ELUSIVE VILLAGES:
SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN RURAL EAST PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

ELUSIVE VILLAGES:
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This thesis focusses on rural community organization and social structure in a part of Comilla District in East Pakistan. It combines the concept and method of cultural ecology with certain social structural insights of Marx and Weber.

The so-called villages of Eastern Bengal, characterized by exceedingly dense populations and scattered patterns of settlement, are in no sense residential social systems of a holistic sort. Rather, they are engulfed in simultaneously operative levels of social organization in which direct links between intra and extra village groupings serve to negate the social reality and internal cohesiveness of the "village" per se. These levels of organization - the intra-village *reyai* and the extra-village *samaj* - involve much larger numbers of people than those resident in a given village. They extend territorially to include the immediate area surrounding individual villages and are as much a part of the organization of group activities of rural residents as are individual villages themselves. Moreover, the overlap of these entities located in given market areas functions in such a way as to allow the assertion that, in reality, the market area and its organizational subdivisions are the relevant residential social system, rather than the village. Evidence from the workings of kinship, economic, political and religious systems is presented to demonstrate this finding. The dynamics of the social system thus described are analyzed

with reference to the economic class, social status and political power relationships which characterize it. These in turn are seen as grounded in the ecological adaptation of a dense population to a deltaic environment in a monsoon climate.

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A completed Ph.D. thesis, representing as it does the culmination both of intellectual effort and of the rites of passage leading to the threshold of an academic career, inevitably suggest its author's host of very special debts. These are both personal and intellectual, reflecting myriad influences on his training and development. And also inevitably, only the most salient of them can be recalled, even fewer named. As do all others in my present position, I face an impossible task.

Surely, however, any attempt even to begin its accomplishment must include loving recognition of the role of my parents, Dr. Peter A and Mrs. Lucy S. Bertocci. First and foremost must be cited their constant effort, from my childhood onward, to inculcate in me a concern for and interest in people and their lives. Herein lies the genesis of my ultimate interest in anthropology, the most humanistic of the social sciences. Secondly, moreover, I must note the fact that my parents have always considered travel an essential ingredient in their children's education and all my life they undertook special sacrifices in order to ensure the inclusion of travel in my education upbringing. This thesis itself in a sense is the product of a train of events which began when, fresh out of college, I accompanied my parents to Calcutta in 1960-61, for it was then that my interest in South Asian Studies and in Bengal was kindled. This, in addition to several previous travel experiences, instilled in me the wanderlust which is the hallmark of the anthropologist's soul.

Over and above these ongoing familial debts, those of friendship and learning

especially in the final years of my educational career, would constitute a long and complicated roster. To my fellow students in the class and study rooms of Michigan State University, where particularly in the early years of graduate study the interaction and mutual support was crucially helpful, I owe the immeasurable debt of camaraderie which made my graduate career as enjoyable as it has been exciting.

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source of pleasure. Dr. Luykx, with his keen interest in and knowledge of rural development problems, was a perennial source of intellectual stimulation as was Mrs. Luykx of gracious hospitality. Mr. and Mrs. D.O. Blackiston, A.I.D., Comilla, Mr. and Mrs. Jens Riis and Mr. Paul Wienegaard of the Danish government's technical assistance program at Comilla, were always the most genial of hosts to the young anthropologist in search of "R and R," as were also Dr. and Mrs. John Stoekel of the Population Council. Finally, to the earstwhile and intrepid British Volunteers, Peter Felix, Barrie Ward, Jim Cordiner and David McHutchison, with whom I shared room and board when in Comilla town, I owe many long hours of conviviality.

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But in the end this thesis owes itself to the many Bengali villagers whose patience, curiousity, talkativeness and simple human kindness made it possible. How quickly the stranger in their midst became a stranger no more! To them, then, this thesis is dedicated. No words of mine put to page in this connection could serve their purpose better than these I adapt from Myron Wiener, who, in *The Politics of Scarcity*, most aptly expresses the feelings of pro-Bengali foreign scholar. Like him, "I cannot close without some special word of affection for the Bengalis whom I interviewed" and behind

whose mud walls I shared food. Unjustifiably despised by certain of their countrymen as backward, unreasonable and weak, ethnocentrically maligned by all too many foreigners who pass through East Pakistan, the people of East Bengal do indeed "remain for the garrulous scholar a sheer delight" and the partially Latinized one finds in them a well-spring of emotional affinity.

Rochester, Michigan, May 1970

TO THE VILLAGERS OF COMILLA THANA

In societies where agricultural activities remain predominant, and where the process of industrialization has only begun, the social problems associated with modernization concern in the first instance the peasantry. It is the rural villager who, in addition to being wrapped in the fabric of tradition, is also the first victim of technological inadequacies as well as the inegalitarian social relations which characterize the old order.

(translated from Georges Balandier, *Le Contexte Socio-culturel et le Coût social du progrès*.)

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INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

The anthropological study of South Asian society has undergone a remarkable florescence in the past 25 years. Just as the discipline has turned its attention to the study of complex societies, the older focus on India's tribal populations gave way in the post-War years to a plethora of studies which took as their concern the social and cultural organization of South Asian peasant communities. In addition to developing a considerable literature on rural society from various regions of the Sub-continent, anthropologists have begun to work in urban areas as well. Yet despite the seeming embarrassment of riches bestowed upon us by two and one half decades of anthropological study in South Asia, the fact remains that our wealthy literature in this regard contains no systematic study of an East Pakistani community. Here, indeed, our embarrassment is one of poverty.

I regard this as something of an historical irony, for one of the first post-War articles in the *American Anthropologist* on South Asian peasantry (Smith 1946) described aspects of life in rural Sylhet District of what is now East Pakistan. Smith's study contained the results of a kind of "culture-at-a-distance" effort, the product of depth interviews with a single Bengali Muslim informant during a course in field methods at Columbia University. Yet since that time, the subsequent proliferation of South Asian ethnographic studies has not, to my knowledge, brought in its train a full-fledged field study of any East Bengali village, although some empirical research reports of varying

lengths and quality are available.[1] In general, anthropological literature on South Asia retains a sizeable lacuna with respect to East Pakistan.

One of the purposes of the present study, then, must be to begin to close this gap in knowledge. Stating this, I merely express a strongly felt obligation to perform something of the traditional ethnographer's task and my effort in these pages will be to provide, to the extent of its relevance to a more specific set of problems, a reasonable modicum of culturally descriptive detail.

Beyond that, however, the present work has no pretension to ethnography, especially if, by my so designating it, the reader were led to expect "an overall view of the culture of the people about whom it is written" (Berreman 1968: 337). Of course, "everyone who does empirical research in cultural or social anthropology engages in ethnography as a process," as Berreman (*ibid.*), in a recent review of the ethnographic method, reminds us. And so, to the extent that this study has depended for its data on the traditional anthropological method of direct observation of both verbal and non-verbal human behavior, my efforts can be described as "ethnographic" in the usual sense. "In practice," Berreman (*ibid.*) goes on to state, an ethnography "covers those aspects which the ethnographer considers relevant to an understanding of the culture he studied." With respect to this study, Berreman's admission should serve as a *caveat* to the reader who delights in ethnographic detail. For in it I am most directly concerned with those aspects of Muslim Bengali society and culture which I have found to be relevant in understanding community organization in one part of rural East Pakistan. Appropriately, then, I consider my attempt in these pages best characterized as a "community study," with which term our sociologist

colleagues have usually labelled their own "ethnographic" efforts.

The major aim of this study, then, is to analyze the relationship between community organization and social structure in one *thana*[2] - a politico-administrative unit roughly analoguous to an American county - in East Pakistan. I shall be concerned with the process by which class, status and power regulate the workings and the interdigitation of territorially and functionally overlapping social groups. Before proceeding, I should make explicit my perspective and assumptions.

By community organization, I refer simply to the complex of groups, associations and institutions related to kinship, economics, politics, and religion which both organizationally and normatively shape interaction between members of a residential population. Now, it is obvious that the question as to what constitutes "a community" is theoretically open-ended. That is, an institutional analysis of the sort I imply here can proceed, depending on the aims of the researcher, from the small localized grouping to encompass a region, many regions, a province, the nation-state and, indeed, "the world." From the point of view of the researcher, the definition of "the community" is, in the end, arbitrary; he must choose what kind of community, and what aspects of that community, he wishes to study. From the point of view of the resident, the community is that complex of groups and institutions with and in which he daily interacts. Thus, for a Bengali peasant, certain activities are associated with his "village" or *gram*, and others with his family of procreation (*poribar*), patrilineage (*gusthi*), and bilaterally extended kin ties (*atiyo*), all of which may or may not be coterminous with his "village." Certain activities are further associated with his mosque (*masjid*), if he is a Muslim, whose congregation may or may not be coterminous with his "village." Political activity may take

place for him within the confines of both intra-village and extra-village groupings, whose nature I shall discuss in some detail. Economic activities are also varied situationally, depending on whether the villager is tilling land in his own, or another "village," or whether he is buting or selling in a nearby or far away market or town, and where, to or from whom, he has borrowed or lend land, money or rice.

As the researcher in this instance, I have taken as my task the definition of an East Bengali community, determined at least initially by the activities of my informants and their ideas about those activities. For reasons I shall explain, I had no choice but to proceed in this manner, for the isolation of what is called a "village" is impossible from a mere scanning of the deltaic terrain. Furthermore, there are problems in assuming too much about the term *gram* (village), which term in English all too often has implied a composite residential social system, the like of which has no reality in East Bengal as such. The term *gram* is a "native category" of importance, whose meaning must be determined with precision, from observation and interviews. The focus of my research was on two socially defined "villages" or *grams*, a total population of nearly 600, but through discovery and analysis of the extent and nature of the inhabitants' kinship, political, economic and religious activities, I was soon led to perceive that their "communities" extended territorially and interactionally well beyond the reaches of their most immediate group referent, the *gram*.

To this extent, then, my approach to community definition is interactional. I have been somewhat arbitrary in limiting my community's "boundaries" to what I call, following Skinner (1964), its "market area." I do not think, however, that my arbitrariness in this respect is total, for most of the daily interaction of the people I knew and

and observed for 11 months can be said to have centered within the confines of their "market area."

But my approach to the study of this community has also been situational. That is, I came ultimately to focus on what kinds of situations were related to what kinds of activities and events and the manner in which these aided in defining the community and manifesting its workings. I am mainly concerned with showing the way in which social structure - more specifically class and power relations - *situates* the activities whose ordered and institutionalized performance gives reality to, and articulates between, groups of people and thus the "community" they comprise.

My orientation in this study toward the analysis of social structure will be seen as essentially Marxian. This will be apparent from my chosen emphasis on the otherwise obvious fact that every society has a "material" foundation and the relevance that foundation has for understanding social relations and political power in a human community. I should stress, however, the limited sense in which I mean to apply this general (and well-known) theoretical framework. In my view, a society's "material basis" merely sets the conditions under which, in differing historical and cultural contexts, the opportunities for both choice and action for some individuals and groups are qualitatively and quantitatively constrained, while those of others are enhanced (see the discussion of this point in Lefebvre 1969: 1-24). In complex societies like the one to be discussed here, it seems clear that the overall relationship of groups and individuals to "modes of production" tends to correlate with the differential allocation of social status and political power. But it is also clear that a superordinate-subordinate disparity between "the powerful" and "the powerless" does not always

obtain absolutely with respect to specific events. For such complex societies are also characterized by a varyingly intricate proliferation of roles and statuses, each differentially and not always necessarily, connected to subsistence activities *per se*. This fact results in the existence of a wide "middle spectrum" of personnel whose activities regularly and importantly attentuate the extremes of power distribution (except under those conditions of intra-societal stress which create a polarization along power lines). Moreover, I recognize that the working out of power relations in a society is subtly acted upon by factors of personality, cultural norms and values. Finally, I see the ensemble of these structural relationships as constantly subject to varying degrees of change.

In this study I shall attempt to demonstrate a postulated relationship between the elaboration of social structure - class and power relations - and ecologically adaptive modes of subsistence. It will be evident that my effort is informed by the concept, and guided by the method, of cultural ecology. I want to show the ways in which social and political relations are grounded in 1) the relationship between an environmental setting and the productive technology used to subsist within it and 2) the group arrangements which develop from the exploitation of that given environment with that particular technological assemblage (following Steward 1955: 39-42). Put differently, my argument here will be that social structure in the East Bengali villages I describe has been historically elaborated in the context of interaction between a population of a certain size and density, its productive technology, and a monsoon climate in a deltaic terrain. Let me emphasize at the outset the emphatic "possibilism" in my view. The relationship between population, technology and environment is seen

here as a constraining, not a determining, influence on the stru of social life in the Bengal Delta. This will, I hope, be evide the extent to which I relate what I know of the are's history to the present-day scene, showing that under given ecological conditions, and in part because of certain historical events and processes, the Bengali peasant villages I discuss are structurally ordered and territorially extended in certain ways.

My study is divided into 2 parts. Part I consists of an essentially "static" descriptive analysis of formal community organization, its ecological underpinnings, historical determinants, and its social structural bases. Where possible and relevant, both quantitative and qualitative data will be fully presented. With respect to the latter, I shall make frequent use of case material. In this "static" part of the study, however, the "cases" will be presented largely for illustrative purposes, to buttress general statements made on the basis of interview, observational and quantitative data. This use of case material, similar to that of Bailey (1960), compared to its use in Part II, is more exemplary in intent than analytical. It will in part serve also as a means of presenting ethnographic data. I prefer thus to designate these "cases" sequentially as "Example 1, Example 2," and so forth. Also in Part I, I shall present data pertaining to economic matters in the form of "hypothetical illustrations," set apart from the main body of the text. These also will be numbered sequentially.

After discussing formal organization and its structural bases in Part I, I proceed in Part II to a more "dynamic" analysis of "how the system really works." This section of the study will contain a more detailed description of actual events against the backdrop of the analysis given in Part I. In it I shall utilize for analytical purposes

cases of the "extended" variety, in something of the manner proposed by Gluckman (1961), although the material presented will vary in depth. Moreover, the cases in Part II will have the narrative continuity, with overlapping casts of characters, reminiscent of Turner's (1957) "social dramas," and, similarly, will be analyzed and related to final conclusions. In *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*, however, Turner was concerned with making a statement about political processes *per se*, which aim is not that of the present work. Because my goal here is more limited, I shall not attempt to apply Turner's "processional form" - "breach, crisis, redressive action and re-integration or recognition of the schism" (Turner 1957: 91ff) - which is central to the concept of "social drama" as he has conceived it. Thus, because I have adopted the form, but not the complete substance, of the "social drama" method of case elucidation and analysis, I shall not presume to use the same term. In Part II, case material will be sequentially labelled "Case Study 1, Part A, Part B," and so forth, each part followed by analysis. Thus, by the use of "case studies" in chronological and narrative sequence, I shall try to show the link between structure and process. In the examples and case studies, as everywhere in the text, references to persons and places are pseudonymous.

Part I

THE BENGALI VILLAGE BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Ei ēk gāō, ōi ēk gāō -
madhye dhu dhu māṭh,
dhān kāuner likhan likhi
karche nitui pāṭh.

Jasimuddin in *Naksī Kāṭhār Māṭh*

A village here, a village there
by broad field liked as one;
their soils must ever learn anew
to measure paddy's sum.

(Field of the Embroidered Quilt)

CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE REPUBLIC AS NON-ENTITY

Students of rural South Asia long ago abandoned the "village republic" view of Indian society which for many decades pervaded the writing of British officialdom on the Sub-continent (see Cohn 1968 for a history of the "village view" of Indian society). Since the beginnings of systematic enquiry into the workings of South Asian peasant communities, the conception of the village as a sociological isolate has come to be considerably modified (see, e.g., Opler 1956) and it is more or less axiomatically accepted that South Asian rural communities form "part of a wider (social) system" (Srinivas and Shah 1960; see also Cohn and Marriott 1968). At the risk, then, of seeming to beat the proverbial dead horse, I think it useful to introduce a discussion of Bengali village organization by pointing out a perhaps less well known fact. It is interesting to note that, despite the prevalence of the "village republic" notion throughout the 19th Century, British administrators familiar with Bengal often in their writings referred to the inappropriateness of the notion at least with respect to the southern districts of the province. In his report on Tippera (now Comilla) District in East Bengal, Hunter (1876: 384-5) asserted: "Village communities, in the sense in which the words may be applied in certain parts of India, do not now exist in Tipperah; ..." Beveridge (1876: 216-17) describes the Bakerganj countryside as follows:

> "The houses are . . . scattered, and there is little of collective village life. Each house stands by itself on its mound, surrounded by a thicket of fruit trees, and there is often no other house in sight or nearer than 100 yards."

Both of these statements refer to the even then heavily populated active delta districts of Bengal, demonstrating the existence of conditions nearly 100 years ago to which recent statements still attest. For example, Nicholas (1963) states that "active delta villages are ordinarily quite dispersed, linear or chain-link in layout with houses quite distant from one another."

It appears, then, in contradistinction to the organizational patterns found typically, for example, in North India and the Deccan, with their seemingly insular, well-nucleated villages, there emerges a quite different pattern of settlement in Bengal and other densely populated deltaic regions of South Asia. Indeed, the predominantly Muslim villages of East Pakistan's southern districts, at least, are, as Geertz (1959: 991) has shown for rural Bali,

> "in no sense ... corporate territorial unit(s) coordinating all aspects of life in terms of residence and land ownership, as peasant communities have commonly been described, but (they are) rather a compound of social structures, each based on a different principle of social affiliation ..."

The village area I shall discuss lies some 4 miles away from the town of Comilla, itself 60 miles southeast of Dacca, the provincial capital. Comilla *Kotwali Thana*, an administrative unit[3] 107 square miles in area, of which the villages form a part, is located well to the east of the great river systems which have moulded and shaped the topography of East Bengal, and thus the area does not fully share the riverine ecology of the districts to the west. Nonetheless, many of its environmental features are decidedly similar. I shall later attempt to show some of the limitations imposed by environment and technology on the choices a peasant cultivator must make in the location of homesteads is not as random as it appears to the eye of the casual observer. But the pattern of settlement effected by purely ecological

considerations is, at the outset, socially random, in the sense that the arrangements of dwellings does not correspond to some externally derived cultural ideal (as in the case of Mesoamerican villages, for example). Large scale nucleation of settlements does not take place; scattered homesteads, somtimes bunched together in clusters, is rather the rule.

Mauza, Village and the Problem of Definition

Population is dense and homesteads are unevenly spaced; human habitation is concentrated, yet its pattern dispersed. The village as a discrete and observable physical entity is seemingly invisible. Moreover, its discernment is complicated at the outset by the fact that such lists of "local"villages" as exist are based on several definitions of the term "village" (as I discovered in consulting the listing of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development compiled in 1963).

The most common definition of village is as a "*mauza*."[4] This term refers to the minimal unit in the system of land revenue collection established by the Mughals and continued by the British, who also made it the "village" of the decennial Census of India. Throughout the area's recent history, particularly in the 18th and 19th Centuries, *mauzas* were simply arbitrary agglomerations of land delineated by men primarily interested in carving up the countryside into taxable units, without respect for natural social groupings. Cumming (1899: 78ff), who directed the last complete settlement survey of the village area under discussion, refers to the long-standing practice of lumping villages into survey units, noting that "many so-called villages are merely bits of land dignified with that name because they are so noted on Collectorate lists, in accordance to which the survey has necessarily been carried

on" (p. 78). Over time it seems to have become the practice to treat *mauzas* as "villages" for practical administrative purposes and that practice continues today. Some 200 *mauzas* exist in Comilla Kotwali Thana today and, "dignified" with distinctive names (of the sort to which I have referred), they serve as one kind of socio-territorial referent for both administrators and villagers. But *mauzas* often do not correspond to "natural" social groupings which are called villages in a sociologically significant sense.

The second type of village referent which complicates the listings is the *gram*. I should point out that the Bengali word *gram* is the most widely used term for "village"; it is the closest in meaning to its English equivalent but has the widest latitude of applications, meaning, for example, both "local village" and *mauza* when used imprecisely. Here I use it solely to refer to socially recognized ("local") villages, the kinds of social groupings which are the subject of this thesis. As regards their listing on offical documents, attempts have been made by administrators to recognize the fact that where clusters of dwellings have come to be seen as social units by local people, irrespective of *mauza* location, they have been given names. Thus they have been included on different kinds of lists, usually, but not always fully, at the Union Council level. Some 460 "local villages" are reported to comprise Comilla Kotwali Thana.

The third referent for the village combines the first 2, thereby compounding the potential for confusion, at least from the point of view of the researcher attempting to make sociological sense out of various village lists. The census village represents another arbitrarily grouped aggregation for the purposes of enumeration during the census operations in 1951 and 1961. Census villages include both *mauzas*

and local villages, in so doing bringing one even further from the actual social situation. Moreover, due to administrative discrepancy or oversight, the Union Council lists may not tally with those available at the Thana Council level. There are nearly 250 census villages in Comilla Kotwali Thana.

It would appear, then, that a seemingly nefarious combination of ecology and bureaucracy succeeds at the outset in thwarting the efforts of the social researcher to find the elusive Comilla village. When beginning his research, the anthropologist must be somewhat arbitrary, depending on his purposes, in seeking a community in which to carry on his investigations. Only after preliminary conversations with local inhabitants can he decide where most fruitfully to begin his inquiry and he must patiently embark upon the time-consuming procedure of taking his own census without full knowledge of the "boundaries" of the group he is studying. But such tentative beginnings are not without their reward. For as he goes about his business, the anthropologist gradually comes to focus, at least approximately, on the social processes which for the villagers themselves bring order out of demographic chaos. And in the end, the anthropologist may learn well the lesson of which the Bengal delta is the teacher *par excellence:* that in social life there are no boundaries save those of the specific situation, and they are never permanently fixed.

Hajipur and Tinpara: Contrasting Modes of Village Organization

The villages I describe are examples of complexity I have outlined above. One of them, Village Hajipur, corresponds largely to a *mauza* in terms of its boundaries as a socially recognized village, although in some social contexts certain nearby homesteads outside the *mauza*

boundaries fit into its collective village activities. In the *mauza* officially known as Hajipur, there are 10 homesteads, lying in nucea-tions set off from those of other *mauzas*, containing a population of 322 (in 1967). This agglomeration is referred to as both Village *and* Mauza Hajipur, although the nearby homesteads to the east, west, and south of the actual *mauza* are often included in it for most social purposes.

Some 250 yards to the south of Hajipur there is another, more tightly unified, homestead cluster. This consists of 13 homesteads which line 2 village roads, one going north-south, the other east-west. These 13 homesteads fall variously into 3 *mauzas*: 5 in the eastern end (*para*: lit. "neighborhood" or "ward") of one *mauza*; 5 in the southern *para* of a second *mauza*; and 3 homesteads house all of a third small *mauza's* inhabitants. The total population of this homestead cluster was 245 at the time of research. Despite their location in 3 different *mauzas*, these homesteads constitute what for their inhabitants is a socially recognized village (*gram*), as their emphatic statements to that effect when questioned made abundantly clear. Thus, although these villagers belong to 3 "official" villages, with different names, their unity as a socially defined village is undisputed. I refer to this otherwise unnamed community as "Tinpara," (Three Neighborhoods), a name of my own concoction introduced for clarity of reference.

The 2 villages provide examples of the contrasting ways in which the "official" village - the *mauza* - often differs from the social reality of the *gram*. The homestead clusters which are their physical expression reflect the dwelling agglomerations which occur in seemingly haphazard fashion as a result of the constraints imposed by climate and topography. Given the relative proximity of member homesteads, it seems

reasonable to suppose that over time the interaction this facilitated contributed to a certain sense of unity in these little groupings, leading to the eventual feeling that their members respectively were united - to which groupings the term *gram* or "village" was naturally applied. As I shall attempt to point out, there are a number of ways in which patterns of group behavior and simple custom tend to buttress this feeling of "village" solidarity. But I also hasten to stress that no aspect of social organization functions solely in support of village solidarity *per se*. Rather the character of kinship, economic, political and religious ties are as much extensive, linking people to extra-village groupings, as they are intensive, lending internal cohesion via specifically village-oriented activities.

The Reyai

Hajipur and Tinpara differ internally in another significant way. Neither of the communities has any formal centralization of authority at the "village" level; that is, there is no single headman in either case. Rather there are within each village several recognized leaders of "influentials" known as *sardars* who are members of (*sardari*) lineages which usually excede their neighbors in land ownership and homestead population. Thus, both Hajipur and Tinpara may be seen as composed of homestead clusters which, while reflecting geographical proximity of residential groups, also represent constellations of families among which certain lineages preponderate in wealth and social influence. The *sardars*, members of dominant lineages, have formally recognized, although not always necessarily obeyed, authority over the homesteads comprising their respective groups. As there is no centralization of village authority, local affairs are when necessary formally regulated

on a kind of *ad hoc* basis by the *sardars* when, for example, a conflict must be settled, or some other similar situation. Thus, social and political power has in the first instance highly localized bases, although power extends beyond the immediate locale, as I shall try to show.

The formalized unity among member homesteads in such groups is reflected in the term by which they are known, *reyai*, a word of apparent Arabic origin meaning "protegés; those who are under the domain of others."[5] The relationship of the *reyai* to village organization varies, however, as the cases of Hajipur and Tinpara will show, for above the level of the homestead-based residential kin group it *can* - but does not always - represent the next step in the territorial expansion of rural social groupings.

Village Hajipur, for example, has 3 *reyais*, in each of which there is one *sardari* lineage, the largest in terms of land holding in each r respective grouping. Village Tinpara - composed as it is of parts of 3 *mauzas* - has only 1 *reyai* in which there are 2 *sardari* lineages. That is, while Hajipur is internally divided into 3 sub-village groupings, the homesteads comprising Tinpara have group unity, to which the terms *reyai* and *gram* are simultaneously applied. Thus, in Tinpara there is no intervening level of organization between the homestead and the village; the homestead cluster and the village make up a solidary unit, known both as a *reyai* and a village with no distinction between the two. One informant, responding to my initial confusion on this point, stated: "It is both our *reyai* and our village" (*āmāder reyāi ō hoy, grām ō hoy*). In both villages, the *sardars* are those to whom first recourse may be had in matters of social control, and they may seek to exercise their authority in this regard individually or jointly, in

consort with *sardars* from other villages.

In Hajipur, whose *reyais* I enumerate here for purposes of clarity (although they are not so enumerated by the villagers), *Reyai* I is composed of 5 homesteads with a total population of 183 (56.18 percent of the village's total) and aggregate land holding of 57.08 acres (56 percent of Hajipur villagers' reported total). In addition, *Reyai* I counts among its members 2 homesteads from a neighboring *mauza* to the west, a fact which demonstrates the inexplicitness of *mauza* and even village boundaries as far as social organization is concerned. Hajipur's *Reyai* II consists of 2 homesteads only, with a total of 68 in population (21.1 percent of total village population) and an aggregate land holding of 20.65 acres (21 percent of Hajipur's total). *Reyai* III consists of 3 homesteads, its total population being 71 (22.1 percent of village total) and aggregate land holding 22.95 acres (23 percent of the village total).

In all 3 *reyai* groupings the *sardari* position of leadership is accorded to what I have called the "dominant" lineage. Thus, in *Reyai* I the *sardari* lineage claims control nearly 35 acres of land (34.59 percent of Hajipur's total) and counts within its fold over 50 members. In *Reyai* II the *sardari* lineage claims nearly 20 acres of land (19.20 percent of Hajipur's total) and also over 50 members. The structure of this *reyai* reflects little more than that of the *sardari* lineage itself however, in that the sole other member homestead of this group is that of an impoverished family whose male members have nearly all married out and live uxorilocally - an anomalous situation. Finally, *Reyai* III, in the northern end of Hajipur, contains a *sardari* lineage whose land holdings is about 13 acres (13 percent of Hajipur's total) and has over 25 members. Thus, Hajipur's unity as a village is countered internally

by the segmentation of 3 sub-village groupings, each headed by the 3 families whose land ownership totals are highest in the village as a whole. In Hajipur, however, most of the collective activities which involve the village as a whole take place under the leadership of the *sardari* lineage in *Reyai* I, whose predominance in numbers and land ownership is evident. It sponsors collective religious observances and had furnished the principle impetus for other village activities, including the formation of a village cooperative society. In its fold is counted one of the principle village money lenders who alone claims control of more than 10 acres of land. But though this lineage is dominant, it is not completely so, for the other 2 *sardari* lineages possess enough status and influence to counteract it in certain situations.

In Tinpara the situation is less complex. There is one *reyai* and it corresponds to the village itself, as I have pointed out. While there are 2 *sardars*, dominance is clear in the hands of one, who singly owns more than 12 percent of Tinpara villagers' total aggregated land holdings. He has been (by reputation) a money lender in the past and even now the less affluent among Tinpara villagers rely on him for rice loans during the lean seasons and occasional employment on his farm. Here also, collective activities center around his homestead - religious gatherings, evening recreation and the like. By contrast, the second *sardari* lineage is far more numerous, its members individually less wealthy, and the group as a whole appears not to figure highly in village affairs.

The Samaj

The 3 *reyais* of Village Hajipur and the single *reyai* which constitutes Tinpara each forms part of a multi-*reyai* grouping known locally

as *samaj*, a word whose generic meaning is "society," but which is also translatable in various specific contexts as "association" (a functionally specific "society"). The *sardars* of the various *reyais* which comprise the *samaj* are members of a kind of "Council of Elders" whose jurisdiction in local affairs extends over an area much wider than that of the *reyais* in which each individual *sardar* holds sway. The *reyais* of Hajipur and Tinpara are part of a *samaj* grouping which extends over 8 *mauzas*, a total area of perhaps 1.2 square miles with a total population of about 1,800. The key territorial feature of this ensemble is the contiguity of the *mauza*-based *reyai* enclaves involved. That is, the *samaj* is composed of a number of territorially contiguous *reyais* and covers the better part of 8 *mauzas*, the *sardars* each representing their respective *reyai* groupings. As suggested, the *samaj* functions as a kind of "Council of Elders" but one whose activities are primarily related to the settlement of disputes and little else. Its manifest function is largely one of social control; but, as I shall discuss in more detail, its latent function is to channel political relations between the prestigious *sardars* and the groups they represent when those relations are thrown into open conflict. But the *samaj* is not an administrative body, nor does it meet regularly; it is not recognized by the Government of Pakistan as a body of local government, although on some occasions its members are consulted, their cooperation requested, when formal governmental bodies, such as the Union Council, or government officials deem their services useful for certain purposes. As I shall later show, it is an institution evolved by local villagers as a means of collectively handling matters of import to the residents of a multi-village area, under historical conditions in which little external authority was present to perform such functions. It is composed

of men who either are, or whose fathers presumably were, among the most influential in the area, althoug the *samaj* is not necessarily the sole institution where the impact of such men can be felt.

Reyai, Village and Samaj: 3 levels of organization

By way of summary to this point, I suggest that rural social organization in the area I am discussing can be seen both structurally and processually as involving the following stages of steps. Its minimal unit is the homestead-based patrilineage which in turn builds into what I have called homestead clusters, constellations of lineages grouped around the most powerful, wealthy or otherwise influential (*sardari*) lineages. At this first stage, the group formed is known as the *reyai*, its formal leadership vested in the *sardars*. Where both geographical and interactional variables suffice to encompass the bulk of individuals' collective activities at this level, such an entity is also described as a village (*gram*); where conversely both geography and collective interaction link the *reyai* homestead cluster with other like entities, the agglomeration of these units becomes the relevant village and thus becomes a second or intervening stage in the elaboration of social organization over a wider area. The final stage in both structure and process is the linkage of the individual *reyais* to the *samaj* grouping, whose functions and composition have been described.

