The Nuances of Transformation

A Study on the Rural Society of Bangladesh

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Fieldwork, Churali, Mymensingh

Foreword

As a professor, when the opportunity to take this course came about, I thought of two main goals- to familiarise the students with on-field research and to widen the breadth of research into Bangladesh's rural landscape. Though my professional research experience is not in rural society, I grew up in Bangladesh, which is historically rural. I think that there is a misconception about rural Bangladeshi society among the general public. When someone imagines rural society, they imagine traditional people and society, poor infrastructure and backwards mindsets in people. There is also a general belief that people from rural societies do not want change.

However, these days these ideas are changing. From this tour that I took with my students, we saw that rural people are also modern, they are connected with technology, with mobile phones and the internet. Rural people, at least of this generation, are also going to school, and getting an education. The economy and the market are also changing, particularly the use of technology in agriculture and the market's connectedness with the city and regional markets. From that point of view, in the last decade, so many changes have been happening in our rural society. I observed that people's mindsets are also changing, in regards to educating their children and gender dimensions. This is why the definition of rural society that we have all these years is changing.

I believe that it is important for students to go out of the classroom to the field, and this generation of students has rarely, if ever, visited the villages- most of their knowledge comes from the media which can have misinformation. Outside of the academic perspective, I also wanted the students to have the experience of talking and interacting with a very different group of people so that they are better able to challenge the theories and literature available. Lastly, because the course is funded by Science Shop, I also wanted to come up with something unique as a result of the funding, to show the students' experience of the visit.

Although the amount of time spent in the villages was inadequate for a full, longitudinal research, it has created an opportunity to begin more extensive research. However, the prime concern for me was to familiarise the students with rural society, and for them to spend time with rural people; from that context, I believe that the goal was achieved. According to the feedback from my students, I think that they are enthusiastic and interested in learning more about rural society, and now they can better challenge the literature they have studied- so, these expectations have been fulfilled.

I saw that there is a lack of research on contemporary rural society, so I thought that the students' papers published as a curated research report would be a good contribution to the field and the literature surrounding rural society. There are many

Government and non-government agencies, both national and international, that are working in rural areas. Therefore, there are resources, but these resources are tough to access. There are class perspectives and political perspectives, power dynamics, and how such changes are occurring due to government interventions. However, one of the missing perspectives is researching how these changes affect the people on the ground. Therefore, access to resources, politics and government intervention are three areas of concern within rural society and there is still much to do in order to improve the lives of rural people.

Besides these, there are other fundamental topics, such as land ownership, the contribution of farmers and the culture of rural Bangladesh. The way the community would treat you depends on your ownership of land, therefore, it is important to see ownership patterns and gender perspectives- women's access to land and their inheritance, etc. Farmers have become a marginalised group due to the intervention of large and multinational organisations. The stories of small and medium farmers can become lost if we do not focus on them. Understanding rural culture and values is very important because there are still big problems in Bangladesh such as child marriage. It is important to understand the values of the people in the village, their mindset and how they think to get to the root of such issues. Thus, even if the list of topics covered in this report is not exhaustive, it is still a good list to grasp the gist.

I believe that it is very simple, anyone who wants to study rural society should do so from their own interest. If they feel that their roots are in the Bangladeshi villages and that they should focus their career on doing good for these people who look to us with the hope that we can alleviate their hardships- then it is possible for someone to conduct an in-depth comprehensive study on rural society and development. So, I wanted to introduce my students to the topic as a whole. From here on, they have the tools and the freedom to conduct such research.

I would like to end by extending my thanks to Science Shop and OSUN for supporting the tour through their funding, and to my students for doing a wonderful job on the field, despite having to go in the middle of the semester and for being able to adjust to such a new environment.

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Our deepest appreciation to Dr. Shahidur Rahman for teaching us the necessary skills we needed to successfully complete this study, and for providing the guidance needed through each stage, which was instrumental in shaping the trajectory of this report.

Special recognition is extended to our research collaborators, whose active involvement significantly enriched the content of these papers. Most importantly, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our research participants, without whose cooperation and insights this research would not exist.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Despite its bustling urban centres in Dhaka and Chittagong, Bangladesh has a majority of its population living in the sprawling rural landscape- around 68% of the population is located in the country's rural areas. Although its contribution to the country's GDP is low, the majority of the people living in these areas are also involved in agricultural work- farming, keeping poultry and fish, etc. However, in the past few decades, there has been an increase in income diversifying in the rural areas, meaning that there are more and more different opportunities and types of work that people are turning to for income generation besides agriculture. This means that there are notable changes in not just the occupations, but also in the very social fabric of rural Bangladesh via changes in class relations and circumstances, marriage and religious affiliations, greater connectivity and literacy, and healthcare and educational opportunities. Many Government and non-government agencies are working in the field in these areas, however, there is a considerable gap in the research of rural society in its own nuanced context. That is the gap that this report aims to fill.

The method adopted by this study is mainly qualitative. A group of 17 students from the Anthropology Program at BRAC University visited the villages of the Ishwarganj Union in Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh, where the students were divided into groups each covering a different relevant topic to gain a holistic understanding of the condition of the villages. These groups conducted semi-structured interviews of random participants with their consent, each in the field of their topic, e.g. students studying the rural market went to the markets in the villages, while those studying the domestic units visited homes.

The overarching theme of the study was transformation. The mental image of the rural areas of Bangladesh continues to be one of the traditional villages one may encounter in the media, however, with the globalisation and greater infrastructure and connectivity, that image is from a bygone era. This is the essence that the chapters of the study aim to capture, and it was revealed through participant observation and interviews how the villages of Bangladesh have considerably changed. The old systems of being mainly connected through one’s family and ethnicity have evolved to now having homes known for their prominent members’ occupations. The rural market and economy have greatly diversified and now most products are readily available for most in the markets. Education and healthcare have reached rural Bangladesh, which was once a struggle due to poor infrastructure and access. This has also allowed governance and law to reach the rural areas, which were previously governed by village courts or shalish.

However, this means new challenges. Greater connectivity and globalisation have meant that new kinds of problems are entering these villages. Newfound competitiveness has made it difficult for old businessmen to keep up with demands, and farmers find themselves at the mercy of market syndicates which dictate their ability to sell their goods on the market. Many youths are facing drug addiction with the introduction of synthetic recreational drugs like Yaba through the borders. Public education and healthcare are still lacking and inefficient, leading to people having to find solutions elsewhere, such as opting for a religious education for their children instead of a secular government one, often leading to women and girls opting out of higher education entirely. Moreover, old problems continue to persist in the form of dowry and child marriages but manifest in new ways.

Following the above, certain recommendations are made:

(1) Rural Social Structure: More households should adopt a mixed approach to income generation to keep up with the diversifying economy. Besides this, more faith leaders should become involved in the discouragement of dowry and child marriage.

(2) Rural Social Structure Contemporary Rural Economies: A more comprehensive economic strategy should be developed, involving government initiatives, grassroots measures and continuous research. Increased training and digital literacy should be implemented to aid the transition from a traditional economy to a globalised economy.

(3) Rural Land Management: Sufficient knowledge about one's rights and inheritance is still unclear, thus improving basic legal literacy and addressing these gaps before taking policy measures to eradicate the key issue of land dispute.

(4) Rural Politics: The moderation of and fair government intervention into contemporary capitalist change-making agents such as NGOs is necessary to ensure rural labour is not exploited.

(5) Rural Governance and Law: The creation of an accountable and transparent Government body is necessary, which can adapt to cultural changes and enforce goal-based policies aiming for rural transformation and decentralising urban centres to fit the needs of the rural populace.

(6) Rural Infrastructure: Digital capacity-building workshops would be an invaluable resource for both school teachers and medical practitioners. Providing incentives such as mid-day meals led to the children being able to pay better attention and having a significant improvement in their academic performance, creating economic incentives to create jobs but also to make sure that the future labour force has appropriate levels of

education. The healthcare institution requires proper transparency and communication channels existing among the healthcare providers and officials. Easier transfer processes of doctors and other staffers, and better logistical support (to avoid backlog) are important in healthcare institutions.

(7) Impacts of Globalisation on Rural Bangladesh: Institutional efforts such as access to medical aid and rehabilitation may help early-stage youth fight narcotics addictions. Alongside this, widespread awareness programs for parents and youth should be held.

Introduction

1.1 Background Context

As with most nations born out of conflict and turmoil, Bangladesh has had eyes on it from the moment of its conception. A myriad of terms have been used to describe Bangladesh from the time that Henry Kissinger deprecatingly dubbed the nascent nation a “basket case” on the global forum. Many academics, economists and global leaders are now labelling Bangladesh as a rapidly growing economy and market. Interestingly enough, a layman’s imagination would likely conjure two visions of Bangladesh that create a strange juxtaposition: that of either the bustling, over-populated metropolitan centre or of vast fields of lush, green paddy and sleepy hamlets full of agrarian families. The truth, perhaps, lies somewhere in between.

Bangladesh has a growing urban centre in the capital city of Dhaka, but the vast majority of its population live in rural communities. According to the Population and Housing Census of 2022 (Post Enumeration Check Adjusted) released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Bangladesh is a nation of nearly 170 million people, of whom only 31.66% live in urban areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The remaining 68.34% of the people are still distributed across sprawling rural settlements across the nation. According to the Preliminary Although exact numbers are hard to verify when looking into the distribution of land between urban and rural settlements within Bangladesh in terms of land usage, the World Bank in 2021 reported in its collection of the development indicators that in percentage of total land, 77.35% of all available land in the nation was used for agricultural purposes - an estimated 100680 square kilometres out of 130170 square kilometres were noted as arable or cropped land.

The Statistical Yearbook Bangladesh 2022 (42nd Edition) published in June 2023 by the BBS notes that 45.33% of Bangladesh’s total labour force was employed in the agricultural sector according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2022, set firmly within rural areas. This percentage of employment, however, must be contextualised in terms of the economic output of the nation. Agriculture, for example, only accounted for 11.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Bangladesh for the Fiscal Year 2021-2022, despite employing nearly 50% of the nation’s labour force, according to the BBS. The contribution of agriculture towards the GDP of Bangladesh has consistently shrunk since the 1970s, when it accounted for around 60% of the nation’s economic earnings, to its present state. The downward trend shows no sign of slowing down because we see a sharp difference within the last five years - the Report on Agriculture and Rural Statistics in 2018 by the BBS found that at the time, agriculture was responsible for 13.31% of Bangladesh’s GDP

while employing 43% of the labour force, in comparison to the 11.6% of this past fiscal year. All of this is to say that while agriculture is responsible for the highest employment in rural communities, it is not the sector from which most income is now generated. With provisional data from the BBS, the Bangladesh Economic Review 2023 by the Finance Division, Ministry of Finance of the Government of Bangladesh found that agricultural contribution towards the nation's GDP had reduced yet again to 11.20% in the fiscal year 2022-2023, while the share of the "industry" sector (including manufacturing, construction and such) had increased to 37.56% in the same period, and the largest contributor to the nation's earnings was now the service sector, which contributed a whopping 51.24% of the GDP and included wholesale and retail trade, real estate services, transport and storage of goods and services, public administration, human health and social work activities, and financial services such as banking. While all of these manufacturing and service jobs are employing less people combined than the agriculture sector does on its own, their earnings are far outpacing agrarian employers and workers. Given that most manufacturing and service jobs are focused either in urban areas in which they are in high demand, or around specially created Economic Zone projects surrounding urban areas, this phenomenon is largely suggestive of the growing wealth gap between rural and urban areas.

The vast majority of the nation's population still resides in rural areas and is employed in the highest percentage in agrarian pursuits, there is a significant motivation to study the rural communities of Bangladesh on their own merit. Most government policies or interventions done by Non-Governmental Organisations at present seem to be geared towards "pulling" rural areas into the sphere of urban growth, largely as an extension of the vision of "modernising" Bangladesh away from the image of an impoverished, backward nation. Unfortunately, this approach manages to erase the unique social constructs, culture, organisation, and diversity of rural communities. By appointing all rural areas as the peripheral points of the nation that are secondary to the desires and benefits of our urban metropoles, we do the nation and our rural peoples a disservice by not examining the fabric of rural life in Bangladesh according to its own value. The unique struggles faced by rural communities are most easily erased, when they are only viewed in juxtaposition to the "modern" urban centre, and more to the point, we as academics or administrators remain oblivious to the cultural practices and reality of the vast majority of our own population.

The way that our rural communities are studied has to be reformed, there is a need to move away from viewing them as either stragglers from or extensions of the push for modernization or urbanisation as part of the state's project. If we are to ever come to the heart of who and what Bangladesh is as a nation, its story must be told while centring the communities where the vast majority of our people live their lives: the expanses of rural communities stretching from border to border, where a myriad of social, economic and

policy-driven forces are provoking startling transformations. With the knowledge that the spectrum of connection between rural and urban areas is complicated by the absolute necessity of connection forged by roads, communications and economic opportunity, a conscious decision must still be made to frame rural communities in the contexts within which they themselves operate, as opposed to viewing them as peripheral communities that operate on the sidelines of the national consciousness. The distinct voices of rural citizens deserve to be heard, especially as their stories may provide insights and narratives which run contrary to the hegemonic portrayal of the regressive, stunted and problematic rural communities which dominate popular conversation. More to the point, the intrinsic experiences and struggles of rural Bangladesh are likely influenced greatly by the cultural constructs and social dynamics particular to non-urban environments - the concerns, fears, desires, triumphs and tragedies of these communities need to be understood in the context of their specific experiences, which are oriented by the particularities of rural life.

Beyond an altruistic desire to record the authentic experiences of rural Bangladeshis, policymakers should be concerned with having comprehensive insight into the lives of the largest demographic of its population. As demonstrated by the economic trends noted earlier, Bangladesh is in the midst of rapid change. Despite all of this, a wide disparity of wealth exists within urban and rural areas: urban areas on average, the same report notes, have higher average monthly incomes than rural areas, with the vast majority of lower-income households present in rural areas. Though poverty alleviation is occurring at a marginally faster rate in rural areas than urban areas (5.9% reduction versus 4.2% reduction, respectively), the sheer amount of lower-income households remain bound within rural regions. Additionally, rural regions experience added levels of economic and social insecurity as opposed to urban areas; climate change and adverse natural events such as floods disproportionately affect rural agrarian communities, damaging their crops and therefore their earnings. For a population with lower household earnings that are dependent on the outcomes of their harvest, this can be devastating. Following the connection of the urban-rural continuum, the yield of most rural harvests is largely used to sustain the food security of the urban sectors. Understanding the vulnerabilities and requirements of rural producers ensures the stability of the entire nation. This insight into the realities of rural life must be contextualised through more than economic indicators and agricultural policies, however; understanding the sociocultural context in which any policy interventions are made is key to their success. Therefore, research into rural communities should be conducted to understand the power structures, social practices and cultural logic which dominate rural life, if there is to ever be any hope of successfully meeting the challenges faced by rural communities, for their own good as well as for the good of the nation as a whole.

1.2 Introduction to the Research and Literature Reviewed

During the Summer trimester session of 2023, undergraduate students from the Anthropology Program of the Department of Economics and Social Sciences, BRAC University had the opportunity to undertake a course studying Rural Society. Led by Professor Shahidur Rahman, the students explored the works of leading experts in the study of rural Bangladesh. Students gained an understanding of the historical context of rural communities, as well as the historic impact of colonial expansion upon them.

The literature reviewed for the course included writings on the cultural practices, economic realities, agrarian practices, domestic organisation, class structures, politics, land management, legal practices and infrastructure of rural communities in the country. Using the works of Adnan Morshed, Adnan Shopon, Akbar Ali Khan, Nazmul Karim, and others who authored significant writings on the historical context and transformation of rural Bangladesh, students gained a theoretical frame of what life in rural Bangladesh is like. This understanding is further contextualised by the works of theoreticians and researchers such as Abhijit V. Banerjee, Esther Dufflo and David Lewis, who have worked extensively on gaining insight into how rural or low-income communities across the globe operate.

Alongside all of these extensive readings, students read “Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources” by Eirik G. Jansen as one of the foundational texts for the course. Jansen came to Bangladesh in 1976 as a Visiting Scholar at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. Between 1976 and 1978, Jansen conducted extensive research into the village of Bhaimara, culminating years later in the publication of his book which offers perhaps what was at the time the most complete, holistic study into rural Bangladeshi society, including topics such as domestic units and structures, lineages, culture, income, wealth, class, politics, land and related disputes, agricultural practices and policies, the role of the government, and much more. This seminal text was used as the basis from which students gained an operational understanding of rural society in Bangladesh, further nuanced by the works of the other previously mentioned authors to account for transformations experienced in the ensuing decades since the publication of “Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources” in 1986. Jansen himself conducted a restudy of Bhaimara village between 2010 and 2016, which he published as “Seeing the End of Poverty? Bhaimara Revisited” in 2018.

Under the leadership of Professor Shahidur Rahman, the students were given the opportunity to explore these questions. They were allowed to conduct fieldwork for three days from the 25th to the 27th of July, 2023 across villages in Ishwarganj Union of Ishwarganj Upazilla, Mymensingh District. Assigning themselves to groups which each took up an investigation into a particular aspect of Jansen’s extensive work, students

interviewed villagers, local leaders, representatives, administrators, educators, doctors, and many others to discover the realities of life for the people of Ishwarganj in 2023.

The objective of the research was essentially to explore how the villagers of Ishwarganj lived and contrast their experiences with the conclusions of Jansen and other authors they had studied. However, along the way, each student discovered and investigated a particular nuance of rural life that they wished to pursue, leading to new lines of questioning guided by the foundational texts of the course. The culmination of this fieldwork came in the form of several papers where each student explored their angle of inquiry. Those papers have been collected and organised in this report in order to best frame their findings and conclusions, in the hopes that it will contribute to further the knowledge regarding rural Bangladesh.

1.3 Fieldwork Preparation

A group of fifteen students pursuing the course were allowed to divide themselves into groups of two to four individuals. Each group was allowed to pursue a broad issue that formed a key tenet of rural life according to the areas explored by Jasen in "Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources". Each group extensively reviewed secondary sources both from the course material and from their independent research that would form the basis for the foundational literature for their topics and created a theoretical framework and open-ended questionnaire of tentative questions to facilitate semi-structured interviews with their potential respondents.

Contact was established with the Union Parishad Chairman of Ishwarganj ahead of the field visit, in order to facilitate opportunities to interview key government or administrative representatives, as well as to identify key villages as sites to approach respondents. From this process, the villages of Joypur, Churali, Charshihari and Islampur were selected, alongside key establishments such as the Union Chairman's Complex (including the Graam Adalot), the Union Nirbahi Officer's complex, the Upazila Health Complex, various public and Non-Government Organization (NGO) based schools, the Superintendent of Police (SP), and local rural markets.

The Teams and their Topics have been listed below:

1) Rural Social Structures and Culture: Tahia Samrin, Amarrah Ahmed and Shakira Sharothi
2) Rural Economy and Markets: Adiba Amreen and Ahmed Khan
3) Rural Land: Kinnory Boishakhi
4) Rural Agriculture: Arnab Fouzder and Iffat Sumaiya Mehzabeen

5) Rural Legal Infrastructure: Mahima Chowdhury
6) Rural Health and Education: Atiqur Rahman Priom and Ruhaima Ridita Ahmed
7) Rural Labour and Migrant Workers: Masuma Warda Khan

Additional assistance during the fieldwork was provided by Fatima Asfee, Zarin Tasnim, Tayeeba Tum Mobashera and Sayad Azmaine, who conducted interviews in the field, helped compile data and create transcripts.

Members of each group would go on to collect their findings into individual papers, which have now been edited, and then arranged into the format of this report by Iffat Sumaiya Mehzabeen, Adiba Amreen, Mahima Chowdhury and Kinnory Boishakhi with additional context, under the direction of Professor Shahidur Rahman.

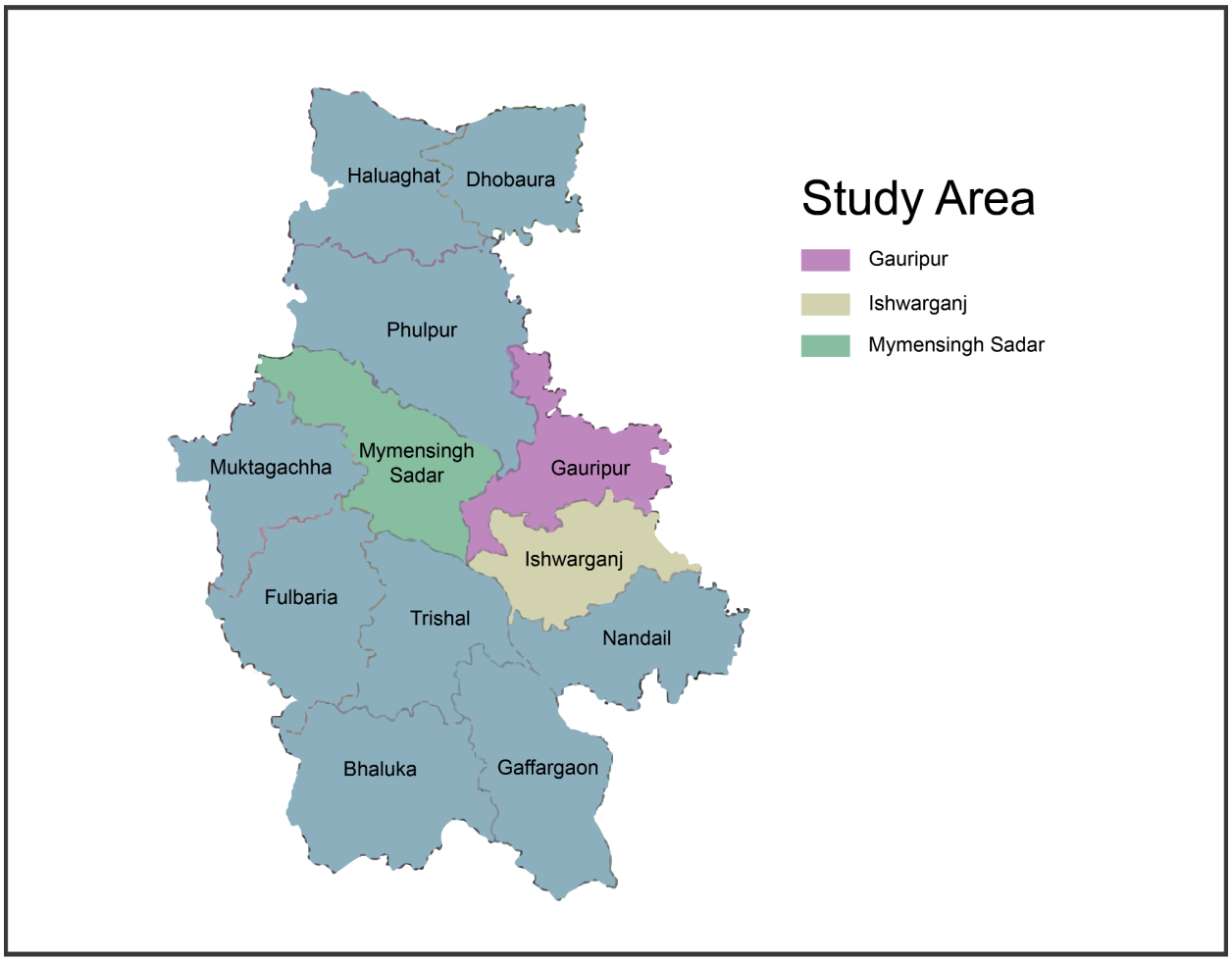
1.4 Research Methodology

In making this report, the authors engaged in extensive theoretical understanding from the course literature as a guide to conducting the fieldwork. Groups of two to three students were divided and allocated to key areas of study, taking themes from Jansen's work on the Rural landscape of Bangladesh. The literature formed the basis of studying the contemporary shifts and changes from the study conducted by Jansen.

With a tailored set of questions developed for each group, aligned with the areas of study, the source of information was mainly primary research through interviews. Each group conducted semi-structured interviews through visiting homes and institutions within the villages like schools, markets, madrasas. The fieldwork was primarily focused in Ishwarganj Upazila of Mymensingh, in the villages of Joypur, Charshihari, Islampur and Churali; with one researcher conducting their fieldwork in Comilla in the villages of Nondonpur, Sridhorpur and Dhonyakola. A wide cross-section of people were interviewed, ranging from different occupations and economic backgrounds, including landless, landed and different social classes. They also included representatives of important stakeholders in rural society like government officials, law enforcement authorities, middlemen, local leaders, political and religious leaders, teachers and doctors. In Comilla, the participants ranged from current migrant workers in the Middle East, to local residents in the target villages and professionals affiliated with institutions that support migration for remittance-earning labourers.

The interviews were documented through written fieldnotes and digital audio recordings with the participants' consent. After data collection, the fieldnotes were transcribed into typed records, enabling each researcher to access and draw inferences from what they read and what they saw and heard. Thus using both the primary data and secondary

information each chapter was constructed pertaining to the individual themes and topic areas. Although the study was concentrated in Ishwarganj Upazila of Mymensingh as a case study, the observations may offer insights into similar rural communities across Bangladesh.



1.5 Clustering of Topics

Though this research was initially undertaken in a manner closely following the key points of inquiry as set out by Eirik G Jansen, the process of interacting with the members of these villages showed the researchers that there were, in fact, many facets of rural life that had evolved over the past few decades that were not present during Jansen's initial fieldwork, and understandably so. Given this, the nature of the inquiry of each researcher bent towards particular transformations that had occurred in their pre-determined field of study into rural Bangladeshi life.

Many of these topics explore similar issues but seek to analyse different aspects of the issue in everyday village life. For example, while researching the lives of rural agrarian

families, the team found that agriculture production often became the site of rural politics to play out, as well as a region in which the presence of the government in rural communities could be analysed. Hence, each section of this report will address a key theme or topic from the initial framework of the research, with Chapters that then further analyse and elaborate upon the particular observances and conclusions of each researcher. These sections, called “Parts” are outlined below:

- **Part I:** The aspects of rural social structure, and include issues of social organisation, class, religion and marriage.
- **Part II:** Rural markets and economies and their transformations over time.
- **Part III:** Land ownership and disputes in rural communities in contemporary times.
- **Part IV:** The dynamics of rural politics.
- **Part V:** The role of the law and governance in rural life.
- **Part VI:** The present state of two aspects of rural infrastructure, healthcare and education.
- **Part VII:** The effect of a globalised world on rural communities.

With these goals in mind, the following research has been undertaken in order to gain perspective on the rural cultural landscape in contemporaneous times. The authors hope that the pursuit of this study and the conclusions that have been reached not only offers insight into the rapidly transforming rural sphere but also shine a light on the rich, complicated tapestries of life in rural Bangladesh that are yet to be explored. It is our sincere hope that this study encourages a trend of nuanced research that centres the rural at the heart of its inquiry.

Part I: Rural Social Structure

This section of the report takes a look into the social structure of Bangladesh's villages. It will view the ways in which forces of change such as changing economies and earning potentials have impacted various aspects of rural social organisation, as well as the culture of the rural areas. Authors of this section not only examine the ways in which new professional opportunities have affected the social stratifications pre existent within rural society, but how the class structure itself may have changed over time. Besides this, we also take a look at how aspects of rural culture such as religion and marriage strategies have evolved with transformations to the rural social structures.

Chapter 1

Social Organization and Stratification Based on Incomes and Professions in Contemporary Rural Societies in Bangladesh

Tahia Samrin

Socio-economic factors and differences have prevailed in all societies, and especially in rural societies of Bangladesh. Members of rural communities in Bangladesh have traditionally been believed to be more firm in their cultural and religious beliefs, which lead them to be more rigid when it comes to prescribed social statuses. However, the mindset of the villagers are transforming in recent years as they increasingly focus on economic advancement. The economic status and wealth of rural citizens has seemingly become more influential than any other social or cultural factor. The focus of this chapter is to understand how income and professions can influence the dynamics of social organisation and affect social stratification in rural Bangladesh. The kind of work each family is involved in and the amount of money they bring home are beginning to equate to how their social life is being formed within rural societies, and is given credence over any other measures of socio-economic classes.

We first start with analysing rural domestic units, and see how differences between income and professions can change the family dynamics. The formations of the domestic units are heavily influenced by the professions and the incomes that are produced by members of the family. We will also see how income can change rural women's agency within the family. Contributions of women to the family in terms of decision-making and division of labour are widely determined by the income of the family in general, and the status and earning-potential of the male members. We will lastly try to understand how the patterns of social stratification have shifted from between the periods of the 1960s-1990s, and the early 2020s. Previously, instances of social stratification were seen to be caused more on the basis of religion and affluent titles within the village, but now is determined on the basis of class and status that income produces. In contemporary rural villages, people hardly remember the traditional origins of a certain family, the *"gushti"* or the *"jaat"* that they are from, but they will be distinguish based on how well they are faring in their respective professions or familial businesses. Here, one's *"gushti"* denotes the clans to which families belong in Bangladeshi culture and their *"jaat"* is the ethnic affiliations to which families belong. This chapter will showcase how the contemporary rural societies of Bangladesh have changed within the domestic arenas to explain how these issues influence social stratification within the people in the villages of Ishwarganj, Mymensingh.

I have mainly studied 3 income classes for the purposes of this study: low, middle and high income. We categorised the income classes based on their estimate of monthly income as a family, their professions, and their structures of their domiciles. Based on the conversations with the villagers and their own interpretation of their income class, we have presented a few case studies for the social factors we have mentioned in order to understand the social organisation and stratification in these villages.

Income As A Contributing Factor

The income of a family often determines their domestic formation and living situation. Sushmita*, aged 22 years, is a young girl from a *"moddhobitto"* (middle income) family, as she would like to call it. She lives with her family in Joypur village of Ishwarganj. We visited this village on the first day of our fieldwork and stumbled upon Sushmita, who was currently pursuing her Honors degree at a local university. She and her family welcomed us with open arms and we sat in their home to conduct interviews. The piece of land where her family lives is known as the *"bari".* Within their *bari*, there are 9-10 *ghors* (Each nuclear domestic domicile, hosting a family unit) and each *ghor* is occupied by a nuclear family. All the nuclear families within the *bari* are related to each other by either birth or marriage. There are no "outsiders" within the *bari* and they all share the *bari* even though they have very individualistic housing units, with separate toilets and kitchens for each family. As we talked to Sushmita and Momena Begum*, Sushmita's grandmother and the head of the family, we came to know that there were at least 4-5 generations of the same family living at this *bari*. The members of this family do agricultural work or *"grihoster kaj"* as their main form of livelihood, and have done so for several generations. According to Momena Begum, the men and women have equally contributed to raise the family's status from a low-income family to a middle-income family. She told us, "We all had to work together. Even I worked in the field with my husband and handled my home too. My husband also helped me around the home. My husband and I worked as a team to build the house that we have built today." She also added that she and her husband are no longer earning members of the family, and have retired as her sons and daughter-in-laws have taken over the work. Even though the families are separate and live in individual housing units, there is a form of harmony within the family as they share the *bari*. When we asked where Momena Begum lived, she told us that she lived with her older son but also often lived with her other sons too. What we understood from the interactions was that the nuclear families within this bari considered themselves as separate domestic units, but they had a sort of expanded family formation since they all live in close proximity. We also noticed that middle income families tend to live together in the same village, within the same *bari* and share resources. Like Sushmita's family, these kinds of families also prefer to follow the same domestic formation for generations and thus several generations of family members end up living together. Momena Begum lives with

her granddaughter's daughter, which means she has been lucky enough to see the fourth-generation descendents of her own family line.

Fig 1: Children of Charshihari village

However, when we visited Charshihari village in Ishwarganj, we saw a different scenario. We visited Kulsum's* house in this village where she lived with her 3 sons and her youngest daughter. All her children were married and the sons had their own businesses in the village. Her youngest daughter lived with her because of work and the eldest daughter was married off to a nearby village. Kulsum's husband was involved in agricultural work but her sons are now known as businessmen or *"beparis"*. She also told us that there were more families in their bari previously, but the number of family members has reduced in recent years as people have been moving away for work. Kulsum only had 4 *ghors* in her bari and we noticed that these homes were not as well-built as the ones we saw at Sushmita's house. Kulsum also affirmed our assumptions by identifying her family as low-income. She and her husband had barely been able to acquire the piece of land that they were living on, and had no other assets to their names. The recent generations of this village were mostly doing business in and around the

village. Nurunnahar* was sitting beside us, listening to our questions. She told us that most of the people who had been born in this village no longer live here. The younger generation has moved away to other cities or villages for jobs and businesses, or mostly because they were transferred for their government services jobs. She said, "There is a *bepari para* not so far away from here. There are around 400 *ghors* around that area but mostly the older generation live there. The younger people have left home for jobs and education and no longer want to live here as they will not be able to do well financially here. You know, they will get better opportunities outside this village and do not want to settle into businesses here." Kulsum said that she lived in her youngest daughter's *ghor* because she worked in the city. She looks after her granddaughter as her daughter goes to work. Her sons also live in the same *bari*, but as nuclear domestic units. Kulsum also told us that there used to be many people in her *bari* when she was married off to this village but they were all low income families, involved in both agricultural and business works. However, the area has transformed into a *bepari para* as the younger generations no longer wanted to do agricultural work because they saw no scope of improvement of their economic status. The *bepari para* with 400 *ghors* therefore now has fewer family members actually living there as they move around for work and business.

