

ROLE OF WOMEN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Birangaon : A study of a village

By

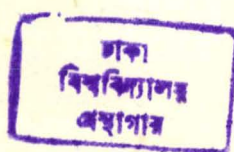
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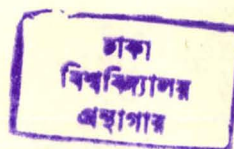
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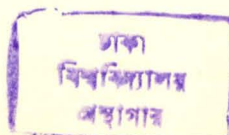
P R E F A C E

This study is part of a project entitled "the action Oriented Study of The Role of Women In Rural Development", which included studies on rural women in the five selected South and South East Asian countries of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The broad objective of the project was to involve female researchers from each of these countries in empirical investigation into the situation of rural women in their respective countries.

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The Bangladesh component, which included this study, was organized on the basis of a joint collaboration between the University of Sussex, England and the University of Dhaka. I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to these two universities for undertaking the initiative to organize such a research oriented study on women.

I would also like to thank Professor T. Scarlett Epstein of Sussex University for directing and coordinating the entire project. Personally I am deeply indebted to her



for her motherly interest in my work and its related problems.

I am very grateful to the Women's Division of the UNICEF, Dhaka, for providing the much needed funds for the conduct of the research work. In this connection, I would like to mention with appreciation the names of Ms. Renee Gerard, who conceived and initiated the programme and Mrs. Jowshan A. Rahman whose continued support helped in the final conclusion of the work.

My profound thanks are due also to Dr. S.P.F. Seneratne of Sri Lanka and Dr. B.K. Jahangir of Dhaka University for undertaking the responsibility of co-supervising my work. Without their special interest and close attention, this study could not have been completed. I am very thankful to them for taking such pains in providing me with valuable guidance and advice at every phase of the work in its minutest problematic detail.

I am also grateful to my husband for his unending cooperation and patient understanding throughout the long and sometimes difficult periods of the work.

And finally, I wish to express my very humble thanks to all the villagers for the invaluable cooperation and assistance. I shall always be grateful to them for the regard and affection with which they looked at my work and stay among them. My brief encounter with the realities of their world will forever remain the brightest spot in my entire life's experience.

A B S T R A C T

The ever-growing body of literature on women in Bangladesh and in most other countries presently hold the view that women's role in society is defined and determined by the degree of their participation in the economic activities. Female contribution to resources of household is the final determinant of the degree of their participation in household decision and hence authority. The assumption is that their status and position depend on their economic role.

Traditionally in Bangladesh there is a strict division of labour on gender lines. Men are producers, women reproducers. The areas of activity for men are the productive and public, while that for women, the domestic and private. Secondly, the behaviour of women is conditioned not only by their role in the economy, but also by the ideological implications of such roles. Since male work is public and productive, it is valued in cash terms or economically. Women's work in the

private world of the household and the domestic is not considered of such value. Men are thus, ideologically conceptualized as superior and responsible for women. The latter's position is related to the prestige of men, earned by their productive role. Women's behaviour, thus, symbolizes the prestige of men as producers. Women's expected behaviour is within the domestic and reproductive realms. Then again, because of a women's reproductive role, she is considered sexually vulnerable. Hence, the requirements of her physical and symbolic isolation from men and the public world.

Bound by socio-religious norms of restricted mobility women's role becomes "invisible" to a world, organised and controlled by men. Because of the symbolic invisibility, the work that women engage in within the household is variously dubbed as "family labour", "domestic labour", "subsistence work", etc., and is considered unproductive.

In recent years there has been drastic economic deterioration in the rural areas, resulting in the sharpening of socio-economic differentiations in the villages. This has resulted not only in an increase in the number of landpoor and landless villagers, but also in the new trend of more female participation in non-traditional area of work.

One of the main objective of this study, is to identify the role of women in this changing situation. What is the impact of shifts in female role on the value related to their traditional roles ? In order to do this, the need is to identify the role of women in the resource position of various categories in the rural areas and to trace the non-economic factors that influence, mould and sustain the values and norms relating to such roles.

The data on women's position in the household resources indicate that their ownership of land or participation in income generative activities within the traditional areas of work provides them with certain support for authority in the family. But only to a limited extent. Female ownership of land does not directly lead to

control over its returns because women have to depend on their male kin for its cultivation.

In the area of income generative work there is a variation in the pattern among different category women, depending on the economic and demographic situation of their households. In the rich group women do little work outside the traditional norms. A few women who work outside are in prestige acquiring jobs such as work in the Family Planning Organization, in the Union Parishad etc. In the middle category, women are utilized most as family labour as in this group a lot of agricultural produce has to be processed at home. Most marginal and poor household women try to earn what they can from income generative work in their homes. Only the poorest go for non-traditional work which reduce the status of the women and their families. The tendency even among the poorest is to hold back the women from such status losing work for as long as the economic situation of the household permits. Female labour is often withdrawn as soon as a family's male labour strength improves or the resource generation by men increases.

Then again, although not considered of economic value, a large part of the agricultural work falls within women's area of activity inside their homes. Thus women are valued as family labour in resource strong households where the demand for such work is high. In landpoor households the demand for such work is less. Hence the value of women diminishes.

At the same time, because of the values related to female activity, non-traditional work outside the household is stigmatised. As a result, when economic need forces women to go for such work their family status is lowered. With this the value of women as family labour is reduced. All this is reflected in the changes that are taking place in the practices of dowry payments, divorces etc.

Women have certain rights in the social institutions of marriage, divorce and inheritance but in practice these are delegated to their male kin. The role of men being related to the productive and the public work, they dominate the traditional social organisation of

Samaj and represent their female kin there. The male role in public areas of life and female non-participation is carried over in the formal institutions of the Union Porishod and the Gram Sarkar. Even though women have been ascribed a role in these organizations, their participation assumes the same nature of dependency on men as within the household and the Samaj.

Thus the traditional roles of women are preserved through the organization and functioning of the socio-political units. These are the male areas of life and more dominated by the economically powerful groups in the village. The women in these groups have to adhere strictly to the established norms.

The perceptions and aspirations of women and the level of awareness of their situation varies among different categories. Among the rich, the aspirations are set within the existing structure of ascribed roles and behaviour. In the landpoor, however, women are more aware of the helplessness of their situations in the case of removal of male support. In this category they are aware of the need for their participation in

household resources by way of contributing to family income. Yet they can perceive of changed needs only within the context of the existing value structure. These women need to work and at the same time try to remain within the norms of mobility which confine them to their homes.

Thus, my analysis of the role of women in the dynamic situation of Birangaon shows that the constraints for women are not only material but also ideological. The discussion of the relevant data indicate that very little change is taking place at the value level. With changes in the material situations, women are being forced to deviate from their traditional roles, but no corresponding resetting of values is taking place to sustain the change in their pattern of behaviour.

It is imperative, therefore, that development projects should attempt to answer not only the economic needs of women, but at the same time address themselves to the values and ideological questions attached to women and their roles. Only approaches of this kind can lead to effective help for women caught in the all engulfing contradiction of economic need and binding ideology.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The Project and the Study:

Since the declaration of the International Women's Year (1975) and the Decade for Women (1975) by the United Nations, there has been a worldwide awakening of interest in women, their situations and their problems, particularly in the developing countries. At the same time the stagnant economic condition in most Third World countries led to a rethinking about economic development. New approaches for development planning, most of which recognised the importance for increasing the role of women in the developmental process were adopted in these countries. The United Nations Declaration for the Women's Year calls for the integration of women in the developmental process as equal partners of men. Defining development in its broad objectives, it read, to bring about sustained improvements in the well being of the individual and of society and to bestow benefits on all. The underlying assumption is that women's involvement in economic

activities will lead to their incorporation in the developmental process. But the integration of women is of a special sort. It is important to distinguish between women's existing socio-economic-political situation and those changes that would truly integrate them into the process by which development is planned and carried out.

In Bangladesh, the need for the effective incorporation of women in the developmental process of the country was felt at all levels at about the same time that the United Nation's Declaration came about. The interest of United Nation's aid giving agencies in this area, following the Declaration of the Women's Year led to the formulation and implementation of projects and programmes for women in the rural areas of the country. This particular study, which is a part of a project entitled the "Role of Women in Rural Development" was conceived and initiated during this period. The broad project which incorporated this study included studies of rural women in the five selected South and South East Asian countries of

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Srilanka. The broad aim of the project was to involve female researchers from each of these countries in empirical investigation into the situation of women in their respective rural areas. This was planned with the view to help the Government in each of these countries to evolve effective programmes that would integrate women in the economic development of the country. The purpose of the project, in other words, was to understand the role of women in a way which will help plan correct ways of incorporating women in the developmental activities of these countries.

In Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim and agricultural country, development planners almost completely forgot women until recently, in their design of projects and programmes. Today, a few special projects include women, but the problem of their effective participation and hence the problem of development remains. Once again this has given way to new thoughts on rural development. It has raised questions as to why the situation of women remain the same or gets worse? Is our perception of women's roles and position in the formulation of

projects not realistic enough ? Or do our contextual approach to the actual situation of women remain faulty ?

In the light of these questions my study is an attempt to understand the different dimensions of rural women's roles and position in the dynamics of a changing situation in Bangladesh, and the interrelationship of various factors affecting it.

Bangladesh Background of the Study:

Bangladesh is basically an agricultural country with 91% of its populations living in the rural areas. 48% or nearly half of this population are women. Predominantly a Muslim Country, the socia-legal structural organization is strongly in line with religious values and codes. In recent years the country has been faced with serious economic crisis. The two major issues that has been identified as incorporating the basic economic problems of the country are over-population and under production in the agricultural sector.

The 1974 National Census of Bangladesh shows a population of 78 million people with an annual growth rate of 2.8% - the birth and death rates being 44 and 16 persons per thousand respectively.¹ With a projection of 90.6 million for 1981, an unchecked growth will result in 180 million people in the year 2000. (Bangladesh National Census, 1974).

In addition to a growing population, natural calamities, political unrest and economic instability during and after the war of liberation and the large scale dislocation of the people in the last decade led to a drastic fall in agricultural productivity and further aggravation of the economic crisis.

With economic deterioration, poverty became widespread and increasing numbers of rural people became landless seeking work in agricultural areas (wood, 1976). Thus, growing impoverishment led to an increase in the labour force participation from the lower income groups in the villages. In the face of this situation, recent studies indicate not only an increase in male labour force participation, but also a strong trend of female participation

1. A Second National Census has been conducted in 1981 - but the results were not available at the time of writing this.

- which is in sharp contrast to female work behavioural norms in existing forms of social organizations (Adnan, 1977, Alamgir, 1970, Westergaard 1980). This trend can be observed among the households of extreme economic need in rural areas. Traditionally women do not participate in the work force which connotes work outside the household in return for a wage. Poor and destitute women do work in return for payment in cash or mostly in kind in other households in female activities of rice husking or paddy preparations but in disguised forms. The new trend, however, is women's participation in work for cash returns in areas of activities which are traditionally labelled as male work, such as earth cutting, work in brickfields etc. However, as has been pointed out by the few studies in this area, it should be borne in mind that only women from extremely poor households which has lost all male support or has poor male support, are going for such work. Households that have some economic stability can still afford to "spare" its women from such work, which are considered degrading not only for the women but also for the family.

The labor force participation in the National Census of Bangladesh 1974 refers only to the civilian labour force. For the total population, the labour participation was 53.0% in 1974, and for females 3.5%. When the population of 10 years and above are considered, the male participation is 19.65 million; 15.25 million in agricultural labour force and 4.42 million in non-agricultural sector (Table-1).

Table - 1

Percentage Distribution of Civilian Labor force
(10 yrs. and above) Bangladesh '61-74 (in millions)

Economic Category	1961	1961	1974	1974	1961	1961	1974	1974
Civilian labor force	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Civilian labor force	14.8	100	19.65	100	2.64	100	0.871	100
Agril. labor force	12.58	85	15.23	77.5	2.42	91.8	0.61	69.8
Non Agril. labor force	2.22	15	4.42	22.5	0.22	8.2	0.26	30.2

1974 Bangladesh National Census Report.

For females, the figures are 0.87 million with a breakdown of 0.61 in agriculture as against 0.26 in non-agriculture.

Table - 2

Labour force participation,
Bangladesh, 1961, 1974

	1961	1974
% of Economically Active		
Total pop., all ages	34.3	28.7
Males - all ages	56.2	53.0
Females - all ages	10.8	2.5

1974, Bangladesh Population Census Report.

But according to both accounts of 1961 and 1974, the number of economically active persons has, however, declined, slightly in the case of men, but sharply in

the case of women (Table - 2).

Table - 3

Numerical (Percentage) Distribution
of Economically Active Population
(10 yrs. and above) in agriculture,
1961, 1974 (in millions).

	1961		1974	
	Number	Percent	No	Percent
Agricultural sector				
Bangladesh	15.0	86.0	15.8	77.1
Male	12.5	85.0	15.2	77.4
Female	2.4	91.8	.6	70.0

1974 Bangladesh Census Report.

This contradictory estimate of female participation in the work force and that of economically active women, exposes once again the definitional inadequacies or shortcomings of the Census Report. To a large extent, the already existing confusion regarding women's work

and its economic value, is increased and strengthened by the vagueness of the Census definition of such work. This shortcoming is to some extent admitted in the Census Report, at the same time not conceding totally by pointing out the possibility of actual decrease in female economic activities due to such facts as increase in the number of female literacy rates.

A second possible reason for such contradiction in estimates could be due to the fact that the opportunities for female participation in recognised economic activities for women were reduced because of the introduction of selected improved technology which took away their work and enabled men to intrude into their work area-such as rice crushing mills, paddy processing complexes etc. These can be taken as indexes which indicate that the decision for women to work, or not to work, is entirely different from men, as their work area and work type are traditionally demarcated from that of men. In case of men, this discrepancy is unlikely to create any confusion because the male areas of work remain the same in traditional and new

activities. This differential male/female work stem from existing norms of strict sexual division of labour between men and women into public areas of work, which are considered of economic value and female work in domestic areas which are not considered of economic value. Today, women are being forced to go for work which traditionally was in male areas. Yet the traditional conceptualization remain. This leads to overlooking of female participation in new areas of activities. Thus, stemming from certain basic conceptions about male/female work and roles in society women's behaviour is dependent on circumstances and situations which in the case of men are not applicable. This conception leads to vagueness in defining women's areas of economic activities. This in turn, leads to further confusion and clouds the whole issue.

Generally, when women's work is considered, economic activity includes all work within the domestic area or in other's domestic arena for little or no direct return in wages. Whereas, in the case of women wage labourers, meaning mostly those who work in non -

traditional areas - it implies work in return for a wage, like that of men. In most censuses, so far the totalities of women's economic activities including their work in both of these areas are not taken into consideration. Hence the statistics remain faulty.

These, therefore, point toward the fact that women's circumstances are special and hence problems related to them have to be considered in the context of the particular situations in which they exist. Hence, in case of women not only should the definition of work and its evaluation in economic terms be given special emphasis, but the circumstances peculiar to women and related facts about their work should also be given serious consideration. It is important not only to explode myths about the economic value of women's work, but also to analyse and evaluate traditional and non-traditional work of women. How does the work of women get evaluated and what factors interplay in the evaluation of women's work are important questions to be asked in any study on women.

Only inquires with such a perspective and solutions for such inquiry can help remove the myth of invisibility of women's role not only in the economy, but also in the social and political organizations. Only then can the women be helped to step out of the dark mysteries of their existence.

Much of the confusion regarding women and their work arises because traditionally there is strict division of labour on sexual lines and regulation of women's mobility by religious norms of Purdah and seclusion. Women's participation in economic activities is within the fourwalls of the homestead. So, one of the chief features of their productive activity is that they are not directly remunerated because they are family farm based activities and are performed in or near the dwelling. All rural women irrespective of their socio-economic status are bound by this norm of behaviour. Poor women, who have to seek employment outside to supplement family income or to support family, go for work in other household's domestic activity. In most occasions, such work of women are attempted to be

disguised, because income generative work for women is considered degrading and is symbolic of the male's inability to support. Thus, all rural women are bound by the norms of seclusion and restricted mobility so far as their behaviour is concerned.

Legal Structure:

In order to understand the situation of women, it is important to look into the status and position of women in the prevailing socio-legal structure of the country, which is based on Islamic principles? Under the existing social organization women hold a secondary and sub-ordinate position to men, with segregation of male/female area of work, and seclusion for women. With 85% of the population being Muslims, the socio-legal structure is based on Islamic codes of behaviour. Based on this work segregation on gender lines, socio-economic roles are set for men and women. These roles are in turn, bound by norms which are maintained through the social and political customs and institutions. This division of roles is between men and women of all

socio-economic classes. Division of labour on gender lines, put women into the domestic realm. Men are considered the bread-earners and providers involved in productive activities. The concept of seclusion of women in order to uphold the prestige and position of men as providers and protectors is in vogue. These restrictions levied on women's mobility become the symbol of men's capability to provide. Consequently, the observance of division of labour projected in the families ability to maintained strict Purdah of its women, is one of the most important determinants of socio-economic status.

Islamic Law ensures certain rights for women and because of this it is often mistakenly referred to as a religion which views women as equal to men. Islam dictates sexual segregation and division of labour. Men, under Islam, are considered as economic producers and women as reproducers who are dependent on men. This creates a superior/sub-ordinate hierarchy between the roles of men and that of women, women's position being one of sub-ordination and dependency on men. The rights given

to women emanate from this broad notion of male dominance, or superiority.

The existing legal system in Bangladesh, is a combination of Muslim Law and Roman Law. This co-existence of Muslim Law and anglicised Roman Law in the legal structure of the country help perpetuate and strengthen the hierarchical positioning of men and women in the society. At the time, the British took over the rule of India, the legal structure was based on Muslim Laws. During their rule, the British gradually changed the public laws to Roman codes, while the personal laws of Hindus and Muslims were allowed to continue. So, the personal laws of the country based on Muslim Law remained while the public laws were changed to Roman codes (Quamruddin, 1977). In order to modernise and update the personal law of the country, in 1961, the then Government of Pakistan introduced the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961). Through this enactment, certain new laws were brought in to uphold the rights of women in marriage, divorce, inheritance etc. But in practice, very little of this affected the lives of the majority of women who live in tradition bound villages of the

country. (Quadir,1981). Hence, in practice the Muslim law of pre-British period continue to guide the personal laws of the country. Consequently, areas of life which affect women are mostly covered by the Muslim Laws, whereas modernisation and improvements were made in the public laws which affect areas of life which are dominated by men. The result is the strengthening and perpetuation of the Islamic codes of behaviour in areas of life that affect women. In this way the hierarchy between men women get projected in the legal structure and gets sharpened in its social manifestations. The unequal rights of men and women gets perpetuated too.

Muslim Law thus embodied in the personal laws relate to marriage, dowry, and inheritance. In marriage, divorce, inheritance, women's rights are limited and the female dependency on male kins further delimits the exercise of these rights in practice.

According to Muslim Law, marriage is a contract requiring the consent of both the husband and wife and also the

same daulity of consent is required in case of divorce. In practice, however, marriage has remained a social institution and consent and decision in both cases of marriage and divorce remain the prerogatives of men (Huq. 1976). On marrying a girl, the man has to agree to pay the wife a fixed amount of dowry (Mohor) for consenting to enter the marriage contract. This is a provision for acknowledging the ensurance of the man's ability to support and provide for the wife. (Aziz, 1979).

Similarly, under the laws of inheritance a Muslim woman can inherit only half of that of her brother and one fourth of the husband's property. To start with, the right of inheritance for women are not equal to that of men, and as such, is the embodiment of the Islamic conceptualization of male role as superior and that of the female of dependence on men. The same notion of female dependency again operates to restrict women from claiming their inheritance in practice. Having to depend on men through/^{out}her life, she foregoes the claim of property from male kins in order to reserve her right to turn to them in times of marital and other

familial crisis in her husbands home. Thus, even this limited right to inherit property is foregone in practice. (Aziz,1979).

An unmarried girl is dependant on her male family members be it her father, uncle or brother, for the fulfilment of economic needs. Once married, she becomes the responsibility of her husband or male members of her husband's family. In old age again, she is under the charge of her son or sons or other male kith and kin. Her role, therefore, throughout life is one of dependence on men, be it her father, husband, sons or any other male kin. (Sattar,1975).

This role is internalised not only by the women themselves but also by the socio-political system, so much so that the rights that are endowed on women are not availed. Before marriage, she is her father's responsibility, hence her consent to marriage is a mere formality, the final decision being made by the father. The norm of a promise to pay dowry (Mohor) by the husband to his wife, is the acknowledgement of his ability and willingness to provide for her. The right of a women to inherit her father's property is in practice not

claimed, in majority of the cases, because of the inherent insecurity of her social position.

Therefore, the facts that emerge from this brief review of Islamic conceptualization of the role of women is that the sexual division of labour and segregation into public and private areas of work create a superior/sub-ordinate position for men and women respectively. Men, involved in production, are the providers and protectors and women are the symbols of the capabilities of such roles of men. Since women are the reproducers of labour, they are considered sexually vulnerable and hence have to be kept in seclusive protection. Assumptions behind the endowment of right to men/women are on similar notions. Women's role is secondary and unimportant and hence her rights are also not equal to that of men. Then again, women being considered dependants on men for economic needs, the rights they have, gets delegated to their male supporters in practice.

The socio-legal organization of the country is one in which there is a superior sub-ordinate hierarchy in the position of men and women. Under this traditional form

of social organization, upheld and perpetuated by the legal structure, the new trend of female participation in outside work is in sharp contrast, even though this is reported to be quite widespread to-day. It is this contradiction that exists in the dynamics that is rural Bangladesh today. A traditional socio-political cultural setup with its supportive institutional frame which demarcates male/female areas of work, and hence roles, and an increasingly decaying economy which is forcing women from poor households to go for non-traditional remunerative work. A proper perspective to women's situation and problems should take women in the dynamics of this contradiction. The influx of studies after the 1973-74 period on poverty in general, and women in particular point toward this new trend in female work pattern, but do not draw attention to the special facts and circumstances related to such work. The following section deals with a critical review of the studies on women in general and on Bangladesh in particular.

Bangladesh Studies on Women:

As against this backdrop of the socio-political-economic structure of the rural country side, a brief review of

the gradual development of interest and thought on women's problems, writings on women, and policies and programmes emanating from all this, is in order. Thoughts and interest in the situation of women and its implications on the wider social arena developed with the gradual progression of socio-political economic history of the country. The phases are (1) the prepartition period, (2) post partition or Pakistan period and (3) the post-liberation period in Bangladesh. In prepartition period the education of Muslim women was considered the only way to emancipate them. The focus of attention were the middle class urban women who were bound by strict Purdah rules and the tool emphasized for the upliftment of women was education.

After the independence of India, the movement for the betterment of the lot of the country's womenfolk continued to concentrate on education for women, and the role of women as wives and mothers were emphasised.

During the latter part of this period, the importance of rural economy in the total developmental process caught on and the role of women in the rural economic

system started to be recognised. During the Pakistan period, rapid industrialisation was the main objective of the Government. With the emergence of Bangladesh, agricultural development got the full attention of all concerned (Islam, 1978). The tradition of rural development is not new in Bengal. What was new was the emphasis on agriculture and the objective of incorporating women in development.

The liberation war of Bangladesh resulted in affecting the women's role in a big way; the familial dislocations, death of male members, the large scale abandoning of war affected women, the general poverty that descended as a result of the famine which followed the war, drastically changed the role of women. Widows and deserted girls suddenly were faced with the glaring realities of economic life with the removal of male support. Consequently more women from poor households were forced to seek income earning work. Recognising this need the Government and non-Governmental organizations framed policies to incorporate women in their developmental programmes. At about the same time the declaration of the International Year for Women and the Decade for Women by the United Nations stirred into focus a wave

of research and studies on women in the Third World Countries. Bangladesh, as a consequence of these factors became a "test case", not only in experiments in rural development, but also in the collection and documentation of information relating to women. In the period between 1973-74 to 1976-77 interested researchers, scholars, Government units, and aid providing agencies sponsored studies on different aspects of women's life and work.

The studies on women in Bangladesh can be categorised into two groups, on the basis of their area of interest. One group of studies was the result of work of general scholars and researchers who were interested in the upliftment of the cause of women. The second group was the outcome of the experience of workers involved in projects and programmes for women. Again the first group stress on the projection of the existing socio-legal political roles of women. While the other explodes the age old traditions of looking at women's role while exposing them in present day context. I have selected only a few representative studies from the vast number

of similar work that has been done so far, for my discussion here.

Two important work belonging to the first group mentioned above are that of Raunaq Jahan (1975), and Arens and Beurden (1976). Jahan's pioneering study, "Women in Bangladesh", based on the author's observations and interview with Bengal women, describes the life style of various category women and focuses on their social, economic, political and legal status. A second study, "Jhagrapur" by Arens and Beurden also focuses its attention on the inferior and sub-ordinate position of women. In this study, the researchers, a male-female team, who based their observation on a year long stay in a village in Bangladesh describe in vivid terms the sexual, economic and social exploitation of women as a class. Their observations, however are more descriptive than analytical, and like Jahan's work, is limited in its scope to statements about the existing situation. Their approach is inadequate for a comprehensive understanding of women's position in our society. They are limited to exposing the existing situation, and are descriptive. Little

attempt is made to explain the situations that are identified by way of relating it to other areas of socio-political, economic life.

The second group of studies inspired by the interest in incorporating women in policies and programmes, look at the productive role of the rural women. Some of the most pointed and revealing in this area are those of Kabir, Abed and Chen (1976), Abdullah and Zeindenstein (1976), Adnan, Islam and The Dhaka University study group (1976), Guznabi and Chen (1977).

Naila Kabir, Ayesha Abed and Marty Chens', "Rural Women in Bangladesh: Exploding some myths", examine a few age old myths which aid in conceptualizing about women in rural Bangladesh. In a new perspective towards women's work, arising out of their empirical experiences in project implementation, they question the myths and suggest ways of dealing with women's problems. This report although path breaking in its attack on traditional ways of looking at women is limited in its scope. It does not question the bases

of such myths and reasons for its perpetuation. Nor do they try to relate significant factors that influence and affect the formation and continuation of such myths.

Abdullah and Ziedenstein in the paper entitled "Rural Women and Development" give a general view of women's activities based on observations and interview of women in course of their (the authors) work of project organization in the rural areas. Prevailing attitudes toward women and the problems that are likely to hinder the initiation of programmes for women are highlighted and remedies suggested in their work. In this again, the interrelated factors that affect women's situations are not brought into perspective.

S. Adnan, R. Islam and the University Study Groups documentation on "Social Change and Rural Women : Possibility of Participation" project the role of rural women in productive activities. It points that the hard work of women go socially unrecognised and hence is under-evaluated. This is one of the few studies which hint at looking at women in the context of the totality but

is limited again in the confinement to suggestion alone. It does not attempt to analyse the situation with empirical data presented. Another drawback of this study is the methodology. Its assumptions were based only on statistics in terms of survey data. Although the situation of rural women in Bangladesh are the same in all categories, it has been seen that changes are affecting their positions in different ways. So the need is to identify the areas^{where} these are being affected and the reasons. So statistical bases alone are not enough for understanding the dynamics of the complexities of women's situation.

Another work which gives a revealing profile of poor women who are working in traditionally male dominated areas, such as earth cutting in public places, is Guznavi and Chen's report "Women in Food for Work : the Bangladesh Experiences". This attempt to project the socio-economic background and attitudes and aspirations of these women through interviews. The aim of this study was basically an identification of the socio-economic background of female earthcutters and their

aspirations for the future.

The studies that were conducted on women in Bangladesh during the first half of the 1970's, fall into two basic areas of enquiry those that looked into women and (a) their socio-legal and political status and positions and (b) their economic role in the society. These studies are important for bringing to the forefront women's issues. But are inadequate for a total analysis of women's situations and circumstances. The first group of studies concentrate on the description of existing position and status of women in the family, kinship, and political areas of life. These, however, do not probe into the causes of the persistence of women's sub-ordinate position, nor attempt to analyse the interplay of socio-economic factors that produce and maintain the status quo.

The second group that focuses its attention basically on the remunerative work done by women, is limited to the recognition of women's role in it and the identification of the social hindrances to such role playing. Suggestions are given in many studies without any attempt to analyse

the problem. This limitation is due to the inherent biases of the investigators. Most studies on women's productive roles were conducted by organizations with the broad purpose of programme assesment or to test the feasibility of women's projects.

Methodology is an important area of weakness of these studies. Most of these studies used survey data and statistics to explain various situation of women. The situation of women is dynamic, with constant change and shifts, the study of which require up to date and first-hand data. Secondly, statistics alone can not answer the complexities of women's problems. These studies are mostly based on short span observation or on survey data, which are inadequate to capture the intecracies and complexities of roles in a changing social economic political situation.

The two important areas of inadequacy of the existing studies on women, thus, relate to the (a) incompletness of an analytical approach to the problem, and (b) the methodological short commings. Recognizing these draw-

backs, in this study, I have tried to overcome this, in both the areas; I attempt to understand the special problems of women in the totality or in the context of the total socio-economic structure and the interplay of various factors that result in womens existing situation. The method adopted is a combination of a long spell of participatory observation, use of survey data and the collection of information through indepth interviews.

The period after the liberation of Bangladesh saw an awakening of interest in women's problems with a different approach. Women gradually came to be perceived as a necessary part of the country. This and the recognition of the need to attend to women's degrading situation, brought an influx of action from different quarters. Women's organizations and concerned scholars and researchers brought to the fore issues relating to women, and the Government, and non-Governmental organisations (NGO's) started projects directed towards women. These again had an effect on the changing roles and situation of women in the country. For this reason it is considered

necessary to briefly review the Governmental policies and programmes since the liberation of the country at this point.

Governmental Policies Towards Women's Issues:

Governmental policies towards women after the liberation focussed mainly on the rehabilitation of distressed and dislocated women. But the objective of policies changed after 1976 (Zaman, 1979). There is a change in emphasis from women's role in welfare activities to income generative work. This however, was done again within the context of the prevailing ideology and without proper analysis of women's situation. Consequently, the realities of changed needs of the women were not reflected in the policies formulated and the programmes that followed.

The post liberation realisation that national development cannot take place without the active involvement of women manifested itself in efforts to create opportu-

nities of gainful employment, of income generating vocations for women and to provide training and educational facilities and health and family planning services. Existing women's programmes in Bangladesh can be classified into:

- a) Literacy Programmes,
- a n d
- b) Income-generating programmes.

Most of the programmes are multipurpose integrated projects. Mainly national and international agencies sustain one or all of these. Apart from Government projects, Islam lists 7 major NGO's which have specific or integrated projects for women (Islam, 1979).