Three things ought to be noted from the brief description offered here. Firstly, the territorial and organizational extensiveness of the *samaj* as an institution stands in marked contrast to the smaller geographic and organizational scale of the *reyai*, based on the clustering of a few homesteads. Thus, social structure takes institutional shape in the form of complementary intensive-extensive opposition of parts

and processes. Secondly, with respect to political relations, especially as regards the resolution of conflict, the village (*gram*), where it consists (as in Hajipur) of several *reyais*, is afforded no formal recognition. From an institutional point of view, the relevant formal organization of conflict resolution for the "villager" is the *reyai* and its linkage to the *samaj* via the participation of the *sardars* in it. The village, where it exists as a multi-*reyai* entity, does not fit into the formal organization of politics. Thirdly, then, the village cannot be seen, as peasant villages elsewhere have often been described, as a territorially-bounded residential social system. Rather it is at best an intervening level of social organization in an institutional constellation which is geographically expansive and demographically inclusive in character, in which both formal and informal groups are flexibly relevant - or not relevant - to the individual depending on situational context.

The market area

Yet the complexity of territorial organization does not stop with the *samaj*. Hajipur, Tinpara, and the *samaj* grouping of which they form a part, lie to the north of a small market place, which I call Alirbazar ("Ali's Market"). Alirbazar is an effective "central place" for some 15 to 20 *mauzas* which surround it. It is the locus of a small local village market (*hat*) which meets twice weekly. On market days, most of the sellers and buyers come from the villages and *mauzas* near Alirbazar, none more than 2 to 3 miles distant, all in the same Union. The marketplace contains a total of 10 assorted tea and betel shops and other small commercial establishments which deal in fruits, vegetables, pulses adn spices, as well as manufactured consumers' items from the town.

These establishments operate on a daily basis and all are owned by local people.

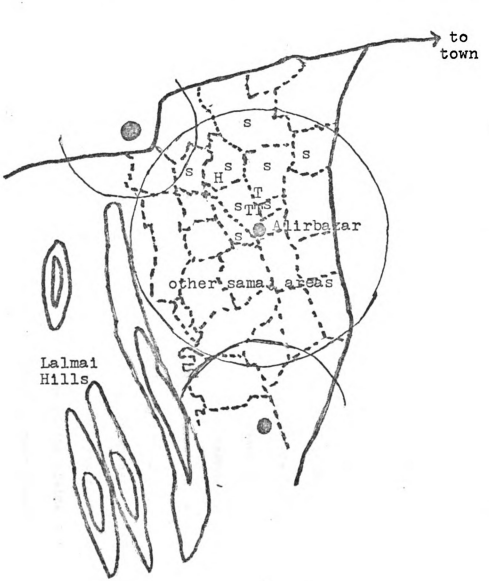
The market place is also the locus of a primary school for village children and before that school's construction there was a *madrasa* (Islamic school) in its place. The seat of the Union Council for the whole area is also there. At one end of the market place there is a cement platform on which evening prayers (*māghribi namāj*) are performed on market days; moreover, an occasional *urs* or *mahfil* is held in the marketplace, which large numbers of people from the *thana* at large attend. Finally, the market place is a center for sports and recreation; in the summer months, for example, volley ball games are often organized by the more athletically inclined younger men. In the evenings the tea shops remain open until well after dark, two of them particularly to the "small hours," where card games are a regular and highly convivial attraction.

In short, this market place is both geographically and socially central ot its surrounding *mauzas* and their various "village" or *reyai* enclaves. The people in these *mauzas* are generally known to each other, are united to a great extent by kinship ties (as I shall demonstrate later) and interact both privately and publically in innumerable kinds of activities. The *samaj* I have described is complemented by similar groupings to the south and west of the marketplace. In this locational context, then, the market place may be seen as the center of a sociological circle (see Map I), whose interactional radii extend through overlapping and complex organizational forms. Much as Skinner (1965: 3) has shown for rural China, the market area to which I allude here may be seen to "help shape local social organization and provide one of the crucial modes for integrating myriad peasant communities into (a)

single social system ...," which encompasses all of the units and sub-units I have cursorily described. In comparative context, then, one might usefully think of the whole bazar area as the minimally relevant social arena for the Bengali peasants who inhabit it. Indeed, a complete discussion of the patterns of social organization in this part of rural East Bengal must ultimately take such a unit as a focus.

MAP I

Market Area and Constituent Samaj Mauzas



Sketch map based on 1928 (latest available) official map provided courtesy of P.A.R.D., Comilla

CHAPTER II

THE ECOLOGY OF VILLAGE STRUCTURE

> East Pakistan may be roughly divided into two main physical divisions: (1) the vast alluvial plain and (2) the marginal hills in the east and south-east.
>
> But this simplicity of form has two peculiar features. The plain is watered by one of the most remarkable networks of rivers in the world, while on the surface of the plain itself there are certain well marked topographical features formed by older alluvial deposits which rise several feet above the dead flatness of the plain and not only serve to break the scenic monotony, but also play a positive role in the agrarian economy of the area. (Nafis Ahmed 1968: 11)

This summary statement by an outstanding Pakistani geographer serves as a good introduction to the basic topographical features of predominantly rural East Pakistan. The province is the product of 3 major river systems, those of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna-Surma Rivers. The Ganges is Himalaya-derived, the Brahmaputra drains the Tibetan Plateau, and the Meghna-Surma siphons off water from the Sub-continent's eastern fringes in Bengal, Assam and the Northeast Frontier, the highest rainfall area in the world. These 3 great river systems have done much to mould and shape the character of the plains through and over which they have flowed, creating, as they have undergone shifts and changes over centuries, both regionally and historically varied conditions for human settlement and sustenance. The remaining 2 systems, stemming from a plethora of hill streams in the extreme north and southeast of the province, have by contrast made lesser contributions to topography.

It is thus possible roughly to divide the vast plain which is East Bengal into 5 discrete topographical regions, according to variations

of contour and minor physiographic differences (Nafis Ahmed 1968: 20-31). While it is not central to my purpose to recapitulate this physical geographical detail, I think it nonetheless crucial to point out the basic distinctions in deltaic environment which do exist. For these have important ecological consequences, despite the otherwise monotonously similar topography, hydraulics and physiography of the Bengal plain.

As the major rivers, particularly the Ganges, have shifted their courses in an easterly direction over the past millenium, 3 types of deltaic environment have resulted in characterizing the modern scene (see Map II). In the north, the oldest part of the delta became moribund, its shifting rivers having silted up their stream beds and the area, becoming more elevated and dry, no longer benefits from yearly silt deposites and has thus declined in soil fertility. Next in chronological sequence was the formation of a mature delta in the central districts of the province, where flooding and silting is still a regular feature. Finally, the south and southeastern districts fall within the most recent and continuing formation, that of an active delta, subject to long periods of flooding and silting, graced annually by rich deposits of silt which make it the most fertile part of the province for agricultural activities (see Nicholas: 1963).

Since the agricultural potential of each deltaic area decreases relative to the time of formation, soil fertility increasing as one measures from northwest to southeast, the ability of the land to support large rural cultivating populations accordingly affects their density. Thus, for example, Dinajpur District in the extreme northwest has a rural population density of 750 per square mile with an average single owner farm measuring 3 acres in size. Conversely, Comilla District in the southeast, much of which falls in the active delta area, has a rural

population density of over 2,000 per square mile, with the average size of single owner farms amounting to only 1.7 acreas.[6] These kinds of density differentials are also related to patterns of rural settlement, for in the moribund delta area of the northwest nucleated villages are commonly found. By contrast the flooding active deltaic environment, with its far greater population densities, virtually precludes the possibility of nucleation in settlement patterns. Nicholas (1963) has suggested that much of the population in the active delta is owed historically to the migration of people who were cultivators by occupation and caste, the pioneer inhabitants of a kind of "frontier" society, in which elaborate social stratification was not a basic feature - a point to which I shall return in another context.

The topography of Comilla Kotwali Thana is typical of the flat low-lying plains comprising nearly all of East Bengal. Its fertile soils are naturally watered (other than by rainfall) by a solitary hill stream, the Gumti, which rises in the Tripura Hills whose flanks form the eastern boundary of the *thana* and district. Buy physiographically the area has been characterized as a flood plain (Nafis Ahmed 1968: 27-31) and while the *thana* area is well removed from the current channels of the Meghna River, its soils are nonetheless considered to be alluvial in origin, known technically as (Old) Brahmaputra alluvium (M.A. Islam and W. Islam 1956: 2-3). The results of a soil survey (M. Amirul Islam n.d.) identified the geographic association of 2 soil series, Chakla and Bharella, with the Comilla Kotwali Thana area, ranging from dark, heavy clays to grey-brown silty clay loam or silty clay. The topography of the series is gently undulating, with imperfect drainage, which results in flooding (from rains) in which standing water ranging in depth from 1 to 4 feet over 3 to 5 months of the year. Broad native categories

assigned to the soils by peasant cultivators fit this technical description, for they generally refer to *ataliya* or *atal* soils, a heavy, sticky clay; to *baliya* or *bele* soils as mixtures of clay and sand; and to another sandy-clay mixture known as *do-as*. These soils are described as highly suitable for the cultivation of at least two rice crops per year and, indeed, under conditions which permit even a limited amoung of irrigation, the pattern of two crops per year obtains.

Thus, the topography of Comilla Kotwali Thana is characterized by a low-lying plain, the fertility of whose soil makes it a prime area for wet-rice agriculture. But despite the general levelness of the plain as a whole, the water-absorbant soil exhibits subtle rises and depressions which, while individually microscopic when the total expanse of the plain is considered, must seriously be taken into account by peasant cultivators not only when planting their crops, but also, and importantly, when locating their homes. These seemingly gentle undulations of the land assume a large importance to the total scheme of things because of the potential heaviness of the monsoon rains, coming sometimes regularly, sometimes sporadically, throughout nearly 6 to 7 months of the year. The Comilla *thana* area reportedly totals over 94 inches of rainfall per year, monthly averages ranging from around .30 inches in December and January to 18 inches and over in the height of the monsoon during June through August (see and compare District Census Report Comilla 1961: II-I, Table 1 and Nafis Ahmed 1968: 58, Table II). Such rains combine with the amazing capacity of the soil to respond to water, quickly turning solid dry grey clods into a soupy morasse of mud which maintains its liquidity for days at a time. Thus, an excess of rain in short periods of time can produce flood conditions in which standing undrained rain water causes destruction to crops by

inhibiting the continued growth of rice stalks.

Under such conditions, the Bengali peasant cannot plant his crops or build his home either randomly or according to a preconceived pattern of location. Rather he must take into detailed account the lay of the lands in his possession when planning such activities. Not only, however, do these topographical and climatic factors influence the choices made by peasants in determining where to build homes. The "state of the arts" of building and construction, as well as of plough agriculture, further limit the kinds of adaptive response possible to a marshy soil complex in a monsoon climate. Homes must be built of mud scooped laboriously from nearby plots of land, or else of bamboo laths (*bata*) if the builder is a relatively poor man. Rooves are most usually of varying qualities of thatch, unless one can afford a "tin" (corrogated iron) one, the latter increasingly seen these days, but as yet on only the homes of the more affluent peasants. Thus, the limitations of a pre-industrial technology must be considered in tracing what Nicholas (1963: 4) has called the "intervening steps" between environment and social structure, seen here in the development of settlement patterns. The result of these conditioning factors is a pattern of settlement which is in effect socially random, in which scattered, sometimes clustered, groupings of homesteads are produced.

But to note the random, scattered pattern of rural settlement is to understand only part of the ecology of village structure. What must further be kept in mind is the extreme density of rural population, particularly in the *thana* under discussion.

East Pakistan has a population density which staggers the demographer's imagination, estimates usually given at over 900 persons per square mile for the province as a whole. But such overall mean

calculations for the province obscure the fact of rural densities well over 1,500 persons per square mile obtaining in the most populous districts. It is not surprising, given differences in the returns to agricultural effort in the different areas of the delta described earlier, that population densities per district vary quite markedly as one compares the moribund, mature, and active delta areas, as in Table 1.

While for both 1872 and 1961 the units compared are not exactly the same, and despite the fact there is no completely uniform correlation between delta area and population density, the data in Table I serve at least to indicate a direct relationship between the two. There is a general tendency for the districts in the active delta areas to have increased by close to or more than 3 times the estimates for 1872, while, with the exception of Mymensingh (through part of which passes the Brahmaputra River), the districts in the moribund and less immediate deltaic areas have merely doubled in density. While 1871-1872 marks the first period for which any adequate population statistics are available in the entire Sub-continent, there is reason to suspect that the trends in Table 1 are reflective of a historical demographic process of much greater duration than that of a mere century.

While the precise origins and character of settlement in the Bengal delta are as yet shrouded in mystery (and may well remain so), what little has been gleaned from early history suggests the beginning and later elaboration of civilization in East Bengal as having their locus along the confluence of the great river systems (Morrison 1969). With growth in population size and concommitant social complexity, coupled with the shifting of the great rivers over the last millenium, it has been hypothesized that the eastern and southern parts of Bengal were

TABLE 1

GROWTH OF POPULATION DENSITIES BY DISTRICT AND DELTA AREA

District	Delta Area*	Population Density 1872+	Population Density 1961** (rural) per sq. mile of cult. area.
Chittagong	A; out++	452	3,300
Comilla	A	562	2,040
Dacca	Ma; A	657	1,900
Noakhali	A	511	1,800
Faridpur	Ma; A	658	1,525
Barisal	A	540	1,350
Pabna	A	722	1,320
Mymensingh	M++	377	1,300
Bogra	M++	472	1,250
Rangpur	M++	619	1,185
Khulna	A++	221	1,065
Jessore	Ma	496	940
Rajshahi	M	542	900
Sylhet	out	316	875
Kushtia	Ma	535	860
Dinajpur	M	362	750
Hill Tracts	out++	14	1,300

Total = 17 districts

*A: active delta
Ma: mature delta
M: moribund delta
out: non-deltaic area

** Adapted from Haroun Er Rashid (1968: 356, Table XCVI)

+ Adapted from Nafis Ahmed (1968: 301); these figures represent only overall population densities, presented here for broad comparative purposes only. Read population per sq. mile.

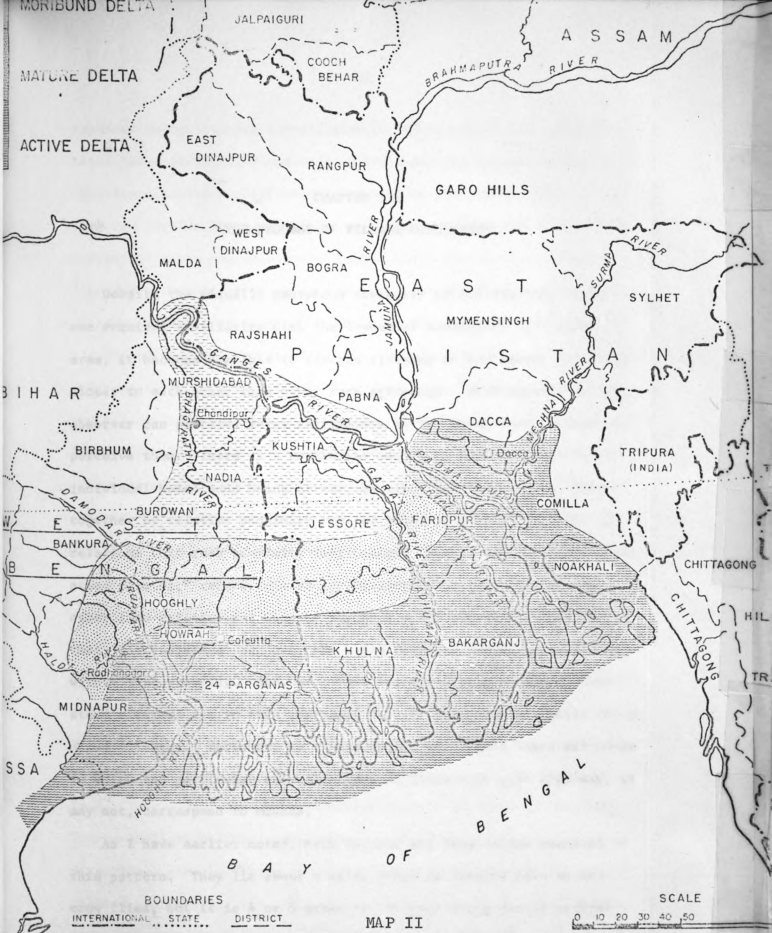
++ The relatively high figures (1961) for Mymensingh, Bogra, and Rangpur Districts, despite their locations in the moribund delta area, may be explained by the fact that all three are prime jute growing areas. Mymensingh and Rangpur have consistently ranked first and second respectively with respect to total area under jute cultivation, Bogra, eighth (Nafis Ahmed 1968: 142, Table XI). The comparatively low density for Khulna in the active delta is explained by the location in that district of the uninhabitable and uncultivable Sunderban forest area; Haroun Er Rashid notes this, further stating that excluding the Sunderbans, the density in this district per cultivated area is *ca.* 2,000. His figure for Chittagong seems inordinately high, but here he has subtracted uncultivable areas. Similarly, the figure for the (Chittagong) Hill Tracts is high for the same reason; usual densities for this largely tribal inhabited district are given as *ca.* 75 per square mile.

gradually populated, first via migration, then by natural increase, as the eastward thrust of the rivers opened up new areas to the possibility of settled cultivation (Nicholas 1962: 16-31). These demographic shifts were apparently not without pattern. As Inden (1967) has suggested, they are at least partly associated with the rise of Hindu chiefdoms whose rulers at first resisted, then were subdued by and finally integrated into, Mughal expansion and rule from the 13th Century onward. Thus, trends evident in demographic estimates given in Table 1 would seem to reflect only the most recent manifestation of a long term historical process. The recent growth, of course, was accelerated to a high degree along with the overwhelming increase in population all over the Sub-continent associated with the "Pax Brittanica."

As is evident in Table 1, Comilla District has one of the highest population densities in the province. It is not surprising that there should be heavy concentrations of people on the western side of the district, bordered as it is by the Meghna River. But while Comilla *Kotwali Thana,* lying some 30 miles away from that great waterway, does not benefit from its annually fresh silt deposits, the *thana* nonetheless has one of the highest rural concentrations of population in the entire district. This fact is eloquent testimony to immense population pressure, the hallmark of human existence in this part of the world. Estimates cited by Webster (1910: 23) show that at the turn of the century the overall population density of the present-day *thana* and its surrounding area was 986 persons per square mile; current calculations yield rural population densities of between 1,500 and 1,700 (or, as suggested in Table 1, over 2,000 if persons per square mile of cultivated area are taken into account).

This extreme density of population, then, is the second key

ecological factor related to village structure in Tinpara and Hajipur. Indeed, much of East Pakistan, not to speak of Comilla District alone, presents a veritable "conruration"[7] with respect to population agglomerates and patterns of settlement. The coined term is rather appropriate when one considers the combined effect of population and settlement patterns. Outside of Comilla town and off the few paved roads which cut through the countryside one is still never far from people and the physical manifestations of their presence. There is acre upon acre of rice land, dotted profusely with tree clusters, each betraying the presence of a homestead. Indeed, trees are the only visual relief on the otherwise featureless plain, save for an occasional mosque, the conical silhouette of a Hindu cremation ground shrine, or seemingly misplaced electric power pylons. The numerous trees perhaps account for the many place names in Comilla *thana* having the suffix "*toli*", as for example in villages named Shawaratoli ("at the foot of the *shawara* tree"), Gabtoli ("at the foot of the custard apple tree"), Beltoli ("at the foot of the wood apple tree"), or Amtoli ("at the foot of the mango tree"). Here, as elsewhere in Bengal, place names eloquently bespeak the ecology of a given religion.[8] Merely to describe this landscape, however, would be to belie the ubiquitous presence of people. To travel down a village road is to enounter a never-ending chain of homesteads, between groups and clusters of which there seems to be no distinguishable boundary, their inhabitants ever-present, in or near their homes, or at work in the seed-beds and fields, especially during the monsoons.



MAP II

BENGAL

WEST BENGAL and EAST PAKISTAN

Courtesy of
R.W. Nicholas

Map illustrating principal ecological zones

CHAPTER III

THE PROCESS OF VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

Despite the visually amorphous character of the countryside, as one acquires familiarity with the layout of homesteads in a small area, it becomes possible to discern clusters of homesteads which are closer to each other than other such groupings. With experience, the observer can perceive rural settlements as the inhabitants themselves perceive them. There is a continuous series of homestead clusters, individual homesteads being of varying sizes and composition, joined together by relative proximity and the relative density of social relations that such proximity facilitates. What I call here the "homestead cluster," refers to a socio-territorial unit separated from other like entities not only by physical space but also by the fact that, for individual members, the prime focus of social relations is within that grouping. And, as I have briefly mentioned above, homestead clusters are in turn the basis for the formation of social recognized villages. Moreover, as I have suggested, the villages and *paras* to which the particular constellations of homesteads give rise may, or may not, correspond to *mauzas*.

As I have earlier noted, both Hajipur and Tinpara are examples of this pattern. They lie about 3 miles south of Comilla town as the crow flies, but it is 4 or 5 miles to the town along one of several choices of unpaved (*kacha*) village roads which eventually branch into a major paved (*pukka*) thoroughfare. The villages form part of Islampur Union, along whose northern border there stretches another road which

inclines imperceptibly westward from the town, toward the Lalmai Hills. These (so-called) hills are in fact the remnants of a dissected, lateritic old alluvial deposit which reaches elevations of 70 feet above mean sea level. These red hillocks seem a veritable Himalaya rising sharply from the gently undulating plain, but the gradual incline leading toward them is unobtrusively measured by the effort with which a rickshaw puller labors his vehicle in their direction (see Map 1).

The westernmost end of the village area encompassing both Hajipur and Tinpara is marked by the rise of the Lalmai Hills. From the southern end of this village grouping the beginnings of the hills are clearly visible. Since the gradual incline of the plain toward them is not immediately perceived, the low land's rice fields appear in rude and abrupt contrast to the hills. Naturally, these fields are continually subject to flooding from the drainage of which they bear the brunt, a sad spectacle I witnessed twice during my stay in the area. There is settlement in and around the hills, but where the unevenness of the plain results in depressions several acres in breadth, only rice fields abound. Where roads and paths, of necessity constantly banked, weave their way through the paddy-embellished fields, or where the natural lay of the land permits, homesteads have been constructed, arranged often in line fashion, bounded by low-lying rice land. This marshy area is the "hinterland" of Alirbazar, through which "central place" village roads pass in both north-south and east-west directions, along which two "line villages" adjacent to the bazar are located. Otherwise, the low lands susceptible to flood allow no settlement nor are they favored as cultivation lands for the same reason.

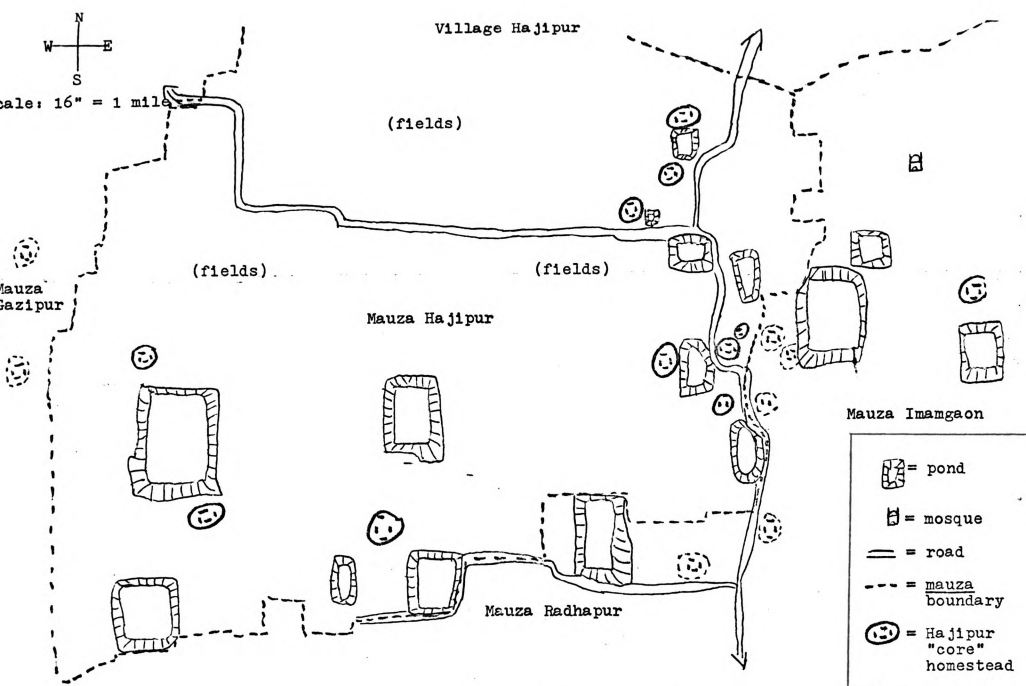
But the area to the north and west of the bazar toward the Lalmai Hills is measurably higher. On these lands settlement is perceptibly

more scattered and haphazard. Homesteads here do not present themselves in the relatively ordered "line" fashion and there seems to be little patterning in their spatial distribution. The land around them is more valuable, because of its relative height, which makes it amenable to settlement and less vulnerable to flooding when cultivated.

On this favored ground Villages Hajipur and Tinpara are located, their homesteads dispersed in settlement pattern, thus contrasting with the "line" villages to the south of the bazar. Hajipur and Tinpara, as socially defined, lie in 4 different *mauzas*; the total area of both villages, however, amounts to less than half a square mile. It would seem surprising that in so small an area two distinct villages could exist as internally distinct social entities, but this is the case according to the local definition that has emerged from patterns of social interaction.

The *mauza* which, with its 10 homesteads, constitutes the core of Village (*gram*) Hajipur is 112.52 acres, or a little less than a fifth of a square mile, in area. 3 of these homesteads are bunched close together in the *mauza's* northern *para*, 4 others knotted around the road some distance to the south of them. Another homestead is located in a spot further removed from those mentioned and the last 2 are situated in the southwest end of the *mauza*, facing each other across a large tank (see Map 3). Thus, the core of Village Hajipur consists of 2 definable homestead clusters and 3 more isolated individual homesteads.

But the social reality of Hajipur is not constrained by the *mauza* boundaries which otherwise confine these 10 homesteads to a particular administrative unit. For the interaction patterns which reflect Hajipur's status as a *gram* extend to 8 other homesteads lying in 3



Sketch map, showing current homesteads, adapted from official mauza map provided courtesy Dt. Collectorate, Comilla. Source: Settlement Survey 1899

mauzas contiguous to that of Hajipur. To the east lies Mauza Imamgaon, 5 of whose homesteads in its northern *para* are linked to Hajipur villagers in daily patterns of interaction and regularized collective activities. Directly south of Hajipur lies Mauza Radhapur, one of whose homesteads is similarly oriented to Hajipur, as are 2 homesteads in eastward-lying Mauza Gazipur.

Thus the boundaries of Hajipur as a village (*gram*) are difficult to identify with any sense of permanence. The various members of the total complex I have described are bound up with Hajipur in differing ways, although the "core" of the village as a social unit seems to consist of the 10 homesteads lying within the *mauza* itself. The average distance between these 10 homesteads is about 350 yards, although the distance between the 2 homesteads furthest apart, from one end of the *mauza* to the other, is nearly double that distance. If one adds to this "core" of homesteads those of the contiguous *mauzas*, the overall average distance between homesteads in Hajipur as a *gram* is lowered to about 330 yards, but the distance between the 2 homesteads furthest apart is over 900 yards. Nonetheless, one of the factors which appears to contribute to the social unity of these dispersed individual units is the fact that each of them is either within Hajipur *mauza* or located more closely to Mauza Hajipur's homesteads than to any other such cluster. To the north and northeast Mauzas Hajipur and Imamgaon are bounded by a canal (*khal*) which separates them from another mauza. The homesteads in Mauza Imamgaon's eastern *para* are closer to those of Hajipur than to those in Imamgaon's own southern *para* and there are many acres between the settled part of Mauza Hajipur and the *mauzas* on its west. The lone homestead in Mauza Radhapur's northern end is nearer to Hajipur's homesteads than any other in

Radhapur.

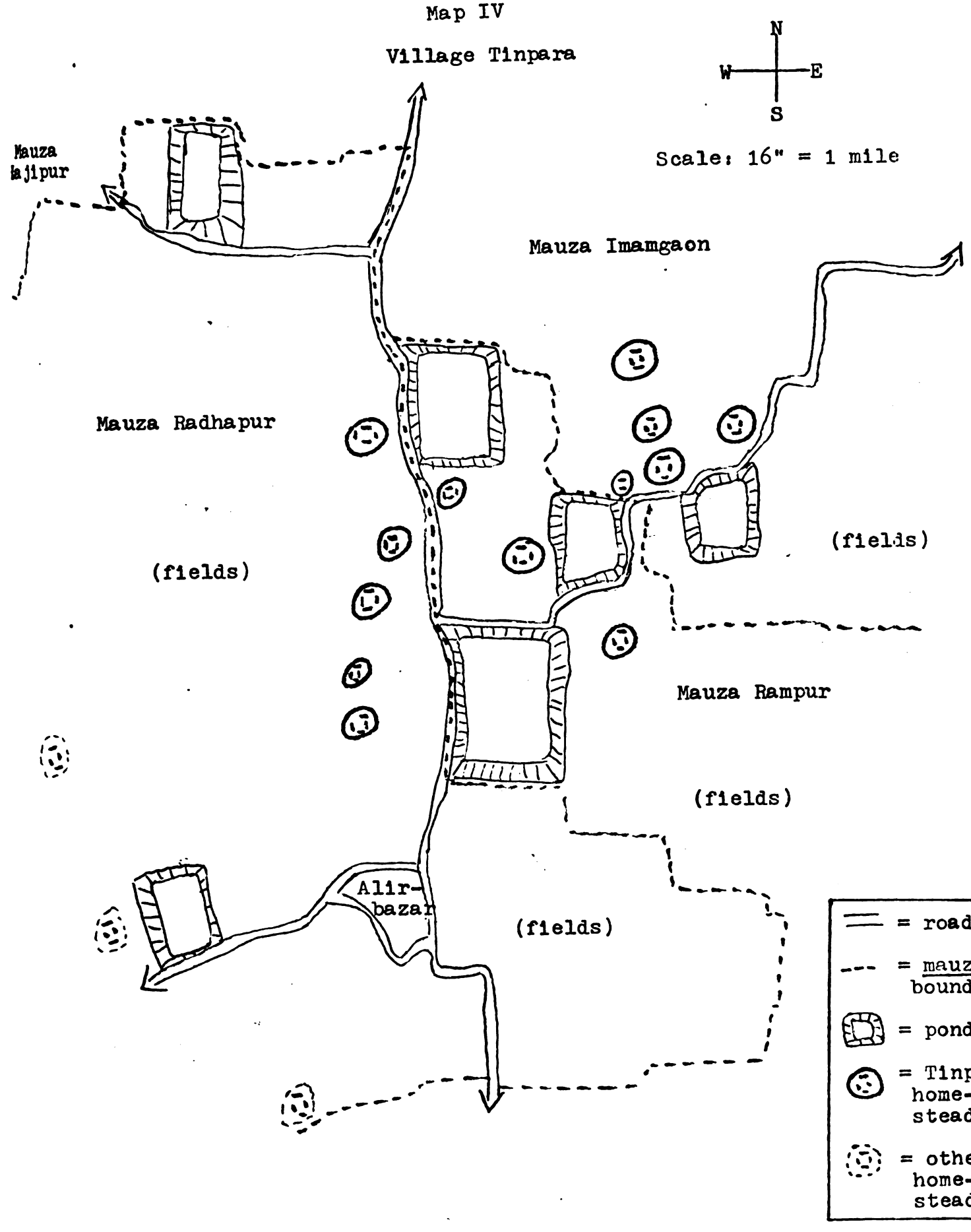
To the 322 people of Mauza Hajipur the other homesteads add a further 150 members. Most of these families are Muslim, but 3 Hindu families are also present. One of these is a family of *jugi* weavers, who give their surname as *Debonath*, by which title they also prefer to be called as a caste.[9] Another is a family of "*jugi* Brahmans" whose members claim to have served the weavers as priests, although none do so now. The third family is one of *napits* (barbers), which caste is usually refered to in Comilla by the surname, *sil*.

