourth Five Year Plan*, Islamabad : Planning Commission, 1970, Table 2, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *The Third Five Year Plan*, Karachi : Planning Commission, 1965, Table 2, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Report of the Panel of Economists*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Report on the Allocation and Apportionment of Revenues between the Centre and the Provinces*, Karachi : Ministry of Finance, 1961, p. 4.



Eleven years of Ayub rule increased the disparity in per capita income levels between the two regions from a nominal 32% in 1959—1960 to 62% in 1969-1970.<sup>32</sup> If price differential is taken into consideration the disparity level in real terms was more than 100%. Secondly, in the political sphere there was almost complete denial of participation to East Pakistan. Elections which were held for cosmetic reasons and legitimacy purposes were always rigged. Political functionaries were puppets without authority. Under constitutional autocracy higher echelons of civil services consisting mostly of West Pakistanis wielded all the power in the country. Thirdly, a deliberate but quiet process of cultural domination was also started. Bengali literature from West Bengal was completely banned even though no such action was contemplated against Urdu or Punjabi literature from across the border. Important names in Bengali literature and music were banished, for example, songs composed by Tagore and literature created by him, and other famous Hindu writers. Many Bengali sartorial and cosmetic customs were not only criticised but also positively discouraged. The reaction against all these measures was as strong as the reaction to congress failure in accommodating Muslim aspirations during Congress rule of 1937—1939.

#### **Movement for Regional Autonomy in East Pakistan**

The Indo—Pakistan war of 1965 very definitely demonstrated the vulnerability of East Pakistan in every sphere. Since all international communication links of East Pakistan were routed through West Pakistan, with the out-break of the war she got completely cut off from the rest of the world. Her borders were left undefended and a conference between the American Ambassador and the Chinese Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw had to secure insulation of East Pakistan from the armed conflict.<sup>33</sup> Since East Pakistan depended entirely on imports from West Pakistan for its day to day requirements, the disruption of interwing links placed her under severe economic stress. This was the precise experience which prompted the announcement of the Six Point Programme by the Awami League chief, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in early 1966.<sup>34</sup> This Programme envisaged a very large measure of autonomy for the provinces; in fact, it gave a plan for a confederation of Pakistan. The basic elements of the Six-Point Programme were; (a) federal

<sup>32</sup> *The Third Five Year Plan*, Karachi : Planning Commission, 1965, p. 11.

*The Economic Survey of E. Pakistan*, Government of E. Pakistan, pp. 102, 103. The income levels of 1959-60 were Rs. 278 in East and Rs. 366 in West while in 1969-70 they were Rs. 308 and Rs. 498 respectively.

<sup>33</sup> *National Assembly of Pakistan Debates—Official Report*, Karachi : Government of Pakistan Press, March 15, 1966, p. 499.

<sup>34</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, "Six Point Programme—Our Right to Live", Mujib-nagar : Reprint by the Government of Bangladesh, 1971.



parliamentary government based on adult franchise, (b) federal responsibility for defense and foreign affairs, (c) one currency if a mechanism could be devised to prevent flight of capital from one region to another, otherwise two currency system, (d) provincial responsibility for fiscal policy and taxation with assurance to federal government of requisite revenue assignments, (e) maintenance of separate foreign exchange accounts by the provinces and control of foreign trade and foreign aid by them and (f) building up of defense potential by federating units through maintenance of regional militias or para-military forces. This scheme was essentially borrowed from the various confederal schemes advanced by Muslim separatists in the 30's. This was also very similar to the plan outlined by Ayub Khan in his famous Dorchester papers in 1953.<sup>35</sup>

When Ayub's stability gave way to national disorder and chaos he called a Round Table Conference in 1969 to resolve political crisis. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was released from custody to participate in this conference. He presented his Six-Point Programme before the conference. The demand for parliamentary government, adult franchise, and direct election were accepted by all parties who attended the conference. There remained three unresolved issues, namely representation on the basis of population, dissolution of West Pakistan into four provinces, and the extent of provincial autonomy under the federal system. There was a general feeling that agreement on the first two unresolved issues could be found but not on the last one. In fact, Yahya's announcement of November 28, 1969, settled the first two issues.<sup>36</sup> On the question of provincial autonomy the points which were in dispute were central responsibility for some measure of taxation, foreign trade, and foreign aid. Almost all of West Pakistan in one voice rejected the constitutional plan provided by the Six Point Programme. Political leaders, retired civil servants and intellectuals came out with statements and articles in local newspapers condemning the Six Point Programme and maintaining that a weak central government would be the end of Pakistan. This was really the time for some accommodation on the part of West Pakistan. The Six Point Programme probably was negotiable at that time. But no compromise on a division of functions and responsibilities between the central and the provincial governments was attempted at that time. Ayub Khan stepped down declaring his acceptance of the parliamentary form of government and direct election on the basis of adult franchise. He left it to the lame duck National Assembly who had very little representative capacity to settle other issues. This Assembly, however, did not get a chance nor did

<sup>35</sup> M. Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters—A Political Autobiography*, Karachi : Oxford University Press, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> *Dawn*, Karachi, November 29, 1971.



the forces of democracy came out immediately victorious. The Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan defense forces, General Yahya Khan, took charge of the country on March 25 under Martial Law. The failure of the Round Table Conference is similar to the failure of the Cripps Mission. Ayub Khan recognized the possibility of the Six Point Programme but refused to accept it and West Pakistan failed to make that accommodation which could dilute the Six Point Programme.

### **The Second Partition—Partition of Pakistan**

Then, like Indian elections of 1945-1946, came the Pakistan elections of 1970-1971. The Awami League contested the election on one issue, that is the demand for a constitutional system based on the Six Point Programme. It received overwhelming support capturing 167 seats in a National Assembly of 313 members in which East Pakistan had 169 seats. It also won 288 seats in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly of 300 members. This was exactly like the vote in support of Pakistan demand in 1945-1946 ; in fact, a little more categorical in the case of the Six Point Programme. West Pakistan, like the Congress of old days refused to listen to the verdict of the electorate. There the party that got the maximum number of seats in the National Assembly ( 88 seats out of 144 ) started a tirade against the Six Point Programme and the rule of majority. Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as the leader of Pakistan Peoples Party claimed that he should share power with the Awami League as the majority party of West Pakistan and particularly as the party succeeding in the polls in the Punjab and Sind which he described as "bastions of power" in Pakistan.<sup>37</sup> The Awami League declared that on the basis of the mandate from the electorate they were committed to framing the constitution on the basis of the Six Point Programme. The PPP, on the other hand announced that unless concessions were made by the Awami League they would not sit in the National Assembly. The Six Point Programme, in fact, was like the Cabinet Mission Plan for Pakistan. Yahya Khan scheduled the session of the National Assembly for March 3, 1971. Bhutto threatened to boycott the session and asked other West Pakistani parties to follow suit. When the country was poised for a National Assembly session and nearly one-half representatives from West Pakistan were already in Dacca to attend the session, President Yahya Khan, submitting to Bhutto's threat postponed the session *sine die* on March 1, 1971.

This was a planned move by the military and the civil bureaucracy of

<sup>37</sup> *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, December 21, 1970.

*Dawn*, Karachi, December 25, 1970.



West Pakistan with whom Bhutto joined hands for satisfying his personal lust for power. The experience of 1968-1969 had taught the defense forces that unless there was political dissension they could not frustrate the democratic process by sheer application of brute force. So the military strategists like General Umar and General Akbar became very active to create political dissension. Bhutto took the bait and provided the opportunity to the military to take charge of the situation. Postponement of the session of the National Assembly coupled with imposition of rigorous Martial Law in the country was designed to threaten Awami League into submission. This did not happen and instead a civil disobedience movement was launched in East Pakistan. The involvement of all sections of the people in East Pakistan in this movement was so total that the movement nullified all edicts of the central government in the province. It was generally speculated that the country was on the verge of disintegration and Sheikh Mujib would unilaterally declare independence of East Pakistan on March 7, 1971. Mujib, however, stopped short of such a declaration and offered the last opportunity for a compromise confederation of Pakistan.<sup>38</sup>

It now appears that during Yahya-Mujib negotiations which began on March 16, 1971 and continued until March 24, a blue-print for a confederation was, in fact, prepared.<sup>39</sup> An interim constitution was to be promulgated reflecting an arrangement under the Six Point Programme. Power was to be transferred to the elected Provincial Assemblies while in the Centre President Yahya was to remain responsible for federal subjects like defense and foreign affairs. By a gradual process other currently central subjects were to be transferred to the provinces ; in fact, dates were fixed by which to separate the foreign exchange accounts, establish separate federal reserve systems and provincialise foreign aid and foreign trade. Meanwhile, the National Assembly was to sit in two separate committees to draw up the final constitutional arrangement for the two regions. Dovetailing the two committee reports, a constitution for the confederation was to be finally prepared by the National Assembly. But the intransigence of Bhutto and the army generals would not allow a compromise of this sort to be successful. Bhutto would not accept provincial responsibility for foreign aid and foreign trade. President Yahya would not accept the confederation concept as it threatened the unity and integrity of the nation. The army would not agree to transfer of power to peoples' representatives under a proclamation and insisted on the supremacy of Martial Law. On March 25, 1971, Yahya broke off negotiations and ordered his generals to march their troops

<sup>38</sup> Rahman Sobhan, "Negotiating for Bangladesh—A Participant's View", London : *South Asian Review*, Vol. 4, July 1971, pp. 315-326.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



against the Bengalis. On the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan there were communal riots all over India. On the failure of Yahya-Mujib negotiations there was a brutal military suppression in Pakistan. The response to such an action was naturally violent. The application of brute force by Yahya converted the plank of regional autonomy into a war of liberation in East Pakistan. So much is the contribution of the exploitative design and the unaccommodating attitude of West Pakistan to the ultimate partition of Pakistan.

Bengali separatism has also been an important factor throughout. When partition of India into two independent countries was almost settled there was a move for an independent United Bengal. This movement was led by leaders of both Hindu and Muslim communities. Suhrawardy from the Muslim League had virtually secured the blessings of the father of the Pakistan nation to such a move.<sup>40</sup> Sarat Bose of the Congress, however, was not that successful. After the creation of Pakistan the proposal to establish Urdu as the only national language of Pakistan initiated a movement of protest in East Pakistan. Bengalis shed blood for their mother tongue on February 21, 1952. This day is still celebrated as the Martyr's Day in Bangladesh. Hostility towards non-Bengali elements also grew by gradual stages in East Pakistan. The control of the economic life by non-Bengalis was one reason for resentment against them. But more important was the behaviour of non-Bengali officials. "They belonged to a superior class. They did not care to speak the Bengali language. They sneered at Bengali culture."<sup>41</sup> The non-Bengali refugees who settled in East Pakistan also continued to maintain such an attitude. The contempt of non-Bengali elements for the Bengalis and their patronizing attitude was also very much disliked. President Ayub's remarks about Bengali heritage of downtrodden races only added fuel to the fire.<sup>42</sup> The infamous Agartala conspiracy case of 1967-1969 furthered the cause of Bengali separatism and hostility to West Pakistan. This was primarily a fabrication by Ayub regime to discredit the Awami League and thus ensure his electoral success in 1969-1970. A good number of Bengali civil and military officials were implicated in this case. It was alleged that they were conspiring with India to wage armed revolt for separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan. At a late stage Mujib who was in prison for 23 months at that time was also implicated in this case. As the trial continued hostility to West Pakistan gained more and

<sup>40</sup> Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*, Bombay : Navajvan Publishers, 1956, Vol. II, p. 180-186.

C. Khaliqzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore : Longmans, 1960, p. 380.

<sup>41</sup> Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase*, p. 412.

<sup>42</sup> Ayub Khan, p. 187.



more ground. The case was withdrawn in February 1969 as a result of public outcry, but it did irreparable damage to the concept of one Pakistani nationhood. The youth of East Pakistan was no longer convinced of the desirability of one Pakistan. The slow and indifferent response of the central government to the natural calamity of 1970 which overtook the coastal areas of East Pakistan was the last straw on the camel's back. It inspired two political parties to ask for separation of the province from Pakistan. Maulana Bhashani, the leader of Pro-China National Awami Party, as well as Ataur Rahman Khan, once Chief Minister of the province and leader of the Pakistan National League Party, asked for complete independence. They based the demand, however, on the original Pakistan Resolution of 1940. Bengali nationalism thus was fairly well-entrenched when Yahya Khan postponed the Assembly session in March 1971. In fact, the Awami League Chief was under severe pressure to declare independence when instead he chose to leave open the door of negotiation to President Yahya Khan.