The broad objective of all these include literacy, health and family planning services and income generation. In the income generating projects, the attempt is to create scope for women to do so by (a) remaining within the domestic realm, (b) and those which offer work in the public areas. The basic assumption behind

such an emphasis on economic programme for women is that no direct involvement of women in resources of households is the reason for^{their} low status within the family and also in the society. Thus the hypothesis behind such projects is that, women's participation in remunerative activities will place them in a positive decision making role.

The questions that can be posited at this point is, does a positive role in income generation for women in a society with traditional socio-legal structure lead to a definite rise in their status ? In other words, is the economic participation of women positively related to their status and position, as it is in the case of men. These assumptions have developed in the light of a major line of thought in conceptualization about women's role and status.

Ester Boserup develops such a model by relating women's role in productive activities with their status in the kinship and political system. Boserup's work. The Role of Women in Economic Development (1970) examines national

and regional data collected from United Nations, Government and other agencies. A central concern of the author is the role of women under different socio-economic conditions. For our purposes we can adopt certain basic principles of Boserup's model to understand the Bangladesh situation in the light of empirical data.

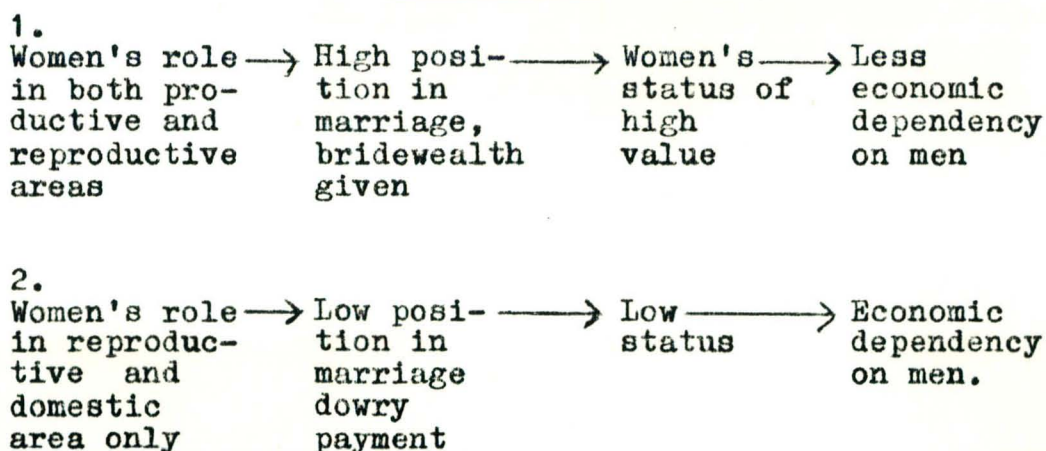
In looking at the background of the role of women in economic development, Boserup distinguishes between male and female farming systems which she tries to relate to factors of population density, technology and the type of cultivation. Her thesis ^{can be} summarised thus. In very sparsely populated regions of the world where shifting cultivation is used, men do little farm work, the women doing most. In somewhat more densely populated regions, where the agricultural system is that of extensive plough cultivation, women do little farm work and men do much more. Finally, in the regions of intensive cultivation or irrigation both men and women must put hard work into agriculture in order to earn enough to support a family on a small piece of land (1970).

She associates the sexual division of labour with differences in the position of women in rural communities which fall into two broad groups: The first type is found in regions where shifting cultivation predominates and the major part of agricultural work is done by women. In such communities, we can expect to find a high incidence of polygamy, and bridewealth being paid by the future husband or his family. The women are hard working and have only a limited right of support from the husbands, but they often enjoy considerable freedom of movement and some economic independence from the sale of their own crops.

The second group is found where plough cultivation predominates and women do less agricultural work than men. In such communities we may expect to find that only a tiny minority of marriages, if any, are polygamous: that a dowry is usually paid by the girls family; that a wife is entirely dependant upon her husband for economic support, and that the husband has an obligation to support his wife and children, at least as long as the marriage is in force (Boserup , 1970).

Boserup thus associating the sexual division of labour with differences in the position and status of women in rural communities, groups agricultural societies into those where women participate in agricultural production and those where women do not involve in productive agricultural work. In the first instance women's role constitute of both productive and reproductive functions whereas in the second, it is confined to productive and its related functions only. Boserup, then links the division of productive and reproductive roles of women to the variables of systems of kinship and marriage. In diagramatic form the two situations would be:

Diagram - 1



Hence the position of women is dependent on her role in production and reproduction. In agrarian systems where women do not participate in productive activities, less value is attached to their position and it has its reflections in the marriage system where a dowry has to be paid. In such a system, women's dependency on male kins is marked or pronounced. In situations where women are involved in reproductive as well as productive activities, much higher value is given to their position, in marriage a bride price is given and their dependence on men are much less. So, in systems of agriculture where women do not participate in production, a hierarchy of values related to male/female work is created.

Elements of the second group are relevant to the agrarian system in rural Bangladesh. In this agrarian system, there is not only a strict sexual division of labour in productive work, but also the religious norm of sexual segregation of men and women in public and private domains. The male role is in the public arena of agricultural productivity while women's role is

reproductive and her entire work area is in the domestic realm where part of the agricultural production work is done by women.

The division of male-female roles into productive and reproductive functions lead to an asymmetrical evaluation of male and female work. The male work in production is related to cash value. And since female role in agricultural production is relegated to the domestic, it gets dubbed as family labour, which is not measured in cash terms, and hence not considered of economic value. The value attached to men's role in agricultural production connotes that it is the responsibility of men to provide and protect his dependents - the women and children. Men, by virtue of this earn a prestige the symbol of which is the seclusion of women into domestic realms. The restriction on women's mobility is the symbol of male ability to provide for her. The prestige that is earned by men's role has to be upheld by the preservation of social norms of Purdah of women.

What is the relevance of Bosurup's conceptualization of women's status and position in relation to her role in Bangladesh ? The traditional norms of female work is one within the domestic area which is not considered productive. Non-productive role of women is considered of high status for the family as it reflects the family male's ability to provide economically. Since women are assumed to be dependents of men, their status is dependant on male status. Male status is high if he can afford to keep women of his family from doing recognised productive work. Women are not individuals who operate as separate entities, but is a part of their husband's family.

In the case of Bangladesh, there is a division of labour on gender lines and consequent demarcation of areas of work. Traditional participation of women in agricultural production is within the domestic area and only for family consumption. Hence her work is not considered productive in terms of money or cash value.

The households in which women involve in productive work within the households, the status and position

of their family is socially high, because it is the sign that men have the ability to provide. In households from which women go out for income generative work outside the household, the status is lowered affecting the households social position as well. Women going for outside work does not enhance their status because ~~it is~~ it is related to the households' social position. Therefore, their work outside is looked down upon. They are deviating from norms of expected behaviour hence their status is reduced. In case of Bangladesh, women's participation in agricultural and non-agricultural work outside the household is not the only variable that can enhance that status and position. There are other factors that also affect women's status and position and their behavioral decisions have to be on the basis of the consideration of these as well.

The increase in the rate of female participation in the work force can be explained and analysed to some extent in the economic terms of the model developed by A.G. Chayanov in his work The Theory of Peasant

Economy. (1966). However, it should be borne in mind that it is only women from extremely poor households, who are going out for work while majority remain within traditional norms of behaviour. By recent estimates over 70% of the rural population fall in the landless category, yet the increase in the number of female in wage labour is not in proportionate ratio. What therefore, are the factors that affect the decision of women's participation in non-traditional income generative work ? Is it pure economic consideration or are non-economic factors important as well ?

Let us first briefly discuss the model development empirically by Chayanov to describe family farm behaviour, particularly family labour participation in subsistence farming. A fundamental principal underlying Chaynov's model is that of labour consumer balance; which simply recognised that when the consumption requirement of the family increases, the balance can only be attained through changes in the time expended in or in the productivity of labour". Thus, the production and consumption decision in the households are interrelated. One of the key features of the household economy, according to this

model is this interdependent consumption and production decisions, and in the absence of wages a category of production cost. Because family labour is not paid a fixed wage, he claimed, its value can not be determined. Instead, he argued that the demographic characteristics of the households largely determine the scale of production. The absolute number of household members - producers and dependants - their age and sex, and traditional standard of living of the community, determine the maximum total output data households must produce.

In other words, the argument of the model is, if the need for family consumption, depending on the size and sex etc. of the household members, exceeds that which is being produced, the family will expand its labour resources as far as possible, or increase the productivity of its existing labour. This principal of Chayanov's model could be usefully adopted to understand the increase in female participation in the work force due to growing impoverishments in rural Bangladesh.

Evidence, however, indicate that the rate of increase in poverty stricken households is not in line with the increasing rate of participation. Gaps of this sort raise questions as to whether all women of needy households are actually participating. Are factors, other than economic need, important in women's decisions to go for such work ? None of the above mentioned studies of Bangladesh which point towards this new trend of female work pattern, however, raise these questions. It is important to investigate empirically in our rural context. It should be remembered that the circumstances for women are different from that of men and hence women and their interest has to be seen separately from men. The reasons are many. First, because of various traditions, religious and non-religious, women have had unequal access to social power of various kinds. Second, attitudes developed out of this patriarchal pattern have influenced development planners to pay attention to men in legal, economic, and political systems as the priority interest, and to regard women as secondary. Hypothesis such as this considering only men as the bread earners, head of households etc. support such

policies. The fact that women have been given this separate status has meant that they have unequal access to beneficial change, hence their social situation is not identical to that of men.

Efforts at helping women particularly those from poor households, if based on the assumption that economic need had forced them to go for income earning and so the provision for such work will help them, can prove to be fruitless. The argument is that the provision of income generative work for women will automatically be taken up and hence projects will be successful and the needs of the poor will be met. But the new role offered to women provide work which is traditionally stigmatised. The upper category women do not involve in such work, and since the institutions are dominated and controlled by economically strong groups in the village, the new role of women is looked down upon. So it comes down to what has been aptly pointed out in a evaluation study of Rural Women's Participation In Development by UNDP (1980). "Although new options may exist for the privileged few, for the large majority of

women, particularly in rural areas, development has not brought change for the better but rather the opposite. An important reason for this situation is that men tend to appropriate the more lucrative employment opportunities that become available as part of the introduction of modern technology. As a result, a modified division of labour may emerge but it is as rigid as the old pattern, except that women are shifted to less rather than more attractive tasks." (UNDP, 1980:6).

The increase in the labour force participation by women however can not be analysed fully by Chayanov's model, if we posit such queries as, are all women from needy households going for such work? If not, as figures indicate then why is it so? What other factors are relevant in the case of women's decision to work?

In the case of rural Bangladesh this is important because traditionally women do not form part of recognised work force and even today only very poor women participate. We are, trying not only to identify which

rural women do what, but at the same time, why ? This is because the objective behind studying women is the possibility of affecting successful incorporation of women in the economic development of the country.

What can be observed in the country today is a situation of contradiction for women. A traditional role of non participation in public areas of economic life which are considered male work, as against a situation of poverty where they are being forced to intrude into such domains. Basing on observation, the following can be taken as the general characteristics of the prevailing situation relating to women in rural Bangladesh.

- 1) There is a single role of women irrespective of socio-economic differences, with poor women being forced to deviate from this ideal.
- 2) Secondly, women's activities are bound by norms of division of labour and segregation. In the ownership of resource, this hinders women's effective participation in the operation and control of the most important

resource in the rural areas, land. In the area of work, too, it is evaluated not in economic terms alone, but also in social terms of status considerations.

- 3) Consequently, all women do not participate in the resource ownership and resource generatives of the households. So in this aspect there is a variation in the roles of women in different categories. This difference is conditioned by the changing needs and circumstances of the households in the present context.

Starting from these assumptions, regarding the existing situation rural women, the areas that I have looked into are:

- 1) What the role of women is in the different socio economic groups in the area of ownership and control of land ? What factors affect the participation of women in this area ?
- 2) What is the variation in the types of activities in the form of domestic and income generative

work of women in the various category households ? How are these activities evaluated in economic and non-economic terms.

- 3) How are these changes in the traditional role of women in these two areas of their activities reflected in the social institutions and the formal and informal socio-political organizations at the village level ?

This study, therefore, focuses on the role of women in a changing situation in rural Bangladesh.

In the second chapter I deal with the purpose of the study, the methodology that was adopted to carry out the research. The physical features of the village are also introduced in this chapter.

The village economy in its various aspects is described in the chapter three.

In fourth chapter I present the data on women's place in the village economy, their position in relation to

land ownership and income earning activities.

In chapter five women's position in relation to social institutions of kinship, marriage and inheritance are discussed.

Chapter six deals with the socio-political/administrative organizations, the Samaj, Union Parishad and the Gram Sarkar and women's role in these.

And in the concluding chapter the various facts in relation to women's position in the economic, social and political areas of life in the village are discussed in the light of the findings of empirical data and existing literature.

CHAPTER - II

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, METHODOLOGY AND THE VILLAGE

Purpose of the study:

The basic aim of this study is to identify the problems or factors that affect Bangladeshi rural women's effective participation in economic, social and political activities. As indicated in the previous chapter, relevant literature on women assume that their participation in productive work leads to the enhancement of their status and situations in relation to the socio-political aspects of life. In Bangladesh, women are reported to be getting more and more involved in productive work. My purpose, through this enquiry, is also to understand how this sort of involvement affects or influences women's position and status in areas other than the economic.

Traditionally women in the country are bound by socio-religious norms of restricted mobility, which makes her role "invisible" to a world organised and controlled by

men. Because of this symbolic invisibility, the work that women engage in within the homestead and which is variously dubbed as "family labour", "domestic labour" "subsistence work" etc., are considered unproductive or not of economic value. However, it has been recognised in Bangladesh, as in many other countries, that such work of women even though not seen physically, and more importantly conceptually, is directly linked to the production of the family. And, if evaluated in terms of money saved by women's work, then very significant contribution to the family resource. The family is not only a consumption unit but also one of production. There is, though, a division of work and places of work between men and women with the latter relegated to the domestic and reproductive roles. Today, a look at the situation prevailing in rural Bangladesh shows that due to economic deterioration, women, largely from poor households, are being forced to go out of their homes to participate in non-traditional work.

What is the position of women in such a contradictory situation? What is happening to the status, position

and the role of women under the circumstances ? How is it affecting the women who remain in traditional norms of work and behaviour ? To understand this, we have to, first, identify empirically which women do what and why, in a rural setting which is changing. How are changed economic circumstances affecting women of different socio-economic groups ? How are women who are faced with this dilemma of social status versus economic need, dealing with it ? What is happening to the social institutions relating to women ?

For a study of this dimension, women cannot be studied in isolation from the society and their role in it. They have to be taken in the context of the socio-political economic and religious situation of the rural community. The position and role of people in the society is related to their economic life and the position of women depend on the position and status of their male kins.

Secondly, as has been mentioned earlier, women in Bangladesh society are members of the community in

relation to their family, vis-a-vis their male guardian, whether it be their father, brother, husband or son. Women's position and role is, therefore, in direct relation to their male kins. The social status of men and their families depend on the adherence of women members to prescribed norms and roles. Women, therefore, has to be studied in the context of the family. Secondly, the family or the household operates within a society which sets socio-religious roles for its male-female members. Therefore, women can not be studied in isolation, but as part of the total socio-political-economic system.

Methodology:

Methodology in social science research has been subjected to wide and critical review in academic circles in recent times. (R. Brown 1978, Epstein, 1979). Social scientists have been drawing attention to the importance of this aspect in social inquiries from various viewpoints and controversies as to the advantage of one method

over another has also been observed. Most literature in this regard, however, lay emphasis on the fact that the method of collecting information should be related to the perspective taken towards a particular problem or issue. What problem one looks at should dictate as to how to collect data so that the problem can be systematically approached and fruitfully analysed.

In my case I am looking at the problem of women's role and status and the related issues in a particular context. So it is important not only to look at specific role of women in a certain area of life but to look at the context or the total circumstances in which women operate. Specifically, to understand and analyse women's role in the dynamic context of rural Bangladesh, I start from the assumption that women's role is very much related to their position or role in the economy. But to understand these, particularly in a dynamic context, I have to analyse the impact or effect of other important aspects of the society in relation to their economic role.

Because there is the problem of conceptualizing women's role in our society due to socio-religious-cultural norms, one has to be particularly careful in selecting the mode of looking at women's issues. Indepth understanding of the relationship that relate to women's situations is essential. At the same time, data on the broader aspects of the society is essential for understanding the basis of these relationships and its ultimate effect on women's situation.

I decided on participant observation method of understanding these mechanisms through which a role is defined for women and men in our society. But I substantiated this form of investigation with some questionnaire enquiry and interviews of the community members. Both these methods individually has certain disadvantages. The question of how to quantify data in purely anthropological studies, remains. While in the questionnaire method, the answers cannot be crossed checked.

I went for collection of questionnaire data while living and participating in all social affairs of the

village over a period of time. Initially I started working in the village as an outsider, that is not residing in the village. Later on I moved into the village. Working in these two capacities has enabled me to understand the value of both types of investigation, which I shall discuss in a later section.

I had faced certain problems as a researcher - as an outsider probing into the life of villagers. Secondly this problem was much more pronounced because in addition to being an 'outsider, I was one from the 'secluded' sex. I started facing specific problems as a female researcher, from the very initial stage of selecting a village for the study.

The focus of the study being the role and position of rural women in a changing situation, the unit chosen for the study is a village. The basic method that was adopted was the anthropological method of participant observation, where the researcher resides with the community for a ^{longer} period of time. I stayed for a year and a half in the village and participated in all

major happenings there. My field work was conducted phasewise with a combination of various techniques of data collection at each phase.

1. Preliminary stage: orientation or initiation into the village.
2. Census taking and questionnaire survey phase; further acquaintance with villagers.
3. Interviewing and participation in all village affairs.

The information that I gathered through the participatory observation method was substantiated by taking surveys, genealogies, structured and unstructured interviews, and information from official records. A sample of 60 households, about 40% of the population was taken, in addition to time allocation and indepth case studies of eleven households.

Most of my data, surveys and interviews, were collected with the help of two assistants, a women and a high school boy from a neighbouring village. Apart from them,

I had several regular "Informants" who after an initial spell of getting to know "What I was upto", well understood my needs and worked accordingly.

The basic tool of inquiry used was the interview, both structured and unstructured applied in groups as well as individually. The case study method was particularly useful in the area of ongoing projects. Individual and the household case histories that I recorded were helpful in the case of women. The whole investigation in general is supported by questionnaire surveys of economic position of households and of women in particular.

Village Selection, Initiation into the village and related problems:

My first task in getting about with this study was the selection of a village. The following are the minimal requirements that I looked for in the choice of a village:

- a. Population of not less than 130 to 150 households.
- b. Stratified structure.

- c. Presence of ongoing projects.
- d. Easy accessibility.
- e. Suitable accommodation with some degree of security for myself.

After a difficult period of looking around, Birangaon¹ was finally selected, the deciding factor being the availability of a suitable residence for my stay. This was the only village among the eleven that I visited and considered for conducting my study, which could offer me living space with the guarantee of some degree of security. My accommodation was arranged in a part of a one room house of a family with high social status, but which had in, recent years, lost most of its economic means. This family was very badly in need for the little money that I could offer for providing accommodation. I realized that this need was overriding in their decision to undertake the risk of accepting the responsibility of a lone women - an outsider whose

1. a pseudonym to preserve the anonymity of the villagers.

intentions were not yet clear to them or their fellow villagers. This was the first occasion, since I undertook the study, in which I realized that I was not only a researcher but more importantly a female. And there was no dearth of such occasions thereafter, throughout the field investigation to remind me of this fact and to cause me to bear the consequences related to it.

Because of my initial problem of finding a residing place, my moving into the village was delayed by a month. During this period I started to visit the village daily. This was the initiation period and it was during this time that I got the physical bearings of the village while orienting myself with the socio-political atmosphere prevailing in this area.

My participation in all socio-cultural political affairs in the village during this spell was an important means of understanding the situation in the village. Again, while getting to know the villagers, acceptance of an outsider that too a female one was of course, initially resisted.

One incidence of resistance which stands out in my list of experiences in the village was that from a group of politically conscious young high school and college going boys. The leader of this group was once a very active member of one of the leading left oriented political parties of the country. On the second day of my stay in the village, I was confronted by this group and was asked to leave the village immediately. They or no other villager, would be responsible for 'whatever' happened to me, in case I decided to do otherwise. The reason for delivering such a high handed 'decree' was that they considered me to be an agent of foreign agencies, trying to pass out important information about rural Bangladesh. These agencies, they realised, have now adopted the novel method of doing so through female 'researchers.'

After much talk which mainly consisted of arguments on their part and logical negation of these from my side, we finally reached an agreement. It was agreed upon that I would be allowed to stay for a week in the village and to conduct whatever business I was upto.

My work and movements would be closely watched and if at the end of the week they were convinced that my work was not 'anti-village' and therefore 'anti-state' (as they very much suspected to be), then I would be allowed to remain. Otherwise, I would have to leave.

My 'trial' week was one of the busiest and most intensive work weeks of the entire study period. I visited each and every home, talked and tried to know the people and their problems. By the end of the week, I had somehow become very much a part of the village—a person most villagers seemed to know and also one who could reasonably claim to know or at least recognise most of them. Needless to say that the scheduled meeting between the young group and the 'notorious' outside agent never took place. Nevertheless, I had spent many hours of countless days in the following one and half years in discussing and analysing in our own ways the problems and issues of the area. Since then, I have always felt thankful to these young boys for giving me the challenge which pushed me right into the very real and complex actualities of this kind of work.

My participation in the 'affairs' of the village ranged from observing and thoroughly enjoying night long "Jatras" with other village women, "Meye Dhekha" or looking-up ceremonies of girls, attendance of marriage arrangements, villagers' way of facing natural hazards - such as fire, storms, floods, to late night ceremonies of warding away of evil spirit by "Witch doctors", or "Fakirs", attendance of Shalish meeting, the dispute settling court sessions of village Samaj.

Problems of data collection:

As I have mentioned previously, because of the problems of finding a residing place, I had to work in the village through frequent visits initially. Collecting data in the village as an outsider during this period and later by staying within the village, gave me the opportunity to get a first-hand experience of two different methods of data collection - the survey and the participant - observation methods. I could compare the two from my

own experience. I would like to mention the advantages and problems in these methods at this point.

The existing data on women, based mostly on survey studies and secondary sources of information, are inadequate. The changes that are being affected at the rural level are subtle yet of far-reaching consequences. It needs a critical and close-up viewing. And this is best possible by being a part of the situation and observing it from within for a longer period of time. My stay in Birangaon has convinced me of the soundness and usefulness of this method of research. I have learned that personal contact and trust are the best means to get the confidence of the villagers.

Since Birangaon is easily accessible from outside, some forty miles from Dhaka, other researchers from various governmental and non-governmental project planning teams have surveyed it before. Consequently, villagers feel vexed and bothered to answer similar questions read out from a prepared format. They do not understand the justification of repeating answers when nothing

tangible for them comes out of this process.

Again the inability of such researchers to explain their purposes satisfactorily and their stand-offish behaviour is another reason for the villagers' hostility. Such an attitude on the part of the researcher makes the villagers feel inferior. My personal hunch, which of course grew out of my experience, is that this kind of superior attitude of such survey researchers prevail because they meet the subjects only briefly, and in most times, never again. Only an experience of living within the community and sharing their day to day events can provoke the researchers interest by revealing the hidden logic of the people's life rythm.

The most serious disadvantage that I perceive in the survey method is the lack of scope for cross checking the information collected. Informants are usually tempted to give answers which they perceive is expected of them or which may benefit them if some measures were to be taken on the basis of the information given or supplied. The information I received during the

early spell of my work as a non-resident of the village, I could substantiate and often correct later by my observations while living in the village itself. The participant observation method of research in combination with surveys and interviews is invaluable in understanding such complicated issues as that of women's role and position in a traditional society. From my experience, I think, it can be particularly useful in case of developmental planning, where the researcher can play an important role between villagers and authorities as an intermediary and a fool proof upward channel of communication.

Problematic of a female researcher:

Since the study focuses on the role of women in our society and the area of investigation is a single village but has wider implications, I feel my experiences as a female researcher should also be mentioned. Researchers and experts on research methodology seem to hold the view that women investigators have greater

accessibility in rural homes and better chances of getting responses on such sensitive issues as women and their life situation.

The second commonly held view among anthropologists is that one should take up the villagers role as much as possible. My experience differs in both instances. So long as I worked in the village as a non-resident, to the villagers I was just another research 'officer' - the gender not evoking any interest. In such a role my mobility and free mixing with men and women in the village and outside was tolerable. But once I became a village resident, I was no longer a research officer but more importantly, a woman, thus specific sex role playing became important and was expected. Mobility without proper escort and going out of the village alone was looked down upon. Thus, once I became a villager, I was expected to be one in the true sense and to behave like a village woman. Soon I found that on the other hand, it was disadvantageous to play too much into their roles as well. It is the situation in which one has to be very careful and not exceed limits either way, and has to depend a lot on one's judgement with

instant tact to tackle this problem which becomes a serious hindrance to a female researcher. A lot of tact had to be used to play the right amount of sex role expected, at the same time not to cross the point where work would become difficult. In respect to field work, I was lucky to have the patronage of several college boys whose broad mindedness and presence helped to break up the ice of even the most stubbornly conservative homes.

At this point it could be mentioned that the personal qualities and weaknesses are important in the creation of a good impression by the researcher. For instance, being married and having the apparent support and blessings of the husband in such a work, added to my qualification. On the other hand, married for several years and not having any children was disapproved of.

Another area in which I encountered special problems in being a female researcher was when I started to collect official records and data at the sub-divisional and Thana levels. The serious doubt and disbelief in

my ability as a researcher and a qualified enough person, by the officers was because of the fact of my being a woman. I had to resort to an introductory and certifying letter with the huge official seal of the administrative officer and the escort of a couple of convincing men to get the confidence of these officials. This was, to me, more frustrating and dissapointing since, unlike in the village, in this area I was dealing with educated, responsible officials. The difficulties that I faced as a female researcher during my field work, gradually gave me a lot more insight into the male-oriented social order of the country and the ideological bindings that hold it together. My problems as researcher was doubled. First, because I was researching on women in a comparatively less frequently adopted methodology in the country, and secondly because I myself was a female.

Village setting:

Birangaon is the village I finally selected for the study. It falls within the densely populated (1,879 persons per square mile/1974 Census) Manikganj sub-

division of Dhaka District. Culturally this area had a strong Hindu influence as it was dominated by Hindu Zamindars during the British colonial period. The Rayots in the region were mostly Muslims. After the partition of India in 1947, there was a mass migration of Hindu landlords and big traders to India. This provided an opportunity to the dominant Rayots to further enhance their prominence by buying up or occupying the departing Hindus families property.

During the war of liberation for Bangladesh, there was another mass exodus of Hindus, mostly belonging to the serving casts of potters, carpenters and weavers. After their departure, many of their traditional services have been taken up by Muslims belonging to the lower socio-economic strata.

Since the British period, Manikganj has been serving as the political, administrative as well as economic centre for the north western part of Dhaka District.¹

1. Administrative units of the country.
Country, District, Sub-division, Thana, Union.

The construction of the Asian Highway in the 1960's improved communications with the northern part of the country. Being close to the capital and serving as an important sub-divisional headquarter, Manikganj has been the focus of developmental programmes for several decades now.

Birangaon is situated within this broad regional background. It is one of the 25 villages of Dighi Union under the Manikganj Thana by the side of the Dhaka-Aricha Highway. This strategic positioning has placed it in an important place within the Union and also within the Thana. Being close to the Highway, Birangaon serves as an outlet for the cluster for village around it and beyond. This accessibility also enables quick movement of villagers to the markets and urban centers. Thus the mobility of the villagers and the outflow of goods and services are easy. Similarly, the inflow of inputs find easy accessibility on the other hand. It is comparatively easier for Birangaon students to travel to Manikganj to attend high school and colleges.

Because of its strategic physical location, the village is the headquarter of the Union. The Union Parishad¹ Office is in the village center. One of the two post offices of the Union, a primary school, a junior high school and a Mosque and Madrasha and local family planning distribution centre is also located in the village around the Union Parishad Office. The small, square, open space in front of all these offices and schools is used as a playground and is used for socio-cultural gatherings. Important Shalish meetings of Samaj are also held here. (See Sketch map of village).

The village gained the reputation of being the center for political activities since the liberation war. The Awami League political party, the Nationalist Socialist Party and the Sharbahara Party had strong holds in the village. Their propaganda and activities in mobilising villagers at various times, gave a different dimension to the usual village politics, which has helped to link the village gradually with national political affairs.

1. Local self Govt. Unit at the Union Level.



Economically, infrastructural improvements led to the outflow of goods and services. Birangaon products found easy access to markets nearby. External incentives for cash cropping of jute and tobacco further enhanced this process. People with means availed the opportunities for higher education which ultimately took them away to jobs in urban areas. People who go for such jobs utilised externally earned resources in investments on land. While those who could avail such scope acquired more resources in the form of land, the not so fortunate ones lost it. As more land entered the market and more external resources poured in, the price of one land increased. In 1971-72 period the price of one bigha¹ or 1/3 acres was Tk.2,000.00 to Tk.3,000.00, after the famine of 1973-74 the price soared upto Tk.8,000.00 Tk.10,000.00 per bigha, while at present land cost about Tk.12,000.00 to Tk.16,000.00.

1. Bigha, Unit of local land measurement.
One Bigha is equal to one third of an acre.

On the other hand the road linkups and governmental efforts and development offered a few alternative earning opportunities to the landpoor, such as richshaw-pulling, petty trading, earth cutting etc. But this alternative offers of income were inadequate to fulfil the needs of a growing number of poor.

When the government initiated the rural development programme in Manikganj, Birangaon was one of the first villages to be included. Rural banking services gained importance and was extended to include more rural areas. Under these new governmental efforts, the agricultural extension services were intensified and extended. This kind of incentives gradually drew away the village resources towards the urban economy. On the other hand, through the extension of the Government agencies right upto the village level, the National Policies were transmitted directly into the heart of the socio-political life of the village. Then again, being thus exposed to the National policies and the national economic system, the village was quick to respond when the opportunity (in 1978) showed up for manpower export

to the middle eastern countries. Thus the village was soon drawn to the international economic system as well. The migration of the villagers led to the inflow of large sums of money from outside. Remittances from abroad were invested in land which further increased its price.

The incoming developmental programmes also include some which are sponsored by foreign agencies. With the advent of these, the linkup of the village with the wider arena, the international scene via the national system - was created. Thus, the village was drawn not only into the national economy and policy, but now became a ground for international rural development experiments as well.

The following are a brief list of the on-going projects (during the field work 1979-81) in Birangaon. These are discussed in the light of the objective of the study in another chapter (Chapter-6).

1. Governmental programmes:
 - a. Irrigation project (2).
 - b. Primary Milk Producers Co-operatives.
2. Non-government agency sponsored projects:
 - a. Food for work Programmes (2).
 - b. Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee organized Co-operatives (2).
 - c. Rickshawpullers Co-operative organized by the local youths.