Later, when we visited Islampur village in Ishwarganj, we saw another kind of domestic formation based on the income of the family. As we entered the village, we saw a very bright green building in the distance. The building was a 4-storied, well built-concrete house. We became curious about it and started to ask around the village about the family that lives here. By talking to the neighbours, we found out that this house was called the *"army bari"* because one of the family members had joined the Bangladesh Army. They had previously been known as the *"rajbari"* since most of the male members of the family were blacksmiths but the status of the family had changed since one of them joined the army. The house was painted in a shade of army green and we saw several male members come out of the house wearing an army training shirt. We asked around about the family further. This family had 7 brothers and 4 sisters and all the brothers' families lived in this house. This house was made after one of the sons of the 7 brothers had joined the army. They are the typical example of an extended family where all the 7 brothers and their families live together under the same roof. One of their neighbours said, "Apu, this family needs around 10kgs of rice for one meal a day. So you can imagine the number of family members in this family. Everyone lives together and eats together." We spoke to one of the brothers of the family and even though he was reluctant to speak to us, he let us know that before they used to have separate *ghors* for each of the families but ever since his nephew joined the army, their income and status had changed. We can now call them a high-income family since they have a stable source of income and security. All the other male members of the family had also fared well in their businesses because their economic and social status had increased. This helped them run their businesses well in the village and improve their income altogether. Everyone in the village

knew the members of the army bari and we could tell that they were very well respected there.

Even though social organisations are often influenced by the scarcity of resources and relations to land (Jansen, 1986), income and the economic status that is determined through the income of the family plays a big part in the formation of the family structure in contemporary rural Bangladesh. Middle-income families tend to live together and share resources in the same household but will have separate family units and homes. These families also have several generations of members living together, involved in the same profession as their forefathers. Low income families prefer to separate from their village core in search for new prospects that may increase their economic status. They believe that by functioning as individual units and looking for other job prospects, they will have a better chance of improving their income and therefore their social status. Lastly, high income families have the opportunity to live under the same roof and share the financial pool. We will find families with many brothers living with their wives and children together with their old parents.

Women in Decision Making and Division of Labor

As told by Eirik G. Jansen, the amount of decision making power of individuals in rural families depends on their socio-economic position in the household. It is generally seen that the eldest male member of the family will be at the centre of all decisions for the entire family (Jansen, 1986). However, depending on the nature of the income flow of the household, women are also seen to be decision makers of the family in the domestic and financial spheres now. Right beside the army bari mentioned earlier, we spoke to a low income family where we found Rezina*. She was very eager to share her thoughts as she heard us ask questions to other women in her family. When we started asking her about what her family does for a profession, she told us that her husband was a rickshaw puller. She told us, “Whatever little money he brings home, I run my household with it. He brings home the money and I manage it and that is why we take all the decisions in the family together. We have never separated the money that is being brought home because that will not help us run the family smoothly. We have divided our work and that is how we like to function as a family.” Her brother-in-law also is a rickshaw puller, as was his father-in-law. The female members have not gone out of the home for work and rely on the husbands’ income to run the household. We asked Rezina if she thought that by going out to work with her husband, she would have more decision making powers in the family. She said, “Apu, even now, my husband does not even change the water tap without asking me. I have a say in all the decisions of the family. How much more do I need?”

Fig 2: Women of the family standing in front of their house

We found a similar scenario when we went to Churali village and found Amena, who belongs to a middle income household. She told us that even though she belonged to a *"moddhobitto"* family, they have been doing well by doing agricultural and poultry work. When we entered her room, we got a strong whiff of cows nearby. When I looked around, I saw a cow staring at me through her bedroom window from a cowshed that was right next to the room. Amena said, "It gives me peace when I get to look at my cows before I go to sleep and when I wake up. I have raised them with my own hands and I have so much love for them." The cow business was started by Amena and her husband now supports her through this business. He looks after some other poultry work too but the most income comes from the cow business and therefore most of the money is controlled by Amena. Her husband said, "My wife handles all the money that comes into the family. She has taken loans and knows how to handle financial matters. I have left it all to her." When we kept talking to Amena, we found that she was excellent at managing money. She has thought out every financial possibility and future plans to increase the fund pool of the family. She is also responsible for all the domestic decisions of the household and very carefully calculates every move she makes for the family.

We had a very good notion of the women's agency in the households of these villages until we went to the Munshi bari in Islampur village. *Munshi bari* is a very well-known household in this village because the head of the family had lived in Saudi Arabia for many years and has now sent his son to manage the shop he has there. Shifa is the eldest

daughter in this household and has been married off to another affluent family, the *Talukdars*, in Charshihari village. We had mainly gone to this house to know more about migrant workers but as we sat down to speak to them, we also tried to ask a few questions about the women of the family. Though the family head was very eager to talk about living and owning a shop in Saudi Arabia, the women of the family barely talked to us. We could see Hamid Munshi, the head, signalling to the women to not speak too much. Despite this, Shifa sat beside us and answered a few of our questions. She had received an education until Class 8 and then could not continue. Later she was married off and had no scope to pursue a career, though she also told us that she had not thought about going out to work. She said, "I look after my house and family. I have a son and my focus is on raising him." Her reluctance to talk to us more about her domestic life was evident from her answers. We assumed that it was because of the way Munshi had directed her to keep quiet and not disclose too much. Belonging from a high income household and being the daughter-in-law of an affluent family has clearly restricted Shifa in multiple ways. While her brother was getting an Honors degree in Economics from a well-known university, Shifa was struggling to even speak to us about her domestic life.

While it was evident that women in the low or middle income families were constantly working in order to sustain their families, they also had more agency and authority within the family for the same reason. As they were direct contributors to the economic well-being of the family, they had equal authority within the family as the male members. The other members respected them more and asked for both domestic and financial advice. Even if women were not actively participating in the labour work outside the home, the male members rely more on the female members to help them in other spheres. On the other hand, belonging to a high income family where the women were not required to contribute to the financial sustainability of the family, they were disregarded in terms of most decisions around the household and were confined within the household in terms of work. Being in a superior position in the house for their high income, the male members do not consider the women of the family to be reliable decision makers. Therefore, we can say that when women are directly contributing to the income of the family or when male members are relying on them for sustenance, they are in a more dominant position in the family which occurs in terms of low and middle income families.

Moving Away from Religion, Agnatic Lineage and Affluent Family Titles:

Rural people are believed to be acute believers of religion and its stratified caste systems. There have been strained relationships within Muslims and Hindus, but also within members of the same religion. There have been differences due to caste and religious statuses (Karim, 1976). However, we hardly found any notable religiously stratified relationship among the villagers in Ishwarganj, Mymensingh in contemporary times. It is

important to note, though, that our research was mostly restricted within Muslim households during our fieldwork, as the Hindu *"paras"* or neighbourhoods were geographically separated from the Muslim areas, from ages before. It is not to say that we did not find both Hindus and Muslims living together, but mostly the concentration of people with the same religion in a certain area was high. Amena's husband told us that just behind his homestead, there was a Hindu para with whom they had very close connections. The Hindus had established their homes together there because there had been a temple at that location in times gone by. He told us that they visited each other on every occasion and celebrated each other's religious festivals. When we asked them if they ever got into conflicts due to living in such close proximity, he told us, "We have been living together for generations and have not ever gone into any major arguments. We live very peacefully, they are like my family now." As we had failed to visit Hindu households during our visit, we were unable to understand if there was any hierarchical or caste division within the Hindu households, which we found were absent in the Muslim households. We also did not gain the perspective of Hindu families in regards to inter-religious communal relations. We nevertheless understood that the villagers were not very conscious of the religion, titles and lineages they belonged to when they formed relationships, though they did consider socio-economic statuses.

Inter-Class Relationships

Earlier, villagers in Bangladesh used to be very precise and conscious about the stratified status of every village class. There used to be hierarchical relationships between the villagers based on the titles or profession they would belong to (Karim, 1976). Traditionally high status patrilineage titles were acquired through generations and the people were very protective of it. Every household with a respectable title had to maintain their stature in order to establish their status within the village (Jansen, 1986). However, this trend of respect towards affluent patrilineage titles has reduced in the recent years. The younger generation hardly can remember or understand the concept of titles and *gushti* now. *Gushti* is known as the group of families that belong to the same patrilineal line. People used to be very wary of which *gushti* a person belonged to when assessing their status. When we asked the villagers in the Islampur or Charshihari village about their titles or *gushti,* they looked at us blankly. Some older women would chime in and say a certain *gushti* name that they belonged to but others would object and say that they had never heard this name. However, they did tell us that there were some *"paras"* which had names. A *para* is a place where many people live together either based on similar profession, or if they are from the same extended family and it separates the living quarters of the villagers within the village. The villagers were able to give us only two *para* names in Charshihari village. One was the *Grihosto para* and the other one was *Bepari para*. Both these *paras* were named after the profession of the people living there -

agrarian workers, and businessmen respectively. Both neighbourhoods previously had different names: *Grihosto para* was known as the *Sheikh para*, and the *Bepari para* was known as the *Kulu para*. When we asked them where these titles had come from, they were unable to tell us the source. One young woman told us, "Apu, our fathers used to know the *gushti* names and family titles before. No one asks for them now and that is why no one cares. I myself will not be able to tell what my forefather's title was." Even though we heard some random *para* or *gushti* names from a few women in the village, they laughed it off and told us that it was no longer necessary for them to know this because it meant nothing to them.

However, something we noticed was that they preferred to identify the *paras* based on the profession the inhabitants practised. Family titles or agnatic lineage (*gushti*) had been replaced by professional titles. Even the *army bari* that we previously spoke about was named after a profession that was the highlight of the family. More so than which lineage the family belonged to or which affluent title the older generations had, the people now associated them with the professions that the households were involved in. It was important for them to be associated with similar socio-economic groups. They preferred to conduct marriages, start businesses and form familial connections with people that belonged to the same income or professional class. But that did not mean that there was no scope of social mobility among the people. Many families that we had interacted with did not belong to the same income class today that they did in years past.

Conclusion:

As found in the fieldwork and by conversing with people from several backgrounds and statuses, it needs to be noted that people consider wealth over any other social or cultural factors in order to determine social organisation or stratification within the society. Wealth is here determined by the amount of income the family produces through their professions and how well they are able to provide for the family. Affluent statuses that have been around for generations, being born into a *"ucha bangsha"* (high status lineage) or belonging to the highest religious caste mean very little to the villagers now. Educational background or land inheritance solely also do not translate well for the villagers when it comes to determining how the society shall be arranged in the domestic domain. Villagers of Ishwarganj rely on determining how well a family or a member of the family has been able to succeed when it comes to their financial status. When a family does well financially, they gain respect within the community. They are seen as the ideal family with a high income and respectable profession that sustains them.

We cannot necessarily note that the stratification based on income classes has been negative in all cases. By focusing on income, people are moving away from other

traditional stratified beliefs which would often isolate certain classes of people. While we might analyse that income or professions as a measure of stratification within the rural society might eliminate many other factors that may be more important to understand the dynamics of the society, the villagers, however, have been accustomed to such matters. They will very nonchalantly accept social status based on their wealth and adapt themselves with the social boundaries or opportunities that come with it. There has been a sort of healthy competition among the people within the rural society which leads them to be motivated and have a scope for social mobility now as they are not confined within hereditary titles, religious castes and divisional roles. While they also thrive for social mobility with every generation, they also accept that in order to do so, they will need to secure a better income and profession above all else.

Chapter 2

The Emergence of A New Non-Agrarian Class and Its Impact on the Transformation of Rural Social Stratifications

Amarraah Ahmad

Background & Context

Much of the research and study that has been done regarding Bangladeshi rural society and the socioeconomic structures that exist within them still portrays a singular and outdated image. When asked to describe this image, our minds immediately go to rampant poverty, the lack of infrastructure and large extended family households set against quaint clay houses, lush rice fields and the call of a rooster at dawn. These households of our imagination are usually *Grihastas*, agriculturalists who exclusively earn their livelihood from the lands they work. Such an image of rural Bangladesh has remained constant for decades and is intertwined in the very history of the nation. It is further reinforced by the nature of the research and documentation widely available on rural Bangladesh.

This is likely due to the fact that bulk of the anthropological research on Bangladeshi rural society has been done prior to the liberation of Bangladesh and in the early decades of the nation's history. We see this within the extensive study done in the Bhaimara village by Social Anthropologist Eirik G. Jansen (1986), and similarly in Peter J. Bertocci's (1972) study of the Moffusil village of Comilla. Within their studies, Jansen and Bertocci delve into social organisations and stratification in addition to the varying aspects of the domestic unit, division of labour, household development cycles and reproduction within the Bhaimara and Moffusil village communities. Jansen and Bertocci, despite having done their study within fifteen years of each other and in two different parts of Bangladesh, shared some similar conceptualizations in regard to social stratification. Both authors maintained that while Muslim caste systems are no longer prevalent, hereditary names and titles in addition to religious and occupational affiliations had significantly influenced the class distinctions observed in rural society.

Jansen suggests the general disregard for the Muslim caste system and the universal claim of a 'Shiekh' status amongst these Muslim communities had made it difficult for him to differentiate amongst the existing classes. However, the claims to certain patrilineal names and titles had helped to discern these blurred lines. These names and titles were of utmost importance within these communities and there existed a consciousness of its legitimacy and longevity across multiple generations or lack thereof. It was through these

names and titles that the villagers themselves drew distinctions amongst the *ucha bangsha* (high status lineage), *madhya bangsha* (middle status) and *nicho bangsha* (low status) households. The names or titles of households belonging to each of these bangshas were derived from their class position (eg: the Khans, Chowdhuries, Takuldars and Munshis) or from a specific religious affiliation (eg: the Mowlanas, Mollas and Imams).

Nevertheless, in the specific case of Bhaimara village, the primary mode of distinction of class and social organisation was done on the basis of *Khandans* versus *Grihastas*: whether the household was of high status who did not partake in physical labour, or were they low status and involved in agriculture? There was a third status within these classifications, but it was reserved for those in occupations considered too defiling amongst Muslims. However, this is seemingly no longer the case in recent years as a result of the development of rural society. With rapid rates of industrialization, urbanisation and the reduction of barriers such as lack of infrastructure and communication connecting urban and rural society, rural demand and economy transform and consequently allow for the development of the non-agricultural sectors in rural Bangladesh.

Sen, et al. (2021) suggest that this allows for rural agriculture-based households to be "pulled" out of purely agriculture-based employment and to become engaged in non-agricultural occupations and the formal salaried economy. This moves away from agricultural work into non-agricultural work essentially results in the breakdown of the *Grihasta* class and from it allows for the emergence of a new non-agricultural working class; distorting our understanding of the social organisation and stratification that Jansen established within his text. With the decline of the *Grihasta* class and the rise of this new working class that also allows for women to seek formalised and salaried employment outside of the domestic sphere, it leads us to question what its impact on the social organisation and stratification in rural communities and how it has transformed as a result.

Reviewing the Literature

As stated above, much of the study in regard to Bangladesh's rural society and the varying aspects of social stratification had been predominantly conducted within a couple of decades before and after the liberation of Bangladesh as an independent nation-state. Much of the existing literature illustrates an image of a rural society that is heavily reliant on religious affiliations and hereditary titles to help organise a stratified society. However, due to the emergence of a new non-agricultural class, the stratifications based on names and titles have been rendered meaningless as new forms of social stratification emerge

as well. To understand this phenomenon, we must understand this shift from *Grihasta* to the new non-agricultural occupational status.

Binayak Sen (1996) in his article 'Rural Non-farm Sector in Bangladesh' examines the expansion of the rural non-farm sector during the period of 1980s to mid-1990s. Within their paper, they suggest that the non-farm sector and its employment can no longer be seen as, what is termed as a 'residual' sector; that if it was truly a residual sector, there would be higher incidences of poverty amongst purely non-farming households. He believes that the shift to non-farm occupations is actually pro-poor in nature and has great potential to alleviate poverty and moderate rural income inequality. In a follow up published in 2021, Sen, et al. explored the varying patterns of existing from agriculture to non-farm work in rural Bangladesh.

They analyse these patterns on the basis of three types of households: (1) pure agricultural: with all members employed in agriculture, (2) rural non-farm: households that are exclusively dependent on non-agricultural employment and (3) mixed, where some members are employed in agriculture while others in non-farm occupations. They examine the rise in preference for non-farm employment between the period of 2000 to 2013 and the increase in the number of mixed households due to the rise in the need for diversification of activities in formerly pure agricultural households. They look at the various factors that led to the structural changes in rural employment and their drivers.

After evaluating the transcripts from the interviews conducted and cross-referencing them with the arguments made by Jansen (1987), I was able to pinpoint the following overarching research question:

With the decline of the Grihasta class and the emergence of a non-agricultural working class that allows women to seek salaried employment outside the domestic sphere, what is the impact on social organisation and stratification in rural Bangladesh and how has it transformed?

This question was seminal in setting the tone and direction in which the secondary research of this chapter would go. To attain relevant information that would aid in building a solid comparative base, I first looked for literature similar to Jansen's own for a second perspective; and next literature that examined the shift to non-agricultural work and its impacts. This particular combination of secondary information in addition to the findings from the brief ethnographic fieldwork, allowed me to build analytical framework for my comparative and exploratory study that would examine the transformation of social stratification by asking the following questions:

- How has the emergence of this new class transformed the social organisation and stratification in rural Bangladesh?

- What are the leading factors that resulted in the emergence of a new class and what it means for women?

The conclusion of the paper attempts to answer the following question: does this new class actually mean the death of the *Grihasta* class?

The emergence of a new class and the transformation of the social organisation and stratification in rural Bangladesh

In the village of Charshihari resides Kulsum, a mother of five and the widow of a late union member. Kulsum sitting on a chair chatting with her youngest granddaughter in a shared *uthan* (courtyard central to the homestead), observes her neighbour Rezina cutting down clumps of hay. When asked about her family and what they do, Kulsum states that all three of her sons own their own businesses and maintain their own nuclear households. Residing in the household of her youngest son, Kulsum now enjoys a retired life and the respect of being an elder of the *Bepari Bari* and its *gusti* (lineage). However, *Bepari Bari* had not always been *Bepari Bari*, as just in her father-in-law's generation members had been involved in agriculture, though they had not owned their own land. So *Bepari* was previously a part of and known as *Grihasta Bari* (agrarian home) due to the nature of their employment. This means just a generation ago, this very lineage was involved in agricultural work and now that Kulsum's late husband and sons have become business owners, their *gusti* has now come to be known as *Beparis*.

Joining into the conversation, neighbour Rezina notes that different paras (neighbourhoods) in the village of Charshihari have similar names to Kulsum's *Bepari Bari*, and how not too long ago had different names too; that up the road the now Grihasta para was once known as Sheikh para and another neighbouring para is known as the *Kuti Shilpa Para* and the members of the household are all involved in handicrafts production. Similarly in the village of Jaipur, resides the infamous Army Bari. Made up of an impressive seven sons and four daughters, *Army Bari* was known as Rajbari some five years ago. With a majority of the male members of the household being employed in construction or as a *rajmistri*, *Rajbari* came to be known as *Army Bari* when one of the brothers left the family business to join the Bangladesh Armed Forces.

Not too far away from *Army bari* is the grand *Munshi bari*, who is connected to the *Talukder bari* through the marriage of their daughter. *Munshi bari* is well known around the Awajpur village for being wealthy and owning a large amount of land. Whilst the patriarch of the household Hamid Munshi and his sons run an electric business in town, they are still heavily involved with their family lands, hiring help during peak harvest seasons. It was evident across Awajpur that the *Munshi bari* was of *ucha bangsha*, in turn, respect

from the tradition of their name/title and held a lot of *izzat* (sense of honour); with this fact being further perpetuated through the discrete nature of the conversation and the heavy surveillance placed on the women of the household.

Fig 3: Chickens in the courtyard of a home of Joypur

Across these accounts, we witness the varying and transformative nature of social organisation and stratification that exists across these villages across generations. Within the first case with Kulsum and her *Bepari Bari*, we see the *gusti* stray away from their *Grihasta* status to become a part of the new non-agricultural working class. The names of *gustis* and baris are no longer predominantly determined by the surnames or the titles of households but by the most noteworthy occupations helped by one of the members. However, a certain level of traditional homage is still paid to titles and lineages as seen within the case of *Munshi Bari*, but this much more a marginal case in comparison to what is currently the norm. Furthermore, the new form of stratification as a result of adopting non-agricultural occupations, allows for the mobility of households to garner the tradition of respect and the alleviation of poverty.

Sen, et al. (2021) note non-agricultural households on average have access to more human capital than purely agricultural households; giving into the need for diversification as a consequence of the urbanisation of rural society, non-agricultural households are now better equipped and educated than their pure agricultural counterparts. Despite the family not owning their own land while still being a *Grihasta bari*, retired Kulsum is able to

enjoy a retired life and does not have to work in her old age. This is a direct result of her late husband taking up the occupation of *'Bepari'* that provided their sons with the human capital to become business owners themselves.

Leading factors that resulted in the emergence of a new class and what this means for women

Sen (1996) in his paper "Rural Non-farm Sector in Bangladesh" notes something rather odd. Relying on the 1984-85 Labour Force Survey, Sen suggests a significant decline in agriculture's share in the rural labour force despite the adoption of the Green Revolution and various micro-credit schemes aiming towards poverty alleviation through graduation schemes. However, this decline in agriculture's share in the rural labour force is easily explainable by the simultaneous implantation of what Sen had referred to as the 'Lewisian transition', a process through which rural agricultural-based households would be 'pulled' out of agriculture as they became increasingly involved with the non-agricultural sector. It must be noted that this transition made way for the rise of two separate trends: first, an overall shift towards salaried employment and away from the self-employment nature of agriculture and second, the rise of formalised employment for women.

As the Lewisian transition occurred, the rural manufacturing sector was simultaneously developing; namely the migrant construction sector and the Ready Made Garments industries. Sen (2016) suggests the migrant construction sector has registered massive rates of growth from the 1990s to the 2000s, with one of the major reasons for this expansion being the growth of foreign remittance incomes. Whilst men went on to become migrant construction workers, agricultural work became the responsibility of women. However, despite the feminization of agriculture, women agriculturalists were never compensated or credited for their labour. Nevertheless, this was rectified with the establishment of the RMG sectors that were readily accepting of low and unskilled workers. The RMG sector was the first of its kind to offer women formalised and salaried work regardless of skill. Despite the poor working conditions and pay, women took up work in RMG or textile which provided them with independence and recognition. This was also key in the development of the role they played in their domestic units, especially in regard to decision-making.

The popularisation of migrant construction work swayed more men away from agriculture and the sudden formalisation of women's employment through the RMG sectors, ultimately led to the reported decline in agriculture's share in rural employment. We see its effects within the case of Mohammad Abdus Salam of Koltarapara, despite having many jobs during his lifetime, who most notably used to be a migrant worker. Now working as primarily an Auto Rickshaw driver, Abdus Salam and his nephew work together to

maintain a cow-rearing business. However, it is his wife who acts as the primary decision-maker maker who maintains all the household expenses. Despite now being retired and a full-time homemaker, Abdus Salam's wife worked at a local thread mill for over twenty years. Her formalised and salaried occupation at the mill endowed with the capability to maintain the household, taking all the major decisions and maintaining the household fund.

Fig 4: Farmers working on the field in Charshihari

Conclusion: what this means for the Grihasta class

To conclude, yes, the emergence of a new non-agricultural working class has indeed led to the transformation of the social organisation and stratification of Bangladeshi rural society in comparison to what had been outlined by Jansen and Bertocci. There no longer exists a *Grihasta* class in its most traditional classifications, wherein the household's livelihood and primary income source is dependent on agriculture and agricultural production. However, as Sen, et al. (2021) suggest the emergence of a "mixed" household category in addition to the preexisting agricultural and non-agricultural households at the two opposing ends of the spectrum. They suggest, with the need to diversify in a changing rural economy, more and more households move into a 'mixed' status; where some of the members of the household are employed in the agricultural sector and some in the non-agricultural sector. We witness this within the case of

Mohammad Abdus Salam and his wife both having worked long years as a migrant worker and at a thread mill respectively. However now during their elderly years, they maintain a cow-rearing business to sustain themselves. Nevertheless, within the current state of Bangladeshi rural society, we do still witness some of the ingrained traditions paid to longstanding lineages, but rural society is not what it used to be. The *Grihasta* class in reality has not and will not die out, but rather is transformed.

Chapter 3

The Entanglements of Dowry and Faith: Exploring the Dynamics of Marriage and Religion in Bangladesh's Rural Areas

Shakira Sharothi

Introduction:

Bangladesh, the world's largest delta, has traditionally had a population that has been centred in its rural areas for agricultural purposes. The beauty of rural culture is symbolised not only by the greenery and community structure but also by the century-old customs and traditions of these places, which have stood the test of time. Rural culture refers to the way of life, beliefs, and activities of people who live in rural or countryside settings. It includes social interactions, religious routines, and other facets of daily life.

A vital aspect of these rural cultures is that they are formed in rural communities where strong social bonds are established within extended family structures, whereas in urban cities it's very different as most families are nuclear. This also plays a major role in laying the foundation for the involved people's way of life. Rural social norms shape relationships and society's dynamics through hierarchical structures and strong reverence for elders. Additionally, religious traditions, rituals, and ideals are firmly rooted, with mosques and temples serving not just as places of worship but also as communal centres for social participation. Also, the community festivals that take place in these rural regions highlight the diversity of their culture even more, for example using school grounds for prayers on Eid and also celebrating or making *Pooja Mondops* (altars for the Hindu religious festivals) there.

Through an ethnographic lens, this research dives into the complicated interaction of religion and marriage in the setting of rural Bangladesh, paying careful attention to the dynamics of these factors and their effect on numerous facets of life.

Marriage in South Asian society is not only a formal and legal union between two individuals, but it also symbolises a deeper level of partnership and shared decisions and responsibilities on both an emotional and financial level for the individual's family and community. On the other hand, religion is the belief in a superior, such as the creator or creators of people and the cosmos as a whole, and the practice of acts associated with this belief, such as praying or worshipping the higher force. Both of these elements of culture are important because they impact numerous parts of everyday routines, festivities, values, and social relationships. Marriage and religion are inextricably linked in

South Asian societies, particularly in rural regions, and contribute to the complicated fabric of social life.

Methodology and Objectives:

The study tries to give a complete knowledge of how religion and marriage impact the lives of individuals in rural areas by applying ethnographic research methodologies. This chapter conducts a thorough evaluation with three major research objectives.

I. The first objective of the paper is to explore the ongoing escalation of the Dowry System in rural regions, offering light on its complex socio-cultural origins by uncovering the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the Dowry System.

II. The second issue is the consequences of depending only on Islamic education, namely how potential differences in educational quality between Islamic and government schools may affect a child's future employment opportunities. The goal is to identify any limits or benefits of Islamic education in terms of future occupational options.

III. The final study objective focuses on the role of religious leaders linked with faith-based organisations in creating societal norms, with a focus on their impact on women's roles and status.

The overarching object here is to explore how religious teachings and leadership affect gender roles, family dynamics, and women's empowerment in the rural environment through participant observation and in-depth interviews with religious leaders and community members, mainly focusing on women.

This ethnographic research seeks to provide detailed knowledge of the rural cultural fabric, where religious practices connect with educational possibilities and marriage customs, profoundly impacting the lives of individuals and communities.

Reviewing the Literature and Context:

Humans have long practised both marriage and religion, and throughout time, those concepts have become more complex. Marriage has different roles and meanings in different societies. If we discuss marriage from the Bangladesh rural society's perspective, Eirik G. Jansen's book, “Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources”, successfully shows a very true image of how marriage is pursued in this

region. This very research was conducted in Bhaimara among 62 households. The book was written 40 years ago, in the year 1986, but even in today's time, a lot of the aspects are very much the same. Starting with the patrilineage dominance in society, where many times marriage is not only confined between two individuals but has established political and economic bonds between communities. As mentioned in the book, most marriages were arranged by the family, especially the elders of the house, who not only take into account how a bride should be but also if the bride's family has the ability to pay the dowry and all the marriage expenses. However, Jansen also mentioned the shift in this dynamic: back then, the groom's family pledged the *mehr* (Islamic mandatory gift) and provided ornaments for the bride, and dowry payments varied based on economic standing and status. This economic fact behind marriage played a very vital role in the concepts of *Ghor-jamais* (man who lives with his wife's family after marriage), age of spouse, polygamy, and divorce.

On the concept of *Ghor-jamais*, Jansen has mentioned that it wasn't very common, but if the economic or social position of a bride's family was much higher than the groom's, they used to shift their marital household to the bride's patrilineal house. Again, the age of the bride was commonly 14 to 15 years old. These concepts are related to dowry because if the bride had any unconventional flaw because of which she could not be sent to the groom's house, it was used to look down upon her, which was a prior point for a higher rate of dowry, and similarly, as girls were most likely to be married in their puberty if they were older, it was also taken as something unusual, which was again a key reason for a higher rate of dowry. However, it has been mentioned in the book that as the education rate increased among girls, they started getting married later in life. Now, talking about divorce, it has been mentioned that if the husbands were landless, the divorce rate was also higher in that kind of household, which indicates the fact that the need and want for dowry were greater in those situations. And the unfulfillment of such needs could have been a possible prior reason behind these divorces. This piece indicates the fact that the practice of taking and giving dowry was very common in the past and also played a vital role in making and breaking marriages.

Further, in the article "Secondary School *Madrasas* in Bangladesh: Incidence, Quality, and Implications for Reform," published in 2009, a QSSMEB survey has been conducted through government, non-government, NGO, Aliyah, Quomi, and other *madrasas* (school for the study of the religion of Islam). An exam of grade eight students was taken, and most Madras students failed to perform and brought 50% marks in distinguished subjects like Maths, English, and General Knowledge. The position of the female students was much lower. Also, a gender gap in test scores is observed at the beginning of the secondary schooling cycle (grade 6) and continues through grade 8 (Asadullah et al., 2009). This suggests that girls might face challenges in terms of learning outcomes. The inconsistency in mathematics is not only visible in the students but also in the teachers,

who are not sufficiently qualified. One unfortunate thing here is that *madrasa* graduates are less favourable to higher education for females than for males (Asadullah et al., 2009). Most *Madrasa*-going female students prefer to have children rather than continue their studies. This lack of capability by both teachers and students has been reported in this article. It indicates the fact that if a student relies solely on Islamic education, it will affect their future career as there will be a potential educational gap compared to government schools.

Furthermore, these *madrasas* are faith-based organisations, and they do not have power over them alone; they are equally involved in shaping social norms and local politics. For the third objective of this paper, we'll be focusing on the journal paper Influence of *Purdah* on Education and Employment of Women in Rural Communities by A.M. Sultana, Jayum A. Jawan, and Ibrahim Hashim, in which a common phenomenon in the rural community of Bangladesh, *"Purdah",* or the use of veiling and other precautions to isolate women from strangers' eyes, has been discussed. This magazine was released in 2009, and it has been noted in the literature that there has long been a claim that "*purdah*" has impacted women's access to employment and education in Bangladesh since the former is seen to restrict women's independence and mobility. The main criteria for identifying proper "*purdah*" practice and social behaviour in Bangladesh include not just purity, honour, religious rites, social-cultural practices, and a show of family status; it may also be asserted that following it is a matter of safety in addition to religion. A significant group of women (53.8%) described "*purdah*" as a social and cultural norm. The findings also demonstrate that, at present, women are joining the workforce. Indicating the fact that "*purdah*" laws in Bangladesh currently have little to no effect on women's access to employment and education. Additionally, a report by UNICEF published in January 2020 on Engagement with Religious Leaders in South Asia has highlighted the fact that religion has been discovered to be another factor that contributes to child marriage in Bangladesh. For instance, an imam who was interviewed for the situation analysis on child marriage explained that a girl is considered to be of marriageable age in Islamic tradition when she is only 12 or 13 years old (UNICEF, 2020).

As these studies were conducted many years ago, new research and the data of current rural society are very much needed to understand the ongoing situation of the dowry system and the influence of religion in rural Bangladesh.

Dowry Dynamics, Religious Education, and Effect of Beliefs in Rural Bangladesh

Firstly, even in the year 2023, the rural areas of Bangladesh are still impacted by the very issues that were escalating 40 years ago. Not only then, but even now, in arranged marriages, the give and take of dowry is still a very common phenomenon. However,

instead of directly naming or labelling it as dowry, the strategy nowadays is for people to call it “giving gifts for the bride and groom”. However, the majority of these expenses are taken by the bride's family, often including a transfer of high-value goods or assets from the bride’s family to the groom, which would be commensurate in valuation to the ‘traditional’ notion of a monetary dowry transaction.

The next problem in rural society was that most people had started relying on Islamic education, but it had been shown in previous literature that it would have a severe effect on future career prospects due to potential gaps in educational quality compared to government schools, especially for women and girls.

Further, in the thorough observation of the impact of religious leaders from faith-based organisations on shaping social norms, with a focus on the role of women, it can be said that not only the leaders but also the local community are very much involved in it. The women who work in the field or outside the house do so mostly because of economic need. The common occupations for women are mostly garment workers, farmers, and teachers in the *madrasas*. However, even when it's known by others that the women working outside are an economic need as the *purdah* is highly maintained in rural society, they still look down upon them. They are neither respected nor warmly welcomed in the community. Below are some case studies done on these matters:

Case 1: A Middle-Class Family of Businessmen From Chorshihari Village, in the Ishwarganj Upazila of Mymensingh

The man of the house was a businessman and had three daughters and one son. They had their eldest daughter married in Dhaka a few years ago who had given her SSC exam at the *madrasa*. They mentioned the fact that they were able to send off their daughter to a better household because she was a good girl by societal norms, as she used to do proper *purdah*, which includes socks, hand gloves, and *burq*a (outer garment worn by Muslim women). They had gifted their daughter a gold necklace worth 24,000 takas and a gold ring to the groom worth 20,000 takas. They voluntarily mentioned they didn't pay a dowry, but it was a gift from them to the couple. They liked the groom's family because they were relatives, and the groom had a job in Dhaka and an education till intermediate.