There is another interesting similarity between the situation that obtained in India in 1946—1947 and the situation that obtained in Pakistan in 1971. On March 1, 1971, President Yahya Khan removed the accommodating Governor of East Pakistan, Admiral Ahsan, and made Lieutenant General Sahibzada Yaqub fully responsible for the administration of the province. Admiral Ahsan stood for acceptance of the Six Point Programme. General Yaqub tried to control the situation through army action. But then he withdrew the troops to the barracks apparently realizing the need for a political settlement. On March 9, General Yaqub was removed and strongman General Tikka was sent as the military governor of the province. A pathetic analogy seems appropriate between General Yaqub and Lord Wavell and between the Dacca situation of early March 1971 and the Calcutta situation of August 1946. Lord Wavell visited Calcutta after August riots and recommended that an immediate acceptance of the confederation concept alone could prevent further bloodshed. But this advice like that of General Yaqub was not accepted by powers that be, and he like General Yaqub was recalled. The comment of Ian Stephens on Indian situation as it existed in 1946 can be aptly applied to the Pakistan situation of 1971. "For if the *military governor's* reading of the lessons of *Dacca* had prevailed, the civil war then just started might have stopped; and in that event partition might have been unnecessary, some loosely federal arrangement in the lines of *Six Point Programme* perhaps providing acceptable after all."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ian Stephens, *Pakistan*, New York : Frederick A. Praeger, 1963, p. 109. The underlined expressions are mine substituting Stephens' 'Viceroy's' "Calcutta" and "Cabinet Mission Plan" respectively.



### The Prospects

The struggle for Pakistan was designed to bring peace in the subcontinent and prosperity to both Pakistanis and Indians in the wake of independence. Through parting of ways the Hindus and Muslims of India wanted to achieve peace and an end to exploitation. But unfortunately the partition of British India did not result in an era of peace and prosperity in the subcontinent. The question of accession of Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Kashmir became a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The Kashmir dispute resulted in two inconclusive wars in 1948 and 1965. The question of sharing of Indus water plagued relations between the two countries till 1960 when at the initiative of the World Bank Indus Treaty was signed to divide the river system. Communal violence from time to time embittered relations between the two countries even though Liaquat-Nehru Pact to solve communal problems was signed in 1950. Confrontation became the corner-stone of Indo-Pak relations and it necessitated diversion of resources for military preparations. Thus the struggle for Pakistan really failed in achieving its ultimate objective of peace and prosperity for the people of the subcontinent.

The political potential of the emergence of Bangladesh as a condition for durable peace in the subcontinent appears to be much greater. Prosperity, however, has become a more difficult and elusive objective because of global developments. There are still some unresolved issues between the three countries. An equitable division of assets and liabilities between Pakistan and Bangladesh is an outstanding problem. Repatriation of some professed Pakistanis from Bangladesh is still a thorny issue. Fortunately Bangladesh and Pakistan do not share a common border which in many cases provides the ground for confrontation politics. In the wake of bitter allegations of genocide and scorched earth policies made by Bangladesh and counter-allegations of secession and a conspiracy to dismember made by Pakistan only four years ago, the development of friendly relations between the two countries now indicates a keen desire to bury the hatchet and live in peace and mutual cooperation. Only recently two countries have exchanged Ambassadors.

The climate of tolerance that pervades in the relationship between India and Pakistan is also quite forward-looking. Kashmir may not disappear as a political plank in Pakistan for some years to come. But at the same time it may not generate strong enough feelings to start off another war. The declaration of unilateral cease-fire by India in 1971 after the liberation of Bangladesh and prompt return thereafter of areas occupied in Pakistan have put to rest a great deal of misgivings about Indian intentions in Pakis-



tan. Though diplomatic relations between the two countries have not yet been established, gradual normalisation of relations has been proceeding quite satisfactorily. The Simla Agreement of 1972 indeed is a landmark in the relations between India and Pakistan. Despite a nuclear explosion in India in 1974 which was loudly condemned by Pakistan, the two sides found it possible to renew trade and communication links.

Disintegration of India and Pakistan predicted in the wake of "Secession of Bangladesh" now looks rather remote. One of the fundamental lessons of Bangladesh war of liberation is that the subjugation of a disgruntled people by force does not have either any appeal or any hope for success. The virtues of political and economic accommodation and grant of autonomy to political subdivisions are reflected in the arrangement worked out for Kashmir in India or Sind in Pakistan. The repressive measures of Bhutto Government may have created temporary disaffection both in the Frontier and Baluchistan provinces. Similarly the dictatorial implications of emergency in India may not have gone down well in many states. But it appears that economic crunch rather than the political culture holds the trump-card. In Bangladesh as well forces of instability appear to be more controllable by economic measures.

One of the far-reaching effects of the second partition of the subcontinent is in the area of communal harmony. Communal disturbances that marred subcontinental politics for generations appear to be very much under control now. The suppression of Muslims of Bangladesh by Muslims of Pakistan and the support of Bengali Muslims in their distress by Hindus of India have brought about a revolution in communal feelings in the subcontinent. The highly progressive political culture of Sheikh Mujib reflected in an unabashed espousal of secularism as a state policy in Bangladesh has left a deep imprint that has survived his elimination from the political scene of the subcontinent.

The power balance in the subcontinent has now been so shaped as to discourage any further inter-state war or massive military built-up. The psychological factor in the new power balance is extremely important. There seems to be a recognition also among the super-powers about the futility of confrontation politics in the subcontinent. Uptil now there has been no let-up in defence expenditure in India and Pakistan. But the new political realities coupled with the economic crunch should soon have its full impact on the situation. Supply scarcity of 1972-73 and concomitant global inflation have already imposed a heavy toll on the subcontinent. All the countries of the subcontinent are listed as most seriously affected countries by the United Nations. Balance of payment difficulties as well as



resource shortage in all the three countries are nullifying the planned efforts for economic development. Survival of the ever-growing population has become the most crucial problem. While the situation is most acute in Bangladesh, it is perhaps a little easier in Pakistan. Annual injection of external resources over the billion dollar mark is required in all the three countries to keep the economies afloat. While a great deal can be achieved by prudent economic management, a stage is being reached when diversion of military expenditure to economic development will be essentially needed. The recent examples set up by Indonesia and China in reducing defense outlay are extremely favourable in this respect. Among the developing countries of the world Bangladesh is already unique in providing a nominal budget for defense and security. In a not-too-distant future this may be acclaimed as the trend-setter for not only the subcontinent but also the developing world.



# An Analysis of the Nature, Causes, and Implications of the 1974 Famine in Kurigram—Bangladesh

Md. Ali Akbar

A severe famine struck Bangladesh in the middle of 1974, and according to the Government 'estimate', at least 27,000 persons had died from it by early November. According to the unofficial estimate, more than one lakh persons had died from starvation in different districts in 1974. Probably the exact death figure, like statistics on many other disasters in Bangladesh will never be known.

Although a severe famine condition prevailed in the whole of Bangladesh, the most severely affected district was Rangpur in which, according to unofficial estimate, more than 70,000 persons died from the famine. About 88 percent of the famine deaths officially recorded in the country were from Rangpur District. The famine was most intense in the Kurigram subdivision of the Rangpur District in which 14,834 famine-deaths were officially recorded.

The present article analyses the nature, causes and implications of the famine in Kurigram. This may, hopefully, provide some insight as to how we can cope with the human problems of future disasters which seem to be very frequent in Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup>

## Nature and Extent of the Famine

The 1974 famine was not the result of a sudden disaster but the severest stage of a deteriorating condition which was developing in the country since the liberation. The world's biggest humanitarian relief operation, under the auspices of the United Nations (UNROD), temporarily averted the threat of a severe famine and the disorganisation of the economic and social structure after liberation. Scattered reports of severe economic distress and starvation deaths had appeared in newspapers before the devastating flood of 1974 began in June. But the gravity of the situation became obvious only when the flood-marooned distressed people fled to-

<sup>1</sup> During 1960-70, there were 14 major natural calamities, 9 cyclones and 5 severe floods. The average relief expenditure for these disasters was about Tk. 102.7 million per year. After liberation, Bangladesh suffered 2 severe floods and 5 devastating local cyclones. Experience indicates that each disaster found the administration unprepared to cope with it and it was handled on *ad hoc* basis.



wards urban areas and crowded the administrative centres.<sup>2</sup> This is reflected in death figures of different months in villages ( of Chilmari ) and in urban areas (of Rangpur town). As Table 1 shows, most of the deaths in Chilmari occurred during August-September while most of the deaths in Rangpur town were recorded during October-November. While the largest number of famine deaths was recorded during September in Chilmari, it was so during October in Rangpur town. No famine-death was recorded in villages after October but many more deaths were recorded in urban areas even in January. Thus, a rural famine had turned into an urban famine.

**Table 1**  
**Famine-Deaths in different Months of 1974 in Rangpur Town and Chilmari Village**

Months	Rangpur	Chilmari
July	—	6
August	1	17
September	4	65
October	57	11
November	21	—
December	9	—
January	8	—
Total (%)	100	100
Number	234	219

### Persons Affected by the Famine

There is no reliable estimate of the number of persons seriously affected by the famine. We can have some idea from the number of persons fed in the gruel kitchens. On November 15, there were 711 gruel kitchens in Rangpur district feeding about 11,10,700 persons who constituted more than 20 per cent of its total population. In Kurigram, there were 109 gruel kitchens feeding 4,21,800 persons who constituted about one-third of its population. If we include the persons who were already dead, those sheltered in destitute camps, and those who had migrated to other districts the percentage of the extremely distressed persons may go up to about half of the population of the subdivision. This should indicate the extent and gravity of the famine in Kurigram.

<sup>2</sup> There is no estimate available of the number of persons who fled from villages. According to the Circle Officer ( Dev. ) of Chilmari, about 40 per cent of the population had left the affected villages in order to avoid starvation. Even in the capital City of Dacca, 2,443 "unclaimed" dead bodies were buried by the *Anjuman-e-Mofidul Islam* during July-December, 1974. About 63 per cent of the bodies were picked up from the streets,



**Table 2**  
**Gruel Kitchens in Rangpur District (November 15, 1974)**

Subdivision	No. of Gruel Kitchens	No. of Persons daily Fed	Percentage of the Total Population
Rangpur Sadar	251	1,75,200	9.4
Kurigram	109	4,21,800	32.74
Gaibandha	243	3,43,700	25.56
Nilphamari	106	1,50,000	15.60
Private (Rangpur)	2	2,000	—
Total :	711	11,10,700	20.45

The persons who had died in the streets were buried as unclaimed dead bodies. In Rangpur Town, about 41 per cent of the recorded famine-deaths occurred among children under 10 years of age ; children under 10 years of age constituted about 32 per cent of the total famine deaths in Chilmari. The famine death rate among the older persons was proportionately the same in villages and among migrants in urban areas.

**Table 3**  
**Age of Persons who Died from Starvation in Rangpur Town and Chilmari Villages**

Age	Percentage of Persons		
	Rangpur	Chilmari	Total
Under 5 years	29	13	21
5-9        ,,	12	19	15
10-39     ,,	9	18	14
40-49     ,,	18	17	17
50 & above ,,	33	33	33
Total (%)	100	100	100
Number	231	219	450

Although there was no sex difference in children's mortality, among adults, two-thirds were males. This was contrary to our expectation and probably shows that adult males are less likely to draw public sympathy than adult females in distress.

A number of temporary destitute camps were set up in all four subdivisions of Rangpur in late October in order to provide shelter to the extremely malnourished and physically infirm adults and orphans and deserted children in urban areas. These camps, at one time, sheltered more than 15,000 persons, about 73 per cent of whom were children. Only about 16



per cent of these children were described as orphans and deserted. About 67 per cent of the adult inmates were women, some of whom had children in camps. As can be expected, about 83 per cent of the destitutes came from landless families or families rendered landless by river erosion. Significantly, about 16 per cent of the inmates came from families whose land was currently fallow. There were some inmates who came from families of village artisans (potters, barbers, and weavers).

**Table 4**  
**Family Characteristics of the Inmates of Destitute Camps**

Characteristic	Percentage of Families
Landless	45.5
Rendered Landless	37.5
Fallow land	15.6
Near Landless	0.2
Artisans ( potters, weavers, barbers etc. )	1.2
Total (%)	100.0
Number	6,503

Thus, in the 1974 famine, like in all other famines in the subcontinent,<sup>3</sup> landless labourers, marginal farmers and village artisans suffered and died most. The mortality of the famine was heaviest among infants, children and elderly men. The famine started in rural areas, and became obvious only after a large-scale outmigration of the hungry and distressed people to urban areas. Most of the migrants either died in the streets or became permanently destitute and a part of the urban floating population.

### **Causes of the Famine in Kurigram**

As we have noted earlier, a severe famine condition was prevailing in Bangladesh during the whole post-liberation period. Since the whole of Bangladesh was affected by crisis, the famine in Kurigram could not be considered as a localised one. The severity of the famine in Kurigram was caused by a combination of factors, some long-term, some recent and temporary. Human sufferings and distress of the famine were aggravated by callousness, unpreparedness and inapt handling of the crisis and human greed manifested in profiteering, hoarding and black-marketing.

<sup>3</sup> B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1963. Amrita Rangaswami, "The Paripeters of Kholisabhita Hindupara : Report on a Famine, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, 1975. pp. 267-282. Choudhury and Chen, "The Dynamics of Contemporary Famine" ; The Ford Foundation, Dacca, January, 1977 (Mimeographed).