In addition, the establishment of the Tobacco leaf collection Depot and the Jute Research Centre, close to the village, has had a direct impact on the village economy. The presence of several brickfields around the village during the dry season, also offer opportunities for employment to the poor.

Thus, we see, that the village has gradually been drawn up into the national and international economic and political system. In recent years, the introduction of foreign aided projects at rural levels and the migration of villagers to middle eastern countries

has pulled the village further into the international sphere as well. The impact and interplay of such factors on the rural economy and society have created a dynamic situation in which changes are visible. To focal point of the study being change -- how are the changes affecting the lives of the villagers, men and women and their relationships, their institutions and their customs ? Stocktaking and evaluation of such dynamics at this point could serve as an indicator of the direction the governmental, non-governmental and international developmental efforts were taking. And correctly evaluated, this kind of study can be of much value to policy framers and planners. For instance, a study of the on-going projects in Birangaon and their impact on the role of villagers may bring to light the possibilities and reasons for the success or failure of such projects.

Birangaon's strategic location within the region has important implications for the changes taking place within it. Similarly the physical setting of the village, its demographic pattern, family/household types etc. have significant relevance to the changes.

These aspects of the village setting is discussed in the following pages.

Demography of Birangaon:

The total population in the village is 934 persons with a breakdown of 504 men and 430 women (1979). Of these, 39 persons are Hindus and the rest are Muslims. The Union Parishad census taken in 1974 shows 734 persons with 367 women. According to the national census, the population of Manikgonj thana has increased by 32% between 1961 and 1974.

According to the age groups, 113 persons are between 0 to 4 years of age, 144 from 5 to 9 years, 425 persons from 10 to 30 years and 252 are 30 years and above. On the basis of this breakdown, 425 persons out of a total of 934 belong to the age group 10-30, that is, 45.5% including both the male and female (See Table-4).

Table - 4Parawise male/female age breakdown in Birangaon

Paras	0-4 yrs.		5-9 yrs.		10-30 yrs.		30+		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
West Para	23	18	26	26	92	72	49	42	348
Khapara	01	00	04	02	05	06	04	02	24
East Para	21	26	31	24	80	70	51	33	336
Karchabadha	13	05	14	08	50	20	33	20	136
Mistri Para	03	03	05	04	17	13	13	04	63
Total:	61	52	80	64	244	181	150	102	934
Total both	113		114		425		252		934

There are in the village a total of 27 ponds, seven tube-well, two deep tube-wells (in which Birangaon shares water with 3 other villages) and nine working wells, in the five neighbourhoods known as paras.

The total population of the village is divided into 167 households which are set into five separate paras or neighbourhood. The paras are named after its location in the village, on lineage or on occupation, or according

to important geographical land marks. East and West paras are identified by their location in the East and West parts of the village. Kha Para derived its names from the important lineage of this area of the village, the Khas or Mias. Mistri Para is named after the carpenters who reside there. Karchabadha, a small, detached neighbourhood at the back of the village, was once a Karcha (a kind of water plant) swamp before people from outside the village and from other paras in the village settled there. East and West paras comprise of the bulk of the village population. (See Table - 5).

Table - 5

Parawise Population and Household Distribution

Paras	Total population	Male	Female	Total no. of households	% of no. of households
West para	346	190	156	62	37.12
East para	330	170	160	61	36.52
Khapara	27	18	09	07	4.19
Karchabadha	167	96	71	25	7.18
Mistripara	64	30	34	12	14.97
Total:	934	504	430	147	99.97

The Neighbourhoods or Paras:West Para

West para is the residential area along both sides of the dirt road and a small canal that leads eastwards to the next village from the village center (See village Map). With a population of 346 persons in 62 households, it is the biggest para in the village. Originally comprising of the tennent cultivators of the Royot holders, it now belongs mainly to landholding sharecroppers and most of the landless. Out of the 62 households, 19 are landless, 26 marginal, 14 middle and three rich households. These three households are big sharecroppers. The characteristic of this para is that two families that claimed to have spiritual and religious superiority and have followers, reside in this para. One is the migrant Pheraji lineage and the other the Phokir Zamadar lineage. The Pherajis are big owner cum sharecroppers who dominate this para. Three leading Matbors or village Sama leaders are residing in the west para. Among the higher

resource group households education is stressed. Two boys are going to the university in Savar and several girls from Pheraji households go to high school and college in Manikgonj. A carpenter from a marginal household has managed to go to the middle east on a labour contract.

East Para:

The dirt road that comes down from the Asian Highway into the village runs northward all along the western boarder of this para. In 1978, the road was extended to the next village under the food for work scheme. On the east of this para is the main bulk of crop land that belong to the villagers. Having a population of 330 persons. This para has 61 households of which seven belong to traditional aristocratic Khan lineage and the Khondoker lineage. The population is comprised of settlers who have come in by virtue of marriage or by migrating from interior villages. One of the original Royot holder household plays a dominant role in this para.

The percentage of literacy is high in this para. There are several graduates and at present three girls from East para attend college in Manikgonj. Out of the 61 households, in 19 the male head is a job holder out side the village. One head of a household is a job holder in a middle eastern country. The ex-Chairman of the Union Porishad is a resident of this para. Out of the 61 households, 18 are landless, 26 marginal, 14 middle and three surplus.

Mistri Para:

Boardering the small plot of land on the west of east para is the neighbourhood known as the Mistri para. To south of this area is the village center where the school, Mosque, and Union Porishad Office and other offices are located. Originally inhabited only by the carpenter caste Hindus, it now has three Muslim households who are originally from other paras but have settled here by buying property from migrating Hindu families. Out of the twelve households, nine are Hindus.

A Muslim matriculate primary school teacher, resides here. His elder brother owns a small shop in the village. This lineage is considered as an important one by virtue of their connections outside the village. Of the 12 households of this para, 8 are landless 2 are marginal, 2 middle and no surplus or rich.

Karcha Badha:

With a population of 167 persons and 25 households this isolated neighbourhood on the north-western boarder of Birangaon is half way between this and the next village. Originally this started as a settlement of tenant cultivators and labourers who migrated from other villages. During the rainy season, Karchabadha gets cut off from the rest of the village, when the bulk of cropland in between gets inundated. A couple of families from this area has emerged as strong economic groups in the village. A women from one of these two households is a matriculate working as a trained family planning health visitor. According to the landholding statistics of this para.

out of 25 households, 5 are landless, 16 marginal, 2 middle and 1 surplus or rich.

Kha Para:

To the east of the village center is a small settlement of seven households and 27 persons known as the Kha or Mia para. It comprises of the original Mia Bari or the sole gentry lineage in the village. The main feature of this para is that although members of only four household are residents in the village, this family has a very strong hold on the village political and economic life. This is because of the economic and political role of one of the absentee members of this family, who by virtue of his participation in the politics of the ruling party during and after the liberation war of Bangladesh gained important political and economic footages outside. This enables him to play an important decisive role in village affairs. Out of the seven households, 1 surplus, 2 landless, 2 marginal and 2 middle households are the land grouping.

The Household as Unit of Study:

The household is one of the basic units of the family. The household, therefore, taken as the starting point of a study with a scope as this, is considered a useful and appropriate tool for analysing women's situation in relation to men and in relation to the total society. Again, through the analysis of the household, in its relation to other aspects of the social structure- socio-economic and political - a view of the formation and operation of the agrarian structure, and the definition of the role of men and women within it, is hoped to be gained.

The importance and usefulness of taking household as the unit of study for understanding various aspects of social life has been formulated by several scholars. Predominant among them is A.M. Shah, who analyse family formation in the light of household composition in "The Household Dimension of The Family In India." His attempt is to extend the understanding of family formations by taking it in the context of the residential locuses of the household. His critique of the traditional approach of classifying kinship compositions

into "Joint" and "Nuclear" families is that it is inadequate in the context of the residential aspect of such groups. Instead taking the household as the unit he developed a model by which he could include all types of kinship formations within the residential locus of the household type. He has broadly divided the types of household into two: complex and simple. The complex households include all those with one or more than one parental family and parts of other parental families - which can be from one patrilineal kin group or of several. (Shah, 1973).

The simple household may be composed of the whole or a part of a parental family of a unit of man, his wife and their unmarried children eating and living together. By the extension of the traditional definition of kinship formations in the households, Shah's attempt is to overcome the possibility of over-looking the non-patrilocal residence of the households. This way of looking at kinship from the household composition point of view is important for understanding the kinship network of a household, but hardly any more. Shah's

model seems to end there. It points towards a way of classifying households from the point of view of various kinship formations which in its most extensive definition, can only indicate who the members of a household are, what are their relationships with each other and the hierarchy in their relationship.

Thus, this typology of households into "who stands where" can be useful in so far as the kinship aspect is concerned, the hierarchical placing of people as per the kinship rules. It is limited to its physical formations only. Other important aspects of kinship such as authority and obedience and the bases of such features, that is, resources are not covered or dealt with. The resource base of households is an important aspect, analysis of which can identify the bases of kinship rules. Resource or the control of resources or a positive role in the resource operation can be an important basis for the support or the authority that determine the hierarchical ordering of kin members. Similarly, the control aspect of resources command and

regulate authority and obedience.

Thus, Shah's focus on one aspect of the various dimensions of a household unit is inadequate in understanding the role of various members of households in its operational aspect. For the purpose of my study, Shah's model needs to be extended to include the resource aspect which is the basis of the kinship hierarchy. The physical composition of kin relations within the residential unit of the household can be useful for our purpose, only in relation to the bases of its operations, in relation to the resource of the households. The focus of my study being the identification of the role of women in relation to the resource structure of the household, the underlying assumption is that women's status to a large extent is defined by her relation to the ownership and control of resources. However, the model points towards an important fact that the residential unit of households can be a much more useful tool than that of kinship units of family or economic units of sharecroppers and labourers, in analysing the operation of the social mechanism.

For purposes of my study, therefore, I have attempted to redefine the household to include a combination of the resource as well as demographic aspects of kin groups that compose the household. In other words, I have looked at households first in the light of its resource position - its role in production then the kinship composition and the impact of each on the other. This way of looking at households is especially essential for analysing women's role. Even though, women's domain is basically the domestic area, her status, it is assumed, is determined by her role in the productive process. Thus I have primarily categorised households on the basis of its resource position and also by following elements of Shah's typology of households, the demographic formation I try to understand explicitly women's domestic as well as productive role and the inter-relationship of each other.

In line with Shah's definition of households, out of a total of 167 households in the village, 47 are of various combinations of complex kinship forms and 120 of simple type. (See Charts 1,2).

CHART - 1TYPES OF COMPLEX HOUSEHOLDS IN BIRANGAON

Types	Kinship formation or composition	No.of house- holds in sample	No.of house- holds outside sample	Total house- holds
I	Widow mother, her un- married children, married sons, their wives and children	1	1	2
II	Widow mother, married sons, their wives and unmarried children	1	2	3
III	Widow mother, her married son, his wife and unmarried children	5	9	14
IV	Husband, his wife/wives, their unmarried children, married sons, their wives and unmarried children	14	11	25
V	Husband, wife his wives mother, their married sons and their wives and unmarried children	-	1	1
VI	Widow mother, and her widow daughter in-law and her unmarried children	1	-	1
VII	Widow mother and her married daughter and husband and their unmarried children	1	-	1
		<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>47</u>



CHART - 2COMPOSITION OF SIMPLE HOUSEHOLDS IN BIRANGAON

Types	Composition	No.of house- holds is sample	No.of house- holds not in sample	Total house holds
I	Husband, wife and their unmarried children	29	72	101
II	Husband, wife, their unmarried children and his mother in law	2	-	02
III	Widow mother and her unmarried children	3	6	09
IV	Widow living alone	1	1	02
V	Widow father and unmarried children	2	1	02
VI	Widow father living alone	-	01	01
VII	Separated father and divorced daughter	-	01	01
VIII	Separated mother and unmarried son	-	01	01
		<u>37</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>120</u>

Out of the total, 33 households have females as the head of the household. A breakdown shows that in 22 of these 33 households, women are heads by virtue of their position in the kinship hierarchy - that is, they are the seniormost person in the kinship formation. Under similar circumstances, we find that in 12 households of the 140 simple households, women occupy the position of the head of household.

Table - 6

No. of simple/complex households
with Male/Female heads

Household type	Male headed	Female headed	Total
Complex	25	22	47
Simple	12	12	140

In all complex households, the female head who is a aged widow (Mother), is shown to be at the head of the household members kinship composition. In most cases she is living with her married children and their families and her unmarried children. Only by analysing the position of the women of these household in the resource

generation of such households or ownership and its control, can we opion as to whether her position as the head of kin group in the household is symbolic or has authority.

In the case of the simple households too, women are in head of household position in the same situation in all but four(IV) and three (III) (Chart - 2). In these two types we find a kinship combination where a widow mother and her unmarried children are living together or a widow is living alone. In these cases, too, it would be very faulty to conclude on their roles without looking at the actuality of their roles in the resource generation and the decisions relating to its distribution. The influence of kinship networks out-side the households on the household decisions is also important to consider. Access to resources and its control are significant factors which determine a women's role - whether it be with the position of a household head or a new member of the household by marriage. However, in the context of societies of strong cultural and religious norms prescribed for

women, her age and position in the life cycle, has important consequences for her role in the household. Thus, by extending Shah's definition of households to include resource as well as the kinship hierarchy, we can come to a proper conclusion on the role of women in various hierarchies in the society and also within the household. Having given the various kinship formations of the households, we can now move on to their resource aspects. Later in analysing the household compositions in combination with its resource features, we shall take only the sample households.

In the next chapter the general resource pattern of the village is discussed first. In this context, the primary sources of income of households and the important secondary sources are discussed. Analysing the two together, the households are categorised into 4 economic groups. This has been done to identify women's role in resource ownership and income earning activities in different category households.

CHAPTER - III

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE VILLAGE

Primary Source of Income : Land

Cropping Pattern:

Agriculture is still the basis of Birgaon's economy. The total acreage of cultivable land is 192 acres of which approximately 45 acres have been brought under irrigation in the deep-tube-well irrigation scheme. High yielding varieties of Aus and Aman are cultivated in the season Falgun¹ Chaitra (Feb.-March) to Ashar - Sraban (July - August). The irrigated land produces two crops a year, and the winter crop of pulses. The non-irrigated land produces one paddy crop of Aus/Aman and the Chaitali, or winter crop. Aus/Aman is sown in Falgun Chaitra, Aus is harvested in Ashar - Sraban and

1. Bangla Calendar Month.

Aman is harvested in Agrahayan (October-November).

Jute, main cash crop of the season is sown at the same time as Aus/Aman and is harvested in Ashar - Sravan (July - August). The second crop of winter pulses known as Chaitali or Maghi is sown in Kartic - Agrahayan and harvested in Falgun - Chaitra.

Landownership Pattern:

The total amount of land owned by the village folk of Birangaon is 187 bighas of which ownership is distributed among 98 households, the remaining 69 households own no cultivable land.

The population of Birangaon is stratified into socio-economic classes or categories. And landholding - the ownership and control of land, is still the basis of such stratification. The few other micro studies conducted so far on the agrarian society of Bangladesh reveals that land is the principal basis of social cleavages, and their categorization of the agricultural population is based on the ownership and non-ownership of land. (Chowdhury, 1982).

It is also true, as has been mentioned in these studies, that occupation or income from sources other than land have important bearings on the categorization. For instance, family size and secondary sources of income bear pressure on or add to the family's economic strength. The land that is sharecropped out are also important. The man-land ratio or the density of the population in different parts of the country has to be considered too. Thus, the categorization of the population differs among the various studies.

The National Census of Bangladesh (1974) categorises the population on employment basis. The groups taken are owner cultivators, owner cultivator cum sharecropper, share cropper, agricultural labourer and unpaid family helper. Jahangir in categorizing the population in his study of a village in Savar Thana of Dhaka District have followed the Bangladesh Agricultural Census (1967-68) groupings: landless; small peasant (0-5.8 bigha); middle peasant (9-25 bigha); and rich peasant (25 bigha and above). Kersten Westergaard (1978) in her study of a Bogra village have categorised the population in the five groups of landless, having no cultivable land;

marginal (0.1-2.9) peasants of households owning and cultivating insufficient land to maintain their families with rice; small (3.0-6.9) peasants and medium (7.0-10.9) peasants of households with sufficient land not to be forced to take outside employment but without a surplus over and above their basic needs; and surplus (25 acres +) peasants with land sufficient to provide a surplus over and above their basic needs.

In BRAC's (1979) survey of a Manikganj village, categorization was done on the basis of landholding of families: landless who own no cultivable land; small households with 1 to 1.5 acres of land; medium households with 2.5 to 6 acres of land surplus households with over 6 acres of land. A comparison of the above categorization shows that while all the studies start with land as the basic factor in creating differences among groups in the village, in individual cases other important factors were considered essentials to be taken as additional to it. Thus to be accurate in identifying the different categories in the village, it is important to place and analyse it in the concrete context of that particular village.

For Birangaon, the basis of categorization have been made on the man land ratio prevailing in the area. In Manikganj thana, the population pressure on land is heavy, 1,879 persons per sq. mile of land (National Census of 1974). The recent statistics is 2,300 persons per sq. mile (BRAC,1977). For Birangaon, the following categorization has been considered appropriate.

Table - 7

Economic categories with landholding size

Category	Amount of Land
Landless	0 - .99
Marginal	1 - 4.99
Middle	5 -13.99
Rich	14

Of the 98 land holding households, 58 own land between one and 4.99 bighas, 34 households own between 5 and 13 bighas, and six households own land over 14 bighas each. Table - 7 shows the distribution of the total number of households in the village into the various economic categories.

Table - 8

Distribution of landholding among
the households in Birangaon

<u>Landholding group</u>	<u>No. of households</u>
14 + bighas	6
5.00 - 13.99 bighas	34
1.00 - 4.99 bighas	58
No. cultivable land	69
Total No. of households	167

For the purposes of my study, therefore, I have categorised the households into the four above mentioned groups. This categorisation is on the basis of the landholding of the households.

Methods of land cultivation:

The main method of land cultivation is either self-cultivation or share cropping. Both family and hired labour is used. The land holding households in the village are either non-cultivators, or owner cultivators cum share croppers. The landless are mostly labourers, who are employed in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

Table - 9

Types of agricultural occupations among the different category sample households :

Types of cultivators	Rich	Middle	Marginal	Landless
Owner non cultivators	5	6	4	0
Owner cultivators	x	x	7	0
Owner cultivators and share cropper	1	9	3	0
Non-owning labourers	x	x	x	12
Non-owning share croppers	x	x	x	3
T o t a l :	6	15	14	15

Small land holding households, in addition to cultivating own land, sharecrop in land. These households also hire out labour.

The owner non-cultivators fall into several groups. In some households, the male head is a job holder outside the village and visits only occasionally. In the second group, the owner non-cultivators are involved

in trading, weaving, carpentry etc. In the third group, fall those households which do not have any other income earning source. These household people have sufficient land which they sharecrop out and remain free to engage in village level politics, by virtue of which again they can strengthen and enhance their economic position. In addition there are the households where females are the heads and they do not engage in the cultivation of land.

Table - 10

Different Areas of activities of owner non-cultivators among t h e sample households (categorywise).

	No. of Households		
	Rich	Middle	Marginal
Job holders outside the village	1	2	x
Traders, carpenters, weavers etc.	x	2	2
Owners not engaging in any other income earning work	x	1	x
Female headed Household	1	2	4
T o t a l:	2	7	6

The first and the third groups are owners of substantial land, but the second group do not own much land. Even then, they do not cultivate their own land as they are engaged in other income earning activities.

The owner non-cultivators sharecrop out land to households which are traditional clients of their families. Recently, however, big land owners also lease out land to sharecroppers who offer the best bargain. The system of payment of a token (salami) money to land owners for assurance of getting his land for cultivation, is in vogue. The land owners also ensure the acceptance of the sharecropper to cultivate his land on his terms, by providing loans for the purchase of fertilizers and agricultural implements in lean seasons. The small owner non-cultivators give out land for cultivating to neighbouring land owning sharecroppers and kins. This group do not cultivate their own land because the primary source of their income is in sources other than land.

The owner cultivators have small amount of land, which they cultivate with family labour as well as hired labour.

In some cases the owner cultivators, in addition to cultivating their land, also engage in other income earning activities, which are not substantial enough to occupy a large part of their time. Hence there is no compulsion for them to sharecrop out their land.

The owner cum sharecropper households range from big land holding households to small ones.

The households with substantial land ownership and also sharecropping in other's land are all of complex types, with strong number of family labour, or those having strong kin ties with other households.

The labourers mostly work in the agricultural field, but also earn by carrying load in haats and in brick-fields in the dry season. The sowing and harvesting time are the peak seasons for labour demand. During peak times, the average rate for an agricultural labourer (1979-80) is Taka ten in cash plus three meals a day. For work in house-building or earth cutting in non-agricultural field, the rate for men in Taka seven

with two meals a day or Taka eleven to Taka thirteen, depending on the skill of the worker.

For women the rate is more or less static throughout the season, even though more paid work is available for women in the peak seasons. For rice husking female labourers get two seers of paddy (Tk.5 to Taka 6, 1976-80, local rates) and cash Taka 1 for every 20 seers of paddy husked and winnowed. It takes about two days (at the rate of 7 to 8 hours a day) to husk 20 seers of paddy for single woman. For earth cutting in homesteads or floor pasting with mud and cowdung, women are paid at the rate of Taka 4 without any meals for half a day's work (1979-80).

The servants employed for agricultural work called rakhals, and who reside in the master's households are paid in accordance with their age and experience. No payment except meals are made in the first year of apprenticeship. Payment starts at the second year at the rate of Taka 50 to Taka 80 per year in addition to meals and yearly clothing and lodging. The maximum rate for an experienced adult resident servant is Taka 170 per year. There are no female resident servants in Birangaon.

Secondary sources of income and the diversification of the economy:

Although cultivation is the primary source of income, important secondary income earning activities are being taken up in the village. The incoming developmental programmes, and improvements in road links provided some amount of such opportunities. Petty trading in the village itself and the neighbouring haats and wholesale markets, rickshawpulling, jobs in towns and thana headquarters, in projects like the Eastern Milk Producers Co-operatives are some of the secondary sources of income for the village people. The presence of haats and trading centers within easily reachable distance and incentives offered by credit providing agencies, such as, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), promoted petty trading in rice, old clothes and handicrafts.

Thus, although the occupational pattern of Birangaon, may be broadly categorised into owner non-cultivators owner cultivators, owner-cum-share-croppers and paid agricultural labourers, many of the households are also involved in important secondary sources of income.

See Table.

Table - 11

Primary and Secondary Occupation of Birangaon Households

Land Category	Owner Culti- vator		Agricul- tural wage labour		Job & business outside		Owner non- culti- vator		Rickshaw puller		Boat- men		Wea- vers		Chow- kidar		Share- cropper		Primary school teacher		Small trader in old clothes		Grocer in vill- age		Retired service holders		Beggar		Carpenter		Milk producer (wholesale)	
	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S
Landless	-	-	30	39	10	03	-	-	10	06	04	01	01	-	03	-	-	08	-	-	02	01	01	-	01	-	01	-	01	-	01	-
Margi- nal	32	03	-	06	04	11	01	01	-	-	02	-	03	-	-	-	-	11	02	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	-	05	-	-	-
Middle	23	07	-	08	12	05	13	14	-	-	-	-	-	01	-	-	02	13	-	-	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	01	-	01	-
Surplus	06	-	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total:	66	10	30	48	27	19	14	15	10	06	06	01	04	01	03	-	02	36	02	-	02	02	02	-	01	-	01	-	06	01	01	01

Table - 12

Primary sources of income of different category
Sample households in Birangaon

	Land- less	Margi- nal	Middle	Rich	Total sample households in each category
Land	-	03	06	04	13
Share cropping	-	-	06	01	07
Agri. labour	12	10	-	-	22
School teaching	02	-	-	-	02
High pay job outside village	-	-	02	01	03
Low status job out- side village	01	-	-	-	01
Carpentry	01	-	01	-	02
Weaving	-	01	-	-	01
Boatmen	01	-	-	-	01
Rickshawpulling	03	-	-	-	03
Chowkidari	01	-	-	-	01
Tailoring	01	-	-	-	01
Petty trading	01	-	-	-	01
Retired job holders	02	-	-	-	02
Total number of sample households in each category	25	14	15	06	-

The total income of a household is derived from the primary and secondary sources, it may be earned by several members of both the sexes of the household. As an example it may be pointed out that all the landless households in the village do not have agricultural wage labour as their primary source of income. Out of the 25 sample landless households 12 are mainly involved in agricultural wage labour. The remaining household's main income comes from such diverse sources as rickshaw-pulling, Chowkidari, boat rowing, hawkers, weaving, cutting trees, primary school teaching etc.

Three of the sample households in the village have a major part of their income from sources outside the village. These households belong to the rich and middle category. Land is therefore, still the basis of the Birangaon economy, and agriculture still the basis of most villager's main source of livelihood. Although attempts at diversifying the economic activities have been going on, the effects of such attempts failed to bring relief to the landpoor and the landless. Because differentiation and hierarchy prevails as a

result of the pattern of landownership, diversification from agriculture could only be availed by or carried out successfully by the landed while the landpoor could only move from one form of subsistence to another, for example, from paid labour in agriculture to rickshawpulling or work as labourer in the brick-fields. The resulting situation is one of strengthening of economic position of the landowning categories, while the landless and landpoor remain at the subsistence and below subsistence levels.

Thus, inspite of certain extent of diversification of economic activities, land remain the major source of employment and hence the important basis of economic differentiation in the village. As can be seen from the data on the distribution of the secondary income sources between the various landholding groups, only the landed can avail the opportunities of additional sources of income more successfully, while for the landpoor, it is a mere shift from one from of subsistence to another. So the categorisation of the village population on the basis of distribution of land would still be an appropriate criteria for the justification of the existing differentiation.

Households resource position:

Out of the 167 households in the village, 69 are landless, 58 are marginal, 34 middle, and six rich or surplus. A sample of 60 households have been taken for the indepth study. The following table shows the landholding categories of our village households and the sample.

Table - 13

No. of households in the various categories
and the no. of sample households

Landholding	Total Number of Households	No. of Sample Households
Groups	167	60
Landless	69	25
Marginal	58	14
Middle	34	96
Rich	06	06

Having classified the households first in their kinship composition patterns (Ch.II) and then categorising households on the basis of their landholding size, we can now turn to each category households in order to identify its members role in the productive process. The main focus in doing all these, however, is the identification of women's role in the domestic as well as productive process and the variations if any with explanations for such variations. The identification of the households resource position and the households kin composition with its demographic features will be used to analyse the role of women. As mentioned earlier, I have taken a sample of 25 landless, 14 marginal, 15 middle and six rich households. Data from these sample households will be used to analyse women's role in the above mentioned framework.

Male/Female Ratio:

The male/female ratio of active villagers (above 12 years of age) of Birangaon is 394 male as against 238 women. The distribution of active female/male members of the sample households is shown in the following table:

Table - 14

Active M/F (about 12 yrs. of age) in the
categorywise sample households

Landholding Group	Male	Female	Total	Total sample households
Landless	47	47	94	25
Marginal	33	32	65	14
Middle	45	36	81	15
Rich	15	19	34	6
Total	140	134	274	60

Out of the total of 60 sample households, 32 households depend only on male members for its income, 23 on both male and female incomes, and five households on female income alone. (See table). That is, a total of 28 sample households out of 60 have women members involved in income earning activities, as against 32 with only male income:

Total households	=	60
Male income	=	32
Male and Female income	=	23
Female income only	=	5

That is, in nearly 50% of the sample households have female members contributing to its resource base.

Table - 15

Male female income in various category
of sample households

Land- holding	Sex of head of household		House- hold male income	House- hold only female income	Both M/F income	No.of total sample house- holds
	M	F				
Landless	23	02	02	02	14	25
Marginal	11	03	06	02	06	14
Middle	12	03	13	00	02	15
Rich	05	01	04	01	01	06
Total	51	09	32	05	23	60

This shows that incidence of female income earning is more in the landless and the marginal groups. There are a few households in the landless, marginal and rich where women are sole income earners for the family, while there are none in the middle group. However, this data should not mislead one to believe that in 50% households women are involved in direct productive work or is in wage labour. Because of the division of labour between men and women and the consequent concepts of male work and female work, while men's income earning activities would indicate a direct relationship with the productive process, women's would not. Women's work is linked to the pattern of mobility. Thus when trying to understand increasing participation of poor household members in wage labour (Chayanov's model of household consumption needs) male/female factors have to be taken separately. In other words, while male participation is directly linked to consumption needs of the household alone, female participation depends on the personal and household characteristics. So, in trying to understand the mechanisms of female participation in work force (wage labour) these pertinent factors have to be identified and taken into account.

For my purpose, I start with the position of the women in the ownership of resource in the village, that is, land, and then try to identify her role in the productive process of the households. By looking at her role in the resource of households and the factors affecting it, an analysis of the specific factors affecting women's position can be made. With this purpose in mind, I try to trace the pattern of land-ownership in the village and the position of women in this in the next chapter. To see, whether there are any difference in the ownership of land among men and women. If there is, then what can be identified as the reasons for such differences. The ultimate motive for this identification is to locate the factors that affect women's ownership and control of an important resource as land. After this, women's contribution to the income of households are similarly looked into. Again the attempt is to locate the factors that affect women's effective participation in this area.

CHAPTER - IVWOMEN AND THE VILLAGE ECONOMYFemale Ownership and Control of Land:

As has already been mentioned land ownership in the village is still the most important source of wealth, status and power for its inhabitants. The ownership of land provides the right to enjoy the returns from its cultivation. Again, for many who do not own land, the opportunity for the cultivation of other's land, provides a source of income. But for women, the second option is closed, as they do not work in the fields in the rural areas. In the area of ownership however, by law, both men and women can own land through inheritance or by purchase. But again, since women do not, by tradition, involve in cultivation work in the fields, female land owners have to depend on either male kinsmen or sharecropper or labourers for the operation of their land. This dependence on male help often leads to the loss or transfer of control of female owned land in return for favours or support of male kins in times of crises. There are studies

(Sattar 1975; Jahan 1974) which show that rural women often forego their share in the parent's property in order to reserve their right to get the support of male kinsman in times of marital crises or just to reserve their yearly visiting rights to the parental homes.

There are, however, few documentation of the pattern of land ownership by village women in Bangladesh, even less has been said on the control of land owned by females. None of the literature on land ownership in rural areas or any statistics on land holdings describe or differentiate between male and female owned land.