Case 2: "Balishita Bari", Islampur village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

It was a middle-class family of six members. They send their daughters to government schools, but their sons are studying in the *madrasa*. However, a woman from the *madrasa* comes to their house to teach the younger daughter. They believed that if the government school would teach them other languages than English, it would be more helpful for them. They had their eldest daughter married off to a serviceman in a sweater company in Dhaka. They had arranged the marriage within a 3,00,000 taka budget. For

the ceremony, they also gifted gold jewellery.

Case 3: "Doctor Bari", Islampur village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

This was the only house from the Hindu community that we could interview in Islampur village. This was called the Doctor's *Bari* (house), as the house's eldest son is a homoeopathy doctor. They were an upper-middle-class joint family. They openly talk about the dowry system in rural areas. According to them, it hasn't been long enough that the amount of dowry has increased from 30 to 40,000 to 1 to 4 lakh taka. Not only the cash, but they had to pay for gold jewellery, furniture, televisions, motorcycles, and other gifts as well. Although asking for a dowry wasn't very common among people in service or educated families, they also mentioned that not only in arranged marriages but even in love marriages, the bride's family would gift things to their daughter. This very family had their lands in the past, but to pay the dowry of their daughters, they had to sell those lands.

The second daughter-in-law of the house mentioned that she had studied in the government school and college, and is currently doing her undergraduate in political science at the National University. Many of her friends from her neighbourhood and college are now studying at Sylhet University, Dhaka University, and also at BUET.

Case 4: A Lower-Middle-Class Family From Chorshihari Village, in the Ishwarganj upazila of Mymensingh

Two girls from this house were the students of a private female *madrasa*. They were also studying at the BRAC School. However, they weren't regulars there. After asking for the reason, they said they prioritise the education system of the *madrasa* because they believe their education would help the girls be more religious and safe in society, which is a very important thing for their marriage. They further added that their girls will not be taught Arabic or how to stay within the rules at BRAC School, which is why they are sending their daughters to *Madrasa* although it's more expensive to send them there. They mentioned this very interesting fact that the women of the families themselves do not pray daily or have any prior knowledge about their very religion, but they're still hopeful about the education of the *madrasa*. Though they're sending both their daughters to the *madrasa* in class 4, where the tuition fees are 300 takas per month, when the salary of the *madrasa* increases in 7th or 8th grade to 600 to 800, they will not be sending their daughters there anymore. Although they wanted their children to study in a disciplined academic institution, they had no plans for their future careers. They mention this fact: though children are sent to the *madrasas* regularly, rather than learning Arabic or how to pray five times a day, they are more focused on how they should do their purdah, indicating that the *madrasas* were more likely to teach them about their social and religious norms than the aspects that might be needed for future educational

purposes. Here, their prior motivation is to make their daughters perfect according to social norms. They further mentioned that the female *madrasas* have their residential arrangement as well and highly encourage the family and the kids to stay there and learn the social norms and take education under the private Islamic Education Organization. Though the food for the fellow students would be sent by their home and they would be allowed to go back home every weekend, the mother of the daughter wanted her children to stay within the house and regularly attend *Madrasa* classes. However, many students from the village and also from outside villages stay in the *madrasa* so that they can learn within the discipline all the time. When we asked them about the dowry system, they openly accepted that they do give dowries in marriages.

Case 5: Islampur Madrasa, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

This very interview was taken in a very hostile environment at the Islampur *Madrasa*, and the interviewee was Azizi, *Boro Hujur* (Principal). The interviewer had to fake his religious identity to talk more comfortably with them. The principal mentioned that it was a Koumi *madrasa* and not funded by the government. He added that no fees or help are taken by anyone to study there, but it is run by the villagers, who voluntarily donate goods and money there. He also mentioned that this institution has the facility to offer master's degrees in Arabic. And the teachers they have are from reputable *madrasas* in Dhaka. And some of them are master's graduates from Dhaka University.

Case 6: Family of a Landless women from Islampur village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

In Islampur village, we interviewed a group of women who were from a landless family and were from the lower economic class. This was the neighbouring house of the Balishita Bari. The daughter of the house discussed how important it is for the community and individuals that the woman follow religious norms. As it is considerably tough to maintain the purdah in the garment factory, the women who work there do not interact with them. Although they know and have sympathy for the fact that they are in economic need because it is against the current social norms of maintaining purdah, they maintain their distance from them. Although the female teachers in the *madrasa* are treated with equal respect as the male teachers, it's believed that they're doing their job while maintaining the social norm. Though women are not allowed to go to religious events openly, when religious leaders from other places come to their *madrasas*, the community arranges sound systems so everyone can participate from their very place.

Case 7: A female madrasa from Chorshihari village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

We went to a female *madrasa* and had a conversation with the female teachers and students. They told us that only unmarried girls study there. Apart from the Bangla,

English, and Arabic learning, they are also taught the social norms and the proper behaviour expected from the women there. The concept of purdah is also highly practised there. For around 350 students, there are seven female teachers, and this faith-based organisation is led by one male teacher who is also known as the Boro Hujur. As he is the sole proprietor of this very faith-based organisation, all the administrative and authoritarian decisions are taken by him.

Marriages in Contemporary Rural Bangladesh:

In the process of matchmaking, the very idea of a perfect girl is that she has to be religious and partake in *purdah*. As for the groom, if there's a livelihood in urban society, it's likely taken as a good and financially well-off family. The education level of the groom is higher on average, so they are more likely to be prioritised. However, this education and the economic and social status of the families are important, mostly because of how much of a dowry or gift would be presented at the wedding as a result of these factors. Another common thing in the current rural areas is that in most families, they try to conduct the marriage within their extended family, as it becomes easier for both the bride and groom's families to understand each other's values, and to hazard whether it would possibly be a good match for the couple. In these marriages, though not a heavy amount of cash is given, the arrangements for the wedding and gifts to the bride and groom are made by the bride's family.

While on the ground level, most families were forthcoming about the continued practice of dowry in its new form of gifts, however, when speaking to officials such as the Chairman of Ishwarganj Upazila, he said "Dowry doesn't exist currently. I go to weddings almost every day and I don't see any exchange of dowry." Therefore, there is a disconnect between the Government officials and the actual people living in these areas. This disconnect can have severe consequences, as there is a necessity for Government intervention in attempts to put an end to practices such as dowry or child marriage.

The Influence of Religious Education:

The observations we made were through conversations with the *Madrasa* Authority, and the locals were, however, very different. The rise of *madrasas* in the rural areas of Bangladesh was comparatively new, as it had started only 10 to 12 years ago. In every community, there are separate *madrasas* for male and female students. As previously mentioned, the priority of the parents in sending children to *Madrasas* was to ensure marriage prospects in the future, but we also noticed that they had complaints about the

lack of discipline in government schools. According to the locals, the teachers of the *madrasa* were stricter, which they believed was good for the students. The education and training quality of the teachers were also good, which strongly contradicts the QSSMEB survey we have found. The interviews we had taken were very different from one another, which might be possible because of the economic conditions of the families.

A major fact that has been noticed throughout the cases is that none of the Muslim female students have been seen to pursue further career prospects like higher education or jobs after graduating from the *madrasas*. Highlighting the fact that there is still an educational gap in the quality of this Islamic education institute compared to government schools.

Influence of Faith Leaders in Creating Societal Norms and Progress:

Female instructors at *madrasas* or community educators have a unique ability to interact with women and families on a personal level, which can help alleviate the issues faced in these areas, such as by addressing gender equity and women's empowerment concerns inside religious organisations. Their participation may result in a reworking of religious texts and teachings to foster a more inclusive perspective of gender roles. Female educators may interact directly with families, addressing problems, encouraging knowledge, and refuting myths about women's responsibilities in society.

Unfortunately, women are becoming increasingly hindered in Bangladesh's rural areas as a result of these concurrent challenges, and one thing that might assist women in overcoming them is empowerment inside faith-based groups. Faith-based groups, such as *Madrasa*, wield considerable power in the region. As previously stated, female teachers who are already working in the *madrasa* as teachers will understand how important it is to teach the locals about gender equality and equity if they can pursue higher education, so rural women will not be confined to little to no high school education but will also be able to pursue further studies. Islam is the main religion in Bangladesh's rural areas, which supported gender equality a thousand years ago. As a result, if the religious teaching system stresses this part of religious teaching and encourages women's empowerment, it will benefit not just the women but also the community's future growth. A fact that was highlighted was that most financially disadvantaged women work outside the home, so if scholarships or subsidies are made available to them by both government and non-government authorities, they will be better able to pursue their livelihood and will be more welcomed within their community.

Conclusion

The study indicated the persistence of the dowry system, which continues to influence marital transactions and family dynamics, while religious rituals play an essential role in defining gender roles. The economic burden imposed on the bride's family emphasizes the importance of raising awareness and educating people about the benefits of education and empowerment rather than dowry. Encouraging families to prioritize education and skill development for both genders might help break the dowry cycle and build a fairer marital culture.

Regardless of its quality, the emphasis on Islamic education raises concerns about its impact on future career chances. Modernising the curriculum and ensuring instructors' qualifications might bridge this educational divide, preparing pupils for various job possibilities. This could also help alleviate the issue of dowry, as spreading awareness and education through Islamic institutions' religious backing will legitimise it in the eyes of those who hold Islamic education in reverence. Most of the houses that we visited had children who were sent to such educational institutes, so it was very likely for the future generation to take this knowledge and understand that the system of dowry is harmful to both the family and community.

The research revealed the complexities of women's roles, where economic need collides with cultural values such as purdah. Gender equality conversations in religious teachings, as well as empowering women within faith-based groups, have the potential to spark change and challenge customary limits. A more inclusive perspective of gender roles might be fostered by harnessing the power of these groups, benefiting not only women but also the entire community.

This study captures the essence of rural life in Bangladesh via a collection of insightful interviews and observations, emphasising the importance of embracing local perspectives and nuances while assessing the interplay of culture, religion, and social dynamics. There is the potential to have a transformational influence on rural culture by focusing on education, empowerment, and developing religious teachings, promoting a fairer and more progressive society in which individuals' identities are determined by choice rather than tradition. The connection between religion, marriage, education, and gender roles is not only a study topic but also an important aspect of the cultural essence that shapes the lives of people and communities in rural Bangladesh.

Part II: Contemporary Rural Economies

This section of the report looks into how rural economies and markets have transformed over time while analysing the factors which have contributed towards its transformations and the factors which problematize their operation. Chapter 4 offers an overall look into the markets with a focus on the market's transformation on the social fabric of rural Bangladesh, while Chapter 5 analyses the market's transformation based on improved road and infrastructural development.

Chapter 4

The Evolution of Bangladesh's Rural Economics and Its Effects on Societal Factors

Ahmed Khan

Bangladesh's rural markets have seen significant changes recently, moving from traditional agricultural methods to a variety of income sources and modern interventions. Based on initial interviews conducted in rural villages of Iswarganj Upazilla in Mymensingh such as Churali and Joypur, this chapter delves into the many changes seen in these markets. The main findings highlight the increasing participation of women in the rural economy, the diversification of income sources, the crucial importance of microfinance institutions, and the changing socioeconomic dynamics. However, issues including socio-cultural issues and the effective utilisation of microloans still exist. The research concludes by highlighting the need for a thorough approach to rural development that strikes a balance between economic success and social peace.

Contextualizing Markets in Rural Bangladesh

The rural market, which is frequently disregarded in favour of vibrant urban regions, is the backbone of many rising economies, particularly in Bangladesh. Historically, these markets functioned as the core of commerce, business, and social life for the large majority of rural people living there. The dynamics of these markets have varied greatly over time as a consequence of several socioeconomic and technological elements. The objective of this essay is to delve deeply at the development of rural markets in Bangladesh, with an emphasis on their relationships with the agricultural industry.

Bangladesh, an agricultural economy, has undergone a fundamental change in its rural terrain. The country's rural marketplaces have long been defined by small-scale trading, notably of agricultural commodities. However, thanks to globalisation, technology improvements, and government interference, these markets have begun to shift into more structured and organised associations (Hossain & Sheikh, 2021). The transformation from an agricultural to an increasingly urbanised industrial and service sector has provided the framework for a more diverse rural market. Nonetheless, agriculture is still at the core of the country's socio-economic fabri. Despite the growth, obstacles such as high transportation costs, a lack of money, and poor infrastructure continue (Uddin et al., 2018).

Furthermore, value-chain operations such as CARE-Bangladesh's "Strengthening the Dairy Value Chain Project" have had a substantial influence on rural markets. Such efforts strive to integrate smallholders into wider market contexts, culminating in higher returns and long-term development. These attempts, however, stress gender inequities, particularly in patriarchal settings where women usually have fewer assets than males. These actions have a major influence on altering gender norms, particularly in the context of wealth ownership and control (Quisumbing et al., 2013). Financial institutions like Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL) play a significant role in rural market development. The "Rural Development Scheme" of IBBL reflects the bank's commitment to boosting the rural economy. These programmes give rural enterprises the financial help they need to develop their operations and access new markets (Islam, 2016). However, the rural market in Bangladesh is at a crossroads. While there are indicators of improvement, the trip is far from done. The relationship between agriculture and the rural market, as well as foreign involvement, will influence these markets' future trajectory.

Bangladesh has long been reliant upon rural markets, which are the lifeblood of the country's economy, due to its rich agricultural tradition. These long-established marketplaces have long functioned as the principal source of trade and commerce for the great majority of rural people. However, as the country advances, the dynamics of these marketplaces vary substantially. The relationship between agricultural and rural commerce is growing, and while this transition offers up new possibilities, it also creates new challenges that must be managed. The difficulty to shift from traditional farming practices to more modern, different kinds of income is a common subject in the interviews conducted in numerous rural districts of Bangladesh. For example, the senior representative from Churali village stresses the difficulties of debt repayment, which drives people to extend their sources of income beyond rice growing. They conduct a number of tasks, such as fish harvesting and cow rearing. While this diversification helps revenue, it also means that conventional agricultural practices and the rural markets that underpin them are in danger of becoming outdated.

Another respondent, MD. Abu Hanif of Joypur, presents a picture of substantial increase in the agricultural environment. He notes tremendous gains in infrastructure, education, and general quality of life. However, in the midst of these good advances, there is an underlying concern: the move from traditional haats (local markets) to physical marketplaces. While this may appear to be a positive thing, it also reveals that the nature of rural markets, which used to depend on local commodities and close-knit community relationships, is changing. Market committees and the drive towards more organised marketplaces may lead to the marginalisation of small-scale merchants and farmers, who were traditionally the backbone of these rural markets.

Rural market growth in Bangladesh, pushed by socioeconomic changes and technical improvements, threatens to create a gap between traditional agricultural practices and contemporary market dynamics. While income diversification is excellent, there is a danger that traditional rural markets might lose their originality. Furthermore, changes in educational possibilities may not effectively educate the next generation for the problems and opportunities given by the changing rural market scenario. This is a complicated problem that involves economic, social, and educational components. It must be dealt with extensively, while also respecting and preparing Bangladesh's rural markets for the future.

Reviewing the Literature

Many scholars have been investigating the evolution of rural markets, especially in traditional agricultural communities. One of the most striking results is that as a consequence of global environmental change, regional agricultural systems are experiencing multidimensional upheaval. Official figures of urbanisation and industry in traditional rural regions may disguise this shift. Yang et al. (2022) performed studies on the Chinese Loess Plateau and noticed that the major source of income switched from conventional farming to more diverse lifestyles, including non-farming occupations. The study also discovered that household behaviours reacted actively or passively to a variety of variables such as climatic change, market change, the influence of urbanisation, and governmental regulation, resulting in non-agricultural transformation and eco-transformation in traditional agricultural regions.

Organic farming has emerged as a viable path for Bangladeshi smallholders to enhance their food security through higher productivity and farm profitability. Sarker et al. (2021) studied the advantages of organic farming for smallholders in Bangladesh and found that utilising organic practices resulted in reduced production costs and increased farm revenue owing to premium pricing. According to the survey, the majority of smallholder farmers have achieved household food security as a result of utilising organic agriculture. Furthermore, the research underlined the relevance of farm size, extension media contact, access to secure markets, and institutional help in enhancing smallholders' family food security through involvement in organic agricultural operations. Agricultural extension services are vital for fostering rural agricultural growth. Qwabe et al. (2022) performed research in South Africa that showed the value of agricultural extension in supporting agrarian transformation and enhancing people's lives. However, the research raises concerns regarding the invisibility of extension services in resource-constrained and historically disadvantaged rural areas. According to the paper, the absence of extension services has a direct influence on rural livelihoods, production challenges, marketability, and economic impact.

Bangladesh's transformation from a rural agricultural economy to a modern urban industrial and service economy has been substantial. Hossain and Sheikh (2021) underlined the significance of education, especially higher education, in this shift. The research underlined the relevance of governance in higher education and its effect on the labour market. According to the scholars, investigation into higher education and the labour market is crucial for Bangladesh's long-term growth and development. Nonetheless, the research highlights the significance of understanding rural market dynamics and how they mix with traditional agricultural practices. Environmental changes, legislative efforts, and socioeconomic advances all have an influence on how these markets develop. As rural markets change, more research is required to guide policy choices and promote long-term growth and development.

Given these factors, rural market transformation in Bangladesh is a multidimensional process intertwined with social, cultural, and technical developments. Using primary data acquired from interviews in varied rural regions, we can uncover a number of significant themes and patterns that underlie this shift.

Income Source Diversification and Its Implications

Rural Bangladesh has long been tied with traditional agriculture, particularly rice growing. However, the contemporary environment demonstrates a broad diversity of revenue sources. The Elder of Churali Village presented a microcosmic picture of this development. While rice is still the backbone, there is a conscious push into other crops like potato farming, cow keeping, and fishing. This diversity is a risk-mitigation method as well as a response to market needs. Rural families are better positioned to tolerate economic turbulence since they have various income sources. This transition also reflects a changing market structure with increasingly sophisticated demand and supply networks, requiring the engagement of a varied variety of agricultural and non-agricultural enterprises.

Microcredit: A double-edged Sword?

Microfinance institutions have a vital role in transforming rural markets. According to the interviews, the bulk of loans are issued to women. A further investigation, however, shows a more complicated picture. While these loans are meant to spur investment, they are typically employed to fund housing costs. This mismatch between intended and actual usage raises basic problems concerning microfinance's usefulness as a rural development

tool. Are these entities mainly concerned with bandaging financial wounds rather than tackling wider socio economic issues?

Making Progress Despite Obstacles in Socioeconomic Dynamics and Women's Changing Roles

Joypur's Chairman portrayed a bright image of socio economic prosperity. Growth may be evident in the transfer of businesses from tin huts to multi-story residences, as well as developments in agricultural equipment. Nonetheless, difficulties continue. The absence of close healthcare facilities, discrepancies in educational quality, and modern cultural problems such as rising divorce rates illustrate that, while economic improvement is clear, social worries linger.

Fig 5: Large Market in Islampur Village

One key conclusion gained from the interviews is that women's roles in rural Bangladesh are changing. Women are no longer constrained to conventional positions, and they are at the vanguard of both economic and social advancement. They acquire microloans, are active agricultural participants, and are increasingly becoming the principal breadwinners in many homes. This transformation has far-reaching ramifications for rural markets, pointing to a more inclusive economic system in which women play a vital role.

When these facts are taken together, it is apparent that rural Bangladesh is under transition. While economic metrics suggest improvement, societal concerns necessitate a more holistic approach to development. In its present form, the rural market is a complicated web of traditional practices intertwined with contemporary initiatives, each having a substantial impact on the other.

Rural Market Non-agricultural Dynamics

Aside from conventional agricultural practices, the rural market in Bangladesh has experienced an increase in non-farm activities. This change reflects a changing economic situation in which municipalities seek new sources of money. Change in rural Bangladesh is the product of more than only individual or group initiatives. It is the product of a symbiotic interaction between technical breakthroughs, governmental efforts, and market dynamics. The adoption of new seeds and farming practices, which is typically advocated by NGOs such as BRAC, has considerably enhanced agricultural production. Non-farm firms, aided by microfinance institutions and government policies, are concurrently transforming the economic landscape. While these policies have assisted economic advancement, they have also generated new obstacles. Financial literacy is becoming increasingly crucial, particularly among microloan borrowers. Furthermore, as rural regions become increasingly integrated with metropolitan markets, there is an urgent need to solve infrastructure concerns and guarantee that the advantages of expansion are dispersed equitably between agricultural and non-farming sectors.

Case Study 1: Joypur's Agricultural Landscape Transformation

Joypur, a rural Bangladeshi hamlet, demonstrates the swift changes taking place in the rural market sector. MD. Abu Hanif, the village's 40-plus-year-old Chairman, discusses the changes in depth. Joypur's economy has long depended mainly on rice agriculture. The field, which produced 10 kg of rice previously, has quadrupled its production and now produces 40 kg of rice. This rise could be connected to advancements in agricultural technology, such as the introduction of new seeds by groups such as BRAC. This is further discussed below:

Agriculture vs. Fisheries:

While paddy remains the backbone, interest in fisheries is expanding. The Chairman, on the other hand, underscored a fundamental challenge: the capital-intensive nature of fish farming. Setting up a fishery needs a large investment, notably in feed and care. Many conventional farmers have been stopped from joining this potentially lucrative industry

owing to financial restrictions. However, the rewards are enormous for those who can afford the initial outlay.

Microfinance and Education's Role:

Joypur's development is based on the government and entities such as BRAC. They not only give loans, but also essential training to the people. These training programmes teach communities the tools they need to diversify their revenue sources, which vary from cow grazing to contemporary agricultural practices. The Chairman underlined that roughly 80% of the village's residents are now involved in some type of business, showing a substantial move away from traditional farming.

Economic and Societal Consequences of Development:

These developments have far-reaching economic effects. Businessmen who formerly resided in tin huts now possess multi-story buildings. Women, who were once limited to the house, are now key contributors in the village's economy, with many working in the textile business. However, economic empowerment has brought with it its own set of obstacles. The Chairman noted a spike in divorce rates, notably among the village's lowest members.

Joypur's transition highlights the challenges of rural market dynamics. While the village's economic metrics are solid, its socio-cultural fabric is under tremendous strain. Joypur's core concern is balancing economic development and social cohesiveness. This case study shows the intricate link between economic interventions like microfinance and training and their socio-cultural effects. Joypur matches the greater trends in rural Bangladesh in many respects, making it a microcosm of the larger transformation that is taking place.

*Case Study No. 2: Women's Dual Roles in the Rural Market and Agriculture in Churali***

Churali, another village in Bangladesh, gives a fresh viewpoint on women's developing roles in the rural market and agricultural sectors. The chat with the Village Elder, a representative who works with BRAC's DABI to oversee resource distribution, offers insight on this transition. Historically, Churali's women were largely in charge of home tasks, with minimal involvement in the village's economic operations. The emergence of microfinance groups such as DABI, however, has generated a change in this dynamic.

Empowerment of Women Through Microfinance:

The concentration of DABI on financing to women has helped them to engage in a broad variety of economic activities. These loans have allowed women to considerably contribute to their families' earnings, from buying livestock to investing in small-scale

companies. This proclivity is evidenced by the Village Elder's son's recent purchase of a cow, which was backed by such a loan.

Diversification of Agricultural Activities:

While rice growing remained a key source of revenue in Churali, the Village Representative underlined the importance of diversifying agricultural operations. Following paddy harvesting, for example, the fields are utilised for potato farming. This rotational farming technique maximises land utilisation while simultaneously maintaining a constant revenue stream throughout the year.

Pond Leasing Programme:

The pond leasing system is an unusual component of Churali's rural economy. The Village Elder's five-year lease on a pond, where he expects to trap and sell fish, reveals the imaginative manner by which the inhabitants enhance their income. The pond, which comprises around 1500 fish, including Rui and Bausch types, promises to be a lucrative investment.

While the economic figures are strong, Churali has particular issues. Loan repayments remain an issue, with some consumers taking out loans for home modifications rather than investing. The Village Elder stressed the scarcity of healthcare facilities even further, identifying Gouripur as the sole accessible area for medical treatment. Churali's tale is one of persistence, resourcefulness, and change. Women, who were traditionally on the outskirts of the economic landscape, are now at its core. However, the constraints of loan repayment and a lack of key facilities such as healthcare underscore the necessity for a comprehensive rural development strategy. This case study shows the vital role of microfinance in empowering women and catalysing rural development. The visit to Churali village gives crucial insights into the difficulties and possibilities inherent in Bangladesh's rural market dynamics.

The Evolving Economic Sphere and Its Social Implications

Primary data obtained through interviews on the growth of rural markets in Bangladesh offer a rich tapestry of insights into the region's evolving socioeconomic environment. The diversification of revenue sources is key to this change, which requires changing from a primarily rice cultivation-centric economy to one that embraces a varied array of industries ranging from potato farming to fisheries. Traditionally, rural Bangladesh has been characterised by its dependence on traditional agricultural practices. The contemporary climate, however, is one of change and adaptability, as illustrated by the Village Elder from Churali and the Chairman from Joypur. Diversification appears to be a

proactive attempt to avoid the dangers associated with monocropping and to capitalise on new economic possibilities, rather than a reaction to market demands. An approach like this mirrors a wider worldwide trend in which rural regions aim to diversify their revenue sources in order to sustain economic resilience in the face of changing climatic circumstances and market dynamics.

Fig 6: Packaged food hanging in a shop in the Islampur Market

The significance of microfinance organisations in aiding this transformation cannot be stressed. According to the report, these institutions have been vital in giving the money required for rural populations to engage in new economic activity. However, the complicated picture that emerges, notably from the Village Elder's narrative, raises serious problems regarding the effectiveness and purpose of these loans. While some loans are employed for their original purpose, such as acquiring assets such as cows, it appears that a large amount is diverted for household requirements. This discrepancy between planned and actual loan usage shows a possible divergence between microfinance firms' objectives and the existing necessities of the rural population.

In addition, the changing role of women in the rural economy is an important metric of socioeconomic advancement. Women, who were historically sidelined in the economic context, are now emerging as key participants in the rural economy. Their rising engagement in agricultural and non-agricultural firms, backed in part by microloans, is transforming the socioeconomic dynamics of rural Bangladesh. While this change is desirable, it also brings new issues to light, as demonstrated by the rising divorce rate among economically active women. When these figures are pooled, it is evident that Bangladesh's rural market transformation is the consequence of a complex interaction of different reasons. While economic data demonstrate development and adaptability, underlying socio-cultural concerns must be addressed. The interviews illustrate a route of

perseverance, innovation, and progress in rural Bangladesh, but it is also a rough and unexpected voyage.

Yang et al. 's (2022) findings on the Chinese Loess Plateau correlate to the observed diversification of income sources in rural Bangladesh, which goes beyond conventional farming to embrace a wide range of occupations. Climate change, market dynamics, and regulatory restraints are all forcing a shift away from conventional agriculture and towards more diverse livelihoods in both sectors. The active and passive responses of families to these issues underscore the dynamic character of rural markets and their inclination to change in response to external pressures. The relevance of organic farming in promoting food security, as underlined by Sarker et al. (2021) in the context of Bangladesh, aligns to the observed variation in agricultural practices in primary data. While the respondents did not directly mention organic farming, the underlying idea of diversifying agricultural practices to boost food security and revenue remained constant. The study's focus on farm size, considerable media participation, and market access is echoed in the interviews, where the significance of money and training in fostering diversification was stressed.

According to Qwabe et al. (2022), the essential facts illustrate the usefulness of agricultural extension services. While Qwabe and colleagues focused on the South African environment, the difficulties connected with a lack of extension services and its influence on rural living, productivity, and marketability are worldwide. Primary evidence from Bangladesh demonstrates the role of microfinance institutions and organisations like BRAC in bridging this gap by providing both financial help and vital training to rural communities. Hossain and Sheikh's (2021) focus on the role of education in Bangladesh's transition offers a wider socioeconomic context to the core conclusions. While the interviews focused primarily on economic activities, the underlying theme of socioeconomic progress, as represented by women's changing roles and the challenges associated with economic empowerment, can be linked to the larger narrative of education and its impact on socioeconomic dynamics. When compared to the literature, the main results from rural Bangladesh indicate consistency as well as subtlety. Diversification, microfinance, the need for training and extension services, and the wider socioeconomic consequences of rural market transformation are issues that have been examined previously. Primary data, on the other hand, brings unique insights, especially in the context of Bangladesh, and enhances the wider conversation on rural market transitions.

This study's conclusions have far-reaching consequences for a wide spectrum of stakeholders, from policymakers to grassroots practitioners. The various functions of microfinance institutions in Bangladesh's rural development is notable. While loans are definitely economic boosters, the disparity between their claimed objective and their actual deployment reveals a lack of financial understanding. This stresses the vital

relevance of efforts that not only give financial resources but also educate customers on how to spend these resources properly. Such focused financial literacy courses aid guarantee that microloans are exploited as tools for long-term development. Another noteworthy outcome is the expanded participation of women in the rural economic fabric. While hopeful, this trend underscores the distinct difficulties that women confront, needing actions that are suited to their special requirements. Gender-sensitive initiatives may assist to guarantee that women are supported, empowered, and protected as they grow in the rural economy. Finally, the socio-cultural dimensions of the study underscore that, however admirable, economic growth is simply one part of rural development. A comprehensive development strategy is necessary to meet continuing socioeconomic difficulties ranging from healthcare access to changing social dynamics. This strategy should combine economic growth with social cohesion activities to achieve inclusive and long-term success.

Conclusion: Rural Markets As Site of Transformation

The complex dynamics of Bangladesh's rural marketplaces, as explored in this research, reflect a diverse transformation process based on socioeconomic, cultural, and technical advances. The move from conventional agricultural practices to a greater range of revenue sources demonstrates a resilient rural population proactively positioning itself in the face of altering economic realities. While microfinance institutions have played an important role in this transition, they also give a confusing picture, underlining the necessity for additional targeted measures to guarantee their effectiveness in actual rural upliftment.

Women's increased engagement in the rural economic framework reflects larger socioeconomic developments, signifying a transition towards a more inclusive market system. The juxtaposition of economic success with persisting socio-cultural difficulties, on the other hand, highlights the importance for a comprehensive development strategy. While economic indications are promising, they must be assessed against social realities to achieve long-term success. Based on the findings of this research and the larger literature, it is evident that, while Bangladesh's rural markets are expanding and changing, the path ahead is complex. To solve them, a collaborative strategy that involves government measures, grassroots activities, and continual research is essential. As Bangladesh determines its future trajectory, insights from its rural core provide crucial lessons not only for the country but for parallel scenarios around the world, underlining the universality of rural market issues and opportunity.

Chapter 5

Winding Roads: The Impact of Transforming Infrastructure on Rural Markets

Adiba Amreen

Introduction

Sometime in the 1980s, a young boy walks across vast fields of paddy as far as his eyes can see. It is just past sunset, and he can hear the Maghrib *azaan*, the Islamic call to prayer, in the distance as night falls around him. Suddenly, he hears something behind him, and in the trees is the fearsome image of a woman. Unbelievably tall, deathly thin with a skeletal face, she stands wearing a white *shari* with her long black hair billowing around her in the wind. She screeches, her voice so hoarse the boy has to cover his ears. Just when he thinks this cannot get worse, she opens her mouth again and out comes not another screech- but fire. At this point, the boy runs, and he runs all the way home. Somehow he makes it- and it is a great fortune that he did, because he lived to be in his 80s, sitting in the same place where he had this ghostly encounter, where a market now stands, able to recount this story to two students from BRAC University and their faculty.

The story above is a recounting shared by a village elder from Charshihari village in rural Mymensingh when we asked him what kind of transformations he has seen in the village, especially the market, in his many years. It is a perfect example of one of the transformations that have happened in *graam* Bangla, the villages of Bengal, that we could see upfront. Improved communications and infrastructure, both on land and on water, have been one of the determining factors of the transformation of the rural market as witnessed in person while conducting fieldwork in the Ishwarganj Upazila in Mymensingh, Bangladesh; as well as reported in the literature surrounding rural growth and development. However, this very transformation is also one of the reasons for elderly entrepreneurs falling behind in the increasingly competitive rural market. This paper will explore what this looked like on the field, what the tangible changes witnessed and heard about while speaking to respondents were, and the stark difference from the image of villages as previously thought of as self-sustaining and isolated.

Reviewing the Context and Literature

Much of the early literature and description surrounding villages comes from the accounts of British Colonial officers who might have seen and experienced these villages during tax collection. However, these descriptions would often be about a village seen in a particular

region of British India and later applied to all villages throughout the subcontinent (Karim, 1956). This was not entirely untrue, as there were striking similarities among the villages of the different Indian, Pakistani and Bengali regions- although they were not always exactly the same (Karim, 1956). One of the generalisations made by the British officers is that of the "self-sustaining" nature of the Indian village, going as far as to call them "little republics", due to the pre-existing governance structure, informal village judiciary (shalish), and how almost everything that the village would need to survive was produced within the village itself, not only food, but any other necessary item, such as pots and tools, would also be produced by village artisans who would be paid in agrarian produce by the people of the village, who were majority farmers. These artisans' families would continue in the same profession generationally (Karim, 1956). This description had been taken for granted many times during discussions of Indian village problems, which is especially true when talking about the rural economy (Karim, 1956). For example, K.M. Ashraf, in his analysis of the Muslim period, stated that production would mostly be for local consumption, and any industries that existed would be near rivers so that access to raw materials would be easier. He went on to say that the village is economically self-sufficient due to its "organic" nature, by which he meant that the community would work together as a team to supply the needs of the village (Ashraf, 1935 as cited in Karim, 1956).