### Geographic Factors

Kurigram subdivision is dominated by two great rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Tista, and two of their tributaries, the Dharala and the Dudhkumar. As they carry a high amount of silt and sand (by the Brahmaputra) and alluvium (by the Tista), and as their river-beds have become shallow, chars rise and disappear and a large number of families have to move from one char to another almost in every year.<sup>4</sup> River erosion and disappearance of chars (or turning them sandy and barren by high flood) uproot many families almost each year. Thus, in 1973, about 4,000 acres of land were eroded in Kurigram. As much as one-third of Chilmari Thana has been eroded by the confluence of the Brahmaputra and the Tista in recent years; at present, about half of the *thana* is under water or chars. The whole of Rowmari *thana* is composed of a number of chars. In Chilmari Thana alone about 47,000 families were affected by river erosion during the last two years of 1973 and 1974. Bhurangamari, Nageswari, and Ulipur Thanas were also severely effected by river erosion.

Table 5  
Effects of 1974 Flood in Kurigram Subdivision

Thana	No. of Families	No. of Persons	No. of Families Affected by Erosion
Kurigram Sadar	3,960	19,800	209
Ulipur	5,600	28,000	307
Chilmari	18,000	90,000	499
Rowmari	13,500	67,500	50
Nageswari	8,000	40,000	381
Bhurangamari	8,000	40,000	60
Fulbari	3,600	18,000	—
Lalmonirhat	11,000	55,000	131
Total :	71,660	3,68,300	1,637

Since there was no relief and rehabilitation programme for the victims of river erosion, the proportion of landless labourers and destitutes in the subdivision has been comparatively higher than in most parts in Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Nafis Ahmad, *An Economic Geography of East Pakistan*, London : Oxford University Press, 1968, pp.12-17.

<sup>5</sup> The low-lying areas of Barisal and Putuakhali, *haor* areas of Mymensing and most parts of Faridpur have similar geographic features and problems. These parts of Bangladesh were also severely affected by the famine in 1974, but not to the extent of Kurigram. A recent study by Bruce Curvy (reported briefly in the *ADAB News* Vol. IV, No 4, April 1977) listed these areas as "famine prone."



There were two severe consecutive floods in Kurigram preceding the famine. The cumulative effects of these floods had serious consequences in causing the severity of the famine. The damage of the *aus* crop due to the flood was considered by the local officials to be the main cause of the famine in Kurigram. But the *aus* crop which usually provides food for three months before the harvesting of the *aman* crop, was only about 10 per cent less than that in previous year, and therefore could not be as serious as the officials suggested.

**Table 6**  
**Acreage and Output of Rice in Kurigram**

	Year	Aus	Aman	Boro	Total
Acreage	1972-73	2,26,230	2,55,765	7,388	4,89,383
	1973-74	2,28,650	2,77,721	9,670	5,15,041
	1974-75	2,71,560	2,47,565	10,343	5,28,468
Output Maunds	1972-73	25,26,807	30,66,414	2,19,872	58,13,293
	1973-74	23,23,363	41,67,217	2,13,190	67,03,770
	1974-75	21,01,904	34,43,962	2,60,209	58,06,075

Source : District Agricultural Office, Rangpur

### Marketing, Prices and Distribution of Foodgrain

But the total production does not indicate how much of it will be available in the market,<sup>6</sup> nor does it indicate the actual level of consumption by different income groups. The largest share of fall in the availability is usually borne by the poor sections of the community.<sup>7</sup> Experience shows that even a moderate expected short-fall in production or any knowledge about the inadequacy of the Government stock, raises the prices of foodgrain more than proportionately due to speculative hoarding and profiteering.<sup>8</sup>

The uncertainty of supply and price spiral of essential goods during the whole of the post-liberation period had created a "psychosis of scarcity" in which everybody, producers, consumers and traders, become hoarders. Organised and large-scale smuggling aggravated the natural scarcity.<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to find reliable and uniform estimates of population, production, import, offtake, and level of per capita (desired or actual) consumption of foodgrain in Bangladesh. Similarly, the existing information of about marketed surplus of foodgrain, and the factors that influence it is also quite scanty.

<sup>7</sup> Mosharref Hossain, "Our Food Problem", *The Holiday* (Dacca), May 19, 1974, 5&7

<sup>8</sup> Raquibuzzaman and Assaduzzaman, "An Analysis of Rice Price in Bangladesh 1951-52 to 1967-68," (Mimeographed), *The Bangladesh Institute of Development Economics*, 1972.

<sup>9</sup> Smuggling was organised by 'influential' persons having political backstage support, and was financed by 'black money'. It was estimated that about 10 per cent of the total production of rice (about 10 lakh tons) was smuggled out of the country during 1973-74, *The Daily Bangladesh Times*. (Dacca) September 13, 1975.



distribution of foodgrain through the rationing system had remained irregular and inadequate. Although the *aman* harvest in Kurigram in 1973-74 was a bumper one, private stock was exhausted through the process of the Government procurement, speculative hoarding and large-scale smuggling across the border. The price of rice showed a continued upward trend immediately after the harvest, and it was astronomical during September-October. Of course, even if prices had been low, it would not have been of much use to the destitutes and the unemployed labourers,

**Table 7**  
**Foodgrains Offtake and the Price of Rice in**  
**Kurigram in 1974 \***

Months	Foodgrains Offtake ( in maunds )		Price of Rice ( per maund )
	MR	GR	
January	4,492	112	4,604
February	6,876	237	6,913
March	16,263	68	16,331
April	14,707	100	14,807
May	14,504	1,143	15,647
June	22,286	230	22,516
July	15,085	567	15,652
August	32,661	2,242	34,903
September	5,010	13,475	18,485
October	1,872	20,932	22,804
November	5,616	46,417	52,033
December	12,287	12,821	25,108

\* Excluding allotment on Priority ( for defence personnel and non-Bangalis ).

**MR** : Means modified rationing ; **GR** : means gratuitous relief

Source : Office of the Subdivisional Controller of Food, Kurigram.

### Employment and Wages

The 1974 flood in Kurigram started in June 15, and was preceded by a month of heavy rain-fall. The flood water receded and rose above danger level thrice, and due to these 'three' floods, attempts to plant the *aman* seedlings were foiled. When the flood water finally receded in September, it was too late or too difficult for some farmers to start the *aman* plantation due to lack of seeds and cash. Some of the chars were rendered uncultivable due to sand deposit. Some of the distressed farmers were compelled to curtail labour use or substitute hired labour by family labour. As a result, agricultural employment which had become scarce in April remained so even in September.



Since there was very little relief ( GR foodgrain ) distribution before September ( Table 7 ), the destitute and unemployed labourers began to migrate towards urban areas. The small peasants and other lower income groups had no alternative but to sell land and other movable properties ( houses, ornaments, pots and pans and domestic animals ) to stave off starvation. The prices of foodgrain were so high that such attempts at survival could not last long, but in the process most of them became totally destitute. Soon large-scale rural exodus began.

We do not know the number of families who became destitute by the famine. Sale of household equipments increased by 36 per cent during the famine in affected villages. There was about 63 per cent increase in the registration of land transfer in Rangpur district. During the height of the crisis, hundreds of people literally camped in front of the registry office to sell their land often at nominal prices. Besides, there was "informal" transfer of land through leasing and mortgaging.

### **Rural Exodus and Societal Response**

The distressed and panic-stricken migrants of Kurigram fled mainly by trains and most of them assembled in Kurigram and Rangpur towns. The air of these towns was infected by the noxious effluvia of dead bodies, the filthy and nauseating ordour of crowds of uncleaned people living in most unhygienic conditions in railway stations, pavements, and other vacant places in and around the towns. The residents became panicky by being suddenly confronted with so many starving people and dead bodies. Their panic increased further by almost suspension of foodgrain availability through the rationing system during the peak of the crisis. Some of the local businessmen, with active support from the local administration, started two gruel kitchens ( one each in Rangpur and Kurigram ) from the second week of September. But these two could feed only about 2,000 persons and were pitifully inadequate to cope with the ever increasing number of starving migrants. The situation became extremely grim in October.

The Government began "emergency" relief measures from the second week of October. Destitute camps and gruel kitchens were set up, and foodgrain as well as cooked food were distributed by helicopters to inaccessible areas. But it was too late. Had these quantities of foodgrain been supplied earlier, Kurigram might have been spared much of the mortality and unnecessary sufferings. The district administration insisted that it had "an early warning" of the approaching crisis and informed the "authorities" in Dacca. The major need at the time was foodgrain but it did not receive more than one-third of the requirement till the situation went beyond its



hands. The national administration, on the other hand, explained that it could not allot foodgrain because of inadequate food reserve, and that the food-aid from abroad did not reach the country till the third week of October. But the local press and the district administration suggested that the local political leaders had "failed to convince" the national leaders about the desperate situation in the district.

As a matter of fact, after the bumper harvest of 1973-74, the government seemed to have suffered from a sense of complacency based on inaccurate understanding of the food situation till the flood came. There was a general sense of callousness and indifference at the crisis. The famine was accepted as inevitable. The government appealed for international assistance, but for unknown reasons did not fully use its available food reserve to save the starving masses (Table 8). Relief was primarily guided and shaped by relief assistance from abroad. Voluntary efforts were discouraged for political reasons, and for fear that the opposition political parties would take advantage of the situation and discredit the government.

Table 8

**Foodgrains (Wheat and Rice) Stock and Offtake in Rangpur District during June-November, 1974**

( In Maunds )

Month	Stock	Offtake	Balance
June	1,90,675	1,22,901	67,774
July	2,08,706	1,32,046	76,660
August	3,19,493	2,00,843	1,18,650
September	1,87,372	1,24,998	62,374
October	2,92,273	1,54,001	1,38,272
November	4,03,767	2,76,324	1,27,443

Source : Office of the District Controller of Food, Rangpur.

The gruel kitchens and destitute camps were closed by the end of November. The inmates were either driven out or simply left without any care. Most of the destitutes who had come to urban areas had nothing left to go back to in their villages after the famine and became a part of the increasing number of urban destitutes. The majority of them were "unattached" women and children.

### Implications for Future Policy

Famine is usually defined as a condition of severe shortage of food accompanied by a large number of starvation deaths.<sup>10</sup> But scarcity alone

<sup>10</sup> Jean Meyer, "Coping With Famine", *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1974, p. 99.



cannot explain such a catastrophic famine in Kurigram. Geographic factors and the consecutive floods and crop damage aggravated the situation. But the main cause of the severity of the famine was steady pauperization of the rural masses, especially those who depended mainly on subsistence wages and who could not withstand disruption of agricultural activities and high prices of foodgrain. The famine was therefore more of a problem of poverty and lack of purchasing power than scarcity or high prices *per se*. The famine syndrome (inability of the poorer villagers to buy food) appears usually after a natural disaster and crop-failure and large-scale migration to larger cities. The first symptom is therefore increase in the number and type of urban beggars and destitutes.

Since Bangladesh seems to be vulnerable to frequent natural disasters, the threat of famine is always present, the problem of famine has to be considered both in a long-term perspective as well as an immediate urgency of human distress.

### Problems of Rural Poverty

Basic reality of Bangladesh is its mass poverty. At present about half the rural households are either landless or marginal farmers who own land which is inadequate to provide them with the minimum subsistence. As a matter of fact, about 60 per cent of the rural families depend, partly or fully, on wage employment for bare subsistence.<sup>11</sup> But the incidence of unemployment in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, has progressively increased over the years, and in 1973-74, unemployment was estimated to be 36.8 per cent of the total labour force.<sup>12</sup> Unemployment in rural areas usually takes the form of large number of people being seasonally unemployed or permanently underemployed. Rural poverty is therefore

Table 9  
Increase in Unemployment in Bangladesh

Year	Unemployment (million man-year)
1955—56	4.40
1960—61	5.50
1964—65	5.80
1969—70	7.00
1973—74	7.37
1974—75	7.50

<sup>11</sup> Mohiuddin Alamgir, "Poverty, Inequality and Social Welfare," *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol. III, No.2, April, 1975, pp. 153-180.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Bangladesh, *The First Five Year Plan, 1973-78*, p. 18.



closely related to employment opportunities. A recent study has revealed that the number of rural poor has continued to grow at an alarming rate.<sup>13</sup> Since wages have more or less remained at subsistence level and since the period of least employment tends to coincide with the period when food-grain is most expensive, the majority of the rural poor are ill-fed and chronically undernourished. The risk of large-scale deaths even during a short period of scarcity becomes inevitable.

Land reform, co-operatives, and other rural and agricultural development programmes have not brought any basic change in agriculture, in economic and political power structure in rural areas. Development strategy in the past rather strengthened the position of the land-owners and feudal lords. In Kurigram, as elsewhere in Bangladesh, two or three families in each village own the major portion of the land and usually control cooperative societies and other local institutions. The entire rural development programme, credit facilities, and subsidised agricultural inputs, have aggravated rural inequalities and concentration of economic power. Because of this exploitative rural economic and social structure, during a crisis the marginal cultivators, *bargadars* and agricultural labourers often have no alternative but to borrow, mortgage land or crop, or to make distress sale of their properties. This is evident from the increasing flow of rural exodus, and rise in the number of urban destitutes and rural landlessness. Unless ways are found to free the rural poor from such exploitation, and then to mobilise and involve them in the development process, the threat of large-scale starvation deaths during a disaster or an extreme scarcity will remain in Kurigram as well as in other vulnerable parts of Bangladesh.