Women's effective control over land can be ascertained from the degree of their participation in decisions relating to the operation of the land, its sale and purchase, and their control over the returns from land. In this chapter, I describe the pattern of female ownership of land and try to identify the factors that effect their actual control in the various economic groups in the village. The aim is to see whether any

difference exists in the various category households and what other factors within the categories influence women's participation or non-participation in land related decisions. The purpose basically in doing this, is to trace the relationship, if any, between women's ownership of an important resource as land and her status and position in the family. Both my data as well as official land records for Birangaon shows that there are land owned in female names. This alone, however, indicate little about the actual pattern of women's ownership and control over land. For instance, what happens to land in the area of its operation when women are the owners ? Do they depend entirely on men for its operation and hence remain owners in name only, while the male kins derive all the benefits ? How far women control the returns from such land ? What factors effect women's effective control ? How are the status and position of women affected by such ownership ?

Before going into an attempt to answer such question in the Birangaon context, let us first look at the pattern of female ownership in relation to male owned

land in the various categories sample households.

How have women come to own the land and what factors influence their control of the land and its returns.

Women can be landowners by virtue of inheritance from their father or from husband and through purchase in their names.

In 22 out of a total of 167 households in the village, women own some lands. Out of a total acreage of 187 acres of cultivable land owned by 98 households in the village, women own approximately 37.25 acres.

In the selected sample of 60 households, in thirteen (13) women own land totalling to 25.25 acres. The reasons for such a big share, (25.25 acres) of the total village female land ownership (37.25) to be in the sample households' women, is that the proportion of female ownership is higher in the rich category households. And my study sample includes all six households that fall in the rich group.

Table No.16

The distribution of female owned land in
the sample categories:

Economic categories	No. of female landowning households	Acreage of landholding	Total sample households which own land
Marginal	6	3	14
Middle	3	8.25	15
Rich	4	14	6
Total	13	25.25	36

Let us look at the form of land ownership by women in each category households, the owners' personal and household characteristics that influence their control of land.

Marginal sample households and women's ownership
of land

In the marginal category, six out of a sample of 14 households have females who own three acres of land. In relation to the marginal category female landowner's household composition, these six households can be sub-categorised into those where the female owners are (a) widowed heads of households, (b) divorced heads of households and (c) wives of household heads.

Marginal Households: Group one (Three Case Studies
from Sample Households).

Case Study - 1

There are three sample marginal households where women landowners are heads of their household . The first of these household women, is Poriskar, who is the widow head of her family of one unmarried son and an unmarried daughter. Above 55 years of age she inherited the land when her husband died. At the time of her

husband's death her son was only eight years of age, a minor who could not immediately become the head of the household. Coming from a Girastha lineage, she share-cropped out her land to her husband's brothers who were sharecropper /labourers residing in the same para. Having a very small amount of land, the crop choice was her brother-in-law's as they decided to cultivate for her whatever crop they cultivated in their own land and in other land they sharecropped in. The use of the produced, however, was her choice. Although this household was barely above subsistence, Porisker decided to give an education to her only son and has managed to do so. Poriskar had mortgated out half of what she inherited at the time of her two elder daughter's marriage. Now she works as a BRAC organizer and her unmarried daughter also earns a little by tailoring for women in the village. Before Porisker's husband died he and his brothers had divided up their property and were living in separate households. This lineage is not very strong in the village and the kin ties between the few households are also not strong. Poriskar's household is of simple type.

Case Study - 2

In the second of the female headed households in this group, the woman became a widow with no sons and three daughters. Having no sons, she received only part of the share of her husband's land. Also coming from a low Girastha lineage (see chapter-5) households with very weak kin network in the village, she keeps her youngest daughter and her family with herself. Her son-in-law, a rickshawpuller by profession, supervises the operation of her land. Misran, the widow, has given part of the land to her elder daughter and has promised the rest to the youngest. She wants her daughter to inherit the full share rather than her husband's brothers. By Muslim law the husband's brother also get a share of his property if he does not have any sons. This household is also of simple nature and the kin status and network is strong and important.

Case Study - 3

In case of the third marginal female landowning widow head of household, the women, over 50 years of age, lives

separately from her two sons and their families. She lives on the income from the land she received from her husband's property. Her husband died leaving two minor sons and his family in the joint household of her father-in-law and his other sons. Her father-in-law and brother-in-law refused to give her a share of the property and forced her to remain in the joint household until her elder son came of age and supported his mother in demanding a division of her husband's share. The mother, Mohitun pleaded with the Samaj leaders and the elders of her husband's kin group. Finally with the son's backing they were given their share of the land. The first son married and lived together. But when the second son married and conflict between the two daughters-in-law led to a separation between the brothers, Mohitun, the mother demanded her share of the land so that she could live separately from the sons. She now lives alone and sharecrops out her land to her elder son. From time to time she visits her sons households but never agrees to live with them permanently. Her husband's family is from a high status lineage of East Para.

So the first sub-category in the marginal group of female landowners, all are widows, but two live with their children while one lives alone. All are from weak kin groups. While two are from Girastha households one is from a high status lineage and Samaj. All three women are aged -- about 55 years of age, and have some mobility in the village and outside. All of these three households are of simple kin composition, in which the influence of the kin group is not strong.

Group Two : (One Case Study)

Case Study - 4

In one household in the second category of marginal sample household where a woman holds some land, she is the divorced head of her household. Coming from the highest status lineage and Samaj of the Mia or Khans, she sought divorce when her husband wanted to marry for a second time. Mother of a minor son, she requested her husband's kins and Samaj members to ask

for a separation with her share of dowry payment from her husband. The girl that her husband wanted to marry was from a very low status and poor family while Halimun, the first wife was from a high status and well known lineage of a nearby a village. She was backed by her husband's kinsmen in her demand. Consequently, her husband was compelled to give her a share of his land and she now lives separately with her son. The land is sharecropped out to traditional client Girastha households of her husband's family. Presently her son, having come of age, looks after the land while working in a shop in Manikganj town. Halimun is over 50 years of age and lives in East Para among the households of her husband's lineage and Samaj. The son is unmarried and the household can be categorised as of simple kin composition.

Group Three (Two Case Studies)

Case Study - 5

In the third sub-group of marginal women in the sample households where they own some land, both are the wives

of household heads. Both are from Kamla households and both are young mothers of minor children. Both the women are second wives. In the case of Rashida of Karchabadha, she bought the land with money she had saved from household expenses and the money she received from her father in exchange for share in his property. She comes from East Para of the village. Her father and brothers are strong, active members of a powerful faction in the village. Her husband and an adult son from his previous marriage often get work in Union Parishad Developmental Projects through them. Rashida increased her savings by lending out to other women in the neighbourhood at a very high interest rate of 100%. When she mortgaged in a small amount of land and later saved enough to buy a small plot in her name, she took the help of her brothers from East Para. Her husband and unmarried step son cultivates the land. She uses some of the produce for her family consumption and sometimes also sells some. Her husband and stepson are both sharecropper/labourers. Rashida is only 35 years of age.

Case Study - 6

Kabiron, of East Para is the second wife of Hossain Ali, labourer/seasonal boatman/rice trader. She is the daughter of an influential sharecropper of the neighbouring village, Bhatboir. She inherited a small piece of land from her father who cultivates and sends her the produce. Kabiron spends it in whatever way she wants, which is mostly in buying household utensils and clothes for the children. Her husband stays out of the village for half the year. Consequently she has to make most of the household decisions. The saving that she makes is used on her husbands trading activities rather than on land as the capital is not enough to mortgage in or to buy land. This household composition is of husband, wife, two children and one unmarried son from previous marriage.

Middle Category Households

In the middle category sample households, 8.25 acres of land is held by women of three households. In this

category there are only two sub-groups, that of two households where the women landowners are widow heads of their family and one where she is the wife of an absentee household head.

Middle Households: (Two Case Studies from Sample)

Case Study - 7

In the group of widow head of the households, Begum Rokeba is a widow with two college-going sons. Her late husband was a graduate belonging to the Mia Bari the highest status lineage in the village. He was a job holder in the then Government of Pakistan and had lived for several years in West Pakistan with his family. The land in the village was then jointly held by his brothers. After his death, eight years back, the property was divided, his share going to his widow. She lives in the village with her two sons. The land is sharecropped out to a traditional family client Girastha household of Karchabadha. Rokeba decides on all crops and disposal matters. She bears the educational

expenses of her sons from the income of land.
This household is of simple kin composition.

Case Study - 8

In the second household in this sub-category, there are no adult males. The widow head of household lives with her widow daughter-in-law and her minor children. Two of her elder grand daughters are married, one to a sharecropper in the village. This is a Girastha household from West Para. The lineage is of low status and the kin group is very small. Traditionally this household was the client of the powerful Pheraji lineage of the same para. Since the death of her son this tie has been weakened. Now she takes the help of her grand daughter's husband to cultivate the land. Her only grand son is nine years of age and can not take up the responsibility of land cultivation. She is nearly 70 years old, while her daughter-in-law is a little over 40. The mother-in-law does most of the land dealings and takes all decisions while the daughter-in-law

looks after the domestic work. There are no adult male member in this household which falls within the category of a complex household.

Group Two (One Case Study)

Case Study - 9

In the second sub-category of the middle sample households where there is a woman landowner, she is the wife of Shahed Ali, who was a job holder in one of the Middle Eastern countries. Shahed Ali was a sharecropper/labourer when he got a chance to go on a job outside the country. He sold most of his land to acquire the money needed for his expenses to go abroad. When he started to remit money, the wife invested it on land in her father's village nearby. Some land was bought in Birangaon in her husband's name. Three of her husband's brother objected to her buying land in another village. But the money was remitted in her name and she decided to invest it in whatever way she saw fit.

Her eldest daughter was stopped from going to school just before her father went abroad. Later her mother started to send her to school again and also admitted the other children to the school. Shahed Ali's wife is about 36 years of age and as a young wife and mother does not have much mobility in the village. The land was cultivated through sharecroppers from the same para. In her father's village, he took the responsibility of cultivating her land. After her husband returned after three years he has taken control over the land. The land in her father's village was sold and new land was bought in Birangaon in Shahed Ali's name. There is a small plot in his wife's name, but its operation is totally controlled by him. This is a simple household with weak kin ties with the larger family.

Rich category sample household and female
landownership

In this group in four households out of a total sample of six, females own land which total to 14 acres. In

this category sample household , there are three sub-groups, those of a widow headed household, two households were the female landowners are the wives of the heads of household , and one household where the wife of the household head and two daughters-in-law are landholders.

Rich Households :Group One (One Case Study from Sample Households)

Case Study - 10

The widow Latifa Begum was the fifth wife of Sormon Bhuiyan, of the Kha Samaj of East Para. Being the 'ugly duckling' of a high lineage family of many daughters of a distant village she was married to this man on the condition that he will transfer his property in her name. As fulfilment of the promise made at the time of marriage, he legally transferred the land to his wife. By virtue of her ownership, Latifa Begum commands authority over her only son and his family. She has

given some land to her two daughters and settled them with their families in her neighbourhood. Nearly 60 years of age, she also plays a leadership role among women of client Girastha and Kamla households of her family. Traditionally her husband's family was a raiyyot holder by virtue of which they command patronage over a big number of Girastha and Kamla household. Latifa Begum makes all operational decisions relating to the cultivation of land. She has not sold or purchased any land but has mortgaged in and out several times. In all such cases the decision was taken by herself with the advice from male neighbours and kinsmen. Latifa Begum is one of the two nominated female member of the Union Parishad. She has read up to class six. This is complex type of household where the widow mother controls the land.

Group Two: (Two case studies)

Case Study - 11

In the second sub-group of the rich sample female landowning household, the first is that of the young

wife of Shamsu Mia, a graduate from the Mia Samaj of East Para. He is a Government jobholder in Dhaka. Born in a high status lineage, Shamsu Mia's father had to sell off most of his land in educating his two sons. After graduating, Shamsu Mia married into a rich family and took a dowry of Taka 10,000. With the money and income from his job he bought land in the village and gradually consolidated his land position. He also bought some land in his wife's name and says that this was to return the money he had taken from her family at the time of his marriage. Being educated and well-informed, Shamsu Mia is aware of the possibility of land reforms with fixation of ceiling and new land taxation and hence knows the advantage of keeping the land in different names. So far as the operational and cultivational decision are concerned, Shamsu Mia makes it all with no consultation with his wife at all. He also controls the use of the produce and the savings from the surplus. A young wife and mother his wife's mobility is also strictly restricted. In this case the land has been put in the female name because of the male head of the

household is educated and aware of the possibility of high taxation on land if it is concentrated in one name. Operationally, the female landholder has no hold in her ownership and the fact of her ownership does not give her a participation or role in the household or land decisions, nor a higher status. Her household is a simple one with her husband playing the dominant role.

Case Study - 12

In the second of these households, of simple kin composition, that of Shajahan Chairman, his wife is middle aged and is from a family of higher status than his own. Shajahan is by profession a trader in indigenous medicines. For his kind of work, he has to stay out of the village mostly. After the liberation of Bangladesh, he also became involved in the village and regional politics. Nominated by the local supportive faction of the then ruling party, the Awami League, he was elected to the chairmanship of the Union Parishad.

His business and later his increasing involvement in political activities keeps him away from the village for long periods of time. The brothers of his wife were influential regional touts of the ruling party and actively back Shajahan's political involvement. He also has the bad reputation of connections with ill famed women in and outside the village. At one time there were rumours of his possible second marriage. The wife with the help of her brothers pressurised Shajahan to transfer his landed property in her name. The majority of the land was bought with the help of her brothers in the first place. Shajahan has ultimately given all the land in his wife's name. Her high status family background, middle age and her husband's position as chairman restricts her mobility in the village. But she controls most land through sharecroppers who are, from long, cultivator clients of her husband's family. All her children eight daughters and one son attends school. She has paid a dowry of Tk.30,000/- to her daughter who has been married recently. In this case of a rich household, the female landowner, even though a housewife has greater hold over land decisions. First because the

husband or the male head is frequently absent from the village. Also the kinsmen of the wife is politically and economically strong and the husband has to depend on their support for his political activities.

Group Three (One Case Study):

Case Study - 13

In the third group of sample households in which land is in female name, is the family of Rofizuddin of Karchabadha. It is a complex household where Rofizuddin, his wife, three married sons, their wives and children and one unmarried son live together. It is a Girastha household, and two of the sons are matriculates. One is a primary school teacher and the second a college student. The wife of the primary school teacher son is also a matriculate, who works as a health visitor in the Government Family Planning Service. The men of this household are active participants in all

village level socio-cultural, political happenings. The male members of this household are aware of the possibility of land reforms leading to legislation, setting a ceiling to land holdings. This was an important factor which led to the placing of some land in the names of its females members. All lands related decisions, however, are the prerogatives of the male members of the family, first as the returns from land cultivation is also controlled by them. However, being educated and holding a high status job, the daughter-in-law, Nafisa, is consulted in all important household affairs.

So in the case of this rich household although three of the female members are landowners, the actual operational control is in the male hands.

In the rich category, therefore, land is effectively controlled by those female owners who have no male authority in the family to depend on. That is, the widows or in the cases when the husband is absent from home for long periods of time. This happens even though in all three cases land is registered in

female names. In the case of one housewife-owner with backing from economically and politically powerful kinsmen, added to the fact of her husbands absence, provide her with considerable participation in land related decisions. In the second landowning housewife's case, however, her age and total dependency on husband who looks after land, bars her from participating in such decision.

So, in the rich category, factors of age, condition under which women become landowner, economic and political strength of the women's kins are factors which lead to a variation in the degree of total control of land by their female owners.

General Conclusion for Landownership by Women

From the examples that I have discussed in the case of female landowning households, certain general conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, no women in any of the categories directly cultivate or supervise the land they own. Secondly, all have to have it operated with the help of

male kinsmen or sharecroppers or labourers. Then in the participation of land cultivation and other land related decisions women's role differ, but not according to the economic category. Rather this is dependent on such factors as mentioned in the following section. First, the means by which women acquire land in their names, determine how far they control it. Land is acquired in various ways, such as : Through inheritance from husband on his death, land transferred in wife's name by husband, bought in wife's name by husband, or land that is - bought with wife's own initiative. Secondly, the absence or presence of husband as the head of the household in the village is important. Widows without any adult male to depend on, are more involved in land decisions. Wives from nuclear households, whose husbands are away for a long period of time. Wives with husband's presence in the village. Thirdly the Samaj and lineage status of the family is important. Fourthly the female kin groups' political and economic strength. The age of women and their position in the domestic life cycle and the educational level of the family.

Table - 17

Types of Female Landowners in the various
Category Sample Households

Land Group	No. of house-hold where women own land	Widows	Divorced	Wife of house-hold head	Daughter-in-Law
Marginal	6	3	1	2	-
Middle	3	2	-	1	-
Rich	4	1	-	2	1
Total	13	6	1	5	1

It is seen, therefore, that although a substantial number of sample households have women who have ownership of land, only a limited among there are in actual control of it. In all economic categories, the condition under which women come to own land is important for their control of it. If they inherit

as widows and if there are no close adult male kin then the involve in land related dealings to a large extent. But in this the incidence of involvement of women of rich and the lower categories are higher than among the middle. This is because, the majority of sharecroppers are in the middle category and the norms of seclusion limits the middle group women to deal with non-kinsmen of the same group.

In cases where land has been bought or transferred in wife's name or to other females in the family by the head of the household, it is more in the control of the men. Only in the cases where husbands are frequently out of the village, do such landowning females engage in important decisions on land. This is more or less the same in all category households.

The control of land is most effectively in female hands in the few cases that it was bought or acquired by the women's own initiative. The incidence of such cases is more among the landpoor groups, where these women also involve in other income earning activities, such as money lending or petty trading in rice.

It can be said that when women are landowners, they do not in all cases control the operation or the returns from such holdings. It, therefore, cannot be assumed that it gives them the same kind of economic and social status that is connoted in the case of male landholders.

However, the fact that when women become owners on their own initiative, particularly in the lower income groups, they do participate in the operational and use of return decisions. In such cases it can be said to enhance the position of women in respect to their contribution to the family's economy. This important factor can be taken as an indication of a growing awareness among the women of landpoor households of the importance of the relation between resource contributions and their value as family members.

Women's work or activity in Birangaon:

Before the mid seventies, the traditional work of rural women within the homes in Bangladesh were generally viewed as unproductive and non-economic. The few women who worked outside their homes for wages were considered to form the female component of the labour force of the country. And the varied kinds of work that many women have been involved in for at least a decade and a half till now, and which falls in between the above two categories, were just ignored as work of no value at all. Neither was it considered 'domestic'. work nor 'economic'. After the sudden focussing of women as a factor and an issue in development, by the united nations in the mid 1970's, the redefining of rural women's work became one of the main objective of many studies. Pioneering among these was the study of A. Farouk who by defining productive work of women to include income generating activities, expenditure saving activities and all household chores, has shown that women spend about twelve to fourteen hours a day in such work. J. Huq also pointed out

in her study that "the traditional definition of economic activities is limited and gives rise to the error and confusion which contributes to the notion that rural women are non-productive, parastic family members". But "In a subsistence oriented self-employed type of economy, women's domestic work and patterns of living are so much integrated to the productive processes that compartmentalization of tasks between productive/economic and non-productive/non-economic is virtually impossible." (Huq 1979:140).

These and other studies have led to the acceptance among most academicians and policy planners that work of women either domestic or income generative is directly linked to the economy of the household. But my hypothesis includes the view that in the context of a tradition bound society like ours, economic myths of women's work is conditioned by another important variable, that of social value. What is the social evaluation of the various kinds of work of women by the rural people themselves ? Exploding myths about the economic value of womens work is only half the objective achieved. We also have to identify what value is attached to

which work of women, so that the myths in the social value system can also be exposed. With this kind of an objective in mind, I have discussed the work of Birangaon women in the next section.

The work of women in the village can primarily be divided into (A) domestic work within the homestead with no income earning connotations and (B) work which bring an income. In case of village women's income generative activities, it can be (a) within the homestead and (b) outside in non-traditional areas of work. Domestic work of village women can again be either (a) purely household chores, such as cooking, fetching water, fuel gathering or making from cow dung cleaning house and its surroundings, child rearing, tending kitchen garden or (b) post-harvest work for the home consumption, such as par boiling of paddy, drying, husking, winnowing and storing.

CHART - IIIVarious Types of Domestic and Income EarningWork of Women in Birangaon

Domestic (A)		Income Earning (B)	
HC	PHWHC	D.I	O.I
Cooking	Parboiling	Matmaking	Post harvest
Fetching water	Husking	Gur/Muri processing	work for others
Fuel gathering	Drying	Quilt making	Earth cutting
	Winnowing	Spinning	Brickfield work
	Storage	silk thread	Family Planning
Child care	Seed selec-	Paddy	Job
Cleaning	tion	processing	BRAC Co-op
Kitchen gardening	Grinding spices	for petty trade	Trainer
Poultry		Stitching clothes	U.P. Membership
Gur/Muri processing			Midwifery
Matmaking			

Codes HC - Household chores.DI-Domestic IncomePHWHC-Post Harvest work for home consumptionOI - Outside Income

The income earning work for women can be put into two groups: income earning work within the household for cash or for kind, and income generative work outside which can be in other household's domestic or post harvest work, or in public areas. Now let us look at the pattern of women's work in these areas in the various categories in the sample households of Birangaon. The data from our sample show that in all category households women do domestic work but if we breakdown domestic work into household chores and post harvest work for home consumption then there is a variation in the pattern in different category households.

Among the 25 landless households in our sample only two household women have to do post harvest work for their own consumption. These two households have agricultural implements and even though they have no land themselves, they take in small amounts of land for sharecropping. The other landless households do not sharecropland. Out of the 14 marginal households in the sample, only in nine (9), women do post harvest work for their family consumption. In the

middle category, women in 13 out of 15 also involve in post harvest work, while in three (3) out of six (6) rich households, women do post harvest work. In the other three (3) poor women are hired in to do the entire post harvest work. So the maximum number of households where women do post harvest work for their own family consumption is in the middle category. The marginal households also show a big tendency towards family women's participation in post harvest activities. Both these category households own as well as sharecrop in land.

Table - 18

Categorywise No. of Birangaon sample households in which women are involved in various types of domestic work

Land Categories	Household chores only		Post harvest work for home consumption also		Total no. of sample households	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Landless	23	.92	2	8	25	100
Marginal	05	36	9	64	14	100
Middle	02	13	13	87	15	100
Rich	03	50	03	50	06	100

We see, therefore, that even though in all category sample households women participate in household chores, there is a variation in their participation pattern in post harvest activities for family consumption, depending on differences in land sizes (amount of cultivable land) and the importance of income from non-land source for the family. Among the rich households family status and educational background and good urban linkage prevent women from doing such work. While in the middle and marginal, only involvement in other income generative work are main reasons for women's non-participation in such activities. The landless do not bring a crop which needs post harvest work and only those landless women whole family sharecrop in land, involve in such work.

In the case of income earning activities by women. Of the 60 sample households 33 have women engaged in income earning work (one per household); 17 work within their houses while 16 do so outside. Among the sample landless households, in ten, (10) women are

going for work outside their own homes, and in eight (8) inside. In the marginal households, in seven (7) women are found to be involved in income earning work in their houses and in four (4) in outside places. In the middle category only two (2) household women are doing income generative work, that too within the fourwalls of their homes. In the rich category, a woman from one (1) out of six (6) sample households is holding a job in the Union Parishad as a nominated female member and one (1) as a family planning health visitor.

Table - 19

Categorywise No.of sample households where women do various types of income-earning work

Land Categories	Within Home (D1)		Outside Home (O1)		Total no. of income earning women	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Landless	08	47	10	63	18	55
Marginal	07	41	04	25	11	33
Middle	02	12	00	-	02	6
Rich	00	-	02	12	02	6
Total:	17	100	16	100	33	100

What comes out from the above pattern of women's income generative activities among the various categories is that in the households of resource scarcity women are involved in these, again only amongst the poorest of these, do women go for such work which is outside the realm of traditional areas of female work. That is, income generative work in other houses or in public places, such as road construction or in brickfields. Economic need of the household is, therefore, the foremost consideration in pushing women into undertaking income earning activities. Our sample household data also bring out the important factor that in the final decision for such work involvement by women is a combination of economic need and status consideration. Traditionally women are reproducers while the male bear the role of producers and providers. Men provide and women preserve the prestige and status earned by men as providers and supporters of his dependants - his family of women and children. This role requires women to remain in protective seclusion and non involvement in income earning work. Women are the symbol of her female

gurdians ability to provide economically and to protect her status brought in by her non-involvement in economic activities. Thus, when economic pressure forces the family to expend its labour forces, the attempt is to hold on as long as possible before women are exposed. The attempt is to first expand all possible male family labour - even male children before women are considered for such work. Even in households where women are being forced to go for income earning work, the first attempts are to do so in disguised ways in close neighbour's or kin's houses for kind payment only. But in households where, the resource base has reached absolute rock bottom and there is no other way of survival except to utilise all its labour potentialities, only women who have reached a certain acceptable age and position in her life cycle are the ones that would go for such work. The process of women's involvement in the productive process in addition to the economic needs of her family, also depends on the absolute lack of all possible male support, no possible kin help, and more importantly on her age and place in the households' kinship composition.

Let us once again, look at the composition of the sample households with age and placement of the women who are involved in income generation. Out of the 60 sample households, 52 have a man at the head of the family, while eight (8) have widows in that role. Out of the 33 households where women are earning an income, only 4 are of complex nature, while the rest (29) are simple households. None of these 4 are landless, with two middle and two rich household.

Table - 20

Types of Households where women earn income
with the economic categories

Land category	No. of households where women earn income	Female Headed	Simple households	Complex households
Landless	18	2	18	0
Marginal	11	3	11	0
Middle	2	2	0	2
Rich	2	1	0	2
Total:	30	8	29	4

All the women who go for income earning work outside their houses are either widows or mothers of grown up children and are within the age group of 36-60 years. (Table-21) women doing income earning activities within

Table - 21

Categorywise Number of sample households where women go out to work according to age

Land categories	No. of households in which go out to work (01)	Widows or divorced women		Housewives	
		Above 36 yrs.	Below 36 yrs.	Above 36 yrs.	Below 36 yrs.
Landless	10	03	02	02	03
Marginal	4	01	00	03	00
Middle	00	00	00	00	00
Rich	2	01	00	01	00
Total	16	05	02	05	04

the household belong to a younger age group - from young girls of age 9 or 10 two women of 25 to 30 years of age and above, whose place in the life cycle is of

young unmarried girls or newly married wives and mothers. (Table - 22) what emerges from this pattern is that, even under economic pressure, households do not straight away put all its labour force which include women, into use. Only those women who have reached a certain age and position in kin composition of the household are allowed to do such work.

Table - 22

Categorywise Number of sample households where women pursue income earning activities within their homes, according to age.

Land categories	No. of households in which women work for an income (D1)	Wido or Divorced women		Housewives	
		Above 36 yrs.	Below 36 yrs.	Above 36 yrs.	Below 36 yrs.
Landless	08	00	03	02	03
Marginal	07	03	00	03	01
Middle	02	00	01	00	01
Rich	00	00	00	00	00
Total	17	03	04	05	05

Let us now look at the facts that emerge from our discussion of women's work pattern in the land categories in our sample. And try to locate or identify the factors that affect such work of women. First to be considered are the reasons underlying women's participation or non-participation.

In the area of post harvest work for house consumption, among the rich group not all women do such work and the reasons are that of high status lineage, educational background, and urban job linkages. But in all high status households, female labour is hired in because the amount of produce is large enough to require extra help, even in households where women do PHWFC. In the middle category also high status lineage and educated sons prevent the women from participation in this kind of work. But in the area of hiring in women labour for PHWFC, only in five out of 14 households is it a practice. The reason for the need for extra help in these households is that they sharecrop in more land and the produce brought home is much more than

that which can be handled by the number of female family labour available.

In the marginal households, five (5) out of 15 households show non-participation of women in PHWFC. In all five (5) of these households, the bulk of income comes from trading and sources other than land and because of their concentration in such work. The land they own are sharecropped out. Of these, two widow marginal household heads are job holders, so have given out land for cultivation.

Among the landless, only two households have been found to sharecrop in land, and hence their women have a role to play in PHWFC. While in the other landless households no produce is brought home. Consequently, their women have no work to play in PHWFC.

If we summarise then, the important factors that are seen to be affecting a variation in the pattern for female participation in PHWFC, are (a) the economic status of the households and (b) the social status,

which includes lineage status, education level and urban connections. The size of land owned and the factors of sharecropping in are also important in the decision for women's participation. On the other hand, the degree of involvement of households in non-land income sources leads to a situation where land is sharecropped out and the scope for female participation in PHWFC is not present. In the rich households, the factor of social status, earned through high status lineage, education and urban jobs and connections prevent women from participation.

In the area of income earning activities by women of sample households the emphasis, in addition to economic need, is in the age and domestic life cycle position of women members. In the landless group, 8 households go for income earning work (Domestic Income, DI) inside the household while eight (8) go for outside income (OI). In the marginal, the number of households where women work outside decreases to four (4) outside and seven (7) inside. While in the middle samples, none of the household women go for IEW outside, with only two out

of 14 doing inside income work two rich household women have high status job outside. Thus in this area of female activity, the ratio of female workers outside decreases with increase in economic status of household.

This pattern and its relation to the household's economic and social standing bring out the fact that there is a status ranking in female work. Depending on the place and kind of work required to be done considerations are made whether it will lead to status loss for the women going for such work. Domestic work fails within the prescribed area of female activities, hence has no value or status loss connotation. PHWFC is also within the domestic realm and does not require the women to move out of the required seclusive restrictions. So in this too, there is no loss of status or prestige. However, in case where women can abstain from such work, it is considered of status enhancement for the family because, as mentioned earlier, it is the sample of male ability to behave according to norms by providing for the economic need for the family.

It has been pointed out in several studies that there is a trend in the increase of women in the labour force of the country (Adnan, Rizwan). Our data, too, show that there is an increase in the rate of female participation in income earning work among the landless and the landpoor. From the statistics in the increasing number of landless families, one can deduce from empirical data that female labour participation is increasing in the countryside. However to merely point out the increase in female labour rate is not the most important fact that needs to be considered in the area of female studies. The rate of increase in the potential for female labour participation is important. According to the data from Birangaon apart from women directly involved in labour force (in public and visible work), many more women from landpoor households are earning for their families in disguised forms in other's household or in their own houses. So economic need is not the sole pushing criteria for women's joining the work force. Family status type of work available and the age of women are important

as well. There are expected norms of women's behaviour, and women operate within such norms. Where economic pressure is so great and there is no male support or insufficient male support, women are forced to shed prestige considerations and go for income earning work. But this action incurs a status loss for the women and her household. Besides, women of young age and in the earlier part of their life cycle are considered more vulnerable and hence are required to remain in physical and symbolic seclusion.