Other scholars, however, have contested this mainly on the basis of salt and iron, which most villages did not produce. This would mean that these essential raw materials, needed in cooking and blacksmithing, would have to have been imported from elsewhere, likely from other villages (Kosambi, 1956 as cited in Karim, 1956). Besides this, *shilpikaaj* (items of arts and crafts) had begun being traded by a newly formed and aspirational trading class. So, although the *shilpi* or the Artisan was still in the village, the distribution of their products had gone to the hands of others (Roy, 1922 as cited in Karim, 1956). Lastly, during the Mughal rule, much of the production from the village began to be taken to the urban centres. However, not much came back to the village- leading to an unequal transactional relationship where the village was affected by the commodity demands of the urban areas but still had to produce their own needs themselves (Habib, 1963 as cited in Karim, 1956). Therefore, it becomes clear that the "self-sufficient" nature of the Indian village remained almost a myth, sometimes even before the British arrived. One of the reasons for this is brought up by Jansen (1987), who says that the percentage of household income that goes towards "imported" goods is very small, lending to the image of self-sufficiency.

The above description of pre-colonial and colonial rural economy is to provide a background for the idea on which this study takes place. Much has changed, especially since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Even pre-independence, there have been development efforts targeting rural Bangladesh aiming to bring development to the

region; and since then they have only increased. One of the main, and as this paper argues- most important, focuses of rural development work is on rural infrastructure, infrastructure being defined as the facilities and services integral to everyday life, such as transportation, communication, water supply, healthcare, education and more (Rahman, 2014). Infrastructure is necessary in order to make rural Bangladesh accessible. Rural accessibility can be understood as the increased ability to travel and transport goods between destinations, using the available infrastructure to do so (Ahmed & Eklund, 2019).

Due to how remote many areas of rural Bangladesh were, accessibility was low and it was difficult for goods and resources to reach these areas and their people, and for people from these areas to move around (Jansen, 1987). Better road systems meant more and better transport opportunities bilaterally, more employment opportunities, and more goods flowing in and out and thus significant changes to the rural economy- and especially important for the purposes of this paper- the rural market (Adnan, 2022). There are marked changes in the tastes of the people of rural Bangladesh, especially due to the massive changes in the goods that are now able to reach them. Where once nothing could be delivered, now there are televisions, fridges, and other electronics; aside from which one can now find packaged snacks. Further, improved road systems and communications have led to better transportation systems, meaning more and more people are able to leave the village to find employment, and as such more women are gaining employment as well- increasing the overall household spending of the rural people and allowing them to purchase goods such as what Adnan calls ‘consumer durables’-TVs, fridges, etc (Adnan, 2022).

Bangladesh has employed many rural development programs, one of which is known as the Comilla Model, within the purview of which the Rural Works Program and the Food for Work Program fall. This program aimed to solve the issues of both unemployment and underdeveloped road systems by employing the village residents to work on these infrastructural projects as an employment opportunity. The Government of Bangladesh decided to use this model and transplant it throughout the country, with this focus on rural infrastructure improvement becoming a key focus of much of the development strategies in Bangladesh since the 1980s (Toufique, 2017). This process occurred over many years and under many names, lastly landing on the Local Government Engineering Department (LEGD), which would become a key player and have a hand in many infrastructure development projects (Toufique, 2017). Besides that, since the late 1990s, there have been initiatives to improve telecommunications throughout Bangladesh, not only through NGOs such as Grameen Bank but also as part of companies’ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Bayes, 2001; Sarker, 2014). Growing telecommunications have led to more and more internet usage throughout the country and in rural areas. This has opened up a whole new world, with new government policies, new markets and, as with any new inclusion, new problems.

One such problem in this case is building up human capacity in response to the newly developed infrastructure. As new technology flows into rural areas, there is a need for those most vulnerable to gain access to literacy regarding these technologies. As discussed, consumer goods in the form of televisions and fridges are flowing into the village. Similarly, mobile phones have also entered rural areas, meaning more and more people have access to the Internet or will in the near future. This calls for capacity building in the form of digital literacy, which according to a recent BIGD (BRAC Institute of Governance and Development), is dismal- with more than half of the households surveyed having low access to the Internet or a computer, and a majority with low skills in Internet use (The Daily Star, 2020).

The primary framework for this paper followed that of Jansen's 'Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources', which is a longitudinal study of Bhaimara village in Manikganj, Bangladesh. Jansen explores every aspect of village life, but for the purposes of this paper, the 8th chapter of his book will be referenced, titled "Political and Economic Integration of Villages into Wider Society" as it tackles government policies and initiatives affecting rural infrastructure. This will mainly act as a reference point to which the current situation of rural Mymensingh will be compared. Following that, I will view the cultural shift that is coming about due to these newly developed networks of connection through the lens of modernisation and globalisation. The basis of most modernisation theories is the idea of change within the norms and values, essentially the culture of what is considered a "traditional society" (Webster, 1990). Of course, theories such as these have some serious criticisms against them, which will be taken into account when applying them. For example, the idea that in order to embrace modernity and thus development, one must shed all traditional values, will be addressed if and when it is brought up. In conjunction with this, I will also be using the concept of globalisation throughout my analyses for this paper. As defined by Stiglitz (2002), globalisation is the closer integration of countries and people due to the reduction in costs of travel and communication, as well as the breaking down of barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge and people across borders.

Findings & Case Studies

As mentioned above, three different markets were visited throughout the fieldwork, and although there were some marked similarities- especially between the two markets that were located within the village premises, there were distinct differences between all three. The first market visited was known as Rangpurer Moar, literally translated to "the intersection of Rangpur", named after a village named Rangpur located beside this market. It is located at the intersection of three different villages under the same Union, and the land surrounding this market were paddy fields, and one has to travel quite a bit

into the village to reach this market. The shops here were all made of tin sheds on embankments beside an asphalt road, and they lined both sides of it. There were about ten different shops in this small village market, with more than one mudir dokan (shop selling assorted goods, mainly foodstuff). There was a pharmacy at this market, and the owner's brother told us that the pharmacist had completed government training to administer first aid, thus the shop acted as both a pharmacy and a place where one could get first aid if necessary. Lastly, there was also a shop for repairing and selling auto rickshaws in this market.

The second market we visited was a semi-urban market called Bottola Bazaar. It is a large market, spanning at least a kilometre in length, and is an amalgam of multiple concrete buildings- a proper shopping complex. This was not located within any one village, but rather on the outskirts of multiple. We came across this one on our way to the office of the Union Parishad Chairman's office, and when we asked villagers from Joypur village, they said that they do come to this market for needs and necessities, especially as it has shops that are well connected and able to bring in a variety of things. As we walked around the market, we noticed many shops carrying ready-made garments- a stark contrast to other rural markets where unstitched cloth was the norm. Besides that, this market is the only one we witnessed with a designated market association, although it mostly took care of security for the goods, as most of the development and repair work for the market was handled by the landlords, according to one businessman. Besides this, another interesting thing we noticed was that there seemed to be a clear divide based on religion in one of the market buildings. The side of the building facing the street had shops owned by majority Muslim owners, some with beards wearing white panjabis, others selling *burkhas*. However, the side of the building on the left seemed to have shops owned by Hindu owners, with a couple of gold shops that were obviously Hindu-owned as they were decorated with colourful pictures of Hindu deities and small idols. A cloth shop owner whom we interviewed told us his brother also owned a shop on the other side of the building.

Fig 7: Midday at the Islampur Market

The last market we visited was the Islampur market, located in the village of the same name. This market was unique in its ownership, whereas other markets were on land owned by multiple owners, this one only had one. There is a large *Madrasa* in this village that owns the land on which the market is built. One of the shop owners told us it owns 100 *bigha* (nearly 62 acres) of land in the village. This market is also fairly large, although its architecture more closely resembles that of the first market than the second. Here, we learned that there are shops for almost anything the villagers could want. Mobile shops, electronics shops, a cloth shop, tea stalls, *mudir dokan*, carpenters and more. Not only that, but one of the residents of this village claimed to have his own garment factory besides a paddy business. When asked about market committees, one shop owner said there was no such thing, and the *Madrasa* only handled the collection of rent. Despite the large size of the market, with quite a few lanes and many individual shops- there was only one shop for cloth. The owner of this shop said that there was another one, but that shop could not keep up with the competition against the only other cloth shop in the market.

Lastly, before delving into the case studies, in the key person interview of the Union Parishad Chairman, when asked about the changes in the rural markets that he had seen as a young man and the ones he sees nowadays and the differences between them, he said that there were vast differences. When he was younger, the markets were rarely permanent structures, now many of them were pukka buildings made of brick and mortar. According to the Chairman, there are market committees for the markets in his Union

which are responsible for the overall care and well-being of the market. He stated that they take care of shop owners who may be struggling or if there are any disagreements between shop owners. However, having spoken to the shop owners, we learned that there are either no market committees or there are market associations that are not particularly active, especially not in the duties that the Chairman said that they would be active in. In the Rangpurer Moar market, the lands have private owners that rent their land out and maintain it. In Bottola Bazaar, there is a market association however, one shop owner stated that they do not actually assist the shop owners at all but only take a monthly 'security fee' to hire night guards. Lastly, in Islampur Market, as the *Madrasa* owned the land on which the market was located, we asked one of the shop owners if they also acted as a market committee in any capacity and he said that no, they did not. They only collect rent, and the rest of the affairs are left up to the individual shop owners. In the KPI with the Union Parishad Secretary, it was revealed that most times elected officials would stay out of market matters in order to ensure that they are able to renew their terms in any upcoming elections.

Having discussed the overall makeup of the three markets, I will present three case studies on which I would like to focus and analyse through the given theoretical framework:

Case Study 1:

In this case study, I would like to talk about a shop and a conversation from the Rangpurer Moar market. The first is a *mudir dokan*, and the latter was a conversation we had with the village residents at the tea shop.

In the case of the mudir dokan, we noticed that the shop was stocked with any and all kinds of packaged snacks. Chips, chocolates, candies, biscuits, anything one could want, none of which would be produced within the village. Thus, we asked the shop owner, whose shop had been there for 16 years (previously owned by his father), how these goods came to him, and whether or not it was the same in his father's time. He told us that oftentimes, he would be approached by agents from different factories to stock their products in his shop, and he would make decisions based on customer demand. The goods would be delivered to his shop, and the transportation for this would cost anywhere between 20 to 30 BDT. When his father ran the shop, he said, the case was quite similar.

Coming to the conversation with the village residents, we got to see a very clear story of infrastructural development in this particular market. Even in the 1980s, the very road we were standing on did not exist, and in its place were vast fields with nothing but narrow paths between them. At the time, the Monsoon would bring massive flooding, it would destroy crops and make it extremely difficult for the villagers to navigate the area, many

would have to take boats to the main road in order to go to the market and get their necessities. However, since part of the nearby river had been filled and this new road had been built, these problems no longer persist, they are able to move around easily and are happy with this development.

Case Study 2:

The owner of this shop was a younger man who was very interested in speaking to us. When he understood we were there for research, he asked if he could tell us his story, and we agreed to listen. He told us how he had worked apprentice jobs to learn different technical and mechanical skills, how he had worked in a garment factory as a mechanic in Dhaka for a while, and how his ultimate dream was always to come back to his hometown and do something there. He had come back to Mymensingh six years ago and opened a clothing store, selling children's clothes and burkhas.

What stood out about this man was his ideology, while telling us his story, he kept underscoring how the most important thing was his hard work, and how fate had very little to do with his success- "1% *kopal*'- 1% fate. He then went on to tell us that he watches videos on Warren Buffet when he can, and how he takes business advice from them. However, he did not only credit his success to himself but also to Allah, using words such as "Alhamdulillah" and "In Shaa Allah" in his sentences. Although he asserted many times that his success is entirely his own when we asked him how he received the finances for the security deposit on his shop, he revealed that his relatives are well-to-do, and he had always told them that one day he would come back and do something in his hometown, how he would ask them for finances when this day came. Therefore, the finances of his shop did come through his well-to-do relatives via a loan of 6 lac BDT.

This was not the only interesting thing about this shop, however. We asked the owner and his associates about the *burkhas* on display in their shop, whether or not they made a lot of sales on them or where they would get them. They told us that these days, more and more people are buying *burkhas*, and there is an increased demand for them. Not only that, but many would come to them with specific designs in mind that they would show the shop owners on their phones, asking for these designs in particular. They would have to try their best to have popular designs in stock to keep up with this.

Case Study 3:

This case is also from the large semi-urban market as the one above, although a very different scenario. This shop is located in a different building a bit further away from the first one, and the owner is an elderly man with an equally elderly associate who sat at a sewing machine at the mouth of the shop. The shop owner had been here for 30 to 35 years, and by his own admission had seen many changes within the market, from soaring

rent prices to the way customers' wants changed. He was struggling to keep his business afloat.

Before, he said, people would come by his shop whenever they wanted new clothes, they would choose the cloth and they would give his associate the cloth to be sewn. However, now people no longer buy clothes from them in this way, rather they only come by when they need new clothing, resulting in losses for them. Despite bringing in cloth they know to sell quickly, they are still struggling, and the shop owner emphasised more than once that once upon a time, customers would have his associate sew their clothes on the spot, but now because there are so many trends and designs, they are unable to keep up with these demands.

Evaluating Rural Markets in Context of Infrastructure Development

Having described the above cases and with the theoretical framework in mind, it can be said that some of the biggest factors of change witnessed in the markets, of any size, in Mymensingh, were the developed road and telecommunication networks. The effect of the improved telecommunication networks was heard throughout the findings, even outside of the specific case studies mentioned above. As both the respondents from Case Studies 2 and 3 stated, the tastes in the fashion of the people of rural Bangladesh have begun to be influenced not only by television shows or movies but by the internet as well. The influence of the globalised network in this case is clear, as improved infrastructure is making way for more and more outside influences to penetrate “remote” markets and drive consumption patterns. Not only can we clearly see the effect of globalisation as Stiglitz defined, as the barriers stopping knowledge-i.e. trends and tastes are falling and reaching what was once considered isolated areas (Stiglitz, 2002), but this is also a clear change in values and norms. One shopkeeper in Bottola Bazaar mentioned how customers would once only buy cloth if they needed them, now they buy them when they want them. The customers as seen here could be said to have had a change in their values, once considering clothing to be a necessity only and now it has become a part of their wants. More and more often, we hear of clothing as self-expression, and with the spread of social media and the internet, it can be inferred that similar values might have reached the rural areas. In order to keep up with these changing trends and customer wants, shop owners themselves must become savvy with technology and trends-meaning that they must reach a level of modernisation themselves in order to keep up with the new values being adopted by their customers, a sign that wider society itself in the rural areas are adopting certain modernised values.

The above example, however, goes directly against Case Study 3, wherein the shop owner has not been able to gain the attention of customers. He has been quoted saying,

“Customer er obhaab, maal er obhaab nai”- there is no shortage of goods, but a shortage of customers. This quote perfectly exemplifies a disconnect between the effect of globalisation and modernisation- he has no difficulty getting his wares, even if they come from far away, due to the falling barriers of travel and transportation- however, the changing trends and tastes of the regular customers are still affecting his business. We had asked him if he pays attention to customer wants when bringing his goods, and he replied that he does, of course, he does! One of the losses his business is facing is that fewer customers want to have their clothes sewn in his shop, but would rather go elsewhere for their sewing. Throughout the other examples, we have seen that there is a marked change in customer tastes and consumption patterns, based on what they see on social media, an effect of the globalised network that the Internet and improved telecommunications bring about. Often, these customers bring reference images on their phones for what kind of clothes they want, and both the shop owner and associate are elderly men who may find it difficult to keep up with the latest technology. Further, failing business and increasing shop rents- as the shop owner himself had mentioned- might mean that he does not have the option to purchase a smartphone to keep up with these trends either. This is corroborated by the BIGD report, the majority of households in rural areas do not have access to smartphones, computers or the Internet (The Daily Star, 2020). Although we saw many younger shop owners with mobile phones, this particular shop in Case Study 3 did not have any, in fact while other shop owners were on their phones between customers- the elderly shop owner was reading a newspaper. When he got a call, it was on an old button phone that he kept behind a small desk in his shop. Further, BIGD’s report found that Mymensingh was on the lower end of digital access (The Daily Star, 2020), meaning that it is entirely possible that not only these elderly shop owners but others could be facing the same challenge in access and opportunity.

A few kilometres from this shop is the Islampur Market. Speaking to the owner of the only cloth shop in this market, Mr. Sujan, who brings his wares from Dhaka, we learned that when this man came to own his shop five years ago, there was another man selling loose spools of cloth, however, he could not keep up with the competition. This competition consisted not only of Mr. Sujan’s shop, but also that of the large market outside of Islampur, Bottola Bazaar, where the village residents would go to get “good” cloth, and their day-to-day needs would be met with the shops in the local market. It has already been discussed how the shop owners of Bottola Bazaar are generally better connected to wider society through the use of the Internet, and Mr. Sujan implied that they are also better connected to the city, being able to bring in better goods than the shop owners of Islampur Market. Thus, it can be inferred that a contributing factor to this “weaker” cloth shop’s demise was their lack of connectivity and access.

Fig 8: Carpenters making traditional wood carvings in their shop

As seen in the previous discussions, Bangladesh has employed multiple rural development programs centering improvement of infrastructure, building roads, ponds and other infrastructural necessities for everyday village life (Toufique, 2017). Although the success of these initiatives differed from area to area, and many areas remain difficult to access, these initiatives have worked well in the above-described villages that we visited. We saw a direct correlation between the building of roads and village residents' access to better goods and services in Charshihari, in the Rangpur er Moar market where the villagers told us about the ways in which this road had greatly benefitted them, and we could practically see how and what kind of products were flowing into the market from the cities in the form of pharmaceuticals and packaged snacks in this market. Besides this, none of the above respondents reported any issues accessing their goods, all have said that they are able to easily obtain their goods and bring them back to their village. Mr. Sujan is able to bring his wares from Dhaka because there is transport that takes him directly to and from the capital city. We witnessed this to be true, as we saw transportation available at all times, with buses zooming past us on the highway and a multitude of auto rickshaws and rickshaws on stand-by near the markets. This has been reported by Adnan (2022), stating that one of the main reasons for the influx of more goods and services into the market is the improved road and transportation systems.

One of the most interesting examples of changing values in the village could be seen in Case Study 2. Not only was this man watching videos of Warren Buffet for business

advice, but he was also repeating a lot of neoliberal rhetoric that one could have possibly seen the likes of Elon Musk repeating, emphasising how much the work they put into building up their business being a bigger contributing factor, while simultaneously ignoring and not acknowledging the privilege they may have had- in this case the shop owner being able to borrow 6 lac BDT from their relatives for a security payment. Although we have seen that borrowing from wealthy relatives and neighbours is a common practice among the rural poor, Jansen has described situations in which the borrower must be careful how and from whom they borrow, and how many times, as they must be vigilant of how they will have to pay them back (Jansen, 1987). Being able to borrow an amount as large as 6 lac BDT shows not only that this shop owner's relatives were relatively wealthier than the average village resident, but also that he had a certain amount of security in his position as their nephew and son to be able to do so. This case is also a good example of the critiques of modernisation theories, as they state that in order to be modernised, one would have to shirk all “traditional” values (Webster, 1990). However, this shop owner still showed that he holds some traditional Islamic values -even his business card starts off with “Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim ''- showing that one can adopt “modern' ' values while holding onto their traditional values at the same time. Further, the fact that the sales of Burkhas have increased throughout both the Bottola Bazaar and the Islampur Market shows that traditional Islamic values still persist throughout rural Bangladesh even if some modernisation has taken place in the tastes of the local consumers.

While some of the Chairman’s statements rang true- that there are obvious changes and differences between the markets now versus fifteen years ago, it was less true that market committees were acting in their capacity within the markets that we had visited. In fact, in the the Union Parishad Secretary’s KPI showed how much influence and need for votes affect the way that a rural market could possibly, ideally run. Even in Jansen’s experience, Union Parishad officials’ roles would vary from village to village, and in Bhaimara, their involvement in government policy implementation was also low (Jansen, 1987). Thus, even though market committees might have been able to help out struggling shop owners in the market, they barely exist or do not work in the capacity described by the UP Chairman. One of the main features of neoliberal development is the reduction of Government intervention in the market, as this is said to improve the flow of goods and services if the demand and supply can be ensured with no interruptions, however, in cases such as Case Study 3 where the intervention of some sort of committee to advocate for struggling shop owners might be necessary to ensure that they are able to continue their livelihoods.

Therefore, the above discussion has shown that Government initiatives towards improving road and telecommunication infrastructure have had immense effects on the rural market in Mymensingh. Entire tastes, values and norms have gone through massive changes; and

the market is ever-expanding due to the in-flow of goods and services. Around 60% of Bangladesh's population still live in rural areas, and those who have left still make their way back to their villages even if it is to visit. Flows such as this of people will further break down barriers to knowledge (Stiglitz, 2002), as more and more information about what is available in the urban markets in terms of goods and services reaches the villages. Therefore, it is important that the business owners in the rural markets are able to cope with these changes.

Rural infrastructure improvement in the villages that we have seen is tangible evidence that it is possible to bring positive change to rural areas. However, this also means that those most affected by these changes be prepared and view them in the same way. The elderly shop owner being unable to keep up with the trends is natural, as many elderly find it difficult to navigate modern technology. Further, one may say that the old cloth shop from Islampur Market being unable to keep up with the competition and having to close down is also part of the natural progression of the market. However, having some sort of technological and internet literacy could have helped both of these shops to keep up with the changing trends, allowing them a better opportunity to keep earning their livelihoods. There are some villages where a new market service involves running one's social media on behalf of them, uploading pictures to Facebook and other applications (Saha, 2023). Such practices leave people vulnerable to having their information leaked or stolen from them, while in other ways lack of digital literacy holds back shop owners such as from Case Study 3 from furthering their business. It can thus be seen that basic technological and digital literacy is essential for the sustainable development of rural Bangladesh.

In Sen's understanding of building capabilities, he asserts that it is necessary for development to include access to possibilities of improving these capabilities, and a lack of this accessibility has a direct correlation to the persistence of poverty and vulnerability (Sen, 1999 as cited in Ahmed & Eklund, 2019). Despite some attempts to improve digital literacy, such as the Digital Literacy Center which has resources and courses on improving digital literacy (Digital Literacy Center, Government of Bangladesh, n.d.), as well as attempts at digitising the Union Parishad office as seen in Mymensingh, there is still more that needs to be done in order to make it more accessible for the rural poor, especially people like the elderly shop owner, who could benefit from such knowledge. In order to make digital literacy more accessible, it would be beneficial to hold digital literacy workshops in the villages, targeting shop owners and possibly training them in how to best use social media to be a useful tool in business, rather than a detriment to it.

Lastly, we have seen that although the concept of a market committee or association does exist, and even the Union Parishad Chairman had stated that there are market committees working in the rural markets, the truth is that they are either not there at all or not helpful at all. It may be beneficial to vulnerable shop owners if there was some

Government intervention in the market committees as well, as the only market committee we had seen was mainly focused on providing security and gave no other support. If the UP Office were able to help out some vulnerable shop owners by advocating for their needs in front of larger market committees, then the shop owners may stand a better chance of surviving in the market, in order to ensure they have access to their entitlements, in the words of Sen.

Conclusion

The effects of modernisation and globalisation in the rural market are stark and obvious. Improved roads, transportation, networks and connectivity have aligned the rural to the urban and to the global, especially with many people from rural areas living abroad in places like the Middle East and Europe and sending back news and ideas about places far away- as well as money in the form of remittance which has allowed for an increase in income that may be spent in the market. The increased sharing of information, thoughts, and ideas has led to changes in the rural consciousness, and how one views oneself and others- as Adnan (2002) has stated, many of the village residents are aware of the vast wealth inequality that exists in villages and how increased globalisation and connection to the neoliberal market has led to village residents becoming landless due to land grabbing. Jansen has stated as well that in Bhaimara, many of the residents were wary of government policy, as they felt that these would benefit the rich more than the poor- and they were not wrong (Jansen, 1987).

However, we do have reason to believe that it is possible for development programs to have a positive impact on the rural areas, and on the rural market. Ease of supply of goods coming in, ease of travel, and ease of finding transportation are all by-products of the government policy initiatives taken in Mymensingh. This, on the other hand, is not a reason to absolve the local government of all responsibilities, as seen even in this paper, elected officials often do not provide the whole truth in their statements. Therefore, work in Bangladesh's rural areas is far from over and there is more to be done to truly improve the standards of living of the rural poor in every single sector, not just in terms of the market. The rural poor are more vulnerable to adverse changes than other demographics. Just as they are the first demographic to feel the effects of climate change, their consumption patterns are also affected by urban tastes and trends. That is to say, the rural population is no longer the isolated demographic it was once believed to be and is now well connected. Yet, this demographic is still very vulnerable and thus, needs the most support in order to be able to weather these adverse changes.

Part III: Rural Land Management

This section reviews the ways in which land is acquired and disputed over in contemporary times, as well as the avenues through which these disputes are resolved. It delves into the customary forms of dispute management, known as shalish, and how the management of land is crucial in the formation of the rural social and class structure.

Chapter 6

Issues of Land : Accumulation, Dispute and Resolution in Contemporary Rural Bangladesh

Kinnory Boishakhi

Introduction

The people in rural Bangladesh are still heavily tied to their Land. It governs their ways of life, financial situation, their power and prestige within the village and so much more. However, with changing times, land is not just the primary means of livelihood anymore as more and more landless people are venturing out to different professions. Yet, it remains a key aspect in wealth and property. Taking issues of land as a central theme, this paper seeks to explore the dynamics concerning issues of land ownership, the disputes that it leads to, their resolution process and how the relationship to land has changed over the years in rural Bangladesh. The objective of the study conducted is to understand the overarching issue of land dispute that results in rural society, why it comes about and the ambiguities in its resolution process that prevent the issue to be mitigated.

Existing literature on issues of the land, starting from inheritance, disputes and governance can be traced from Eirik Jansen's book on Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources, where he discusses much of the mechanism of the village surrounding land issues. The book was, however, published in the 1980s, almost 40 years ago and so the objective is to drive out comparisons of what has changed over the years, reflecting on the present situation. The areas Jansen covers in Chapter 7 of his book titled Land Disputes states the kind of land disputes that occur in rural society, starting from disputes over inheritance, documentation, over hindu land post partition and independence and ambiguities surrounding char and khas land. To understand the mechanisms of how these disputes are mitigated, studies surrounding village courts and shalish, an informal village court made of reputed members of the village to solve issues, are referred to better understand their workings and their significance in issues of the land.

Land in rural Bangladesh dictates one's profession, one's ability to leave behind property for the next generation, is regarded as a status symbol, and controls decision-making and the relations people are able to forge. The legal authority governing land related matters at the village level in Bangladesh is the Bhumi Office (Land Office), where everything from taxes to registration to survey all is done under its jurisdiction. It is essentially an extension of bureaucratic authority of the Union Parishad, the smallest governmental unit in rural society, concerned with matters of the land. Now a huge problem surrounding this

land is how it comes into possession, creating familial disputes and the problems one faces when having to resolve through shalish or village courts.

The Progression of Land Dispute: Inheritance Leading to Dispute and Its Resolution

Let us begin with a look at land and its many issues across multiple generations. The story of Abdul Malek Bhuiyan, of how land was bought and sold, how it changed in its ownership on paper and in reality, how it is the family members that cause dispute and seize another's property and where village politics enters the debate of what is right and what is one's right. The story begins in the 1950s, when Abdul Malek migrated to Dhaka for his livelihood, leaving his father and two brothers at their village Atiya of Polash upazila in Ghorashal. He soon became a Circle Officer, a government official in East Pakistan, similar to what we now call Thana Nirbahi officer or TNO, who is in charge of the Upazila or subdistrict. The money he earned would often be sent to his brothers to buy land as an investment but they would often register those lands in their father's name. So over the years, his family in Dhaka knew of approximately 100 bighas, approximately 2.5 hectares, of land that had been bought. After his father's death, all the land he had bought but was in their father's name was thus divided equally among the brothers, but there still was a lot of property in his name remaining. Many years later, now in independent Bangladesh and also after the death of Abdul Malek when his children went back to their village to claim their inherited right, they found that the lands had no proper paperwork, much of it was taken by their uncles and their families, even to the point that they built houses on their land. The family never received any earnings from agriculture on their land, rather since they were family, the brothers reaped the benefits, sending their sons abroad and increasing their power and wealth in the village using income from that land. They had sold off several of their own lands, mortgaged or leased some, even constructed houses, and thus gave rise to the ambiguities of which land belonged to which brother. However, they managed to keep asking for tax money for the land from the family in the name of maintaining it themselves. As there were no specific boundary or marker to determine the different plots, it gave rise to confusion and with no adequate paperwork or boundary the land remained unclaimed, all because the true owners of the land were absent, living all the way in Dhaka.

Overtime, the children wanted to get the appropriate paperwork and claim their rightful land but the relatives would console them by simply showing them the land but never the correct documentation. When they approached the Chairman of the Union Parishad and other officials from the Land office to correctly mark and allocate the land, to create the proper documentation, they would often stall and ask for bribes. Relatives would claim that they sent them the earnings from the land but the amounts were very little in the face of the amount of land that they held. In this way over the span of many decades, they were continually denied access to the land that they presumably owned. Another aspect of this whole scenario was that within the village the relatives had been taking

care and investing on the land, even to the point of becoming quite wealthy from it. They had the community support as they were voters for the Union Parishad Chairman, also well-known and respected among the villagers. The community thus supported them as they had only witnessed them working for the land. Even when the situation rose to levels of dispute, with the parties calling Shalish to settle the matters surrounding the boundary, the relatives never showed up and so even seeking help from villagers was not much of a help for Abdul Malek's family. As a result, even with so much land, the family is ideally now landless, living in Dhaka and losing all their connection to their village slowly with each passing generation.

Fig 9: Members of a family in front of their home in Charshihari

From the above case study we see the complexities that come from land and the issues rural society altogether face, be it the way land is distributed, transferred, the types of alliances and enmities it creates, the ways it causes disputes and the long struggle to resolve matters using the mechanism in rural society like Shalish or Village courts. All this indicates that not much has changed over the years in terms of the importance of land. It still governs a considerable part of the whole power structure, politics, economic position and so much more in rural society.

The Transfer of Land

To begin analysing the issues, there are a number of ways land is transferred, a few identified by Jansen in his book include inheritance, buying and selling, credit relations leading to transfer, Hiba/gift and forceful accumulation. The main mechanism for transfer of land is however, still inheritance although the increasing scarcity of land is pushing people to adopt new methods of wealth accumulation and changing the overall conception of private property to an extent.

Particularly in villages, the laws of inheritance and how property is distributed still follows the religious laws of the people whose property comes into question. For the majority in Bangladesh, the Islamic rules of inheritance dictate how property is to be divided, that there is to be an equal share amongst sons while daughters get half of what their brothers may inherit. There are also specific rules for inheritance of wives and step children and certain complications regarding how one may not inherit any property (Jansen, 1983). For the hindu population, completely different rules of inheritance apply as daughters do not get any share of their father's property. Despite clear rules but the complexities within it, most of the people are unaware of their rights to properties and this is significantly more among people in villages. While sons take on an active effort to access their rights, women's role in getting their inheritance, especially land becomes a far cry: often they have no knowledge and are not made aware of their rights by the elders, in cases where they are aware they do not expect or hope to inherit because of competition with their brothers and even their closest male relatives. Women's ties as members of another household after marriage and favouring their children's rights over her own also come as obstacles to inheriting property, especially land.

In addition to what Jansen initially noted, more approaches to inheritance are being taken on, such as through Hiba or gift giving of land parcels, or forging wills to distribute property. Many families, who are conscious of their rights and willing to distribute property in this way may adopt such measures. Another significant difference from what Jansen notes in his book to what we found on the field was the fact that the land is no longer the primary source of income for most of the rural people. With changing times and even scarcer resources, people have ventured beyond their traditional farming roles and adopted new skills and means of livelihood. Many now work in garment or textile factories, drive automobiles, have shops and businesses in the markets and migrated outside for work, and such ambiguities of property inheritance now not just apply to land but also these kinds of properties.

Credit relations leading to transfer of land is common in circumstances where people take loans from others through keeping their land mortgaged. This is still a very common practice in villages and a very significant way of how many lose their lands due to their inability to pay off their debt. The land then becomes the property of the creditor.

Lastly, forceful accumulation of land still occurs quite a lot in villages where jealousy or simply the need to get more wealth can push people to grab land. This is particularly more prevalent if the owners are poor, the party that takes it has an interest in it and as we have seen in the first case study, are absentee landowners. Now this and inheritance are usually the main areas where land disputes may result.

Inheritance Issues Forming the Grounds for Dispute

As noted above, inheritance is one of the key fuels to disputes regarding land in villages. Be it the way land was divided, the way family members may fight for a considerable amount of property or the angle of excluding women from such matters of the land. Below are some case studies that may help understand how such issues exist in the villages.

Case 1: Bepari Bari of the Chorshihari village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

Living right across the fields of Chorshihari village, the Bepari Bari or house, a collection of 2 huts, a storehouse and one kitchen is a family run through the sole income of one son earning as a tradesman, hence the name Bepari which means businessman. This family in particular had faced many of the challenges surrounding inheritance, leading to a very long running land dispute among brothers. The dispute grew such in proportions that it eventually led to loss of land that they did have, and pushed them to take on other forms of livelihood, in this case getting into the fertiliser business.