The development strategy must therefore emphasize equity, employment and self-reliance. Specifically, the strategy should be directed (a) to make small holdings economically more viable, (b) to ensure the rights of the share-croppers by mitigating the exploitative features of the share-cropping system, and (c) to raise productivity of the poor and the underemployed by increased employment opportunities and mitigating the conditions which relegate them to a position of economic and political subordination to the rural elites. The present Food for Work Programme and Works Programme are temporary and welfare measures, and therefore cannot effect the dependency relationship of the poor *visa-vis* the well-to-do farmers. These programmes generate substantial productive employment in small-scale labour-intensive projects but ultimately benefit the land owning farmers.

<sup>13</sup> Mohiuddin Alamgir, *op. cit.*



## Marketing and Distribution of Foodgrains

Agricultural production in Bangladesh has been subject to wide fluctuations and a prospect slight fall in foodgrain production always causes an "unnatural" price spiral. The larger share of the fall in availability and higher prices of food has to be borne by lower income groups who are already living on starvation diets and are extremely malnourished. Steps to build food-reserve and to stabilise availability and prices are therefore essential components of an effective food and famine policy for Bangladesh.

Food situation depends on the harvest about which little can be known in advance until the dominant influences of the monsoon flood is over. Buffer stock is therefore important in regulating prices and ensuring confidence of the people in the ability of the government to take appropriate measures in case of crop-failure. Since the bulk of the foodgrain market is in the hands of the private traders, and since more than 50 per cent of the rural population depends on the market, measures have to be taken to curb private profiteering and speculative hoarding during actual and expected crop failure and scarcity.

## Special Problems of Vulnerable Areas

Flood-prone low-lying areas of Bangladesh are more vulnerable to crop failure and famine. Possibility of flood control in these areas is yet remote. Past experience shows that a flood is likely to effect agriculture at particular times of the year, usually during mid-June to mid-August. The impact of a flood may be reduced by crop diversification, and by reducing dependence on crops ( usually the *aus* ) during the flood-season. The farmers may be encouraged to grow more *rabi* crops ( *boro* rice, potatoes, groundnuts etc.). Poultry and duck farming, dairy farming, vegetables growing etc., may also reduce their dependence only on agriculture. Well prepared relief and rehabilitation measures for the victims of river erosion are required to reduce the number of distitutes in these regions.

## Relief and Rehabilitation Measures

Despite the existence of elaborate Famine Code, Cyclone Code and Emergency Standing Order for Relief, during all disasters in Bangladesh, the government relief and rehabilitation measures have been found to be inadequate, belated, and ill-organised. Usually, the stricken people had to flock into towns in the hope of finding relief and drawing attention of the government. This unnecessary migration results in acute distress and social disorganisation. During a disaster, if it is "recognised", the government tends to assume the responsibility for maintenance of the distitute until economic activities re-start in effected areas. The weakness of this policy is



that the government recognition and action come late, only after large number of people have completely lost control on their future sources of income. The government often depends on "distant" local administration to get a "clear picture" of the situation. Since the recognition imposes a heavy burden of responsibility on the government, officials tend to minimise the extent of a disaster and await sanction for relief works. Usually, the government assumes distress as "temporary", and relief as an "emergency" operation. As a result, except for some works programme projects, rehabilitation measures seldom benefit those who have become destitutes and those who cannot be expected to recover from the disaster. Rehabilitation measures tend to benefit only the land-owning classes in the area.<sup>14</sup> It is therefore important to examine the present approaches to disaster relief and rehabilitation in Bangladesh. The government should strengthen local institutions (a) to collect intelligence about sudden or creeping distress in order to prevent large-scale out-migration, and (b) to prepare and implement relief and rehabilitation programmes in the effected areas. Large-scale disorganised relief-giving may produce dependency syndrome, and dissatisfaction among the recipients.

<sup>14</sup> David M. Morris, "Needed—A New Famine Policy", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, 1975. pp. 283-294; N.S. Jodh, "Famine and Famine Policies : Some Empirical Evidence", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 11, 1975. pp. 1609—1623.







# Classifying Peasants in a Village of Bangladesh

Jenneke Arens  
& Jos van Beurden

The authors of this article were in Bangladesh during 1974 and 1975. In their village study, "Jhagrapur : Peasant Classes in a village of Bangladesh" they describe the condition of poor peasants and the condition of women. In the former issue of this Journal they wrote about their conception of rural research, how they selected Jhagrapur, how they were living there and collected their data.

In this article they will deal with some more theoretical aspects of classifying peasants. The meaning of the term 'peasant' will be discussed. It will be explained why the amount of legally owned land is not a sufficient indication for a family's class position ; and why many classifications are biased against the poor peasantry. Next, the reader will be confronted with difficulties the authors had in classifying the peasants of Jhagrapur. Finally, the classes of the population of Jhagrapur will be defined.

In the article terms such as 'poor peasant', 'middle peasant' or 'landlord' bear the meaning which they get at the end of the article, unless it has been indicated differently.

The class structure of the rural population in Bangladesh is extremely complicated. In some areas the relations of production are still feudal while in others more capitalist. Bangladesh is in transition between these two phases, important regional differences do exist. Even in areas where the mode of production is still feudal one cannot simplify the enumeration of classes to sharecroppers and landlords. And one would prejudice reality as well in asserting that in more 'capitalist' areas the contradictions are restricted to capitalist farmers and wage labourers. In one and the same area there can be wage labourers, poor traditional landowners, sharecroppers, landlords, capitalist farmers, independent middle peasants, etc. And as we found out in Jhagrapur, a sharecropper does not necessarily belong to the poor peasant class. More than half of the families which we finally classified as middle peasants have additional income from sharecropping land of rich landowners. It seems to be almost impossible to design one uniform classification for the whole of the country unless it has been formulated flexibly and vaguely.

A great peasant leader, Mao Tse-tung, differentiated initially 8 classes of the rural population of China; three of these had to be subdivided, as Alavi has pointed out.<sup>1</sup> This number 8 was restricted to 5 in the Agrarian Reform Law of China of 1947. In the present reality of China, where, e.g.,

<sup>1</sup> Hamza Alavi "Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties," ; *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1, Oct. 1973; p. 27



landlordism has been abolished, a different classification will be needed again. We finally formulated 4 main classes of the rural population in Jhagrapur and surroundings; two of these had to be subdivided. In each stage of the history of the village (and the country) the class structure has to be (re-) defined. We will describe now how this classification has been brought about. To start with, some terminological problems will be discussed.

### The Term 'Peasant'

When reading about the problems of the peasantry in Bangladesh we often got confused because so many expressions are used in different ways and so many different words for the same concept. Most authors seem to be careless in using the terms; almost none of them defines these. Especially in a society where production relations are changing we think it important to be clear and consistent in using certain crucial expressions.

Among people in rural areas one can find cultivators, government officials, handicraftsmen, rich landowners, big merchants, moneylenders, etc. Important socio-economic differences exist between these people. But how can we categorize them according to these differences? Should, for instance, the distinction between cultivators and non-cultivators be the main one? We do not think so, as in the latter group both big merchants and poor handicraftsmen, both government officials and landlords would be included. Their interests differ very much. Should people in rural areas be divided into those who are really integrated in rural life and those who are not? Government officials and big merchants would belong to the latter group while the former would cover both poor peasants and landlords. But the interest of those poor peasants and landlords differ very much. The enumeration of possible categorizations could be continued for a long time. To make it short: what do we think a useful categorization of the rural population?

To start with, the rural population has to be divided into 'peasants' and 'non-peasants'. What is a peasant? Like Sagir Ahmad<sup>2</sup> and Van Schendel,<sup>3</sup> we suggest to use the term 'peasant' both for cultivating people and certain types of non-cultivating people in rural areas. Non-cultivating peasants are, e.g., the carpenter, blacksmith, potter and so on. The term 'peasant' has been given such a broad meaning, as historically, cultivators, artisans, and other village servants were indispensable members of rural society,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Saghir Ahmad, "Peasant Classes in Pakistan," : Gough and Sharma, 1973, *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia*; New York, etc. (Monthly Review); pp. 208-9.

<sup>3</sup> W. van, Schendel, *At Bay : The Peasantry of Bangladesh* ; Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1974, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad, p. 212/3.



and often they still are. Who can imagine, for instance, a traditional cultivator without a blacksmith who repairs his plough and other tools. Traditionally, cultivating and non-cultivating peasants have complemented each other. Villagers such as the *chowkidar* who prevents cows and goats from destroying the fruits of the fields and does so many other services, or the shopkeeper who supplies villagers with simple daily necessities should also be included in the group of non cultivating peasants.

Though the interdependence of cultivators and non-cultivating peasants decreased after the British started to colonize South Asia and the self-sufficient village community became seriously disrupted,<sup>5</sup> the interdependence has not yet disappeared. As many authors restrict the meaning of the term 'peasant' to 'cultivator', the group of non-cultivating peasants is almost entirely neglected in their studies and often categorized on the basis of their landed property.

We think the following definition of the term 'peasant' the most relevant. The term 'peasant' covers both cultivators and non-cultivators. They are living and integrated in rural society and either work for their living or are not able to do so. The richest among them control more than sufficient means of production while the poorest are completely deprived of them. They do not consider their means of production as pure commodities but primarily as means of survival and subsistence.

This definition does not only cover cultivators, craftsmen, *chowkidars*, etc. but also their wives, children and grandparents, or female workers in the house of well-to-do landowners, casual labourers who are frequently unemployed, beggars, adults and youngsters, healthy and disabled people, etc. Yet it does not cover all people who are living and/or working in rural areas. There are three important non-peasant groups in rural areas as well.

First of all, there is a group of landlords in and around Jhagrapur and in other areas of Bangladesh as well. Though they do live in the country and are integrated in rural society they do not work for their living. They possess far more land than they need for their own family and live purely by exploiting others.

Another non-peasant group consists of those people who have salaried employment as their main occupation. Though often working in rural areas, they have not been integrated in rural society. Their homes are often far away from their work and besides, most of these people have their 'camp' in town or, at best, in villages near a town. So they do not really belong to the rural population in the area where they work. In Jhagrapur there were no such salaried employees. The teachers of the local primary school may

<sup>5</sup> R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Calcutta (Manisha), 1970, pp. 87-206.



be called peasants, since they are living and working in their native village or area and their employment is only a subsidiary occupation for them.

The last non-peasant group to be mentioned are the 'farmers'. The differences between them and peasant cultivators is that the former produce first of all cash crops for the market while the latter mainly produce for their own subsistence or survival and consume their products largely themselves. In addition, a farmer has often lost touch with village life and has become more of an industrial manager. The appearance of the farmer is closely connected with the introduction of capitalist production relations. As it is not known exactly to what extent this penetration has taken place in Bangladesh, and as the (conceptual) distinction between peasant and farmer is mostly neglected, it is not possible to calculate the number of farmers in this country. In Jhagrapur there are no farmers. In its surroundings we noticed a few cases of mainly rich peasants and landlords slowly becoming farmers producing along capitalist lines. In Comilla Kotwali Thana where the Green Revolution has progressed relatively far there must be many of them. In certain areas of India and Pakistan there must be many as well. They can easily be found in the countries of Western Europe and North America.

### Only Legally Owned Land ?

The next problem we want to discuss in some more detail is why we think it not sufficient to use a family's legally owned land as the only factor in determining its class position. First of all, other means of production than land alone and other factors have to be considered as well. Besides, it is just as important to know how much land a family controls *de facto* in addition to knowledge of the quantity of land it legally owns.

In a village close to Jhagrapur lives a peasant who owns only a little land and probably would be labelled as a poor peasant if his landed property was used as the criterion for categorizing him. The peasant, however, has got control of another important means of production : his weaving loom. He even can save money and use that money to take land in mortgage from inhabitants in Jhagrapur. If only this peasant's landed property would be considered his class position cannot be determined correctly, as one can easily understand.

The situation of four brothers, in Jhagrapur, all of whom inherited 4 acres of land and still own legally exactly the same amount of land, is also illustrative for our discussion :

1. The oldest one has taken  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres in sharecropping. He owns one plough and five animals for cultivation. He is considered as a middle peasant who is well off.



2. The second one sharecrops as much land as his elder brother. He is the proud owner of two ploughs and ten bullocks. The villagers consider him as a well off hardworking middle peasant as well.

3. The third one is not a sharecropper. Since his left leg which has been bad for many years will not heal any more, and since he does not own a plough or bullocks, he is forced to sublet half of his land to a sharecropper. He considers himself a bad cultivator and farm manager. Incidentally he sells his labour, if he can find not too heavy work. He is considered as a small peasant.

4. The youngest one is also badly off. Besides one plough, one bullock and a cripple calf he does not own many other things. None of his eight children has become a fully earning member yet. Sometimes he has to accept relief materials because of his poverty. He is not a good manager of his farm. He is considered as a poor peasant.

What is in the example of these brothers so illustrative ? First, the ownership of a plough and animals for cultivation has turned out to be crucial. It has been an important factor in determining the class position of these brothers. Up to now three other means of production than land have influenced us : a weaving loom, plough and bullocks. Even if one mainly has to do with cultivating peasants, as is the case in Jhagrapur, it is still not sufficient to classify them on the basis of their legally owned land. Even factors such as a bad leg, the size of one's family, or being a cultivator or farm manager, can be relevant.