For the women from the middle and rich category households, the situation is not so. The resource base of these households allow them to preserve the status by not going for outside work. The rich and middle households by virtue of their economic strength are in the dominant position not only in the resource structure of the village but also in the traditional institutional frame of the community. These households are value setters and value 'preservers'. Economically also they are the providers for many poor households. The

traditional role of women in the rich and middle households can be maintained, preserved and strengthened which adversely affects the dependent landpoor household women's behavioural pattern. Thus, the situation of male dominance and control in the rich and powerful households becomes the ideal and is binding on the poor households value structure even in situations where the resource base of such households are in shambles. The ideological beliefs of such households are maintained while their resource base cracks under the pressures of economic burden. And the most apparent impact or expression of this is on the contradicting situation faced by women.

What one has to consider in the discussion of women's participation or non-participation in non-traditional economic activities is the attitude of men and women towards such work. My data, as shown here indicate that there is a status ranking of women's work, according to which women and consequently their families lose or gain status in relation to deviation from or adherence to the ideal. The value of the ideal persists,

with the consequence that women who are forced to deviate because of economic needs are looked down upon.

CHAPTER - VWOMEN AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE VILLAGEKinship, Marriage and Inheritance

In the previous chapter, different category household women's position in land ownership and her role in the income earning activities of the household have been identified and analysed. In this chapter women's role and position in the social institutions of marriage and inheritance and their controlling system of kinship relations are to be discussed. Kinship systems operate to order the affines in hierarchical positions of seniors and juniors. It is a relationship of superiors and subordinates with authority and obedience. An important basis of the authority and subordinate relationships between affines in the kinship system is resource and in the rural context the most important resource is land. Men own and control resources or land, in the form of property by virtue of which they command authority over affines. Through inheritance, this property is transmitted to affines through the

male line only. Women can inherit but can not transmit the property to female affines alone. Inheritance, therefore, is one aspect of the kinship system through the operation of which hierarchy of authority and obedience between male affines on the one hand, and between male and female affines on the other, is maintained and perpetuated.

A second aspect of kinship system is marriage. Marriage is an institution which is structured on dowry payment, on divorce and other associated elements. My area of interest in relation to this study covers such questions as to what are the rules in such social institutions and what is the position of women in it. How are women placed in the kinship system and what is her role in the resource exchange aspects of kinship. I try to look at these questions in the context of the data from the village. In the first section of this chapter I have discussed the various kin groups in Birangaon, with their social, economic, political roles in the village life. In the second section I have looked into how marriage and inheritance function in these

groups. In doing all these, the central issue is of course, an attempt to understand the position of women in these social institutions.

Kinship:

The two broad aspects of kinship are the relationships or bondage created through blood ties or through marriage and the property distribution that underlie the other ties. Blood ties create hierarchy within the kin network, between generations - between elders and younger ones, while the property inheritance laws or rules of distribution of property supports this superior subordinate ordering.

Let us look at the kingroups in Birangaon in the light of the above. A group of household or families comprise a Gushti or lineage. "All these households or families are agnatically related with the exception of in-marrying wives and out-marrying daughters. A gusthi, therefore, consists of all the male patrilineal descendants of a

great-grandfather. Common ancestry provides a sense of belonging that binds together the members of a gusthi. A gusthi is, therefore, nothing but a lineage. Members of the lineage can trace their common origin to a single deceased male ancestor." (A Chowdhury, 1982; 44). There are in the village 23 lineages or gusthis the members of each of these are connected by blood ties from the male side. These gusthis are composed of several households each, which vary in size. Except in the case of one gusthi, the households of a gusthi are located in the same para. The Kha Para is resided only by the Khan or Miah Kin group members, West Para comprises of households belonging to nine (9) different kin groups; East Para of six (6); Mistri Para of two (2) and Karchabadha of five (5). Two households of a kin group in East Para have bought land and settled in Mistri Para, making the exception among their group of residing in the East Para.

There is a status ranking in the different Gusthis in the village. There are the Uchu or Bhodro, Girastha (Cultivators) and Nichu or Kamla Gushtis -- this categorisation is on the basis of social status of lineages.

Status Ranking of Gushtis in Birangaon

Uchu or Bhodro Gushtis	- High status
Girhastha Gusthis	- Middle status
Kamla Gushtis	- Low status.

The Uchu or Bhodro Gusthis are the high ranking families which have been important landholders from the times of the Zamindari system. In addition to this, these Gusthis have been holding jobs outside the village for several generations and also have had education in the family for some generations. A combination of all these factors have, over the generations put these families in the "Gentry" or Bhodro Class. The middle status kin groups are the Girasthas or cultivators who are directly and mainly linked to the cultivation of land and hence are of lower status or the "Gentry" class. In many families belonging to the Girastha class, education and urban jobs have been taken up, but the villagers still identify them as Girasthas. The lowest ranked social class are the Kamlas or agricultural labourers

who are considered subservient to the Girasthas.

So the 23 different kin groups in the village can be placed into these three categories. The following table shows the parawise distribution of the various Gushtis in their status-rank order.

Table - 23

Parawise Rank Ordering of Kingroups
In Birangaon

Rank	East Para	West Para	Karcha- badha	Khapara	Mustri Para	Total
Uchu or Bhodro	3	-	-	1	-	3
Grishtha	2	7	3	-	2	14
Kamla	1	2	2	-	-	5
Total:	6	9	5	1	2	23

The families of Uchu Gushti are concentrated in the Kha and East Para, the Girasthas in West and Kharchabadha while kamlas are mostly in the West and East Paras. Being a patriarchial society, women have little role in the lineages. Women belong to lineages as relations

of men - as daughters or wives. (Ellickson, 1972).
In the next section, the case studies of kin groups from each of the three categories are discussed.

Khan or Miah Group of the Uchu Lineage:

The Kha or Miah kin group is considered by Birangaon folk as the highest and oldest of the Uchu or Bhodra Ghusthis or lineages in the village. This lineage members are in the rich category in the village. Members of this group were important rent collectors during the Zamindari times and later they became a big landholder group in the village. This family has education and urban linkages through jobs for more than three generations. Economic resources in the form of landownership has been strong in this family. Towards the second half of the previous generation, however, the resource of this group weakened due to a combination of several factors -- illness of male members, neglect of land cultivation for educational purposes by male members, outside marriage of female members and the general outgoing attitude of its educated, urban-job

seeking younger male members. During the liberation war one male member, Kanu Mia, by virtue of his active role in the Awami League political party acquired a large amount of money which he started investing in business and land in the village. In return for favours from the party leaders in the region he had to organise support from the village. He started consolidating his land position in the village so that he could provide patronage to land-poor groups in return for political support. He also started re-settling in Birangaon many of his kinsmen who had earlier migrated to other villages or cities. And he also resettled his cousin sisters and sisters and their families by buying homestead and cultivable land for them. Gradually, he had managed to strengthen the number of kin member households in the village and this revitalized the power, position and authority of the Miah Bari. His linkage with important urban groups -- both political and economic put him in a position of command in factional politics and village leadership. The Khans have also strengthened their position by establishing marriage ties with other

families of equal status in the village. The possibility of these families to stand up as rivals to them was thus reduced. The level of education among both male and female members is high in this Uchu Gushti. No female in this lineage are going for outside income earning work and hired help is brought in regularly for post harvest work within the households.

The Pherajis of the Girastha Lineage:

One of the strong kin groups that belong to the middle category of Girasthas is the Pherajis. They belong to the middle landholding groups in the village. The Pharajis migrated to the village three generations ago. They came from an interior village where educational and business scope were limited. They started village life in Birangaon as a big land owning and sharecropping group. The feeling of alienation from the rest of the village as migrants, have led to the maintenance of strong kin ties among the different households in this Gushti . Economically, this has made them more dependent

on each other and their relationships with other groups of the village are limited. The urge to secure a place in the village socio-political life and aspirations of involvement in the other areas of village activities, made this group stress on educating male as well as female members in this generation. In marriage, the Pherajis seek high status families for the men although they are not considered of equal and marriageable status by other high status households of the village. In any conflict or disagreement in the village, they assert themselves very strongly as a kin group. Apart from the two major factions of the village, the Pherajis are a separate factionally leading lineage. The level of education among both male and female members was not high in the past generations. However in the various households in the present generation education is highly stressed. It is to this lineage that one of the two university going students of the village belong. Several girls from among the Pherajis are going to colleges in Manikganj. No female from among them are doing income earning work outside the households. Some amount of hired women are

taken in for post harvest work within the households, but most of it is done by the Pheraji women themselves.

Kisrof Gushti of the Kamla Lineage:

Kishrof Kha's family belonging to the landless category has been poor for more than three generations. Their economic position has remained between the categories of landless and marginal and are known to belong to the Kamla group. The forefathers of Kisrof Kha's kin group were settled in the village as labourers of a Raiyot holder of the local Zaminder, the Bhuiyas. Through generations they have remained agricultural labourers and have not been able to improve their economic condition. They had received a small amount of land as their own when the Zamindari system was abolished. Unfortunately this land was located in the strip on which the Asian Highway was constructed and was taken away for the road. And the compensation that they received was not sufficient to buy another patch of land. Besides, low productivity in the village led to

unemployment during and after the war of liberation. This had forced all households of this group to go out of the village in search of work. Then with the increase in governmental efforts to boost up productivity in the rural areas, Kisrof's group members gradually started coming back to the village and their homesteads. But with no strong economic base in the village, the group members have remained poor and continue selling their labour for agricultural work. When the Raiyot patronage was closed and their economic baseline removed by the acquisition of land by the Highways Department, their position further deteriorated. In the present generation a few male members have managed to get low paid jobs at the village and thana levels as chowkider or darwans and are gradually establishing linkages within the village and outside it. These can be helpful in creating job and trading opportunities for other kin members. But with a very low economic level of bare subsistence, the opportunities are limited and in most cases beyond the reach of the members.

Most members of this lineage are non-literates. Very few children from the present households are being sent to school. Women from these households do low status income earning work both in public areas as well as in other village households.

Marriage, Dowry and Inheritance

The law of the country based on Muslim socio-religious rules provide women with certain rights in the institution of marriage and inheritance. But in the practice of such institutions these rights are not operative. This is because of certain inherent contradictions that has remained in the development of the legal system and the socio-religious-cultural norms related to the behaviour of women in the society.

The legal structure of the country consists of both Muslims law (Personal/family law) and Roman law (Public laws). Muslim law was the basis of the legal system when the British took over the rule of the sub-continent.

The existing system, which was the traditional Hanafi Muslim law sponsored by the Mughal Emperors and administrated by the Kazi continued for some time even during the British period of rule. During 1772 to 1869 Muslim law was gradually replaced by English legal concepts and laws and the entire field of public law was based on Roman laws. The personal laws were not changed for the Muslims and for the Hindus. The Hindu personal law remained applicable to regulate matters concerning family status of Hindus (Qamruddin, 1977). In 1961 the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance was introduced to initiate some modernisation in the Muslim family laws -- relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance. So today's legal structure is a combination of Public Laws based on Roman legal principles and family laws based on Muslim laws. As discussed earlier, Bangladesh rural society is predominately Muslim with religious norms and values regulating the behaviour and lives of men and women.

According to Islamic Law, marriage is a contract which require the consent of both men and women and in the case of dissolution of the marriage contract by divorce, the same duality of the consent has to be present. In practice, divorce is the prerogatives of men only. The laws require that the condition and rules of the contract are to be put down in a formal document known as the "Kabin Nama". An amount of money - Mohor is agreed upon for the men for payment to his would be bride for her consent to enter into the marriage bond. Provisions for payment of part of the Mohor agreed upon in the contract, in case of breach of contract leading to divorce, is also provided. By such law a women is given the right to ask for divorce or separation and demand the payment that was agreed upon. Similarly, the laws of inheritance gives women the right to inherit part of the parental and husband's property. But in all the rights given, it is not on equal terms as that provided to men, because the laws are based on the assumption of female non-involvement in the productive process and hence dependence on men. The provision of Mohor is a safeguard

against the men's refusal to take care for the women's economic needs. It reflects the assumption that women are considered dependent on men for the fulfilment of their economic needs. The payment of brideprice, too, to the bride's family is a symbol of assuring the girl's parents of the son-in-law's ability to provide for his bride. The law of inheriting less than the males as wife and daughter is also based on similar assumptions. Women by traditional norms do not operate the cultivation of land or deal with cultivators. It is the duty and responsibility of male members of the family. In the case of daughters who are married within or outside villages, the right in the share of property is foregone in order to retain the support of brothers and male kins in the case of any marital crisis, and also to retain their right to visit their family. In the case of widows, the right in the share of husband's property provide a safeguard for the widowed mother to be taken care of and looked after in old age. The property after the death of the mother is inherited by the sons which is an incentive for them to look after her.

The other important assumption that underlies the legal provisions in our country is the economic responsibility of males. The right of men are superior and overriding because it is assumed that they are the providers for the women and children. It has been observed that economic conditions of many households have been deteriorating during recent years. The resource distribution have created hierarchies in the village. What needs to be looked into is, what is the pattern of marriage, dowry, inheritance in various resource based households or simply, in the various economic categories.

What happens when the male economic support is insufficient for the family ? What form do marriage, dowry, inheritance take under such circumstances ? Do they vary, or do the traditional norms prevail ? Let us now look at the situation of these institutions in the light of our data from the village.

Pattern of Marriage:

In Birangaon, the pattern of marriage among all category households have some general features, but again due to the differential positioning of different category households in the economic structure, its form and implications become varied in different economic groups. First we shall describe the general pattern of marriage in the village and then go on to the various implications of resource base differentials between households on their marriage features, if any.

The girls in Birangaon are generally married to nearby villages, whereas the tendency in case of male is to marry in distant villages. In the sample households, all girls except one married within the same district with above 85% in the same thana. One girl from a middle category household is married to a man from Kushtia district. All men from Birangaon except one, Kanu Mia, are married within the same district. The average marriage age of girls is now from 14 to 18 years and about 10 years ago the average age was

between 12 and 15 years. For men the average age is now between 20 and 24 years -- while 10 years ago it was between 16 and 20 years.

Marriages are arranged between households of equal socio-economic status. In the data from the sample households, in the case of one marriage the choice was made by the couple themselves. All other marriages were arranged by the elders. The marriage of a girl from a Bhodro (Uchu) or high status family will be sought to a boy from similar household; likewise a Girastha or cultivator family would look forward to marrying its girls and boys to other Girastha households. Although this is the ideal and the general pattern as such, there are exceptions. In some cases, when the economic position of a household improves, its aspirations lean towards social and political power. A common manifestation of this aspiration is the attempt to create marriage bonds with socially high status families. In the village, two such cases have occurred where high status households have fallen in economic position and thus became vulnerable to the marriage aspirations of low status but newly resource strong families from

the village itself. Thus through marriage, social esteem and status can be acquired. Resource exchange in the form of dowry is also an important function of the institution of marriage.

Table - 24

Pattern of marriage in the sample households
(Marriage of head of household)

Land Groups	Ghor-jamai	Married from village	2 marriages	3 marriages	5 marriages	More than one wife living together
Landless	02	00	00	01	00	00
Marginal	01	03	01	00	01	00
Middle	00	03	02	00	00	01
Rich	00	01	00	01	01	00
Total households	03	07	03	02	02	01

*The number of times the head of these household married.

Among the sample households there are seven cases where a male had married more than once. Of these, three were married twice, and in one, two wives live together; Two males married three times and two males five times each. Of these, in two cases a wife was divorced before marrying for the second time, while in all other cases, the husbands remarried after the death of their first wives. Once a proposal is made, the family after due consideration of all the aspects of the proposal, put it to the important 'Gushti' elders and Samaj members for their opinion. If it is considered acceptable then a date is fixed for the "Looking Over" of the girl by the boy and/or his close relatives and friends in their parents house. If this goes satisfactorily, then the members of each party -- important kins and Samaj members sit down to discuss the terms of the marriage. After the date of wedding is agreed upon, the demands for dowry from each party is put forward, discussed, argued, bargained and finally fixed. The amount of Mohor that the bride-groom's party has to agree to pay to his wife on marriage and in the case of a divorce is

also negotiated and fixed. If all this is agreed upon, then the marriage is considered arranged. On the date fixed, the bride-groom with a party of previously agreed numbers of persons go to the bride's house where the wedding takes place. At the bride's residence, the groom's party and her relatives and neighbours are entertained with food and songs according to the economic position of the bride's family. After the ceremonies are over which usually takes the whole night, the bridegroom returns to his village with the bride, who from that day onwards become a member of his household, and is his responsibility. In one form of marriage, which is quite common in Manikganj region, the residential location of a man and his wife is reversed. This is the case of Ghor jamai or residential son-in-law, where the man comes to reside in the wife's household and village. This happens mostly in cases where there is no son or immediate male kin in the girl's family. In such cases, the son-in-law looks after the land and property of the bride or her parents. The number of Ghor jamai cases among the household heads of the sample are given in chart.

Three important kin groups or Ghustis of Birangaon, all of which belong to the rich and Uchu lineages, started with Ghor-jamais, who were settled in the village by big land owning families which did not have sons but only daughters. These high status men were made to settle in the village. Our data in the present situation, however shows a greater incidence of Ghar-jamai among the landpoor groups.

Table - 25

Mohor payments in (amount in Taka) in sample households (categorywise), (of head of household only).

Land groups	50-200	300-500	600-1000	2000-5000	No Mohor agreed
Landless	08	05	00	07	03
Marginal	09	01	02	01	01
Middle	05	03	02	04	01
Rich	01	03	01	02	00
Total no. of households	23	13	05	14	05

Dowry and Brideprice:

Dowry and bride-price are the two systems through which resources change hands in the institution of marriage. The system of giving a brideprice, that is payment of cash money or kind payments to the brides' family to

indicate the would be husband's ability to provide for his wife. This payment of a token brideprice was prevalent in all category households, more in the G. irhastha, in the marriages that took place approximately 15 years ago. The form that the payment took was a token some of money such as taka 15 or 20 and clothes and jewellery for the bride. The token is referred to in the village as "Poun" (payment) for the food expenses that the bride's family incur during wedding celebration.

The data on dowry and bride-price from the sample households show a gradual turn towards dowry from brideprice. Dowry is the payment of cash and kind by the bride's family to the groom and/or his family. Dowry, in the form of ornaments and clothes to the bride by her family was given in the affluent households in earlier times as well. But the novelty in the present system of dowry is fixation of cash

and kind payments to the bridegroom and his family during the marriage arrangement. In most cases today, it includes a cash amount as well as such material things as radio, cassette recorder, bicycle, watches etc. The money is invested on land, or trading, or rickshaws etc. by the groom and/or his family, depending on their occupation. The dowry money is never in the control of or utilised by the girl herself. Only in one middle household was the dowry money returned to the wife in the form of land bought in her name.

Sample - I

Dowry and Bridewealth

Name	Relation to head of house- hold	Period of Marriage	Dowry paid	Dowry received	Birdewealth
Md. Goizuddin	Head	28 years	X	X	Silver ornaments +all expenses +cash Tk.9
Shaizuddin	Son	7 yrs.	X	Silver ornaments + all expenses	X
Waizuddin	Son	5 yrs.		Silver ornaments + all expenses	X
Bosiruddin	Son	4 yrs.	X	I gold ornament + Silver ornaments + all expenses	X
Khodeja	Daughter	5 yrs.	Cash Tk.500 + all Silver ornaments +all expenses	X	X
Bachatun	Daughter	3 yrs.	Cash Tk.800 + all ornaments +all expenses	X	X

Sample - II

Dowry and Bridewealth

Name	Relation to head of households	Period of Marriage	Dowry paid	Dowry received	Bridewealth
Bideshi Pheraji	Head	29 yrs.	X	X	All ornaments + expenses + cash Tk.7
Razia Khatun	Daughter	11 yrs.	Silver chain and 4 bangles	X	All expenses
Rahela*	Daughter	2 yrs.	Tk.500 cash + gold earring + one guilt	X	X
Moslemuddin Pheraji	Son	3 months	X	Cash Tk.1000 + gold earring + wedding	X

*Rahela 18, returned to parents' house 2 months after her marriage. Her husband had deceived her parents by saying that his wife by a previous marriage was dead. She was, in fact, very much alive, and made Rahela's life miserable when she went to her husband's house. Her parents are now contemplating a legal separation and a second marriage for her. Rahela's dowry at the second marriage would have to be increased as she has the added disqualification of a separated women.

Divorce:

In the cases of the sample households, six divorces have been reported, in five (5) cases the heads of the household divorced his wife and in one case, a daughter have been divorced and returned to their parents household. In one case only was a divorced daughter married for the second time. In one case a twice divorced woman lives separately with her unmarried son and live on the share of her husband's land. In this case the husband belonging to a very high status kin group wanted to marry a women of low status, and was objected to by his kins and Samaj members. When he refused to listen to their objection, they forced him through a Shalish to give her part of his land as payment. The first wife was also granted the divorce she asked for. Her husband was forced by his own kins and Shamaj members to make her the Mohor payment.

In the second case, of a middle category Girastha, his third wife refused to stay with him when she discovered on arrival that he had several children at

home from his two previous marriages. She belonged to a rich family, who threatened to sue him if he did not divorce her. On the advice of his Shamaj Matbars and kins, he compromised with the girl's family by paying 1000 Takas which was an amount less than that he would have to pay if he was taken to the court. It should be mentioned that none of the divorce cases were decided in court. The respective Samaj deals with them and both parties accept the verdict given. The following are the data on case studies of four households from the four economic categories on the pattern of marriage, dowry, divorce etc.

Case Study - 1

Sheik Khedani married about 35 years ago with a Mohor promise of Tk.40/- and had paid a 'Poun' (payment) of Tk. eight (8) to his father-in-law. His eldest son was married 11 years ago and did not pay any 'Poun' and had promised Mohor of Tk.2000/-. His wife was given two pieces of ornaments and all clothes and in

addition he was given two sets of clothes. He was not given any cash, but his wife was given half a Bigha of land as share from her father's property. Later he separated from his father's family. Sheik Khadeni's eldest daughter was married 8 years ago with a Mohor of Tk.50/- only. She was given a nose ring from her husband's family. Her father had to give her two pieces of ornaments and all clothing, in addition to spending about (5) five hundred taka for food and other expenditure for the wedding. His second daughter was married in 1979 to a boy from a marginal household in a neighbouring village. The dowry for the marriage was fixed at cash Taka 600 and a Radio for the groom and all cloths with two pieces of ornaments for the girl. Khedani and his two unmarried sons are wage labourers and his two younger daughters work in others houses for food and small cash. The neighbours, Samaj elders, patrons of the family agreed to help him with the dowry by each paying for one item of the ornaments and clothes demanded. The kind payments were made but Khedani could not acquire the three takas he needed to entertain the bridal party.

He promised to pay the cash dowry of Tk.600/- in six months time. The marriage took place and she went to her husband's village. Within a year and half, however, she was back to her parents house, this time with her small child. Her husband and his family told her not to return without the money promised. Meanwhile, she has to work in other's houses for feeding herself and her child.

She works in a disguised form because the fact that she works may have adverse repercussions and her husband's family may refuse to take her back. Sheik Khedani and his sons are yet to accumulate the money for her dowry payment. Meanwhile the other two young daughters are nearing marriage age.

Case Study - 2

Mohiuddin Tuita, a marginal farmer had inherited four bighas of land and was married by his father to a girl from a neighbouring village with a 'Poun' of Taka 16, and a gold ornament and Mohor fixed at Tk.50/-.

He had to sell much of his land to bring up a large family, with two daughters to marry off before his four sons grew up. Tuita married his two daughters without any dowry, but they were married to big Girastha households and as a prestige symbol, he gave gold ornaments and clothes to his daughters. His eldest son started to earn as a Rakhal in a rich household in the village form where he saved some money and bought land. He was married seven years ago for a Mohor of Tk.200/- and cash payment of Tk.500/- with ornaments and clothings for the bride. With his savings and his dowry money, he bought a handloom and started weaving hand towels with the help of his younger brothers. About three years ago, the father arranged for the marriage of his second son who read up to class eight with a girl from a rich Girastha household in another village. The girl had read upto class ten and in addition can read the Holy Quran and say all the prayers. The marriage was arranged with a Mohor of Tk.5000/- and a cash dowry payment of Tk.2000/- and two pieces of gold ornaments for the bride. This son invested the dowry money on two more handlooms. Tuita and his sons live

together in a joint family with his wife as head of the female line of authority. Tuita and his sons hope to consolidate their land position as soon as they are well established in the weaving business.

Case Study - 3

Aminur Rahman, Dhokai, married Fuljan of an adjacent village about 35 years ago and she was not given a Poun, nor was any dowry paid for her. Her parents gave her clothes and one piece of ornament. Dhokai's second daughter, Zohura was married about 10 years back with a dowry of Tk.600/- and the Mohor was fixed at Tk.200/-. The fact that Zohura's bridegroom had a wife and two small children by a previous marriage was kept in the dark during this marriage arrangement.

Zohura discovered them when she arrived at her husband's home after the wedding. The wife was sick and her husband expected Zohura to look after her and the children. Zohura a young girl of 16 years, refused to stay and returned to her parent's house. Fortunately,

for Zohura, there was a dearth of female family labour in her parents household as none of her brothers were married and her mother was a semi invalid. So she was given a home to stay, even though not welcomed back cordially. Her husband did not divorce her legally, nor did he return the dowry money or make the Mohor payment. Dhokai and his sons considered it a better situation, because legal action would cost them more. Zohura now works from morning till night in her parents house. Her father and brothers are owner cum sharecroppers who also do trading in paddy and rice. Dhokai's eldest son was married four years ago with a dowry of Tk.700/- in cash and a radio. The money was invested in the rich trading activity of the family.

Case Study - 4

About eighteen years ago, Md. Shiraj of Birangaon, a trader in local medicines in and around Manikgonj married a girl from a high status family from another Thana.

The Mohor was fixed at Tk.5000/- and Shiraj paid Tk.350/- for food expenditure to his father-in-law and gave as gift six tolas of gold to his bride. Later he also gave six bighas of land in her name as payment of the Mohor. As dowry, the bride's father gave gold ornaments and land to the girl. Shiraj read up to class eight while his wife had formal education up to class nine. Her family belongs to the rich category and her brothers are influential in the region.

What can be observed in the marriage pattern among the various category households is that irrespective of the resource bases, women have very little say in the arrangement of marriage. In all categories marriage are arranged by elders, kins, neighbours and Samaj members. The consent for the marriage is given by the guardian of the girl. The norm of women's dependency on men for their economic needs, leads to all decisions regarding the women and their wives being vested on the men. In the case of divorce, too, women's consent is not taken. When a woman refuses to live with her husband for some reason, she can

only get her wish accepted if other male kins support her. When a man wants to divorce his wife, he can do so without the consent of the girl. Only in cases where the girl's male kins are in a strong position to support her does her consent matter. The fact, reflected in the village Samaj, that none of the divorces reported were formalised in any court of country as the law requires. Yet, divorces are being given and put into force - some through Samaj Shalishee, but mostly even without that amount of formality.

Form of Dependency:

The values relating to women's dependency on men operate in preventing their from staking a claim in their rights in marriage, and in divorce. The variations that are occurring today are due to economic crises. But this does not go in favour of women's position. The system of norms that is in operation further worsens the condition of women who are forced to deviate.

Inheritance:

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, inheritance of property is the basis of the superior/subordinate relationships in the kinship system. It is also the basis of superior/dependant relationship between men and women. A man's property on his death is inherited by his wife, daughters and sons. The wife is entitled to one eighth of the property and the daughter/daughters can inherit only half of what the son/sons do. According to the socio-religious-cultural norms that bind the society, women do not cultivate land nor go out to work for an income. Consequently, even if they do own land, they have to depend on male kins for its cultivations and related dealings. Secondly, throughout her life a woman has to depend on a man for the fulfilment of her economic needs. As an unmarried girl she is looked after by her father, as a married woman by her husband and as a widow by her sons. Whatever resources a woman comes to own by virtue of inheritance, is used as a safeguard against the provision of her economic needs by men

on whom she has to depend at various stages of her life. A woman often foregoes her share in the parents' property in favour of her brothers in order to retain her right to demand economic or other support in times of crises. A widow's share in her husband's property is the basis which gives her the right of support from her sons, who inherit the property on her death. "There is a gap between a woman's inheritance rights and the actual practice. Widows always demand inheritance but it is used by their sons. If a widow demands inheritance, she is expected to live in her husband's household and not go back to her parents. Traditionally daughters give up the right of inheritance in favour of their brothers unless the family happens to be wealthy or very poor. By giving up the right of inheritance the daughters may visit their 'baper badi' or father's house several times annually following the death of their father. By not claiming the paternal property a woman can easily maintain cordial relation with her brothers. In case of divorce or widowhood she would need her brother's help or guardian's protection

and sometimes she may move back to the 'baper badi' especially following a divorce. It was observed that frequently women did not want to strain relations with their brothers by claiming their shares in paternal property." (Aziz, 1979:69).

The question that arises is, whether the differences in rich and poor households, high and low status kin groups, has any implication on the inheritance rights of women ? In other words, does the resource base of households, the basis of the resources and women's participation in resource generation has any affect on the inheritance rights of females ? Let us look at the position of women's inheritance in the sample households.

Among the present category males of landless, 14 out of the total of 25 households, had inherited some lands, while the rest inherited no land. And in five (5) women had inherited land of which four is from their parents and one from husband. In three other households land that was inherited is jointly held by widows and son/sons. In the marginal group, eleven households out of 14 inherited

land. In four households women own inherited land, of which two are from father and two from husband. In four households, land is jointly held widows and son/sons. In the middle households, thirteen out of fifteen households started with inherited land. In three of these, women own land, of which one inherited from father, one from husband, and in one land was bought by husband for repayment of dowry taken at the time of marriage. In one case, land is jointly held by widow and her sons. Among the rich sample households, all six started with inherited land. In four (4) women inherited land, of which one is from husband and the other three from both husband and father. In one rich household inherited land is jointly held by sons and the widow mother.

Table - 26

Pattern of male/female inheritance in sample households

Land Groups	No. of house-hold that inherited land	Male In-heri-tance	Female in heri-tance	Both M/F inheri-tance	Total no. of sample households
Landless	14	12	02	02	25
Marginal	11	09	02	02	14
Middle	13	11	01	02	15
Rich	06	03	01	03	06
Total house-holds	44	35	06	09	60

A look at the data on the inheritance and claim of land by women in the sample households show that in the landless group in five households, women have inherited land with one claiming a share. In the marginal group four households have inherited land in women's name with two more claiming a share. While in the middle group, women in three households have inherited land with one staking a claim in the rich category, in a total of five out of six households, women have inherited land.