The land in concern belonged to Bepari's grandfather who had four sons, and after his death would have been equally divided amongst the children following the Islamic laws of inheritance. However the property was divided amongst the elder three brothers and sister, excluding the youngest of his share of around 7 kattha plot, with 1 kattha equalling 720 square feet of land. The youngest, who was the father of Bepari, urged to fight a long running dispute with his brothers who had joined forces in this conspiracy to exclude him. The father's sister also got her share of the land from the grandfather and left the village when she got married. The case had gone on for almost 40 years now, exhausting all the steps from shalish to magistrate court in Mymensingh city and all the way to High Court in Dhaka but the cost of it was too much for either side to bear. The dispute ended up costing the Beparis significant loss on the 5 kattha land they already held, having to mortgage or sell parts of it to bear the costs of litigation and for emergency cash needed for survival. Now only 2 katthas remain which they use to cultivate their own food on and the land that was in dispute lies barren and neither parties are able to accommodate or use it. There had been several scuffles between the two parties where force was applied to try to gain access. But at the end, the land now remains barren, unclaimed because of the dispute that has been going on for generations.

Case 2: Army Bari, Chorshihari village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

Exactly two houses after the Beparis, the Army Bari reflected a similar scenario but from the other perspective. The house, even though now known as Army Bari, was previously Police Bari depending on the profession held by the sons in the family. This was a joint family in comparison to the Beparis who can be classified as somewhat nuclear in its composition. The household was therefore large, with three brothers and their families; the eldest brother living with two wives and children, the two with their wives and children. The property they inherited from their forefather was not divided up, resulting in the land being almost 12 katthas altogether, using it equally amongst the three brothers. They, however, purposefully excluded the share of land to their youngest brother who had died, depriving his family of any share in the property. The brothers also have a sister who took money in exchange for her share of the inherited land and often pushes for more money from time to time. She was also in on the exclusion of the last brother and his family from the property inherited. As a result of this, the son of the youngest brother had to move abroad, working as a migrant worker in the middle east. Since the matter brother who was excluded had died and the son could not fight for their right, the case never went to the level of a formal dispute, calling in shalish or even an official complaint to the land office. In fear of suffering more loss in the process of trying to get the land, the matter subsided while familial relations bore the brunt of the dispute.

Case 3 : Kazi Bari, Chorshihari village, Ishwarganj upazila, Mymensingh

A relatively larger household than the previous two cases, this family did not divide and distribute their land but had faced such a scenario where concerns of inheritance arose in the generation before. Presently, they have around 10-12 katha land where they cultivate as well as have a shop in the market which functions as a storage for their merchant business. The previous generation divided the land amongst the children, primarily between brothers but sisters also received some but this amount was considerably less than the brothers. Each sister received 1 katha of land since they left the village after they got married. The common consensus was that female members do not really have knowledge regarding their rights to inheritance, they have to rely on their brothers to do all the official work and most are often content with whatever their brothers give them.

Land Disputes as the Key Issue

Now that we understand how the grounds for such land disputes are created in villages through inheritance, let us look at how these cause the main problem in rural society.

The Superintendent of Police of Mymensingh noted how among most of the cases that come to them in the station, about 80% of the cases falling under criminal offences have

ties to land disputes. To reach the law enforcement levels, such land disputes usually accelerate to violence or instances where the parties are engaged in bodily harm to even murder over land issues. The sheer volume of land related disputes is therefore huge, tying its importance as land remains a lucrative form of property, means of livelihood and so much more.

Other authoritative figures like the Union Parishad Chairman remark how the recent cases of land dispute has risen because of some particular factors. First being the fact that greed amongst people has risen which lead many to deceive their own relatives, forging false documentation, forcefully accumulating land and even causing enmity and dispute. The second reason is that the rural population is still illiterate in comparison, making it easy for them to become deceived as they are not properly aware of the laws and their rights. The recent spike in land prices has also caused this need to accumulate land and hold property to oneself thus leading to issues surrounding land to rise.

Dispute and Mitigation Process: A Reflection of Rural Power Structures

The traditional way for dispute resolution that has been prevalent in the villages for a very long time has been through the work of Shalish. Jansen noted that these are essentially informal community groups that discuss and reach consensus in order to resolve disputes within the community. It is the means of mediation, conciliation, arbitration or any other intervention through a neutral third party. Headed by elders and influentials within the village, also known as the samaj, it was a way for the village people to get justice for a wide range of issues. Among the kinds of disputes tackled by Shalish which may range from any form of harm, violence or conflict the most common are land disputes.

With changing times, the composition and workings of Shalish has changed and the findings in the village dictate that their importance has diminished significantly. In the Islampur village of Ishwarganj, Mymensingh, the village shalish does not engage in domestic matters anymore, and only intervenes in land disputes or other serious offences like violence. When asked amongst the villagers there seems to be certain power dynamics at play in the workings of the shalish. One noted that “Shalish is not for the poor '' as it is headed by the powerful in order to bring justice to those who have the same or some kind of power or agency. The absolute powerless thus do not have any means of getting justice without community support. Since it is the village elders or Gram matbars who are part of the samaj and thus sit when shalish is called, cases where they themselves are the wrongdoers go unaddressed. These influentials often use sticks and stones as force in certain kinds of disputes, common amongst which is forceful seizure of land. Buying shalish members with money is also not an unheard of scenario.

The residents note how the workings of Shalish have become heavily biassed and so amongst the poor and vulnerable, they prefer not to raise any issues altogether, letting go of them to live in peace. They also noted how shalish now has many young politicians becoming members and holding hearings and meetings, who “don’t pay respect to the elders” bringing in a political, party driven angle in the informal village governance. Apart from these, the recommendations provided by shalish are not enforceable if the parties do not voluntarily abide by them which can lead to its failures in trying to resolve a matter.

Keeping all the shortcomings of shalish in mind, the government had introduced a more institutionalised, formal nature of shalish through the Gram adalat, or village court. This was an alternative backed by the local government’s lower unit, known as the Union Parishad. Among other functions it oversees local village level disputes and also takes help from the village police to uphold law and order. When asked the chairman of the Union Parishad of Islampur, Mymensingh, about its workings he noted how the village court is now replacing the traditional shalish as a more institutionalised alternative. It is responsible to function as a village level court but through keeping conciliation and mitigation at its centre.

Fig 9: Sign outside the Graam Adalat of Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh

Established in 2006 following the Village Court Act, the Gram Adalat is working in 1080 union parishads across Bangladesh, dealing with many varieties of cases at the union level.

The structure of these village courts situated in a room of the union parishad offices is that the chairman of the union parishad is the head, solving any different kinds of

disputes among the villagers. Any party that wishes to bring in issues or disputes have to complete a series of forms and paperwork, pay a fee of Tk.10 for civil cases and Tk20 for criminal offences. Upon receiving the application, the chairman issues notices to the parties involved in the dispute to attend the Gram Adalat on specific date and time for hearing. As for the court itself, it sits with the Chairman, 2 representatives from each party, making it a panel of 5 members and the litigants. It deals with cases surrounding intentional bodily harm, harm resulting from enmity, damage, participation in illegal gatherings and of course land and credit related disputes a total of 27 types of issues. Following an amendment in 2013 which strengthened the institutional sustainability of the Gram Adalat, issues such as clash between parties, theft, damaging of crops, harming livestock, breach of monetary agreements can be settled in the village court as per the law. The village court is only entitled to give monetary sanctions or fines of up to 75000 tk. They have no jurisdiction to impose any kind of custodial punishment. If one is dissatisfied with the judgement of the village court, they can appeal against the verdict to a first class magistrate court for criminal cases and in the assistant judge court for civil cases, bringing the cases to the more formalised courts.

Upon enquiry, the UP chairman had claimed that the village court runs mostly like a formal court with judgements and hearings following laws as stated by the government, but in retrospect to the way it was introduced it is essentially a more formalised, institutionalised version of the shalish. The only difference being that judgements were enforceable by law with the cooperation of the union parishad. Shalishes still do run in the small villages where they might also invite the union parishad chairman to listen and help solve their disputes as he is an influential member of their samaj or community.

There is also a rise in NGO-Shalish, which works with the help of NGO officials as villagers reach out to them in times of need. These are backed up by NGOs policy and have gained the confidence of people as they guide villagers to making better financial decisions, provide them with assistance and knowledge, thus becoming an influential force in the villages.

The particular unpopularity of village courts amongst the people can be traced to certain characteristics it holds, like the paperwork and procedure many may find as a hassle or the lack of proper knowledge about their workings, leading to lower outreach. Due to the structure of the village court there may also be several concerns on its credibility to provide just decisions as the chairman is afterall a political appointment and not someone trained in the judiciary, making the legal proceeding biassed. Since village courts, like shalish are based on the members of the samaj, similar power imbalances and interference of local leaders or influentials can be expected, posing a hierarchical stand which should not be allowed in the legal system. The village courts or collectively the whole union parishad to an extent still lacks adequate infrastructure. For all these reasons, the gram adalats or village courts in many of the unions are non-functioning or

sit once in a while, while villagers prefer to either solve issues amongst themselves or not bring it to the local government offices at all.

Conclusion

Looking back at how much problems matters of land can create for the rural people and the complicated mechanisms they have to go through to hold on to land, the issues that arise are still tied to the fact that land is considered the most important form of property. From inheriting land as property to the rise of ambiguities in measurements and borders, or just family members preventing one from receiving their rights, the foundations of land dispute can be found in every possible step in rural societies. Sufficient knowledge about one's rights and inheritance is still unclear to many who are not conscious about it and lay significant trust on their relatives for such matters, especially female members. Even though times are changing as resources are becoming scarce, including most importantly land, people are moving away from it and accumulating other kinds of properties in the form of shops, houses or apartments, vehicles and so on in rural settings. By addressing these gaps, only then can we effectively take policy measures to eradicate the key issue that is land dispute. From the most number of crimes occuring due to land disputes to village courts and shalish-es being burdened by such issues, land matters are central in village politics and economic structure. They dictate everything from the ties one creates, the decision-making and power position to even the functions of government at the village level.

Part IV: Rural Politics

Rural politics is largely intertwined with other sections of this report, such as land management and the economy; as is the agriculture sector. This section examines the ways in which the undercurrents and dynamics of rural politics find expression, especially in the realms of the agrarian community.

Chapter 7

The Politics of Agriculture and Farming in Rural Society and Development

Arnab Fouzder

Introduction

The rural society of the Bangladesh region dates back to seeing visible studies from 1960. Research shows that from 1960 to 2020, the population decreased from 95% to 60%. When given a simplified statistics by Edward Gleaser, for every 10% rise in urban population, there is a 30% rise in per capita income. This in turn gives the verdict that per capita income in urban areas is four times higher than that of rural areas. But it is also an important finding from these statistics that development of a state cannot be attained without focusing on villages. Hence, to link the rural society with the global market and culture, rural-urban continuum is essential instead of isolation. The reason why this is necessary is because of poverty alleviation, climate change impacts, food security and reduction of pressure on urban centres.

Notable areas of transformation of rural Bengal include the economic production organisation and its changes and change in social organisation. Recent trends in rural culture give rise to certain questions and without answering those, it is difficult to move forward. Such questions being the social trend for rural areas after partition and the process that acted as a driving force for this economic, social and cultural changes.

When discussing trends in agricultural developments following partition (in 1947 and later), there was a shift in agricultural methods, with a focus on raising production and adopting modern farming techniques. This includes the use of fertilisers and pesticides, as well as the introduction of new crop types and increasing automation. Land reforms were conducted by the government to address concerns of land inequality and redistribution. This entailed redistribution of land to landless and marginalised farmers in order to achieve a more fair allocation of land resources. There was tremendous movement from rural to urban regions as well as across borders. Economic possibilities, political shifts, and social upheavals all contributed to this movement. In terms of population dynamics, labour availability, and remittances, migration had an impact on rural areas.

The assumption that rural settlements in Bangladesh are the same as village communities in South Asia is incorrect and misleading, as stated by Akbar Ali Khan. Dumont and

Pocock argue that the village is only an architectural and demographic entity, lacking social significance. It is also stated that the concept of a self-sufficient village community in South Asia is exaggerated.

Background Context

Ruth Paneli in her book “The Handbook of Rural Studies,” says that capitalism in Agriculture was proliferating. The signs of this include loss of natural environment and biodiversity, rise of fish farming and chicken farms, saltwater shrimp farming, industrial productions and transportation systems, participation of women in economic production, changes in market structure and demand, and neoliberal globalisation and capitalist reformations (Paneli, 2006). Akbar Ali khan presents further data with statistics and timelines by using correlation coefficient for percentage change in numbers of villages to that of population/area change in the districts of Bangladesh. The change was insignificant from 1951 to 1961. It declined during 1961 to 1974, but heavily increased during 1974 to 1981 (Khan, 2017).

Eric G. Jansen in his book “Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources” talks about the political and economic integration of villages into a wider society. His study aimed to fully describe the framework of land and employment competition in villages, which includes wider politics. Villages seemed to be self-sufficient at first, with little outside political and economic influence. Villagers generally rely on land for a living and generate basic needs inside the community. The community looks to be self-sufficient, with little reliance on imported supplies. Residents rarely leave the community and have little connection with the outside world. The village's seclusion is reflected in the few visits by government officials and outsiders. Jansen talks about the effects of food aid and price increase in rural Bangladesh, which also leads to the impact of rice prices and wages on purchasing capacity and economic position of households in rural Bangladesh (Jansen, 1999).

Jansen presents case studies on the impact of grain imports on marketed grain volume and prices. Grain import availability is critical for the volume of marketed grain and the market price of grain. Food scarcity on the market can lead to severe hunger and afflict the rural poor owing to delays in importing food. The US government's delay in granting food supplies in 1974 created a devastating famine in Bangladesh, killing 30,000 people. Domestic grain acquisition for the food-rationing system has an impact on the people in food-grain-supplying areas. Government actions, such as lowering the price of procured rice, prompted 'surplus' peasants to avoid having their harvests procured. In the 1960s and 1970s, national purchase of food grain remained low (less than 100,000 tons per year). Following a successful crop in 1977-78, the government hiked rice prices and

bought 0.5 million tons of staple grain. In Bhaimara, government procurement rates were significantly higher than local market prices. Poor peasants were compelled to sell grains to middlemen who worked between them and government purchasers. Multiple middlemen were engaged in certain situations, leading in government officials getting grain at a price lower than the official price. The impoverished peasants, who benefited little from increasing prices, and the landless, who had to pay a higher price in local markets owing to government buying, were the losers in this procurement effort.

The food-rationing system is fascinating in many ways, including its ramifications and operation. International donors have been able to influence Bangladesh's development policy because of food aid. The food-rationing system remains in place as a result of the country's political and power realities, with the policy of giving subsidised food reflecting the necessity to preserve political stability. Subsidising meals for all government employees and the urban population, regardless of income, helps the government maintain its political position. Because they are disorganised and a quiet majority, the rural poor do not constitute an immediate challenge to the political establishment. The government's agenda stresses retaining positions of power and privilege over weakening them in order to benefit the poor.

Tax collection plummeted once the British withdrew, and the Awami League sought to tax only the largest agricultural holdings. However, wealthier peasants were able to avoid taxation, making it impossible to collect taxes from individuals who owned more than 25 bighas of land. Agricultural taxes have recently been levied mostly on tea estates and have contributed marginally to governmental income. Several academics and policymakers have stressed the potential for agriculture taxes to generate revenue for the government. The government's reluctance to levy taxes on large farms underscores its wish to keep the powerful rural elite on board. The government also develops rural development programs, which have an immediate impact on villages and are affected by the rural power structure.

Theoretical Framework

A set of concepts, structures, and views that attempt to explain the processes of economic, social, and political growth of societies is referred to as development theory. These ideas seek to comprehend how cultures evolve, transform, and improve over time. Development theories give analytical tools for investigating the causes and dynamics that determine development trajectory in various places and circumstances. There are numerous significant development theories, each with its own take on the origins, methods, and effects of development. The theories accompanying this paper and its

content are parts of the Development theory, which are Modernization theory and Dependency theory.

Modernization theory is a social and development theory that originated in the mid-twentieth century, particularly after World War II. It tries to describe the process of societal evolution and change from traditional or rural to modern industrialised cultures. During the mid-twentieth century, modernization thought was significant in determining development policies and tactics, particularly in the context of decolonization and the Cold War. This theory believes that communities go through discrete stages of evolution, shifting from traditional to contemporary modes of organisation and economic activity. As development drivers, it stresses industry, urbanisation, education, and technical innovation. The uneven link between rich and developing nations is highlighted by dependency theory. It contends that historical and structural circumstances have resulted in the exploitation and reliance of developing countries on wealthy countries. The significance of global economic systems in sustaining disparities is emphasised in this view.

When linking the findings of the fieldwork to modernization theory, we get a link with agricultural transformation. The transition from rural to industrial economies is emphasised in modernization theory. Modernization theory can influence measures to increase agricultural production through mechanisation, improved practices, and market integration in rural Bangladesh, where agriculture is a prominent sector. As civilizations modernise, rural-urban mobility is predicted by modernization theory. This is significant in Bangladesh since many rural folks relocate to cities in pursuit of better prospects. Understanding the variables driving this movement can aid in the formulation of policies that address both rural development and urbanisation. This is a case that will be visible for migrants who return to Bangladesh to set up fishery farms.

According to modernization theory, education and greater literacy are important drivers of societal development. Promoting education in rural Bangladesh can lead to changes in attitudes, values, and ambitions, potentially contributing to economic and social growth. This will be linked to the change in agriculture because of the influence of education in the family.

Infrastructure development is becoming increasingly important as civilizations modernise. Focusing on road construction, electricity regulation, and basic utilities in rural Bangladesh can improve connectivity and quality of life, coinciding with modernization theory's emphasis on urban-rural infrastructure discrepancies. The transition from traditional to rational-legal forms of power is emphasised by modernization theory. To assist growth, this approach might be applied in Bangladesh through enhancing governance, building transparency, and strengthening local institutions. However, it is important to consider that the influence of globalisation and external dependency, which

play a crucial role in Bangladesh's growth, is not addressed by modernization theory. Dependency theory can provide further information to this.

When linking the findings of the fieldwork to dependency theory, we get a link with trade and agriculture. Dependency theory stresses how developing countries frequently act as raw material suppliers to wealthy countries. The theory can assist examine how global trade dynamics affect the agricultural sector in rural Bangladesh, where agriculture is an important industry. For example, investigating how international commodity prices influence rural farmers' livelihoods and if they experience pricing and market access disadvantages.

Dependency theory emphasises how rich countries might exploit the resources of poor countries. In the context of rural Bangladesh, this may involve examining how multinational firms or foreign organisations take resources (such as land, water, or minerals) without providing equal benefits to local residents. This theory emphasises how developing countries may be restricted to supplying raw resources rather than completed goods. This may be significant in rural Bangladesh, where agricultural value addition may be limited due to limited access to processing facilities and global markets. Technology flows from industrialised to underdeveloped nations can exacerbate reliance, according to dependency theory. Analysing whether technology transfer aids local capacity building or only serves the interests of foreign players is important in the context of rural Bangladesh.

Interview Findings

Our interview starts with Joypur village. We talked to the people from the Digitization office, villagers from a house of Joypur and the union parishad chairman. Later that day, we talked to three women from Charshihari village.
On the second day, we started off with another round of interviews at Joypur village to get more insight before we spent most of our time in Islampur as we talked to the villagers and the Boro Huzur of Islampur’s most influential madrasa.
On our final day, interviews were done in Churali village to take a look at the farmers by BRAC’s DABI for comparing the insights received from the other two villagers.

Digitization Office, Joypur

Bilkis Akhter of the Digital Center Uddokta provides services such as digitising official credentials. She has been digitising documents and issuing applications since June 2014. Previously, all records were written by hand. Computers and printers given by the government assist in the process. Holders of an NID or a birth certificate now receive digital certificates rather than physical papers. The government election office provides

NID smart cards, as well as interim laminated voter slips if necessary. For school stipends, birth certificates are required. Issues with the server impede issuance. Newborns are issued immunisation cards using their parents' NIDs or birth certificates. Stipends and nutritional supplements are awarded to infants who register within 45 days. The village police undertake random checks and record server outages. Between January to mid-July, there are application modifications. Birth certificates were once required, however NIDs or birth certificates are now sufficient. The chairman's signature on Prottoyon Potro is an option for difficult-to-obtain registered papers. Farmers rely on NIDs to gain access to seeds and online documentation. The NIDs of Farmer Committee members are noted. Bilkis uses microphones to broadcast NID application alerts. Softcopies can be used until actual cards arrive. Unless the registration number is accessible, lost NIDs must be reapplied for. Fraud instances are on the rise, due to Bkash or bank account application procedures. The lack of NIDs makes it difficult to aid victims of fraud.

Fig 10: Student talking to the digitization officer of Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh

Abdul Mannan (66), villager of Joypur

Mannan, a middle-class villager, finds happiness despite financial constraints. Government work possibilities enhanced their lives by making up for educational gaps. The hamlet advanced with power, improved roads that increased revenue, and improved healthcare access. Despite the fact that Mannan's children are studying abroad, they intend to inherit the family farm. The community is sustained by BRAC's school and fish aquaculture. Medical access has increased, but female physicians remain in short supply.

Mannan makes money through chicken and duck farming by selling eggs and hens. His crops prospered despite COVID-19, and cell phones facilitate communication. Telemedicine is useless. Phones help farmers communicate. Mannan, in contrast to the government, favours fish aquaculture to rice cultivation. He succeeds in small-scale fish farming.

MD. Abu Hanif (40+), Union parishad Chairman, Joypur

The Chairman observes that rural circumstances in India and Pakistan are superior, highlighting economic potential and increased education. For diverse categories, the government provides free books, food, stipends, and allowances. Fish farming necessitates major investment, but technological developments increase paddy productivity. Diversification via education includes paddy, fishery, and animal farming. The government educates farmers, encourages employment, and aids agriculture. The village court handles disputes in the same way as regular courts do. Land conflicts are resolved by shalish dorbars, whereas district problems are resolved in court. In most cases, compensation is preferable to incarceration. Agriculture, poultry, dairy, and social companies are booming, with market committees keeping an eye on them. Individuals who are landless are given land by the government. Increasing the number of female instructors is a goal, but problems remain. Madrasas provide more dependable instruction, luring children as the basic school system fails. Teachers at BRAC schools are underpaid. Women work actively in agriculture with males.

Women from Three Households, Charshihari, Ishwarganj

In the first household, the mother tends to hens and calves as both a hobby and necessity. Lack of funds and land hinders her aspirations for her child's education and business. Self-funding is the norm, with no Union Porishod support. Second household's mother runs a fisheries business with losses due to lack of government aid. High interest rates (10-15%) accompany government loans, and discounts on feed are absent. Farmers are self-taught. Marginalised farmers face challenges with government assistance: lack of Samiti/government help, resource misuse by leaders, document formality, no technological aid, land disputes due to wealthy encroachers, inefficient village court, and NGO involvement with loan recovery. Farmers need fertilisers, seeds, and irrigation equipment. Market monopolies prompt wholesale rice selling. Rice delivery to Dhaka is uncertain.

Fig 11: Power tiller rented and shared by the villagers of Charshihari

Women from Joypur, Ishwarganj

The woman explains that they have been raising fish for a few years and have had both profits and losses. Fish farming necessitates a substantial investment, which they obtain from banks or organisations such as BRAC. According to the woman, they make more money from fish than from crops, however they also make money from rice farming. They used to farm maize (corn), but now concentrate on fishing to increase earnings. The woman reveals that they do not receive government assistance and must hatch the fish hatchlings themselves. The elderly residents in the village have power, which they occasionally abuse by renting out farmland. The woman reports no knowledge of any fish cultivation training, but she receives assistance from the Samiti. There have been land conflicts and claims, but there are now no problems. They are permitted to cultivate contested lands but are not permitted to sell them if they are mortgaged. For fisheries, the government offers a 1 lac taka loan (with a 3% interest rate) that must be returned within 12 months. Pouroshova-specific training is provided, however they do not participate owing to a lack of knowledge. When necessary, they borrow from Samitis for amounts ranging from 200 to 1000 BDT. Farming is not viable on its own, and they require passive revenue from other enterprises. During Eid, they sell a large quantity of fish and reinvest the proceeds in fish farming.

Men from Islampur Bazar, Islampur

The first person has 5-6 bighas of land where he grows Boishakhi and Aguni. Rice is chosen because of great demand, and government help is questioned. Only those who are part of the "system" profit, yet its very existence is being questioned. He claims that the majority of revenues are spent on fertilisers, which have no price restriction. The

eligibility for the elderly allowance generates some uncertainty. The government provides BORO seeds but not continuous fertiliser delivery. Allowance access is complicated, and crop diversification is hampered by unjust price and mill shortage. Loans are made to organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) mortgage land to cover overdue loans. Farming is supplemented by side businesses. Mamlas (land litigation) drag on, deterring participation. Land leasing and labour employment are both increasing. Education is being promoted in order to lessen dependency on agriculture. The second man, an illegal migrant turned farmer, put his money on cattle feed, fisheries, and poultry medicine. Crops are threatened by heavy rainfall. During the interview, a newcomer highlights dependability and profit in dairy, poultry, and fishing. His appearance dispersed all the locals in the small bazaar, indicating political authority.

Fishermen and Fishery Owners from Islampur Village, Islampur

The first observes development but believes that conditions remain constant. They own fish farming ponds and survive on both fish and cereals. Rice prices influence harvest sales. Due to the lack of the government and the influence of fish feed dealers, foreign businesses such as "megafeed" give fish farming instruction. The second person has 20-30 years of expertise in fish farming, highlighting variable profitability owing to expenditures, diseases, and feed access. For fish ponds, large expenditures and oxygen apparatus are required. The government does not assist in the purchase of equipment. Economic difficulties afflict the middle class, which relies on loans from NGOs like BRAC and ASHA. High lending rates are charged by NGOs, creating hardship. Villagers' self-sufficiency decreases as they rely on NGOs, resulting in financial difficulties. Grameen Bank and BRAC fail to successfully assist the impoverished, instead favouring richer borrowers. The second person verifies the lack of assistance from neighbouring villages, showing self-sufficiency in hatchling harvesting and sales.

Boro Huzur, Jamiah Gafuria Darussunah Madrasa, Islampur

The Qawmi madrasa adheres to government norms and regulations, and audits are done in the same manner as government audits. To preserve openness with the bank, the institution has a financial committee. The committee is elected by the people every four years. The organisation goes to the bank twice a week to register expenses and make loans. Before engaging in initiatives, NGOs such as BRAC must communicate and get authorisation. Larger non-governmental organisations may engage the chairman in negotiations, whereas smaller non-governmental organisations contact directly with the institution. Nearby, the paan trade is prospering, with locally grown paan selling for 10 to 20 tk. Farmers occasionally give paans as presents as a reward for good harvests.

DABI Official and DABI Farmers, Churali, Gauripur

DABI, Brac's microfinance program, provides farmers with loans ranging from 20,000 to 1 lakh taka based on their financial capabilities. Progoti and Brac Bank provide higher loans of up to 5 lakh taka and 10 lakh taka, respectively. Dabi is popular in Churali due to its adaptability for those with little financial resources. It employs 6 people to serve 26 clients. Agriculture and livestock ranching are the primary beneficiaries of loans. Borrowers who qualify can apply for new loans with a repayment duration of 11.5 months and an interest rate of 24%. The application processes for Progoti and Brac Bank are unique. Surveys, family size, income, and loan purpose all influence loan eligibility. Late repayment necessitates a double payment. Loans mostly benefit women, but males can also obtain them for livestock purchases. Village Elder engages in traditional farming, taking out loans to gather crops. There are no hospitals nearby. Village Elder invests in farming equipment, rents ponds for fish farming, and repays debts in a variety of ways. Some borrowers may refuse to invest loans, specifying justifications.

There are certain patterns that have been observed in the data, which are as follows:

I. *Pattern of Government Perception:* One of the most remarkable patterns that emerges from the data provided above is the villagers' complete agreement on the lack of significant government aid. While the villagers do not overtly criticise the government, their collective feeling is indisputably clear: the fundamental fault is with those charged with handling governmental matters. This statement reflects a common notion that the main problem is not always the aim of the government, but rather the administration and execution of programs at the grassroots level. The villagers' point of view emphasises the importance of more efficient and responsible governance methods that may transform government activities into actual benefits for their communities. This pattern may act as a trigger for conversation between communities and government officials in order to overcome the perceived gap and promote successful policy delivery.

II. *The Dual Role and Impact of BRAC:* Another notable trend arises regarding the role and influence of BRAC, an organisation that works as an NGO but does not strictly adhere to the typical NGO model. While the majority of villagers exhibit unanimity in their gratitude for the quality of services given by BRAC, a key subtlety emerges: borrowing from BRAC to satisfy financial necessities is causing unanticipated emotional and economic anguish for the villages. This ambivalence concerning BRAC derives from the fact that, while its services are well acclaimed, its reliance on loans raises questions about the financial arrangement's larger ramifications. This trend highlights the complicated relationship between access to basic services and the possible economic constraints associated with such services. It also stimulates thought on the importance of doing a thorough assessment of

development initiatives to guarantee that they truly improve the overall well-being of rural communities.

III. *Acceptance of Technology and Service Delivery:* A recurring theme in the data pertains to the villagers' increasing connection with digital means. The use of online registration systems for stipends, allowances, and resource access marks a significant step toward technological integration. However, it is clear that the move to digital processes would be difficult. The villagers' lack of experience with these tactics, as well as their subsequent refusal to accept them, have contributed to an increase in dissatisfaction, particularly with government services. This trend emphasises the significance of efficiently introducing and integrating technology in rural areas, as well as the relevance of comprehensive digital literacy initiatives. Furthermore, this technological resistance highlights a broader concern that unless these new methods are introduced thoughtfully and widely understood, they may inadvertently exacerbate existing service delivery frustrations, highlighting the critical role of user-friendly and culturally sensitive technology implementation in rural contexts.

Interpretation and Comparison of Findings Literature Used

In terms of government perception, the findings from Ruth Paneli's book and Akbar Ali Khan's data analysis provide insights into the link between rural development and government support. Paneli's analysis of the spread of capitalism in agriculture underlines an essential feature of rural development. The indicators she discusses, such as changes in market structures, women's participation in economic output, and alterations in demand, highlight a shifting economic environment that may interact with government policies. Khan's statistical research adds to this by demonstrating how the link between population change and village numbers has changed through time. These findings assist to frame the villagers' opinion that the fundamental issue is with the folks in charge of government affairs. While the literature does not explicitly address this tendency, it does provide us with information on the many aspects influencing government-community dynamics in rural Bangladesh.

Ruth Paneli's assessment on the growth of various types of industrialised agriculture methods is consistent with the villagers' diverse feelings about BRAC's services. While BRAC's services are regarded as great, the unexpected repercussions of debt and economic difficulties are consistent with Paneli's concept of agro capitalism. The literature's emphasis on agricultural developments, market systems, and external interventions overlaps with villagers' perceptions of problems associated with participation with development organisations. As Paneli said, the change toward

market-driven methods may amplify the villagers' worries about financial costs associated with receiving services. This correspondence between literature and observations emphasises the complex interaction between development endeavours and their unintended consequences.

The literature does not explicitly address the opposition to embracing technology, but it does describe changes in the economic environment of rural Bangladesh. According to Paneli, the influence of neoliberal globalisation and capitalist reformations has likely resulted in changes in how services are offered and accessed. This is consistent with the villagers' aversion to digital techniques, showing a possible mismatch between the advent of technology improvements and the level of familiarity among rural areas. The literature implicitly emphasises the importance of developing technology integration techniques that take into account the community's preparedness and knowledge of these tools. The villagers' struggle with digital approaches echoes the wider difficulties of adopting new technology in environments where old behaviours and institutions are strongly embedded.

According to modernization theory, civilizations move in a linear fashion from traditional to contemporary forms. In the context of the government perception pattern, the villagers' recognition of the obstacles in government support may signify a stage in the modernization process in which conventional systems are being questioned or modified. This is consistent with the emphasis on governance and institutional frameworks in modernization theory. This approach stresses industrialization and economic expansion as important development factors. Paneli's reference of the expansion of fish farming, shrimp farming, and other industrial activities reflects this emphasis on economic diversification. However, the negative repercussions that villages face as a result of loan availability may be viewed as a potential contradiction to modernization theory's assumption of unilinear progress. Modernization theory also emphasises technical advancement as a distinguishing feature of contemporary cultures. The topic of neoliberal globalisation and capitalist reformations in the literature corresponds with modernization theory's emphasis on responding to global economic trends. The villagers' struggles with technology are consistent with modernization theory's concept of societal adaptation to new instruments and practices.

The data analysis by Akbar Ali Khan shows how the rural environment has changed over time in response to population and area changes. Population growth and village expansion may imply a shift toward a more urbanised form, which is a feature of modernization theory. This is consistent with Paneli's observation of capitalist features spreading in agriculture, resulting in changes in market structures and economic processes. Both of these tendencies are consistent with modernization theory's emphasis on the transition from traditional to contemporary forms of society.

Ruth Paneli's description of industrialised agricultural methods like fish farming and shrimp farming might be interpreted as a response to market demands and economic diversification, both of which are stressed in modernization theory. Eric G. Jansen's insights into the influence of grain imports and food aid, on the other hand, provide a counterbalance, demonstrating the potential for foreign interventions to upset local economies. This illustrates the complexities of development processes, where the straight advancement of modernization may be hampered by external forces.