The fertility of the soil can be such a factor as well. We realised this through analysing the following remark of one of the Indian participants of a seminar on high yielding varieties in Comilla in 1975 :

"A middle farmer in Bangladesh would be considered as a small farmer in India."

We think this an odd though not exceptional remark. Assuming that the participant meant 'peasant' when using the term 'farmer' (which was obvious from the rest of his story), he apparently did not understand what class is. A class is a group of people characterized by a similar relation to the means of production. What the learned participant apparently wanted to express was : the soil in Bangladesh is so fertile and the output so high in comparison with much of the soil in India that the ownership of the same number of acres would make a cultivating family in India belong to the class of poor peasants while it would be sufficient for a cultivator in Bangladesh to be a middle peasant. In this way, the fertility of the soil and the output become factors in classifying peasant families as well. Even in Jhagrapur the fertility of all plots is not the same. Sharecroppers, for instance, complained that often the worst plots are allotted to them by the owners.



Sometimes authors really try to design and apply an elaborated classification in which all sorts of factors seem to have been balanced. Bertocci pretends to be one of them.<sup>6</sup> He claims that his classification is a Marxist one. Yet he admits that he has not been able to avoid some arbitrariness. He turns out to consider landed property as the only and decisive factor when he writes that :

"1.15 acres has been arbitrarily used as the dividing point between the land-poor and middle categories."

We think this a non Marxist backsliding which seriously weakens Bertocci's argument.

Let us now explain why we think it essential to distinguish between legal ownership and de facto control of land. The example of the four brothers in Jhagrapur is illustrative again. The third brother does not have full de facto control over his land as he is forced to sublet half of it in sharecropping. His two older brothers, on the contrary, cultivate de facto more land than they legally own. If a family receives the fruits of more or less land than it owns legally, this might have to be expressed in their class position. To illustrate this with another example : a family in Jhagrapur owns legally 5 *bighas*. But all this land has been given in mortgage. As a result, the family has lost all control over those *bighas*. Therefore, they have been classified as semi-proletarian.

A serious problem in determining the quantity of de facto controlled land of a family is to find a suitable criterion or maybe definition for the term 'de facto'. Let us first see how some other authors have handled it. Qadir has provided some clues.<sup>7</sup> Although he considers land as a sufficient indication of a family's class position and neglects other means of production and factors, he has a contribution to our discussion as well. He has distinguished between legal ownership and de facto control of land ; de facto or operational possession of land is defined as : "the amount of land actually cultivated under the supervision of the family". This includes land which, though owned legally by other families, is held by the family in mortgage, rent or sharecropping. Rearranging the families according to their de facto possessed land Qadir had to change the position of 18 families or more than 25% of all families studied by him. In 5 cases the change is rather impressive.

Two out of those 5 cases will be considered more closely. In the first one a family is labelled landless since it has let out all its land because of a

<sup>6</sup> P. J. Bertocci, *Elusive Villages: Social Structure and Community Organization in Rural Pakistan*; Thesis, Michigan State University, 1970 pp. 69-70.

<sup>7</sup> S. A. Qadir, "Village Dhanishwar—Three Generations of Man-Land Adjustment in an East Pakistan Village," Comilla (B.A.R.D.), 1964 p. 64 ff.



government job. Though Qadir does not indicate what type of job, it can reasonably be assumed that the job will not make the family's situation deteriorate. Although this family does not cultivate its own land any more, we think the term 'landless' does not indicate its socio-economic position exactly. After all, it still has the security of landed property, it still gets 50% of the usufruct of it and, in addition, it receives income, and possibly social prestige, from a government job. Instead of categorizing the family as poor he should have put it in a richer category. In the second case a similar situation exists: a family is called landless as it has let out all its land because of urban interests (whatever that is). Our conclusion is the same as in the first case.

Applying Qadir's definition in the case of Jhagrapur would cause serious troubles. This will be illustrated with the example of the only landlord in the village and a big surplus peasant. A couple of years ago the first one still gave most of his land in sharecropping. The second one, on the contrary, had taken 12 *bighas* in sharecropping. With Qadir's definition those 12 *bighas* would have to be added to the big surplus peasant's de facto possessed land while 100 *bighas* would have to be subtracted from the landlord's de facto controlled land. In a more schematic way:

	Owned Legally	In Sharecropping	Possessed de facto
landlord	150	— 100	50
big surplus peasant	40	+ 12	52

The big surplus peasant would be considered as better off than the landlord, the first one possessing de facto 2 *bighas* more than the other. The distinction made by Qadir as such is useful but his definition of the criterion for it causes many problems.

Another author who has devoted attention to this problem is Wood.<sup>8</sup> His criterion for de facto control is usufruct. Usufruct of land means that one family uses the land of another one and draws the fruits of that land. A sharecropper who owns legally 2 acres of land and has taken another 2 acres in sharecropping on a 50% basis is defined as effectively possessing 3 acres. One acre of land taken in mortgage and cultivated by the mortgagee is added to the de facto possession of that mortgagee. This criterion seems to be more subtle than the one applied by Qadir. Still we have two objections against the use of it.

The first one is that Wood has neglected the security factor. In Jhagrapur a peasant's father had taken a certain amount of land in sharecropping

<sup>8</sup> G. D. Wood, "The Politics of Rural Development in Bangladesh: a Study of Class and Power from a Comilla Village," Comilla (B.A.R.D.), 1975, p. 7. (Paper for HYV Seminar).



a long time ago. When he died, his son continued sharecropping the same land. Next year, however, this continuity will be broken as the landowner intends to sell some of that land. The son, while being sure of sufficient food this year, might get in trouble next year. While his father never doubted whether he would get the same amount of land in sharecropping the next year, the son faces the danger of eviction now. In other words, the son has less security than his father. As a peasant's class position should indicate his long term position and not an ad hoc position, we think this insecurity should be taken into account as well.

The importance of the security factor can be shown through another instance. Many sharecroppers in 24 Parganas and Midnapur Districts, both in West Bengal, India, are so much threatened with eviction and are actually evicted on such a large scale that there are serious rumors that "at the present rate sharecropping as an agrarian institution will soon disappear"<sup>9</sup> from those districts. And the police and administration are said to choose often the side of the evicting landowners. To simply add 50% of the sharecropped land to the de facto possession of these peasants who are not sure whether they will be able to grow another crop on the same land prejudices their reality.

Both examples suffice for illustrating our second objection as well. We think many authors, including Wood and Qadir, are too rigid in applying their criteria. Classifying peasants demands much flexibility in the practical village situation in order to prevent generalisations and arbitrariness. Where flexibility is missing in reports, they seem to be written in an ivory social science tower with a dweller who is more preoccupied by his academic work than by depicting the situation of villagers vividly and correctly. Classifying peasants is much more subtle in the practical village situation than can be sufficiently expressed on a piece of paper. Sometimes it took us hours in our discussion with informants to classify a certain family correctly. Often it happened that we had to start talking about one and the same family several times.

### Enemies of the Poor Peasants

To develop a strategy for the liberation of the poor peasants one has to understand class distinctions and contradictions. The necessity of this has been shown abundantly.<sup>10</sup> In spite of this, quite a number of authors try to evade the class issue. We will try to analyse why a few of these authors have evaded this.

<sup>9</sup> *Bargadars' Plight in West Bengal*, Times of India (Issue of 12/VIII/1974).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g., Alavi, 1973, Ahmad 1973, Schendel, 1974.



To start with, we will discuss M. Nurul Haq's study on village Monagram.<sup>11</sup> Why did Nurul Haq restrict himself to categorizing the population of Monagram without indicating the class differences between the inhabitants? Why does he continuously write about 'the' villagers instead of explaining carefully whom he deals with, e.g., poor or rich landowners? Why does he consider village life as 'community life'? Why does he offer the summary of his discussions with 'the' villagers in such a way that class contradictions can be denied? He has answered these questions himself. As he writes, one of the main purposes of his book is "to indicate that the village co-operative has been an effective institution in solving some of the basic problems of the village." Apparently, Nurul Haq did not want to investigate whether this (Comilla type of) Co-operative is a useful solution of problems in Bangladesh, but only wanted to propagate this as an indisputable fact.

To be able to do this he was forced to deny class contradictions and to write about the 'community life' of 'the' villagers. But we have learned in Jhagrapur that many villages in Bangladesh are no peaceful communities. We were convinced of this already before one land quarrel in the village had reached such an explosive stage that a murder took place during our stay. The strain of families who have to mortgage out land, the troubles of sharecroppers who are threatened with eviction, the hardships of agricultural labourers who are paid below-subsistence wages, the lack of solidarity, all these matters have taught us that the village considered as a community is a dreamland illusion of the disadvantage of the poor peasants.

Besides, the Comilla type of co-operative which is advocated by Nurul Haq has turned into a failure, at least from the point of view of the poor peasants. First of all, such co-operatives offer no room to semi-proletarian peasants (12.5% of the inhabitants of Monagram belong to this category). Only landowners are accepted as members. In addition, in Comilla Kotwali Thana where this type of co-operative has been promoted particularly the pauperisation of the peasantry has increased rapidly. Between 1963 and 1974 the percentage of poor peasants is said to have increased from 25 to 72.12. This increase cannot be ascribed to the population growth alone. The nature and abuses within the co-operatives must have played a crucial role as well. One can understand why we consider Nurul Haq's study an example of 'rich peasant research'.

<sup>11</sup> M. Nurul Haq, "Village Development in Bangladesh," Comilla (B.A.R.D.), 1973 pp. 5-6, 52

<sup>12</sup> Mahbub Alam Chashi, "New Institutions for New Goals: The Agricultural Co-operative," Comilla (B.A.R.D., Paper for the HYV Seminar), 1975, appendix B.



The authors of the First Five Year Plan also offer an example of how the class issue can be evaded.<sup>13</sup> They divide the rural population into three categories according to the relation of each to the means of production :

“Category A : those who practically have no means of production, who depend entirely on their own labour and work as hired hands ; Category B : those who have small means of production, who depend on their own labour, occasionally employ hired labourers or work as hired workers when the need arises ; and Category C : those who have appreciable means of production, who work themselves but also employ hired labourers, but do not work as hired labourers themselves. They tend to work more as managers of their enterprises rather than as manual workers.”

In this categorization other means of production than landed property are taken into consideration. Besides, both cultivating and non-cultivating peasants are covered. At first sight, this is a good classification. Class distinctions are implicitly recognized since people from Category A have to sell their labour to and buy their essential commodities from members of Category C. In the formulation of plans and schemes, however, conflicts between these Categories are fully ignored. One of these plans, for instance, is : “The village level cooperative will have a broader base by bringing together three categories of people pursuing *identical* objectives into a single organisation” (our under-lining). On one and the same page it has been written that the three categories have identical objectives and contradictory interests at the same time. The authors verbally admit the existence of class differences and contradictions in their definitions but actually ignore them ! This approach made Abdullah remark about the Planning Commission<sup>14</sup> “having opened their eyes wide and caught a glimpse of reality, they hurriedly shut them tight again and proceed to preach a sanctimonious doctrine of class harmony that would have gladdened the heart of Gandhi.”

Another way to evade the implications of the existence of class contradictions is to locate class divisions differently from where they are in reality. Such a distortion can be detrimental to the poor peasantry. Chashi's classification is an illustration of such intentional or unintentional distortion : <sup>15</sup>

- “1. landless and sub-marginal farmers (below 1 acre)
2. marginal farmers (1—2½ acres)”
3. medium and large farmers (above 2½ acres)”.

<sup>13</sup> Planning Commission *First Five Year Plan 1973-78*; Dacca ( Government of Bangladesh), 1973, p. 157

<sup>14</sup> Abu Abdullah, “Institution-building in Agriculture : Implicit Social Theory in the First Five Year Plan,” 1974, Dacca, Paper for a BEA Conference; p. 5

<sup>15</sup> Chashi, p. 1.



Why do we think this classification is detrimental to the cause of the poor peasants? Is it not to their advantage that so much attention is devoted to the poor peasants (who are approximately covered by the first two groups) and to the different groups with their own problems among them? After all, a landless peasant does not have the same problems as a poor landowner or as a sharecropper. And in some areas the number of them has increased to almost three-quarters of the population: would it not be difficult to put them together in one group? Their great number and the existence of important differences between the problems and interests of the several categories among the poor peasants have to be admitted.

Why then do we have objections? Besides, objecting against the confusion of the terms 'peasant' and 'farmer', the exclusion of non-cultivating peasants and the use of landed property as the main criterion for the determination of a family's class position, we do have a more serious objection. Chashi has divided the poor peasants into two different classes while uniting middle peasants, rich peasants, landlords, and farmers into one class. The dissimilarities between the class interests of the different categories of the poor peasants are overshadowed by the similarities. All poor peasants, whether being 'landless', 'sub-marginal', or 'marginal' are exploited. All of them lack control of sufficient means of production. All of them have to sell their labour or are exploited as sharecropper; they get very low wages or a small share of the crop while they have to pay high prices for their daily necessities. These factors make all of them live below subsistence level. These are their fundamental problems. If one wants to elicit support for the most exploited ones in their struggle against their exploiters, the farmers' unity has to be promoted as much as possible. They should be helped in gaining insight in the common features of their problems. To divide the poor peasants is to support their enemies. According to Chashi's classification, if applied in Jhagrapur, the landlord who has a tremendous yearly surplus by exploiting poor and even middle peasants is incorporated in the same class as some middle peasant sharecroppers who even might be evicted by him. The interests of these middle peasants and the landlords are not so identical that they form one class!