Table - 27

Land inheritance by women in the various
Categories of the sample households

Land Group	From Father	From Husband	From Brother	Claiming share
Landless	04	02	00	01
Marginal	02	02	00	02
Middle	01	02	00	01
Rich	00	03	02	00
Total house- hold	07	09	02	04

So the ratio of inheritance of land by women in the sample households would be - in landless five (5) out of 25. In marginal four (4) out of 14; in middle three (3) out of 15 and in the rich category five (5) out of six (6) households. The pattern is, therefore, one which indicates more towards inheritance of land by women in the rich categories. On the other hand, in three households among the landless it is jointly held by widow mother and sons. In four (4) in the marginal group and one each in the middle and rich group. So, the trend is also one of individual ownership by females in the rich groups while that of joint ownership with male heirs in the poorer households. Then again, the incidence of claim for share in the parents property is more among landless and marginal households.

Women, by tradition do not work in the fields or in outside work in the public sphere. With economic deterioration family need of many households are not fulfilled with male income alone. Yet, women do not, and even if they are forced to, have the skill to earn incomes. Resource in the form of ownership of inherited land, is the only acceptable form of female

participation in family's resource needs. Thus, economic necessity is pushing women from landpoor households to claim and get inherited land. But among the poor again, the amount of land inherited is too small to last for long. So even though, through these, some women have a contribution to the family resource need, it is only temporary.

In the area of kinship, marriage and inheritance, the data from Birangaon indicates that women have a secondary and dependent role. Being a male dominated society, women are members of lineages by virtue of being a relation to men. Gushtis or lineages are based on male lines of descent. The rules of inheritance or property/resource transmission that exist leaves room only for male dominance, as it is transmitted through the male line alone. In marriage system dowry payments and divorce practices, also, women's position seem to be subordinate to and dependent on men. The data on these from the village indicate that the changes in the economic structures of households have little effect on the position of women in these institutions. Women from low status kingroups or lineages are less restricted

by status considerations in their choice of non-traditional work and hence behaviour. But again, the general socio-political dependence of their group on high status resource strong kin groups forces them to remain within certain limits of expected social behaviour. In marriage practices and patterns of inheritance, the changed resource positions have very little effect among women of the various economic categories.

CHAPTER - VISOCIAL AND POLITICAL/ADMINISTRATIVE
ORGANIZATIONS AND VILLAGE WOMENSamaj, The Union Parishad and The Gram SarkerSamaj

Samaj is the traditional social organization which is found in almost all villages in Bangladesh.

Bertocci (1972), Aziz (1979), Jahangir (1979), and Chowdhury (1978) have all dealt with Samaj organization in their respective village studies. These studies have found that Samaj is a group of people based on kinship and which has a territorial boundary with common socio-political identity. Among the Hindus, a caste may be regarded as a Samaj.

Usually there are a number of Samajas in a village but very rarely, there may be one Samaj in a village.

"A Samaj may consist of one or more lineages, the character of which is usually homeogenous. Normally

a Samaj grouping does not extend over a larger territory than a village. On the other hand, a village may contain several Samaj groupings within its territory." (Chowdhury, 1982:45).

The functions of Samaj is the conduct of social and judicial aspects of its group members lives."The Samaj pattern is taken as the basic frame of reference for social activities. The Samaj has the authority to award punishment if anyone deviates from the established social norms. Every individual is conscious about the controlling authority of Samaj. Social control of individuals who are involved in activities against the social and religious tradition of the society is an important function of the Samaj. From area to area the Samaj pattern varies from highly cohesive to loosely informal." (Aziz, 1979:26).

From the information gathered from the old people in Birangaon it seems that in earlier times, Samaj cut across village boundaries and included households of similar social and lineage status of neighbouring

villages. The high status or Uchu (Bhodra) lineages formed one Samaj, while a Girastha was considered out of this Samaj. The Girastha had their own Samaj organization. Today, however, a Samaj is limited to single villages and in many cases, even to neighbourhoods or paras of a village. For example if a village has five paras, each one may have a Samaj of its own. Again a Samaj may also be an endogamous group. (Chowdhury 1982). In Birangaon, there is one Samaj of Uchu households while the Girasthas are split into several Samajas. The Hindu households have a separate Samaj. There are three Samaj among the Girasthas. In Birangaon, the group members of all Samajas do not live in the same Para. The Samaj is referred to by the dominant lineage name particularly in case of the Uchu (Bhadro) Samaj or by the name of the Chief Matbor or Leader of the Samaj. The five Samaj of Birangaon are therefore, the following:

Distribution of the Different Samaj in the Paras

1. Mia Samaj (Kader) including households in
Uchu Samaj Kha Para and East Para
2. Shoda (Bolai) Samaj with members in Karcha-
Girastha Samaj badha and West Para households
3. Nazai Samaj west Para and a few Girastha
Girastha Samaj households of East Para.
4. Pheraji Samaj including members of
Girastha Samaj migrant Pheraji lineage
in West Para and some
Girastha households of
West Para.
5. Mistri Samaj with Hindu households
Hindu Samaj of Mistri Para.

The Mia Samaj is known as the Uchu (high) Samaj of high status lineages and kingroups while the other three are Girastha lineages and the fifth is the Hindu Samaj. The members of the Mia Samaj are traditionally land owners who do not cultivate owned land, but sharecrop it out. In recent, times, due to fall in economic status, some cultivate land with the help of labourers. The Mia Samaj members are the highest educated and the highest in urban linkages, as high status jobs outside the village are held by members of this Samaj. The Girastha Samaj members are mostly land owners cum sharecroppers who work in the fields. The Pherajis, a migrant lineage, considered themselves of high status, by virtue of a claim of descent from a highly religious lineage. But the group members are mostly cultivators and sharecroppers whom the villagers do not consider of high status.

The functions of a Samaj are conducted by a council of elders. These elders are known as matbors. Each Samaj has its informal council of elders who as the leaders of the Samaj exert enough influence over its members. (Chowdhury, 1982:45). There are two or three Matbors in a Samaj with the eldest usually considered the leader among them. Disputes are judged and settled through a judicial sitting known as the Shalish. When a dispute

arises, the parties call a Shalish of its Samaj members with the Matbors who then through discussion settle the disputes. Shalish is the hearing in which the grievances and arguments of the disputing parties are heard, discussed and settled.

The Matbors of the Samaj are usually economically strong in the Samaj and by virtue of his economic hold also have political or factional power, in the form of hold over economically dependent groups. The economic position of the Matbor of each of the Samaj in Birangaon, point towards this fact.

CHART - 5

Samaj Matbors and their Economic Position

<u>Same of Samaj Matbors with land group positions</u>	
Mia Samaj	Kader Matbor (R) Faizuddin Matbor (M)
Shoda Samaj	Shoda Matbor (M) Balai Matbor (M)
Nazai Samaj	Nazai Matbor (M) Nalu Matbor (M)
Pheraji Samaj	Khaimuddin Pheraji (M) Lalan Pheraji (M)
Misteri Samaj	Sunil Chandra Moulick (M) Sunil Chandra Sutradhar (M)
R - Rich	
M - Middle	

All the Matbors except one in the Mia Samaj belong to middle category households. Kader Matbor of the Mia Samaj belong to the rich group. Besides, among the rich group in the village, two persons play important leadership roles but are not called Matbors because they donot reside in the village itself. They are Kanu Mia and Shamsu Mia.

In most Shalish, the verdict of the Matbors and other economically and politically powerful persons in the village are accepted and carried out.

So far as participation in the Samaj affairs are concerned, women have no role to play. Women are members of the Samaj not as individuals but as members of their household, as daughter, wife or widow of the male household head. Traditionally, women's area of work and leisure is the domestic area. Men are producer and by virtue of that occupies the public realm. Women are not participants in the productive process and hence are dependent on men. Besides, the religious-cultural norm of seclusion from outside males, relegates women to a

backward and secondary position. Men are therefore, the gurdians for the social aspects of women's lives. In the case of marriage or divorce it is the male members of the household who call the Shalish meeting and it is the male members who discuss and decide matters on behalf of their female dependents.

Case of a Shalish

Here we present the case of a Shalish which not only point out the lack of female role in the Samaj and representation of her by male members but also the fact of the dominance of the economically powerful groups in the Samaj itself. This is the case which I refer to as that of Sonaullah Vs. Lalan Pheraji.

Sonaullah, a young middle category owner cum share-cropper from West Para married an exceptionally petty girl from a nearby village. Soon after the marriage, Lalan Pheraji, also a West Para, and a neighbour of Sonaullah, married with several children, fell for

Sonaullah's brides beauty and started to entice her to elope with him. When the girl refused to reciprocate, Lalan Pheraji threatened to take her away by force. Sometime later, he forced her to marry him, when she was on a visit to her parents village, Sonaullah called a Shalish of the Pheraji Samaj to which he belonged. Lalan was a Matbor of the Samaj and his cousin Khaimuddin Pheraji was the Chief Matbor. The Pheraji's are economically the most powerful kingroup in West Para, with many Girastha households being dependent on them for employment. The Shalish was held but no action was taken against Lalan Pheraji, instead his marriage to Sonaullah's wife was formalised. Sonaullah and a few of his relatives left the Pheraji Samaj as a protest against this unfair dealing. But that was all they could do against the powerful Pharajis. The Pheraji lineage is a migrant group who are not yet accepted by the other important lineages in the share of socio-political affairs in the village. The different households within this lineage have close social and economic relationships among themselves. Consequently all the households stick together in whatever matters are under taken. The result was, any possible support

for Sonaullah from among the Pheraji's was cancelled out. In this whole affair, the two most important persons - women whose lives were being dealt with and being changed, were not consulted or given a say in the matter. These two women were Sonaullah's wife and Lalan Pheraji's wife.

Samaj and Participation:

In most Shalish and disputes the interest of the Samaj leader or their dependents are given preference. We see, therefore, that even though, the concept of Samaj is based on equal participation of similar status people, there is in practice inequality. There is inequality between rich and powerful members and those who are economically dependent on them. And there is inequality between men and women. The hierarchy between powerful groups in the agrarian structure and the hierarchy between men and women that stems from their roles in the households, is reproduced in the social organization of Samaj. This form of organization reproduces the norm of female

dependency on men and the Samaj operates to preserve and perpetuate this value.

The splitting or the breakup of Samaj - particularly the Girastha Samaj as a result of dissatisfaction with the decision of the Samaj leaders indicate that the dependency of landpoor households have decreased to some extent. The opportunities, though limited, of alternate means of earning is to some extent, reducing dependency of agricultural labourers on land owners. The possibility of less dependence on traditional employers, are increasing the position of landpoor groups to defy their orders, the manifestation of which can be the Samaj splits and the organization/formation of new Samaj. But the scope is limited and the possibility of total removal of dependency is very remote. In the case of women, too, those from very poor households are being formed by economic necessity to break the norms of Purdah and mobility to go for traditional work in public places. The Samaj injunctions can do little to stop such women. But the trend to preserve norms of women's behaviour in the Uchu or Upper Samaj is very strong and this again becomes binding on

women of low status households. Thus we see that with economic changes, shifts in traditional Samaj organization are visible, but these seem to be minor shifts and dependent on other factors which again pull back to the traditional system.

Formal Institutions for Self-Government at Rural Level

The Union Parishad:

Bangladesh is administratively divided into the units of division, district, sub-division, thana, and union.¹ A union comprises of several villages. In 1980, the Gram Sarkar was introduced as a local self governing body at the village level.²

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1. In 1983, the units of administration has been reorganised into division, district, upa-zila and union. The sub-divisions are to be upgraded into districts and the thanas have been renamed as upa-zilas.
 2. The Gram Sarkar has later been abolished by the new martial law government.

The origin of institutions of local self-government in rural areas dates way back into the history of Bengal. The Village Panchayets were recorded to be operative in Bengal villages at time when local government was not even thought of in many parts of the sub-continent. However, local self-government in the modern sense was the creation of the British government in India. The British rulers founded the local governing bodies at the union, district and town levels. (Ahmed, 1979). Local governing bodies at a level closest to the village in Bengal, were first established in 1870 in the form of the Union Panchayets (Village Chowkidari Act, 1870), members of which were all nominated by the government. In 1885, the Union Committees were formed, which had part of its members elected by the local people. And from 1885 to 1919 when the Bengal Village Self-government Act was passed, the Committees and the Panchayets at the union level continued to exist side by side. The Union Board was created in 1919 and for the first time it became a fully elected body. During the Pakistan period the Basic Democracies Order in 1959 changed the Union Boards to Union

Councils and made the provision of nominating one third of the members. After the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign state, Union Council were adopted into Union Panchayets with the provision of both elected and nominated members. The Union Parishad however got the present form and name by the Local Government Ordinance of 1977, promulgated by the then Martial Law Government. By this order the composition of the Union Parishad includes ten elected male members and two nominated female members. The Union Parishad was until 1980, the lowest unit of local self-government in Bangladesh. In 1980, the increased emphasis on further decentralization of political authority with newly formulated concepts of local self-reliance at the grass-roots has led to the introduction of local councils at the village level. This is the Swanirvar Gram Sarkar.

Throughout this history of the origin and gradual development of local self-government institutions, changes can be observed in two major aspects in their membership and functions. In the 1970 reforms, the membership of Union Councils were extended to

include women members. And the second aspect is the gradual shift in the function of these bodies, from governing the villages to the serving of the interest of the ruling political party at the National political level. The important questions, therefore, are related to these two aspects. Has the change in the ascribed role of women in these local governing bodies led to participation of women in village affairs ? How do the Union Parishad operate in relation to traditional units, such as the Samaj ? Is it in conflict or does it function to serve the interest of the Samaj ? How does this aspect relate to the position of women, which is one of contradiction between traditional and ascribed roles ? In the case of Gram Sarkars too, how do these operate ?

A.U.P. consists of a Union of several villages while the Swanirvar Gram Sarker which is to operate side by side with the U.P., of one village only. Birangaon is one of the 25 villages of the Dighi Union in Manikganj thana in Dhaka District. The concept of Gram Sarker, therefore, is further decentralization of the administration unit.

When the British introduced the Union Boards, the prominent Hindu land holders close to the Zamindars, were dominant in the Boards. The history of Deghi Union Parishad reveals that it held its first offices at village Patrail, at a three miles distance from Birangaon, under the nominated presidentship of Shuresh Shaha. Suresh was the most powerful agent of the local Zamindar in the region. With the turn of the century, the Bengal political scene was marked by a Muslim revivalism, propagated and encouraged by the Muslim League Political Party. At this time, a big Pir (Muslim spiritual leader) in Gorpara, five miles from Birangaon, started to preach and mobilise muslims in the region to assert their rights and to resist Hindu landlords. Soon after, the partition of India took place, resulting in a mass exodus of Hindus from east Bengal to India and the return of large members of Muslims of East Bengal who had migrated to city centers in search of jobs or for education.

At this time, some returning muslim families, forcibly occupied or bought over the land of departing Hindu landowners. The fact that these were high status

lineage members, who could acquire education and hence go to the cities for a job or trading, added to their capability to capture the place vacated by departing or decaying Hindu lineages in the regional power structure. Their urban connections were a strong point in providing them with the scope to become the middle men between the rural masses and the National Political and economic scene, linkages which developed thereafter.

Contrary to the popular notion of Bengal villages as self operating, independent units, economic and social (kinship) links cut across villages in the region. Marriage between inter village lineages, is one important basis of this link. Economically land is owned and cultivated often by people not only in one village area but in several. The links are, therefore, present. These again create affiliations between people of similar interests in different villages and is one of the significant basis of factional groupings in the regional power game. The formal manifestation of this is in the U.P. - whose factional group leaders have their affiliated factional groups in different villages.

The three villages that have been playing a significant role in the policies of the U.P., since the independence of India, are Dautia, Susanda and Birangaon. In the Pakistan period the faction with Muslim League affiliations and blessings was dominant. Before this, power changed hands for a brief period over to a lineage from Susanda. After this an educated person from Bagjan, an adjacent village, was elected the chairman of the U.P., and having a strong hold over the members of the U.P., he manipulated and managed to establish the U.P. office at permanent locations in Birangaon. This was in the late 1960's. Sometime later the movement for the liberation of Bangladesh started bringing with it a new wave of political sentiment of the masses which was at that time reflected in the manifesto of the Awami League Party. With the political changes at the national level, the wind changed directions in the rural areas as well. The factional groups that were so long opposed to the established factions, now affiliated with the formal ruling party and they, in turn, were utilised by the newly powerful Awami League. This resulted in a change in the leadership in such

local bodies as the U.P. Pro-Awami League groups became important with support from the national party organization. At this time the seat of power of the Union Parishad turned towards Birangaon, by virtue of blessings of ^a dominant, Awami League supporter in the village who had influential links with the ruling party leaders of the region.

At this point, the economic changes on the countryside also played a significant role in shaping the political situation thereafter. The first half of the decade after the emergence of Bangladesh was marked by significant economic changes. The after-effects of war and the political instability at the center resulted in rapid economic degradation. With widespread poverty and discontent mounting, some important left oriented political parties gained prominence and established strong followings in this region. However, the subsequent drastic crushing of this movement in the form of mass killing and arrest of party organisers and workers put an end to this movement and with it the possibility of organising the landless by outside support was also contained.

The Dighi U.P. Office headquarters was established in Birangaon in 1970. Apart from the chairman there were 12 male members and two women members. The chairman and the male members are elected while the women members are nominated by the U.P. members with the consent of the elected member of parliament of the region. The chairman draws a salary of Tk.300.00 per month and the members Tk.200.00 per month each. There are six paid Chowkidars and one Dafader in the U.P. The jurisdiction of the U.P. covers three wards. The chairman, one male and one female member of the U.P. belong to Birangaon and the rest are from other villages in the Union. The chairman is from a rich category household and all the other members also belong to rich and middle groups.

The functions of the U.P. covers part of village level revenue collection, settlement of disputes, supervision of schools, Masjid etc., to monitoring incoming developmental projects etc. The U.P. has to have weekly meeting of its members. The women member's role is nominal in the U.P. None of the two female members are representative of the female villagers since they are not

elected. Belonging to rich holding category the two women are the carefully chosen candidates of the dominant group in the U.P.; they have been nominated for the explicit purpose of preserving the interest of this group of men. The result is that the women members do not even attend all the meetings. Their mobility being restricted, they do not much circulate in the villages in the Union. Coming from land owning groups, these women help both the purposes of safeguarding class interest as well as male interest of the dominant group.

The composition and function of the U.P., in the context of our village, shows that it incompromises both the hierarchy between dominant groups and their dependents and the non-participatory role of women that are characteristic of the Samaj. The U.P. is dominated by the economically powerful persons in the region. Thus, the Samaj leaders are again emerging as the formal leaders at the U.P. level. Opposing dominant groups come into prominence, because they are tapped and utilized by the new parties in power at the national level. The change therefore,

is not towards an egalitarian representation but that from one dominant, rich group to another. The landpoor groups in the village are economically and socially dependent on the landed and hence have to support their patrons who are in the leadership position.

Secondly, women's role in the Samaj organization gets duplicated in the U.P. Recognizing the need to broaden the participation base of formal institutions, a role for women has been incorporated in the U.P. But the ideology of women's non-involvement in public areas of life dominate, and the values emanating from it hinder her effective participation. Two women of 56 and 45 years of age were chosen by the chairman and his dominating supporters in the Parishad. The female member who hails from Birangaon is a distant relation of the then chairman, and the other, the wife of his friend from a nearby village. Both women know how to read and write only. Applications for nomination to female membership included several from graduate women who are known to be socially and politically active in the region. But the selection committee comprising

of the Union Parishad Chairman and his local political supporters, gave preference to these two women. These members, as a result, are handpicked "yes" people of the dominant group in the U.P. In addition to their obligation to their "masters" in the U.P. these women are bound by the norms of mobility and secondary role to men in public affairs, and as such has limited participation in the U.P. affairs. Thus, in the U.P. organization both the dominating/dependent hierarchy and the secondary role of women prevail.

The Gram Sarkar:

The Swanirvar Gram Sarkar is the most recent (1980) attempt by the National Government to decentralise administrative and judicial power down to the village level. The concept of the Swanirvar Gram Sarkar rose out of the experience of several recent experiments in initiating self-reliant developmental programmes from within the villages themselves. (The Swanirvar Programme of Comilla BARD, The Ulashi Jadunathpur project of Jessore). "The gram sarkar strategy has

been particularly designed to ensure "economic freedom" (Yunus, 1979 b:1) to the people of Bangladesh by making the full utilization of local resources, giving local solutions to local problems, creating local leadership and by utilizing human resources as the main basis of development. The gram sarkar (village government) will be the focal point of this strategy." (Chowdhury 1982:91).

The Union Parishad covers a population of 20,000 persons in several villages, it is elected on a ward basis which means that each and every village does not have representation and there is still competition among different villages to get a U.P. member or chairman elected. Gram Sarkar, on the other hand, cover a "maximum of 5,000 people - bigger villages are divided, while very small ones put together. The Gram Sarkar is to have its own financial base, for a four year term.

Broadly, the functions of the Gram Sarkar include procurement of paddy, (earlier U.P. job), to function as local courts (earlier U.P. and Samaj function), and it is expected that development planning and implementation at village level will be carried out by the Gram Sarkar.

(earlier a function of the U.P. or works committees of U.P.) Thus, many of the functions of the U.P. are duplicated in the Gram Sarker, at a further decentralised level -- the village. The areas of function of the two are not specifically demarcated, thus leaving a gap for the possible conflict and power rivalry between the two. The Gram Sarker do not have any provision for office of its own and the directives to upward communication are to be channeled via the U.P.

The main tasks of the Gram Sarker are to be:

1. To double production in all sectors and reach self-sufficient in food for Bangladesh;
2. To mobilise the village population towards a big effort in controlling the population growth;
3. To combat literacy and this very much in order to help improve family palnning;
4. To ensure law and order in the rural areas.

Apart from this the Gram Sarkars are also to control the village defence party, a rural semi-voluntary police

force which has been built up and trained lately. The creation of Gram Sarkar has also been viewed as an attempt on the part of the ruling party to extend its organizational structure to the grass roots level.

At the level of organization, the Gram Sarkar base has been further broadened by the provision of inclusion of landless members and two women members. The U.P. members are not eligible for the Gram Sarkar membership. The model for the creation of the G.S., is a peaceful selection, by consensus if possible, in which 12 members representing different interest groups in the village got appointed. One village Prodhan (Chief), one secretary, two youth representatives, two farmer representatives, two women, two representatives for the landless and two for crafts, fisherman and other occupation.

The G.S. in Birangaon was formed in a meeting held in the village center on 29th July, 1980. The U.P. which was directed by the Circle Officer (Dev.) to initiate the G.S., was officially represented by the Chairman and

one member who was also a Matbor of Samaj. The number of villagers present there were 195 men and 15 women. The Gram Prodhan, a young member of the defunct Shar-bahara Party, has strong links with the Circle Officer and Thana level officers at Manikganj. The initiative was more on his part than on the U.P., which is in the process of change in its leadership. With the approaching U.P. elections, the existing leadership in the U.P. are less stable with on the opposition party becoming reorganized at regional levels -- particularly during the last presidential election.

The strong function in the U.P. so long was the group which was affiliated more towards the Awami League and other opposition parties. With the victory of the ruling party (B.N.P.)¹ and its Members of Parliament from Susunda in the last parliamentary election the balance in favour of the minority faction in the U.P. The newly elected Gram Prodhan is an emerging leader of

1. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party under the leadership of President Ziaur Rahman was then party in power in the Government.

the youth in the village. During the post liberation period he was an active organiser/leader of the Sharbahara Party. He was arrested by the ruling Awami League Leader of the region in collaboration with a village faction, and had served a jail term for four years, being released under the general amnesty announced by the then President. Since then, this young man has been actively involved at village level social welfare activities by organising the educating youth group. Both the major factional groups in the village have been collaborating with him and conceding to his demand of official support by the U.P., because they recognised his potential to organise the youth community. With the formulation of the G.S. plan. This young man got the opportunity to materialise his dreams of participating officially in village affairs. The ruling party organisers and their supporting counter-parts at the Thana level, on the other hand, recognising his potential at organization, wanted to draw him in to the system by encouraging and supporting him to take the lead at the G.S. formation at Birangaon.

The interest of both the party coincided and this young man became the Gram Prodhan and choose his Sarkar members giving careful attention to all interests in the village. Consequently, the Gram Sarkar was formed without any conflict. A total of 210 out of a population of 930 of Birangaon attended the meeting. The U.P. representatives put up no objection to the selection. One female U.P. member was unofficially present. The female members and four male members of the G.S. were not present in this meeting. Of these only one, a Mathor of an third factional group in the village was reluctant to join the G.S. but later consented.

None of the choosen members were informed or asked consent prior to their selection.

Table - 28

Land holding categories of Gram Sarkar Members in Birangaon

Land Groups	No. of G.S. Members
Landless	04 (2 females)
Marginal	01
Middle	03
Rich	04 (three members and Gram Prodhan)
Total:	12

Composition of the Gram Sarker Members:

The following are the age and social status, landholding size, income, occupation, education, Para Samaj, factional and other organizational affiliation of the Gram Sarkar members.

Age:

Two members are in age group - 25 and 30 years. The Gram Prodhan and three male members are between 30 and 35 years of age, two are between 40 and 45 and the remaining are between 50 and 60. One female member is 43 years old and the other 54. Out of the 12 members, 7 are below 45 years of age.

Education:

The Gram Prodhan is a commerce graduate and one member is an arts graduate, one is an intermediate, one member is an intermediate student, a male and a female member has read up to class four and one male and a female member read upto class three. The rest of the members

four in number are non-literate. Apart from these four non-literate members, there are two graduate, with intermediate education and 4 others has read upto class three or four and can read and write and understand Bengali.

Landholding Size:

According to their landholding size, the Gram Prodhan and two other members fall into the rich farmer category, with land size of 14 bigha or above. The members can be classified into middle peasant with 5 - 13 bigha of land, one fall into the small peasant category (1-4 bigha) and the rest, that is four members are landless.

Occupation:

Out of the 12 members, seven are from owner cultivating household, one is from an owner non-cultivating households, with the member holding job in Dhaka, one is a rickshaw-puller who also owns one rickshaw, one Mohila (female)

member, who is the window head of her household works as a BRAC organiser, one member is the wife of retired railway clerk who now works as the Mullah of the Masjid, and one member only is a wage labour.*

Income:

The income given here is the total income of the member's household and not his personal income along. The income of the rich category members between Tk.25,000 and Tk.33,000 P.A., the middle group between the figures of Tk.15,000 and Tk.18,000 P.A., one small peasant category member has income of Tk.20,000 P.A. and the landless member's income varies from Tk.2,000 to Tk.6,000 P.A.

*Here the main occupation or occupations of the household of the members is taken, because in some cases the Gram Sarker member is not the head of the household.

It has to be mentioned here that the income of a member's household should not be taken as an indication of his resource position. The number of family members and their age are important factors that has to be considered.

Family Size and Status:

The Gram Prodhan and two members (one Mohila) belong to high status, non-Girastha households, seven members (one Mohila) belong to middle status, Girastha households, and two landless members belong to low status Kamla households. The highest family size of a member's household is 16 and the lowest three.

Para, Samaj, factional position of Gram Sarkar Member's Households:

As has been shown in the earlier chapters, there are five Paras, five Samaj and three major factions that are indentifiable in this village. The Gram Prodhan and five members belong to the East Para (the Chairman

of the U.P. is also a resident of this Para), two members are from west Para (one Mohila member), two from Peraji Para and two from Karchabadha.

None are represented from the Kha Para and the Mistri (Hindu) Para directly, but the interest of both are represented in the form of factional support in the other Para Groups.

Out of the five Samaj grouping, the four prominent ones are represented by the Gram Sarker members, six members (including the Gram Prodhan and one Mohila member) belong to the Samaj known by its leader's name. Kader, three are from the Samaj known as the Bolai Samaj two are from Nazai Samaj and one from Pheraji Samaj. The Samaj and Para groups in the village are contained in the three big factional groups. These are the east Para faction, the Karchabadha -- West Para faction, and the Pheraji faction and their supporters.

The East Para faction has six members in the Gram Sarker (Gram Prodhan and one Mohila from the Kader Samaj and one from Bolai Samaj).

The Karchabadha and west Para faction - has two Gram Sarker members from Bolai Samaj and two from Nazai's. The Pheraji faction, has one member from the eraji faction.

Political Party affiliations of Gram Sarker Members:

The Gram Prodhan and two members, Mozaffar and Eman Ali are ex-members of the Sharbahara Political Party which was active in this region in the post liberation period. Eman Ali and the Gram Prodhan had served jail terms under the Awami League Government. None of the other members are known to have been directly involved in any political party. Nalu Matbor, a member of the Gram Sarker, though himself is not directly involved in any political party, is close to an important absentee landowner Kanu Mia of the village, who was "Powerful" at one time because of his known connections with important leaders of the Awami League. Nalu Matbor looks after all property of this Kanu Mia and represents him in all important village matters.

The west Para Pheraji faction were close supporters of the late chairman of the U.P. Anis Khan, who belonged to the village adjacent to this Para. Anis, a known Awami League, was killed by the underground activities of the Sharbahara party in 1973. Kanu Mia was a good friend of Anis Khan.

The east Para faction and the Karchabadha west Para faction were in opposition to Anis Khan, but were not linked to any political party. Many young people from these factional groups were members of the Sharbahara party. Akkas, (the present Gram Prodhan) a party leader in this region had linkage with the party bases outside the village. It was during the period before this, when he had held a Government job in the Manikganj election office, that he had created a good deal of his connections with government officials.

The Gram Prodhan is an active member of village socio-political-economic-cultural activities. He is in a leadership position among the educating and educated youth of the village. Nalu Mathor and Lalan Pheraji hold leadership places among their respective Samaj members.

Role of Female Members in the Gram Sarkar

Out of the four landless members, two are the Mohila members. Parishkar Bibi, 54, is the widow of a Boyati Phokir (a religious singer) who travelled from place to place. During this last years he become blind and Parishkar had to accompany him to places where he went to sing. This gave her the morality and the acceptance for it among the villagers. Her age is also favourable for her, and because of this she has access to most houses in the village and is the linkage between women of different households within the village and outside. Whatever any programme for women is considered she is the first choice as the most eligible to organize. She is the BRAC organiser of women's co-operation. Her background and mobility within and outside the village as well as her economic position, was important in the choice or her selection as member of the Gram Sarkar. Her family status is low and is a Girastha household.

Jahanara Begum, the second woman member of the Gram Sarkar on the other hand, comes from a high status

non-Girastha family, which has hardly any economic means left. Her husband, a retired railway supervisor, settled in his wife's village and invested his savings in a business partnership with a locally powerful person. The business failed and he lost his money. He now earns a little by serving as the Mullah of the village Masjid. His wife, because of her high family status cannot work as a labourer in other's home nor can she go for a skill-oriented job. She is a neighbour of the Gram Prodhan and a little before the establishment of the Gram Sarkar, Jahanara tried to organise some women of this para to form a cooperative. Akkas was involved in this, but the plan did not work out because of lack of funds. When the Gram Sarkar was started, Akkas, the Gram Prodhan chose her as one of the Mohila members. Of the other two landless members of the Gram Sarkar one is a rickshawpuller, who also owns a rickshaw and the second is a wage labourer. Both have the background of having close relation with other young man in organising cultural functions and sports events in the village.