To the south of Hajipur, and lying in *mauzas* continguous to it, are Tinpara's 13 homesteads among which similar kinds of unity obtain, but with interesting and important differences (see Map 4). Five of these homesteads are situated along a road which forms the eastern border of Mauza Radhapur. Three of them lie on the other side of that road in a small *mauza* named Rampur. The remaining 4 are in the southern *para* of Mauza Imamgaon. The total population is 245; 2 of these families are Hindu, representing the *dhopa* (washerman) and *chutar* (or *sutradar*; carpenter) castes. To the north of this complex is a solitary homestead of *Jugi* weavers (or *debonath*), a family which seems to participate little in the activities of either Hajipur or Tinpara.

The 11 Muslim homesteads are formally united as a *reyai* grouping, with 2 *sardari* lineages. But in this case, as noted above, the members of this *reyai* grouping refer to themselves as a village (*gram*) as well, and to the extent that the two Hindu families participate in certain collective activities they are included in the "village," although not all of them participate in the same measure. The carpenter family seems most highly integrated into all, save religious, activities of their Muslim neighbors, but the lower caste washerman family, relatively

Map IV

Village Tinpara



Sketch map, showing current homesteads, adapted from official mauza map provided courtesy of Dt. Collectorate, Comilla.
Source: Settlement Survey 1899

impoverished, seemed to be socially more isolated. Thus, certain *paras* of 2 *mauzas* combine with the homesteads in a third small one to make up a discrete socially recognized *gram*, bounded at this level of organization by the definition of the villagers themselves. The mean distance between homesteads constituting Tinpara is about 170 yards, reflecting a much more closely knit spatial arrangement than that of Hajipur. Tinpara is to some extent geographically distinct from Hajipur and even more so from other village complexes (the row of homesteads comprising Tinpara's westerly flank are 300 to 400 yards removed from it). Thus locational factors contribute to the social solidarity felt by Tinpara villagers; by contrast Hajipur is so much more dispersed locationally that a similar sense of village solidarity seems more difficult to achieve. A further factor which perhaps influences communication in in Tinpara is that of the road along which most of its homesteads are situated; in Hajipur the westernmost homesteads are well removed from the main clusters along the road, these homesteads also not easily reached via the paddy field embankments, especially during wet weather (see maps).

I have emphasized here the locational factor in village definition, although, as I shall point out, other elements combine with it to give a certain solidarity to these little communities. But the importance of location in influencing the social groups with which individual members of these communities primarily interact is reflected in 2 ways. Firstly, it may be seen in the sets of neighbors the members of an individual homestead most easily choose in forming groups. Secondly, the "principle" of geographic location I have said is operative here may be illustrated by the problems of "finding a group in which to belong" experienced by members of homesteads whose location is ambiguous *vis à vis*

2 or more sets of neighbors who are more felicitously clustered into a "natural" unit. An example of the second instance demonstrates "the exception which proves the rule."

Example 1

Cultivator Ahab Ali lives in a homestead located in Mauza Radhapur, lying about 110 yards from the nearest neighbor, his cousin, Shah Alam. To the north lies the next nearest homestead, in Mauza Reshompur, about 165 yards away. Ahab Ali *Bari* is surrounded by his seed beds and rice fields, further hidden by a thick undergrowth of uncultivated woods and bush.

Ahab Ali and Shah Alam are collaterals, in that Ahab Ali's grandmother and Shah Alam's grandfather were brother and sister. Ahab Ali's grandmother married and went to live virilocally, as is the post-marital residence rule. When her husband died she returned to her natal homestead, bringing her son, Ahab Ali's father. The woman had surrendered her claims to the inheritance of land to her brothers at the time of marriage and thus her children were not entitled to inherit from their matrilateral kinsmen. Despite this disadvantageous situation, the woman and later her son managed to purchase some land, to which her grandson, Ahab Ali, ultimately moved to live neolocally.

Shah Alam *Bari* is one of 5 homesteads which comprise a *reyai* which lies to the south of Tinpara in several other *mauzas*. As noted, *Mauza* and Village Reshompur lie to the north of Ahab Ali *Bari*, the latter sufficiently distant from both groupings to enable Ahab Ali to choose between the two as the focus of his family's basic group affiliation.

Ahab Ali, in fact, belonged first to one, then to the other of these 2 groups. When he originally moved to his current homestead location, he appears to have vacillated, initially belonging to the *reyai* of his kinsmen, those of Shah Alam Bari, then switching his allegiance to the Reshompur *reyai*. Around 1960 he aligned himself with the Reshompur people, remaining in their fold for 4 years.

in 1965, Ahab Ali's eldest daughter was married; her wedding was an event which put the father into an embarrasing situation. Ahab Ali wanted to invite both his kinsmen and his *reyai* peers to the wedding, but the custom at weddings is to invite only the members of one's own *reyai*. When his intention to do both became clear, Ahab Ali incurred the anger of Master Saheb, the *sardar* of the Reshompur *reyai*, who confronted Ahab Ali with the fact of his deviance from custom in inviting both groups. Master Saheb made it clear that he would not allow his own and his *reyai's* "honor"

> (*izzat*) to be impugned in this manner and thus he formally expelled Ahab Ali from the Reshompur group. In effect, Ahab Ali was told to go and join with his kinsmen once and for all. The principle of exclusivity in *reyai* membership seems reflected in the Master Saheb's words: "*dhanno dike ýete pāre nā*" (no man can go in both directions at the same time).

This example illustrates the way in which homestead location influences *reyai* and village membership, although in any given situation involves other complexities. In Example 1, Ahab Ali is torn between his kinship connections and those with non-kinsmen in another *reyai* grouping (matrilateral kin ties take on a great importance in this otherwise ideologically patrilineal society, in ways I shall specify below). His problem seems to have been brought about precisely by the ambiguous location of his lonely homestead, nearly equidistant from two clustered groupings. Surely, had his home been located nearer to that of his relatives, the path of least resisitance would have been to join their *reyai* grouping. Homestead propinquity and the resulting social cohesion in *reyai* and village groupings also influences membership in voluntary associations. In both Tinpara and Hajipur, where cooperative societies had been formed prior to my arrival and functioned as going concerns, membership in the cooperatives of each village correlated with village membership *per se*. Yet in the initial stages of cooperative formation, men from other villages had joined either that of Hajipur or of Tinpara. In all such instances I learned of, the non-villager members of these societies eventually left and were instrumental in forming cooperatives in their own bailiwicks. Tinpara and Hajipur villagers, in relating these instances to me, indicated that the men concerned "felt more at home" with their own neighbors, in that interaction between the members of one village and those of another in group activities is normally minimal. It is thus not surprising that the outsiders in these instances

would prefer engaging in such an innovative practice as the formation of an agricultural cooperative with members of more "traditional" social groupings.[10]

Thus, relative proximity of settlement, the result of ecosystem processes that originate in the extra-human environment as well as in social relations, is one of the "intervening steps" in the process of social organization. By creating the basis for group interaction, it supports the development of extra-kinship ties by facilitating group interaction. The formal expression of that interaction is seen in the development of *reyai*, village, and *samaj* organizations.

The Process of Settlement

Earlier I discussed the great increase in population in the Comilla area over the past 150 years. While it appears that the early populating of the active delta of Bengal was mainly the result of migration, the population growth over the past decades has been in large part due to natural increase. Webster (1910: 22-25) reported that population growth between 1872 and 1901 proceeded practically independent of immigration, noting that in 1901 less than 57,000 people were born outside the district, about 3 percent of the total, while the total population growth between 1891 and 1901 was 18.8 percent. There was, according to Webster, a certain amount of temporary migration, both from the northern and southern bordering districts (Sylhet and Noakhali respectively) and from Hill Tippera (the present day Indian Union Territory of Tripura State), to the east.

But while, for Comilla District as a whole, migration appears to have had a minimal effect on the population growth in recent years, this is perhaps less so for the eastern-most *thanas*, such as that of Comilla

town and environs. Webster cited the greatest increase in population at the turn of the century in the western-most *thanas* which lie along or near the Meghna River and thus directly in the active delta area. But the eastern *thanas* are on the fringe of the active delta area, where the soil does not receive annual replentishment from silt deposits. Thus, the fact that these eastern *thanas* have also increased in population, and in some cases, such as that of Comilla *Kotwali Thana* today, have higher population densities than do other more westerly *thanas*, suggests that while absolute increase was in the long run greater to the west, where population appears simply to have grown beyond bounds, people migrated eastward, filling up the presumably less fertile areas of Comilla District near the border of what is now Tripura State.

It is further relevant to note the varying circumstances under which individual families have moved over the 150 year period in question. A discussion of the qualitative aspects of settlement and migration should throw light on the recent historical background of present-day social life in rural Comilla *thana*.

Much of what now constitutes Comilla *Kotwali Thana* was, prior to the Partition of India, part of a large *zamindari* estate, over which the *Rajas* of Tripura had the rights of revenue collection. This *zamindari*, known as the Chakla Roshnabad Estate, was an 80-mile stretch of territory on the plains of Bengal from Sylhet to Noakhali, much of it running within only several miles of the current India-Pakistan border. The estate was the only part of the plains left to the *Rajas* after 1732, a date marking the end of a long see-saw for power in southeastern Bengal between successive Tippera Hindu rules and the ever-expanding Muslim power to the southeast. After the British acceded to power in Bengal in 1765, the *Rajas* were allowed to retain internal ruling perogatives in

their hilly state (known as Hill Tippera District until 1947, thereafter Tripura State). They also continued to hold the rights of revenue collection stemming from the pre-1765 arrangement with the Mughals.

The Chakla Roshnabad Estate was a large *zamindari* and, (given conditions of transport and communication), impossible to manage directly. Under the *Rajas* a fairly elaborate system of revenue collection and administration was set up, directed from their capital in Agartala, but with several subsidiary headquarters of which Comilla Town was one. The Central Division of the estate, in which Comilla *Kotwali Thana* was located, required the employment of some 650 people at various administrative levels in recent years, according to an account given me by a former tax collector. The estate was divided into units consistent with the subdivisions established by the British. For the former Comilla Sadar Subdivision, there was an Assistant Manager and a Deputy Manager. That subdivision was further divided into 12 taxable areas, each administered by a tax collection office (*tahsil kachari*) in the charge of an official known as a *Naib*. Under each of the offices was grouped a number of revenue *mauzas*, each of which was the administrative domain of a *tahsildar* or tax collector. Under control of the *Naibs* were various petty officials: the *gomasthas* whose duties entailed the direct collection of revenue from the larger tenants; the *jomadars* whose task it was to police the more recalcitrant tenants.

In the 19th Century the estate managers seemed to be faced with two basic problems of administration. The first was that of bringing as much land as possible under cultivation for the realization of rent. The second and related problem was how most efficiently to administer tax collection at the local level.

The first problem contained in part the seeds of its own solution, in that with population growth, more lands were brought into cultivation as a matter of course. The problem of efficient revenue collection was attacked by granting the status of *tahsildar* to local villagers who were given the responsibility for collection in one, several, or only parts of, *mauzas*. In some cases, apparently, cultivators were enticed into the Chakla Roshnabad area with the promise of such a position. These men, moreover, were often the first cultivators to inhabit previously unsettled *mauzas*, gaining the rights to collect taxes from others who came later. Another way in which local people participated in the *zamindari* system in this part of Bengal was through the institution of the *Ijara*. Under the *Ijara* system, the *Raj* farmed out on temporary lease whole blocks of villages to men who could realize revenue from them. In later years, when the banks in Comilla town lent large sums of money to the *Rajas* against the collateral of land rights, the banks in turn would lease out blocks of villages, sometimes indefinitely, to those capable of collecting from them, be they town or village dwellers (Qadir 1960: 32-33). It appears to have been common to grant the status of *tahsildar* or *ijaradar* to newcomers, even from central and northern India (Qadir 1960: 33 provides an example of this and I knew of several families outside my study area whose members claimed such an origin). Thus, the tax collection system which relied on a wide network of local officials seems to have set the basis for economic power and political leadership at the local level - a point to which I shall return. At this juncture I shall simply point out that 4 of the 7 *sardari* lineages with whose background I am familiar claim to have participated in the estate administration at some point either as *tahsildars* or *ijaradars*.

It is possible to postulate 3 stages of settlement in Comilla *Kotwali Thana* as Qadir (1960: 46-50) has done. Prior to 1870 there was a period of immigration, often not from great distances. From the 1870's onward there seems to have been a period on consolidation and growth of local families, with established lineages growing to maximum supportable size and then splitting off into lineage segments which re-settled elsewhere. Finally, in recent years, phenomenal land pressure appears to have stimulated settlement of previously undesirable areas or emigration to such areas elsewhere.

On the basis of interviews at the time of collecting genealogical data, I am able to account for the backgrounds of 15 out of 37 homestead-based patrilineages or 40.5 percent of my sample. I hasten to add that the remaining informants were unable to state when their forefathers came into the Comilla *thana* area - a "lapse of memory" characteristic of peoples with shallow lineage systems - although this does not necessarily mean that such "forgetful" villagers' families antedate those for which I was able to obtain data. I present a summary of the obtainable data in tabular form below.

Only two of the 15 lineages for which I have data show an inability to state either exactly or approximately when they moved into the area studied, although they are aware of relatively recent origins in the area. The respondents for 6 lineages could not identify from where their forefather came, although they could recall the approximate time period. It is not surprising that inability to identify place of origin increases proportionately with length of time in the current place of residence. Significantly, however, of the 9 lineages whose respondents could identify their place of origin, 8 indicated places within the *thana*, an area of 107 square miles, 6 of these within the same

TABLE 2

ORIGINS OF FAMILIES PRIOR TO CURRENT PLACE OF SETTLEMENT*

Years Before 1966-67	Same Mauza	Contiguous Mauza	Same Union	Same Thana	Another Thana	Unknown
25-50	2	-	-	1	-	1
50-100	-	1	1	1	1	2
100-150	-	-	-	-	-	3
unknown	2	-	-	-	-	-

Total = 15 homesteads

*Not all these data refer to families in Hajipur and Tinpara alone, for I have data from surrounding villages as well. I report these because my aim is to show a process of settlement for the whole area.

union, currently about 18 square miles in area, and of the latter, 5 claim to have moved from within an area of less than 1 square mile.

These facts suggest some things about the process of village formation and the relations between villages. Firstly, there appears to have been a fair amount of shifting of residence over very short distances over the past 100 years or so, a fact to which we also have the testimony of such records as the district gazetteers. Secondly, most lineages originated near the *mauzas* and villages where they are now located and the gradual splitting off of lineage segments has been part of the process. Where the latter process has occurred, however, kinship ties between villages of origin and villages of settlement have been maintained, thereby adding to the social solidarity of a total area much wider than the individual villages to or from which people have moved. To show this process more clearly, I relate several examples of it below.

Example 2

The Majumdars of *Mauza* Radhapur come originally from Sarail, an area in the northern part of Comilla District which has been shifted back and forth administratively between Sylhet and Comilla Districts. When they were in Sarail the members of this family bore the title *Kazi*, reflecting a post in the Mughal and post-Mughal judicial system. Some 100 years ago, members of this lineage were given the rights to collect taxes in Comilla *thana* and they moved to *Mauza* Amtoli, which adjoins Radhapur. For their position they obtained the title of Majumdar by the *Rajas* of Tripura and retain that title today, one of the few lineages to do so "legitimately" in the eyes of their fellow villagers.

The Majumdars were able to amass a large amount of land, including that which later became the location of Alirbazar. They later moved on to some of that land in *Mauza* Kawlatoli, also adjacent to Radhapur and later part of the lineage split off into a separate homestead in the southern *para* of *Mauza* Radhapur, although not part of Village Tinpara. The Majumdars retain some of the Alirbazar land today, renting the plots for various shops to other villagers. They are regarded as one of the most influential families in the area, their members having been elected time and again to public office at the local level, at least until very recently. This lineage is a *sardari* lineage as well.

Example 3

Seventy-five to 100 years ago the family of Gazi Mia were *Ijaradars* in a *mauza* in Chotobagh Union several miles to the east of Islampur Union, for which service the present-day descendants of Gazi Mia claim to have been given the title of Majumdar. Gazi Mia inherited the title and the rights of *Ijaradar*, with his brothers. He died, however, at the age of 30, of snake bite.

Now Gazi Mia had married a woman of *Mauza* Kawlatoli in Islampur Union (near Hajipur and Tinpara). Upon the death of her husband, the woman returned to her natal homestead in Kawlatoli taking with her her son, Amir Ali. When Amir Ali came came of age he was given no inheritance, for his mother had not exercised her rights in that regard when she had married out and was never given land by her brothers when she moved back to live with her brothers in Kawlapur. Amir Ali was fortunate, however, in that his uncles on both sides of his family aided him in getting a small plot of land in *Mauza* Radhapur, just to the north of his matrilateral relatives' homestead, in that part of Radhapur which is part of the socially recognized village I have called Tinpara.

The current members of that homestead are descendents of Amir Ali, through his son, Abul Hossain and the homestead bears his name (Abul Hossain *Bari*) to this day. The title *majumdar* no longer is claimed by them and they take this as a symbol of the fact that though their family has come through hard times, they no longer have the position Gazi Mia once had.

Example 4

Mauza Rampur, a revenue unit of only 30-odd acres of land, contiguous with *Mauza* Imamgaon on the latter's southern end, was once joined with it for purposes of revenue unit enumeration. The current *Mauza* Rampur is the locus of 3 homesteads, one of which is that of the dominant *sardari* lineage of Village Tinpara, the master of which is Pradhan Ali, Sardar.

Pradhan Ali's great-grandfather, Gani Mia, was the first to settle in Mauza Rampur and he succeeded in gaining the rights to revenue collection in the area, particularly in Imamgaon which was at that time uninhabited. Pradhan Ali is the sole surviving patrilineal descendent of Gani Mia. His father's sister, Amina Khatun, was married out to *Mauza* Kawlatoli (see Example 1), but when her husband died she returned to Rampur with her children. The two sons of Amina Khatun were given land by their uncle, Pradhan Ali's father, and live in a separate section (*bhadra*; see below for explanation) of Pradhan Ali's homestead.

Pradhan Ali's grandfather had only one other son, who died unmarried. The bulk of the inheritance left by his grandfather went to Pradhan Ali. By contrast, Pradhan Ali's great-uncle, Ahmen Ali, had 4 sons, among whom his property had to be divided and later subdivided among their surviving sons and daughters. This branch of the lineage as a result owns less land. A generation ago, the descendants of Ahmed Ali split off from Pradhan Ali's homestead, forming another nearby; they still recognize their patrilineal connection (see Kinship Diagram 1). This homestead was the second one to be established in Rampur. The third is that of a recent arrival, Chanu Mia, a specialist in the curing of cattle illnesses, whose settlement was facilitated by Pradhan Ali, despite the fact that there is no kinship connection between the two.

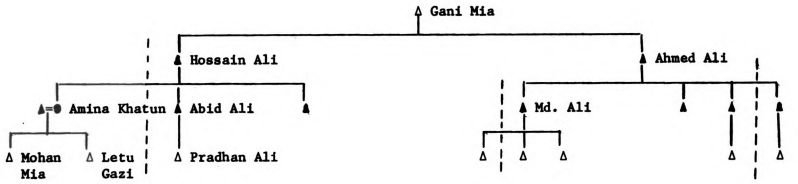
Pradham Ali similarly aided the settlement of another homestead, also a part of Village Tinpara, that of Fazlur Rahman in the southern *para* of *Mauza* Imamgaon, whose descendants initially lived there at the sufferance of the first settlers. In later times Pradhan Ali was still able to influence who would be taken into that homestead. Despite several marriages, Pradhan Ali has no son, a fact which obviously concerned him at the time of my research. Some years earlier, he learned of a twice-divorced woman whose origins were outside the *thana* and who was left homeless by her second divorce. The woman had an infant son. Pradhan Ali was able to arrange the lodging of that woman in the homestead of Fazlur Rahman, on the condition that she aid his (Pradhan Ali's) wife in household tasks. When her infant son grew old enough to work he was taken into the homestead of Pradhan Ali as a laborer, in the place of the son that Pradhan Ali never had (although the boy was never formally adopted). The young fellow remains in that status in Pradhan Ali's homestead, earning Rs. 225 a year plus room and board.

Example 5

Bela Mia *Bari* is located on the western border of *Mauza* Radhapur. It is not part of Village Tinpara, but rather its inhabitants are united in a *reyai* grouping whose "core" homesteads are in *Mauza* Reshompur, to which Bela Mia *Bari* is closer than any others.

A generation ago, Dona Mia, one of 4 brothers, married a girl connected to *Munshi* (clerk) *Bari* in *Mauza* Hajipur (the *Munshis* do

KINSHIP DIAGRAM 1



Patrilineal Connections between Two Homesteads
in *Mauza* Rampur, part of Village Tinpara

▲ ● = deceased

= homestead division (*bhadra*)

not claim her as a kinswoman, although Dona Mia's descendants insist that she was). Be that as it may, Dona Mia moved out of his natal homestead, lived with his wife in Hajipur's *Munshi Bari* for a while, then moved to a houseplot within 25 years of the *Munshi Bari*. His descendants continue to live there. Dona Mia's son became proficient as a native curer (*kobiraj*) and the homestead is now commonly referred to as *Kobiraj Bari*. *Kobiraj* and *Munshi Baris*, plus one other located nearby, lie in Hajipur's northern *para*, forming one of Hajipur's 3 *reyais*, the *sardar* of which is a member of *Munshi Bari*.

Dona Mia's sister, Khatuni Bibi, married Alim Mia, of *Mauza* Hajipur, who then lived in a homestead in the western end of Hajipur. Dona Mia's and Khatuni Bibi's brother, Kasim Mia, who remained in the Radhapur homestead, had no sons by either of two marriages. He persuaded his sister to allow him to adopt her second son, Afaz Mia (the practice of "giving" youngest sons to male heirless kinsmen occasionally occurs, for which occurence I have other examples). Afaz Mia is not the senior member of Bela Mia *Bari*, in *Mauza* Radhapur, part of Village (*gram*) Reshompur. Alim Mia of Hajipur lost his land after the adoption of Afaz Mia. His first son, Sayadur Rahman (Afaz Mia's elder brother), was forced to shift to a smaller homestead plot in Hajipur. He was clearly one of Hajipur's most impoverished villagers at the time of my research.

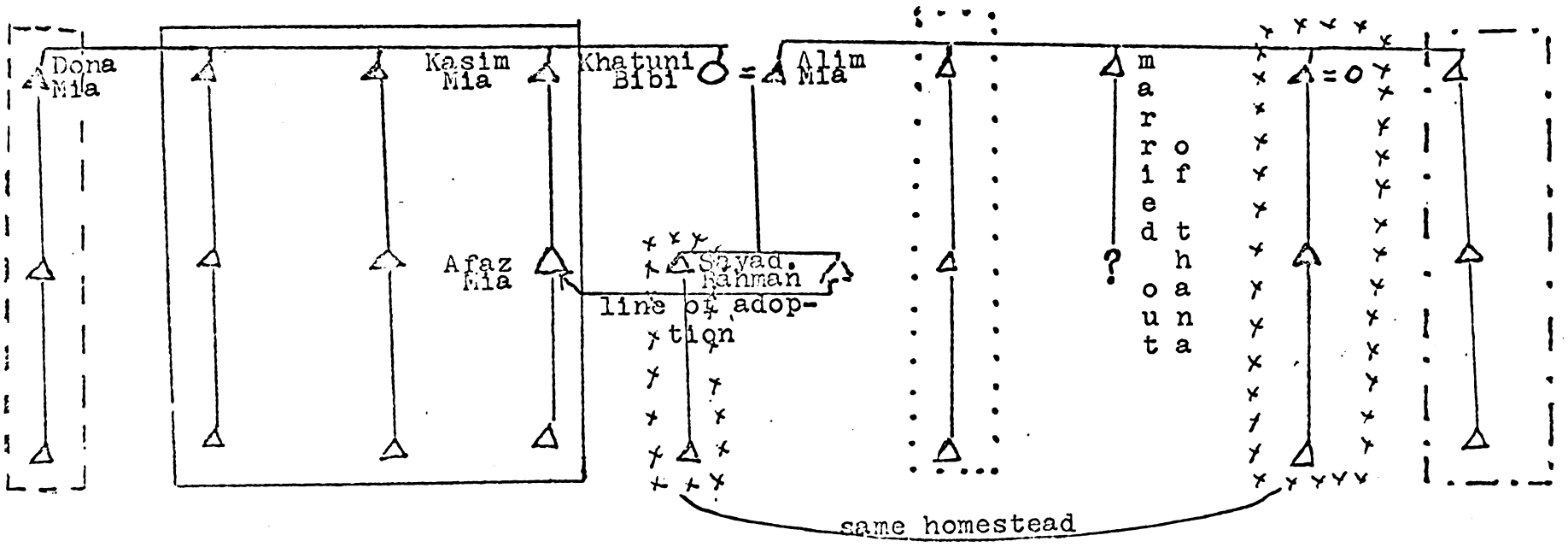
Three of Alim Mia's 4 brothers married and went to live "in their (respective) fathers-in-law's houses" (see below for a more detailed discussion of "uxorilocal residence" as it is defined in Bengal). One brother married into Hajipur's Majumdar *Bari;* another married into and became the head of the current members of a homestead in *Mauza* (and Village) Reshompur, the third leaving altogether.

Thus, through a process of fission, involving marriages, changes of residence after marriage, and the adoption of children 5 homesteads in 3 *mauzas* and 2 *grams* are linked in a web of kinship. This process has contributed to the settlement of the villages under study, with both agnatic and affinal kinsmen distributed throughout several *mauzas* and *grams*. (See Kinship Diagram 2).

Example 6

Jiban Ali *Bari* in *Mauza* Reshompur contains descendants of a man who moved into the area from another part of Islampur Union 3 generations ago. The current members of the homestead comprise the families of 2 groups of brothers descended from Jiban Ali. The total land owned by these 5 men is very small, even by local standards (less than 4 acres total, whereas the average for Hajipur and Tinpara is about 1.5 acres per farm). They subsist largely by day labor and, when possible, they lease land from the major *sardari* family in Reshompur. Their wives occasionally work at polishing rice in the 2 more prosperous homesteads in Reshompur, an arduous task for which they receive a minimal payment in kind.

Kinship Diagram 2



— — — Kobiraj Bari, Hajipur

——— Bela Mia Bari, Reshompur

×××× Sayadur Rahman Bari, Hajipur

····· Pagali Bari, Reshompur

—·—·— Majumdar Bari, Hajipur

△ ○ deceased

The Dispersal of Lineage Segments
into Two Villages

Several years ago, one of these men, Hakim Mia, learned of the possibility of obtaining land in Ramghar, a foothill area in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, about 60 miles by road away from Comilla town. The Government of Pakistan is encouraging immigration into this thinly populated hill area, granting plots of land on favorable terms. Hakim Ali sold a little over 1 acre of his land in the Reshompur area, using the money received to buy clearing rights to 3 times as much land in Ramghar. At the time of my research Hakim Ali was "commuting" back and forth from Comilla to Ramghar, staying there for a week or 10 days at a time, supervising the laborers whom he had hired locally to clear the land. He was planning to move his entire family there not long after the point at which I left the area.

His cousin, Dudu Mia, became interested in the prospects of obtaining land in Ramghar and during my stay in Hajipur and Tinpara he had begun the same process of selling his land in Reshompur and taking land in Ramghar. During the entire period of my stay in the area, talk of the new land developments in Ramghar was common among villagers and while I knew of no others besides Hakim Ali and Dudu Mia who had actually taken steps to move, the possibility of doing so was on the minds of many villagers with whom I had casual contact.

Example 7

Taz Mia lives in Mauza Shonapur, his homestead situated on the flanks of the Lalmai Hills to the west of Hajipur and Tinpara. Taz Mia lives with his married son and grandchildren, in a small homestead he constructed some 25 years ago when he moved up into the hills from a *mauza* just south of Tinpara. The Lalmai Hills are not preferred as either a dwelling place or a cultivation area, but Taz Mia gave as one of the reasons for his move the fact of land pressure in the lower lying lands. Over the years he and his son have managed to subsist relatively well. They have amassed some 21 *kanis*, or 8.4 acres, of land, all of it sloping and uneven. They cultivate rice on the less steeply inclined of their plots, but also grow arum plants in the sandier soils, as well as roof thatch, which is a good commerical investment. They face the continual problem of erosion of their fields, which they have partially solved by surrounding their rice plots with trenches some 4-5 feet deep in places. Similarly, they have had to dig trenches around the homestead plot itself, and the inner courtyard must be continuously drained as well. Taz Mia joked about his formerly solitary existence in the hills, claiming that the preceding 10 years had brought him neighbors (although none were in sight of his homestead) from the lower lying villages who also had faced the problem of scarcity of land.

These examples illustrate the stages of settlement to which I have referred. Examples 2 and 3 are reflective of the first stage of settlement which occurred in the 19th Century. The Majumdars of Radhapur came into the Comilla *thana* area as tax collectors and, gaining local prominence in that

position, have been able to maintain it over successive generations. By contrast, the descendants of Gazi Mia represent the decline and dismemberment of a formerly prosperous family, the branches of which were relocated in Village Tinpara; only in this generation have they begun to re-establish themselves as a locally respected family. Example 4 is similar, reflecting the way in which a previously unsettled, but taxable, piece of land was inhabited and how, by the process of fission, new homesteads are created. In Example 4 the transition from the first to the second stage, that of building up of settlement from the branching off of lineage segments. This stage is shown in more detail by Example 5, which traces the interconnections of kinship between a number of homesteads located in continguous *mauzas* and villages. In this instance, the process of fission and relocation of older, more established, but overcrowded, lineages is seen, as sons marry out or voluntarily establish themselves in neo-local situations. Examples 6 and 7 represent the third, contemporary stage, a continuation of this time-worn process. Here the plight of the land-poor and landless lineage segments of individual homesteads is brought out in bold relief, with the alternative of relocating to hilly and less desirable areas, often at relatively great distances.[11]

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC ADAPTATIONS TO THE DELTAIC ENVIRONMENT

I have dealt at some length with the impact of population increase and density on the pattern of rural settlement in Villages Hajipur and Tinpara and their neighbors. In this chapter I suggest that population has had its impact in another important way.