For understanding more fully how disadvantageous it is for the cause of the poor peasantry if middle peasants are categorized in the same class as rich peasants, farmers and landlords, one has to realize the possible role of middle peasants in radical changes which benefit both middle and poor peasants.<sup>16</sup> In history, it often has happened that only after the middle peasants had shown the poor peasants that it was possible to break the power

<sup>16</sup> Alavi Hamza, "Peasants and Revolution," Gough and Sharma, 1973, p. 334.



of their exploiters, those poor peasants finally and irrevocably took the road to radical changes. This happened both in Russia and China. In other words, the poor peasants might initially need the support and even the leadership of the middle peasants in their struggle for liberation. Therefore, from the point of view of the poor peasantry not only poor peasants' unity has to be promoted as much as possible but it is also crucial that no serious discord is created between poor and middle peasants. Whoever tries to keep the poor peasants divided is their enemy. Whoever, besides, tries to unite the middle peasants with the exploiters of the poor peasants is the double enemy of the rural poor!

### **How to Classify the Peasants of Jhagrapur ?**

Most villagers in Jhagrapur are poverty conscious without being class conscious. They know that some of them eat only once a day while others twice or even three times. "Those who eat rice three times a day are rich", some of them used to say. Most do not understand that the one is poor *because* the other is rich, because the rich exploit the poor. Only a few villagers experience this as a situation of injustice which has to be changed through radical means.

These class conscious villagers have been especially helpful in classifying the peasants. While having discussions with them we discovered how difficult it is for people to classify their neighbours or themselves in the practical village situation. There are several factors responsible for this. Classifying peasants is not applying abstract criteria but dealing with human beings several of whom one knows pretty well. In classifying a mixture of criteria has to be used. Finally, the class position of many families is changing. The difficult character of classifying will be illustrated with some examples.

In Jhagrapur there is big family headed by a wise old man with whom we had a good relationship. We wanted the family to decide itself to which class it belongs. The father used to argue that he was a middle peasant and had never sold his labour. His sons never showed a sign of agreement or disagreement (probably expressing their respect for him in this way). The sons worked for others incidentally. In the absence of their father they told us they would have to do so more and more in the future, especially after they all would be married. In fact, they admitted that they had become or soon would become poor peasants. We finally decided to classify the family as poor peasant since all male working members were selling their labour from time to time while the father did not work at all due to his old age. But if we had come to the village ten years earlier they probably would



have been classified as middle peasant. It was apparently difficult for the father to understand that the family's situation had deteriorated.

If we had used land as the only indication for a family's class position another family owning 10 acres would have been classified as rich peasant. Yet we finally classified them as middle peasant. The family consists of a widow, her four working sons and eight other persons. The father was a well respected village leader who died about ten years ago. Because at the time of his death his sons were all young and the *bangsa* to which the family belongs was very much on the decline, there was nobody to defend their landed property. So it happened that out of their 30 acres 20 acres 'disappeared', mostly by extortion. The family has not yet overcome this blow, and still tries to take back its land but understands that they lack the power and support to do so. Due to their malaise the management of their farm is not very good. Regularly they either have to borrow money against high interest or to give land in mortgage. Besides, the family tries to maintain a status similar to that when the father was still alive. After prolonged discussions and thinking, it was decided to classify this family as middle peasant. A mixture of criteria and information on the family's background which cannot easily be expressed in figures have been decisive factors in classifying them.

Both cases described above show how difficult classifying can be. They also indicate how emotional it can be for families to talk about their own condition. From time to time it happened that people started crying when telling the history of their family or themselves. We got convinced in Jhagrapur that poorer villages especially suffer tremendously due to tensions and aggression which cannot be expressed and have to be suppressed. All these tensions and this aggression are bound to erupt one day and when the poor peasants have organized themselves ; they will begin to denounce and shout at their exploiters and punish the worst of them.

Before defining the classes into which the inhabitants of Jhagrapur have been divided, a last issue has to be dealt with. As far as we have noticed, most classifications of rural people are incomplete because landlords are not distinguished as a separate class. Yet we think this necessary in the case of Jhagrapur and surroundings and many other areas of Bangladesh. Landlords do not work in their own fields. When shaking hands with them one can feel that their hands are soft because all the work is done for them either by labourers or sharecroppers. Villagers notice essential differences between rich peasants and landlords, several of whom control more than 150 acres of land. Many poor and middle peasants have a small degree of class consciousness in regard of these landlords. Some of them know by heart a list of all landlords the area around Jhagrapur, their landed property, their



evils and good things. They also have learned that these exploiters will never cede some of their wealth voluntarily.

We could think of two reasons that landlords so often are not mentioned as a separate class. The first is that many people think that landlordism is past in Bangladesh. It is not exceptional to hear that feudal lords are very few or non-existent. We agree that hacienda holders in Latin America control more than half of all the land, and that the holdings of landlords in India and Pakistan are bigger than those of landlords in Bangladesh who control only a very small quantity of the total area while in some areas they are totally absent. Yet it is our impression that the number of landlords and their influence in local matters is generally underestimated. This underestimation is, among other things due to the fact that most rural research in the country has been done around Comilla town, where the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development is established. It is known that landlords do (almost?) not exist in that area. A landowner with more than 10 acres seems to be even an exception. That they do not exist in this area has often been generalised for the whole country. This is clearly wrong.<sup>17</sup>

The second reason is that important quantitative differences in holdings in Latin America, India and Pakistan, on the one hand, and Bangladesh, on the other, do exist. But one has to realize that the soil in Bangladesh is relatively very fertile: 100 acres of always productive clay in Bangladesh give much more paddy than 100 acres of barren desert somewhere else. The rich quality of the soil compensates for the difference in quantity of land. This difference should not make people ignore the presence of landlords in Bangladesh. What hacienda holders in Latin America and landlords in Bangladesh have in common is that they are representatives of a comparable feudal system with a not essentially different relation to the means of production.

In many areas of Bangladesh there are still landlords while in some areas there are none any more. These regional differences have to be taken into account and to be expressed in the enumeration of classes. In some areas 'supervisory farmers' might have to be added to the class of landlords, as Saghir Ahmed has done in the case of villages in Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> It might be necessary to do the same in Comilla Kotwali Thana. This approach might appear to be rather complicated in the eyes of social scientists. But if one relies on the villagers themselves (which is necessary anyway if

<sup>17</sup> J. Arens, and J. van Beurden, 'Powerstructure and Modernisation of Agriculture in Bangladesh,' unpublished paper; 1975 p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmad, 1973, p. 212.



one wants to come to a correct classification), these problems can be easily solved. The villagers from Jhagrapur who helped us in classifying were really able to consider the particular features of their village and area.

### Peasant Classes in Jhagrapur Defined

To finish this article the classes into which we have divided the families of Jhagrapur will be defined :

*Poor Peasants* : Poor peasants are either not in control of any or of only very little means of production (such as land, bullocks, handicraft tools, etc.). They are not self-sufficient and therefore, depend heavily on selling their labour but they suffer from un- and underemployment. Some of them get a chance to take land in sharecropping. Many are exploited by moneylenders. Some of them receive additional income from petty trade. Their situation is characterised by a high degree of insecurity. They form the bulk of the peasantry, and are the most exploited ones.

Within this class two sub-classes have to be distinguished. Those who control very little means of production are called *Small Peasants*. Those who are completely deprived of them are called *Semi-Proletarian Peasants* or *Poorest Peasants*. This second sub-class is often called either 'landless peasant' or 'agricultural labourers' class. We think the term 'landless' not exact as land is not the only indication for a family's class position. The term 'agricultural labourer' is not exact either as many of the poorest peasants are forced to accept any work they can get, whether agricultural or not. We have used 'semi-proletarian' as this term depicts the changing character of production relations; it covers those who are on their way to become rural proletariat. Possibly this term does not fit in with the objective situation in every part of Bangladesh, e.g., in Dinajpur Dt. where production relations might be still more feudal. As 'semi-proletarian' is a rather difficult word the term 'poorest' can be used as alternative.

*Middle Peasants* : Middle peasants generally own sufficient means of production to be able to make both ends meet. They rarely sell their labour and some of them hire labour in during the harvest. Many of them are exploited as sharecroppers or through moneylending (especially during economic crisis). But they are less dependent upon others than poor peasants. Their situation is more secure. Often they are called subsistence peasants.

Their potential role in effecting radical changes in favour of themselves and the poor peasants has already been pointed out above. It is possibly due to the fact that they have to worry less about their daily rice than poor



peasants and that they are relatively independent from the exploiting classes.<sup>19</sup> It might be also due to the fact that they are partly exploited and that the economic position of some of them is rapidly declining. It is often assumed that especially those middle peasants who are in danger of becoming small peasants are willing to change socio-economic relations radically. We know a few of these middle peasants in danger in Jhagrapur who are very radically minded. If we had stayed longer in the village we could have studied this issue in some more depth and concluded whether middle peasants there should be divided into two sub-classes ; the one consisting of those in danger and the other of more secure peasants.

*Rich Peasants* : Rich peasants own more than sufficient means of production. They hire in labour and sublet part of their land to sharecroppers. They do manual labour in their own fields or workshops. They have more security than middle peasants. They belong to the exploiting classes, though they are by far not the worst exploiters. Often they are called above-subsistence peasants.

Several villagers divided rich peasants in what we have finally called *Small Surplus Peasants* and *Big Surplus Peasants*. The gap between the former and well-to-do middle peasants can be very small. The gap between big surplus peasants and petty landlords can be small as well. In several big surplus peasant families only one family member works in the fields (with the labourers) while the others do not involve themselves in manual labour.

The small surplus peasants are said to have been hit by the present economic crisis. Though being rich peasants, their surplus is too small to enable them to purchase goods which they used to buy before (such as soap and sugar). This has upset most of them very much. Their faith in the present ruling class has decreased significantly. Rich peasants with a big surplus (say, for instance, 100 *maunds* of paddy per year) profit heavily from the present price hike. Many of them are strong supporters of the ruling class. This is another important point to realize for those who think that the present ruling class has to be defeated before radical changes can be carried out. They will meet the big surplus peasants in Jhagrapur as their enemies while it might be possible to neutralize the small surplus peasants.

*Landlords* : Landlords own a huge amount of land, far more than they need for their family. Mostly they do not do any manual labour themselves and live purely from exploiting others, either by hiring in their labour or sharecropping out their land. They belong to the worst exploiters.

<sup>19</sup> See note 1.



As the wealth of these landlords is mainly based on the huge quantity of land they control, we have adopted this as a measuring rod (as is in accordance with most of the existing literature). The only landlord in Jhagrapur controls 50 acres of land and is small in comparison with landlords in neighbouring villages, some of whom own as many as 150 acres. They have been benefited most by the government schemes for the modernization of agriculture.<sup>20</sup> A few among them slowly begin to show the features of rich farmers. This transition, however, is still in its very initial phase and has, therefore, not been expressed in this classification.

### Summary

The term 'peasant' covers both cultivators and non-cultivators. They are living and integrated in rural society and either work for their living or are not able to do so. The richest among them control more than sufficient means of production while the poorest are completely deprived of them. They do not consider their means of production as pure commodities but primarily as means of survival and subsistence.

Non-peasant groups in rural areas are: landlords, who are integrated in rural society without doing any manual labour and who live by exploiting others; salaried employees, most of whom live far away from their native place and are temporarily settled in towns or near to town villages; and finally, farmers, who aim for profit and have often lost touch with village life and traditions.

Even if one mainly has to do with cultivating peasants (as is the case in Jhagrapur), the classification of those peasants should not be based on their landed property alone. Other means of production (such as ploughs and animals for cultivation) and other factors (such as the fertility of the soil or farm management) should be taken into consideration as well. Besides, as to landed property it has turned out to be fundamental to distinguish between legal ownership and *de facto* control of land. The definition of the term '*de facto* control of land' is dependent upon the particular situation one is dealing with. Generally, classifying peasants demands flexibility while arbitrariness has to be avoided.

Some authors either deny or evade the existence of class differences and contradictions. The deeper cause of this is their (often covered) bias in favour of the richer and ruling classes and against the poor peasantry. To keep up a facade of 'objective' social science all sorts of distortions are made in which the objective reality is ignored.

<sup>20</sup> Arens and Beurden, 1975,



Classifying the peasant families of Jhagrapur has not been applying abstract criteria for us but dealing with human beings. We have tried to consult the families themselves as much as possible. Such discussions could be rather emotional. Often a whole mixture of criteria was applied. An additional difficulty was that the class position of several families was on the change. In Jhagrapur and surroundings landlords are still powerful people. They have been distinguished as a separate class.

Finally, four classes have been distinguished :

1. Poor peasants (subdivided as semi-proletarian and small peasants)
2. Middle peasants
3. Rich peasants (subdivided as small and big surplus peasants)
4. Landlords.