The notion of dependency examines uneven ties between rich and developing countries. The villagers' view of little government help may reflect their perceived reliance on outside players to offer successful governance. The notion that the fault is with the people in charge of government concerns is consistent with dependency theory's emphasis on external variables impacting development. The exploitative aspect of global economic systems is emphasised in this viewpoint. The villagers' experience with BRAC loans and unexpected consequences coincides with dependency theory's critique of development projects that may perpetuate reliance and uneven power dynamics. Dependency theory also emphasises how global economic systems may have an impact on local activities. The adoption of digital techniques and opposition to technology are consistent with dependence theory's contention that external influences are not always appropriate for local settings, potentially leading to resistance and obstacles.

The implications of external factors on rural development are discussed in both Akbar Ali Khan's statistical study and Ruth Paneli's assessment of capitalist aspects. The peasants' sense of inadequate government aid might be read via the perspective of dependency theory, which highlights the uneven ties between developed and underdeveloped regions. The impact of market dynamics and global economic trends on rural communities is consistent with dependence theory's criticism of economic exploitation.

Ruth Paneli's description of BRAC's services, as well as the villagers' mixed feelings about them, is consistent with dependency theory's worries about external actors sustaining reliance and uneven power relations. The observations of Eric G. Jansen concerning the impact of grain imports and food aid highlight the possible vulnerabilities generated by external actions. The combination of these views emphasises how development attempts, although aiming for progress, can unwittingly promote reliance and inequities, which is key to the critique of dependency theory.

Thus, combining the ideas of Akbar Ali Khan, Ruth Paneli, and Eric G. Jansen with the theoretical frameworks of modernization theory and dependency theory reveals a complex interplay between development processes and outside forces. While certain portions of the literature support both hypotheses, there are also discrepancies and complexity that call their assumptions into question. This implies that rural development in Bangladesh is impacted by a variety of causes, and theoretical frameworks provide lenses

through which to comprehend these dynamics; nevertheless, no one theory can fully contain the nuanced realities on the ground.

Drivers of Change and the Bigger Picture for Future Prospects

Based on the findings and the literature that I have worked on in the context of rural society and development in Bangladesh, several drivers of change can be identified:

I. *Economic Transformation:* The emergence of capitalist aspects in agriculture is a fundamental driver of change. Market structural changes, the adoption of industrialised agriculture methods, and the creation of new economic activities such as fish farming and shrimp farming are changing traditional rural economies.

II. *Globalization and External Influence:* The influence of neoliberal globalisation is pushing changes in market dynamics, demand patterns, and economic integration. External actors, organisations, and economic trends have an impact on rural communities, causing changes in production, consumption, and livelihood strategies.

III. *Technological Integration:* As seen by the villagers' opposition to technology, the introduction of digital ways for services and resources is a driver of change. The use of technical instruments can cause changes in service delivery mechanisms, affect communication patterns, and even alter social dynamics in rural areas.

IV. *Development Organizations and Interventions:* As noted under the villagers' mixed feelings, the role of organisations such as BRAC is another driver of change. Development efforts can have both intentional and unanticipated negative repercussions for rural populations' livelihoods, economic habits, and social interactions.

V. *Government Policies and Governance:* The villagers' impression of insufficient government help highlights the importance of governance and policy execution as change agents. Effective government actions can help rural development, but ineffective or poorly administered policies could hinder growth.

VI. *Market Dynamics and External Shocks:* The influence of grain imports demonstrates how market dynamics and external shocks may drive changes in rural areas. Price changes, food scarcity, and foreign help may all have a significant impact on local economies and livelihood options.

VII. *Environmental and Ecological Changes:* The loss of natural environment and biodiversity demonstrates that environmental causes are also drivers of change. Land use changes, the emergence of industrial activities, and changes in farming techniques may all affect natural dynamics and have an influence on rural communities.

VIII. *Social and Cultural transformations:* The transition from self-sufficient, isolated societies to those impacted by larger society reveals social and cultural transformations. developments in norms, values, and social relationships in rural communities might result from these developments.

IX. *Land and Resource rivalry:* Eric G. Jansen's concept of land and employment rivalry inside communities is a change driver. Competition for few resources can cause villages' economic methods, livelihood choices, and social relationships to evolve.

X. *Reliance and Power Dynamics:* The involvement and influence of external players, as shown in the impact of grain imports and food aid, emphasise the reliance and power dynamics that shape rural development. These factors can influence rural community decision-making, economic consequences, and social interactions.

So, we are able to see that often the people in these areas are unable to see the larger picture of the difficulties they confront, available resources, and development timetables, highlighting a serious concern. This may be linked to issues such as insufficient education and isolation from larger economic and social networks. The contrast between rural and urban communities highlights the discrepancies in terms of resources, information availability, and development opportunities. Political factors can exacerbate the problems that rural people experience. The execution of development programs might be hampered if governance structures are ineffective or insensitive to the requirements of rural inhabitants. A variety of causes may contribute to the villagers' apparent lack of interest in collaborating with the government and non-governmental organisations. It might be the result of historical distrust, inadequate previous efforts, or a sense of disconnection from greater society developments.

As a result, solving the issues already mentioned necessitates a holistic approach that includes education, governance, connectivity, and all-round development. The possibility for a better balanced as well as sustainable rural development in Bangladesh may be achieved by fostering an environment in which rural populations are empowered, active, and integrated into the larger development framework.

Part V: Rural Governance and Law

Governance in rural communities has seen multiple evolutions since the birth of the country. Regions that were once isolated have now come under direct Government presence, as well as the presence of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). This has had an effect on most aspects of rural life, but also especially law, which is a sector often dealt by the customary legal system, also known as shalish. In this section, the authors examine the ways in which the legal system and the presence of the government operate within the realms of rural communities, and the unique ways in which both have adapted to or impacted rural society.

Chapter 8

The Impacts on Rural Agriculture Due to Increased Government Presence

Iffat Sumaiya Mehzabeen

Introduction

In this chapter, I intended to explore the ways in which the lives of farmers and agriculture-based workers had changed since Jansen's first foray into Bangladeshi rural society. Over the course of extensively interviewing various stakeholders such government officials, farmers of various socioeconomic classes, NGOs, credit facilitators, etc, I aimed to understand not only the specific comparisons to Jansen's earlier work, but whether there were new factors at play that impacted the lives of farmers and rural agrarian communities.

The most noticeable overarching influence that I observed over three days of fieldwork showed that there had been a rapid and noticeable increase in the pervasiveness of the state's presence within rural communities, especially though policy interventions that impacted quotidian life, and a surge in the presence of politicisation within rural society.

Though the ripple effects of an increased government presence into everyday life and an intensification of politicisation are widespread and innumerable, I have identified four-fold problems in terms of their influence on agrarian communities and their stakeholders. Firstly, this increased government presence is most keenly felt through invasive and encompassing policies regarding citizenship and welfare aid. These policies, however, often increase the difficulties of access to these much-needed welfare programs and often in fact compound existing deficiencies faced by farmers and their families. Secondly, the structure and orientation of these government institutions and offices are often extractive in nature, to the point that they contribute towards the consolidation of power towards the central state mechanisms, the rural elite, and the urban centres of the country. Whether through acts of corruption, inadequate implementation and regulation, or a desire to enhance benefits for the rural centre at the cost of the rural periphery, the nature of these extractive institutions continue to undermine most efforts undertaken to increase the quality of life of farmers and agrarian communities especially. Thirdly, with the increase in politicisation of rural life, we have observed an increase in the value of holding government or political positions. As a result, a distinctive change has been seen in the strategies of the rural elite, which has seen them amalgamate their power by aiming to position themselves into the aforementioned roles, to the detriment of the average

rural civilian. Fourthly, the increased government presence when contrasted with the shortcomings of the state's avowed promises of development for rural communities has made it glaringly obvious that a mismatch exists within the desires of the people, and the state's abilities to minister to them. Within this gap, NGOs have emerged to take up the mantle of the purveyor of necessary services, though they often first serve their own agendas and interests. In the case of farmers, the NGOs have overwhelmingly taken over the roles of creditors to the farmers, and have gained a monopoly of power over their livelihoods.

The following sections will analyse the literature that supported this fieldwork that includes a brief comparative understanding of Jansen's own observance of rural government and politics, the methodology undertaken during the study, and the findings observed from the gathered data.

Reviewing Literature

Eirik G. Jansen spoke extensively on his observations regarding the presence of the state and politics in rural life in his chapter entitled 'Political and Economic Integration of Villages into a Wider Society' from his primary work on rural society, "Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources''. Jansen argued that, though at first, he observed that wider state policies did not seem to impact the quotidian life and economies of individual villages, the effects of state policies did in fact act as "external factors" which impacted village life (Jansen, 1987). Policies undertaken by the government had the ability to impact issues of land reform and ownership for farmers, the allocation of funds for agricultural development, credit relations for farmers, pricing of the sales of agricultural goods, the strategies and methods of raising crops, etc. Even, as Jansen says, while individual villages still maintained local credit relations, means to mediate legal disputes, localised markets for sales and distribution and the like, the policy from the central government and its directives had the ability to influence these institutions. This shows that a pattern was present within that timeframe that suggests that government intervention into agrarian life played a massive role in orienting agricultural life.

Jansen notes that due to the colonial nature of many of the institutions that governed rural life and administrations such as government offices, credit institutions, and marketplaces, said institutions were predisposed to be "extractive" in nature, as they had been created initially with the intention and mechanism to strip wealth and resources from the "periphery" of the rural areas to the urban centres that then consolidated these resources for the colonisers. The notion of "extractive institutions" is heavily discussed in Acemoglu and Robinson's groundbreaking book "Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty", where the authors discuss how the general ethos and orientation

of social institutions such as governments, collectives, agencies and organisations can often be traditionally upheld in such a manner that they operate in order to secure power, wealth and privileges for a specific cultural elite group, at the cost of those outside of the elite network (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). This matches with the notion of the second observed problem in regards to the present-day institutions of rural societies.

Jansen also noted that the rural elite often act as middle-men or arbiters during important occasions or schemes which impact village life, and do so as a means to curry favour and gain power through proximity to powerful individuals with connection to urban areas, the central government, or local leadership positions. This suggests that there existed a tendency of the rural elite to assimilate themselves within circles of power as a strategy to forward their own interests.

Finally, Jansen observed that during the 1970s the nascent interventions of NGOs into rural spheres, where they acted as supplementary agents to government causes, such as in providing tools for agricultural work such as hand-pumps for irrigation to poor farmers.

Fig 12: Union Parishad Office, Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh

Findings and Observations

While many changes were noted surrounding the lives of farmers in Ishwarganj, I particularly noticed that many of these transformations could be attributed to the overarching existence of an increased and considerably more complex government

presence. The central government created many modifications to the structures of rural government organisation since the 1970s, and particularly during the time of President Ershad in the 1990s. This led to a more wide-spread structure of government roles that infiltrated rural life, and the presence of government agents who sought to enforce the directives of the central government. Districts have been broken down into sub-districts or Upazilas, under which operate unions. Between these levels of administration lie various bureaucratic roles, such as Union Chairmans, Secretaries, Union Nirbahi Officers, Members of Parliaments, etc. Since the 2000s, the central government has made the effort to further empower rural officials with authorities to supposedly better serve their administrative zones, and these powers have allowed said administrators to wield increasingly more influence. Simultaneously, the central government from Dhaka has also begun to direct more policies that connect individual rural civilians to the mandate of the central state. Added to these factors is the political situation of the country – where the ruling Awami League (AL) party has held onto power unopposed for an unprecedented stretch of time through employing populist ideology and using the might of die-hard political followers. This charged environment has led to an increased level of politicisation throughout all aspects of the nation, which can be felt even throughout rural communities. The effects of these two factors on agrarian sectors of rural societies, as observed through the fieldwork, has been discussed in detail below:

I. *The Presence of Policies that Pervade Every Aspect of Agrarian Life:* One of the new government officials introduced into the rural administrative network, we discovered, was the role of Union Digitization Officer. The role, we learnt, was invoked as a step to further the central government's agenda to "digitise" Bangladesh, its public administration, and policy implementation. Miss Bilkis, the Digitization Officer of Ishwarganj Union, informed us that her primary roles were to digitise previously analogue records for birth certificates and National IDs, issue new birth certificates and IDs as community members registered, and to help direct villagers to other digital resources that may aid them claim government schemes though the birth certificates and IDs, which act as recognized identification. We observed that all forms of supposed government support, such as stipends for newborns, expecting and postnatal mothers, the elderly, the disabled, etc, could only be claimed through a registration process which required the existence of a form of formal identification such as the birth certificate or national IDs. Farmers were able to use this identification to register for government subsidised seed distributions, training courses, up-skilling opportunities, etc. Potentially, the access to these heavily subsidised government resources could sharply reduce the toil and personal capital farmers would need to invest, and increase their yield.

However, in practice, we discovered that many barriers existed to the access to these fundamental forms of identification, which meant that farmers could not access them. Primarily, many farmers and civilians were unaware of the need for these IDs when the initiatives were initially launched, which meant that many missed out on the opportunity to register. Additionally, the process of registering for IDs in the present case is rather arduous, as the government server to register for IDs is often out of commission for long- unpredictable stretches of time. Added to that, the registration of newer generations of children relies on the parents already having official IDs – and without them, they are often not allowed to register. This means that farmers and their families are precluded from accessing basic documentation that is essential to their ability to access important resources for the sustenance and development of their livelihoods or families.

Influenced by the government's directive to only allow access though official identification, non-government entities also presume access to their resources based upon government-issued identification. This means that creditors such as banks or NGOs, to which farmers turn in order to gain capital, do not extend those services to farmers without documentation. As a result, the barriers to access to much needed resources become mired within a sea of bureaucratic hassle and added difficulty.

We also have to remember that in nations like Bangladesh with poor agrarian communities, most of the relief of daily stresses such as supplemental income, healthcare or welfare comes through the access to government-promised schemes and policies. The inability to receive these resources means that the struggles of farmers are compounded. Given the fact that we see in the next section that a certain level of corruption and resource-hoarding takes place, even as a vast majority of farmers fight to even gain the support to which they are supposedly entitled, a smaller section of well-connected rural elite manage to accumulate much-needed resources and wealth. This obviously contributes towards the widening of the wealth-gap in rural communities, and often reinforces generational patterns of success for some families at the cost of others. Compared to Jansen's observations, the complexity and intensity of government presence in rural communities has increased, as have their attendant impacts.

II. *The Extractive Nature of Rural Institutions:* In line with the theories of Acemoglu and Robinson, the nature of most rural institutions – and especially those connected to governmental structures, is extractive. Despite the reforms and increasingly complex rural administrative structure, the goal of these bodies seems to always pull rural communities towards the structure, norms, and organisational

strategies of the “urban” centres. Additionally, these institutions often are oriented towards ensuring that resources from the rural peripheries are syphoned into the urban centres. Farmers, in particular we found, felt compelled to sell most of their goods to wholesalers who bought for the urban market such as Dhaka’s Kawran Bazar Market, as they would not gain a commensurate price for their local markets in Ishwarganj.

A further layer of extractive qualities of institutions was observed with the culture of corruption and incompetent implantation within government bodies. Despite the party line towed by the Chairman of Ishwarganj Union during his interview, whereby he painted an almost utopic picture of a government hard at work to meet the demands of the people, conversations with farmers showed that this could not be farther from reality. Farmers of the landless or small-holdings scale both complained bitterly that even after undergoing the needlessly difficult process of registering for government schemes, they were unable to actually access any relevant resources in terms of agricultural training, or farming tools that were meant to be given to them by the administration. One small-holdings farmer in Islampur who had operated fisheries for 20 years bitterly complained that the resources were often squandered amongst the bureaucrats, who either consumed the resources and money for themselves, or wasted them through poor implementation of the resources.

Landless farmers who worked as day labourers for others, or leased plots from the landed gentry were found and interviewed in Islampur Bazaar, and when queried vehemently denied the presence of working government schemes for their welfare that they have been able to access, as most of the money went towards “the fat cats.” Contrasted with the interview of the Union Secretary, where we learned that the government actually had many schemes for rural welfare, and large blocks of the national budget invested into improving rural life and infrastructure, we found that on the ground, most people either denied the awareness of these projects due to lack of campaigning by the local administration, bemoaned the difficulty of accessing these resources even when following procedure, or directly said that their shares were syphoned off by those who were better connected.

During this interview, the heavy suppression of opposition towards these extractive practices were also noted, as the group of farmers we were speaking to dispersed quietly upon the arrival of two young landed farmers, who were ostensibly loyal to the AL regime, for fear of reprisal. Interestingly, these two wealthy, landed farmers spoke graciously of all the aid they received through government schemes. One of them even openly proclaimed that his loyalty for the party would drive him to “bomb someone’s home if it was asked and needed of

him, no questions asked", suggesting a nearly obsessive sort of politicisation within certain villagers and elite-allied farmers.

In general, we observed that the increased integration of the government into rural life had strengthened the presence of existing extractive practices, which were now further bolstered by political agents.

Interestingly, the average farmer did not feel any ill-will towards the central government, or the abstract concept of the "state" and its avowed direction of the nation. They seemed to draw a direct distinction between the AL party and its government which organised the nation from the capital, and their grassroots members who were part of the village government. Mistrust for the Chairman between non-elite agrarian farmers was universally high, even as praises for the Prime Minister and her cabinet were plentiful. The general opinion of farmers seemed to be that though the central government was taking steps to ensure their betterment, members of their own rural elite and their cohorts were disrupting the efforts by subsuming the local rural administration for their less-than-honest self-interests.

Another angle of these extractive institutions can be seen in the emergence of the new rural elite class – entrepreneurial individuals and families who leverage the work and low remuneration of local landless farmers as their labourers and renters. The goods and rent revenue generated off the backs of these small farmers would be used directly to invest into business ventures such as stores, transports businesses, showrooms, etc – and even invested into metropolitan areas. Ironically, some of the businesses these extractive elite invest into often perpetuate their own control over their area. In Islampur, we met and spoke to a local entrepreneur who gained wealth first as a migrant worker in Singapore, then as a land-owner from the plots bought with his foreign remittance earnings. From these earnings, the entrepreneur then invested into a dealership that is amongst the largest feed stores for the local fisheries and poultry farms. As the only local franchised dealer for the larger feed companies, he now held a monopoly over the local farmers. More to the point, he provided auxiliary services through his feed store such as advising medication for sick farm animals. The farmers were beholden to this entrepreneur and his medications regardless of pricing, as they lacked informed knowledge or resources on these matters due to lack of government training or alternatives. Thus, a further layer of dependence fell upon these local farmers, who became tied to the services of an elite class on many different, all-encompassing levels.

III. *The Integration of the Rural Elite into Government:* While according to Jansen's work, the rural elite usually had operated in close allyship with the existing government structures in a sort of symbiotic relationship, our observations during the fieldwork suggested to us that an interesting strategy had been adapted by the rural elites to further gain power. Instead of operating distinctly from the government officials, they now attempt to directly integrate into government roles to gain power first hand.

Upon speaking to farmers who lived in Islampur and Charshihari, we discovered that in the younger generations, there was a propensity for children of landed elites to enter not just into political roles, but as government officials into various administrative offices, such as under the Chairman's office or the UNO office. This means that they are then able to negotiate and redirect resources provided to them from the central government towards the gain of the elites. Combined that with the previous point of the integration of extractive institutions into the government structure, and it was plain to see why many of those who operated fisheries in those two villages argued that resources such as feed, pumps, electrification, and water management were given on a familiar basis to family members of the relevant government offices who were meant to distribute them, instead of fairly based on the priority of the needy. Similarly, fishery owner Abdul Manna's son informed us that this use of privilege also extends towards protection from repercussions. The young 3-generation fishery farmer informed us that in the previous season, he had incurred a huge loss as some of his fields and ponds had been flooded out due to a neighbouring farmer building a dam on his property that had pushed water into the Mannan family's lot. Nothing could be done to resolve the issue, ask for compensation, or remove the dam, as the neighbour had relatives who worked in the local land office and "graam adalot" (village court). A general sense of mistrust operated in regards to a farmer's ability to access recourse through the legal or administrative avenues. An erosion of trust in institutions is also a marker of Acemoglu and Robinson's formulation of extractive institutions, which we can observe here.

Hence, we see that the adaptive strategies of the rural elite have evolved to integrate themselves directly into the structure of the government which has become pervasive in village life. As stated previously, this consolidation of power therefore has become even more intense, and perpetuates the rapid widening of the wealth gap in rural communities.

IV. *The Increased Role of NGOs:* While the involvement of NGOs was complementary to the government at the time that Jansen observed rural societies in the 1970s, at

present day we see that NGOS such as ASHA and BRAC have completely entered into and fulfilled the niches where the rural public is disillusioned with the local government's intention or ability to improve their lives. The most noticeable role that NGOs have come to play in the lives of farmers is that of creditors.

In the 1970s, most credit relationships for farmers were between themselves and individual, wealthy lenders or "shomitis" which were convened by groups of locals with the sole interest of acting as creditors for agricultural purposes. Owning to the high-investment nature of agriculture which requires large amounts of capital for the purchase of seeds to grow, fertiliser to feed crops and tools such as irrigation and tractors to increase yield, it is easy to see why especially landless or small-scale farmers would need the presence of lenders to extend them credit.

However, we observed that while intra-family or personal credit relations still exist on the small scale, the larger and more sustainable lenders available to farmers were the NGOS and banks. Given that they could not rely on government commitment to train them or provide them with subsidised resources, farmers have to largely gain this capital for themselves. Most rural farmers choose to loan from NGOs instead of banks for two simple reasons: banks are usually more reluctant to negotiate with farmers with no or limited collateral, and that most farmers had to offer up their most precious capital of land to guarantee bank loans – and they were unwilling to risk their more valuable asset to forfeiture in case they failed to make payments to the bank, as the loss of the land to the bank would mean the destruction of their livelihoods.

Though NGOs seemingly operate with the mandate to aid rural development through their loans, on the ground we found that the reality was quite different. NGOs seemed to operate with a complex two-level agenda when approaching farmers of different socioeconomic farmers.

Relatively poor or small-scale farmers of Charshihari and Islampur told us that most NGOs who operated in their area appeared almost predatory in nature. They are prone to coming into the homes of poor families, and convincing them to take loans by attempting to minimise the stress of their interest rates, or the repercussions of missing repayment instalments. Though the farmers gained capital from the loans, they had to portion a large section of their monthly or weekly earnings into repaying the instalments on schedule. Failure to pay on time would usually lead to harassment by loan agents, the "gram police", local agents acting on behalf of the NGOs in an unofficial capacity and even the odd threat of jail. Most farmers say that NGOs will operate in any way necessary to ensure that they receive the interest from their loans, so that they can continue to profit. Many families said that agriculture had become such an uncertain and difficult field, that

almost no “purely agrarian” families existed anymore – most family members did a secondary job alongside agriculture such as transport driving, cottage works, or small-scale entrepreneurial ventures, in order to sustain their families under the stress of paying back their NGO loans. Small fishery owners in Islampur very vividly described sleepless nights and anxiety over the concern of repaying their loans, and the fear of the harassment and social shaming their failure to do so would entail.

Conversely, we observed in the “model village” of Churali that operated under the aegis of BRAC’s Dabi credit program, that more established families were treated differently. Despite the Dabi guidelines ensuring the thresholds for families who could claim credit with them as only within BDT 20, 000 and 1,00,000, the head of the family at Churali’s most established family (that Dabi presented as their “success story”) revealed that his family could negotiate the loans for multiple members of the same nuclear family at once, therefore raising their collective threshold to almost four times the one lakh taka limit. This gave the family a much larger competitive advantage over his neighbours. We were able to see evidence of this, as this particular family has the largest and best maintained fishery pond in the neighbourhood with its own privately-owned drainage and pump, and one of the larger dairy operations as well – all funded through Dabi loans. In exchange, the family’s patriarch revealed, he acted almost as an agent for the NGO amongst his own peers by ensuring that they repay loans on time, commit surveillance on their ventures on behalf of the loan officers, and continue to make sure that the Dabi office meets its targeted goals to reflect the “success” of the program on record – on families just like the small scale fishery owners of Islampur, who spoke of the fear of social pressure to repay the loan instalments on time, interestingly enough.

Thus, we can see that the gap of government intervention has allowed the monopolisation of rural credit relations to go to NGOs, who usually serve their own interests to the detriment of the average farmer.

Conclusion

Given that most of the problems identified in this paper originate from the pervasive nature of government administration, coupled with the extractive nature of those institutions, the best form of recourse against these issues are linked to a two-pronged approach of reform and accountability. It is not enough to simply attempt to restructure or retrain government administrators and policy makers so that they streamline the resources they are allocated from the central government towards rural development, and

neither is it enough to solely suggest that these institutions simply adhere to increased transparency through audits or third-party surveillance in the form of watchdogs and such. Actual effective change must step from a top-down approach from the central government that re-examines and changes the material philosophy of the culture they enforce within their administration, and in the nature of the practicality of policies they implement. On a secondary level, transparency must go hand in hand with this transformation, but not simply towards the higher-ups in the central government. It would likely be more effective if local rural administrations were made to be more transparent regarding their allocated budgets, resources and chosen expenditures, directly to the civilians whom they serve.

Chapter 9

The Enduring Prevalence of Shalish In The Face of the Official Judicial System in Rural Communities

Mahima Chowdhury

Introduction

In an interview with Hoque and Zarif (2019), an interviewee had said:
"A Shalish has more opportunity to offer a suitable resolution than the court. For a court has no chance to see the cause of dispute exactly"

Fig 13: Discussions on land disputes with the women of Islampur village

This gives us the impression that Shalish is a system considered to be an equivalent of formal courts and an impersonal adjudication system; most villagers believe that shalish has more access to information and context is greater than in a court. Shalish are disciplinary bodies, who make sure that the rural social order is maintained and play an active role in settling civil and criminal problems (Al-Amin and Akhter, 2023). While they are not registered under the court of law, they do not need to be, since they provide amicable solutions to cases without having to take legal actions at most times. If legal actions are required, for example, should a couple seek divorce, then Shalish in theory will try to understand the couple's conflict and advise ways in which the conflict can be minimised; if the advice works, the matter is resolved there. However, should the couple seek divorce anyway, they shall have to make their way to the courts. In theory, Shalish can only act as an advisory role and an intermediary to minimising conflict; however, in Bangladesh's rural community, Shalish acts as the main adjudication system and is preferred over formal courts despite their outcomes being typically negative (Al-Amin and Akhter, 2023). Despite this, Shalish is involved in cases of infidelity all the way to land disputes and forceful land grabbing.

Shalish, in this manner, has taken over the work of formal courts in rural areas. Even in matters of dire attention, the village leaders and/or elders are called upon to resolve these matters. It may be considered a failure on the part of formal authorities and the government to have their representation be absent from rural areas; and even if representatives are present, their work is not synonymous with justice since almost all people are left with heavy expenses and no resolve from consulting the system (Hoque and Zarif, 2019). When it comes to the crime activity of a said area, the SP interview on our trip to Mymensingh identified that 80% of the criminal cases that are recorded in the area are related to land disputes. Having noticed the large influx of crime rate only coming from land disputes, it is a given that a lot of these cases fall under the adjudication of Shalish.

In the light of this, it is particularly interesting to notice how Shalish may try to resolve land grabbing and land disputes. Land disputes, involving many social facets such as gender, socioeconomic conditions, religion etc. is a complicated matter to look into; land dispute itself is a matter that is heavily nuanced. Under 12 of the many ways Ayub Ali (2020) highlighted, land disputes can be caused by things ranging from the contract itself all the way to partition, mortgage and documentation. If consulting formal court only leads to further expenses and long-dragged hearings with no resolutions, people may lose whatever land they are in possession of, creating a worse situation for themselves. But other than that, are there further reasons why people prefer Shalish over Formal Judicial proceedings, specifically for land disputes? What are the supporting theories behind the former questions and what can be possible solutions to these problems? In this paper, I plan to explore exactly that.

Reviewing the Literature

Muhammad Rafiqul Haque and Muhammad Mustaqim Mohd. Zarif's (2019) paper is important since it highlights the historical context of Shalish and why it is considered superior to formal judiciary. Not only do they state that about 60-70% of rural disputes are solved through Shalish, but also, they mention that the Bangladeshi courts are so backed up in terms of keeping up with cases that it leads to delayed dates of hearings and resolve; therefore, Shalish provides a quicker solution to disputes.

Al-Amin and Akhter (2022), in their paper, further state that the official justice system is greatly absent in the remote areas of Bangladesh and even if it were present, minorities such as indigenous and minority gender groups have a hard time getting access to the official system. Furthermore, it was stated that formal court has certain unique regulations, alongside having lengthy and expensive proceedings, which is greatly unsustainable by underprivileged and much of the rural communities. Al-Amin and Akhter (2022) also stated that while people relied on the Shalish procedures, the adjudicators can often be influenced by bribery. Hence, the effectiveness of the Shalish depends on whether the disputants succumb to the peer pressure of the villages to act according to the Shalish's advice.

Lastly, for Md. Ayub Ali (2017)'s article, there was further clarification on land disputes and why they occur. In this paper, not only is there a list of different types of land disputes recognised by law, Ali identified corruption being one of the reasons why the formal judiciary system is ineffective in its process. Ali explained the ineffectiveness as follows: "the estimated time to dispose of such ever increasing suits is equivalent to 27 million years, the cumulative amount of money spent to meet litigation cost is higher than the annual development budget of the country and the annual amount of incidental expenses is Tk. 248, 599 million with 50 percent as bribe" (Ali, 2019).

Findings and Analysis

For this segment, I have chosen to provide my theories for why people choose Shalish to be superior, backed by findings presented in the transcripts of the Mymensingh visit.

1. Ineffectiveness of the Official Judicial System

Land-related Judicial proceedings are especially expensive and lengthy as discussed in Ali's (2017) article, the court proceedings in Bangladesh are incredibly backed up and are operated on the foundations of corruption. In this case, if one is to present their case to court and expect their resolve to be reached on time, not only will they have to bribe the officials, but also, the property lawyers of Bangladesh need to be paid with a share of the

property in question. For a rich peasant, even, the expenses lead to not only the exception of the existing property to pay for court proceedings, but also, they might have to risk their current living quarters to pay for getting a parcel of land. This, ultimately, leads to the loss of wealth and is not beneficial in the long run.

In this case, even if by any chance the rich peasant were to come off the end of the court proceedings with any kind of profit, that consequence is an impossible feat for regular members of the rural community. Especially, in case they were in dispute against much richer land grabbers or siblings who are in better socioeconomic status, this procedure can be harmful since connections in the court can be used to make the lower socioeconomic status suffer more losses. Therefore, the system ultimately is unfair and is run on the basis of networks.

On the contrary, through Shalish, people of the lower socioeconomic background disputants may have to suffer losses since Shalish systems are biassed as well. But, they'll be left with a greater share than the consequences of court proceedings since, through Shalish, the other disputant is still to be socially accountable to some extent and the person can still pick up their life from where it was left off.

Case Study 1: Bepari Bari

A 40-year-old land dispute within siblings has left the patriarch of the Bepari Bari to sell and mortgage different parts of their 5 katha land, all for a 7 katha land under dispute. This case could not be kept within Shalish and having travelled to village court and then high court, the dispute is costing Bepari Bari a lot of money and is taking away from their living property. They used to have 5 katha more land where they had previously cropped, but now they're living on credit relations of influential families like Talukdar Baari, to whom a majority of their land is mortgaged. Ultimately, not being able to keep the dispute off the courts had led to their loss of wealth and financial security.

2. The Consequences of Shalish can be controlled

As explained before, the judiciary court is racked by corruption and is usually favouring people of more social and economic capital. In this case, without the right networks, it is impossible for anyone to get justice, and that too on time. However, if anyone has networks in their village community, they are better able to dictate the Shalish in their favour. This is because, as explained before, Shalish is conducted by people who have a closer relationship with the disputants, even as little as living in the same community. If a person is in connection with the Shalishkar, they are better able to influence the adjudicator on their side and as the advice of the Shalish swings in their favour, the opposition of the disputants have to accept the consequences in lieu of peer pressure

from the village. This would have not been possible in an official court setting, at least by people from remote parts of Bangladesh.

For cases of land dispute and inheritance, families like to maintain their reputation and see it as a crack in their reputation if their internal affairs are left open for others to see. This is also where the control of the Shalish comes in, since, the disputants with greater economic power can ask the Shalish board to work inside their property and shelter, creating “small resolutions” to force the opposition to accept under peer pressure. This ensures that the news of instability in the family stays within the family, despite the consequences on the opposition.

In the light of that, while women of richer peasant class families are not often allowed to be a part of property dispute, through their social capital, they can set up Shalish within their property to make sure their image in society is not reduced. Here, intersections of different social factors may come in, which leads to people not wanting to let their community know about their internal affairs. For example, Arens (2014), when highlighting women’s position in land disputes, said that women thought of ownership of land as a burden since it comes with social responsibilities and often disputes that conflict with their image of a caring and loving mother. This is further supported by Hoque and Zarif (2019) stating that Shalish may be preferred as a result of Shalishkars choosing to be present in the place of dispute to discuss and announce the results of the Shalish, resulting in the news of the conflict being contained in the family.

Against this, not only would resorting to court be an extremely public act, it will give off control over the consequences of the property. Additionally, property lawyers are often needed to be paid in shares of land rather than money, which ultimately causes people to fragment their property anyway. Therefore, above the official judiciary system, Shalishes are preferred by the rural communities.