The diachronic interaction of population, environment and technology have contributed to an economy of scarcity which has had a primordial influence on the pattern and quality of social life in these villages. Firstly, the relative recency of settlement and a limited range of variation in the size of land-holdings have resulted in a surprisingly little-differentiated occupational structure in the villages. This occupational pattern has been maintained and in turn affects the pattern of social stratification in that population densities have affected land ownership and thus the accumulation of wealth. Finally, competition for land has rendered conflict endemic to the area.

Population pressure and its influence on land tenure are major factors in a total economy of scarcity. The basis of that economy is rice agriculture which takes place against the background of the almost whimsical variability of a monsoon climate. Ninety percent of the cropped area of the *thana* is devoted to the cultivation of rice, with sugar cane, local vegetables, pulses, and spices comprising subsidiary crops. As I have noted, soils vary in mixtures of sand and clay, but on the whole, the Brahmaputra alluvium is a fertile nurturant to the seeds of rice on which the cultivator's hopes are seasonally pinned.

Yet beneficient soils are hardly suffice to ensure good crops. A constant and controllable supply of water is the other *sina qua non* of wet-rice agriculture and in this respect the dependence of the Bengali peasant on the monsoons begets the major weakness of his agricultural system. Rainfall in sufficient quantities for farming can be expected during 6 to 8 months of the year - at best from late March to mid-October - allowing, in combination with the gestation period for most native rice varieties, for two major crops a year. Planting of the first crop (*aus*) begins with the first rainfall in early Spring, aiming at a mid-July harvest. The *aus* harvest takes place concommitantly with the planting of the second crop (*amon*), to be cut in late December and early January. Under pre-modern technological conditions, a third crop (*boro*) in the intervening dry season is possible only on plots of land located near sources of water - rivers, streams, or man-made ponds ("tanks" in Anglo-Indian dialect; *puskarini, pukur* in Bengali).

Monsoon agriculture subjects the cultivator to three basic hazards. Firstly, if the rains do not fall early enough, the chances for 2 full crops are diminished for lack of time. Secondly, if the rains fall too heavily, on the one hand, or if they are bestowed in too niggardly a fashion on the other, there is the threat of crop loss due to flooding or dryness. Thirdly, if the monsoon ends too early in the year, there is every possibility that the standing crop will not receive sufficient moisture toward the end of its maturation period and the yield will be greatly reduced relative to the potential. Thus, in addition to a long dry spell in which at best a small crop is possible for a few cultivators, during the wet season most face the continual possibility that their efforts will be poorly rewarded or even put to naught by the vagaries of a monsoon climate.

A further consideration is the fact of great fragmentation and scattered

location of land plots, a condition long recognized to be a serious impediment to agricultural modernization. With its huge population, it is not surprising that East Pakistan is perhaps archetypically a land of *minifundia*. Ninety percent of farms in the province as a whole report some degree of fragmentation, 52 percent of them with from 6 to over 10 plots per farm; 91 percent of the farms in Comilla District report fragmentation, 44 percent with from 6 to over 10 plots each (Census of Agriculture 1960: 86 ff., Table 10). Qadir (1960: 84-89), in a detailed study of land problems of a Comilla *thana* village, found that the average overall size of plots there was .31 acres; my own very approximate estimates from Hajipur and Tinpara range around .25 acres per plot. Qadir (1960: 61-62) estimated that in a period of 66 years the number of plots in the village he studied nearly doubled, from 242 in 1894 to 453 in 1960, the average size of farm decreasing from 4.8 acres to 1.9 acres in the same period. Such has been the impact of population growth and norms of inheritance which require equal division of property (see discussion below).

To all this must be added another limiting factor. Given the levels of production needed to feed so large a population, available technology does not suffice in overcoming the environmental constraints imposed on agricultural activities. This is so despite the fact that the "traditional" equipment of the Bengali peasant is remarkably well-adapted to a deltaic environment, when one considers the sophisticated use of natural materials relative to levels of knowledge. The judicious use of household compost, for example, cannot rival the yields made possible by chemical fertilizers correctly applied. Several varieties of iron-tipped wooden plow are artistically hewn by members of the Hindu carpenter caste, shaped from various woods and in slightly differing forms, each appropriate to soil type and season of projected use of the implement. But, used universally with bullock-traction,

these tools cannot compete with the speed and efficiency of the machine-powered tiller. For irrigation purposes, village drainage ditches are constructed by sometimes ingenious local "civil engineering" methods and fed by bamboo-woven "water shovels", either of the 2-man swing variety (*heyat*) or a scoop-shaped type (*hat heyat*) which can be used by a single man. But these techniques cannot bring large amounts of water over long distances to sun-parched plots of rice. The inadequacies of irrigation methods are all the more unfortunate when one considers the fact that the ideal climatic period for cultivation is the dry season, assuming modern methods of assuring an adequate water supply. In a word, innovations in agricultural methods and technology amounting to a veritable quantum leap are essential if the East Pakistani cultivator is eventually to attain adequate levels of food production.[12]

It is not surprising, then, that rice production is low. Average "good" yields in Hajipur and Tinpara range between 20 and 30 *maunds*[13] per acre or between 1,600 and 2,500 pounds. More often than not even this amount is not forthcoming in an average harvest. Low production has a variety of consequences, not the least of which is, of course, the lowering of quantitative and qualitative food consumption levels. Here, however, its effect on the structure of social relations must be considered.

Under conditions of unpredictability in natural environment, low-level technological development and heavy population, the only manner in which subsistence, not to speak of surplus, can be maintained, is to have an adequate supply of land. But, the small size of holdings - 1.5 acres per farm in Hajipur and Tinpara - makes mere subsistence practically difficult for most, impossible for not a few, families. Population size and competition for land place a premium on land ownership, rendering relative differences in ownership of even a minute scale potentially quite significant.

As I have suggested, the, while in Comilla *thana* nobody starves, the problem of keeping body and soul together is solved in an only haphazardly successful manner and with considerable effort. The cultivator who has the average of 1.5 acres of land or less finds great difficulty in maintaining adequate levels of subsistence along with capital reinvestment at the same time. The man with 2 acres of land or better can meet his family's needs more adequately. But many with these amounts or less are obliged at some time or other to borrow either food or cash or otherwise to work for wages and rent land. For an economy of such scarcity engenders a great deal of borrowing and lending of goods and services, merely for subsistence purposes. At the same time, there is a significant number of farms who depend on lending activities as a major or even the most important part of their income. These activities of exchange are centrally relevant to the discussion of social structure.

Hypothetical Illustration 1: The Hazards of Subsistence

With an average of 1.5 acres of land, on which 2 "good" harvests in a given year are grown, a yield of about 3,200 pounds of paddy can be expected. Assuming for the moment that the total year's crop is consumed by the cultivator's family, this means that after husking the yield is by the very process (of husking) reduced to two-thirds the harvested amount or about 2,100 pounds. Per capita consumption estimates provided by Kalimuddin Ahmed (1965: 86-87) allow the calculation that about 1,800 pounds of cereals - largely rice - is the average amount consumed by a family of 5 in rural East Pakistan per year (the average family size per separate household in Hajipur and Tinpara is 5.5). Thus under *optimum* conditions, assuming that rice alone is grown on his land (although in practice vegetables, pulses and spices are also grown), a cultivator with 1.5 acres can in fact feed his family in a manner consistent with the provincial average, with a little paddy left over for possible sale and capital reinvestment. However, most farms of this size in Comilla *thana* produce little more than 1,600 pounds of paddy alone in a given *year* (even with 2 crops), providing clearly less than enough to meet average consumption levels as reported by Ahmed for the province (in 1963); see Farkhanda Akhtar (1966: a and b) for estimates of average yields in Comilla *thana*. It should be noted, moreover, that I deal here only with food consumption items in the abstract and do not treat the costs of capital reinvestment, debt repayment, payment for services and non-food consumption items, all of which would normally be counted in a thorough estimate

of cultivators' incomes.

> Another kind of estimate of cultivators' ability to subsist is provided by Qadir (1960: 59-61). Assuming on the basis of villagers' own estimates of 2.5 acres as necessary to maintain a standard of living "on a moderate level" (*sic*; Qadir *ibid.*), Qadir shows that cultivating family of 4 with 1.9 acres of land (the average for the village he studied) can raise more than the consumption requirement of the postulated "moderate" level. Nonetheless, he calculates, such a family will fail by 50 percent to meet the surplus amount required to exchange for non-consumption items of goods and services, as well as for capital reinvestment.

These examples treat only the plight of the relatively well-off peasant families; for the poor and landless, the situation is far more precarious. At the same time, some of these "middle level" cultivators rely for their incomes precisely on their neighbors' constant need for cash and land. Finally, the relatively few "wealthy" cultivators also depend on the plight of their neighbors at all lower levels of wealth as a key means of income. Money lending and land rent thus function at all levels of the peasant economy. Indeed, as Calkins (1969) has shown, this appears to have been the case for a long time. According to Calkins, under the Mughal revenue collection system in 18th century Bengal, the men who operated at its lower levels - the *mustajirs* who bid for and won the rights of collection over one or several *mauzas* - were dependent on the local *mahajans* to finance their activities and to support their payments to the higher authorities in times of need. And, as I have earlier noted, even the large landlords - the *Rajas* of Tippera, for example - were obliged to depend on banks to pay their rent quotas in some years - a dependence which produced the *ijara* system of tax collection in Comilla *thana* that I have discussed. Thus, it would appear that, as elsewhere (modern America no exception), in Bengal, money lending has been important in economic relations for a long time. Today's Bengali peasants are indeed inheritors of that "Great Tradition."

There are 4 basic ways in which to lend and borrow money and rice or to rent land. Of these, one of the most common, and that which carries the highest risk, is lending cash or kind without collateral. While I did not collect data on the frequency of this practice in Hajipur and Tinpara, it is clear from general discussions with villagers that a number of them, especially the poorest, were heavily indebted, particularly from rice loans. A recent study (Ali Akhtar Khan 1968: 22) from another Comilla *thana* village reports that nearly half the loans taken by villagers surveyed were without collateral or security of any sort. If, however, a man lends Rs. 100 in cash or its equivalent in kind, to another with little or no collateral, it is the common practice to accept payment in kind, usually in the amount and form of between 4 to 5 *maunds* of husked rice (*chal*). At optimum market rates, a *maund* of *chal* can be sold at about Rs. 40 to 45. Thus, a lender who has been repaid for a loan of Rs. 100 in this way in effect receives interest at a rate of between 60 and 80 percent.

From the point of view of the lender, the use of land as collateral is a far less risky proposition. Firstly, the land is given to the lender in usufructuary mortgage, in most cases, thus entitling him to the yield of the land for as long as the loan remains unpaid. This practice is so profitable that lenders are quite willing to allow loans to go unpaid indefinitely. On this point, Ali Akhtar Khan (1968: 25) comments:

> "Since the agriculturalist lenders enjoy the annual output of land as interest on their money, they do not bother about realisation of debt. They rather like to continue (*sic*) their possession on such mortgaged land by not realising debt."

Secondly, once land is mortaged (*bandak*) as loan collateral, the possibility of foreclosure allows the lender to anticipate the eventual full possession of the land, given the difficulties of the borrower in repaying his loan. In fact, it is commonly assumed that land, once mortgaged, is as good as

lost - "sold" in effect as much less than its market value. One of my informants described the plight of his debtors in this respect in simple and matter-of-fact tones: "They will not see *this* land again!" (*tārā ei jomi ār dekhbe nā*). Indeed, for the borrower, the mortgaging of his land is a serious affair.

Land mortgage is thus a reasonably common method of financing loans. Out of 110 cases of land transcations that I recorded, a total of 63 or 57 percent were in the form of mortgage. Of a total of 102 farms, 24 or 23.5 percent had land in mortgage. The usufructuary mortgage is profitable to the lender not only in terms of the return to his investment; it is also a major mode of land transfer in these villages.

Hypothetical Illustration 2: The Economics of the Mortgage

Information about the arrangements for 10 mortgages was collected. For the sample of 10, the average amount of money loaned was RS. 403 for collateral averaging .193 acres of land. It was thus possible to estimate that 1 acre of land would be needed to obtain a loan of Rs. 2,088 (19.3/100 X 403/x = 2088).

It is thus possible to calculate a rate of interest as follows. Under usufructuary mortgage, assuming 2 better than average harvests a year, the yield from 1 acre of land would be *ca.* Forty *maunds* (20 *maunds* per harvest) per year. Further assuming immediate sale of paddy at the time of harvest (and often in fact it is hoarded) at *ca.* Rs. 30 per *maund*, the total amount realized would be *ca.* Rs. 1,200 per year. Thus, the return to the initial investment of Rs. 2,088 would be around 56 percent of the capital; this equates to an effective rate of interest of nearly 60 percent.

Another way of looking at the mortgage is to view it as, in effect, a "sale." A borrower faces great problems in repaying his loan. For he must devote whatever land he has left not only to repayment, but also to subsistence; several years' effort are thus required, assuming "good" harvests, to meet the demands of his creditor, and he may never succeed in so doing. The market value of 1 acre of land at the time of research was *ca.* Rs. 3,000. As noted, 1 acre of land also served as collateral for a loan of *ca.* Rs. 2,000. In the event that the borrower failed to repay his creditor, the latter can be said, in effect, to have purchased the land in question for two thirds of its market value.

Thus, lending money in return for a usufructuary mortgage is a profitable business, entailing a minimum of risk.

It should also be noted that none of these practices is thought to violate the well-known Islamic norms against usury and the taking of interest. Firstly, the taking of payment in kind for a loan of cash is by consensual definition not regarded as accumulating interest. Indeed, given the vagaries of the market, it is not always certain that the sale of rice taken as loan payment will yield the optimum potential cash value and thus reward the lender with an adequate return on his principle. This is perhaps one of the reasons why husked rice (*chal*), more readily sold at top prices in any season, is usually demanded as the form of loan repayment. Secondly, the fact that the yield of land given as security accrues to the lender is not considered to be tantamount to interest *per se*. Thirdly, the loss of land due to inability to repay is simply viewed as a "sale" of that land, albeit at one-third less than its market value; surely the Prophet himself could despise so excellent a purchase!

Moreover, the loss of some land in mortgage is sometimes tolerated by cultivators capable of redeeming it in order to make better transactions with what little capital they might acquire. That is, a man who has mortgaged less valuable land might prefer to utilize capital subsequently obtained to buy better land, rather than redeem his mortgaged plots. For even the more wealthy cultivators have at best small amounts of capital to use and they must calculate the optimum benefits from each set of circumstances in order that it not be wasted. Thus, a single individual may appear in statistics on rural credit as creditor and debtor at the same time.

The remaining forms of exchange to be discussed here are those of renting land *via* lease and share cropping. It is interesting that in fact these two forms of lending are less frequent in Hajipur and Tinpara and in Comilla District than in the province as a whole. Only 11 or 10.7 percent of all farms in Tinpara and Hajipur reported cases of leasing and sharecropping. [According to

the Census of Agriculture (1960: 55, Table 5), only 20 percent of all farms in Comilla District are reported as "owner-cum-tenant" farms.] Outright tenancy in the district is less than .5 percent of farms and it did not exist in Hajipur or Tinpara at the time of my research. This is explainable partly by the fact that land poor and landless cultivators supplement their meager incomes by other means, usually those of unskilled or skilled labor.

Hypothetical Illustration 3: The Economics of Lease and Sharecropping

Detailed information was collected for 10 lease arrangements, 5 for cash, 5 on a kind basis. For the cash transactions it was found that an average of .40 acres was leased for an average of Rs. 197 per crop over a 2-crop period. Thus the rent rate could be calculated as Rs. 492 per acre per 2-crop period. For the 5 transactions involving payment in kind, it was found that an average of .50 acres was rented for an average of 6 *maunds* a crop over a 2-crop period, or a rate of 12 *maunds* of paddy per 2-crop period.

Let us assume 2 better than average harvests over the 2-crop period, yielding a total of *ca.* 40 *maunds* per acre, and that this is sold immediately at Rs. 30 per *maund*, the gross receipts totalling Rs. 1,200. Payment in kind at a rate of 12 *maunds* per 2-crop period yields a rent rate of *ca.* 30 percent (12/40 = .30) of the total crop value. Payment in cash at a rate of Rs. 492 per 2-crop period yields a rent rate of *ca.* 40 percent (Rs. 492/Rs. 1,200 = .41) of total crop value. These figures would vary with prices, the type of land and the quality of paddy grown. Thus they are meant to be merely suggestive of the economics of land rent.

Actual cases of sharecropping are not enumerated here because the universal standard of rent is that of equal division of the crop between owner and tenant, or a rate of rent amounting to 50 percent. Perhaps for this reason sharecroppers are often called *adhiars* (from *adhar*, meaning "one-half") - "those who rent for half the crop."[14]

In a peasant society, land ownership and land relations provide the key link between economy and social structure. Firstly, as I have noted, varying types of land and their soils influence importantly the pattern of rural settlement, with implications in turn for the structure of social relations. Secondly, the location of lands, the degree of plot fragmentation, and the norms regarding its possession (whether communal or individual) and transmission (whether via partible or impartible inheritance), help to locate the foci

TABLE 3

FARM SIZE IN HAJIPUR AND TINPARA

acres	N*	%
0.00	10	9.80
.01 - .49	17	16.67
.50 - .99	18	17.65
1.00 - 1.49	15	14.71
1.50 - 1.99	13	12.75
2.00 - 2.49	8	7.84
2.50 - 2.99	6	5.88
3.00 - 3.49	6	5.88
3.50 - 3.99	--	-----
4.00 - 4.49	2	1.96
4.50 - 4.99	4	3.92
5.00 - 8.00+	3**	2.94
Totals	102	100.00

Hajipur: 100.68 acres
54 farms*
1.8 acres per farm

Tinpara: 58.69 acres
54 farms
1.2 acres per farm

Both: 159.37 acres
102 farms
1.5 acres per farm

median land ownership per farm, both villages = 1.15

*N = number farms. There are actually 104 *chulas* or economic family units, but 3 of these in Hajipur are combined in a lineal collateral joint ownership arrangement despite separate *chulas*. Hence, the actual N farms = 102.

** Holdings of these 3 are: 7.96 acres; 8.00 acres; and 8.80 acres.

of rural people's activities and thus the territorial, as well as the social, organization of peasant communities. Thirdly, relative differences in land ownership and control are crucial, if not the sole, determinants of the distribution of status, power and influence.

For these reasons, it is necessary to determine the nature of land relations in the study of peasant communities, if something of their social organization is to be understood. A discussion of land ownership in Hajipur and Tinpara should help to throw light on the character of these communities.

In both villages most families own some land. As indicated in Table 3, however, the vast majority of them are holders of exceedingly small "farms," a characteristic of the rural economy of East Pakistan and of Bengal in general. The term "farm" will be used here to indicate a separate productive unit organized on the basis of kinship, although this should not be taken to mean that all "farms" indicate purely agricultural producing units. Moreover, the term "family" - used here as a convenient form of reference - is technically a misnomer in some cases, in that these are single individuals who nonetheless are separate with respect to their economic activities. For example, there are several widowers who have no families to support, but own, cultivate or rent out land; there are several cases of widows[15] without small children who live separately from their adult children and who own and rent out land - or have none; finally, there are cases of individual men who are landless and work at day labor or the like with no wives or families.

Some of the single individuals are among the landless. Of those remaining in this category, several men have special skills which help them to earn some income as, for example, a specialist in roof thatching whose services are often in demand. But in general, the landless must rely on field labor for wages or else other unskilled occupations. Several are rickshaw pullers, adding to the thousands of such men of all ages who ply the streets and roads of

Comilla town and environs.[16]

In addition to the landless, the vast majority of land holders in Hajipur and Tinpara own less than the average amount of land. These also must supplement their incomes by wage labor. Some have a special occupation which serves them in this regard; notably, the Hindu carpenter and washerman families are in this category. Others work at field labor, some engage in petty trading[17] and not a few rent land. This group is continually in debt, and in many instances large portions of their farms, small though they may be, are mortgaged.

If there is a "typical" Hajipur or Tinpara cultivator, it is he who owns between the median (1.15 acres) and the mean (1.5 acres) ownership for both villages. But these "typical" cultivators do not form an undifferentiated mass. Some are heavily in debt and must rely on loans or rented land from one year to the next or must work for wages. Most of this group do not rely, however, on rented land nor are they continually obliged to borrow money. Moreover, aside from an occasional loan, they do not consistently engage in money or land lending practices nor do they regularly sell or hire labor. But a (third) significant segment of this group in fact does rely on creditor activities as a crucial component of its income and so is perceptibly distinguishable from others in this category.

Those who own more than 4 acres are, relative to the rest of their neighbors, well-to-do men. Of these some cultivate their own lands, especially if they have adult sons who can collectively perform most of the required labor. Nor, so far as I could ascertain, do all well-to-do cultivators engage in creditor activities to any appreciable extent. (It is not uncommon to find that well-to-do cultivators are indebted to a greater extent than are their less fortunate neighbors, although in these cases the debt is likely to be

to commerical or government credit institutions and to have been incurred for capital, not consumption, expenditures. (See Ali Akhtar Khan 1968: 24-31). In Hajipur and Tinpara, nearly half the well-to-do cultivators do, however, engage in creditor activities as a means of further accumulation.

It is thus possible to distinguish broad aggregates of cultivators, groupings ranked with respect to land ownership and economic activities, as I attempt to do in Table 4. This is a procedure used by Marxist students of peasantry who begin discussions of social stratification with categories based primarily on economic rank (see e.g., Mao tse-tung 1927, 1933; Alavi 1965; Hinton 1966, Chapter 2 and Appendix C; Gough 1968-69). This procedure serves as the means whereby the link between economy and social structure can be perceived. The next step in the analysis is to study the correlations between economic and political power, either synchronically or diachronically and, where exact correlations between the two cannot be established, to explain the manifestation of power under the given conditions. Finally, a holistic study of social stratification seeks further to understand the relationship - or its lack - between these variables and those of status and general life style. One of the most conceptually useful of recent studies of South Asian peasantry in this regard is that of Beteille (1966), whose approach has influenced that taken here.

Table 4 represents the beginning of analysis of the link between economy and social structure in Hajipur and Tinpara. The categories in this table are not wholly arbitrary, for in choosing them I have attempted to reflect not only relative wealth but economic activities as well. Moreover, while the categories are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, the reader will rightly assume progressive shadings in land ownership at either end of each category in the arranged continuum. As Table 3 indicates, between the

land poor and middle cultivators, there is little absolute difference in land holdings, for nearly all families in both villages have less than the average amount of land. That average is, of course, raised by the higher end of the range, in which only 3 cultivators have more than 5 acres of land. For this reason, the median holding of 1.15 acres has been arbitrarily used as the dividing point between the land poor and the middle categories. Thus, between the poor and middle peasants, very little difference in ownership can be perceived and it follows hypothetically that the distinction between these in status and power is also small. Moreover, the fact that a number of middle peasants are heavily in debt demonstrates the continual threat of downward mobility (due to loss of land) to families in the middle categories. Nor are rich peasant families immune to this threat. At the same time, certain middle peasants share with certain rich ones the economic activities of the creditor. This is not always the case for purely economic reasons, for a creditor with relatively little land may be motivated by prestige and status considerations, for example, to lease his land rather than work it himself. Finally, the use of the term "rich peasant" as a categorical designation must be understood in relative terms. Clearly, those I have designated as "rich peasants" are not very rich at all in any absolute sense. My use of the term here is merely consistent with the technical distinction made by the other writers whose works I have cited between "landlord" and "rich peasant." In contradistinction to the "landlord" class, "rich peasants" are defined in their studies as cultivators who as a group own, and *in part work themselves*, the largest holdings in a community and as a rule rely on wage labor, sharecropping and land rent as a major source of wealth accumulation. Despite the seeming inappropriateness of the term "rich peasant" the technical definition advanced here is consonant with present East Pakistani land holding

TABLE 4

CULTIVATORS CLASSED BY LAND OWNERSHIP AND ECONOMIC BEHAVIOR

Class	N	%		Grouped %
landless	10	9.8	}	44.1 poor
land poor	35	34.3		
debtor middle	6	5.9		
non-debtor middle	30	29.4	}	47.1 middle
creditor middle	12	11.8		
non-creditor rich	5	4.9	}	8.8 rich
creditor rich	4	3.9		
Totals	102	100.0		100.0

Definitions

landless: Own 0.00 acres; sell skilled or unskilled labor.

land poor: Own less than 1.15 acres; supplement income by wage labor; may also rent land or borrow money to extent of more than 50% total farm value.

debtor middle: Own 1.15-3.99 acres; may sell labor; may rent land or borrow money to more than 20% of total farm value.

non-debtor middle: Own 1.15-3.99; occasionally hire or sell labor; do not rent land out or lend money to more than 10% of total farm value.

creditor middle: Own 1.15-3.99 acres; rent out land or lend money to extent of more than 20% of total farm value.

rich non-creditor: Own more than 4 acres; do not rent out land or loan money to more than 10% of total farm value; may hire labor, but usually work own farm.

rich creditor: Own more than 4 acres; rent out land and loan money to more than 20% of farm value; rely on hired labor.

Methodological note: With a range of ownership between 0 and 8+ acres, and nearly 60% of farms falling under the mean of 1.5 acres, it is preferable to use the median (1.15) as a dividing point between "poor" and "middle" cultivator categories

conditions. Large scale absentee ownership usually taken as synonymous with "landlordism" has not been prevalent in East Pakistan since the Partition of 1947, the exodus of Hindu *zamindars*, and the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950.

If land ownership is taken as a major criterion, then, it can be hypothesized that social relations among most heads of households in these villages are rather egalitarian in character. But this statement, while essentially true in my observation, is an over-simplification. For, as Table 4 suggests, differences in actual economic activities - "what people do with what they have" - have relevance for the understanding of basic distinctions in status and power. From this step, then, I proceed to a larger discussion of social stratification and its relationship to community organization in Hajipur and Tinpara.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN HAJIPUR AND TINPARA: CASTE OR CLASS?

In discussions of South Asian Muslim social stratification common reference is found to a broad division of status among the followers of the Prophet: that of the *Ashraf* or "noble," "high-born," and that of the *Ajlaf* (synonym in Bengal, *Atraf*) or "low born," (literally "wretches," "mean people," according to Gait 1902). Among the *Ashraf*, four groups can be delimited. The highest ranked of these are said to be the *Sayads*, claiming descent from the lineage of the Prophet himself, and next in rank are the *Sheikhs*, who putatively reckon descent from the Prophet's tribe, the Meccan Qureshi. Below these and ranked in generally analogous status are those who calim descent from the *Mughals* and the *Pathans*, among the most important of the foreign Muslims who brought Islam to India (see discussions in Nazmul Karim 1956: 128-142 and Vreede-de Stuers 1968: 3-27). It is generally stated that these 4 *Ashraf* groups constitute at least historically an intermarrying aristocracy, albeit with internal status distinctions based on ranked kin groupings (*biradari*) and effective marrying groups (*bhiadari*). Below the *Ashraf*, the *Ajlaf* Muslims constitute a category of occupational groups within which status-ranking also occurs, toward the lower end of which continuum evidence of rigid group endogamy is said to be found.

The existence of caste in South Asian Muslim society has been discussed by a number of writers, including British scholar-administrators who were fascinated by its appearance and latter-day anthropologists who have found it in their empirical field studies. For West Pakistan, caste has been discussed

in the regions of the Northwest Frontier (Barth 1960) and the Punjab (Eglar 1958). Ansari (1956; 1959-60) has reported extensively on Muslim castes of rural Uttar Pradesh (India). Guha (1965) and Mukherjee (1948) make brief reference to caste among the Muslims of West Bengal. Nazmul Karim (1956) presents an historical overview of Muslim social stratification in East Pakistan and the field studies of Fazlur Rashid Khan (1962) and Nizam Uddin Ahmed (1962) report on various "caste" groupings in Dacca District of that province. Gait (1902), who directed and wrote the report for the Census of India (Bengal) of 1901, made note of a plethora of titles and caste names of groups reported in Bengal proper, 28 of which he stated to be endogamous or "true castes." Most of these latter belonged to occupational groupings and at least the most numerous of them, according to Gait, had "caste panchayats" similar to those found among analoguous Hindu castes. All such groupings fall within the *Ajlaf* category, and it may be that they stood, at least historically, in relationship to the *Ashraf* groupings in a kind of *zamindar-kammi* relationship as has been found, for example, in West Pakistan (see, e.g., Eglar 1958).

The *Ashraf-Ajlaf* division, however, can only be taken as the broadest of distinctions and, with variations and nuances in status distinction by region and province, is not very helpful in understanding the empirical situation in each specific region where Muslims predominate in any measure (Imtiaz Ahmad 1967). In most of the decennial censuses for which respondants were required to list membership "castes" or "tribes," the Muslims of Bengal most commonly recorded themselves as *Sheikh*, although variations in which large numbers of them reported *Sayad* or *Pathan* status may be seen from decade to decade and district to district. It is interesting to note that in the Census of 1871-2, the vast majority of Muslims in Bengal reported neither

"caste" nor title; that is, on the census caste tables the category "unspecified" remains consistently the largest for all districts. Unfortunately, the director of the Census of 1881 devoted very little attention to "caste" (he did not, apparently, feel that caste listing was an appropriate function of the census, but rather a matter to be relegated to mere ethnographers), and so there are no listings for Muslim caste for that year. More attention was devoted to the listing of both Hindu and Muslim caste in the Census of 1801, although the data were not very detailed. Nonetheless, the Census of 1891 does record a surprising phenomenon. Whereas the vast majority of Muslims in Bengal in 1872 did not return themselves as belonging to any specific caste or title category, by 1891 this majority was reversed and 95 percent of those who responded to the part of the schedule indicating caste and occupation reported themselves as *Sheikhs*. As Table 5 indicates, this situation was revealed again in 1901 and continued down to 1931, the last census in which caste was recorded.

From the data presented in Table 5, it would appear that within a period of 20 to 30 years the Muslims of Bengal engaged in a massive shift in self-definition, at least as far as status is concerned. This amounts to a kind of *"ashrafization" en masse*, to use the term of Vreede-de Stuers, a phenomenon similar to the process of sanskritization as Srinivas (see his latest statement, 1968) and others have described and analyzed it. In fact, the process among Muslims is noted in the census reports themselves. According to Beverly (1875: 191), the "four great Muhammedan tribes (*sic: Sayad, Pathan, Mughal and Sheikh)* are but poorly represented." He nonetheless asserted, despite the fact that in the census tables most Muslims were "unspecified," that "all Muhammedans in Bengal ... assume the title of Shaikh (*sic*)." Even if Beverly's unsupported generalization is correct, it seems

TABLE 5

THE INCREASE IN REPORT OF SHEIKH IN BENGAL, FROM 1871 TO 1901

District	1871*			in % 1901**	
	Unspecified	Sheikh	Other	Sheikh	Other
Burdwan	98.8	.8	.4	85.3	14.2
Bankura	99.4	.1	.5	91.4	8.6
Birbhum	98.2	.7	1.1	88.0	12.0
Midnapur	95.9	.3	1.1	67.7	32.3
Howrah				86.3	13.7
and	96.4	3.2	.4		
Hooghly	(listed together in 1871)			90.1	9.9
24 Parganas	92.8	6.1	1.1	63.1	36.9
Nadia	99.4	.2	.4	85.9	14.1
Jessore	98.9	.2	.9	88.9	11.1
Murshidabad	94.2	5.3	.5	93.7	6.3
Dinajpur	99.9	.03	.07	98.8	1.2
Malda	98.8	.9	.3	94.4	5.6
Rajshahi	omitted here for 1871 due to inconsistent data in census			95.0	5.0
Rangpur	99.9	0	.1	92.1	7.9
Bogra	99.9	0	.1	96.1	3.9
Pabna	96.5	2.4	1.1	87.7	12.3
Darjeeling	97.2	1.3	1.5	100.0	0.0
Jalpaiguri	99.9	.01	.09	71.2	28.8
Dacca	97.6	1.3	1.1	94.4	5.6
Faridpur	97.9	.9	1.2	92.9	7.1
Bakerganj	95.8	3.9	.3	97.2	2.8
Khulna	not listed separately in 1871			46.3	56.4
Mymensingh	99.6	.2	.2	95.5	4.5

TABLE 5 (continued)

District	1871* in %			1901**	
	Unspecified	Sheikh	Other	Sheikh	Other
Chittagong	99.9	.02	.08	98.6	1.4
Noakhali	99.9	.06	.04	99.5	.5
Tippera	99.6	.3	.1	99.6	.4

*Census of Bengal, 1872, General Statement V.B., Statement on Nationalities, Race, Tribes and Castes, pp. cxxiv-cxxv.