**Glossary**

<i>chowkidar</i>	Lit. : guard. A government paid servant at the village level who is supposed to report births, deaths and crimes to the local administration. In Jhagrapur he has to prevent goats, bullocks, etc. from eating the crops and to announce village meetings.
<i>bigha</i>	one-third of an acre.
<i>bangsa</i>	patrilineal group.
<i>maund</i>	a measure equivalent to 40 seers ( one seer = two English pound).







# Caste and Occupational Mobility in a Village of Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>

Profulla Chandra Sarker

## Introduction

Caste is a social group characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the traditional pursuit of a particular occupation and is usually associated with more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system ( Beteille, 1969, p. 46 ). Occupational mobility may be considered in different cases, among them (a) as a change in occupation that involves a consequent change in status; (b) as a promotion within the same occupational group; (c) as the accumulation of seniority within the given occupation; (d) as a change in occupation from one generation to another, as from father's to son's (Merril, 1969, p.332). In this paper I have given emphasis on the traditional occupation structure of the different castes and their mobility from generation to generation. Writers on rural society in the Indian sub-continent also have mentioned that caste and the occupation are closely linked up (Srinivas, 1955, pp. 1-2; Dube, 1955, pp. 36-37 and; Mayer, 1956, pp. 127-130). My aim in this paper is to give a clear picture about the different types of castes and their occupational mobility in a village of Bangladesh.

## Research Site

Mohānandakhālī is a medium-sized multi-religion and multi-caste village in Rajshahi district. It is ten miles north of Rajshahi town: nine miles of metalled motorable road and one mile of *Kācā* road. The total households at Mohānandakhālī are one hundred. Of the households, 56 are Muslims and the remaining 44 are Hindus. The village itself is not built according to a definite plan. It is divided into three *pārās*. Tiktikipārā is situated at the northern part of the village, and all the inhabitants of the *pārā* are Muslims. Madhyapārā or Hindupārā is situated at middle portion of the village and most of the inhabitants of this *pārā* are Hindus, but there are three Muslim inhabitants in the Hindupārā. They came from

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a part of the thesis titled *Aspect of Caste and Social Structure in a Rural Community of Bangladesh* for the degree of Master of Philosophy. I have spent ten months doing field work in Mohānandakhālī during 1975-76. I am grateful to Professor S. A. Qadir and Professor J. Kirkpatrick of the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University, for advice and guidance. I am also indebted to the Institute of Bangladesh Studies for funding the project.



India through mutual exchange of land with Hindus. And the third, Dakhminpārā, is situated at the southern part of the village, where all the inhabitants are Muslims. Most of the houses of the village are made of mud walls with thatch or corrugated iron roof. Only one house is built of bricks.

### Population

The total population of Mohānandakhālī during my field work was about 638: 351 males and 287 females. Out of the total population, 60% are Muslims and 40% Hindus. Among the Muslims 53% are males and 47% females. Among the Hindus, 58% are males and 42% females. There are 251 Hindus in the village and they are differentiated on the basis of caste: Brāhmaṇ 8, Vaiṣnavas 44, Hāluyāi 158, Māheshyas 18, Śunris 8 and Namaśudras 15. The size of an average family in Mohānandakhālī is 6.3. Men between the age of 11-50 constituted 31% of the total population and are considered to constitute the active labour force in the normal economic sense of that term. Over 70% of the village population have absolutely no education; 30% have studied in primary school or above. The literacy percentage of different castes and religions are Brāhmaṇ 62%, Vaiṣnava 13%, Hāluyāi 38%, Māheshya 16%, Śunri 37%, Namaśudra 26% and Muslim 20%.

### Village Economy

Agriculture is the economic base of the village. Most of the people of the village are engaged in agriculture and a few villagers are engaged in certain professions—business, white-collar jobs, medicine, priesthood, tailoring, shop-keeping, carting, agricultural labour, barbing, and hawking. The main crops of the village are four kinds of paddy, *āmān*, *āus*, irri-20, irri-8, besides jute, sugarcane, and potatoes. Besides these the villagers produce wheat, onions, watermelons, different kinds of pulses, mustard seed, vegetables, sesamum, and so on. In Mohānandakhālī traditional methods of agriculture still exists. A little change has taken place in the field of agriculture with the establishment of a co-operative society, irrigation pumps, supply of improved seed and chemical fertilizers, plus weekly group discussion with model farmers. Share-cropping and the mortgage system are important features of Mohānandakhālī.

### Caste and Occupational Mobility

Like the caste system, the traditional structure of occupation in Mohānandakhālī was also relatively closed and rigid. The cases of occupational mobility and occupational differentiation were fewer. This



was reinforced by the hereditary nature of occupational specialization of families within the caste system.

"The unfreedom of occupation in actual operation at the beginning of the 19th century was accompanied by a staunch belief that almost everyone of the large number of castes had an occupation which was its own, its traditional and hence the hereditary occupation of its members, to abandon which in search of another was at least not proper, if not actually sinful" (Ghurye, 1961, p. 241). What has been written by Ghurye of a period over one hundred years ago may not be found today in Mohānandakhāli.

Two classifications of occupation have been applied: first, occupations based on secular sanctions, and second, those based on religious-ritualistic (pollution/purity) sanctions (Sharma, 1974, p.148). In the secular group of occupations I include those which have come into being as a result of modernizing forces, such as modernization of the means of transport and communications, spread of education, and technological effect on production. Occupations based on ritualistic sanctions can be further classified into two categories, the pure and the impure. It is these which have traditionally been associated with caste stratification. This dual conceptual scheme applied to classify occupations might give us an insight into change in the rural occupational structure, which may be analysed through the process of occupational mobility.

Thirty-five years ago, there were no modern schools, post offices, roads, buses, radios, or newspapers for the people of Mohānandakhāli. There was not even a single matriculate in the village. The more recent availability of these means of communication and transport, the spread of education, and the pressure of poverty have altered the traditional occupational structure of Mohānandakhāli. The abolition of *zamindari* on the one hand, which supported the caste system, and the inconsistencies or strains of over-conformity to traditional occupations on the other, have also contributed to changes in traditional occupations. Nevertheless, what we find today are traditional occupations which persist along with the non-traditional ones. Yet most of the castes today practise neither the traditional (caste-based) nor the secular (non-caste) occupations exclusively.

Some Brāhmaṇs have discarded certain traditional occupations. For instance, the young Brāhmaṇs do not like profession of priesthood. They think that priesthood reduces their prestige and position in the society, because the priest being in the low income group cannot lead a modern and progressive life. In Mohānandakhāli "modern" and "progressive" means



**Table**  
**Traditional and Present Occupational Structure of**  
**different Castes and Religious Groups**

Caste & Religion Group	Traditional Caste based Occupation	Present Occupations Caste-based or non-caste
Brāhmaṇ	Priesthood, worshipping, jotdāri.	Priesthood, worshipping, jotdāri, cultivation, white-collar jobs.
Vaiṣṇava	Mendicant, shop-keeping	Cultivation, business, shop-keeping, labour.
Hāluṃyāi	Zamindari, cultivation, labour.	Jotdāri, cultivation, business, white-collar jobs, labour, tailoring.
Māheshya	Cultivation, labour, animal husbandry.	Cultivation, labour, business, white-collar jobs, animal husbandry.
Śunri	Business, shop-keeping, money lending.	Business, cultivation, white-collar jobs.
Namaśudra	Cultivation, labour, animal husbandry	Cultivation, carting, business.
Muslim	Cultivation, animal husbandry, carting, labour, business, hawking, tailoring, priesthood.	Cultivation, business, carting, white-collar jobs, shop-keeping, hawking, labour, doctor, barbering, tailoring, priesthood.

wearing western dress ( pants, shirts) and freely interdining. I asked Mr. Ramendra Nath Bhadury if he would become a priest in Mohānandakhālī. He replied that the priesthood is the lower profession of the the Brāhmaṇs, and for this reason he is primarily working in the government office as a clerk and his secondary occupation is cultivation. (Still it should be remembered that the Brāhmaṇs do not cultivate their land by their own hands, as to do so would be sinful for them. They cultivate their land by hired labour under their own supervision.)

The Vaiṣṇava have discarded certain traditional callings now felt to be derogatory such as mendicancy, as people called them *bairāgi* (a derogatory term, beggar). They have adopted new occupations to compensate for the economic loss. Now, the Vaiṣṇavas are not mendicants, but cultivators, labourers, business men, and so on.



The abolition of the *zamindāri* system especially affected the Hāluyāis, who were mostly *zamindārs* in former times. Today in most cases they are farmers; some have become white-collar workers and some even manual labourers, businessman, and one a tailor. For example, Mr. Tarani Kanta Mondal, a son of an ex-landlord, is now a cultivator and his brother's son is a tailor. His brother's son's son is a school teacher.

The traditional occupations of the Māheshya were cultivation, manual labour, or animal husbandry. But changes have taken place in the occupational structure of the Māheshya. The new occupations of the Māheshyas are white-collar jobs, business, and tailoring. The main causes of the occupational changes are poverty, spread of education, modernization of the means of transport and communication, and technology in the field of production. For example, in Mohānandakhālī Mr. Ramkrishna Mandal is a Māheshya. His traditional occupation is agriculture. But now he purchases vegetables from the village *hāts* and supplies them to the permanent vegetable shops at Rajshahi town. It is no doubt a lucrative business. It has, however, been possible for him to pursue this occupation because of the good communication from Mohānandakhālī to Rajshahi town and because of the introduction of modern technology, supply of good seeds, irrigation, and modern ideas for growing vegetable. So changes are coming from two sides; one is the mode of production and the other the change of occupation.

There are other castes, however, who have not been affected considerably by the land reform. The Śunri is one of them. In Mohānandakhālī two Śunri families continue to be engaged in business such as goldsmiths. But they have stopped their previous subsidiary profession of money lending. I asked a Śunri, Mr. Narayan Chandra Saha, why they no longer lend money, and he replied that they cannot rely on the people who borrow to pay back their loans in time. Śunris prefer only cash repayments on loans, so the business is too much trouble for them these days.

A little change has also taken place in the traditional occupational structure of the Namasudras. Formerly the Namaśudras were cultivators, labourers and keepers of herds in Mohānandakhālī. But now they have undertaken business of aluminium utensils, keeping a permanent shop at Naohātā *hāt*. Mr. Rabindra Nath Sarker's father and his paternal grandfather were cultivators but he is a businessman dealing in utensils.

Occupational mobility can also be found among the Muslims, both Mohammadi and Hānāfi, in Mohānandakhālī. Twenty-five years ago the traditional occupations of the Muslims were cultivation, animal husbandry, labour, carting, business, hawking, and tailoring. The recent, newly



Table

## Occupations in Mohānandakhālī

Religious Group and Caste Occupation		Hindu						Muslims		
Primary	Secondary	Brāhmaṇ	Vaiṣṇava	Halayāi	Māheshya	Sūni	Nama-sudra	Total	Mohammadi	Hānāfi
Agriculture	—	1	1	24	3	—	—	29	45	7
Agriculture	Business	—	6	6	—	1	—	13	4	—
Agriculture	Carter	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	1
Agriculture	Labour	—	—	1	1	—	—	2	3	—
Agriculture	Shopkeeper	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Business	—	—	—	2	1	—	3	6	6	2
Business	Agriculture	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	—	—
Salaried employment	—	—	—	3	1	1	—	5	7	—
Salaried employment	Agriculture	1	—	1	—	—	—	2	1	—
Salaried employment	Business	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	2	—
Business	Salaried employment	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	2
		—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	2
		—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	2

Per cent

31.6

6.6

1.6

1.9

0.3

5.4

1.6

4.5

1.1

1.1

1.1



Table ( Contd. )  
Occupations in Mohanandakhali

Religious Group and Caste Occupation			Hindu							Muslim		
Primary	Secondary	Brāhmaṇ	Vaiṣṇava	Haluyāi	Māheshya	Śunri	Nama-sudra	Total	Mohammedi	Hānāfi	Total	Per cent
Hawker	Agriculture	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3	1.1
Doctor	Agriculture	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3	1.1
Tailoring	—	—	—	3	1	—	—	4	2	1	7	2.7
Labour	—	—	3	2	—	—	—	5	5	—	10	3.8
Labour	Agriculture	—	1	6	—	—	—	7	2	—	9	3.5
Priest	Agriculture	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	0.3
Hawker	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	4	4	0.6
Barber	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	0.3
Student	—	—	1	19	—	4	1	25	42	1	68	26.5
Others	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	2	4	—	6	2.3
Total		3	14	69	7	8	5	106	138	12	256	100%



emerged occupations of the Muslims are white-collar jobs, shop-keeping, medicine, and barbering. The priesthood is not inherited from parents and grand parents. Becoming a priest requires the requisite training and piety, and anyone with necessary qualifications can be a *mollā*. The Table on pages 168 and 169 shows the primary and secondary occupations of the various religious groups in Mohānandakhālī.