Case Study 2: The Women’s Recreational Shed in Islampur Village

Being a woman’s space for almost all demographics, but mostly middle-aged to elderly, they spoke of how Shalish at the current moment is “not for the poor”. They said that Shalish does not sit for anything other than land disputes, and even then, the results are heavily biassed since the Shalishkars can be bought. They commented that the violence has indeed increased and in cases of land dispute, physical violence is often observed and from that point, police and Gram Adalat are involved. Only after then is Shalish stepping in to advise the family on how to fix the ongoing problem. They also commented that the Gram Adalat is not efficient enough, saying that not only are they irregular they are also lengthy and require too much paperwork. Therefore, people with lesser social capital are less able to get justice and therefore say that Shalish can be biassed.

3. The Judiciary Has Biopower

In light of the above discussion of agency in adjudication, people who are of greater socioeconomic status also prefer Shalish, because shalish cannot provide physical punishment or confinement, other than cases of murder (Hoque and Zarif, 2019). The official judiciary system, however, has the power to "discipline" the labour force, and are able to provide as far as capital punishments to people they deem fit. Therefore, in order to avert that risk, people stick to Shalish since this adjudication system provides the guarantee of having some sense of control over consequences.

This is also factored into the fact that when seeking official judiciary support, people have to comply with regulations and provide documentation which, if not given to their wants, can be used against the disputants. In this case, the power dynamic is such that the government officials are capable of posing harm to the disputants in a manner incapable of Shalishkars, they can delay their access to the property and in case of any other greater transgressions, the disputants can be put behind bars. This fear of manipulation in the public sphere leads people to succumb to whatever peer pressure they may have to face, since it is the lesser evil in comparison to judiciary trouble.

Case Study 3: Forid Bari

The male of the family works as a sharecropper after having lost his property through forceful land grabbing by influential people, to which he did not dispute in fear of losing his existing living property. Not having gotten any property in inheritance either, he relied on microfinance and created his own way up; he also said that he cannot rely on the government for funds since the support for farmers is unreliable. He now has educated daughters and is capable of being able to provide for his family, but only after conforming to the peer pressure of not disputing against the people of higher socioeconomic status and not asking for judiciary support.

Fig 14: Interview of the Chairman of Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh

Discussion

The theoretical perspective for developing these solutions have been made keeping the lower socioeconomic status' people in mind. Since, the capitalist system eventually develops a loophole around most laws, we must aim for equity in laws which can be created through representation. Having said that, the following steps can be taken to mandate that:

I. *Decentralising the court system:* since the current court system is extremely backed up as a result of insufficient staffers, not only should the government increase the staffers, but also, change the system of one central court to state or division-based court. This makes sure that the load reduces from one central court and representation of the people in remote areas are present in court.

   This case is particularly important to highlight since a system of village courts do exist in the Mymensingh villages where the fieldwork for this paper has been

conducted, and, while these village courts are formed by the government, they are led by village leaders, which just makes it a more official and government-approved form of Shalish, where the Shalishkars can still give undue advantages to the people of higher economic status. Instead, what my solution suggests is opening a branch of higher court bodies at the district/city level, with officials transferred by the government in order for the cases to be less backed up in higher courts and for people to get their resolve on time.

II. *Creating a village-based "travelling-court" system:* since we are already aware that the rural community are not comfortable about seeking legal help and having the news of their land dispute get out, it is the government's responsibility to make the system more accessible to the general public. This has to be done through their own resources and not through NGOs (since they are private organisations, using NGOs will fill another capitalistic hole) and use the said resources to form a legal team, or a set of legal teams, per upazila. This team can travel to the property of the people in need (as representatives of the government) and ensure that if people find it difficult to go to court themselves and take access to services they have a right to, the government makes their access easier. This also includes a team of lawyers per upazila in charge of the paperwork since that is also a big, rigorous part of the process. In order to minimise biases, the teams can also be circulating within certain intervals within upazilas.

Conclusion

The theoretical perspective for attempting to develop solutions for the aforementioned issues need to be made keeping the lower socioeconomic status' people in mind. Since, the capitalist system eventually develops a loophole around most laws, we must aim for equity in laws which can be created through representation. While the system is flawed on both sides, the responsibility of correcting the system first falls on the government since they are responsible for sustaining the order of the community. Additionally, with the right services and the right guidance, the citizens are likely to follow since it's only in their best interest.

For land disputes, additionally, it is important to have government intervention since it is yet an underdeveloped area in Bangladesh. Bangladesh, in order to keep up and compete with the rest of the capitalistic world, had to develop at a rapid pace and therefore not develop fundamental parts of its structure. Also, according to Ali (2017), a majority of the laws we use to this day are old and inherited from colonial times. Today's issues such as

the income stratification created by capitalism and the work of NGOs along with the government are contemporary issues that are hard to be managed by the administration with the help of colonial laws.

Finally, it is important to address the rampant corruption on all levels of the administration. Should all of the aforementioned solutions and theories be applied to Bangladesh today, the taxes are to increase as a natural consequence. It is important for the government to not only stay accountable to the programs this taxed money is to be used for, but also, remove the current intermediaries that exist in the system. The specialisation of local leaders serves as a good example to show why governments should be accountable for any actions undertaken, since the “travelling-court” system can also be used as a tool for exploitation of the rural communities. Therefore, it is important to create an accountable and aware sphere of community for a society to thrive.

Part VI: Rural Infrastructure

Healthcare and Education are the first things that policymakers think of when considering development and transformation. There are varying ideas as to how to arrange education so as to maximise benefit. In terms of Healthcare, the consensus is that an efficient healthcare system is invaluable for the betterment of a population. This section examines the ways in which rural communities have been impacted with transformations in the key infrastructural realms of public education and healthcare.

Chapter 10

Analysing Urban Biassed Policies as a Contributing Factor in Mass Dropouts and Migration to Madrasas in Rural Areas

Atiqur Rahman Priom

Background Context

In 1974, a universal, scientific, and unified general education system was conferred by the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission which was formed in 1972 by the newly formed government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to build a nation that stands on a society that has a collective foundation of equality. From 1972 to 2003, five commissions were created and the latest addition from 2021, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) has been proposed with the target of achieving the UNDP Sustainable Development 4: Quality Education by 2030. Keeping in mind the primary aim of education that was long ago addressed while forming the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission, in 2010 and 2021, the National Education Policy (NEP) from 2010 and National Curriculum Framework (2021) was developed. Both NEP (2010) and NCF (2021) have emphasised pre-primary and primary-level education in Bangladesh.

Pre-primary education is the phase before primary school education where children get the essence of 12 years of formal education. There they will get used to the school environment and the subjects they will study in primary school. The age frame of pre-primary education is 4+ to 5+ years divided into Play and Nursery classes. Then comes Primary school from grade 1 to grade 5. Primary school is divided into 2 divisions, grades 1 and 2 are lower primary and consist of 3 subjects, and grades 3 to 5 are upper primary which consists of 6 subjects. In 2010, the dropout rate of students in primary school till or before the completion of Grade 5 was around 50%, and of the rest, who dropped out of school before completing Grade 10 was about 40%, (National Education Policy, 2010). NEP's (2010) report also acknowledges that to solve the dropout problem the stipend volume for poor students needs to be increased and wider school feeding programs or free lunches for students need to be heavily implemented.

Though the policies are well designed, reality contradicts when it comes to implementing the policies. Though the latest National Curriculum 2021 is largely targeted to achieve the UNDP's Sustainable Development Goal 4, when we see the national budget proposed for the fiscal year 2023-24, the record-high national budget is TK 761,785 crore, and the allocated budget for Education is TK 88,000 crore – which amounts to 11.57 percent of the total budget and 1.76% of GDP. To achieve the SDGs UNESCO recommended the level of

educational funding of GDP should be 4 to 6% or 15 to 20% of public expenditure. Bangladesh consecutively failed to maintain this while allocating the budget. Moreover, after the liberation war, students in schools were given nutritious milk powder in some areas, and later in 1993, the Food for Children program was launched. The students were given rice, vitamin pulses, etc. In the year 2000, vitamin-enriched biscuits replaced those. The school feeding program was nationally launched in 2010 with the help of the World Food Program and Food and Agriculture Organization. From 2010 to 2021 the project cost the government TK 4,991 crore. Since 1990, 5 crore kids have directly benefited from the program (TBS, 2022).

However, the pandemic affected educational institutions heavily, and when we needed the school feeding program most to bring back children to school the government suddenly stopped the program in July 2022. Even in a recent report by TBS (2023a), the state minister acknowledged and stated that “The project played an effective role in addressing nutritional deficiencies of primary school children, 100% enrollment in schools, regular school attendance, prevention of dropouts, and timely completion of education cycle.” Furthermore, The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) on 1 June 2021 turned down a project under the school feeding program designed to provide "Khichuri" (a dish consisting chiefly of rice and pulses) or other food items as a more effective lunch to primary school students. The government officials didn’t mention why the school feeding program stopped but while conducting the fieldwork, I learned that the government launched a slogan that says children’s food should be cooked by their mothers. Before going to the field, my primary goal was to find out if there were dropouts of girls because of child marriage, but what was found is that the main reasons for dropouts were not child marriage but the government's current decisions on stopping the free lunch program and urban biased allocation procedure while implementing any policies. And another interesting fact is the dropouts are mostly boys, not girls. Additionally, religious sentiment has become a fact for many students migrating from school to madrasa. To understand this dropout pattern Michael Lipton’s urban bias theory has been a key theory of this paper. Michael Lipton’s theory on urban bias has been discussed in the theoretical part of the paper.

Literature Review

Michael Lipton (1977) in his book, “Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban Bias in World Development” structurally criticised the “urban bias” in different ways. He used various examples of third-world nations to argue the fact that “urban bias” is one of the core factors that became a huge obstacle in the way of collective development, not only in national and foreign relations but also within the nation’s urban-rural relations. In his book (Lipton, 1977) deeply emphasised the definition of “urban bias”. He argued that to

understand the definition of urban bias one should not look for the literal meaning of the words but need to understand the metaphorical meaning of it. By favouring the populations of urban regions to the detriment of rural regions, he contended that the monetary and financial approaches of these nations tend to be inefficient. He also argues that from allocating budgets or goods to distributing goods urban policymakers prioritise the urban areas. Eirik G. Jansen (1986) in his book "Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources", in chapter 8 also mentioned how sets of policies were persuaded that gave high priority and allocation of budget in favour of urban areas at the expense of agricultural development.

Fig 15: Students of Charshihari Govt. Primary School

Findings & Case Studies

"A small packet of biscuits might not be a big thing for children in cities. In fact, a packet of biscuits or "Samosa" is nothing compared to the tiffin many children in urban schools bring from home. But here in Charshihari village, the kids will walk miles to come to school to have that single packet of biscuits in tiffin break." That's how Monira Begum, a school teacher from Charshihari Govt. Primary School started her answer when the question was asked in the focus group discussion on why there are so many dropped-out students in their school. In my 3 days of fieldwork in Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh, I went to 2 government and 2 private primary schools in 3 villages – Joypur, Charshihari, and Islampur. However, 2 private schools run by NGOs were not open when I visited and 1

government primary school administration in Islampur village refused to talk. The only government primary school in Charshihari where I interviewed 2 teachers separately and had a Focus Group Discussion with 4 teachers and the caretaker (the school land was donated by the grandfather of the caretaker) of that school. Before that, I interviewed the Ishwarganj Union Chairman Mr. Abu Hanif, and a Parent from Joypur village Mr. Abdul Mannan.

Case Study 1:

The Chairman in his interview talked about overall education facilities in his union and said the quality of education improved there. Now they have more high schools, a college, and a lot of Aliyah and Qawmi Madrasas. Qawmi Madrasas don't need the approval of the government and they can just start teaching with a house or room. Also, Qawmi Madrasas started Bangla education now. He also emphasises that a small Qawmi madrasa roughly has 20 to 30 students, takes tuition fees of TK 300 to TK 400 from each student, and a Huzur (madrasa teacher) teaches Bangla along with Arabic and other religious moral values. On the other hand, the chairman criticises the teachers in School. He said, "Primary schools have more female teachers. The government aims to have female teachers so that they can teach students like mothers. That is not happening. They are not teaching the students with responsibility. They keep track of time and end their duty." Furthermore, he talked about how primary schools are not working out, hence students are being sent to Madrasas because parents can rely on Huzurs in terms of actually giving education. Finally, he concludes by mentioning BRAC NGO School's cheap tuition fees and how if one student doesn't come to school, they send 3 or 4 others to bring the missing student.

Case Study 02:

Mr. Abdul Mannan is the father of a son in Joypur village. His son completed Hafezia and now became a Maulana (Scholar in Islam) in the capital Dhaka. When he was asked why sent his son to the madrasa instead of school he replied that in school, his son would gain nothing but by studying Hafezia his son not only bring honour to the family but also in his afterlife his son will go to Jannat (Heaven) for religious practice. Mr. Mannan also mentions BRAC NGO Schools in his village where little girls go to study. Besides, in his neighbourhood, most villagers are comparatively solvent that's why they either send their children to private schools or madrasas.

Case Study 03:

Before the focus group discussion, I visited the classrooms of Grades 3, 4, and 5 to observe. In all 3 of them, what I noticed is that the number of girls present in the class was triple or quadruple than the number of boys. No projector or modern equipment was

not available in the classrooms. Later, I asked for the number of students in the school and got to know that there were 122 girls and 144 boys, a total of 266 students currently enrolled in the school. In 2022, the total number of students was around 345 to 355. The dropout and migration rate is almost 23% to 26% in one year. The majority of them dropped out of school and very few of them migrated from school to madrasa in 1 year. Apart from that, the number of teachers including the headmaster of the school is 9, and all of them are females. The only staff who serves as a caretaker is male.

After learning the numbers and observing the classrooms, in the focus group discussion at Charshihari Govt. Primary School, the teachers pointed out that the sudden stop of the school feeding program in July 2022 is one of the key reasons that many students dropped out of school, and among the current students, the attendance rate is decreasing alarmingly. Mostly the boys don't find interest in coming to school, rather they go to agriculture fields with elders as there they can earn money. There is also a slogan "Shishur Khabar Hok Maayer Haater Ranna" (Kid's food should be the food that is cooked by their mother.) attached while stopping the school feeding program, added one of the teachers Kunti Saha.

Moreover, the student stipend program is now mobile banking-based. The government decided to send the stipend directly to the parents through the mobile banking app "Nagad''. Many parents in the village find it hazardous to use and many times they forget the procedure or account PIN to withdraw money from the account. The amount of the student stipend is only TK 100 per month which the government sends through Nagad every 6 months. So for this small amount of money, many parents are not willing to go through the procedures again and again. That is another reason parents don't get attracted by stipends anymore.

Furthermore, each year when the month of Ramadan comes, many parents send their kids to Madrasa to learn Islamic manuscripts and religious practices. Sometimes it becomes very difficult for these young children to continue in two educational institutes back to back in a single day, as they have to study for a long time and because of the religious sentiments parents prefer madrasa over school so they leave the school after a certain time. This migration was not as inevitable before but after stopping the school feeding program and digitalizing the stipend program the final nail in the coffin, stated another teacher Monira Begum. Additionally, I tried to find out if there were any other reasons like child marriage also causing the student drop, in answer I found that because the current UNO is female, she is very strict and sincere on matters like child marriage, teachers don't have to worry about child marriage in the village anymore and it is not an issue there.

In the second half of the FGD, I brought up the findings from the interview with the Ishwarganj union chairman and one of the parents from Joypur village about how the

chairman and the parent think the school teachers nowadays don't teach responsibly and madrasa teachers are more responsible that is why they prefer madrasa over school. All 4 teachers in the FGD without any hesitation accepted the opinions and shared their reasons behind it. Monira Begum stated, "My husband and I both are teachers in two schools in this union, But I also have to play the role of primary caregiver in the house. I need to cook food for my family in the morning and do the household work. Then I have to come to school and classes from 9 to 5 pm. My husband doesn't do all these things. But we both get paid the same." Besides that teachers also mentioned that they have to go through the menstrual cycle every month but they don't get minimum facilities for that, not even a proper washroom. Also, the government has some extra policies and programs for rural schools which urban school teachers don't have to do. One of them is the School Management Committee (SMC), where teachers have to go to the homes of villagers and talk to mothers regularly to create awareness of child education. The three roles that these women have to fulfil put pressure on them which hampers their primary job as a teacher to teach students with care and responsibility. Over and above that, the continuous change of NCTB books and curriculum became another pain in the neck as teachers don't get the necessary training and guidance on time. This year NCTB changed the curriculum of the books but teachers in Charshihari Govt. Primary School received the "Shikkha-Sohayika Pustak" (Teaching-assistant guidebook) in mid-July which is almost 6 and half months after the 2023 academic year started. That's another reason teachers are unable to teach effectively in classrooms. Last but not least, the teachers conclude with another issue that there is no government pre-primary school in the village, so it becomes tough for students who directly enrol in primary school. Grade 1 and 2 are not tough but when they get promoted to grade 3 they struggle a lot and some lose encouragement to study where it is easier for students who have the learning experience of 4 years including 2 years of pre-primary level education.

Fig 16: Charshihari Govt. Primary School of Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh

Discussion

In this part of the paper, keeping the theoretical framework in mind, I will analyse how the above case studies and the government's urban bias education policy are not efficiently working to reduce the student dropout rate in rural schools. Firstly, if we look at Case Study 03, the number of total students from 2022 to 2023 dropped by about 23% to 26%, one of the leading reasons behind it is stopping the school feeding program in July 2022. However, numbers could not be found among the dropouts how many boys and girls were there. According to the teachers' statements, the majority of them were boys. In 2023, out of the total students, 54.14% are boys and 45.86% are girls but we see the average attendance of boys in the classes is ¼ of the girls' attendance. Teachers of Charshihari Govt. Primary Schools suspect that the dropout rate of boys will increase at the end of this year. In answer to my question on why the number of dropout boys is increasing, the teachers said that they don't find anything to attract them to school or they find it useful enough to bring food at home, and many of them work in the agricultural fields or help

their fathers in shops. When they become teenagers, some of them leave the village to cities for work. These events lead us to what Lipton (1977) mentioned in his book in section 11 “The Rural Skill Drain”. The process of education in rural schools is a big strainer that creates a pipeline, through which abled youths from rural areas go to urban and semi-urban areas where they serve their labour for urban elites. Besides, the framework of schooling and the curriculum are incoherent to rural needs. Even if the youths from rural areas somehow manage to educate themselves in rural schools, the curriculum projects an urban-based job mentality in their mind. That leads to more rural skill drains and educated youths who could have worked in rural agriculture and other rural development sectors, end up serving their skills to urban development. Also to support my analysis, I want to bring to light an interview by The Business Standard (2022) with Rasheda K Chowdhury a noted educationist and executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), who states, “Many parents send their children to school for the meals. The kids too came to school for biscuits as many of them remained hungry. We think dropout and child labour will increase while enrollment will fall in the post-COVID era if the project ends permanently”.

Secondly, the digitalization of poor student stipend programs is another example of how urban policymakers don't take into consideration the digital literacy of people in rural areas. To increase student enrollment in schools and help poor students, the National Education Policy (2010) provisioned free lunches and stipends that will attract and retain poor children in schools, especially in rural areas. This stipend program showed its effectiveness by reducing the student dropout rates in school after it was launched. Previously the stipends were distributed by the school administrators in school to the students, but now the government directly distributes the stipends to parents’ accounts through the digital mobile banking platform “Nagad”. To use Nagad, 3 primary things are a) one must own a mobile phone, b) must have a Nagad account, and c) need to have minimum digital literacy to use it. In villages, most parents of the students do own a mobile, and school administrators help them to open a Nagad account but most of the parents in rural areas find it difficult and hazardous to use it. Many parents only use the account to receive the stipend money which is given twice a year. Because of that many parents forget the PIN to withdraw money from the account. Also, some get into the trap of hacking. With the inconvenient process of recovering the PIN and scams, only to get a small amount of TK 600 every 6 months, most parents in rural lost their interest in the stipends, leading to not sending their children to school instead they send their children to work and some migrate to madrasas as the parents find madrasas to be more useful.

Finally, in the National Education Policy (2010), the government provisioned to prioritise female teachers for primary schools in terms of recruitment. The core thought behind it is female teachers can teach students with care alike a mother. When analysing Case Studies 01 and 02, it is quite obvious that the provision of recruiting female teachers is

not working much, rather it is creating dissatisfaction among parents. Parents who can afford minimum tuition fees send their children to madrasas as they find madrasa Huzurs are more responsible in terms of teaching. Along with that, parents believe studying religious manuscripts and etiquette their children will gain respect in society as well as Jannat (heaven) in the afterlife. This explains how the idea of gaining something attracts parents and children toward any sort of education system that they are getting from Madrasas, and not from the school as the government stopped school feeding programs, complicated the stipend program by digitising it, and doubts on teachers' responsible teaching.

To understand why the female teacher recruitment provision is not working we can find answers in the second half of Case Study 03. In Bangladesh, when we study gender-based roles, females are the primary caregivers of their children and family even if they have professional careers, and provide financial support. Whereas males tend to provide financial support for their family by working outside. So, female teachers are not only working at school but also working in their houses. In addition to that for rural schools, the MoPME in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare has various social welfare programs to create awareness among parents about the necessity of education. One of them is the School Management Committee (SMC), under this program teachers in a rural school regularly visit the houses of children in the village, organise sessions with mothers to create awareness, and monitor students who are not attending the school regularly. The initiative is commendable but without proper infrastructure and adequate support, giving the responsibility to teachers who are already playing a double role in their house and school only creates another burden on teachers' shoulders.

Jansen (1986) in his book while explaining the political and economic integration of villages mentioned different kinds of biases like the urban bias, the bureaucratic bias, the capital bias, and the private bias. After the independence from 1973 to 1979, budget analysis shows how the allocation of capital favours the small number of urban dwellers and the development of urban infrastructure whereas the majority of the country lived in rural areas (Jansen, 1986). Similarly, Lipton (1977) used the example of East and West Pakistan budget allocation in the chapter on Alternative Bias Development. In 1961, only 5.2% of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was urban area and 22.5% of West Pakistan was urban, using this West Pakistani leaders made an urban-based budget that helped West Pakistan to keep a big portion of the budget (Lipton, 1977). In Case Study 03, female teachers in rural schools have to play a triple role but when it comes to their salary they get the same as teachers in urban schools. Further, SDG 6.2 emphasises paying special consideration to the requirements of women and girls on menstrual hygiene. In Charshihari Govt. Primary School proper sanitation was not available for female teachers. And for lunch, according to the teachers’ statement, they only get TK 200 per month which is not enough if we consider the rising prices of goods.

Conclusion

In September 2020, the MoPME proposed a TK 19,283 crore budget for a school feeding program to provide Khichuri and biscuits for 1.48 crore children in 509 upazilas. But later in June 2021, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) turned down the project because of concerns about its feasibility (TBS, 2023b). In my recommendation, I would like to bring the example of one of the most successful NGOs in India, the Akshaya Patra Foundation which provides free midday meals for 22 years to 1,800,907 primary and upper-primary school children with a minimum of 450 and 700 calories respectively on a daily basis across 15 States and 2 Union Territories in India, costing them per meal TK 23 (information from their official website). According to their financial report 2021-22 on their official website, they spent TK 863.6 crore whereas the government support was TK 271.14 crore, serving 11.6 crore mid-day meals. Following that, 86% of the budget was spent on program costs, 10% on program management costs, and 4% on fundraising costs. In a study of the free school mid-day meal program of the Akshaya Patra Foundation, the Government of Karnataka found that 99.6% of students said they could pay better attention in their studies, and 93.8% of teachers reported that the overall academic performance of students increased significantly (Upton et al., 2007). Moreover, another study by M.S. Ramaiah Medical College, conducted in one of the rural areas where the Akshaya Patra served free meals to schools, showed that the number of children below the recommended nutrition level went down from 60% to nearly 0%, Anaemia among the number of children went down from 40% to less than 5%, and skin infections declined from 80% to 0% (Upton et al., 2007). Akshaya Patra Foundation's success shows that with proper determination and research, free school feeding programs are not only feasible on a larger scale but also show how much impact they can have in rural development in terms of education and health. Hence, to reduce the school dropout rate school feeding programs need to be started more widely than ever as soon as possible. Furthermore, during making the policies and frameworks, the situation of rural areas needs to be kept in mind and the budget should be distributed on a rural-urban equity basis. For teachers in rural areas, additional financial and infrastructural support should be provided. Finally, the curriculum of education should be designed in a way that both urban and rural students find relevant to their context.

Chapter 11

Navigating Maternal and Child Healthcare in Rural Bangladesh

Ruhaima Ridita Ahmed

Introduction

In the context of Bangladesh, the arena of health has been subjected to social inquiry considering the economic, social, demographic and political conditions prevailing in the country. Although there has been significant capacity development and reorientation towards health education in urban areas, there are questions and concerns regarding access to quality healthcare in hospitals, clinics, health programs within the periphery of Bangladeshi village communities. This chapter specifically aims to illuminate the observations and current conditions of Rural Health in Ishwarganj and Gauripur Upazila of Mymensingh District while also delving into the improvements, shortcomings and inconsistencies in healthcare provision in the Upazila Health Complex. Essentially, it will cover the subset of women's health which involves their personal medical experiences as well as reproductive and maternal health in relation to childcare and child's health. Precisely, this chapter will serve as a lens to view the different facets of the rural health management system and how the recipients and providers of healthcare view these changes in the health sector.

Bangladesh has come a long way in social development. From being a "Bottomless Basket" it has emerged as an "Asian Tiger" in the economic arena. In this narrative, healthcare has evolved as a success story because Bangladesh has earned all the MDG goals ahead of time. Now, the road is being paved towards acquiring the SDG targets. Visibly, a 3 tier system of health care has been established in Bangladesh showcasing Primary, Secondary and Tertiary tiers. Correspondingly, the Upazila health complexes are the foothold of primary healthcare. So currently, the Health Bulletin (2020) data reveals that Bangladesh has 495 Upazilas and 424 Upazila health Complexes which serve people at the grassroots.

To explore the healthcare system, the proximal destinations of Ishwarganj and Gauripur Upazila located within the horizon of Mymensingh District were selected. Particularly in Ishwarganj Upazila, there is a Upazila Health Complex and numerous community clinics to facilitate healthcare services. To assess the quality of healthcare in these areas, it is pivotal to take into consideration the patient satisfaction, medical expenditure, awareness regarding health programs, qualifications of doctors, transparency of healthcare

providers, doctor-patient ratio, presence of proper medical equipment and access to medication, treatment, medical subsidies and allowances.

An interesting facet of exploration is finding whether the healthcare system has become navigable for women because a nation's healthcare system predominantly focuses on maternal or child health or as a whole reproductive healthcare. One of the ways to assess this stream of health is by comparing the narratives and personal stories of people with the official records of health data in the Upazila Health Complex. Overall, this paper will immerse into the role of the healthcare system in mitigating the health complications encountered by recipients of healthcare, specifically women. This will provide an opportunity to elucidate the setbacks, achievements, discrepancies and improvements in this field.

Fig 17: In front of Upazila Health Complex, Ishwarganj Upazila, Mymensingh

Reviewing Background and Literature

In the rural panorama, it is perceivable that various development intervention programs percolated into the village communities. This fostered the dynamic changes in education as well as healthcare services. As a matter of fact, MacMillan (2022) embellished that these changes were mainly anchored on the health projects launched by Sir Fazle Hasan Abed which included BRAC's oral rehydration solution making. From a developmental and analytical perspective, the surge of modernization was making these changes inexorable in various sectors of Bangladesh, essentially permeating across the economic,

agricultural, service and health sector too. Alternative development of the 1970s, in conjunction with the Human Development during 1980s encompassing literacy, health and education fostered the mission of BRAC. Through these programs encapsulating health and education, Sir Abed's vision was to amplify the efficiency of village community members during any health crisis. Also, Ahmed et al. (2023) shed light on the development of health infrastructure during that decade, mainly primary healthcare encompassing maternal and child healthcare.

During the 1980s, it became more apparent that a debilitating disease known as diarrhoea was diminishing the lives of children. MacMillan (2022) portrayed that Sir Abed's oral rehydration program was not only an epiphanic solution to a severely contaminating disease, but the training phase of the program involving mothers was an active step towards equipping mothers as healthcare providers. Even in the absence of literacy, the one to one exposure based training of the mothers and crash courses on oral rehydration done at ICDDR,B by female Oral Replacement Workers (ORWs) helped the mothers to prepare the solution. This was also a step to combat the high mortality rate of children and also to manage the exponential growth in population which seemed to plunge Bangladesh in the vicious circle of poverty.

Zooming out from the scenario of Bangladesh, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2011), provided a global perspective of the healthcare system in the past, mainly indicating the systems of health management in India. They highlight that there was a tendency of people to refrain from seeking help from the public health system because it was inefficient and as a result there was a low rate of expectant mothers seeking antenatal health checkups. This scenario has changed nationally, regionally as well as globally with the introduction of various health programs and policies to ensure proper regulation of health, which is a fundamental right of every citizen of the country.

The Healthcare Scenario in Mymensingh District of Bangladesh

(A) Joypur Village, Ishwarganj Upazila:

In Joypur village of Ishwarganj Upazila, the Digital Center and office of the Union Parishad's Chairman is located in the same premises. Upon entering the Digital Center, Bilkis Akhter, the person responsible for compartmentalising, registering, digitising all documents, revealed that all essential documents such as birth certificates, NID and chairman attested certificates are required during the application process in schools as well as allowance distribution schemes. As a result of the digitization process starting in 2013, all data is recorded virtually. Specifically, she mentioned that an allowance distribution process is available for pregnant mothers and infants through this system. To

expedite the process of registration for infants, stipends are given to parents who complete the registration process within 45 days. Police intervention is also visible in this case as the village police keep track of the babies who are going to be born. Later, when Superintendent Faruk of Police was interviewed, he claimed that police intervene mainly when there is violation of government resources in health complex such as stealing of medical equipment and abolishment of data-entry computers.

Additionally, pregnancy allowances are also given which ensures postnatal care and nutritional supplements given to malnourished infants. However, there has been a postponement in this digitization process because of the server being dysfunctional for a considerable period of time. The evidence of this server issue became apparent when a 4 month old pregnant woman entered the office to issue a new pregnancy card during the interview of Bilkis Akhter. The pregnant woman was asked to collect an ANC (Antenatal Care) card from the hospital. Afterwards, she was requested to fill out the necessary forms as the digital centre worker told the woman that the allowance will be distributed after the government gives them approval. This procedure has now been subjected to intermittent intervals and postponements due to the disruption in the server. According to the Health Bulletin (2020), pregnant mothers are supposed to receive maternal health vouchers which first came to the limelight through the Maternal Health Voucher Scheme of 2007. So if a pregnant mother is a voucher-holder, the delay in the server potentially means that she is being deprived of this service.

During the course of the fieldwork, a resident of Joypur village named Abdul Mannan was also interviewed. Through the interaction between the fellow researcher Atiqur Rahman Priom and Mr. Mannan, it was found that the health situation is quite progressive in this area. According to Mr. Mannan, people had to visit the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital or even Dhaka to avail healthcare approximately 5 to 7 years ago. The custom of *Kabiraji* (spiritual and ayurvedic healthcare) has become obsolete in his opinion because people can go to doctors to receive the treatment and also the behaviour of the doctors are deemed as cordial. The most striking feature in this conversation was when he disclosed that there is a shortage of female doctors in this area. So, women have to go to Ishwarganj Upazila Bazar which is the government health complex when they face any ailments. Conversely, pregnant women seek help from private clinics during childbirth unless the condition is severe. In severe cases, they are referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

(B) Visiting The Upazila Health Complex of Ishwarganj

The exploration of the Upazila Health Complex gave a plethora of opportunities and avenues to view the advancements, transparency issues and discrepancies in this health facility. Structurally, the health complex was a two-storey building, resembling the architectural outlook of schools in the area. A captivating element inside the Upazila

Health Complex was a sign board which indicated not only a location guide to find the specialist in this complex but also a separate notice in the board showing the health services provided to pregnant mothers. The consultation hours designated here were from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm and another segment showed that emergency and childbirth units were always open.

Fig 18: Patients waiting inside the health complex

Generally, when a mother is pregnant she needs proper antenatal care. According to the data reported by Ahmed et al. (2023), this is ensured through 4 visits which includes the FWV (Family Welfare Visitor) having an account of all the newly married and pregnant women. So, they cross-check whether the pregnant mother came for their regular checkup. Additionally, there are Maternal and Child Welfare Centers (MCWCs) and FWCs at village level. They cater to normal deliveries and they conduct caesarian sections if the gynaecologist and anaesthetist pair is there. However, manpower and staffing shortages are the main epicentre of concern for the proper regulation of maternal health which obscures the opportunities for ensuring the reproductive health of women often resulting in postnatal complications and risks to the health of the newborn.

From what we have noticed, the Upazila Health Complex is quite advanced when it comes to resolving health complications related to Non-Communicable Diseases such as diabetes because the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer (UHFPO), Dr. Lopa Chowdhury mentioned that an app is used for tracking the patients with severe NCDs and

medicines are provided to the patients. For instance, for a level 4 diabetes patient who is unable to control his or her diabetes, insulin is given to them for a month and notifications are sent to them after that month to come for a check-up. If they fail to show up on the designated day, the patients are called directly and asked why they did not comply with the checkup routines. So, the Health Bulletin (2020) suggests that through this telemedicine scheme, the Upazila Health Complex is adhering to the National Health Policy of 2011 which claims that health complexes in the upazilas should be accommodating towards patients when it comes to providing basic health utilities. A notable observation here is that there is an escalating number of patients with NCDs because of a change in food habits and lifestyle due to development and rural transformation. People's lives are shifting from strenuous activities to sedentary lifestyles as they choose to do non-farm activities apart from agriculture. As a result, this scheme proves that active steps are taken for people to be more aware of their health conditions and specially provides a medium for senior citizens to not become a health burden on their families, as mentioned by Dr. Lopa.