**Census of India, 1901, Volume VI, The Lower Provinces of Bengal and their Feudatories, Part III, Provincial Tables, Table III, pp. 62-123.

Notes:

Sylhet and the Chittagong Hill Tracts are excluded in both listings here.

For 1871, "other" includes Pathan, Mughal, Sayad and Joloha (weaver caste) only. Nadia, Dinajpur, Rangpur and Bogra Districts all reported greater numbers of Pathans and Sayads than Sheikhs. Significant numbers of Jolohas were also found in these districts, as were they in Dacca and Faridpur Districts as well. But virtually none of these titles of castes were found in either Tippera or Noakhali.

For 1901, the caste listings by district are far more complete, although they are not discussed here. Although there is a fair degree of variation from district to district, the dominance of Sheikhs throughout Bengal Proper is marked indeed.

Summary totals for the censuses reported are:

1871 - all Bengal (including Sylhet and Hill Tracts, excluding Cachar): Unspecified 98.1%; all other 1.9%.

1901 - all Bengal (including Hill Tracts): Sheikhs 8819%; all others 11.1%.

Sheikhs: mean = 88.9%
median = 92.5%
mode = no real modal clustering
range = 46.3 - 100.0%
for all districts.

clear that in 1871 there was little concern among the majority of Muslims that their claim to *Sheikh* status be duly recorded. As noted, the Census of 1881 made no listing of Muslim "castes." By 1891, however, O'Donnell (p. 268) could report that "The great majority (of Muslims) made use of (the caste) column to return their titles or occupation..." which fact indicates a growth of interest among Muslims in recording some indication of high status. By 1901, the tendency of Bengali Muslims to prefer the title *Sheikh* was noted by Gait (1902 VI: 442) who wrote that "... the amorphous ranks of the Shekh not only include large crowds of converts from Hinduism, but also many Jolahas (weavers) and others who had a strong objection to being returned under their functional designations and claimed to be entered under this head." In 1921, Thompson (1923: 349) reported increasing political opposition to the recording of status distinctions among Muslims, the "distinction between section and section being gradually looser than among Hindus ..." And finally, in 1931, Porter (1933 V, Part I: 422-423) annoyedly reported the political opposition of the Muslims to the recording of "any sectional distinctions whatever" on religious grounds. He went on to discuss the existence of Muslim caste at some length, however, but did report that large numbers refused to claim any title than that of "*Momin*," or "believer."

I am not prepared at this juncture to offer much in the way of explanation of this "ashrafization" phenomenon. If there is any truth in Beverly's assertion (*supra*) that Bengali Muslims had always regarded themselves as *Sheikhs*, then one must explain why they seemed unconcerned that this "fact" be recorded in the Census of 1871, one the one hand, and, on the other, why they insisted with such remarkable unanimity only 20 years later that it be recorded. Part of the answer may lie in the actual procedures for collecting

the census data, which are known to have varied from decade to decade, as well as the interest of the particular census director in each case. And surely much of the answer must be related to the growing concern with sanskritization evident among Hindus during the late 19th Century and well on into the 20th Century. For if, indeed, Hindu cultivating castes were demanding that their caste titles be recorded in more acceptable ways, it would not be surprising to see this idea rapidly diffused among Muslims. Thus if *Haliya Kaibarttas* could demand to be called *Mahisyas*, if *Pods* could insist that they were *Paundra Kshatriyas*, and if even the lowly *Chandals* could remonstrate over their claim to be known as *Namasudras*, then surely common Muslim cultivators would be somehow similarly justified in calling themselves *Sheikh*, whether their claim of "tribal" affiliation to the Qureshi could be substantiated or not. Thus Gait (1902) distinguished between "true" *Sheikhs* and "cultivating" *Sheikhs*, between which groups, he noted, there existed little in the way of mutual exclusiveness as far as marriage, commensality, and other aspects of social relations were concerned. Finally, I suggest that the process of "ashrafization," as that of sanskritization, is no doubt related to general political trends of the period. It is well known that for much of the history of Bengal after the coming of Islam, in the rural areas there existed a great deal of cultural syncretism and social integration between the Hindu and Muslim communities. Usually, as is still the case in West Bengal, Muslims constituted a distinct "caste" within the ranking hierarchy of any given village, usually low ranked or "exterior" in status. With the rise of Muslim "nationalist" consciousness in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, it seems reasonable to view the "ashrafization" process as part of a total movement which emphasized the cultural, religious, social and political distinctness of Muslims from their Hindu compatriots.

These comments are meant merely to be suggestive as an approach to the explanation of the "ashrafization" phenomenon, which must be sought by further research. For, whatever the reasons which may have impelled them to do so, the fact that most Bengali Muslims have long claimed the title of *Sheikh* is not, superficially at least, of much utility in understanding Muslim social stratification in rural East Bengal. Indeed, if all are *Sheikh*, does it follow that within the fold of the *Sheikhs* there are, as is said of Islam itself, "no genealogies," no distinctions? This seems unlikely. Nonetheless, the nearly universal claim to *Sheikh* status provides a beginning point for a more complicated, but perhaps more fruitful, discussion.

Earlier reference has been made to the hypothesis advanced by Nicholas to the effect that the historical development of social organization in rural Bengal may best be viewed as the evolution of a "frontier society." In a recent paper, Nicholas (1969) summarizes the "frontier hypothesis" in an attempt to account for the remarkable "ethnic homogeneity" of the active delta.

> The most frontier-like portions of the delta are simplest in their caste composition. In the areas of the deepest annual floods and the richest soils, single castes tend to predominate over large expanses of territory. Members of the caste-like group of Muslim agriculturalists, often known as Sekhs, predominate in all the rural districts of East Bengal. The Hindu pioneers of the delta are primarily Māhiṣya, Pod and Namasūdra. ... The Sekhs, Mahisyas, Pods and Namasudras constitute the great bulk of the population of undivided Bengal. Their techniques as housebuilders, boatmen, fishermen and "deep water" cultivators are precisely adapted to the requirements of life in the delta.
>
> These groups have non-Aryan origins; perhaps they are indigenous to Bengal; ... No records suggest that they were ever elaborately divided into specialized caste groups. ... Superimposed over the relatively simple and unstratified society of delta pioneers is a heterogeneous "foreign" aristocracy, holding ideas about both religion and society that are quite different from those of ordinary villagers. (Nicholas 1969: 36-37).

Thus in the active delta districts of West Bengal it is common to find inelaborately stratified villages, containing no more than 7 or 8 castes *in toto*, with, for example, *Mahisya* cultivators as the "dominant caste," often comprising as much as 75 percent of the population. The same processes of migration and settlement seem to have occurred in East Bengal. The earliest inhabitants of the southern districts of what is now East Pakistan most probably were the ancestors of the *Namasudra* cultivators, to which group an older generation of British scholar-administrators like to refer, in what seems scandalously archaic language today, as the "great race caste" of Eastern Bengal. In the light of what little we know about the spread of Islam in Bengal, it seems reasonable to suppose that many of the converts to Islam in rural areas were most probably *Namasudras*, whose status in Bengali Hindu society was always humble (even today their most common name, *chandal*, is mouthed with a certain derision by those Hindus of supposed gentler birth). Despite centuries of gradual conversion, well into the 19th Century there persisted nonetheless a certain religious syncretism in the practice of both Hinduism and Islam in rural Bengal, noted for its emotive and substantive similarities even at points where formal theological doctrine otherwise most radically diverges (see Nicholas 1969). Evidence of this syncretism, reflective of a certain cultural and ethnic homogeneity, still impresses the foreign observer familiar with "both" post-1947 Bengals. It can thus be suggested that, much as the *Mahisyas*, *Namasudras* and *Pods* "dominate" in the active delta districts of West Bengal, so does a "dominant caste" of Muslim "*Sheikhs*" hold sway in the counterpart areas of East Pakistan.[18] Villages like Hajipur and Tinpara are typical of this pattern.

Rural Comilla *thana* is dominated numerically by Muslim peasantry, with few Muslims performing those traditional service occupations which among Hindus

are associated with varying degrees of low status and ritual pollution. Most males above the age of 15 in both villages report farming as a major occupation, with half of these also engaged in other tasks for supplementary income - as workers in factories of the town, as salaried service holders (usually menial, but not in all cases), in trade or as manual laborers of some sort. Three are teachers, 4 are *imams* and among the Hindus of the washerman, barber and carpenter castes most practice their traditional occupation to some extent. In neither Hajipur nor Tinpara and their neighboring communities are there any Muslims engaged in the tasks of barbers, washerman, or leather workers, for example, but there are both Hindu and Muslim groups in the *thana* area whose members do perform these functions. In short, what exists of occupational differentiation historically associated with caste is in part tied to the continued presence of middle and low ranked Hindu serving castes, which may be one of the reasons why many of these tasks are not as yet widely performed by Muslims. But, while this is the case, my village informants were aware that elsewhere, in the town and in certain villages in the *thana*, there were also some Muslims who in fact perform these tasks. In the interviews I conducted on this subject I was able consistently to elicit reference to certain Muslim groups whose members carry on occupations associated in some sense with low status and thought to be "defiling." These references were most often to Muslims who were washermen, barbers and sweepers (local Hindu sweeper castes in Comilla town are collectively subsumed under the name of *methar*, which name is sometimes applied to Muslims performing this task). More interestingly, groups that perform specifically Muslim services were mentioned in this "caste" category: the butchers (*khasai*), who visit Alirbazar once a week, but who live in Comilla town, and the *hajjams* who perform ritual circumcision, enjoined upon all Muslim males. The *hajjams*, none of whom live in or around Hajipur and Tinpara, come through them "on

tour," as it were, from others parts of the *thana* during the winter months when their services are most in demand. They are referred to as "a caste" (*ekṭā jāt*), into whose families no Muslim cultivator would marry (*"tāder kāce keho biye dibe nā"*).

In short, it can be said that Hajipur and Tinpara contain social stratification patterns broadly consistent with predominantly Hindu "pioneer" active delta villages in West Bengal. They are composed of a "dominant caste" of Muslim cultivators, whose need for non-cultivating services is fulfilled either by resident Hindu serving castes[19] or by non-resident Hindu *and* Muslim groups, among whom the Muslims are thought of in "caste" terms. It would have been useful to be able to test the statements of villagers to which I have referred regarding "caste ideology," against the reality of a differentiated occupational structure in a Muslim village. Why no such village could be found in the research area is at least hypothetically explained by the "frontier hypothesis." But despite the lack of elaborate caste stratification in the area, it can be said that "caste ideology" exists - "*jati* thinking," as Gould (1969) has recently put it in a reassessment of the caste concept and its utility.

It may thus be said that in this part of East Pakistan, the *Sheikhs* may be seen as a kind of "dominant caste," whose relations with certain non-*Sheikh* groups are minimal, except for locally resident Hindu serving castes. These relations are, moreover, usually functionally specific, interaction occurring for very utilitarian purposes. Finally, relations between the *Sheikhs* and endogamous "*Ajlaf*" occupational groups are couched in terms of "caste" ideology or "*jati* thinking." But this conception, while historically important and ethnographically interesting, does not bring a student of rural Bengal Muslim society to a full understanding of crucial aspects of its organization,

particularly that aspect relating to the distribution of power and status. An analysis of class relations - as distinct from those of caste - is far more important.

Class relations in Hajipur and Tinpara

It is useful to think of class primarily as an economic group, following Marx and Weber. The relationship of differing groups to the means of production, as well as their differential access to goods and services, provides the link between economy and society. At the same time, it is necessary to distinguish conceptually the notion of status, defined by Weber as "every typical component in the life fate of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*" (Gerth and Mills 1958: 186-187). Class and status are, of course, related, although the specific manifestation of one or the other may not be correlated in all given situations. As Weber has put it, however:

> ...: class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions. Property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity. (Gerth and Mills 1958: 187)

It is possible to identify both class and status groups in Villages Hajipur and Tinpara. Table 4 (*supra*) presents a rough classification of reasonably distinct economic groups, with reference to land ownership and sources of income, which may be broadly seen to represent the existence of 3 "classes:" those of rich, middle and poor peasantry, in Maoist terminology. It is also possible to link these classes to differences in status and power in Hajipur and Tinpara.

It is common in these villages and in Comilla *thana* generally for both lineages and homesteads to have titles or names. The origins of these are quite diverse, as I shall demonstrate, and there are differences in the significance of one title or name as opposed to another. Lineage titles denoting

high status in often function as patronymics whereas other titles do not. In this sense they contradict the more usual situation, which corresponds to the *hadith* often cited in support of Islamic egalitarianism: "There are no genealogies in Islam" (see the discussion in Levy 1957: Chapter 1). That is, a man born into a family with the title of *Majumdar* will retain that title as a patronymic, whereas a man born into an untitled family will be known simply as, for example, Abdur Rahman, son of Jainal Abedin, Village X, *Thana* X, etc.

There are 4 kinds of names or titles commonly associated with lineages and homesteads in Hajipur and Tinpara. Among these two kinds are what may be called "traditionally high status" titles or names associated with a) landed aristocracy, positions in the revenue collection system of pre-Independence times or in government administration and b) religion. Among these are to be found lineage titles which function as patronymics, although not all have this characteristic. The two remaining kinds of titles - or, better put, names or common appelations - some are associated with c) occupation, in a service or artisan capacity, others with d) personal characteristics of a given member or members of the family remembered for some reason. The latter are not patronymics, but merely localisms by which nieghboring families in the villages have come to call a given homestead. In Comilla *thana* the following examples of these names and titles were found.

A) Traditional high status, secular

Majūmdār: according to Sinha (1962: 39), *majumdars* were the keepers of the records of land transfers in the Mughal revenue system; the title was apparently also often conferred on local holders of revenue collection rights by the Mughal aristocracy, be they Hindus or Muslims; thus historically associated with ownership and control of land (*jūm*, Persian; *jomi*, Bengali; land); a patronymic.

Cowdhūrī: according to Webster (1910: 82ff) a title (of Persian derivation) conferred by Mughal rulers on the managers of estates, either Hindu or Muslim; also historically associated with ownership or control of land; a patronymic.

Bhuiyā: apparently derived from Sanskrit *bhūmi*, meaning "earth, ground" (*bhūi, bhui* in Bengali); also associated historically with land ownership and landed aristocracy, especially with the famous "*bāro bhuiyā*" or "12 Bhuiya families" of pre-Mughal and early Mughal times in Bengal (see Wise 1874); a patronymic.

Mahiśan: from the Bengali *mahiś*, meaning specifically "water buffalo," not historically a title granted in associated with land ownership or revenue so far as I know; but associated with the ownership of a lot of land in that its bearers claim historically to have been cattle traders, a profession which requires large amounts of grazing land, as well as trading capital; a patronymic.

Kāji: from the Arabic, *qadi*, the title of an ecclesiastical judge, among whose important functions were and still are important in the registration of marriages and divorce; a patronymic, usually preceding its bearer's given name; most commonly pronounced *kazi*.

Munśi, Kerānī, Muhurī: all terms for "clerk" or, especially the latter, "deed-writer;" these positions were historically associated with the administration of revenue collection; they may be, but are not always, patronymics.

B) Traditional high status, religious

Khōndakār: from the Persian *khawandgar*, "circumcisor of Muslim boys;" according to Wise (1903: 28-29) a priestly class which functioned importantly in the spreading of Islam in Bengal; the title is for this reason, apparently, high status, despite the Persian meaning of its origin which, as I have noted earlier, refers to an occupation which is considered "defiling" (that of the *hajjams*); present day bearers of this title may or may not be religious leaders; a patronymic.

Hāji: a title borne by one who has performed the religious duty of pilgrimage or *Hajj*; not a patronymic.

Mowlānā: a religious leader of usually greater training than that of a more common *imām*, *mallā*, or *mowlabī*, all of whom are allowed to lead mosque prayers; a certain degree of scholarship is attributed to *maulanas*, who are recognized as authorities on religious and certain legal matters; tends to be religiously prestigious.

Pharaji: commonly spelled *Faraizi* or *Fara'idi*, especially with reference to the important Islamic revivalistic and social movement of the 19th Century in Bengal (see M.A. Khan 1965); the term appears to be derived from the Arabic *fard*, which refers to a category of "moral acts" which are encumbent upon and essential duties for Muslims; perhaps because it reflects special piety and orthodoxy,

it appears to connote a high degree of respectability for its bearers; it is not a personal name, but usually attached to a homestead (e.g., *Faraizi Bari*).

C) Occupational titles, secular and religious, but not of especially high status: some examples

Imām, Mallā, Mowlabī: local circles, religious congregational leaders, with sufficient training to be accepted by the Faithful as leaders in limited capacities; conveys honorable, but not especially high, status.

Kabirāj: "native doctor;" either of persons or animals.

Kāthmistrī: wood worker, carpenter (as distinct from the Hindu caste carpenter).

D) Names of homesteads denoting personal characteristics: examples

Māl: Bengali meaning "strength, force, high value;" One homestead in Hajipur is sometimes called *Mal Bari* because of the forceful character of the (now deceased) head of its resident lineage.

Pāgalī: from the Bengali *pāgal* or "mad;" This name attaches to a particular homestead in Village Reshompur, near my study area, where there formerly lived a widow who is reputed to have vigorously resisted all attempts to deprive her of her land by inheritance. The constant battles and litigations in which she is said to have been engaged earned for her the title of "*pāgalī*" or "madwoman" (itself a commentary on the status of women in rural Bengali Muslim society). The homestead in which her descendants live became known thus as *Pagali Bari*, or "Home of the Madwoman," a source of amused embarrassment to its current inhabitants.

Ordinary villagers in Hajipur and Tinpara, when asked to identify with respect to status either their own or other families with which they may be associated in marriage, will refer to these kinds of appelations if they are relevant. This is the phenomenon I encountered when making a census and recording genealogies, which surprised me because I had expected that when so queried people would respond with the term *Sheikh* or other such *Ashraf* (or *Ajlaf*) titles. Not all lineages or homesteads have names or titles, however, and when asked to identify these in any way which denotes status, usually informants said that the people in question were simply "*grihasthi*," a term whose local dialectal pronunciation given here is probably related to

the Sanskrit *grihastha*, which refers to the "householder" stage of the traditional Hindu Four "Stages of Life." By this it appeared to mean that the person or family in question was merely a "common villager," someone "just like anyone else."[20]

My concern with names and titles is not merely ethnographic, for an awareness of the differences in status they connote facilitates an understanding of social stratification in Hajipur and Tinpara, where status, in the Weberian sense, is often empirically distinct from class as an economic grouping. Villagers themselves discriminate between *ucho-bangsho* (high status lineage), *madhya-bangsho* (middle status lineage) and *nichu-bangsho* (low status lineage) families and appear to do so on the basis of a title, or its lack, as much as anything else. This appears to be common in other parts of East Bengal as well, as Glasse (1967) shows for Matlab Bazar in Comilla District, where villagers also are disposed to rank titles in this manner.

Not all those in Hajipur and Tinpara with traditionally high status titles, either secular or religious, are particularly wealthy. This is the case partly because of the considerable differences in land holding which obtain within the same homestead. The homestead is the residential locus of a patrilineally extended family, with which may also be living matrilateral kinsmen and even families of non-kinsmen or affines. The homestead is further broken down into individual economic segments or families which may be either sub-nuclear, nuclear or join; these are known as *chula* ("hearth," "oven") or, less commonly, *khana* ("eating groups") and represent either sub-lineal segments of the patrilineage or matrilateral and unrelated coresidents. Ownership of land is not based on a corporate lineage principle and each sub-unit represents an economically separate group. These *chulas* or households have been represented in Tables 3 and 4 as "farms," indicating their separateness as individual producing units (see the more extensive discussion of kinship and residence in Chapter 6 and

Appendix II). Thus, within each homestead there may be found marked differences in sizes of land holdings (taken here as the chief indicator of wealth), even though most male members of a given homestead are agnatically related. Membership in the same lineage, however, means that if the patrilineal group has a high status title, which is also its patronymic in some cases, it will be shared by all the agnates in the group. Thus, for example, members of Hajipur's Majumdar family display a range of land ownership of between complete landlessness and 8.00 acres, its individual *chulas* encompassing every economic class of peasants, as I have used the term above and in Table 4, from "landless" to "rich creditor," yet all the agnatically related males in that family still have the name *Majumdar*.

Of the traditionally high status religious and secular titles I have discussed above, there are to be found in Hajipur and Tinpara the following: 2 lineages of Majumdars, 2 of Khondakars, and 1 each of Mahisan, Munshi, Farizi and Haji. All other homesteads and lineages in both villages have either occupational titles or personal appellations which do not denote particularly high status or are simply without distinct name or title of any sort ("*grihasthi*").

In Tables 6a and 6b, individual farms are compared on the basis of economic class (as in Table 4) and status. Of the 102 family farms in Hajipur and Tinpara, 35 constitute those of individuals and groups with traditionally high status titles. In Table 6a, the numerical majority of these fall within the "middle peasant" class, but when these are compared on a percentage basis by economic category, possession of high status titles is very unequally distributed in the sample, the highest proportion being found in the category of the "rich peasant." Table 6b compares high status with other lineages on the basis of number of farms in each economic category or class. It will be seen that among the high status lineages over 25 percent fall into the class of

TABLE 6

CLASS AND STATUS IN HAJIPUR AND TINPARA I

class	N	%	title	N	total	% per class
Rich (4 acres+)	9	8.8	Majumdar Mahisan Munshi Haji Faraizi Khondakar	3 3 2 - 1 -	9	100.00
Middle (1.15-3.99 acres)	48	47.1	Majumdar Mahisan Munshi Haji Faraizi Khondakar	3 7 2 1 1 3	17	35.4
Poor (landless-1.15 acres)	45	44.1	Majumdar Mahisan Munshi Haji Faraizi Khondakar	6 1 - - 1 2	9	20.0
Totals	102	100.0			35	34.3*

*34.3 percent of 102 families are those of individuals with high status titles.

TABLE 7

CLASS AND STATUS IN HAJIPUR AND TINPARA II

	High status		Non-high status	
	N	%	N	%
Rich	9	25.7	0	0.0
Middle	17	48.6	31	46.3
Poor	9	25.7	36	53.7
Totals	35	100.0	67	100.00

"rich peasants," while among the non-high status lineages, none are in this class. Both high and non-high status lineage have approximately the same number in the "middle peasant" class, but the number of non-high status "poor peasants" is more than double that of the high status families in this class.

These data suggest that in the "middle peasant"category, there is a broad overlap between "class" as an economically conceived phenomenon and "status." But the extremes of the "rich-poor" continuum reflect general correlations of rank between the two, in that all the "rich" families are members of high status lineages and comparatively few (20 percent) of the land poor and landless families are of high status lineages. This fact bears out Weber's dictum that although propoerty and status do not always coincide they tend to do so in the long run "with extraordinary regularity."

Classes in any society evince differential patterns of behavior, are characterized by unequally distributed access to goods and services and, as exemplified by marriage patterns, may be seen to unite families along horizontally stratified lines. With respect to all of these characteristics, some differences can be perceived in Hajipur and Tinpara along the class lines I have attempted to delineate.

Table 4 indicates differences in the distribution of control over productive resources which is taken as the basis for class idfferentiation. It will be obvious that "middle" and "rich" peasants most often lend money and goods while the "poor" peasants are invariably only debtors. Because, however, the lending of money is so constant and uniquitous a feature of social and economic activities in these villages, it is difficult to say unequivocally that the "exploitation" implied in them is the unique province of any one class. As Table 4 suggests, a large number of "middle peasants" depend on

money and land lending to provide a substantial portion of their income, which some "rich peasants" do not. The ability to engage in money lending or the renting out of land is, however, clearly related to the possession of at least the median amount of land.[21] Moreover, what I could learn of the individual case histories of "rich peasants" not involved in lending at the time of my research indicated that they had done so in the recent past.

With respect to non-economic differences among the groups, relatively high status and the ability to maintain it also is differientiated along class lines. Larger homesteads and houses (*ghar*) of better construction are more common among "rich peasants" than others. A common indicator of relative wealth could be seen in the fact that the more fortunate cultivators had sufficient land to have a pond within the homestead where members of the homestead could bathe in private. "Rich peasants" often entertain visitors in a separate building maintained by the lineage for the reception of guests, known as *kachari ghar*. These symbols of relative affluence are especially important in the maintenance of what Weber called "status honor." Indeed, the Muslim term and concept of *izzat* - personal or group prestige or honor - is a manifestation of Weber's notion *par excellence*. In no way is the *izzat* of a family better evidenced than in its ability to maintain the "privacy" of its women and to entertain guests in a manner consistent with both the norms of *purdah* as well as of genteel hospitality. The poorer families, whose women must bathe in the ponds of others near the cultivation fields, unhidden from public view, and must hide behind screens in houses when guests are entertained for lack of a *kachari ghar*, must constantly be reminded thereby of their low status. It was my own properly Koranic experience "never to look upon" the wives and mature daughters of my more wealthy village acquaintances, although over time I came to know the men well. But in the homes of the poorer villagers, less precaution was taken to ensure that my presence would not "embarrass"

the ladies of the house and in several cases I was able to banter with women while they worked in their compounds; even in these houses, however, such occasions were rare. Thus, in Hajipur and Tinpara, general differences in wealth and status overlap with distinctions in behavior and access to the goods and services which facilitate the maintenance of "status honor."

Status distinctions may also be seen in the pattern of marriage alliances. From the earliest point in my research I was interested in the degree to which class or "caste" lines, once defined, would correspond to marriage patterns. At a number of points, I discussed the matter with villagers and was most often told, with varying tones of insistence, that economic considerations were of the greatest import in the selection of spouses. Thus, for example, I was told that in an earlier day, the Chaudhuris, Bhuiyas and Majumdars, and their equals, tended preferentially to intermarry, but that this was no longer the case. As one informant put it: "Nowadays if one's economic position is good, one's lineage status is also good" (*ājkāl ýāder abasthā bhālo, tāder bangśo ō bhālo*).

This statement seems to ring true in no small measure. The most important consideration in the selection of husbands for daughters seems to lie in the economic well-being and social status of the potential husbands' families. It was often touchingly put to me that a father wanted above all for his daughter to be married into a family where she would "be happy." By this seemed to be meant her marriage into a lineage whose members were economically secure enough that ayoung wife would not have to perform more than the normal domestic duties. In some of the more wealthy families, domestic servants are often employed, for example. Conversely, the wives of the poorer families must not only contend with the tasks of their own husbands' homesteads, but also are often sent to work as domestic help or "hired labor" during harvest seasons in

the homesteads of the more wealthy, as I have pointed out above. I have also noted that it is a matter of "status honor" for those who can afford it to provide adequately for the observance of *purdah*. Thus, in the selection of a prospective husband, it is a matter of some import that there be minimal risk that the bride's *lajja* ("modesty," "natural shyness," or "sense of shame") will be offended. Finally, concern for the girl's relations with the women in her "father-in-law's house" is a further element in attempting to assure for her a "happy" married life. For, as is common in South Asia, a young bride's relations with her husband's elder brothers' wives and, above all, with her mother-in-law, may be tense. For this reason, a perceptive informant once told me, families in which many divorces are known to have occurred are often avoided as sources of marriage partners; frequency of divorce is taken as a sign of a family where men are inordinately demanding and mean or with whose women it is difficult to get along.

The families of girls being considered as brides are also investigated to ascertain locally their economic situation and status. In this connection, local *sardars* are often consulted as independent checks, if a bride is sought far from home. In addition to the economic well-being and status of the family, some personal considerations are operative. It seems to be a matter of some concern that the girl in question be properly "religious," that is, that she can and regularly does "read" the Koran during the appropriate prayer periods (i.e., in most cases this amounts to her reciting what she can remember of the appropriate prayers). For this reason, I add parenthetically, it is common to find more girls present in *madrassas* than in public schools, since from the point of view of the family who must find her the best possible match, it is more important that a girl be familiar with the formal niceties of religious observance than with simple mathematics or the Bengali alphabet (although

in families where the sons have attained a significantly higher average of education, it is common to seek a bride who is to some extent literate). Finally, as village men will regularly attest at least, it is desirable that a girl be reasonably good looking (or, in terms of cultural standards, "fair-skinned").[22]

In Hajipur and Tinpara the choices of marital alliances tend to exhibit a certain endogamy along the lines of the status groups I have delimited. Genealogical data from 31 patrilineages, including those in the 23 homesteads which comprise the villages, reflect this fact. Of the 31, 14 bore traditionally high status titles and 17 did not. A count of all marriages recorded in these genealogies for which data on lineage status was obtained shows that the titled lineages married into others of like status at an average rate of 42.3 percent of their total marriages. By contrast, non-titled *grihasthi* genealogies show evidence of marriage into titled lineages and homesteads at an average rate of 13.4 percent of their total recorded marriages. Thus, the tendency for titled lineages to intermarry was over three times the rate of *grihasthi* lineages to marry into them.

These data point to a certain independence of status from class taken as a purely economic category. Status would appear to be as much a consideration as economic well-being, even where the two do not coincide. Thus, a titled lineage can obtain desirable marriage partners for its sons and daughters even if its economic situation (*abastha*) is comparatively modest. This is particularly the case if the basis of its own status is religious. For example, the family of Haji's in Hajipur has a marriage rate of 44.4 percent with other families bearing both secular and religious titles, despite that the Haji family is only of "middle peasant" economic status. At the same time, however, it should further be pointed out that while within a given lineage the

individual families (*chula*) may vary greatly with respect to economic well-being, where there is a titled lineage among whose individual families can be found one or more rich cultivators, it is this family which has predominance within the lineage and maintenance of status honor falls largely the shoulders of its members. As Table 6a indicates, all rich peasants in Hajipur and Tinpara are members of titled lineages. Thus, a "middle peasant" family of a titled lineage has the advantage of status which is "paid for" in the long run by the fortunes of the lineage as a whole, in particular the more wealthy segments of it. The role of the rich peasant in maintaining status honor will be discussed more fully below.

In this sense, the statements of villagers are partly refelctive of the reality of economic well-being as the major consideration in marriage choice. But the extent ot which status alone is a consideration is also demonstrated by an analysis of actual marriages over time, as is possible with genealogical data. Thus, only indirectly can it be maintained that "those whose economic situation is good also have good lineage status."

At the same time, the data reflect a certain openness in social stratification, as far as status is concerned, in that even among titled lineages the absolute majority of marriages are with non-titled lineages. In short, mobility between high status and non-high status groups is clearly evident.