In the present occupational structure I have found that people tend to have two occupations as sources for making a living, since most of the people, both Hindus and Muslims, are directly or indirectly involved in cultivation. It is interesting to note that people always try to alleviate their social status by quoting their non-farm profession first. For example, let's say that the primary occupation (primary and secondary occupation is based on major and minor source of income) of a person is cultivation and the secondary occupation is business or salaried employment. In this situation, if anybody asks a villager, he will give his employment or business as his primary occupation even though it is really cultivation. In the occupational hierarchy, irrespective of income people emphasize salaried employment first in status, and business second. Though the income of a cultivator may be higher than that of a salaried employee, the people always try to enhance their status in the society by showing their rank in terms of new or "modern" occupations. So white-collar jobs and business are higher status markers than farming.

The Table shows the high and low occupational mobility among the various castes. The occupational mobility of the intermediate group, i. e. Hāluyāi and Māheshya, is higher than that of the upper and lower groups. So the upper group of Brāhmaṇs are more anxious than the intermediate group to maintain their position in the society. The lower group is less motivated towards occupational mobility than the upper and intermediate groups. For example, the Śunris have a typical economic ethic of their own supported by traditional caste values. They prefer business and a secondary occupation such as agriculture connected with it. Even the educated persons are not sent for white-collar salaried jobs because they earn more by getting engaged in business than doing white-collar jobs. In Mohānandakhālī one educated son of a Śunri (Secondary School Certificate pass) is neither allowed further studies nor he is sent for a salaried job, as he will ultimately take up the business profession.

In the above Table I have mentioned "student" as an occupation especially of the young people of Mohānandakhālī. The number of students in the middle group of Hāluyāi and Māheshya is higher than in the upper [and lower groups. The middle group is in a rising position in the various



spheres of their socio-economic and political life. Among the Muslims the number of students of the Mohammadi group is comparatively higher than that of Hānāfi. The existing students of the village, both Hindu and Muslim, also work for their guardians especially in the vacation periods. These students cannot devote their full time to education, because their needy guardians require their labour.

### Conclusion

Each caste in Mohānandakhāli is traditionally associated with the practice of a particular occupation. This does not mean, however, that all the members of a caste or even the majority of them do in fact always follow their traditional calling. It can be mentioned that many persons have more than one occupation of which the traditional one is either primary or secondary. These multi-occupational patterns are the outcome of the middle level economy of the village. Some non-traditional callings may be economically more remunerative than the traditional one. This makes it necessary for a person to go outside the traditional occupation.



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## Economic Development and Economic Growth : A Review Article

S. P. Singh, ed., *Underdevelopment to Developing Economies*,  
Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 551. Rs. 85.00

Economic development has most often been equated with economic growth. The rate of growth in Gross National Product (GNP) and sometimes its Per Capita expression have been considered as conceptualizing all that is relevant to, and important in, economic development. The overemphasis given to Gross National Product or Per Capita income has given rise to a large number of what are known as "Growth models" which seek to explain both the levels of national income and the Per Capita income at a point of time and the determinants of change in them from one period to another. The variables considered crucial for the purpose are income and expenditure, consumption and savings, investment and output, etc. Most of these growth models may be viewed as an elaboration of one or the other of these variables, and most of them are theoretical exercises based on the experience of the Western developed countries. These growth models have been predicated upon the belief that increases in national income or per capita income, if they are sufficiently large, will lead to the solution of the social and economic problems in the developing countries.

The experience of the last two decades, however, "makes that belief look rather naive".<sup>1</sup> The "mad chase after certain magic figures" of national income or Per Capita income has been illusory. The Per Capita income disparity between the developed and developing countries has continued to widen. For the developing countries, the increase in Per Capita income has been less than a dollar a year for the last twenty years. "Even this increase, miserable as it may seem, has been unevenly distributed with the poorest 40 per cent of the population hopelessly squeezed in its struggle for existence and sometimes getting even less than what it received twenty years ago."<sup>2</sup> In most of these countries, the problems of mal-

<sup>1</sup> Dudley Seers, "What are we Trying to Measure ?" in Nancy Baster, ed., *Measuring Development*, London : Frank Cass, 1972, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Mahbub-ul Haq, "The Crisis in Development Strategies", in Charles K. Wilbar, ed., *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment*, New York : Random House, 1973, p. 367.



nutrition, disease, illiteracy, squalor, unemployment, inequalities, etc., have reached alarming proportions. Significantly, these are due, not to any faulty implementation of the national development plans in these countries, but mostly to their successful completion, signifying that certain types of growth have caused them. All these suggest the need for "a fresh way" of looking at the problems of economic development.

Economic development is a process of change and it involves a change both in social and economic conditions. Economic development in this sense is unmistakably linked with economic growth; in fact, economic growth is an integral part of economic development. Without economic growth, poverty cannot be eliminated, nor can employment opportunities be created, and in its absence redistribution would amount to the distribution of poverty. But economic development is a broader concept. It transcends the narrow quantitative growth perspective and encompasses a wider view; it tends to focus on the socio-economic constraints that have given rise to, and perpetuate underdevelopment. In other words, economic development tends to focus on questions of social and economic problems and of institutional and political leadership.

Following Uphoff and Ilchman we can, for analytical purposes identify economic growth with "production", and economic development with "productivity". The one concerns actual production; the other, potential production or capacity for production, which has the greatest impact over time.<sup>3</sup> To achieve economic growth, the structure of production is taken as given and outputs are increased primarily by increasing inputs; but to achieve economic development the structures or patterns of resource flows and their uses must be changed so as to raise productivity. Productivity is a social phenomenon which is determined by social relations and institutions and it depends basically on human qualities. "Economic factors are powerfully influenced by social considerations; they also have weighty social consequences."<sup>4</sup> Pajestka suggests that for improved productivity not only is the contribution of each individual of concern, but the way it expresses itself in the social structure, where it acquires a new dimension and different values is also important. If the social objectives are integrated with the economic ones, both sets of aims can be mutually supportive, resulting in a feed back, most advantageous to overall progress,

<sup>3</sup> Norman T. Uphoff and Warren F. Ilchman, *The Political Economy of Development*, Berkeley; The University of California Press, 1972, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Pajestka, "Social Dimensions of Development," *The Cases for Development*, United Nations Centre for Economic and Social Information, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973, p. 97.



Improved health care, better education, widespread skills, measures to distribute national income more equitably, more employment opportunities, etc., are not only justified social aims, they also improve physical capacity and qualifications of men, and all these are of the utmost importance for economic development.

A distinctive feature of economic development is, as suggested by Simon Kuznets, its "self-sustaining" and self-generating nature,<sup>5</sup> and it depends on the greatest possible involvement and participation of the masses in productive activities.

The self-sustaining nature of economic development stemming from the deep involvement and active participation of the masses depends, however, on a wide diffusion of political and economic power so that a participatory rather than a regulatory system becomes operative. Distribution is closely linked to a given system of production. Unless the power and interests associated with a system of production are distributed among the less privileged groups and classes, even the economic measures which are meant for the benefit of the poor and weak may ultimately end up benefitting the rich and the influential. In other words, economic development demands that the poorer sections of the population must have political power. In fact, as suggested by Colin Leys, "the distribution of political power reflects, and also underwrites, the distribution of economic power".<sup>6</sup> In most of the developing countries it involves, in the ultimate analysis, a "breaking and building" process—breaking the traditional power structure and resource possession and building a new social order where all persons belonging to different classes can participate meaningfully in the productive and distributive activities.

The concept of economic development in this sense is seldom used in the current literature and the book under review—*Underdevelopment to Developing Economies*—edited by S.P.Singh and Published by Oxford University Press, Bombay, is no exception. Being a sequel to *The Economics of Underdevelopment* and *Accelerating Investment in Developing Economies* this book explores various aspects of economic growth in the developing countries in the traditional manner. It contains 22 articles which were already published in journals and monographs. The articles have been arranged in seven sections. All of them are well-written pieces and some of them are really very illuminating. In some articles, new concepts, tools

<sup>5</sup> Simon Kuznets, *Six Lectures on Economic Growth*, Illinois : The Free Press of Glencoe, 1959, p 14.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Leys, "The Politics of Redistribution", *I. D. S. Bulletin*, 7 ( August, 1975 ) No. 2, p. 6



and models have been developed or new use of the existing concepts, tools and models has been made to conceptualize the problems of economic growth. The book emphasizes, in the words of the editor, "the finer aspects of economics as a tool of analysis" than the conclusions in respect of "an immediate or pressing policy issue" (PVI); it is, moreover, designed to be useful "inputs" in the "training of the coming generations of students of economics". That is why the articles dealing with specific issues in all rigours and methodological clarity have been selected quite judiciously in this edition, and from that point of view it is an excellent collection.

The editor himself admits that though interdisciplinary approaches have been well appreciated these days for the study and analysis of the problems of development, this edition, for reasons stated above, does not represent that approach. It is expected that the editor will bring forth another volume to fill up this gap. The problems of economic development are, as we know, not only economic but mostly social and political. The study of various problems must, therefore, transcend the narrow limit of "economism" or "pure economics at the cost of social and political factors would be bad economics" and might lead to explosive politics.<sup>7</sup> The articles included in the book are to that extent narrowly conceived, though some of them contain flashes of socio-political approach which, beside being the inputs of Core-Courses of economics for the graduate students, are most likely to generate deep insights into the relevant problems.

In two of the three articles in Section 1 entitled "Agrarianism, Dualism and Development," John C.H. Fei and Gustav Ranis, and Dale W. Johnson have undertaken an elaborate analysis of the widely known two-sector growth model. Bringing out the basic distinctions between classical and neo-classical assumptions, they have analysed how economic growth is linked with population growth, surplus labour, employment etc., both in the agricultural and industrial sectors. John Fei and Ranis are not contented with the model analysis efforts only but have gone beyond and pointed out that "any policy for industrialization must be accompanied by policies for population control and for the introduction of non-traditional factors into the agricultural sector" if and when the conditions for viability of the industrial sector are not met (page 70). Werner Baer and Michel E.A. Herve in their article, "Employment and Industrialization in Developing Countries" have shown that "the lack of labour absorption in the manufacturing sector" in the developing countries is due not necessarily to conscious or wrong policy choices but some other variables which have to be explored (pp. 107-109). That is why they have suggested further rese-

<sup>7</sup> K. B. Sayeed, "Power Elites, Public Policies and Political System in South Asia", an unpublished (Seminar) paper, 1973, p. 13



arch on employment in the service sector and its relationship to other sector. Thus, the writers have gone beyond their traditional mould and are on the threshold of a "brave new world".

The developing countries in general and those in South and South East Asia in particular are greatly effected by the problem of unemployment in all its ramifications. The problem has been mooted by Gustav Ranis and C.H. Fei at the theoretical level. Lloyd G. Reynolds, in his article entitled "Wages and Employment in a Labour-Surplus Economy" has viewed the problem in a different light and came to the conclusion that "development policies which are not oriented toward using the abundant labour supply will also fail to maximize national output" (p.132). This kind of study should not only be read and re-read by the students of Economics but should be heeded by these policy makers also.

Another problem which the developing countries are trying hard to grapple with is one of rapidly growing urban population and urban work force, combined with a much slower increase in employment opportunities in the large scale urban establishments. The findings of C.R. Frank, Jr., are timely in that context. According to him, an approach based on limiting the growth of population along with a policy combined with attempts to reduce the urban-rural income differential could be one of the possible answers, and I think some of the developing countries might all around but quite profitably use this for checking not only the growth of shanty towns also for alleviating the misery of the slum dwellers. A.O. Hirschman's article—"The political Economy of Import Substituting Industrialization in Latin America"—is a bold attempt to chart a course for the "late late" industrializing countries to the unknown and uncertain sea of industrialization though he predicts that it would not be easy sailing for them. Touching on unemployment problem in a "typical developing country", Gustav Ranis has emphasized the question of "technological transplantation" with labour using innovations (p. 232),

Henry J. Bruton's comment in his article, "The Two Gap Approach to Aid and Development", is also very timely, and his analysis, especially, of the foreign aid, may be profitably used at the policy-making levels in the "soft" states which depend so much on foreign aid and expect to tide over the crisis in the transitional phase. Aid, according to Bruton, "can provide resources with which an economy can continue to function acceptably without bringing about the elimination of the distortions or changing structure"; but by relieving the pressure on the system, "aid may also reduce not only the incentive to make painful changes, it may hide the location of the right allocations." (p. 496). This is highly suggestive and it puts press-



ures on the policy makers to make conscious choice to accept aid only in the developmental framework.

Most of the economists these days are trying to make much of the agricultural sector in a developing country and their optimism grew skyhigh with the invention of the "magic seeds" and the applicability of the output augmenting agricultural inputs. The article of K.N. Raj—"Growth, Transformation and Planning of Agriculture"—will surely have a sobering effect on them and will bring their lofty optimism down from heaven to earth where all is not always well with the "dirty soil".

In fine, I must say that the book is an excellent one. It deals with important issues which are common to the developing countries. The writers have shown considerable skills in reducing the complicated theoretical problems to simple and easily understandable propositions. They have analyzed the problems, though having only the economists' world view, and have brought forth forceful conclusions. They do not care to know why many of the problem-solving rational economic solutions cannot be adopted in the developing countries; they are indifferent to the structural constraints that are retarding even the seemingly vigorous growth. But that is natural, and the trouble lies elsewhere, not in the "economists' den". I welcome this as a valuable addition in a neat and compact form and hope that not only the students of economics but the general readers also would make the best use of the book. Dr. S.P. Singh deserves our thanks.

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