Activities of Gram Sarkar:

Since its conception, the G.S. had performed very few functions. One land dispute has been settled in a preliminary way, and a second one is pending. The G.S., so far, has not received any instructions from the Govt. in other areas of its functions. During the last presidential elections, held in Nov.1981, no direct help was sought from the G.S. In the pre-election period, however, the G.P. was requested by the Thana level officers to participate in the meetings and programme launching ceremonies of development projects by the Govt. officials -- such as Canal digging, Irrigation, Co-operatives. In these the G.P.'s. presence was indicative of his support of the programmes undertaken by the Govt. The U.P. members on the otherhand, took a more direct part. In several meetings, the acting chairman and the U.P. members pledged their support to Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the ruling party and requested the villagers to cast their votes in favour of the its candidates. The U.P. acting Chairman also took an active part in distributing leaflets and posters of the B.N.P.

The Samaj organization is based on the concept of equality of its members. But the membership and functions indicate that there are dominating and dependent groups in the Samaj. The leaders of Samaj, Matbors, are economically dominant in the village agrarian structure. Non-land owner groups are dependant on them for employment and support. The dependents include kins and non-kins. By virtue of their resource strength, the Matbors and leaders can acquire education and with which can get urban jobs and hence connections. The landpoor can not acquire these tools for enabling them to scale the ladder of upward social mobility, and hence has to depend on their patrons for the conduct of any affair that is related to the urban or formal areas of life. Thus, the economic dependency leads to dependency in non-economic areas of life. Then again by virtue of their patronage, the village leader draws support from the clients in their drive for political power at the village level formal institutions.

In these institution, such as the U.P. and G.S., the dominant groups predominate. Thus, this mean that no

change has been affected in power structure at the rural levels. Evidence brought forth by the Birangaon case, indicates, that changes are apparent - but whether they are the desired ones or not, remains an open question. The developments in the political scene at the national level has had its impact on the power structure at grass roots. With each consequent change of power at the center, the power shifted from group to group at the village level. The significant feature of these changes is that it shifted from one economically dominant group to another, without any broadening of the bases to include middle and land-poor groups. Thus the dominance of economically powerful groups mainly lineages, at the Samaj organisation, percolated in the formal institutions of the Gram Sarkar. The second feature of the Samaj organization that was pointed out was the non-participation of women. The pre-dominant ideology in the rural areas is that of female dependence on men for their socio-economic needs. Men are in productive activities and hence dominate public areas of life. Women are in reproductive and related roles within the domestic

world. They are bearers of the prestige earned by their male gurdian who are involved in productive work. This prestige has to be preserved through the behaviour of the women. Women's mobility is restricted to areas that do not expose them to non-kin male members. Thus the ideology of relegation of women to the domestic area prevails. Women are not considered capable of conducting public affairs. Consequently, the Samaj organization holds no place for female participation. Roles for women in the U.P. & G.S. have been ascribed in the formulation of the models. But because of the pre-dominance of the existing ideology of women's behavioral norms, they can not participate fully. They are given a decorative role. The men in these organizations continue to conduct all affairs on behalf of women. So, the concept of female dependency and delimitation of female areas of interest to domestic affairs is carried over to the U.P. and G.S.

Developmental Projects and Women:

During the later part of the Pakistan regime, efforts at rural development had been started. The recognition of the urgent need for revitalization of the rural economy increased manifold these attempts since the inception of Bangladesh.

Broadly, the projects and programmes that are going on in the area can be classified into:

1. Governmental
2. Non-governmental,
- a n d
3. International Agency sponsored.

All these, initiated by different sources work within the single framework of development. Yet the approach and focus of each differ. Most governmental projects focus on agricultural production through inputs in the form of credit and materials. In such projects no attempt is made to restructure the agricultural sector.

The non-governmental programmes mainly supply credit for small scale income generating activities. Small scale attempts have been made by some of these initiators to create awareness among the populace by including functional education and mobilization process as part of their economic programmes.

The third kind of ongoing developmental projects are those sponsored by the international aid-giving agencies. The main focus of these is to create employment opportunities. For example, the road construction and pond excavation projects under the food-for-work programmes provide such opportunities. It gives some emphasis on production as well.

A discussion of these projects initiated by different agencies will give an idea about their working, participation of the villagers, men and women, and general impact of these on the different classes of villagers and on women in particular.

The Food For Work Projects:

The food-for work scheme is sponsored by foreign aid giving agencies, which donate food-grains namely wheat which the Governmental agencies utilise by undertaking developmental work in which the wheat is given as remuneration. There were two food for work projects in Birangaon during the study period. One was a road construction scheme, and the other was for pond excavation. In both schemes women from the village and outside participated. The projects were:

1. Dighi Patrial Road Construction Project:

According to the project plan, the total earth to be cut was 22,80,960 cft. and the total allocation of wheat was 3190 maunds. The rate of payment adopted was three seers of rice for every 70 cft. of earth cut. There was a project committee of twelve members of whom only one was a women, a member of the U.P. All the other members were men, who are either the chairman and member of the Union Parishad or local Matbors,

belonging to both middle and rich and category.

In this road construction three 'gangs' of 20 women in each, and five 'gangs' of men participated.

2. The Dighi Union Parishad Pond Excavation Project:

This was the second project under the food-for work scheme in Birangaon. The total area to be covered in this project was, 15,1200 cft. of land. Total allocation of wheat was 2282 maunds and the rate of payment was three seers of wheat for every 70 cft. of earth cut.

All 12 members of this project committee were chairman and members of the U.P., and local elites, who belong to rich and medium land holding categories. The workers in this project comprised of eight 'gangs' of 20 to 15 women in each and six male gangs of 30 to 40 members in each. One gang of 15 women was from Birangaon. In both these projects men and women worked side by side in their separate 'gangs'.

Types of Female Workers in The Food For Work Projects:

Most of the women working under the food work projects are either widows or women who has been deserted by their husbands and have small children to support.

A few married women worked in their husband's gangs in cases where a man is the leader of both male and female groups. Many of the women had no one at home to look after the children. So they brought them along to the work site. They rested the infants on the cold, wet, earth around the work site for the six hours that they worked. Other older children loitered in the dust around the sites.

All women earth cutters belong to the lowest economic status. As their families were gradually pushed out of land, women joined the ranks of the male members in looking for work to support their families. Men took advantage of whatever other opportunities for income earning was available, like rickshawpulling, small trade or carrying loads in boats, petty trading etc. Women of this group were also in an economic position

where they needed to earn but they, unlike the men, have few opportunities at hand. Most available opportunities were male oriented, demanding male skills. Women's traditional sources of income from rice husking were taken away by the introduction of rice mills nearby. Work in other houses were limited as more and more poor women were joining the rank of their sisters looking for work.

Besides, as already mentioned, only low status women are prepared to participate in such male oriented work as earth cutting. Women of higher social status, even if they are just as poor are prevented by the existing norms to join in such work. Many high status families have become economically weak but they are still bound by the values relating to that class.

Here I give the case study of one household to illustrate this fact.

Abdur Shobhan is a retired Railway Inspector of over 70 years of age. His second wife, Puspa, is no more than 40. Abdur Shobhan, on retirement from service had

invested all his savings and pension money in a business but was soon cheated out of it by his partner, a local man. He is too old to do any other work, yet has a family of five members, his wife, one teenage son, one son of eleven and one of seven years of age. The family had no source of income.

Seeing the pitiable and helpless condition of the family some of the village leaders and the wife's mother who is a nominated member of the Union Parishad arranged to give Abdur Shobhan the job of giving the prayer call at the village masjid five times a day in return for Taka 100 per month. But the salary being a kind of donation is not paid regularly. The family lives on practically nothing -- the children managed to get half a meal a day, if any, in the neighbouring relatives houses. The man, being religious, would get donations of food from people's houses sometimes, and the wife would go without food for days. When the Food for Work project came to the village, many women from the lowest social class joined in earth cutting projects. Puspa's family's economic plight was as desperate as the other

women's but her social status was a bar to work. On the other hand she had no skills or education to go for work that is considered suitable for her status. Through much persuasion and request of some village leaders who were at one time the clients of this family, a job was arranged for her in the Food for Work project. She was to supervise the workers, both men and women, by taking their attendance thrice a day in the work sites. For this she had to walk five to six miles a day. In return she got about half a maund of wheat per week. The family could have at least a meal a day. After a month, though, she was asked by one of the local leaders, who was a distant relation of hers to discontinue the work. The reason was, it did not look nice for such a close relation of his to do such public and lowly work. He promised to find her a more suitable and prestigious job. But till today, the women got no other job, nor any help from her status-conscious relation. The plight of the family is unbearable -- the woman is trapped between the contradicting and conflicting demands of social status and economic desperation. As a last resort,

A. Shoban's wife has sent away two of her sons, the teenager to work for a meal-a-day in a distant cousin's small factory in Dhaka and the eleven year old boy to work in his uncle's irrigated land in another village. She is contemplating to give the small son of seven to an orphanage.

Apart from the specific problem of status consideration in going for such work as earth cutting, there are other aspects which effect women's participation:

Seasonality of Work:

The seasonal work of earth cutting under the Food For Work Programmes goes on for only four or five months of the dry season. The women workers are mostly unemployed otherwise, or work for very little in other's houses. But most need to earn desperately as they are destitutes, having no male support, or insufficient male support. Once the season is over, these women have only very limited opportunities to find other work. By contrast, men go back to their primary

occupation of agricultural labourers and/or take up other options which are open to them.

Organization of Work:

The work under Food For Work is organised on the basis of 'gangs' of 15 to 20 persons with a leader in each. The Sarder, i.e. the gang leader recruits the members of his gang--mainly his kins and neighbours. The women gang leader is also chosen by a man gang leader, who then delegates the responsibility of recruiting other members to her. Usually, the women gang leader does not understand the measurement of earth cut and the rates of payment. She has to depend on a male gang leader for negotiating with the officials when payment is made.

Differential Rate for Work:

Most men who worked in the food for work project got the opportunity to earn double incomes during the dry

season i.e., earth-cutting in the mornings and agricultural labour in the afternoons. For women the work in Food For Work represented the sole source of income. They worked half the day and that is all they earned. Besides, they also have to do the housework. Since earth-cutting is only seasonal, once the rains start they are unemployed again.

Birangaon women, employed in FFW projects received only half the daily prescribed wage. The fixing of rates of payment depends on the amount of earth cut, the distance to which it has to be carried etc. This is a complicated process of calculation and the workers mostly have to depend on the supervisors to make the measurement. On the average, the rate of payment for women comes to three seers of wheat per day and four and half seers for men. Although, the women who get less than her entitlement accept it, in order to satisfy her extreme need even though she is aware of the unfairness that is being adopted. Through their participation in this kind of organised work, these women are gradually becoming aware of their rights.

Under the existing system of male dominance they are unable to articulate it. Yet, a process of mobilisation is at work among women involved in this project.

In the BRAC programmes (discussion follows), as well, the membership of women in the co-operatives as members, are helping to create confidence in themselves and in the value of their capabilities. It also helps to establish the fact of their independent ability to work in the eyes of their male counterparts in the family. This would lead to a growing understanding between the sexes within the family and thus enhances women's status in the household and outside. They gain scope for more participation in the household decision making process. Thus, the informal process of mobilisation has far reaching effects on the development of consciousness among women as well as men.

There were two on-going FFW programmes during the spell of my field work. One was a road construction project and the other union pond project, two separate committees were formed to conduct the work of these projects.

60% of the project members were composed of the U.P. Chairman and members including the female members. The rest were Mathors and Samaj leaders. All members were from the middle and rich landholding groups. The committee was vested with the responsibilities of reorganising the project, supervision of the work and the payments of the grains that were donated by aid giving agencies. Payment was on weekly basis but was always delayed. Women received half of that they earned, the men managed to get the full share even if it was delayed. The striking feature about the female workers observed in the FPW work in the village is that they worked in organised group along with male members in a job and place of work traditionally marked as male. Striking instances of co-operation among the women were apparent. The elderly women and these who were sick were given light work while the strenuous work such as cutting the earth and carrying it to another place were done by the younger women. The looking after of infants that accompanied the female workers to the worksite was shared by mutual cooperation. Yet, when the questions of demanding their rightfull

share in the payment came up the women could not organise into a group for action. No articulation was apparent in this respect. Several reasons can be pointed out.

One is that women's work and income are generally considered secondary and supplementary, a notion that has been internalised by the women as well. The demand for payment seems to them to be the right of men alone. Secondly, the work opportunity for needy is limited and the danger of losing even the meagre grains in such a scarce situation is too big a risk for the women to take. EFW provides only seasonally work and the guarantee of the same for the next dry season is absent. So whatever little the women get, is better than none at all.

Third, is the social value constraints. Earth cutting is a male job which women undertake to do because there is economic need and no other options are open for them. The social norms in operation are against such public work. This kind of work is looked down upon and in the conduct of social life these women face problems of

criticisms and non-cooperation. The prevailing values and the resultant difficulties of these women are always a consideration for them to remain within possible limits.

BRAC Co-operatives:

Besides, the FFW programme, a second scheme by BRAC involved women in the village. It was started in the village in 1977. Two functional educational groups were organized -- one of 42 males and one of 30 females. The members were from marginal and landless families which BRAC from its survey decided were the 'Disadvantaged Homogeneous' groups in the village. A matriculate primary school teacher and a women with high school education were trained for giving functional education courses as outlined by BRAC. With the help of BRAC organisers, classes were held in the evenings. After a course of 60 lessens was completed, a male and a female co-operative were formed with 36 men and 21 women members from the functional education groups.

The aim of BRAC in organising the functional education was the "concientization" of the volunteers to create a feeling of awareness of common problems and then on the basis of this, to encourage group undertaking though the formation of cooperatives. BRAC provided the initial credit requirements. But since the definition of disadvantaged groups of landless destitute women, sharecroppers weavers and potters included both landless and small farmers, differences of opinion started to show when the question of credit and its use arose. BRAC's initiation to the village was through a young primary school teacher who was an active member of the defunct Sharbahara Party. He belongs to a rich land owning household. Most of the women organisers were his relations and close neighbours. Ainuddin, this primary school teacher belong to the factional group dominating west and Karchabadha para and consists mainly of Girastha households. This is a rival faction of the east para non-cultivating lineages. BRAC entered the village through the help of Ainuddin. Consequently, when conflict regarding selection of members for the co-op arose. BRAC workers sided with Ainuddin and the east para enthusiasts

withdrew. There are no east para landless and marginal representation in the BRAC co-operatives. Most of the functional educational group members are the neighbours and kinsman of Ainuddin. The pond renovation and fish cultivation projects that were undertaken by the co-operatives were located in Karchabadha. Thus, the factional affiliations and interests of the persons through whom BRAC entered the village cancelled out its objective of reaching all disadvantaged landless and poor groups. BRAC's contact with Ainuddin resulted in its concentration on west Para Karchabadha only. The landless and poor of other Paras were left out. Besides, since Ainuddin's family members also get a place in the co-operatives the objectives of limiting its membership to only landless and marginal groups was also defeated.

Secondly because of Ainuddin's involvement in the co-operatives, people other than landless and poor also got a place in the co-operatives, who ultimately came to dominate in its activities. Instead of going for joint undertaking in groups, members started to show interest in using the loans for individual

purposes. Conflict arose in the process of which the whole purpose of instilling a feeling of common awareness was lost. In the women's co-operative, the aims of functional education were not achieved. Most women after taking the credit invest it in their families income earning activities. Apart from these, women have specific problems such as difficulty in meeting regularly as different women have different kinds of work at various times. Thus, BRAC's aim of 'organising co-operatives for mutual self help activities' is lost.

Irrigation Projects:

At present there are two irrigation projects in Birangaon jointly with two adjacent villages. Under the irrigation projects, the Agricultural Development Corporation rents out deep water pumps for irrigation at a rate of Tk.1200/- per annum and a security deposit of Tk.300/-. Projects are planned and implemented by committees formed from within the village.

These committees are composed of a Chairman, a Manager, who is the liason between the ADC and the project in the

village, and has overall responsibility, a secretary, an 'ideal' farmer - one reputed to produce good harvests in past years, and nine to eleven members. A budget is made by the committee as to how much the total expenditure budgeted share are sold among members as well as outsiders. When the crop is harvested, one fourth of it goes to the shareholders, and the rest to the land-holders after the production cost (fuel for the pumps, preparation of land etc.) is met.

The committee on an average meets three to four times a month. There are two paid workers in each project, who are paid from the project fund - a 'driver' (pay Tk.325/-P.M.) of the pumps who waters the land twice a day, and a 'Chowkider' (pay Tk.300/-P.M.) whose duty is to ensure that all land blocks get equal share of water, and the crops are not stolen. He also helps in the distribution of the crops.

Irri Project

The initiation for the first irrigation programme in Birangaon was taken in 1974, by a group of college boys. The linkage with the Government extension service was created by the project committee's chairman. Kanu Mia of Kha Para, a dominant socio-political non-resident villagers, a bank officer in the city, he has prospered well in business as well. He is known to the village to have important connections in the Manikganj area. The Secretary of the Committee was Arshad a youth from West Para. The ideal farmer was ownershare cropper from West Para. The nine original members were mainly from the western block of the village west para, Kha Para and Karchabadha, and the area brought under irrigation was the cultivable land of this block.

The budget of Tk.30,000/- was made, but there was not much response from villagers to buy share. Since it was a new kind of venture, people were reluctant to participate. Ultimately, Kanu Mia, who managed to get the pump from the Government extension service,

gave the required amount as loan to the project. In 1977, the pump was installed and the first cultivation undertaken. It did not produce a good harvest and capital invested was not fully recovered. The Committee decided to go for a crop in 1977-1978 in order to overcome the losses incurred during the first year. By this time other villagers with land joined in and the second harvest brought good return.

Irri Project II:

A second deep tubeOwell was sunk on the eastern block of cultivable land of Birangaon in 1978. The initiative for this was taken by a brother of the chairman of the U.P. A primary school teacher of East Para, was the chairman of this committee, and two sharecropper cultivators were selected as 'ideal' farmer. The total budget was fixed at Tk.31,000/- and sufficient shares were sold. The first season of this project, had a sufficient enough harvest to pay off all share loan.

Under this system of Governmental sponsored agricultural projects, only those people in the village who have strong political links and connections can initiate and participate. Since their 'connections' are essential for the getting of loans of the tube-wells, their say in such decisions as to where the pumps are to be sunk are final. Consequently, most land under irrigation belongs to them and their kin and friends.

Thus, under such systems of Governmental agricultural programmes only a certain category of the villagers can participate. It is reaching only one section of the village population. Besides, in none of the two irrigation projects is there a women member, as most land are in the name of men. Here again, is a project and one initiated directly by the Government which left no scope for the women to participate. Although, in this project, direct participation is limited to a certain class of men only, it indirectly effects the lower land holding categories as well. When more crops a year are produced in the irrigated areas, it generates more employment. Because of increase in produce, demand for labour is increased. Thus many

marginal and landless cultivators get scope for work throughout the year.

It has been seen that the middle and rich households get the major benefit of irrigational facilities. In these rich households, normally landless women are employed for domestic work which includes processing of food grains. Thus with increase in yield through irrigation, more work is generated in the rich houses. As a result, the poor women get some additional work in other seasons as well. Recently, however, a big paddy processing complex which includes power driven implements have been established in a nearby haat area. The bulk of the crop produced in the irrigation schemes are processed in this complex. The result is that poor women are again being deprived of the opportunity to earn when the yield improves.

Primary Milk Producers Co-operative Society:

The Eastern Milk Producers Co-operative Society Limited (Milk Vita) was established in 1974 with the aim of supplying milk to the urban centres by collecting it

from the 'Milk belts' of the country-namely Manikganj, Tangail, Faridpur and Pabna. The Co-operative Society's other aim was to ensure a fair and stable price to the rural milk producers. There are 31 Co-operatives in Manikganj. The Co-operative Society in Birangaon and its adjacent village started in February 1974. The Co-operative milk collection centre and the cattle treatment centres are in Birangaon.

The Co-operative Society is run by a committee of one Chairman and five members who are elected from among the Society members. A share in the society costs Tk.10/- and an admission fee of Tk.1/- and a saving of Tk.1/- are the requirement for admission. Any villager having milking cow can become a member and membership is cancelled only if one fails to give at least 150 days milk in a year to the society. The price for the milk is fixed after the fat content is tested on the spot. The usual rates ranging from Tk.2.50 to Tk.4.50 per seer of milk is fair compared to the local standards.

In addition to a fair price and an ensured market right in the village the other incentive offered to the milk

producers, is free treatment of cattle twice a week, when the co-operative veterinary visits the village. Besides, the extension worker of the Co-operative hold meetings to discuss problems and to give advice. The number of members up to January 1979 was 144, but there were no women members extended.

Thus, this system of taking delivery of the produce in the village itself, encouraged many families to join the Co-operative. Besides, it provided the opportunity to get good price for small amounts of milk which if sold to private wholesale buyers would bring much less. The benefit of cattle treatment is an added incentive.

Inspite of all this, there are certain loopholes in the working of the Co-operative. The extension worker and the doctors' visits are not regular. Besides, there is non-provision for the doctors visit in case of emergency. As a minimum of 150 of days of supplying milk to the co-operative is required for the continuation of membership, it is only logical to think that farmer with a minimum of two milking cows can be the members. Out of 300 households in the two villages, there are only 144 members.

As already mentioned, women do most of the work relating to the care of cattle at home. It is women who would be more receptive to advice regarding the care of cattle and would be women who would benefit more if problems relating to cattle were discussed with them. Yet the co-operative has no women member.

Thus, like most other projects, participation is limited to certain groups of people and also limited to men. No scope is offered for women to join in.

Rickshawpuller's Co-operative:

During the dry season, rickshawpulling becomes a source of income of a group of unemployed villagers. The recent construction of 'kutchra' roads between Birangaon and the interior villages has led to an increase of plying of rickshaws between villages and rickshaw pulling as a source of income. The rickshaw pullers, because of their daily contacts

with Manikganj are well aware of developments in the urban centre. In Birangaon, there are 15 rickshaw pullers, of whom eight own rickshaws as well. In the early part of this year, the rickshaw pullers, with the help of an educated boy from East Para formed a co-operative. It started with seven members, each agreeing to pay a minimum of Tk.0.25 to a common fund each day. The co-operative will use the fund to buy rickshaws to be rented out to new members. These will belong to the Co-operative and when a member saves enough to cover the price of a rickshaw, it would become his. This Co-operative, is a purely private one and has not been registered yet, even then, membership is good and the members enthusiastic about it.

Since women do not drive rickshaws nor own any in Birangaon, this effort at self help from among the villagers themselves leaves women out. Yet, this new source of income earning has impact on women in a different way. Rickshaw pulling unlike agricultural labour, takes the men away from the homes for the entire day. This places the women in their households in total charge for the whole day - having to deal with all

problems and decision making single handed. It creates a new role for the women in the decision making process of their households.

Bangladesh Tobacco Leaf Collection Depot and The
Jute Research Institute:

Besides, these on-going projects in Birangaon itself, the establishment of the tobacco collection depot and the Jute Research Institute in 1978 close to Manikganj has had important impact on the village and its economy. Both these are encouraging cash cropping of tobacco and jute. Originally tobacco was produced mainly for home consumption, but incentives from the collection depot in the form of advice, fair prices, and the taking of delivery from markets nearby, are turning people towards these crops. Because of the same reasons, jute is becoming a popular crop in the area. Further, the introduction of irrigation for paddy cultivation has increased yields. Consequently, farmers are encouraged to go for cash cropping in the non-irrigated land.

Once again, all these can be availed mainly by cultivators who have sufficient amount of land. The landless get the opportunity for work. Women have no direct participation in these. But like in the irrigation project, have more work to do, as a result of generation of employment by higher yields.

The Governmental initiated projects that are reaching Birangaon are the irrigation co-operative projects are the jute and tobacco research and extension services. One important aspects in the system of delivery of goods in these projects is that these can be availed only by those who have the ability of initiating and manipulating from within the village. This is possible only where there are political linkages with the Government agencies and the higher Government centres. Thus, only villagers who have the economic stability and job/business linkages to create such contacts are able to initiate such programmes. Consequently, these projects came under their patronage and make them and their kins and followers the major beneficiaries. For example, the two deep tube-wells under the irrigation scheme, where sunk at points where

most land belong to the landed and dominant villagers - those who have the political contact to manipulate the incoming projects. The participants of such projects are the people who have land and are politically dominant as well. The sharecroppers and the landless labourers, the classes most in need - have no scope for such participation. For them, the projects only offer the opportunity for more work in a situation where employment is scarce and competitive.

The incentives for cash cropping of jute and tobacco are having the same kind of effects. Only people who have sufficient amount of land are going in for such investments. The second aspect of the Government initiated projects is that they are solely male oriented. They offer skills only for the male sector of the population. Consequently, the women remain uninvolved. Their traditional role within the family as dependents and their work within the households continue. The inability of projects to offer skills that are female oriented, further strengthens the dependency of women on their male kinsmen.

The international aid agency sponsored projects, which in the case of Birangaon, are the Food for Work Projects of earth cutting for road construction and pond excavation are channalised to the village through the Union Parishad. The U.P. controls and implements these programmes. The committees that have been formed to undertake this responsibility are comprised of the U.P. Chairman, members and prominent villagers. The two nominated U.P. women members also have their names in the committees. But since they are nominated by the U.P. Chairman and male members have a very negative role in the U.P. as well as in the project committees.

Since the purpose of these projects is mainly to generate income, they offer scope for work to the landless group of people. Women also participate in these projects. Most of these women belong to families that have reached the last stage of economic desperation. Many are widows or are deserted and who instead of being supported by their families, have themselves to support their children and other dependents. Women in

none of the social and economic groups can participate in such projects, as they offer male skills which even the higher status women cannot take up. Besides, these offer only seasonal employment. While men take up other work once the season is over, women have no more scope for the utilization of such skills. So they have to go back to their original skills or land up in social problems, in trying to go for other male oriented work in the village or outside.

The approach of non-governmental projects, like that of BRAC, to go directly to their target groups is in a better position to reach all sections of the villagers. BRAC has organised two co-operatives, one for men having 40 members and the other for women having 21 members. The prerequisite for membership to the co-operatives, which gives credit, was the attendance of a functional education course of 60 lessons. With a population of over 900 persons, the majority of whom are landless and marginal cultivators, the number of members in the co-operatives show that all needy persons did not fall within BRAC's 'target group' criterion. Besides,

the aim of the functional education to create an awareness of their common economic and social problems has failed to have its impact, as most members take it as a prerequisite to their co-operative membership and eligibility to get loans. Even, the alphabets they learn in the course are soon foregotten.

The women who receive credit use it up in the family's capital investments rather than on separate income generating work by themselves. Most women use their credits on paddy processing business or trading in old clothes - which is also the family's major income earning activity. Besides, the women depend on men to go to the market to procure the raw materials and to sell the finished products, so their dependency remains. Thus even projects which directly involve women fail to remove their dependency on men and their families.

The other non-governmental project in Birangaon - the milk producer's co-operative has no female members, although theoretically there is no bar to female

membership. Yet, most of the work of cattle caring i.e., feeding, water supply, in certain cases even milking is done by women within the households. As the member household of the co-operative take up to procuring and maintaining more cows, the work-load on the women increases. Thus, this kind of projects are not directly involving women in their programmes, though they are indirectly affecting the women adversely. The result, again, is that the traditional norm of their dependency on men and the family remains, which their work burden increases.

Brickfield:

The establishment of brickfields in the area around Birangaon is another effort which has affected women without involving them in the project itself. Several brickfields around the village draws away a large portion of landless cultivators in the dry season. In certain cases, entire families move to the field site for the season, in others, only the men go away.

In cases where the men go away, the family has to depend on kins and neighbours for help and advice during **his** absence.

This kind of absence of male head of households in an important phenomenon in the changing situation in Birangaon. It has caused a new kind of role playing for the women in the household. Sometimes, she has to go under the dependence of a kin male or in other cases, she has to take over the responsibilities and decision makings as head of households.

This brief discussion on the various types of projects that are going on in Birangaon brings out several aspects. The first important factor that comes out is that the skills that are generated by the projects are mostly male oriented.

Consequently, the bulk of the projects offer, generate and promote male skills. Even the few instances where attempt is made to promote female skills (i.e. BRAC), women have to depend on male family member for the procurement and sale of products. In other words, they

do not create situations where such female skills can be promoted independently by the women themselves. There are incentives for women to work in earthcutting projects but this again is a male skill. As a result it conflicts with the existing values and norms which strictly demarcates male/female area of work. It creates a lot of social problems for women as well as make such work out of which for women of all social class.

The major drawback of the projects, therefore, is the overlooking of scope for female participation and the consequent emphasis on male oriented skills. The result is the scope for participation of women among the lower landholding categories in the incoming projects are limited.

For women in higher landholding groups, the developmental efforts have a different kind of impact. The skills that these women develop as a result of infrastructural facilitations, get no chance for utilization. These become problematic. Girls, getting educated, for example, go away from villages either in search of suitable jobs, or by getting married. There is no

scope for utilization of their acquired skills in the rural areas.

The developmental projects that came into Birangaon included those specifically for women. The governmental projects are channelled through the U.P. which organises works committees for the conduct of projects. The memberships and functions of the committees that has been formed in the village indicate that these are dominated and control by the leaders of the U.P. and their supportive leaders of the Samaj. The result was preservation of interest of these groups. The women U.P. members were included in the committee but their service was a name only, the decisions and control remained vested in the hands of the male members.

In some cases of non-governmental projects (BRAC) attempt was made to approach the villagers directly. The case studies of such projects in the village show that these attempts could not overcome the nature of factionalism in the village. These got up in the factional politics of the Samaj leaders. The result

was that the benefits could be derived only by the nominant groups. The landpoor groups are dependent on these leaders who also has the urban connections to manipulate incoming resources in their favour. The breakdown of Samaj in recent times indicate the possibility of lessening of dependence of such groups but the interest of the land poor are varied - and the organizational capabilities from within are neutralised by factional interest of the leaders. The alternate sources of employment by the landpoor are limited keeping in limit their possibilities of breaking from traditional bonds with the strong groups.

The possibility of organising the landpoor by outside help in the form of political party activity was crushed by the dominating parties. The ideological leanings of its local members were washed out by the subsequent absorption of these youth in the existing political party system. The traditional hold of economically and socially dominant group on the village power structure continues, resulting in the preservation traditional of norms and values relating to the role of women.

CHAPTER - VIICONCLUSION : IDEOLOGY, WOMEN AND THE DYNAMICS

The objective of this study, as mentioned earlier is to identify the role and position of women in the changing rural situation in Bangladesh. The basic questions that the enquiry starts with is, therefore, what the role of women in rural Bangladesh is, and how are socio-economic-political changes affecting it.