A high degree of mobility of individual families between economic classes and status groups is an important feature of social stratification in Hajipur and Tinpara and probably has been so for a long time. It should not be forgotten that the economy of these villages is one of general scarcity, given population size and density and the vicissitudes of agriculture in a monsoon climate, as I have earlier stressed. Under these conditions, it is unlikely that a lineage can maintain superior wealth over a long period of time without

some difficulty. This is partly the case because ownership of property is individual, not corporate or communal. Inheritance is partible and stresses equal division among males, with a certain proportion of the patrimony legally designated for females in shares which, while in total disproportionate to that given to males, are also equally divided among women who inherit. Thus, over time, unless land is consistently accumulated, a given lineage taken collectively, becomes vulnerable to the inexorable problems of agriculture in a monsoon climate, in that as its propoerty is progressively divided into smaller and smaller shares, the size of individual holdings diminishes and renders individual members of the lineage each less capable of maintaining large enough amounts of land to ensure adequate production, given the vagaries of the monsoons. Hence, over time, unless accumulation of land is kept up, a lineage's collective wealth stands to be dissipated. At the same time, other families, of "middle peasant" status, may be rising, especially if they are able successfully to engage in lending activities, in particular the taking of land in mortgage, over a given period of time. Thus, there appears to occur a regular rise and fall of families, the decline of wealth (and hence power) for some and the increase of those for others, in a process which probably evinces a three or four generation periodicity.

The assignment of status seems to follow the rise and fall of various families in this respect. Villagers in Hajipur and Tinpara are quick to distinguish between long-standing and recently acquired titles. For example. they will readily inform one of which families, among, say, the local Majumdars, are the "real," "original" (*ashol*) Majumdars, who gained the title "legitimately" in the past for performance of the requisite services, and which of them are merely "so-called" (*dak*) Majumdars, in those cases where the title has merely been adopted by rural upstart *parvenus*. Similarly,

members of poor peasant families will sometimes claim to have enjoyed the status of a secular title in past generations, but will end their tale of woe stating that they can no longer claim it. One is reminded, in short, of the proverb common to Muslims everywhere in the Sub-continent whick states: "Last year I was a *jolaha* (weaver, of *Ajlaf* status), this year I have vecome a *Sheikh*, and if next year's crops are good, I shall be a *Sayad*." Some examples of this phenomenon may readily be cited.

Example 9: The Hajipur Mahisans

The Mahisan lineage of Hajipur is the largest in population and land ownership. Its members number over 50 and own collectively about one third of Hajipur villagers' total land holdings. Within the lineage most individual *chulas* are those of "middle peasants," only one family being truly poor. It is a *sardari* lineage, although the *sardar* himself, Gada Mia, a "rich creditor peasant" with 4 acres of land and over an acre held in mortgage, is not the richest man. His cousin, Anwar Ali, holding over 8 acres outright and another 1.60 acres in mortgage is the wealthiest and best known money lender in the Alribazar area.

The lineage is one of the oldest in Hajipur and Tinpara and it appears that over time they have grown to considerable prominence in local affairs. The Mahisans originally engaged in the cattle trade, to which fact their name attests, and several of their memebers still carry on this occupation today, although in a smaller scale than did previous generations.

Anwar Ali is not only a large land holder and money lender, but also has obtained the rights to run the sole government ration shop in Alirbazar, which returns him an acceptable, if modest, profit. Because of his large holdings, he can afford to hoard rice to a period well beyond the harvest time and thus obtain maximum prices for it during the "lean months" of the year. His sons are often seen selling his stocks in small amounts during the Fall and Winter on market days in Alirbazar. In November of 1967 I once sat next to his grandson in the market while that latter sold 10 *seers* of the previous year's crop. The young man, a high school graduate with some knowledge of English, casually told me that the family still had 60 maunds of the previous year's *amon* season alone and had harvested recently 250 *maunds*, of which they had sold or kept for consumption 110 *maunds*. They would, he said, be sure to keep a certain amount for sale during "the crisis period" of *Jaista* and *Kartik* months, late summer and early fall.

The Mahisans are the truly dominant lineage of Hajipur. Collective activities in the village center around their lineage. They have

constructed a cement platform for prayers near a pond on the outskirts of their homestead and during certain religious holidays in which villagers gather collectively to celebrate and perform prayer, it is at this spot (see discussion in more detail below). During my stay the leadership of a newly formed village cooperative society under the aegis of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development came to be lodged with members of the Mahisan lineage. All of these activities cross *reyai* lines, and are part of the reason that Hajipur is a multi-*reyai* village. Though there is some vying for influence between the Mahisans and the other 2 *sardari* lineages in Hajipur, the Mahisans were constantly central to life in the village throughout my stay there and had probably been so for years before then.

Example 10: The Hajipur Munshis

The leadership of Hajipur's *Reyai* II is in the hands of the Munshi *Bari*, whose title comes from the fact that one of its older and best known men, Fazar Ali, was for many years an accountant (*munshi* or *kerani* for the Maharaja of Tripura's revenue collection in the area. Two of the lineages four families are "rich peasants," although not creditors, the other two are in the "middle peasant"category.

Fazar Ali and his sons are regarded with wide-spread distrust and disaffection in the village and the *samaj* of which it is a part. Much of this distrust stems from the fact that Fazar Ali is said to have utilized his position as a revenue accountant to enrich himself at the expense of his neighbors. He is further said to have been associated with a great amount of unsavory scheming and plotting in the politics of the *samaj* (discussed below), which has earned for him a great deal of continuing hostility. His son, Monu Mia, is regarded in the same light, always suspect for behind-the-scenes manipulations. When I arrived in Hajipur, Monu Mia was the Chairman of Hajipur's cooperative society (mentioned in Example 9), but during my stay he came under criticism for having stolen the cooperative's funds and was ousted from the Chairmanship, which went, as 4.52 acres, of which nearly half is mortgaged out. He holds no mortgage from others so far as I could learn, and others said that he was so untrustworthy that they would never go to him for money. Fazar Ali's personal property has diminished and his lineage's status is threatened not only by the problem of maintaining wealth but also by declining esteem in the eyes of other villagers. Fazar Ali's sister married a man who came to live in the Munshi *Bari* after marriage (*ghar jamai*; see discussion below). This man, Rajab Ali, is a "middle peasant" with over 3 acres, to whose sole daughter Fazar Ali arranged to have married to his eldest son, Amirul Islam. Rajas Ali had begun to register his patrimony in the name of his daughter and Amirul Islam. Thus, the losses in mortgage sustained by Fazar Ali may be recouped in this manner, by his sons.

One member of the Munshi lineage is a debtor middle peasant, the owner of less than 1.5 acres most of which is mortgaged out to various other families. This man is obliged to earn his living share-cropping his own

his own land held in mortgage by others. The fourth family in the Munshi Bari is that of Bashar Mia, the eldest man in the lineage, now blind. He has several sons, who can work his land holding of over 4.5 acres, but he occasionally hires labor as well, since one of his sons is employed as a clerk in Comilla town.

The Munshi lineage thus represents the kinds of variation existent in one lineage. It also represents a formerly powerful family which may have appeared to have vegun an incipient decline in influence in village and local affairs.

Example 11: The Hajipur Kobiraj Homestead

Hajipur's *Kobiraj Bari* is the home of the descendants of Dona Mia (see example 4) who moved several generations ago from another village nearby. The scns of Dona Mia have managed to amass a land holding of over 7 acres, part of which is held by the eldest, a man of seemingly ancient vintage, Akkas Ali, a rich peasant with over 4 acres. Kayam Ali, his younger brother, is a creditor middle peasant, who rents out a small portion of his land and has lent a little money, thus holding land in mortgage. Akkas Ali's grandson holds an Intermediate Arts (2 years of college) degree and is a high school teacher in Comilla town. For this reason, Akkas Ali, and his son and grandson, among whom land is held jointly, regularly hire labor. Moreover, Akkas Ali has begun to register his land in his grandson's name, for he is afraid that his daughters, who have married without inheritance might at some point return to claim inheritance, thus threatening land loss to the lineage as a whole.

The Kobiraj homestead is an example of a lineage which has grown in size and wealth from comparatively poor origins in 4 generations. Its members are constantly concerned about the relative wealth and power of the lineage, as well as about its respectability. Kayam Ali, the second son of Dona Mia, learned something of the art of curing cattle illnesses and became known in the area as a *kobiraj*, which is the source of one of the homestead's titles. This lineage is also known, however, as *Faraizi Bari*, for it is said that Dona Mia was a very pious man and his sons wish that image to remain. They have managed to secure marriage ties with lineages variously entitled Majumdar, Munshi, Haji and other high status titles in various parts of the *thana*. A conversation with Hakim Mia, the school teacher grandson of Kayam Ali, makes the consciousness of their rise quite clear. At one point, he referred to their rivalry with other lineages, particularly that of the Munshi homestead, and said: "We have increased our population quite a bit now and have gained a bit of land. Grandfather is a good man and well respected in the village. These days no one wishes to give us any trouble."

Example 12: The Kazis of Mauza Imamgaon

One of the homesteads peripheral to Hajipur's core is that of an impoverished Kazi family whose members still retain that distinguished title.

Its members are all land poor or landless, having lost most of their property in mortgage over the years. All of the men who are still able work what remains of their own land, till that of others, held in lease, and in the winter months are engaged as rickshaw pullers, hiring the vehicles from others in Alirbazar. They are recognized in Hajipur and environs as a poor lineage and the Kazis are singled out for the donation of cow hides during the festival of *Id-ul-Azha* (*Korbani Id*), when animals are ritually slaughtered for the celebration and during *Id-ul-Fitra* when the end of Ramadan marks the occasion of a great fest. It is encumbent on the wealthy to give away the hides of the animals, whose meat they otherwise consume, to the disadvantaged.

The poor Kazis are well regarded, however, by other villagers, and they are always welcomed in villager gatherings. One of their members has joined the cooperative society in Hajipur and has taken loans with moderate interest in the hope of improving his lot. The others had not done so at the time of my research.

Example 12: Shona Mia of Tinpara

Shona Mia is a member of a *grihasthi* lineage, only one of whose individual families is a middle peasant in economic category. Shona Mia owns only .06 acres of land, which has been mortgaged off; he is, in effect, landless. He earns his living by rickshaw pulling and day labor in the fields of others. He and his agnatic relatives are rarely seen as participants in collective activities in Tinpara and, with the exception of Shona Mia, are fearful of many of their neighbors. Shona Mia claims that they were once called *Kazi*, but neither they nor their neighbors use the title at the present time.

The above examples are broadly indicative of the various statuses and classes in Hajipur and Tinpara. As evident in Example 9, some of the wealthier families have succeeded in maintaining and improving both land ownership and status, as well as power. This is the case of the Hajipur Mahisans, whose importance and influence in Hajipur affairs will be made manifest in subsequent chapters. Beginning as cattle traders, the lineage's early settlers in the area bequeathed to their descendants the economic wherewithal to maintain a long-standing position of power in the village and the area. They continue in that position by time-worn methods which are central to social organization and structure, notably that of money lending and land renting. In Example 10, the case of the Munshis reflects the process of decline, in which a formerly

powerful man has begun to lose his land. As will be shown, the role of the Munshis in Hajipur has begun to be considerably diminished, some of the events in which process I shall report below. At the same time, As Example 11 reflects the graduate rise to economic and social "respectability" of a family, the Kobiraj, from humble beginnings, a necessarily gradual process which is now in its third generational "phase." Finally, Examples 12 and 13 briefly describe the plight of "poor peasant" families, thrown on the mercies of their neighbors, as in the case of the Kazis, and dependent on wage labor as the basis of their economic survival. For these, it would seem, the chances of gaining in wealth and status seem very few.

Summary

The traditional *Ashraf-Ajlaf* status categories, to the extent that these historically reflected a "caste" system in this part of East Bengal, no longer retain that significance. As I have tried to show, at the end of the 19th Century and well on into the 20th Century, a process of "*ashrafization*" took place on a wide-spread scale, for which reason it is commonly mentioned in the literature on this subject that most East Bengali Muslims refer to themselves as *Sheikhs*. I have suggested that, just as the *Mahisyas* and other cultivating castes are "dominant" in (Hindu) West Bengal, so it is possible to think of the *Sheikhs* of rural East Bengal as a "dominant caste." While the remnants of certain "functional groupings," or "serving castes" of *Ajlaf* status are to be found in heavily populated districts like Comilla, standing in *quasi*-caste relationship to the "dominant"cultivating group, caste, as the basis for social stratification in villages like Hajipur and Tinpara is not primary. Rather, as I have tried to show, it is possible to delimit rural classes, which reflect the unequal distribution of economic and political power (as I shall try to demonstrate in subsequent chapters), along the continuum of which status also tends

in the long run to be distributed. At the same time, social stratification in Tinpara and Hajipur is as yet flexible between the "middle" and "upper" strata, although it is possible to perceive a tendency toward polarization at the extremes. The vast majority of villagers hold very small amounts of land and it is not difficult to lose what they have. While over time the transition from "middle" to "rich" peasant status maintains a certain constancy, there is a far easier transition from "debtor middle" to land poor and landless situations. That is, although there is a certain process of "rising and falling" between the "middle" and "rich" peasant categories - and we must remember that we are dealing with relatively small amounts of land owned in any of these cases - the workings of the "system" under current ecological pressures seem continuously to force people out at the bottom. Gough (1969) has suggested that a similar situation has begun to take place in South India, which she argues is related to the rural unrest which seems endemic to that part of India. Similarly, the events of early 1969 in East Pakistan, in which wide-spread rural violence was reported and contributed to the downfall of the Ayub regime, must surely in part have their causes in the processes I have discussed.

CHAPTER VI

THE VILLAGES AND THEIR EXTENSIONS - I

This thesis begins in Chapter 1 with a brief outline of the formal social organization in Hajipur and Tinpara, in which the *reyai*, village, *samaj* and market area were delimited as the relevant social units. Subsequent chapters have focussed on the underlying ecological and economic bases of that organization. In the next two chapters, I shall discuss the ways in which economic, kinship, religious and political systems function alternately to maintain local *reyai* and village intensive organization on the one hand and the territorially extensive organization of the *samaj* and market area on the other hand. Some attempt will be made to put these processes in historical perspective.

Economic factors in the development of local groupings

There are several ways in which the channels of organized activity in Hajipur and Tinpara structure the internal social cohesion of these villages, while at the same time lending themselves to the extension of effective social units beyond their boundaries. I have previously pointed out that the proximity of homesteads resulting from the pattern of rural settlement provides the basis for interaction and thus a certain degree of internal solidarity which defines the relevant village itself. But the delimitation of village boundaries, as well as the areas into which the activities of villagers overlap beyond them, seems partly related to the location of land owned by members of the villages. Population pressure and the resultant fragmentation of holdings to which I have earlier referred, contribute to the

process by which these individually small groupings extend themselves into larger ones. For the relevant question here is how the *reyai* homestead cluster either by itself or with others, become the village? And how do these groupings unite to form a *samaj*?

Part of the answer to these questions may be found in an examination of the location of fragmented land holdings. Table 8 and Table 9 give tabulations of land location for Hajipur and Tinpara villagers respectively.

Table 8

Land Location of Hajipur Villagers

	acres	%
Hajipur Mauza	72.60	72.0
Samaj mauzas	24.18	24.0
Market area non-samaj	3.90	3.9
Totals	100.68	100.0

Table 9

Land Location of Tinpara Villagers

	acres	%
Tinpara* village mauzas	56.28	95.9
Samaj mauzas	.56	.9
Market area non-samaj	1.85	3.2
Totals	58.69	100.0

*Includes Mauzas Imamgaon, Radhapur, Rampur, all of which are part of the *samaj*.

It will be noted that the majority, but by no means all, of the land holdings in Hajipur fall within the *mauza* boundaries in which are located the 10 homesteads I have called the "core" of Hajipur. The next largest percentage lie in *mauzas*, some of which are contiguous with *mauza* Hajipur, which constitute the *samaj* grouping of which Hajipur forms a part. The remainder of

Hajipur villagers' holdings lie in *mauzas* which are in the general market area, although part of neither the village nor the *samaj*. By way of contrast, over 90 percent of the land holdings of Tinpara villagers are located in the 3 *mauzas*, parts of which form Tinpara as a socially recognized village. Very few of their holdings are beyond the general area of their homesteads.

From these data it can be seen that, in addition to the factor of relative proximity of settlement, location of the villagers' land holdings is related to the formation of socially recognized villages. Moreover, the fragmentation of holdings results in the dispersal of holdings outside the immediate boundaries of socially defined villages and contributes to the development of multi-village lineages, such as that of the *samaj*.

Tinpara is a socially defined village by virtue of at least 2 important facts. Firstly, its constituent homesteads are clustered together in such a way as to form a "natural" interactional grouping. Secondly, the greatest part of its members' land holdings lies, albeit in fragmented plots, in those parts of *mauzas* whose *paras* ("neighborhoods") form Tinpara as a homestead cluster. In the case of Hajipur, however, there are 3 *reyais* which constitute the village as socially defined. Here the data show that the bulk of Hajipur villagers' fragmented land holdings lie in the very *mauza* which gives Hajipur its name and in which its 3 *reyais* are predominantly located. Thus, the same conclusion is possible in this case; Hajipur is a village by virtue of the location of land holdings and the relative proximity of settlement. Land holding, thus, is not confined to the immediate *mauzas* comprising these villages, but crosses *mauza* boundaries as do social groupings, and in this respect contributes to the formation not only of village, but also of larger, groupings.

For many individual and collective activities center primarily on the

village, but also tend to overlap into areas beyond their limits as well. An unobtrusive measure of the degree of familiarity villagers have with each other may be seen in the fact that *purdah* - the seclusion of women - is relaxed within the boundaries of both villages. Men in both Hajipur and Tinpara can go unannounced into each others' homes and be received by the women there in the absence of male members of the homestead. Moreover, even in the homes of the more wealthy peasants, to whose zeal in maintaining *purdah* norms I have referred, fellow villagers are as often as not received within the confines of homes to which a less well known visitor, otherwise entertained in the *kachari ghar*, would not be readily admitted. These facts, of course, may partially be explained by kinship connection, in many cases, since among kinsmen the bars of *purdah* tend generally to be lowered. But not all villagers are directly related, either by consanguineal or affinal ties, yet they are normally accorded these "privileges" nonetheless. It is worth noting also that non-related men and women in such situations are likely to address each other respectfully by kin terms appropriate to their age and sex. Perhaps more indicative of inter-homestead familiarity is the fact that women are often allowed to go without the *burka* ("veil") within the confines of village boundaries, whereas their travel beyond those limits is discouraged and even forbidden. Moreover, when women do leave their villages, for example, to visit their natal homesteads elsewhere, they are not only veiled but, if possible, travel in rickshaws which are elaborately shrouded with cloth to shield the passenger from the prying eyes of passers-by.

In addition to informal patterns of interaction reflected in the relaxation of *purdah* restrictions, certain more functionally specific activities tend to take place most often among co-residents in the same village, rather than between them and outsiders. Labor exchange, for example, when it is not practiced

in a given instance between kinsmen, is most likely to take place among fellow villagers. Money lending and borrowing, as well as the renting of land, also follow a similar pattern. Of 100 such transactions for which I was able to fain information regarding the homestead locations of the individuals involved, 59 had taken place among fellow villagers in Hajipur and Tinpara respectively, 25 had been transacted between members of the villages and individuals in the *samaj mauzas*, and the remaining 16 were between villagers and people resident in *mauzas* which were not part of their own *samaj* grouping in the Alirbazar market area.

Thus, while informal interaction reflects the internal social cohesion of both villages, it is important to note that functionally specific, dyadic relations reflect not only a tendency to cluster in village groupings, but also reflect the way in which interactional patters of village life extend themselves beyond village boundaries.

The role of kinship

In no way is the tendency toward extensiveness in social ties better reflected than in kinship organization. Two aspects of Bengali Muslin kinship stand out and are relevant to this general discussion: the non-corporate character of the domestic group and the extension of marriage ties.

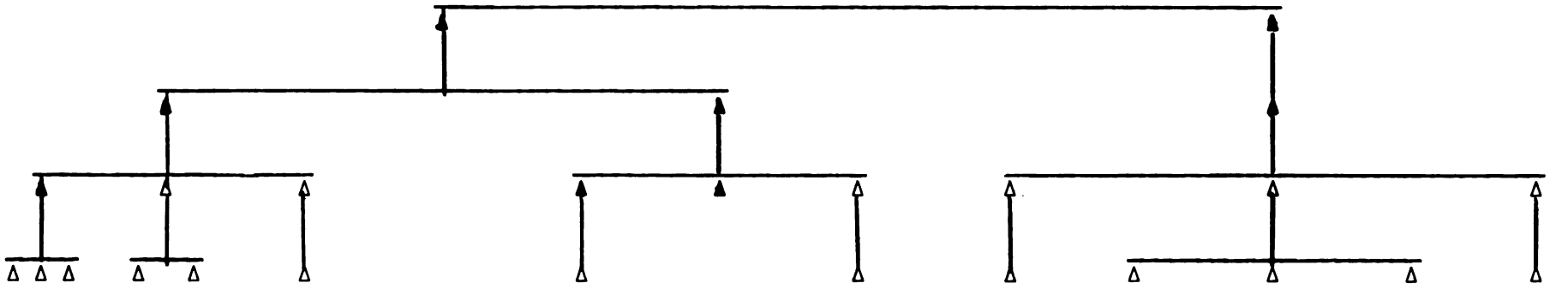
The building block of social organization in Hajipur and Tinpara is the homestead, residential locus of the patrilineal extended family and its allied segments. Physically the homestead is composed of mud and bamboo dwellings, arranged in more or less rectangular fashion around one or more courtyards, these flanked by subsidiary buildings such as cooking shed, cow sheds, and the like. Within this physical unit, the domestic group is organized around a patrilineally extended family (*gusthi*). But while the patrilineal kin group forms the basis for the domestic unit, not all residents in the homestead are

necessarily members of this patrilineage. For it is common in the homesteads of both villages to find matrilateral and affinal kinsmen of the basic agnatic group and, indeed, genealogically unconnected residents may be found as well, the reasons for the presence quite varied. Kinship Diagrams 3, 4, and 5 give examples of homestead compositions in Hajipur and Tinpara. Diagram 3 indicates a simple, if populous, patrilineal extended family, with no non-lineal kinsmen or non-kin residents at the time of research. Diagram 4 shows the presence of a resident son-in-law (*ghar jamai*) whose descendants are nonetheless counted in the lineage of his father-in-law - a point I shall discuss in more detail. Diagram 4 reflects the way in which matrilineal kinsmen and non-related residents may be integrated into the structure of a given homestead.

Regardless of the particular affiliation in each case, it is common for most residents to own homestead propoerty. For the Bengal Muslim *gusthi* is not a corporate group as unilineal descent groups have often been described in other parts of the world (see, e.g., Fortes 1953), if the term corporate is meant to include joint ownership of lineage propoerty. In the homestead itself, joint ownership of property is not the rule and the homestead plot, its physical structures, other economic items such as cattle and plants, as well as agricultural land, may be rigorously divided among adult residents.

The homestead is thus further broken down into a number of *households* - this term used here in explicit contradistinction to the term *homestead* - in which dwell sub-lineal branches of the patrilineal kin group as a whole, as well as its non-lineally allied co-residents. These households, known commonly as *chula* (meaning "hearth" or "oven") or *khana* ("eating group"), have a certain measure of economic independence one from the other, made explicit by the practice of maintaining separate dwelling units for each group. The

KINSHIP DIAGRAM 3

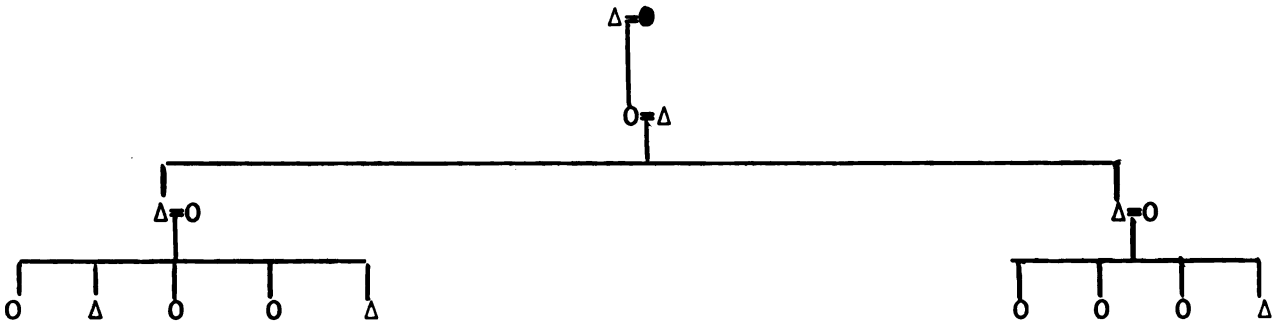


Mahisan Bari - Village Hajipur

▲ = deceased

Demonstrates the local "ideal" with the co-resident branches of a patrilineal kin group. Only married males are represented here.

KINSHIP DIAGRAM 4

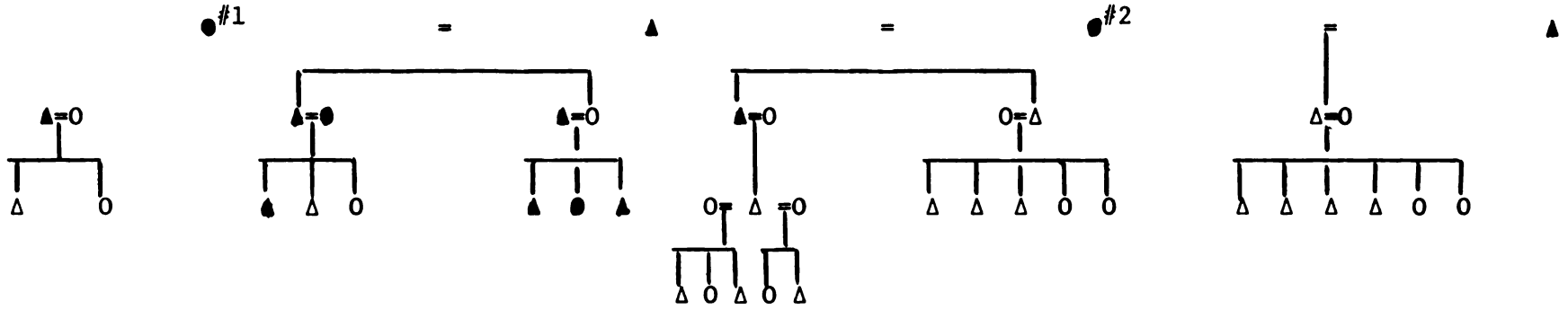


●=deceased

Abul Hossain Bari - Village Tinpara

This diagram demonstrates the build-up of a patrilineage despite the fact that the apical male had no sons. His son-in-law is resident, as are his grandsons by his daughter (*dohitro*), now married themselves. This family is of the linear joint type with respect to both residential unit and land ownership.

KINSHIP DIAGRAM 5



▲ ● = deceased

Fazlur Rahman Bari - Village Tinpara

This diagram shows the descendants of one man through two wives, the second of whom remarried a man who had already moved into the homestead and whose son now lives there with his matrilateral cousins. Note the presence of a non-related widow with children (see Example 3 for her background). There is also shown an instance of otherwise relatively rare polygynous marriage. The numbers show the order of the wives' marriage to the apical male.

individual plots within the homestead are owned (usually) by the male members of each household grouping. Absolute rights of ownership are, however, circumscribed by the unlikelihood that the owner of a given household plot would be allowed to sell it, willy nilly, to anyone whom he might choose outside, and against the wishes of the other members, of the homestead. Members of each household may possess agricultural land (either individually or jointly) and the household, with its members as a labor force and the land they cultivate, constitutes an individual peasant farm. That is, as an economic unit, the household is the minimal economically productive group in rural Bengali society.

The households of Hajipur and Tinpara may be divided into 6 types, following the classifications used by Kolenda (1967) as in Table 10. While in this part of South Asia, as elsewhere, the "joint family" is usually stated to be the ideal for the domestic group, it will be seen that simple and supplemented nuclear families constitute over 70 percent of all households in both villages. The reasons for this are similar to those explaining the prevalence of nuclear, as opposed to joint, families elsewhere in Bengal (Nicholas 1965-66) and the Sub-continent (Kolenda 1967). In general, the prevalence of nuclear families is related to the small size of land holdings (1.5 acres the average for the two villages) relative to the amount of land needed to support a large residential group. Also, Bengali Muslims practice the equal division of inheritance (among males; see discussion below), which usually takes place at the time of the father's death and is accompanied by the separation of the brothers into nuclear family households. This is not universal, however, as the presence of lineal joint and lineal collateral joint households in Hajipur and Tinpara shows, and it is not uncommon for a father to share his property in some measure with his sons before his death, in which cases joint residence households are

TABLE 10*

HAJIPUR AND TINPARA:
HOUSEHOLD TYPES AND COMPOSITION**

Type	Number of Households	Percent Total Households	Number of Population Per Type	Percent Population Per Type
Single	6	5.8	6	1.1
Sub-Nuclear	7	6.7	22	3.9
Nuclear	54	51.9	255	45.0
Supplemented Nuclear	19	18.3	110	19.4
Lineal Joint	11	10.6	91	16.1
Lineal Collateral Joint	7	6.7	82	14.5
Totals	104	100.0	566	100.0

*Tabular summary of data for each village given in Appendix II.

**Type categories taken from those of Kolenda (1967). It should be noted that not all those she has defined exist in this sample, e.g., *collateral joint* (joint among brothers).

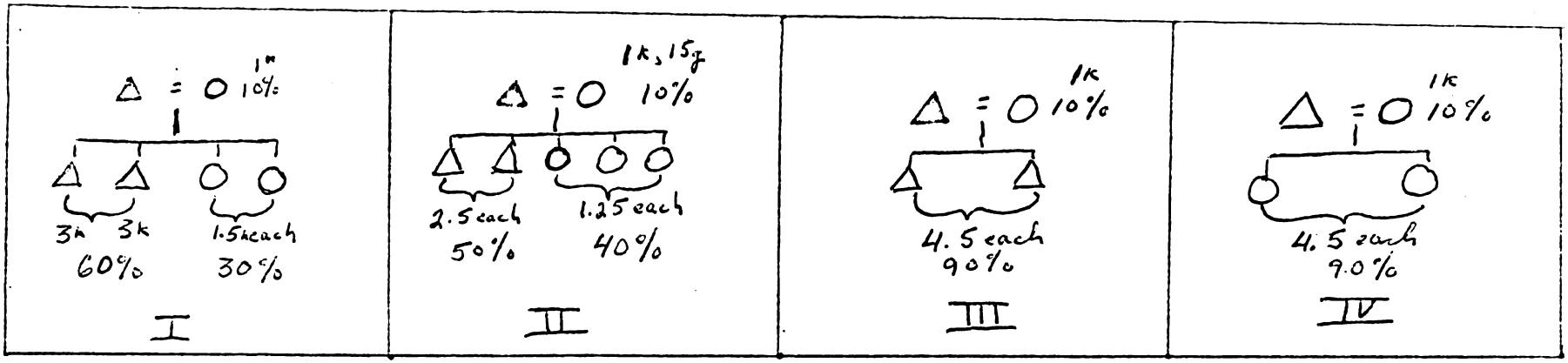
maintained. As will be noted, nonetheless, collateral joint residence is not found in this sample since, as elsewhere (Nicholas 1965-66), division of inherited propoerty among brothers at the time of the father's death is almost automatic, leading to separate nuclear family households, even though the brothers may have shared propoerty and lived jointly with their father prior to his death. A more detailed discussion of the economics of family types in Hajipur and Tinpara is provided in Appendix II.