However, even if they were adept at addressing NCDs, the reverse was observed regarding obstetric care. During the course of three interviews taken in this complex, several issues became discernible related to women's health, specifically the ways in which the deliveries are conducted in this complex. To address our doubts, we interviewed Dr. Lopa because a common problem which appeared during the fieldwork was shortage of female doctors. During the gestation period, if the patient wants a female gynaecologist then they don't usually find one in the government or public hospitals in this area. In response to these queries, Dr. Lopa denied these claims and reinforced the fact that female doctors are available in hospitals and midwives are there in all government facilitated hospitals and health complexes. A further discussion proceeded regarding the qualifications of midwives to which she said that midwives are nurses who are specialised in child delivery. Adding to their qualification repertoire, UHFPO reiterated that midwives acquire a 3-year diploma course from government nursing institutes. Instead of midwives being hired by the health complex, they are assigned here by the government according to the capacity of the health complex. In this health complex, a total of 6 midwives are present. During this interview, a midwife named Nazia was present in the room and to our surprise, Dr. Lopa and Midwife Nazia both eagerly said how 12 deliveries were completed successfully the night before we came here. So, Dr. Lopa told us to imagine how many deliveries would be conducted in a month, claiming that midwives are more expert than doctors!

The next phase of the Health Complex exploration was done through the interviews of Resident Medical Officer and General Practitioner Dr. Jahidul Haque and Medical Officer ICT Dr. Sharmin Islam. The RMO specifically mentioned that our country has won many

awards in the health sector when it came to reducing maternal and child mortality. Interestingly, he considered the health complex as a “mini medical hospital” due to its wide range of services and consultants. Unlike previous years when only medications such as iron, paracetamols and B-Complex were served, there is a wide variety of medications available to reduce symptoms of specific conditions or diseases now. When he was asked about the connection between allowance distribution and the role of the health complex, he indicated that the health complex is associated with the Social Welfare Directorate so in case of patients who are poor, the health complex gives a recommendation to the directorate to subsidise their medical fees. Currently, there is no specific room for providing this allowance so patients have to contact the directorate through visitation. Not only that, pregnant mothers also receive these allowances when the health complex sends a recommendation to the union. There are also awareness campaigns through the health week promotion when pregnant mothers, lactating mothers and the elderly are called upon.

On the other hand, when he began to disclose information about the staffing requirements, discrepancies in the data began to appear. When conversing about the vacancy of posts, it was discovered that the post of gynaecologist was claimed to be temporarily empty after the designated gynaecologist of this health complex got transferred. Along with that, the posts of Emergency Medical Technician and two other posts of Medical Officer were found vacant. Apart from this issue, he highlighted that the incoming patients often exceed the capacity of the health complex. This is mainly due to patients being unaware of the fact that they should go to community clinics in case of minor health problems or when they are afflicted with contagious and infectious diseases. As a result, insufficient manpower exists as there is only one technologist in the health complex. Even after comprehending the gravity of this issue, the RMO still believed that the staffing issue is not a matter of concern because there are doctors, SSMs, civil staff nurses, medical assistants, staff for pathology, and staff for handling medical equipment. A question which hovers in our minds: if the post of gynaecologist is currently vacant, how are caesarean sections conducted in the health complex?

Delving deeper into this matter, the enriched quantitative data received from MOICT Dr. Sharmin Islam, proved to be the marker of inconsistencies that was found after the statements of the three health staff were compared. The data of June 2023 revealed that there were 6100 outdoor patients, 4000 emergency patients, 800 admitted patients and 1500 children receiving service. When it came to the data of total deliveries conducted in a month, the data of June 2023 revealed that only 85 deliveries were done in a month with the data of C-sections being unknown or inconclusive. This is where the incompatibility of results started to emerge because Dr. Lopa Chowdhury did mention that 12 deliveries were done in a day. So, this data would not equate to the subtotal if the average delivery remains high. Dr. Sharmin continued to mention that in normal delivery

rooms, midwives play the primary role. Whereas, C-sections which inevitably require assistance of the gynaecologist, are more time consuming.

Challenges and Issues Found in the Research of the Upazila Health Complex

Since RMO Dr. Haque advised us to visit the official facebook page of the Upazila Health Complex, we also investigated the social media page. Evidently, one of the posts showed an awareness poster for the 4 visits that should be done during pregnancy, stating the exact monthly/ weekly schedule of the checkups that should be conducted during the gestation period. Conversely, a glaring fact became visible which is the farewell of the gynaecologist who was here previously. From the post, Dr. Sharmin Akhter, gynaecology and obstetrics specialist received her farewell on 21st March, 2023. This alludes to the fact that the post of gynaecologist has been vacant for a considerable period of time. When it comes to analysing this situation, it is comprehensible that there are considerable inconsistencies in the transfer process of female doctors reflecting mismanagement in the rural health system.

Apart from that, the contradictions between statements of the health staff and registered data is an example of transparency issues. This illustrates that the communication channel is not clear amongst the health staff regarding the inadequacy of staffing. Absence of the gynaecologist also means that the obstetric care unit including the midwives, anaesthetist and gynaecologist is not ensured properly in this health complex. There are no substitutes readily available to fill the vacancy so obscurities regarding the caesarean section remain as a topic beyond acknowledgement. From a broader perspective, this situation captures the insufficiency of manpower when it comes to responding to medical emergencies during childbirth, exposing the mother and child to health risks during antenatal and postnatal period. Therefore, this situation also refers to institutional problems associated with capacity development because the doctor-patient ratio is not maintained in this case. Similarly, this situation was also extrapolated in a study conducted by Ahmed et. al (2022), where it was described how the capacity limitation and specialist shortage at the primary healthcare level of upazila health centres discouraged people to seek medical help there. This resonates with what Mr. Mannan mentioned the inclination of people towards private clinic practitioners rather than the public hospitals.

Some information regarding the health situation in rural areas was also gathered from the Secretary of Union Parishad who decided to keep his identity anonymous to maintain privacy. Not only did he impart his knowledge regarding the structure of Union Parishad (Council), but also shared his opinions related to the requirements that should be fulfilled by the health sector in the rural areas. He addressed the fact that people of remote areas

of the rural periphery are deprived of essential health services. Also, he believed that doctors with higher qualifications do not want to reside in rural areas, which is why adequate health service is not provided in Upazila Health Complexes. Even though the community clinics provide more personalised care than the health complexes, there is still a lack of manpower witnessed here. These clinics are directed by the Community Health Care Provider where some health staff work under his or her supervision. So, the concerns regarding these agencies are associated with the performance of Upazila Health Complex and the community clinics located there.

(C) Case study of a woman having a child with disability in Churali Village, Gauripur Upazila:

Mrs. Kolpona, whose age is around 30 years, started living in Churali village after she got married. As a mother of two children, Nadia aged 16 years and Lamia almost 3 years, she has encountered many obstacles in the arduous journey of motherhood. In a quivering voice, she explained that her younger daughter Lamia has been suffering from an undiagnosed disability. When Lamia was 6 months old, her parents noticed that she was non-verbal, could not sit upright and was unable to move her neck because of problems in her spinal column.

To her dismay, even after multiple visitations to the Health Complex and Social Welfare authorities, she could not get a definite diagnosis. In a dismal tone, she went on to explain how her daughter did not receive any allowance even if she is entitled to it as a person with disabilities. Instead, the authorities reinforced that her daughter will not be eligible to receive an allowance card before the age of 7. Contacting the Disability Survey, health programs and even public hospitals remained futile in her case. As her child needs frequent medical assistance, she mentioned that they visit the Charpara Child Ward in Mymensingh.

Since she could not see any improvement in her child's condition, she poured all her hopes in homoeopathic medications, believing that would alleviate the pain her daughter is suffering from. When she could not receive any proper help from the government hospitals and primary health care centres, this faith based approach became her only source of reassurance. For 16 to 17 months, Lamia took all the homoeopathic medications that were prescribed to her but all these pills proved to be ineffective. Mrs. Kolpona explained that a significant portion of their family income has been spent on Lamia already and this is plunging the family's condition into a dire state. This goes on to prove that without any assistance from the hospitals, health complexes and allowance distribution schemes, families become entangled in the health poverty trap.

Like other respondents in Churali village, she also confirmed that she gets to hear about government resources being available in the area but due to corruption prevalent in the

UP chairman's office, the resource distribution gets distorted and ultimately gets redirected towards people who do not need it. To her disappointment, there is also a delay in receiving healthcare because of the distance they have to travel to go to the nearest health complex. She said "If there is a pregnant woman needing immediate medical care or someone with severe health issues, they have to travel one hour to go to the nearest hospital. There is high risk involved. People even die before receiving help." Clearly, this alludes to the fact that 3 obstetric care delays such as delay in seeking service, delay in transportation and delay in getting the service are all observable in the context of this village. Our concerns sprout here because the lack of obstetric and postnatal care might have aggravated little Lamia's condition, putting her family into a spiral of difficulties.

Conclusion: Some Insights into Rural Health Management System

During the course of this research, many issues were expounded to provide a comprehensive picture of the Upazila Health Complex and the role it plays to ensure maternal and child healthcare. A noteworthy element here is the presence of a health complex in Ishwarganj out of the 424 Upazila Health Complexes that exist in Bangladesh. To excavate the depths of these healthcare mechanisms, numerous perspectives of healthcare providers, patients and recipients of healthcare were funnelled down in this discussion.

If the analysis is dissected into a few segments, we find that there are unresolved problems and areas of concerns found mainly in the Upazila Health Complex alongside digitization centres, community clinics and allowance distribution schemes. To ensure that mothers receive antenatal cards and maternal health vouchers without delay, the server in the digitization centres should be updated monthly and upgraded yearly to reduce the frequency of data congestion. Proceeding to the issues observed in Upazila Health Complex, it was evident how insufficient manpower in obstetric care and transparency issues are eclipsing the quality of healthcare given to mothers and children. First and foremost, there should be a proper communication channel existing amongst the healthcare providers and officials. They should be equally aware of the inconsistencies in the healthcare system to expedite the process of resolving staffing problems, specialist vacancies and capacity issues. It is vital to reduce dependency on a specific healthcare professional inside the delivery rooms. For instance, during deliveries, the obstetric care unit consisting of midwives, anesthesiologist and gynaecologist should be present instead of midwives being present only in normal deliveries and gynaecologists being assigned only during caesarean sections because complications can arise in both types of deliveries.

In order to reduce the extended period of vacant posts, the transfer process of doctors should be made easier so that whenever there is a vacancy, specialised doctors can fill in those posts. Fringe benefits such as free accommodation, meals, transport subsidy should be provided to doctors who work in these local health complexes to incentivize the process of working in Upazila Health Complexes. Prior to the transfer of the specialist, a substitute specialist should be designated to the post to eliminate the possibility of pregnant mothers as well as mothers seeking postnatal care being deprived of health service. This will help to minimise the gap between doctor-patient ratio and eventually foster capacity development.

It is also important to look into the health behaviour of people who have a tendency to either consult unauthorised private clinics or in extreme cases visit homoeopathic doctors to take medications when there is a lack of assistance received from public hospitals as we saw in Lamia's case. To bring a positive change and reduce inclination towards faith-based healthcare options, it is essential for qualified doctors to work beyond the domain of Upazila Health Complex. These doctors should visit the community clinics weekly to investigate the cases of pregnant mothers and mothers seeking antenatal and postnatal care. Through this chain of communication, reciprocal relations can be established between the doctor and patients as doctors will be able to provide insights to the mothers from a professional ground and the mothers seeking care will be able to acquire knowledge regarding their conditions and find ways to prevent any complications. Moreover, the estimated delivery dates of the patients should be listed so that ambulance services are available during that time. The Upazila Health Complex and community clinics can also establish cooperative relations with the digitization centre and allowance providers so that people can seek help within this healthcare loop and not get diverted when asking for help and assistance.

Thus it is possible to instil dynamic changes in the canvas of rural healthcare and give impetus to the efficient regulation of the rural health management system. As we have seen earlier, Bangladesh has overcome diverse obstacles to reach this destination in the health sector. With this research, we hope to accomplish the health security of mothers and their children as well as provide a space for people to be vocal about their health concerns so that the changes can be accommodated into this narrative of health improvement. Strength of mothers like Kolpona and the glinting eyes of Lamia, serve as a testament of the spoken and unspoken experiences, viewed through the lens of rural health.

Part VII: Globalisation in Rural Bangladesh

In a departure from the remainder of the report, this section reports on one researcher's experience interviewing residents of villages in Comilla in order to understand how globalisation has influenced the economies and cultures of rural Bangladeshi communities. The researcher has used the same framework and methodology as their cohort for this project, though additional context has been provided for their particular research site of Comilla.

Chapter 12

Drugs in Rural Communities: A Deep Concern for Migrant Fathers

Masuma Warda Khan

Introduction

From the 1980s to 1990s, economic globalisation played a major role in expanding economic activity across borders as the demand for semiskilled and unskilled labour increased, motivating the locals in Bangladesh to build their own capacity by going abroad (Barai, 2012). This step allowed the country to grow massive rates of GDP over the years and continues to be a desirable sector for those living in the rural-urban spheres. According to the World Bank 2022 report, Bangladesh is currently known as the world's 8th highest recipient of remittances. It is important to note that most migrant workers (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) are often taken from villages across the country to provide a large labour force for the more developed countries in regions such as the Middle East and, quite recently, Europe (Barai, 2012). To ensure that these labourers are not struggling in a new environment, Bangladesh offers various training programs such as the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) in the Technical Training Centre located in Nondonpur, Comilla. This program allows interested labourers to receive vocational training before applying for a work visa in another country. Although most migrants claim that these facilities allow them to have continuous employment abroad, they also believe that their absence has had a major impact on the youth over the past few years. This paper intends to study the impacts of flowing remittances on the rural youth population from the perspective of current migrant workers, the persistent forces behind these impacts, and whether this matter can be resolved in a feasible manner that can be sustained for generations ahead.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research approach, there was a total number of eight participants interviewed. This chapter centres on the feedback of local residents in the villages of the Comilla District in Bangladesh as follows: Nondonpur, Sridhorpur and Dhonyakola. The participants ranged from current migrant workers in the Middle East, to local residents in the target villages and professionals affiliated with institutions that support migration for remittance-earning labourers. Some of these professionals were migrant workers themselves and have shared their experiences regarding the influence on the rural youth

due to their former occupations. To accompany the study with a theoretical framework, I will be referring to Munim Barai's article, “Development Dynamics of Remittances in Bangladesh'' for a brief genealogy of migration in Bangladesh, followed by Eirik Jansen, “Competition for Scarce Resources,” and Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach theories to build a discourse on the behaviour patterns for those in the rural sphere, relying on the bare minimum they can afford. Lastly, I will be touching on the main subject of this paper with S.A. Fattah’s editorial, “Yaba Addiction-A Rising Concern in Bangladesh,” Abdul Mohiuddin’s journal, “Drug Addiction in Bangladesh: A Consequence of Social Demoralization Rather Than Individual Flaws'' accompanied by iJRASET’s journal publication, “Teenagers Indulgence in Drug: A Study on Different Socio-Economic Groups in Urban and Rural Bangladesh” written by Moiuddin Ahmed.

Yaba: The Influx of “The Crazy Medicine” in the Bangladeshi Rural Youth

An addictive mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine, also known as “Yaba,” was first introduced in Bangladesh back in 1999 when it spread from Myanmar (Fattah, 2012). However, it started to grow more prevalent with the passing years as it made a considerable impact on the lives of the youth population. Millions of local Bangladeshis are not only exposed to the cheap drug but consume it on a regular basis as the local drug dealers contemplate where else to invest their growing income. Although the urban youth of the country consume variants of international drugs, they are still functioning in the urban sphere as students or the young working class by generating monthly income. Unfortunately, the main problem arises with the rural youth in the picture. Comilla, a district located in the Meghna River belt, is known for its massive supply of overseas migrants. Most of these migrants are male and they are often fathers who leave the household to economically contribute to their poor households. Yet, despite their uplifting performance that increases the standard of living for their family, it seems that they are faced with the harsh reality of accepting the impact of their absence as a strict figure of surveillance. One may argue that a mother is as equally capable of ensuring discipline amongst their children as their father may be. However, it must not be forgotten that, traditionally, fathers have always held the power of decision-making in rural Bangladesh and proceed to do so even today. Therefore, the absence of a father proves to drastically impact the child’s future when surrounded by various influences. More specifically to Comilla, the youth population is either expected to attend school and graduate with the ambition of securing a stable job or they are met with unfortunate circumstances (such as poor flow of remittance) that compel their parents to stop sending them to school. In other cases, children of wealthy migrant workers are attracted to local drug dealers, who require large investments of money to purchase expensive international drugs. It is due to this easy access to illegal substances that the youth of the rural population in Bangladesh

are starting to focus less on their schooling and more on the consumption of addictive drugs that send them into a state of deluded euphoria.

Most research indicates one of the driving forces that push the youth into consuming drugs has to do with familial distress (Fattah, 2012, Mohiuddin, 2019, Ahmed, 2023). Such distress may be generated from the lack of remittance supply to the child's needs and care or "not enough" remittances for the child to use. Thus, the solution to this problematic scenario is to fully immerse oneself in a temporary happy feeling instead of existing in the harsh, lived reality. In other words, rather than capacity building for self-sustenance through personal income, the youth only proceed to become demotivated and lack the incentive to generate their daily bread for themselves. People in rural Bangladesh continue to compete for scarce resources with growing economic expectations. It is those who are victorious from these battles who improve their standard of living while the losers are reminded of their persistent state of impoverishment (Jansen, 1986). Although most locals in Bangladesh assume that there is a sense of unity in the village community, there has been a break over the past few years as people have expanded their opportunities in the job market. Some might agree that a cause of this could be a break in the samaj/village council or the transition from extended, joint families to more singular, nuclear families due to urbanisation at the time of industrialization. According to current migrants from Saudi Arabia, "If our youth are destroyed, there is no point in thinking about our samaj" (Fieldwork, 2023). Simply put, if the youth proceed to break down due to socioeconomic circumstances at home, there will be only losses for the overall rural community.

Now, it is important to note that the rural-urban spheres must not be separated because if there are no longer any labourers available at the grassroots, the urban population will have to reshape their system to accommodate for the imbalance in equilibrium. After all, our farmers, craftsmen, drivers, plumbers, miners and more, all belong to the rural society. Those born into the urban lifestyle may refuse to adapt to performing the tasks already designated to a specific class of people. Thus, the potential for a rural-urban clash will only proceed to harm Bangladesh's future as well as its global contributor image. The interviewed migrant fathers claimed that the rising demotivated youth emerged from the lack of financial resources their parents have and from being “lazy” due to lacking the hardworking nature the past generations would have towards stabilising their economic well-being when met with calamities (Fieldwork, 2023). Their target solution to resolve the issue was to ensure schools as a motivational space for fitness and economic well-being. They believe that teachers must motivate their students with the future of obtaining an economically stable job if they study well to increase their value in the job market. However, to ensure that schools can perform this task successfully, the migrants also believe that the local government must provide strict regulation by policing the

drug-dealing criminals who pull the rural youth away from the right path (Fieldwork, 2023).

Changing the Existing System: A Fresh Start

Granted that these migrants are active in fields of technical services abroad, most of their responses came from an emotional standpoint as fathers with young children in the village. Therefore, any offered solution that can be feasible for the Bangladeshi community while being sustainable for generations to come requires the input of an interdisciplinary approach. One cannot expect the local government to continuously take policing initiatives; however, the state must realise the need for widespread awareness at a communal level before proceeding with a holistic solution. The intervention of a project by a non-governmental body or international body may only be possible if the state allows for the project to proceed without fearing any threat to their political position, and is willing to cooperate alongside the suggested policy only they can establish as the governing body. Although most individuals may assume that the medical input will be sufficient to deal with this drug addiction crisis, which is certainly not the case. This is because the field of medicine may either provide curative or preventive care to deal with bodily matters. However, medicine alone cannot police or provide awareness at a theoretical level. Therefore, there must be an initiative that covers all three aspects: medical, legal and educational to have a holistic impact on the matter.

(A) Medical Support To Spread Awareness & Provide Healthcare

To begin, it is important to categorise individuals involved with drug use through an evaluation test which not only covers their physical conditions at the time of the test but also their history with drug consumption/influences. Through this system, the early-staged youth may be saved with immediate healthcare and rehabilitation services. However, if there are any extreme cases of addiction identified, such addicts must be criminalised into surveillance centres in which they will be provided with counselling services and necessary treatments under strict monitoring bodies to ensure that they do not continue to spread the malicious effect of illegal drug consumption. Amongst these institutional efforts, there must be widespread awareness programs across the country for both parents and their offspring. These programs should do the task of informing, educating and alerting the target population with detailed information on how the drugs look, with their composition, videos that disclose the physical impacts on the body as well as the immediate strategies to follow and actions to take in case one is exposed first-hand to the drug. Of course, the education must not only be centred around the Yaba drug but also various other types of drugs that will be easy for villagers to learn about through visual displays (such as diagrams, pictures, videos and more).

(B) Legally Approved Strategies for Punishment

Although the Department of Narcotics Control in Bangladesh was founded in 1990 and has been playing a critical role in ensuring the statistical input of drug addiction within the country ever since; they are still limited to the total control they have over managing such affairs. However, if one were to establish an authoritative institution on the basis of the theoretical framework for punishment through the 4 Punishment Theories of Jurisprudence, there might be a scope in controlling this issue within Bangladesh holistically. First, as per the Deterrent Theory, fear must be inflicted on reformed criminals and general citizens as a means to avoid future crimes. It will only be a successful mechanism if the punishment for such criminals is harsh enough that a second round would induce a sense of trauma that will restrict the individual from performing the crime again- be it in secret or in the public eye. Second, the Retributive Theory suggests that punishment is designed for those who are worthy of arrest for their wrongdoings. Thus, anyone who falls under the criminal category for being a drug dealer, allowing for easier access to drugs for the youth population or even being affiliated to the party who can make it through the Bangladeshi borders with large amounts of invested drugs, will face arrest immediately when proven guilty. Third, it is important to isolate and defend society from insensitive criminals; therefore, one must be exiled, imprisoned or sentenced to death upon performing criminal activity. By following the theory of Prevention, the state will be able to enforce restrictions that will bind criminals from their mobility within the country. Lastly, the fourth theory concludes with the most well-known measure, also known as the Reformative Theory. Here, criminals or substance use offenders will be given the opportunity to receive immediate healthcare and rehabilitation services to return back into society once more.

(C) Changes in Education Type for Low-Income Families

It is imperative that Bangladesh reshapes its legal systems to be stricter with policing and proceed with providing necessary medical care when it is required. However, one of the reasons (noted in the villages in Comilla) students in rural Bangladesh step away from formal schooling is because of the lack of financial resources their parents have. Thus, instead of burdening the poor with making their children capable of sustaining themselves economically while also receiving necessary formal education, there must be free facilities available to provide practical training for the youth. Those who cannot afford to study theory may learn how to build on their skills through practical lessons instead. The level of difficulty per class will vary depending on the age of the students and their skills. By doing so, children will be able to contribute to their families by doing lightweight tasks in neighbouring households to heavyweight work as adults that generate income.

One must bear in mind that the traditional culture of having minors perform lightweight work has been prevalent even to this day because these children (ages 5 and up) often

belong to ultra-poor, vulnerable families who have no choice but to individually contribute to the household bread so that they can sleep well that night. Thus, if the children can distract themselves during the daytime with training and focus on having warm meals along with ideal hours of sleep at night, they will not be too free to be targeted by bad influences- especially if the authoritative institutions emerge with strict policing regimes. These free institutions may also have a give-and-take relationship with their students so that once they are employed in different fields of work as adults; they can provide a certain portion of their income to run the schools for future batches. In other words, if a student had been in the school for 10 to 13 years, and accumulated a total amount of BDT 5,000.00 in overall expenses, they will have to return this amount in monthly instalments so that the school can make up the money they had invested in their graduates. However, this will only be applicable after the graduate is equipped with a job as a source of income.

Conclusion: The Potential for Something New

Bangladesh has had significant structural development over the past few years and can be regarded as more financially stable than some third-world countries today. However, it is crucial for the local government to ensure that progress continues to flow in a cyclic manner for future generations to carry it forward. One of the recent troubles the country is encountering will have to do with the overconsumption of illegal drugs by the rural youth populations across the nation. Although it may seem unimportant for some, however, this trend stands as a threat to the future of the urban sphere. After all, it is the rural class that performs all the necessary groundwork for the bigger institutions to develop. For instance, to establish a garment factory on a selected plot of land, the owner will require a large labour force to prepare the foundations for the building construction. The urban sphere does not have that many individuals who would be willing to perform red-collar and blue-collar jobs. Hence, rural-urban migration is highly desirable as the migrant labourers would work for much cheaper costs. Yet, this cheap labour is facing a crisis in which the future of such manpower remains uncertain as the rural children proceed to indulge in the drug market due to unforeseen circumstances or the absence of the household head. If the rural youth is lost to drug dealers, then the rural labour force will grow scarce and possibly more expensive.

As studied from field research conducted in the Comilla District, most of these influenced youth belong to migrant households where the male guardians are abroad as remittance earners. If the state requires high rates of remittances while also maintaining its labour force for infrastructural development, it must be willing to tackle the root problem at hand and trace out the criminals standing in the way of structural prosperity with the three initiatives suggested in this paper. The state must also be a figure of protection to the

migrant class families as multiple fathers risk the fate of their children at the hands of their village community. The end goal is to provide a safe environment with strict enforcement of laws and regulations for our youth population to prosper even if they are deprived of their parent's complete intervention. Youth in rural Bangladesh should continue to be motivated with the intention to expand their capabilities with their existing resources (Sen, 2008) as they strive to obtain more self-sustenance.

Recommendations

Having seen the state of rural Bangladesh and spoken to those living there, the authors were able to identify a number of concerns. This section outlines recommendations based on these observations and conversations. These were mentioned in specific articles but for the convenience of the reader, they are organised by part of the report:

1. Rural Social Structure

Our study suggests that Bangladesh's rural culture is indeed transforming from a purely agricultural mode of production– and the rural middle class is changing with the times. We suggest, with the need to diversify in a changing economy, more and more households move into a 'mixed' status; where some of the members of the household are employed in the agricultural sector and some in the non-agricultural sector. Besides this, in order to encourage women's education and deter instances of giving and taking dowry as well as child marriage, more faith leaders should be involved in spreading awareness of these issues. Our research also suggests that women of rural upper class families are not given enough decision-making power by the patriarchs of the family, which will require deliberate social intervention through education and socialisation programs to not only trust but also mobilise women in decision making positions.

2. Rural Social Structure Contemporary Rural Economies

We push the need for a more comprehensive economic development strategy, that involves government measures, grassroots activities, and continual research; and, we know this to be a potential effective solution since our discussion has shown that Government initiatives towards improving road and telecommunication infrastructure have had immense effects on the rural market in Mymensingh. There seems to be a great disconnect between the effects of globalisation and modernisation, therefore, we recommend the introduction of methods to increase digital literacy in the rural markets which includes digital literacy workshops in the villages, targeting shop owners and possibly training them in how to best use social media to be a useful tool in business, rather than a detriment to it. All of this needs to be a community and government team effort, where the community is allowed to voice their direct concerns and the government applies and maintains fair policies.

3. Rural Land Management

Through our study, we have noticed that sufficient knowledge about one's rights and inheritance is still unclear; many are not conscious about it and lay significant trust on their relatives for such matters, especially female members. People are also not aware of the other kinds of assets available, such as shops, vehicles etc. By creating more pathways of basic legal literacy and addressing these gaps, only then can we effectively

take policy measures to eradicate the key issue that is land dispute. Additionally, while this has reduced in the recent years, the lack of documentation and its maintenance is still an issue that needs to be mitigated in rural society, because this lack of documentation is often used to scam the land owners. A solution may include a team of government workers made responsible for keeping track of a ward or union's collective documentation, and its fair use in times of need. Government intervention is necessary for both the maintenance of documentation and its fair use.

4. Rural Politics

The emergence of capitalist aspects in agriculture is a fundamental driver of change, particularly through the emergence of globalisation; we see the manifestations of this through the use of technology and the saturation of NGO work in rural areas. This, however, needs moderation and this is where (fair) governmental intervention is necessary. Policies to make sure that the contemporary rise of capitalist change-making agents are important, since they dictate fair use and prevention of exploitation of the rural labour. In the light of this, we recommend market structural changes, the adoption of industrialised agriculture methods, and the creation of new economic activities such as fish farming and shrimp farming are changing traditional rural economies. Fair use, followed by economic hikes and lows, should gear forward the market supply from the rural areas, make way for more efficient use of land, and make place for new leaders of the new time to have concrete decision-making.

5. Rural Governance and Law

For actual effective change, we must start by creating a governing body that is much more accountable and transparent. This includes a body trained to see the changes of culture, resources and needs to not only create or adapt politics, but effectively enforce them as well. This needs to be goal-based, meaning the policies must aim for rural transformation and decentralisation from cities, making rural culture, economy and laws as favourable as that of urban areas. A direct manifestation of this may include decentralising the court system and making a "travelling court" system to allow rural people to pursue justice without the social stigma of going to a courthouse. We also believe that the development of rural governance and law goes both ways; in order to make sure that the governing body can be held accountable when needed and shalish can bring about fair resolutions, legal workshops (conducted by NGOs or governmental agencies) can be provided and used to train rural citizens regarding their legal rights. Furthermore, in order to make the endeavour effective, these workshops need to be incentivised for the citizens. These incentives may include direct help regarding their legal documents and/or monetary incentives.

6. Rural Infrastructure

For a direct resolution on both educational and healthcare institutions, digital capacity building workshops should be incredibly valuable for both school teachers and medical practitioners. For making education more rapidly pursued, it is helpful to bring in the example of Akshay Partha Foundation. As previously discussed in this paper, providing incentives such as mid-day meals led to the children being able to pay better attention and having a significant improvement in their academic performance. This can be used to not only create economic incentives to create jobs, but also making sure that the future labour force has appropriate levels of education. While the curriculum update requires input from both the community and policymakers, the healthcare institution requires proper transparency and communication channels existing amongst the healthcare providers and officials. Services such as antenatal cards and maternal health vouchers, easier transfer processes of doctors and other staffers, and better logistical support (to avoid backlog) are important in the healthcare institutions.

7. Impacts of Globalisation on Rural Bangladesh

Our study into the impacts of globalisation involves a lot of awareness for fields such as narcotics use, changes in education and access to healthcare. To begin, it is important to categorise individuals involved with drug use through an evaluation test which not only covers their physical conditions at the time of the test but also their history with drug consumption/influences. Through this system, the early-staged youth may be saved with immediate healthcare and rehabilitation services. Amongst these institutional efforts, there must be widespread awareness programs across the country for both parents and their offspring. Stricter policing and more rapid access to medicare also plays a crucial part in making the aforementioned solutions more effective.

Concluding Remarks

Rural Bangladesh as a Site for Transformation

This entire research endeavour has been an exercise in broadening the minds of all those involved to the fact that rural Bangladesh is a society thoroughly in the midst of robust and comprehensive transformation. It was always to be expected that decades of domestic and foreign policy interventions, NGO presence, climate-related impacts and economic stimuli would lead to a transformation in the ways in which rural Bangladeshi society was organised and operated.

However, what was fascinating for all those involved were the myriads of nuances that these transformations have presented, as well as the many points at which these transformative stimuli or the waves of change from them have converged. Though it is quite tempting to look at certain aspects of rural society from a layman's lens and believe that the more things change, the more they stay the same, the reality is that rural communities in Bangladesh are now more than ever contending with the ripple effects of change that are rapidly transforming the ways that they earn, marry, produce, consume, navigate politics and representation, and form relations to members of their own society. The categories of class, occupation and status which have so often defined the world's perceptions of rural Bangladeshi villages are currently under a process of change - some are being strengthened, broadened, or sublimated, while others still have disappeared completely.

Though the chapters of this report have all individually shown each author's findings, perhaps the most important contribution of this report is the suggestion of possibility - before our eyes, rural communities in Bangladesh are undergoing a metamorphosis, often at the hands of influences beyond their deliberate control. As a site for such active and rapid social transformation, there needs to be more attention paid to the ways in which rural societies respond, resist or adapt to the challenges and influences that are currently being placed amongst them, and we hope to encourage others to contribute more facets and nuances towards our collective understanding of the ways in which rural communities in Bangladesh exist.

Limitations:

However, no work is without its limitations. Though we spent an extensive amount of time preparing the theoretical foundation and research framework for the project, we realistically had only three days to conduct the research across one Upazilla in

Mymensingh. This in turn has made it very difficult to identify any other overarching problems that may exist within these communities. However, that is not to say there exists no singular problem within these communities, but they are more so on a case-by-case individual basis. Attempts were made to account for this time constraint by assigning multiple students to each broad topic, and dividing them amongst various locales and between different rural classes and backgrounds; while we are confident that we have been able to conduct a thorough and realistic examination of rural life as they encountered it, our efforts are by no means exhaustive.

Furthermore, the nature and area of study played a big role in the outcome of the data. This particular area of study of rural communities required the entry into the villagers' households. We were initially met with distrust from participants, as the women of the house assumed we were either government workers or representatives from non-profit organisations. The woman present during the midday was already apprehensive to relay any information that we were seeking, however, this was further aggravated by the presence of any male family member whose presence acted as a censor, hampering the women's ability to speak freely about their lived experiences.

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