In Bangladesh there is a strict division of labour between men and women. Men are the producers and women, the reproducers. The area of activity for men is the productive and the public domain while for women it is in the domestic arena. Since the work of men are public and in production, it is valued in cash terms or economically. Since women's **work**, is in the private world of the household and domestic it is not considered of such value. Secondly, men are, ideologically conceptualized as superior and responsible for the women. Women's behaviour symbolises the prestige earned by men.

The behaviour of women is conditioned not only by the role she has in the economy but also by the ideological implications of such roles, which creates values for female activities. Women's expected behaviour, therefore, is within the realm of the domestic and reproductive. As reproducers women are considered sexually vulnerable. The non-participation of women in productive activities and the connotations of prestige symbolized in female adherence to norms of behaviour, leads to a hierarchical ordering of superior/subordinate relationships between men and women. This relationship is again reflected in the practice of the institutions of marriage, divorce and inheritance. The ideological notions of female dependency on men that stem from her ascribed role in the productive process, creates values which lead to a secondary and dependent position for women in these institutional practices.

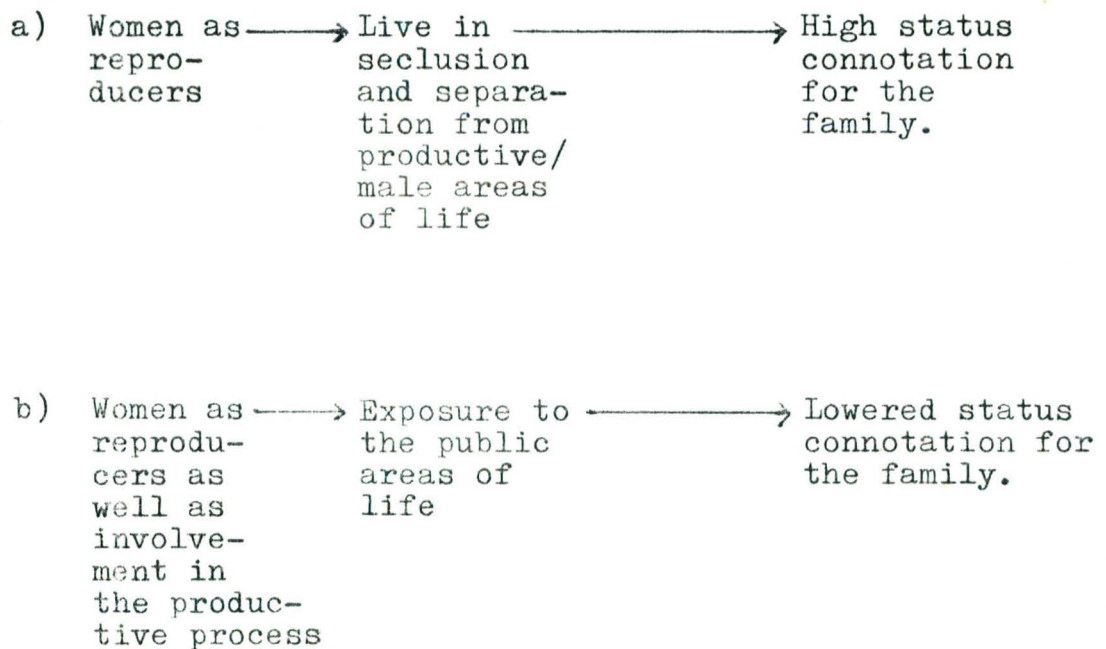
Men being considered the ones related to the public world, are dominant in the traditional social organization, such as the Samaj. This predominance of ideology of male superiority and dependency of women on men

for the conduct of all public affairs, is carried over to the local level institutions, such as the Union Parishad and the Gram Sarkar. We have also seen the ideological leanings in favour of male participation and the dependency of women that percolates in to the developmental efforts at the village level. The consequence is, once again, a reproduction of values attached to female roles which becomes a bar to her effective participation in developmental programmes, even when these are specially designed for women.

Then again, we have seen that the ideology of division of labour on gender lines ascribes a role for women irrespective of economic or class considerations. There is a sexual division of labour leading to non-participation of women in productive activities and alienation from the public domains, resulting in Purdah practices and dependency of women on men for the satisfaction of their economic and social necessities of life.

In diagrammatic form it can be shown as:

DIAGRAM - 2



The changes in the economic situation in recent years in Bangladesh, has resulted in a new trend of female participation in the work force - that is, work in non-traditional activities outside the household's domestic realm. Recent thought on women's status and

position stress the point that women's role in the economic areas is related to their position in other aspects of their life, that is, in socio-political areas. Now, what I have tried to look into in this study is how the new trends of female economic activity is affecting their existing role in society. In other words, what effect does the new role of women in non-traditional economic work have on their traditional role in socio-political affairs? How is the changes affecting the values attached to her work? The questions asked are which women are doing what and why?

First, I have tried to look at which category women do what with respect to household resources, in the area of land ownership and in the area of income generative activities.

Secondly, I have tried to answer the questions of why women do what they do, or in other words what non-economic factors affect their behaviour by looking at the role of women in the social institutions of marriage/divorce inheritance and kinship which point

towards the ideological connotations. The role of women in the two important resource sources of households, that is, landownership and income earning from other economic activities has been discussed in the context of the data from Birangaon. Now let us look at the findings from the data to see how this ideological concepts about women operate in the area of households' resources and the institutions.

The situation of women in the resource of households is related to two areas. (a) the ownership of land and (b) income earning activities. In the area of ownership of land, the ideal is, women generally speaking, do not own land in their names. This is firstly because they are dependent on men for the fulfilment of their economic need and so do not involve in such affairs. It is men's responsibility to deal with the resource of households. Secondly, women's area of work is within the household, so she is removed from productive activities which, in a basically agrarian system, is in the field outside the periphery of the household. The result is, in cases where women own land by virtue of inheritance, the control over

the returns of such land gets delegated to their male gurdians, because women have to depend on them for its operation. The ownership of resource, in the form of land, gives little scope for women to control the return from such ownership.

In certain cases of landpoor houses, younger women have come to own land by virtue of inheritance from their kins or land was purchased in their name by their kins. In such cases, women have to depend on their male kins for the operation of land. But in certain instances they have retained effective control over it. Reasons for this has been found in the data on particular instances. The need or demand for women as family labour is valued in the household and has been found to be an important factor in giving them a say in decisions related to their self-owned land. Secondly, the strength of support, economic and political, of their own kinsmen act as a safeguard to their effective participation in such decisions.

Data from Birangaon indicates that there are attempts at investing self earned or inherited cash in land in

their own names by women particularly in the landpoor categories. In spite of the ideological and practical constraints for women's effective operation and control of such land, the awareness about the importance of ownership of land as a strong support for their position within the family is prevailing among the economically hard up households. Special features of the household to which these women belong and their personal characteristics that has been mentioned before, are of course, factors on which this kind of awareness of women depend. For example, it has also been identified that the kin network position is weak in such households and that they are of simple compositions. The women who were found to be playing such a role are either young and middle aged widows with young children and no adult male to depend on or young wives from simple households with low economic status. The situation of women that has been affected in recent years as the result of economic instability of households and related factors, can be said to have led to such an awareness among women in the village.

Traditionally, women have little control of owned land, because they do not involve in the cultivation of land. Recent exposition of women's insecure position in the absence of male support have led to the increasing awareness among the women of the need for women to participate in productive areas of work. This is particularly marked among women in landpoor households. But the resource limitation of households where women are involved in making land related decisions and the persisting values relating to the non-involvement of women in male oriented work becomes a bar to an increase in women's involvement in this area of resources.

In the area of activity or work of women there is a division of male/female work and area of work. The ideology of female role of reproduction is in operation. The norm is of female participation in domestic work only and the restriction of her mobility to the seclusion of the homestead. This leads to a categorisation of women's work on the basis of the kind of work and its place both physically and symbolically. Work is

categorised as outside or in the public area and inside or domestic work. Work thus, categorised is ranked according to the status loss connotations depending on the requirement of its deviation from the situation stated. Non-domestic or outside work is derogatory and hence has a loss of status connotation. Work within the domestic sphere in the seclusion of the household has no such status loss implications. Both outside and inside work has a status ranking. This ranking is based on the degree of (a) deviation from the norms of mobility and (b) the connotations of need for the women's work to supplant male income of the households, which reflects inability of the fulfilment of family needs by male income. Thus, in work within the domestic sphere, non-income generating work of women has higher status than that for income generation. In the area of outside work women's employment in other household's domestic activities has less status loss implication than that in public, traditionally non-female work, such as, earthcutting and brickfield employments. The areas of work of village women can be put into the following groups (Codes are used to simplify discussion).

Codes: Domestic work that expose women to the
D (E) public (such as fetching water, gathering
and making fuel, washing clothes in
public water sources etc.).

D (I): Domestic work inside the household (that
is, cooking, cleaning, vegetable growing,
child care, poultry raising and cattle care
etc.).

UNPAID: Unpaid post harvest food grain processing
D(I) work inside the households (such as parboiling
of paddy, drying, husking, windowing, seed
preservation, etc.).

PAID-HS: High status remunerative work outside (such
as jobs requiring skills like education and
training jobs in F.P. project etc.).

PAID-LS: Low status work outside the homestead (such
as domestic work in other household).

PAID-VLS: Very low status work outside (such as public place work of earthcutting or in brickfields).

PAID-D(I): Remunerative work inside the household (such as handicrafts, weaving, paddy processing, petty trading in old clothes etc.).

This list gives a pattern of what work women perform in the village and the value attached to each. The pattern of work in the various category households in the village reflects the operation of such values. The following is the pattern of different kind of work performed by various category of women.

D (I): Is done by all women to some extent. D(E) is done by landless and marginal but not by middle and surplus. PAID-LS and PAID-VLS by marginal and landless.

UNPAID-D(I): Is not done by landless (such UNPAID-D(I) that they do are for the middle and surplus and falls within PAID-LS). Proportionately UNPAID-D(I) is highest among the middle group. Marginal women also participate.

PAID-D(I) : Is done mostly by the marginal, some by the middle, PAID-HS is done by rich household women.

This pattern of work of women indicate that not all women do the same kind of work. There are certain factors involved in the decision for women's work. The landless are going for PAID-LS and PAID-VLS. While the marginal do PAID-LS and PAID-D(I). The middle category women mainly involve in D(I) and some PAID-D(I). The rich women decide to go for HS jobs only. The facts that are considered important in the decision of these women are the need for supplementing income and the values attached to female work. The work that require a loss of status for the women and her family

is avoided in cases where the resource position of the family permit. Unless the economic necessity of households are absolutely critical, women are prevented from going for low status work.

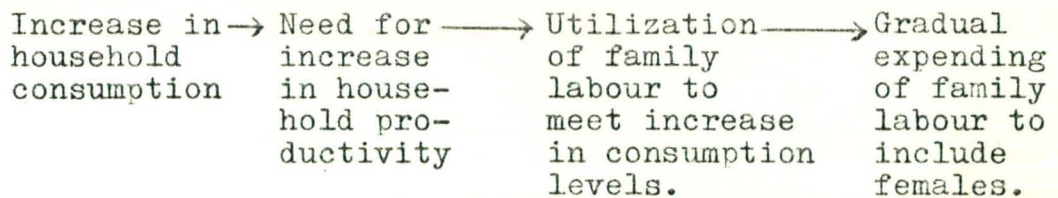
Among the very poor, households where there is no male support, women are forced to act as sole income earners for the family. In cases where women are from a higher age group, the problem of social sanctions are less than that for younger women. In the poor households, when economic necessity requires additional income it is earned by expending all possible labour from the family. In some cases women within the vulnerable age group refrain from participation or attempt to work in disguised ways. Thus, for women labourers the life cycle and age are important in their decisions to enter the work force. In cases where after a period of crisis, male support is regained in the form of better employment of husband or son or of a son growing up to join the income earning activities, women stop working outside and revert to their original role within the household.

In the area of income earning work of women, data shows that women from higher income households go for higher status, education-oriented work which enhances the status of their households. This strengthens the position of these households in setting and maintaining traditional norms of female behaviour and hence values relating to them. On the other hand, the shift in the role of women in income earning work in the lower categories, is in the area of low status work in non-traditional areas of activity. The consequence is that the position of these women are being reduced, while the values remain and are strengthened by their continuation in the upper categories. So although the economic role of women among the landpoor has changed and the need for more participation has increased, the perpetuation of traditional norms of work continue as a major constraint. In addition, the lack of availability of increasing amount of work also places women in a disadvantageous situation.

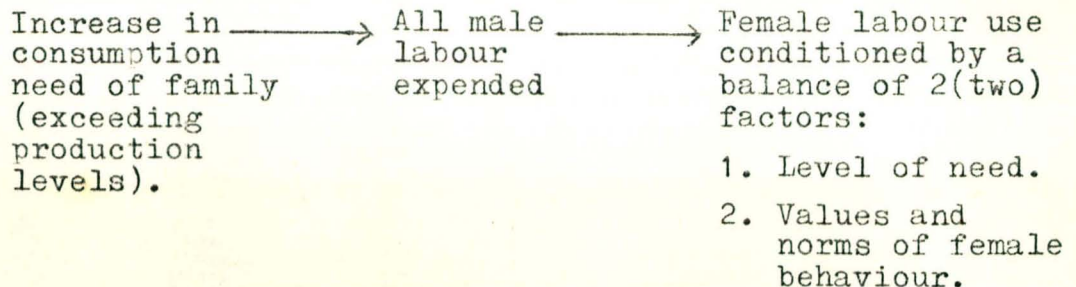
I have made an attempt to relate the increasing rate of female participation in the work force to the growing pauperization in terms of Chayanov's consumer/labour

balance model of the family farm households. This model is based on the principle that the consumption need of household balances the family labour production. When consumption increases, the production has to be increased or productivity of family labour raised in order to meet a balance. Family labour has to be expended, which should gradually lead to the tapping of the family's female labour resources. In diagram form it can be shown as:

DIAGRAMS-3 & 4



In the case of the village, the diagram extension would be:



In the case of Birangaon, we have seen that when the consumption of households exceed the production level, first attempts are to extend all possible male labour, then when the need for further productivity arises, women only in the older age group are utilised. When the family position improve, the female labour are withdrawn. Thus, the increasing rate of female participation in the labour force can not be fully analysed in terms of the principle of Chayanov's model. The operation of the ideology of division of labour, leads to the ideology of female non-participation in productive work. The age and position of the female family labour are factors which play an important role in the decisions of poor household women to go for outside work. In the case of rural women of Bangladesh the values related to female work is an addition to the economic considerations of family need.

From our data relating to both ownership of resources and participation in income generative work by women, there is an indication that ideological notions of women's role leads to non-participation of women in

these areas. The alienation from resources, constraint women's participation in household decisions. Among resource scarce households, women's economic roles are changing to some extent. We have earlier discussed the statistics which indicate a growth in the number of poor households and also an increase in female participation in income generating activities. Here the question that arise is how are such changes affecting the values attached to female activities and hence roles ? Are values being reset or are the combined operation of ideology and resource constraints within the households prevent the resetting of values. We have to look into how this dependent position of women that stem from their non-participatory role in household resources, is reflected in the systems of marriage dowry, inheritance. In the changing situation, how is the new roles for women affecting their position in these social institutions? The ideology of female dependency is reflected in the role and functions of the social institutions of kinship, marriage, dowry and inheritance. In these the right of participation of women are unequal and limited. The notions

behind such rights is the value attached to female roles in the household. In the area of marriage and divorce the right of consent by women gets delegated to their male guardians. Because of women's non participatory roles in the productive process but as important participants in part of the post harvest work that is done within the domestic realm, they are valued as family labour. With economic degradation of households the need for this is reduced with the consequence that their value as family labour is diminished. Yet women's work outside is considered degrading. This leads to a situation where women's existing value as family worker is reduced, but the work outside the domestic that can be taken up, does not replace the value that they lose as family labourers.

Impact of this can be observed in the area of marriage and dowry among the landpoor groups. It has led not only to a shift from the practice of bride price to dowry payments but also to a gradual increase in

dowry payments. The traditional role of women in domestic work provided them with a value as family labour. With economic degradation this role of women has been removed in many landpoor households. At the same time, the little income earning work that is available for women are in public areas and male oriented. Thus, while, work that gives a value to women in the family is reduced, no alternative is available for absorbing them in status oriented work. And no new value is being attached to the new types of work that are being offered. The reduction of women's value gets projected in the practice of marriage and divorce in the form of shift from brideprice to dowry payments. Thus, changes in economic role of women without corresponding changes in the attitudes and values of women's work, is adversely affecting their position in the social institutions as well.

In inheritance, too, women are given an unequal right which is often foregone. Women have to depend on male kins for the fulfilment of their economic necessities and their work area is limited to the domestic. Hence

the control of their inherited property is either not taken or is delegated to male kins on whom they are dependent. So even, though the roles of women in the productive activities are changing, the effect of these on the social practices are either negative or adverse. How and why is this happening and in what ways is it sustained and perpetuated ? I have attempted to locate the bases of such value setting in the formal and informal socio-political organisations in the village.

The ideology of female non-participation in economic areas of life gets percolated to the social organisation of Samaj and the politico-administrative units of the Union Parishad and the Gram Sarkar. Women have a negative role in the Samaj, which is controlled by men of dominating factions in the village. Similarly the organization and functions of Union Parishad and Gram Sarkar indicate a situation of non-role playing by women. In the first place, the provision of nomination of female members as against the election of men is

based on the assumption of secondary, dependent position of women. Secondly, the functions that are allocated to female members relate to women's affairs, implying that it is based on the notion of limitation of female role to the domestic and reproductive areas only.

In the developmental projects for women, the emerging economic needs have been taken into consideration. The ideological aspects of women's behavioral norms have been overlooked. Developmental projects aimed at women cater mostly to providing women with income earning work within the household. This provides small incomes which supplement family income to some extent. Women remain within households and this forces them to depend on men for the external affairs of their lives, such as the purchase of raw materials and the sale of products. Projects which offer income, often leads to a status loss for women, such as earth-cutting. Besides the stigma attached to this kind of work places women in a disadvantageous position in the Samaj and hence reduces her ability to bargain. Because of the norms of female non-involvement in

public affairs, her participation in such work is regulated and conducted by her male kins or Samaj leaders.

The situation prevailing in the village indicates that although economic desperation is forcing women at the grass roots to play a non-traditional role in household resources from one of non-participation to one of participation, very little shift is taking place at the value or ideological levels. Under the circumstances, the changed economic needs and the persisting values create a contradictory situation for women's positions. The traditional norms of women's role and behaviour persist through the economically and socially dominant group in the agrarian structure. This ideology is maintained and perpetuated through the institutional frame.

A popular trend of thought on female status and position as upheld in the model constructed by Boserup, is that the role of woman is determined by her position in the resources. Findings from our study indicate that such an assumption is lacking in certain aspects

and can not lead to complete analysis of the situation of women. This is the aspect of ideology that persist behind the ascription and the perpetuation of such values through the operation of the institutions. According to the principles of the model set forth by Boserup, the status and position of women in the system of kinship and political organizations are related to their role in the resource or productive process. In areas of agriculture where women participate in production their value is high in the family. This is reflected in the marriage and kinship systems where the women's value are set.

In the case of our agrarian system, women are valued as family labour but the work of women are not counted as productive. This is because, the sexual division of labour not only demarcates work on male/female lines, but also the area of work. Strict regulation of norms of restricted mobility for women are part of the division of work on sexual lines. These stem from the ideological notion of men, the bread earner and the female the dependent. The norms of seclusion for women

arise out of this female dependency notion. Women's behaviour is symbolic of the capabilities of men to provide for them. Thus, in the case of Bangladesh, rural women worker's mobility are bound by norms of behaviour. Participation in productive work within the household is valued but outside work is degrading.

None of the studies on rural women in Bangladesh have attempted to look at the changing role of women from this point of view. Most of the studies, have through the identification of women's socio-economic and political role, established that their existing roles are either (a) non-recognised (as in the economic sphere) or that they have a limited or dependent role (as in the socio-political spheres) to play. General studies on women in an international level are mostly based on data related to situations prevailing in Africa or in Asian countries where notions of sexual division of labour are not based on physical and symbolic seclusion of women. A major conclusion of such studies (Boserup, 1970) is that women's role and position in socio-political areas of life is dependent on their

positive or negative role in economic activities.

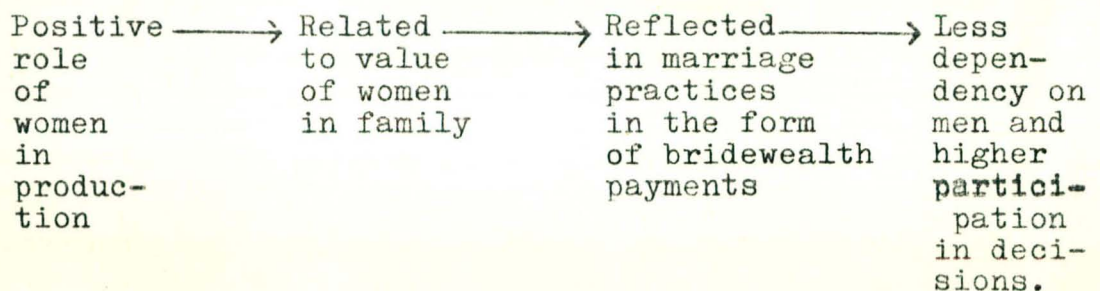
That is, a positive role in productive/economic sphere of families is co-related to a higher status in such social institutions as kinship, marriage, inheritance.

Most studies in Bangladesh so far have based their enquiries on such an assumption. The traditional work of women is in the domestic areas of the social scene and hence it goes un-recognised, as having^{no} productive/economic value. Thus, many of the pioneering studies on women in Bangladesh concentrated on exposing such work of women as directly linked to the economic base of the family. The contention is that since these work are unrecognised as having economic value, women's status and position also remain low. Consequently, the remedy suggested is to recognise these as valuable contribution to the families' resources. In cases where poverty has deprived women of such traditional work, productive work should be provided, so that women can retain their status and position as important contributors to their families' economic base. None of the studies, however, have taken into consideration the

ideology that has been established in relation to notions of women's work and behaviour and how through the practices of traditional institutions this value system has been maintained and perpetuated.

Let us look at these assumptions in the context of the model of Boserup and see how far it relates to the Bangladeshi situation as projected in the data from Birangaon. In Boserup's model the sequence of interrelationship of factors of women's economic role and position in socio-political organization is as follows:

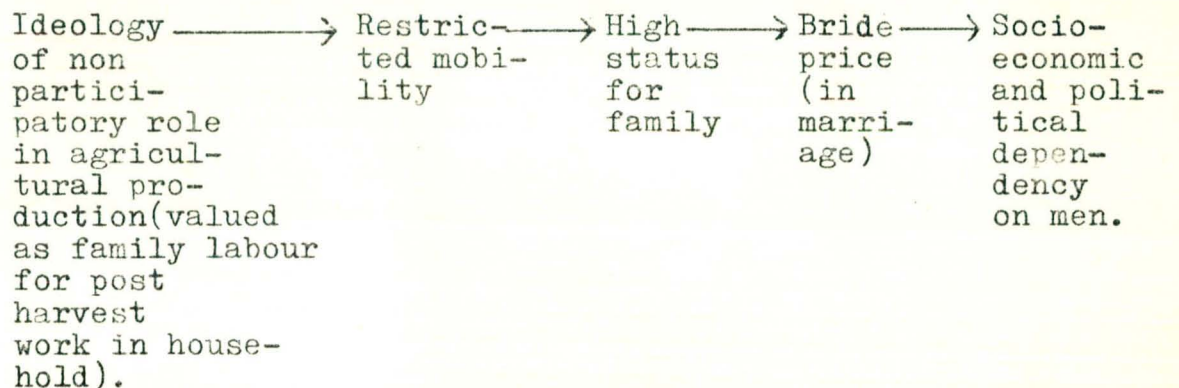
DIAGRAM - 5



In the context of the Bangladesh agrarian structure, the model has to be extended in the following manner:

DIAGRAM - 6

The Ideal

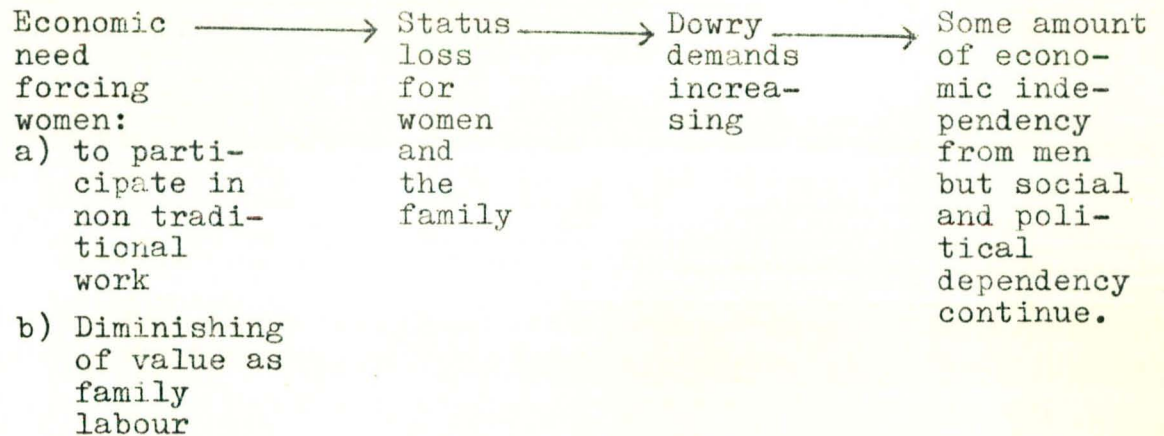


In our village do not participate in agricultural production in the public area. Their role is in the productive work within the household. They are valued as family labour, and their restriction within the domestic realm is symbolic of their family status. With economic deterioration, women are forced to work outside, and this reduces their status. At the same time, the diminished demands for their value as family

labour affects their status, and their position in kinship also worsens.

DIAGRAM - 7

The Reality



In a social set up like that of Bangladesh the constraints are, therefore, not only material but also ideological. Our discussion of the relevant data in this light show that very little change is taking place at the value level. With changes in material situations,

women are being forced to deviate from traditional roles, but no corresponding resetting of values is taking place to sustain their changed in roles.

So far the on-going developmental projects in Birangaon offer very few opportunities for women to participate. The few that do, are either unsuitable for women of all status under the prevailing value structure, or has no use in the village. Projects for women aim mostly to provide them with income earning work within the households. This provides only marginal addition to their incomes. Women remain within households and this forces them to depend on men for the external aspects of their work, such as procurement of raw materials and the sale of products. On the other hand, the schemes such as the government food for work projects, offer work in a traditionally male area of activity, hence leading to a loss of status for women. Because of women's abstainence from public affairs, this kind of work requires them to depend on male kins and Samaj leaders which again places them in a disadvantageous position in the Samaj and hence reduces their ability to bargain or assert their rights.

Thus, a good idea about the material and value constraints and how they operate at each level of the social order can go a long way to help in the formulation of projects acceptable to women. Only then can we hope to be successful in drawing women into the developmental process.

Implications of Findings for Action Programmes:

Such analysis of women's position in the dynamic situation of Birangaon also throw light on important aspects of female awareness and aspirations, which should be taken into consideration in formulating action programmes for women. Women in Birangaon, particularly in the landpoor sections, are aware of the importance of the need for female participation and contribution to household resources. In better economic situations women internalised their ascribed roles and the ability of the economic structure sustained such roles. Today, however, economic pressures on the family and the

general exposition during and after the liberation war, of women's helplessness without male support, have made women acutely aware of their circumstances. This is strongly reflected in the aspirations and attitudes of women towards the roles of their daughters. Women are aware of the need and are willing to participate in income earning activities, but with the existing social-political structure, the ideological constraints remain. Projects aimed at rural women can play an important role, not only by providing credit for promoting income generative activities but also at the same time in attempting to help women reset values related to their roles. For this the availability of supportive services to women is a must. Support to uphold and protect women's rights at the village level is essential. Without such backing and support, the change in the roles of women in the existing socio-political set-up is difficult to visualise. The enactment of anti-dowry laws, for example, in the national parliament is of not much help to women in the village - who in the village is to

uphold and implement such laws ? The case studies of the Union Parishad and the Gram Sarkar gives very little indication of the possibility of women members' role in this respect. Projects in the village can, in addition to answering to the needs for credit can play a big role in providing support to women in the above aspects. Only projects with an approach of this kind can hope to provide affective help to poor rural women caught in the all engulfing contradiction of economic need and binding ideology.

G L O S S A R Y

Agrahayan	Eight month of the Bengali Calendar (October-November)
Aman	Seasonal paddy crop.
Ashar	Third Bengali Month (July).
Aus	Seasonal paddy crop
Bhodro	Gentry.
Bigha	Land measurement, approximately one third of an acre.
Birangaon	Barren village
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
Chaitali	Winter crop of pulses.
Chaitra	Last month in Bengali Calendar (March).
Chowkidar	Village police, a government paid servant.
Circle Officer	Government Officer at thana level of administration.
Darwan	Guard in offices or godowns.

District	Administrative unit.
Fakir	Literal; beggar, religious person.
Falgun	Eleventh month of the Bengali Calendar (February)
Gharjami	Brideroom who comes to reside in his father-in-laws house permanently.
Girastha	Cultivator
Gram Prodhan	Village Chief or Headman.
Gram Sarkar	Village Government
Gushti	Lineage
Haat	Village market
Hanafi	A sect in muslim religion
Jatra	Drama performed by villagers.
Kabin Nama	Marriage contract
Kamla	Labourer
Kartic	Seventh Bengali Month (September).
Kazi	Marriage Registrar.

Kutchra road	Non-concretes dirt road
Madrasa	School of Islamic studies.
Maghi	Winter crop named after Bengali month Magh when it is harvested.
Matbar	Samaj Leader
Mohor	Dowry or agreed dowry . to be paid to the brides' family.
Maund	A measure equivalent to 82 pounds.
Meyedukha	Looking up ceremony of would be brides.
Nichu	Low status
Para	Part of the village (ward).
Pir	Muslim spiritual leader
Purdah	Veil - System of seclusion of muslim women from outsiders.
Quran	Muslim Holy Book
Rakhal	Resident servant who works in the fields as well as looks after the agricultural implement s .

Rayot	Tenant
Salami	Token payment
Samaj	Village society
Sardar	Leader
Seer	Measure equivalent to two pounds.
Shalish	Samaj or village court.
Shraban	Fourth month of the Bengali Calendar
Sub-division	Administrative unit.
Taka	Monetary unit
Thana	Police Station, also administrative unit .
Tola	Weight for measuring gold or silver.
Uchu	High status.
Union	Administrative unit
Union Parishad	Elected administrative council at union level.
Zamindar	Landlord

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