A further complication in the partitioning of homestead property is evident in the practice, most commonly seen in the homesteads with larger population, of combining groups of individual households into what are called *bhadra*

groupings (probably from the word *bhadrasan* meaning "kin group" or "lineage"; another word used in the local dialect is *hishya*). That is, for example. two or more brothers who have divided residentially into separate households may nonetheless occupy contiguous plots within the homestead and utilize common parts of the homestead area and property to the exclusion of others. Thus, *bhadra* divisions arise when the descendants of a given group of siblings further divided and specifically utilize sections of the homestead among themselves. These are recognized as homestead sub-divisions even though the patrilineal kin group (*gusthi*) remains effective for members of different *bhadra* groupings who are so related. Kinship Diagrams 7 and 7 give examples of *bhadra* organization.

Thus the homestead is divided into various sub-units along the lines of patrilineal kinship and property ownership. Such division does not, as a practical matter, preclude cooperation among homestead residents when it comes to the use of each others' possessions or household area within the homestead. But it does define rights of ownership in both normative and legal terms. The explicit character of those rights is reflected in the pervasiveness of conflict over homestead property by members of different households, in which recourse may be had to actual litigation in the civil courts, pitting kinsmen and co-residents one against the other.

The economics of kinship and the organization of the homestead are, then, a complicated matter. Nor does a discussion of inheritance patterns in Hajipur and Tinpara reduce the complexity of these villages' kinship systems. Kinship Diagram 8 demonstrates some simple models of inheritance, as understood by the villagers themselves. It will be apparent that wives and daughters may inherit property, albeit unequally in relation to men, according to Islamic law. A common rule of thumb in the distribution of patrimony is that "Two daughters



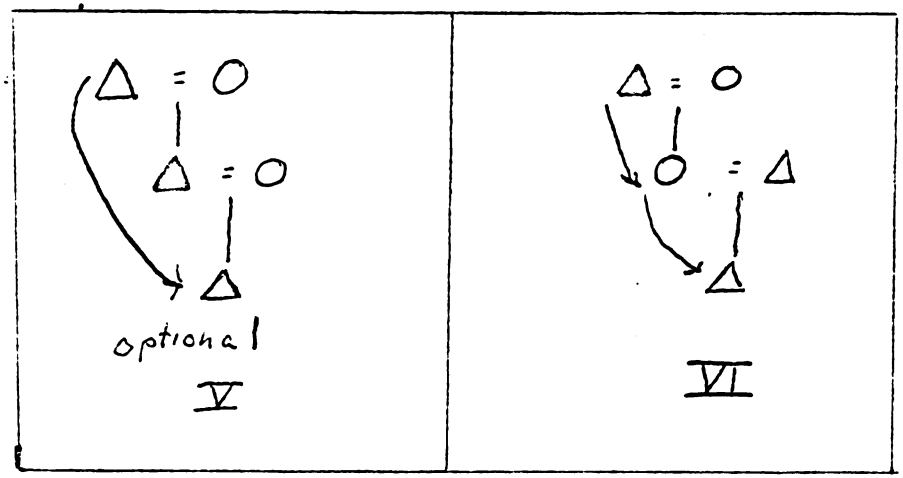
1 kani=20 gandas

1 kani=.40 acres

1 ganda=.02 acres

k = kani

g = ganda



Types of Inheritance

Villagers interviewed with hypothetical kinship and inheritance situations as diagrammed above were asked to show how 10 *kanis* of land would be divided in each situation. Examples I and II show the distribution among sons and daughters in two hypothetical combinations, the existence of a widowed mother held constant. Examples III and IV reflect equal distribution among sons and daughters (if in the latter case there are no sons). Example V shows how a grandson may not necessarily inherit if his father's death precedes that of his grandfather, a practice now forbidden by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961. Example VI shows the case of an only daughter with a resident son-in-law (*ghar jamai*), in which she inherits and transmits her father's property to her son.

are equal to one son," although in Hajipur and Tinpara this rule was honored as much in the breach as in the practice. But the fact that women have the right to inherit some property and often insist on doing so has implications for the character of affinal and matrilateral ties of their patrikin.

A married woman living away from her natal homestead is entitled to inherit a share of her father's property, as the ideal models depicted in Kinship Diagram 8 show. In many cases, however, daughters either do not claim their inheritance or are in fact deprived of it by certain devices. Of 130 adult Muslim women in Hajipur and Tinpara who had been married at least once, only 16 or little more than 12 percent had any land registered in their names, so far as I could learn at the time of research. In some cases, fathers had begun the process of transferring land to their sons by registering certain portions of it in their names. This was done explicitly, some informants explained, to preclude the possibility that a daughter who had married out of the homestead could later claim the land, since it would already be in the possession of her brother(s) and thus not part of the father's patrimony at the time of his death. In the cases of some of the women living post-maritally in Hajipur and Tinpara, these had inherited land in their natal villages, but the land was effectively farmed by their brothers or else a kind of "land transfer" had taken place, in that their land in their natal villages had been sold and the money thereby obtained used to buy land locally near Hajipur or Tinpara, which was subsequently registered in their husbands' names.

But it is most common for women "voluntarily" to forego their rights to inherit land in order to maintain good relations with members of their patrilineages. This was often stated as being the norm by Hajipur and Tinpara villagers and this expressed motivation is found in other research reports pertaining to the subject as well. Florence McCarthy (1967: 31-32), who has

studied villages in Comilla *thana*, notes:

> "Village women keep strong ties with their father's family, even though they spend the majority of their lives in the varis of their husbands. This acts as a built-in security for them in case of divorce or widowhood.
>
> "(An) alternative for a woman who is widowed is to return to her own family. If her ties are strong and her relationship good, upon the death of her husband, her brothers might welcome her home to live with them. If, however, her relationship with them is not good, if she has taken part of her father's inheritance, for example, the brothers might not ask her home, or they may not take such good care of her. In this context it is not surprising that women do not usually take that part of the inheritance due them, but invest it in their future security bygiving it to their brothers."

The same security considerations are operative, I might add, because of the ever-present possibility of divorce, more easy for a man to initiate than for a woman. Over 16 percent of all marriages I recorded in Hajipur and Tinpara had ended in divorce at the time of research.

What I have said thus far about inheritance and inter-lineage ties via marriage may be summarized as follows. While the domestic group is not an economically corporate unit, in the sense of having joint ownership of property, it may be said that the basic bias of the inheritance system is to keep property, and especially cultivation land, in the hands of its male members. This patrilineal bias in inheritance practices reflects a desire to keep property in the possession of lineage members, protecting it from passing out to other lineages through females who have marrried out, despite their legal right to patrimonly. The exceptional case of uxorilocal residence would seem to "prove" the rule. For where a man resides post-maritally in his father-in-law's house - such a husband know as a *ghar jamai* ("resident son-in-law") - he cannot expect to inherit the latter's property. Rather, the father's property is passed direction to his *dohitro* ("daughter's children"). The daughter herself may inherit it first, depending on the age of her children at the time of her father's death, but in any case the land is rarely ever formally in the

possession of her husband. It should be noted, moreover, that a *ghar jamai's* children are reckoned as members of his wife's, not his own, patrilineage.[26]

Thus, when a woman marries out and does not exercise her right to inherit, it would seem that reasonably good relations between her own and her husband's lineages are at least partially ensured. And indeed, in my observation, both courteous and warm relationships among affinally related kin are the rule. The woman's husband is accorded a special welcome when he visits her father and her brothers. The husband's family reciprocates by allowing frequent visits of the woman to her own family during times of the year when household work is less demanding upon her. McCarthy (1967: 31) reports that the relations between a woman and her brothers are supported by specific obligations on the part of the latter. "Twice a year ..., the brothers have to bring their sisters to their home. They also have to give them *saris*, and clothes to any children that might have come along." Thus, women do not exercise their claims over propoerty that they might have because of their affectionate relationship with their brothers, on the one hand, and, on the other, to preserve future claims on their brothers' support. Their brothers reciprocate, continuing the close relationship which is said to exist in childhood and early adolescence between brothers and sisters, by "taking care of" their sisters, even while they are married and in the event of their widowhood or divorce. It should be noted also, of course, that the brothers stand in a "mother's brother" (*mama*) relationship to the sisters' children, which, by implying a special affection for the latter (*bhagina, bhagini*; "sister's son, duaghter"), is a further factor in cementing the relationship. But a woman can always claim her inheritance and it is not uncommon for this to happen, despite the social pressures against it. When it does take place, relations between a woman and her husband *vis à vis* her brothers are likely to be strained.

I have dwelt on this subject with two ends in mind. Firstly, I want to outline some of the reasons for which non-unilineal, matrilateral and affinal kinship ties constitute an important channel for social relations in Hajipur, Tinpara and their neighboring communities. Lest this seem an overly obvious point, I should remind the reader that anthropologists have usually thought unilineal descent systems to operate in a manner which gives little emphasis to matrilateral and affinal relationships. The basis for our having thought that this is the case comes primarily from the field of African ethnology in which traditional structural-functionalist interpretations have laid down this view of unilineal descent systems. Data from Asian societies, however, have given rise to some recent interpretations of unilineal descent which point out that matrilateral and affinal relationships are far more important in the overall structure of these societies than the traditional structuralist interpretations of African data on this subject have led us to believe (see, e.g., Gallin 1960; 1968). The Muslim Bengali *gusthi* is not required by rules of marriage to be exogamous, as unilineal descent groups elsewhere are often reported to be. This is so because Islam permits both parallel and cross cousin marriage and in some parts of the Muslim world lineage endogamy is practiced to a very high extent. But despite the culturally allowed option for lineage endogamy, it is little practiced in the villages of East Bengal with which I am most familiar. Thus, a second reason for emphasizing matrilateral and affinal relations is to seek a general explanation for the choice against lineage endogamy which rural Bengali Muslims exercise by overwhelmingly common preference. I believe that the explanation lies in the role played by extensiveness of kinship ties in the elaboration of the social structure of the market area.

Table 11 presents data which reflect the contribution of marriage ties to

TABLE 11

LOCATION OF MARITAL TIES OF HAJIPUR AND TINPARA*

Place	N Marriages	%	Area in Square Miles
same village	29	6.58	less than .5
out of village in *samaj*	62	14.06	.5 to 1 square mile
out of *samaj* in market area	103	23.35	4 square miles
out of market area in Union	53	12.02	18 square miles
out of Union in *thana*	173	39.23	107 square miles
out of thana	21	4.76	unknown
Totals	441	100.00	

*Muslims only; area is cumulative, does not reflect actual travel distances, which vary depending on season, road conditions, etc.

the village-*samaj*-market area ensemble I have described earlier. These data include marriages over a period of 1 to 4 generations. There is comparatively little lineage endogamy and intra-village marriages are not great in number. Nor do marital ties function specifically to lend cohesion to the *samaj mauzas*. However, if intra-village, *samaj*, and market area marriages are combined, it can be seen that nearly 45 percent of the marriages fall within an area of 4 square miles, precisely the market area which is the locus of other ties which channel most of the villagers' daily activities. Thus, lineal and village endogamy contribute to the formation of the larger social unit. The remainder of the marriages fall largely within the Union and the *thana*, illustrating the extent to which most villagers' ties with the world at large are likely to stretch, if marital relationships are taken to be at least one indicator of them.

As noted in Table 11, the marriage data presented are for Muslims only. In contrast to the Muslims, the Hindu families in Hajipur, Tinpara and environs, required to seek mates with their respective castes, have limited choice about where mates will come from, since their fellow castement are distributed irregularly in small groups throughout the locality. All the Hindu families are further guided in their choice of mates by their own caste *samaj* groupings - not to be confused with the *samaj* groupings as I have discussed it here (for a more detailed description of Bengali Hindu caste *samaj* as the determinant of effective marrying units, see Klass 1966). I collected genealogical data from 5 Hindu homesteads, the Carpenters and Washermen of Hajipur and Tinpara proper, plus two nearby families of *Jugi* weavers and one family of Barbers. Forty out of 78 marriages among these castes for which I have locational data are with families in each respective caste outside the *thana* - 51.30 percent, as opposed to the mere 4.76 percent for the Muslims in these villages.

It is further interesting to relate the locational data on marriages to the general tendencies noted above toward a certain amount of class and status group inter-marriage. In general, the Muslim high status lineages do not demonstrate marked divergence from the data presented in Table 11. But certain of these seem more concerned to find properly equivalent status families than others, and these families differ from the norm of intra-*thana* marriages. Thus, for example, the status-conscious *imams* of the Tinpara Khondakar lineage arranged 7 out of 31 recorded marriages, or 22 percent of them, with families outside the *thana*. Also, the Majumdars of *Mauza* Radhapur arranged 55 percent of their recorded marriages in the past several generations with high status lineages. Of a total of 20 marriages for which I have locational data in this lineage, 8, or 40 percent are outside the *thana*. Thus,

while most high status lineages do not tend to look far afield for marriage alliances appropriate to their social standing, some do so. The fact that most do not, however, allows the conclusion that the class and status lines which I have delineated in an earlier section are operative primarily within the market area secondarily within the Union and the *thana* itself. This further supports one of the general findings of this research, that the market area, rather than the "village," is the most important territorial referent for "community" in this part of East Pakistan.

The extensiveness of marital connection and the importance of matrilateral and affinal ties are also related to the same ecological features which underlie the social structure of these villages as a whole. The Islamic law that all members of the patrilineal descent group must inherit, albeit unequally, is in fact contradicted by the cultural expectation that daughters will not claim agricultural land. To the extent, then, that these inheritance practices in effect resemble the Hindu *Dayabhaga* system of inheritance, they reflect one of the many ways in which Bengali Muslim culture represents an adaptation of the Islamic Great Tradition to Bengal's historical conditions. For the systematic deprivation of the right of inheritance to women probably is related to the decreasing availability of land all throughout the 19th Century at least (I do not know how far back this "local adaptation" of inheritance practices historically extends). At the same time, the Islamic principle that both sons and daughters must inherit patrimony is used by both men and women under conditions of poverty and land scarcity to obtain land when the possibility of successfully invoking the rule arises.[25] This helps to explain the solicitude brothers will display toward "good" sisters, which otherwise expresses simple human affection and cultural values. At the same time, the ever-present possibility of tension between brothers-in-law is

similarly explained. Thus, for a variety of reasons, matrilateral and affinal relationships are attended to with scarcely less priority than are patrilineal ones. Kinship in Hajipur and Tinpara thus takes on a certain bilaterality in practical terms, despite the fact that it is an ideologically patrilineal system.

The Role of Religion

If kinship functions as a way of extending social ties beyond the immediate localized group, religion has certain social features which serve to emphasize its internal unity. This may be seen in a discussion of collective religious activities.

There are a number of religious requirements of the faithful in Islam, the fulfillment of which is done in groups. One of these is the obligation to perform weekly congregational prayer (*jumma namaz*). Moreover, certain holidays, recurring annually and distributed throughout the year, are celebrated in groups. There are some obvious ways in which collective worship of this sort serves to unite local groupings.

The weekly *jumma* prayer is held in a local mosque. It is important to note that while mosques come to be associated with a particular congregation, in the area where I studied they were not usually constructed by the collective effort of the congregation. Historical information I was able to gather regarding the construction of 4 mosques in the Alirbazar area indicates that the donation of mosque land (Arabic: *waqf*) and the cost of actual construction were contributed largely by one family in each of the cases, and in every case a *sardari* lineage. Mosque construction, in the eyes of villagers, adds to religious merit and enhances social prestige, but it is clearly dependent on economic affluence and can be seen as consonant with political influence as

well. Once a mosque is constructed, however, the congregation which comes to use it regularly and contribute in some measure to its upkeep becomes more or less fixed over time and corresponds broadly to the locality group surrounding the mosque. It is not an exclusive group in principle; in practice, too, the use of the mosque is open to any believer who wants to participate in worship there, regardless of his homestead's location. Naturally, however, people tend to go to the mosque nearest their home and over time a congregation becomes stabilized.

Neither Hajipur nor Tinpara has a mosque within its *mauza* boundaries. Hajipur villagers use a mosque lying to the east of the *mauza* proper, in *Mauza* Imamgaon, with whose residents they share not only the mosque, but also a number of other activities. The congregation contributes to its upkeep, paying "dues" (*chanda*) once a year on the evening of *Shab-e-Barat* (on the occasion of the Islamic "new year"), supporting a locally respected *maulana* as the weekly prayer reader. Tinpara villagers have to travel further for weekly worship, to a mosque southwest of Alirbazar. They are not otherwise integrated into the groups of villagers with whom they share the use of that mosque. Thus, while the Hajipur mosque congregation overlaps with Hajipur as a local village (*gram*) and thus serves as another unifying factor for that grouping, this is not the case for Tinpara villagers. In their case, regular weekly *jumma namaz* gatherings bring them into contact with villagers outside their own *reyai*/village grouping, and thus serves to extend Tinpara's contacts with other villages in the market area.

The spatial distribution of mosques thus tends to affect intra-group and/or inter-group solidarity, varying in each case with respect to the local villages or *reyais* involved. Mosques are not built on the basis of preexisting congregations, but when and if a given family has the means and the

desire to construct them. Some *mauzas*, then, have one mosque, others two and still others none at all. It happens that Hajipur villagers have a mosque within their own socially recognized village and so for them the observance of Friday prayers and joint responsibility for the upkeep of the mosque may be seen as a socially unifying collective activities. For Tinpara villagers, however, worship at a mosque clearly removed from their own village's boundaries brings them into contact with members of other villagers in the market area.

The observance of religious festivals functions socially in a similar manner as does mosque location. Some of them focus less on the mosque and more on collective worship at the homesteads of the dominant *sardari* lineages in each village. During the festival of *Shab-e-Barat*, for example, the "Night of Reckoning," when it is said that each man's future for the coming year is being written, it is the custom to pray long into the night, indeed, all night in the case of the especially devout. At this time, Hajipur villagers meet at the homestead of the prominent Mahisan lineage, performing prayer at the cement platform which the Mahisans constructed for that purpose near one of their ponds. In Tinpara some of the villagers congregate on this occasion in the *kachari ghar* of Pradhan Ali, the most influential single man in that village; others pray at home individually or go to their mosque.

During the month of *Ramadan*, when the injunction of the daily fast is operative for all Muslims, there is a special prayer (*tarabi namaz*) required after the breaking of the day-long fast. Villagers in both Hajipur and Tinpara observe this prayer collectively, at the home once again of the most prominent *sardari* lineage in each respective group. Other examples of this sort might be mentioned, but the major point should be clear. During collective worship occasion, both at *jumma* prayers and yearly recurring holidays,

the unity of the local group is, in some cases, indirectly given support, and in other cases, a certain mixing of local groupings takes place. Glasse (1967) has reported a similar function of religion for the Matlab *Thana* in northwest Comilla District, where, according to his account, groups like the *reyais* of Hajipur and Tinpara are in fact congruent with collective worship groupings (*milat*).

But not all religious observances serve to foster group intensiveness. On important occasions kinship ties are cemented, rather than those of local or extended group membership. This is the case on the occasion of two major religious festivals, *Id-ul-Fitr* and *Id-ul-Azha* (*Korbani Id*). Both festivals are the occasion for special and relatively sumptuous feasting; the former celebrates the end of the *ramadan* fast and the latter commemorates Abraham's devotion to God expressed in his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Matrilateral and affinal kinsmen come to these feasts and exchanges of visits between members of different patrilineages are the significant social features of these occasions. But it should also be mentioned that the *Id* holidays bring together members of different village groupings, again depending on the location of religious places. On both holidays, it is required of the faithful to observe *jumma* prayer not at their respective mosques, but rather at a special *Id* congregational field (*Idgah*), a plot of land reserved primarily for this, and few other, purposes. In Hajipur there is such a plot, donated about 20 years ago by a pious man who had been to Mecca (from whose having performed this pilgrimage the Haji family of Village Hajipur gets its name). The field is surrounded by a low wall, has a pond for the performance of pre-prayer ablutions, and a small platform where the aforementioned *maulana*, who officiates at this, as well as other, ceremonies, can lead prayer and give a sermon. On *Id* days, villagers from all parts of the Alirbazar market area

come to worship in Hajipur, for it happens that this village has one of the few *Idgahs* in the locality. Thus, on this occasion, villagers from the *samaj* groupings in perhaps 20 *mauzas* meet and worship together.

There is more about the role of Islam in these villages that one might say, of course, but I choose for the purposes of the present discussion to emphasize certain of its social features. Firstly, the collective religious activities of villagers serve on the one hand to unite local groupings in some instances and on the other to bring together people from different local groupings. It should be clear that locational factors - the spatial distribution of mosques and *Idgahs* - are so important in determining the interactional settings in which group unification and group extension is brought about. Secondly, the role of dominant lineages in the construction of mosques and in the provision of other physical facilities, as well as leadership, for collective worship activities should be noted, for this is consistent with the organizational pattern in which social and political leadership has evolved in these villages and the relationships between leadership groups are carried on.

CHAPTER VII

THE VILLAGES AND THEIR EXTENSIONS - II

The preceding chapter has highlighted two complementary features of social organization in Hajipur and Tinpara. Firstly, proximity of settlement, land ownership, daily interaction and the performance of certain collective activities serve to buttress the internal cohesiveness of the village grouping. These factors lend support to a localized intensiveness of organization to small population nuclei whose residence in relatively small areas define the "village" in this part of East Pakistan. Secondly, dyadic, often functionally specific kinds of interaction, unite individuals and groups in ways which cross the social boundaries of the "village." These factors, as well as certain aspects of kinship and religious organization which I have discussed, emphasize territorial extensiveness in social organization. The analysis thus far attempts to take account of ecology and economy as the underlying basis for these organizational forms. Another level of analysis - the purely organizational one - can now be brought to bear on the understanding of social life in these communites. In particular, I want now to focus on the nature of political leadership in Hajipur, Tinpara and their various *reyai* and *samaj* connections.

The Social Organization of Politics

It has already been noted that collective activities in Hajipur and Tinpara center primarily around the homesteads of the dominant *sardari* lineages in each case. In Hajipur there are 3 *sardars*, each the head of one of 3 *reyai* groupings: 1) the Mahisan lineage, whose members own about one third

of Hajipur villagers' total land and who constitute about one sixth of its total population, with an average of 3.08 acres per household; 2) the Majumdar lineage with approximately 13 percent of Hajipur villagers' land holdings, making up also about one sixth of the village population, with an average of 1.8 acres per household; and 3) the Munshi lineage, with about 13 percent of the village's total land holdings and about one tenth of the total village population, with an average holding of 3.48 per household. These three lineages, then, are the largest land owners (their individual household farm holdings taken collectively) in the village. But only one, the Mahisan lineage, dominates over all others in land ownership and population. The Majumdars and the Munshis are more or less equal in land ownership, although the Majumdars' total land holdings are only a little above average per household. The Munshis have a smaller total population than do either of the other two important lineages, but among them are 2 rich peasant households out of a total of 4 households, which accounts for the fact that the Munshi land holding average per household is the highest in the village. Among the Mahisans are found 3 rich peasant families, 2 of whose members are important creditors in both money lending and land rentals. The Majumdar lineage has in its fold only 2 rich peasant households, just one of whose members is an important creditor. While there are 2 rich peasant families in the Munshi homestead, neither of these was important as a creditor at the time of research, although one of these, that of the *sardar*, Fazar Ali, can be perceived to be on the decline in land ownership and influence. The majority of the Mahisan families are middle peasants; only one household in the Mahisan homestead can be classified as poor. Seven of the Majumdar households contain middle peasant families, and 6 of that lineage's households are poor. In the Munshi homestead, of the 4 households,

2 are rich, as I have noted, 1 is of middle peasant economic status and the other debtor middle.

All three *sardari* lineages are titled. But if land ownership, both collective and individual, and population size are taken as indicators of potential plitical dominance, the Mahisans stand out most clearly in this respect. At the same time, despite the variations in land and population I have described, each of the other two retain sufficient basis for influence so as to counterweight the Mahisans who would otherwise be completely dominant politically in Hajipur. Moreover, as I shall relate in more detail, there has been intermittent conflict over the past 20 years among the 3 *sardari* lineages in the village, despite the fact that the three are significantly linked by affinal connections which extend over several generations.

In Hajipur, then, there exists clear segmentation along *reyai* lines. That is, the non-*sardari* lineages respectively acknowledge at least verbally the claim to *sardari* leadership of one or the other of the three lineages. But there are few collective activities which contribute to *reyai* - as opposed to village - solidarity. The only activity of this sort which emphasizes the solidarity of the *reyai* as opposed to other groupings is that of the marriage ceremony of the son or daughter of one of the *reyai* members. It is customary for weddings to be held at the home of the bride. Very often, if a young man lives far away, his representatives in seeking a match with a local girl will rely on the *sardars* in her village as a source of independent information regarding the status of her family and its economic situation. When the negotiations of the match are in their final stages, the *sardar(s)* of the *reyai* grouping to which the girl's family belongs are consulted in the matter of the *maharana* (or *maher*) - the "compensatory bride price" to be paid in the event of a divorce. *Sardars* are also the final arbiters

of who may be invited to the wedding and in all cases that I knew of invitations were limited exclusively to *reyai* members and kinsmen, to the exclusion of close friends outside the group, even though they might live in the bride's village. In Hajipur this practice is carried on with great rigidity, if the two weddings which occurred there during my stay are any indication of its effective force.

Example 13: Hamidulla's Daughter's Wedding

Hamidulla, a school teacher, is married to a woman of Hajipur's respected Haji family and, although from a village outside the *thana*, resides in the Haji *Bari*. In the spring of 1967 he arranged a marriage for his 14 year old and the ceremony was held in April of that year.

Invitations to the actual ceremony followed customary protocol and present at the event were, in addition to the groom's family and friends from outside Hajipur, all representatives of the other lineages in Hajipur's *Reyai* I, of which the Haji lineage is a member. Hamidulla explained to me modestly that he was not a man of such great menas as to be able to invite all the members of the *reyai* and so it had been decided that the senior men - or their representatives - of each lineage in the *reyai* would be invited. The *sardar*, Jabbar Mia Mahisan, did not come, but sent in his place a younger and more vigorous man, Shahidul Islam, his cousin, who acted as "leader" and spokesman for the *reyai* members present. At one point before the actual ceremony, Shahid called me out and showed me the gifts that the groom's family had brought for the bride. These included 5 *saris*, one of them silk, several gold ornaments and some cosmetics. The total value of the gifts was about Rs. 500, I was told. On query I learned that the bride's family had presented a gold ring to the groom.

The actual ceremony was presided over by the prestigious *maulana* who serves the mosque frequented by Hajipur people. After the ceremony, a meal was served to all those present. The *reyai* members, in addition to their own partaking of the meal, helped Hamidulla to serve the other guests, from the groom's entourage. The cost of the meal was an expense of the Haji family. Shahidul Islam later took me aside and produced Rs. 40 from his pocket; this, he said, was to pay the officiating *maulana* as well as the barber and washerman who had helped prepare the bride for the occasion. That amount was Rs. 20, the remainder a gift to the various *reyai* families for their role both in making the match and their participation in the ceremony. This total sum had been paid by the groom's family.

No other members of Village Hajipur and its surrounding *mauzas* were present. Earlier that afternoon I had been talking with another teacher, whose homestead is practically adjacent to Hamidulla's, but in another

> *mauza* and not part of the same *reyai*. The teacher, also from another *thana* but locally resident with his wife's family, was one of Hamidulla's best personal friends, but he could not be invited, he said complainingly, because of the principle of *reyai* invitation only.
>
> "The people of this village," he lamented disgustedly, "are backward and clannish. In my home village, such things would never take place."
>
> As his village lay some 30 miles away and I had never visited it, I cannot evluate his assertion of its virtue in matters of hospitality, but this mans' resentment at having had to miss the wedding of his best friend's daughter serves to underline the segmentation of *reyai* lines, as expressed in wedding ceremonies, which seemed characteristic of Hajipur at that time.

Although I never had occasion to witness a wedding in Tinpara, I conclude on the basis of discussions with informants in that village that such exclusiveness in wedding invitations would not have taken place. For Tinpara is both a *reyai* and a village and the principle of *reyai* invitation to weddings would naturally extend to the village as it is socially defined. In short, the segmentation which exists in Hajipur has no counterpart in Tinpara. The reason for this is because there is in Tinpara only one dominant *sardari* lineage - in effect, one dominant individual - whose influence overrides that of any other lineage in the village. There are 2 *sardari* lineages in the Tinpara *reyai*. One of these is an untitled lineage, that named after a now deceased *sardar*, Tara Gazi, whose mantle of leadership fell on his grandson, Safat Ali, an aged and now feeble man. The members of Tara Gazi Homestead are numerous, constituting nearly a fifth of Tinpara's population. Collectively, their land ownership is the largest of any lineage in Tinpara, amounting to nearly a fourth of the village's total holdings. But the households of Tara Gazi *Bari* average only 1.4 acres of land, less than the average of 1.5 acres for both villages. In contrast, the other *sardari* family is that of Pradhan Ali Majumdar, which is not numerous. Pradhan Ali himself, the *sardar* owns nearly 7 acres, nearly 12 percent of Tinpara's total. He is a regular employer of

hired labor, both locally and of men from other *thanas*, as he has no sons. The average household land holding for his homestead as a whole is 3.3 acres. His home is a regular meeting place for Tinpara villagers in the evening and, as I have earlier noted, collective religious activities which do not take place in the mosque attended by the Tinpara villagers take place instead at his home. He is an elected official, although not the Manager, of the Tinpara Cooperative Society, which meets at his home as well, in the *kachari ghar*. Little of any consequence in the way of group activities takes place in Tinpara without involving Pradhan Ali, and no combinations of factions within the village which have arisen from time to time have succeeded in besting him in conflict. If there is any example of a truly dominant individual in these villages, it is Pradhan Ali. And the fact that activities center around his leadership help to give focus over time to the internal organization of Tinpara as a *reyai*/village grouping.

It is thus possible to conclude that an important factor in the internal unity of both Hajipur and Tinpara is the existence of dominant lineages around whose homesteads collective activities tend to cluster. While there is segmentation in Hajipur, the Mahisans, at the time of my stay at least, were nonetheless clearly dominant in this sense, as well as being economically and numerically the most outstanding lineage in that village. In Tinpara the constellation of forces is less complex and one lineage - indeed, effectively one man - stands out as the "leader" in village activities.

At the same time, the relations between the *sardars*, their lineages and their roles in the *samaj*, contribute importantly to the extensions of each smaller village and *reyai* grouping which the *samaj* represents. Of the 5 *sardari* lineages in Hajipur and Tinpara, 4 are the bearers of high status titles, and contain rich peasant families within them. My genealogical material

included identifiable high status lineages outside of the villages, but, due to the wide dispersal of marriage alliances as indicated in Table 11, it is less easy to identify the extent to which villagers in Tinpara and Hajipur have married into *sardari* lineages outside their own *samaj*. An analysis of marriage into *sardari* lineages within their *samaj* grouping, however, is possible. In Hajipur and Tinpara, the 5 *sardari* lineages show an overall rate of inter-marriage with other *samaj sardari* families of 11.4 percent of all marriages (some of these, of course, overlapping with data presented for the intermarriages of high status lineages). The 16 non-*sardari* Muslim lineages have married into *samaj sardari* lineages at a rate of 8.7 percent of all recorded marriages. While the difference between the rates of *sardari* lineage marriage between the two groups is not statistically significant (p=.1135 using Fisher's Exact Test), the direction of the difference is toward a clearly higher rate of intermarriage between *sardari* lineages than that occurring between non-*sardari* and *sardari* lineages. Thus, while the *sardars* do not form an exclusively intermarrying group, they tend to choose each other's lineages as sources of mates more often than they allow such alliances to be formed with non-*sardari* lineages. At the same time, however, the fact that non-*sardari* lineages can have access to mates from *sardari* lineages is an important one. From the perspective of intermarriage, the *samaj* as a grouping is unified in two ways. On the one hand, intermarriage between the dominant *sardari* lineages from each sub-unit of the *samaj* helps to solidify ties at the "upper levels" of power and influence within the *samaj* itself. On the other hand, the fact that non-*sardari* lineages can gain access to *sardari* lineages in the same *samaj* by marriage adds to the multiplicity of ties between the more and less powerful within the *samaj* as a whole, thereby increasing its cohesion as a group.

From an interactional point of view, particularly with respect to local politics and conflict resolution, relations between the *sardari* and non-*sardari* lineages within the *samaj* have important implications for the analysis of social organization in this part of East Bengal. As I have noted, the primary *raison d'être* of the *samaj* is as an institution for the control of conflict. When a dispute occurs between two villagers, be they of the same village or not, one or both disputants may call upon several or all of the *sardars* in the *samaj* group to constitute a kind of rural court - known as *Salish* - to hear and adjudicate the dispute. It is not necessary that the *sardars* in question be from the *reyai* or *reyais* of the various disputants, although not all the *sardars* of the *samaj* need to be called to sit on the *salish*. This procedure means that a conflict in one *reyai* or village (sub-units of the *samaj* grouping as a whole) can be and usually is "escaleted" to involve members of the *samaj* from various villages. The settlement of disputes in this manner is not the only legitimate means utilized in conflict resolution, I hasten to point out. Very often villagers resort to litigation in the government courts as well. Moreover, increasingly at the time of my research, villagers were having resort to the Union Council, an elected local government body empowered to adjudicate local disputes. But when the *samaj* is called upon as a means for conflict resolution, the initial actors in a dispute situation are multiplied immediately and the territory over which conflict may spread is automatically expanded.

A latent function of the *samaj* is that of regulation of relations among the *sardars*, themselves representative usually of the dominant lineages in their respective villages. This may be seen in the fact that, although transferral of the mantle of *sardari* leadership normally proceeds from father to eldest son, a man who has newly inherited this status must as a matter of

course cement his relations with the other *sardars* in the same *samaj* grouping. This is usually done with the formality of a dinner invitation. This "courtesy" in effect gives the *sardars* some method of sanctioning admission to their ranks, even though the man upon whom the position of *sardar* has newly devolved is legitimately encumbent by virtue of inheritance. This is a crucial factor in recruitment to *sardari* ranks, in that a man who wants to be a *sardar*, and can establish some legitimacy to his claim as against that of another, can build upon this by inviting *sardars* to dine, by promising them support in the case of their personal needs, or otherwise inviegle them into granting him the position of *sardar*. When conflict over the position of *sardari* leadership in one given *reyai* or village takes place, all the *sardars* in the *samaj* grouping are *ipso facto* involved. Here again, a purely local conflict in one sub-unit of the *samaj*, by the very nature of the *sardari* system of leadership, territorially extensive in expression, automatically escalates to involve other groupings in the relevant territory.

The *samaj* and the system of *sardari* leadership displays important linkages to other *samaj* groupings as well as to official governmental bodies. The extensiveness of social organization to include the market area as a relevant unit can be seen here. There are 3 *samaj* groupings contiguous to Alirbazar. One of these, to the north of the market, is that to which Hajipur and Tinpara belong, one lies to the west of the bazar and one to the south of it. The affairs of the market are informally regulated by the *sardars* of these 3 *samaj* groupings. That is, if some irregularity occurs in the market - which as a central place for some 30 *mauzas*, is a kind of "neutral" territory where no single *samaj* or *reyai* grouping holds sway - the relevant *sardars* of the *samaj* groupings whose members may be involved in the matter are called upon to help sort out the trouble. For example, there is no formal

allocation of places in the little market which meets twice weekly in Alirbazar. But over time the number of regular sellers - as opposed to villagers who casually come to sell when they have goods - has become stabilized and every week during my stay the same individuals could be seen at the same spots in the market. In the unlikely event that a newcomer usurps the customary place of a seller of longer precedence in the market, the resultant conflict would bring forth an attempt to mediate it by the *sardars* of the relevant *samaj* groupings of which the disputants are members. As I have pointed out, nearly all the sellers in Alirbazar are from the immediate surrounding market area, which means that one or the other of the three *samaj* groupings is likely to be involved in any dispute in the marketplace. For this reason, the *sardari* system of conflict resolution and the regulation of local affairs extends over and conforms to the market area, which fact further indicates the importance of the market area as a basic socio-territorial unit in community organization.

Finally, the *sardari* system is linked of official local government bodies. The Union, lowest tier in the Basic Democracies System of government promulgated by Ayub Khan in 1959, is itself an amalgam of *mauzas*, composed of electoral wards which cross-cut the "natural" community sub-groupings I have attempted to describe. Each such "ward" elects a Basic Democrat to serve on the Union Council, the ward in theory being so drawn as to cover representatively a population of around 1,200. The composition of the Union Council to which Hajipur and Tinpara had elected members reflects the bases of leadership that I have outlined. Of 14 Basic Democrats in Islampur Union, 12 were Muslims and of these, 9 were *sardars* or from *sardari* lineages, at the time of my research.

In recent years, as I have suggested, villagers have had increasing resort to the Union Council as an agent of conflict resolution. I myself witnessed

several *salish* cases to which the Union Council formally attended and was told by its secretary that its members heard at official meetings some 75 cases a year and I know that they mediated unofficially in many others. Moreover, the official government bodies reach down to the local level through the Union Council, utilizing it as a means of administration and social control in the rural areas, as well as of implementation of certain kinds of development projects. In cases of conflict which come to the attention of the higher authorities, the Union Council is called upon to mediate and utilizes the existing structure of power and influence in the area.

Example 14: Official Conflict Resolution in Rural Areas

In 1967 conflict broke out over some land in the Lalmai Hills which the government had taken over to begin a reforestation project. Because the hills had been declared to be government propoerty, villagers from outside the Alirbazar area had begun to come to the hills and take thatch grass, which the government allowed. This was a matter of some annoyance to local people, in that over the years, prior to the government take-over of the land, many farmers from the Alirbazar area had begun to farm and even reside in the hills (see Example 6). For despite the fact that the government reclamation had effectively dispossessed them, they nonetheless resented the presence of outsiders cutting valuable thatch grass in the hills. Some of the outsiders so engaged were attacked by local people from 4 *mauzas* comprising the *samaj* lying to the west of Alirbazar. As the outsiders had in this instance been kinsmen of, and invited by, a local man, the latter brought the case to the relevant *samaj* grouping and its *sardar* leaders. The *sardars*, however, were inclined to protect local interests and fined the complaintant for having allowed outsiders to encroach on local property.

The complaintant, insensed, appealed the case to official authority in the person of the Sub-divisional Officer, which official has direct supervisory powers over the Union Councils. Word went out from his office to the Chairman of the Islampur Union Council to settle the matter. This was done as a *salish* meeting in late October of 1967, to which were convened the local *sardars* who had made the original decision. The conflict was adjudicated by reducing the fine, but warning the complaintant that he had better forewarn others before inviting outsiders into the area to take thatch grass.

The *reyai/samaj* complex and the *sardari* system of rural leadership are thus bound up with official organs of government, feeding personnel into

them and at the same time relating symbiotically with formal and official institutuions as a kind of local power structure with which the former must be linked in order to be effective at the local level.

Political organization, then, reflects the general patterns of organization which are seen in the manifestations of economics, kinship and religion in Hajipur and Tinpara. Firstly, the homestead cluster, a kind of population micro-nucleate, centered around one or more dominant lineages, and characterized by a high degree of mutual interaction between homesteads, gives rise to the formalized grouping known as *reyai*. Where several homestead clusters are sufficiently close to each other as to extend the interaction process to include all the homesteads in question, as in Hajipur, the several *reyais* are socially recognized as belonging to the same "village" (*gram*). The social reality of both *reyai* and village groupings is given content by individual and collective activities which take place within their territorial confines. But collective activities are in turn centered around those particular families whose members are able and disposed to organize them and, where necessary, provide the facilities, both physical and financial, for them, as in the case of religious occasions discussed above. In short, the social reality of local groupings in this part of East Bengal is at least partially dependent upon the political and social leadership which "naturally" evolves from those lineages whose relative size and wealth give them a basis to exercise it and to be formally acknowledge for so doing. In the next chapter I shall discuss in more detail the relvance of competition between *sardari* lineages to the differing internal structures of Hajipur and Tinpara. Suffice it to say here, by way of summary, that the *sardari* lineages constitute the central focus around which small, localized groupings are formally organized and retain some kind of permanence over time.

Secondly, however, consistent with the territorial extensiveness other aspects of rural social organization exhibit, formal political organization in these villages reflects the structural interdependence of the various social groupings in a situation of dense and numerous population whose group boundaries are visibly diffuse. Under the ecological conditions I have described, there occurs the formal extension of social and political relations to territorially wider groupings than that of the *reyai* and village. This, then, gives rise to the *samaj* as a formal political grouping, whose manifest function is to adjudicate disputes, and whose latent function is to channel relations among the powerful *sardari* lineages in a given grouping. This "multi-tiered" and territorially expansive organizational form thus reflects local social structure and, with the common representation of *sardars* and *sardari* lineages on elected governing bodies such as the Union Council, the linkage between the rural "power structure" and that represented by the modern Pakistani state is effectively accomplished. In addition to the ecological factors which underly this ensemble of organizations, however, certain historical factors have also contributed to its emergence.

History, Ecology and Social Structure

The origins of Villages Hajipur and Tinpara as distinct social groupings lie in a complex of factors, as these chapters, perhaps belabored, have attempted to show. The demographic history of the villages which I have been partially able to reconstruct, reflects a process of immigration, population increase and family fission as basic to the original settlement of the area. The long run development of a sense of community solidarity seems related in part to this purely demographic phenomenon, as well as to the pattern of rural settlement I have discussed. Also important in the development of community in this part of Bengal is the localization of political influence at is base

in such small groupings as that which the *reyai* represents.

At the same time, I have attempted to show that the intensiveness of such small groupings has its limits and that opposite, and complementary, processes result in the extension of social ties and the extensiveness of rural institutions in such a way as to preclude the possibility that the "village" as socially defined be the major relevant unit of social organization. Thus, the *samaj* and the market area are basic components of rural social structure. And I have tried to show that social stratification as well as patterns of political power and influence correspond to these basic patterns of organization which evolve from the area's cultural ecology.

But it is appropriate further to sketch out the historical conditions attendant on this general process. I want to suggest that these organizational forms seem to have come about not solely as a result of the mere facts of human adaptation to a deltaic environment and a monsoon climate under certain technological conditions, but that historical conditions further allowed the process to take this particular course.

The villages of Comilla *thana* seem to have been under relatively ineffective control from urban centers until comparatively recent times. I have noted that prior to Partition, much of the Comilla *thana* area was part of the Chakla Roshnabad *zamindari* estate. While the estate's revenue collection system as I have earlier outlined it seems to have been formally quite elaborate, this does not necessarily mean that the landlords and their agents exercised pervasive influence on the village areas which constituted their revenue domain. Indeed, there is little in the accounts of the Tripura *Rajas* that I have seen to suggest that, beyond the collection of revenue, the *Rajas* concerned themselves with much else in the villages. In this regard they seem to have been typical, at least in the 19th and 20th Centuries, of *zamindars* elsewhere in Bengal.

As is well known, the Permanent Settlement of 1793 envisaged not merely a revenue collection role for the *zamindars*, but also one in which these landlords *in perpetuo* would also carry on certain other functions of rural administration and social control. As Rahman (1962: 103-104) notes, the Permanent Settlement not only made the *zamindars* the "sole lessees of land in Bengal," but further required them to be "responsible for maintaining village peace as well." However, by the 1870's the latter responsibility was judged openly to have been conspicuously unfulfilled. The Bengal Administration Report of 1871, cited by Rahman (1962: 104-105) and Tepper (1966: 45) lamented the fact that while such expectations of the *zamindars* were being met in other provinces, in Bengal the performance of functions other than those of revenue collection were "entirely absent," and that "British authority (was) brought less home to the people" and "the rich (were) less restrained and the poor and weak less protected than elsewhere." The results of recent research on the Mughal revenue collection system in Bengal, onto which the British grafted their own notions of proper and effective rural "public administration," show in retrospect at least that this should not have been surprising.[26]

In a manner typical of these general problems of colonial administration, it appears that the *Rajas* of Tripura engaged in very little "interference" in local affairs in Chakla Roshnabad once rents were paid. Thus, until the 1870's at least, when the British began to intervene more directly in the policing of rural areas all over Bengal, there was apparently little direct contact between the inhabitants of the countryside and the ruling colonial power (Rahman 1962: 103-109; Tepper 1966: 43-45; Webster 1920: 74-77). Moreover, the Chakla Roshnabad estate was far less subinfeudated than were other *zamindaris* in Bengal and Cumming (1899: 35ff), who conducted the last thorough revenue survey of the area, reported that nearly 90 percent of the cultivators

owned their own land and paid their taxes directly to the *Rajas'* agents.

In this situation, then, it seems likely that the organization of the rural areas of the estate evolved in a manner relatively uninfluenced by external, more powerful, authority, and the localization of social influence and political power seems naturally to have centered on those lineages and families to which others would concede leadership. These tended to be the lineages in each *reyai* or village grouping whose members were among the first settlers or who came successively over generations to amass the larger collective land holdings in their respective bailiwicks. Examples 1 and 3 in my discussion of the process of settlement indicate that the revenue collection system in the estate - the practice of granting the status of *ijaradar* and *tahsildar* to local, early inhabitants - contributed in individual cases to the development of social structure in that it allowed such families to gain land, or control of it, and hence subsequent increased power and influence.

Thus, in the various homestead clusters and groups of them one or more lineages became dominant and their leadership in matters pertaining to their respective groups as a whole came to be formally acknowledged. The long term result of such intensive localization of social and political activity in small scale units seems to have mitigated against any process which would have led to the formation of formally centralized authority vested in such a personage as a "village headman," as found elsewhere in Bengal and other parts of the Sub-continent. This has meant in the long run that the kinds of vertical cleavages and their potential for factional conflict between groups led by men of roughly equivalent status and power, so common in South Asian villages (see Nicholas 1967), were never off-set in this part of Bengal by formal and powerful ties which criss-crossed territorially and socially

bounded nucleates which are described as "villages" in other parts of the world.

But if social organization never really coalesced at the "village" level, it does not mean that ties to larger organizational entities did not extend themselves, as much of what I have outlined above attempts to show in some detail. Thus, in complementary opposition to the intensive quality of social relations such as those which the homestead cluster, the *reyai* and the "village" as socially defined all engender, there is the countervailing tendency toward social and territorial extensiveness as seen in the *samaj* as a political institution and the market area as a prime organizational nexus. Moreover, in a situation of population increase, deteriorating economic fortunes and relative lack of direct external control, it seems quite reasonable to hypothesize that as the need for mutual self-help and social control especially as land holdings became increasingly fragmented and scattered, that rural social institutions would tend to extend themsevles beyond the smaller units. Hence, the amalgamation of various *reyais* into wider *samaj* groupings covering a number of contiguous *mauzas* seems to have developed in a manner consistent with the extension of other kinds of ties: those of kinship as well as dyadically contractual and functionally specific interaction, as reflected in patterns of rural credit and labor exchange.

Contemporary social organization in Comilla *thana*, then, has resulted from the confluence of a particular ecology with a particular history. The adaptation of an increasingly dense population to a deltaic monsoon environment under preindustrial technological conditions produced a scattered settlement pattern coupled with excessive fragmentation of decreasingly small land holdings. These conditions in turn may be related to the gradual extension of social ties over wide areas, concommitant with an evolving rural class

structure which gave organization its underlying content if not its overt form. And it seems natural that marketplaces, as central places where both economic exchange and social interaction for individuals resident in ordinarily dispersed social groupings, would become the nexi of overlap for these smaller entities. Finally, however, given the fact that the intervention of the state was administratively and politically quixotic, never consistent in its impact over time, it is not surprising that local solutions to commonplace political problems of conflict and its redress would fall to those upon whom these natural social processes were to bestow power at any point in time. The question as to how this indigneous organization will now be merged with the modernizing and increasingly pervasive Pakistani state is at the heart of the not-so-quiet crisis on the delta of East Bengal today.

Part II

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

AND

SOCIAL PROCESS

CHAPTER VIII

FUSION AND FISSION IN THE POLITICS OF THE *SARDARI* SYSTEM

Part I of this thesis has been primarily concerned with an analytical description of social organization and social structure in two East Bengali "villages." The *reyai*, village and *samaj* groupings whose forms I have outlined are seen here as simple formal organization. At the same time, I have attempted to relate these forms to social structure - by which I have meant "class relations" - and further to show how social structure is related to ecological adaptation of a dense population to a deltaic, monsoon environment.

I have reserved a somewhat detailed discussion of politics in Hajipur and Tinpara for several reasons. Firstly, in the process of my research, politics became its particular interest and focus. Although very early in my stay in the area I was aware of territorially extensive and "multi-tiered" social organizational forms, I did not really begin to understand something of their workings until I had heard about, witnessed and recorded the specifically political events I am about to relate. Secondly, and more important for the analysis at hand, I think that politics serves as an apt subject for demonstrating social processes. Description thus far, largely organizational and structural in emphasis, has been perforce something of an abstraction, which is at once the prerogative and the problem of the outside observer of a social system in attempting to relate the relevant facts. The inevitable risk in such a discussion is that of leaving the impression of stasis. I wish now to convey something of the dynamic which "makes the system work."

I have tried to show that the *reyai*, village and *samaj* groupings build somewhat logically into one another to form a holistic social - and political - unit and that relations between various *samaj* groupings and their subunits are further elaborated in the larger "market area." It should be obvious that territorial extensiveness and institutional linkages do not end here. The "market area" is not a bounded unit of social organization in East Pakistan; the *reyai*, village and *samaj* as socially defined are "bounded," but also permeable, and the "market area" is geographically bounded, but by no means restricted as an interactional locus. Thus, I have chosen these as the focus of description and analysis, with no intent to portray them as being strictly "systemically bounded."

In a purely political context, it is useful to conceive of the *reyai*, village, *samaj* and market area as *arenas*, in the sense that Bailey (1963: 224-226) has used the term analytically to denote the boundaries of groups, governed by norms, customs and values, with and/or between which conflict may take place. It should by now be obvious, as it is in Bailey's conceptualization, that these *arenas* are interlocked. In this chapter I shall attempt to show the manner in which events in one arena may "escalate" to include persons, groups, and territory of another one - or, under circumstances, how this may be prevented from occurring. Moreover, I shall continue to relate process as reflected in events to social structure, as reflected in the relations among dominant *sardari* lineages in different *reyai* and village groupings, as well as those which take place between them and non-dominant lineages.

I begin with a brief summary of the background of conflict in Hajipur, Tinpara and their neighboring *reyai* and village groupings in the *samaj*. Much of the material presented will be in the form of "cases," as defined in Chapter 1, followed by an analysis of them.

The Samaj and Twenty Years of Conflict

The *samaj* to which Hajipur and Tinpara belong consists, as I have said, of 8 *mauzas*, in which 14 *sardars* formally exercise leadership in their respective *reyais*. These are:

Hajipur: a *mauza* and village, with 3 *reyais*, 3 *sardars*

Imamgaon: a *mauza*, with one *reyai* in its northern *para* and two *sardars*; the homesteads in its southern *para* are part of Tinpara *reyai*/*village*

Radhapur: a *mauza*, whose northern *para* is part of Tinpara, where also lies the homestead of one of Tinpara's *sardars*; one homestead in the western *para* part of Reshompur (*mauza*, *reyai*/village)

Rampur: a *mauza*, part of Tinpara, with one *sardar*

Monogram: *mauza* contiguous to Hajipur, its homesteads part of Hajipur's *Reyai* I

Reshompur: *mauza* and *reyai*/village; separate from Hajipur and Tinpara

Zindapur: *mauza* with 3 *reyais* and 3 *sardars*, comprises one village

Amirnagar: a *mauza* with 2 *reyais* and 2 *sardars*, comprises one village

I have briefly described the ideal role of the *samaj* as a "Council of Elders" in the mediation of disputes. But throughout my entire period of contact with these villages I heard continual lamenting of the fact that the *sardari* system of conflict resolution had "broken down," that it had "gone bad" and that the *samaj* had "been destroyed" (*samāj nasta hoygēlō*). Indeed, there was to my knowledge only one meeting of the *sardars* to mediate a dispute during the whole time of my stay, despite continual conflict in the villages.

In this connection, I should delineate two kinds of conflict as I observed them. Firstly, there is what I might call "atomistic" conflict, involving two or more individuals but which does not generate the formation of opposing groups in concerted action. Such conflict is endemic, occurring at all levels

of organization - the household, the homestead, the *reyai*, the village and between men from different villages. Usually it involves competitive striving toward specific, often narrowly material goals, as in the case of disputes over land. The resolution of such conflict can take privately, in a settlement between the individuals involved - or, for that matter in a situation of the "zero-sum" game, in which one can only win what the other loses. It is often resolved, especially in the case of land disputes, through recourse to costly litigation in the courts. It may occasionally be settled through mediation either by the *samaj* or, importantly, the Union Council.

Secondly, there is factional conflict, by which I mean conflict groups coalesced around one or more leaders. The goals in such conflict are diffuse and may involve to a high degree such material intangibles as prestige. Or they may arise from situations of initially "atomistic" conflict, over specific competitions, in which one or the other of the disputants involved attempts to generate support for his "cause." When this occurs, the entire heritage of disputes, as we shall see in a case to be presented below, may be quickly dredged up from the past. Whatever may be the "efficient cause" of a given case of factional conflict, I know of none which did not involve locally powerful and prestigious men, most of the members of the dominant lineages and *sardars*. Finally, factional conflict takes place at the level of the *reyai*, the village, and the *samaj* and can involve all three levels of organization at one time, encompassing a wide area. In so doing, it results in the solidifying of some groups, and the splitting up and rearranging of others, thereby injecting a great deal of fluidity and insecurity into the whole system, allowing no grouping to be perceived as permanent, no institution to be seen as inherently stable. Perhaps this is why the villagers I know spoke continually of

the "break down" of the *sardari* system, and self-effacedly decry the malice (*hingsha*) felt, perhaps exaggeratedly, to be omnipresent in the villages.

I shall attempt to illustrate this process by first relating the historical background of *samaj* conflict and then, through an analysis of case material, to relate conflict to social structure and process in the villages under discussion.

Some 20 years prior to my arrival, the *samaj* in the area studied was shaken by the inability of the *sardars* from the 8 constituent *mauzas* to agree on the proper settlement of two disputes. The first of these involved disagreement over whom should succeed to the *sardarship* in one of the constituent *reyais* and the second concerned the settling of a marital dispute.

Case 1, Part A

In *mauza* and village Amirnagar, one of the sub-units of the *samaj* (see Map 5), there are two *reyais*, one of which is headed by a wealthy lineage with the title of Mahisan. In the middle 1940's, the *sardar* belonging to this lineage died. The man had had two wives (not polygynously) and his patrimony was to be divided among the two sets of siblings by each of his unions. Each set of siblings was headed by a male, Gani Mia, the eldest by the first wife, and Karim Mia, the eldest by the second wife. The eldest of the two half-brothers, Gani Mia, for reasons which were unclear to my informants, agreed to waive a certain portion of his inheritance and allow it to go to his half-brother, Karim Mia. As is customary, the eldest son of the deceased sardar, Gani Mia, inherited the *sardarship* of his father, and perhaps he gave up part of his inheritance to forestall any attempt by his half-brother, Karim Mia, to dispute the succession to the *sardarship*. Karim Mia took the portion of the inheritance which his elder half-brother had granted him and there the rather simple matter appeared to rest for some time.

Several years later, Karim Mia had a dream in which he saw himself constructing a mosque as an example of his piety and fidelity to the canons of Islam. As often happens in such things, he took his dream experience as a divine mandate to build a mosque and undertook shortly thereafter to construct the building. He prevailed on his half-brother, Gani Mia, to help with the building costs and in addition to donate an acre of land which would be used for the upkeep of the mosque. Gani Mia refused to do so, saying that he had, after all, given up part of his inheritance and thus needed all of his land to support his own family. He finally, however, under continued pressure, agreed to give one *kani* (.40 acre) of

land to the cause. Karim Mia, was, nonetheless, not satisfied with this amount.

Either seeking revenge out of pique with his half-brother or seizing upon the opportunity to advance himself, Karim Mia began to prevail upon the *sardars* of the *samaj* to remove Gani Mia from the position, justifying this demand on the grounds that Gani Mia had displayed irreligious behavior in a manner ill-befitting a *sardar*, thereby demeaning the collective prestige of all the *sardars* in the *samaj*. The key ally of Karim Mia in this effort was Fazar Ali of Hajipur's Munshi lineage, with whom Karim Mia is reputed to have had illegitimate land dealings. As I have noted in Example 10 (Chapter 5), Fazar Ali is said to have used his position as an accountant and *tahsildar* of the Tripura *Rajas* to sell away *khas* or "public" lands to those who would reward him for such assistance. With the influence of Fazar Ali, himself a *sardar*, Karim Mia succeeded in getting the other *sardars* to demand that Gani Mia allocate the requested acre as *waqf* or mosque land. Gani Mia resisted the pressure of his peers and in so doing made the whole matter a prestige issue. After some time, the other *sardars* in the *samaj* unitedly stripped Gani Mia of his *sardarship* and transferred it to Karim Mia. One of the methods whereby Gani Mia was to be deprived of his claim to be a *sardar* was that of refusal to invite him to sit at *salish* meetings and to dine with the other *sardars* on the formal occasions for which invitations are issued, such as weddings.

Several years later, a second major distrubance took place involving the entire *samaj*. This time the venue of conflict was *mauza* and village Zindapur (see Map 5) where a man had divorced his wife and then soon afterward remarried her before the amount of time required by orthodox Islamic law in such cases had elapsed. While it is a comparatively simple matter, at least traditionally, for a man to divorce his wife, remarrying her is a rather lengthy process.[27] The couple in Zindapur did not comply with the complicated procedures required and, for this lack of compliance the husband in question received the censure of his fellow villagers who called upon the *samaj* formally to rebuke him. He resisted, saying that either out of ignorance of the law or out of some obscure legal point that would have justified his action, that his behavior had been correct. The *samaj* met in its entirety, inviting in addition two locally respected *maulanas*, who are regarded as theological and legal experts, to help decide the case. There apparently ensued a long debate and discussion which came to no conlusion or agreeemtn (to the best of my knowledge the "illegal" remarriage remained intact). The long-term effect of this incident, as that of the succession of *sardarship* in Amirnagar (above) was the aligning of the *sardars* in opposing factions.

It will be noted that these events had the effect of "escalating" the conflict, to which I have earlier referred. That is, two individual events, occurring among members of one lineage in one case and in a single household in the other, set in motion the leadership of larger groupings over an area much

wider in territory than that of the individual *reyais* and villages to which the disputants in each case belonged. The effects of this "escalation" in including other groupings ultimately had repurcussions in all the constituent *reyais* and villages in the *samaj*.

Case 1, Part B

Although the decision to replace Gani Mia with Karim in Amirnagar was said by some informants to be unanimous, others who had been close to the scene of events or part of them stated to me that the *samaj* did suffer long-lasting internal enmities as a result. In Hajipur, all the *sardars* were in agreement with the decision to give the position to Karim Mia, who, as I have noted, enlisted the support of Fazar Ali in his effort to unseat his half-brother. But the aftermath of the Zindapur divorce incident left permanent division in Hajipur. At the time of these events there were only two *reyais* in Hajipur, that of Fazar Ali, which is still intact, and which I have identified as *Reyai* III. The other, and much larger *reyai* was led jointly by the Mahisans and the Majumdars of Hajipur. These two lineages' leaders took opposite sides of the issue in the divorce case from that of Fazar Ali and thus increased hostility between the Munshis on the one hand and the Majumdars and the Mahisans on the other.

In Tinpara, which was then as now a *reyai*/village grouping whose members acknowledged the leadership of two *sardars*, the latter were in disagreement regarding the divorce. One of them, Pradhan Ali, the most powerful individual in the village, felt that the remarriage had not been proper, while the other *sardar*, Tara Gazi, was of the opinion that it had been correct in procedure. The two had been, moreover, opposed over the Amirnagar incident, Pardhan Ali supporting Gani Mia, while Tara Gazi was an advocate of the case of Karim Mia. Neither of these disagreements, however, resulted in a permanent cleavage in Tinpara.

The subsequent two decades in the two villages saw intermittent conflict involving the major *sardari* lineages. Relations between the Munshi and the Majumdar families deteriorated during a succession of land disputes between them. After Independence and Partition, Fazar Ali lost his position as *tahsildar* in the *zamindari* abolition of 1950 and the sequisure of the estate by the Government of Pakistan, although at the time I knew him, he still maintained his position as clerk in the office that dealt with the remainder of the legal work connected with the estate.

In Tinpara, several land disputes ensued in which most of the homesteads in the village were in one way or another involved. In all the cases of which I was able to learn, groups seemed to coalesce around the two *sardari* lineages. That of Tara Gazi, however, gradually declined in influence as it grew progressively larger in population while at the same time failed to gain land in any appreciable measure. At the time of my stay, members of this lineage were involved in few creditor activities. Meanwhile, Pradhan Ali, the last surviving male in his own homestead, with no sons, retained not only the substantial holding his father and grandfather had built up over two generations, but also was able to increase there, by nearly a third according to his own account. Factional conflict in Tinpara in the 1950's seems to have involved the attempts by Pradhan Ali to gain land in the area and to thwart the efforts of two "middle peasant" families in this respect. In one instance, Pradhan Ali supported the claims of "poor peasant" families against that of Fazlur Rahman, one of the village's "middle peasants," in a long and costly litigation over the houseplot and homestead seedling plots left by a deceased member of the village.

Thus, conflict in Hajipur seems to have been a matter of petty disputes among the three *sardari* lineages. Of these, the Mahisans gained consistent prominence while the Majumdars and Munshis alternately quarrelled and united against the Mahisans in various disputes. In Tinpara, the gradual eclipse of the Tara Gazi *sardari* lineage took place, while Pradhan Ali maintained a position of prominence in village affairs.

Case 1, Part C

In 1964, the Amirnagar *sardari* again surfaced, this time with the sons of the original protagonists as the major figures. Junab Ali, the son of Gani Mia, with the consent of his brothers, decided to give the .40 acre his father had once promised as *waqf* land for the Amirnagar mosque

and thus clear the disgraced name of his late father. With this decision, he was in a position to claim the title of *sardar*, of which his father had been deprived, and he did so, over the objection of Ali Ajjam, the son of Karim Mia. This occasioned yet another meeting of the *samaj*, which reopened the wound first dealt it by the earlier phase in the long conflict. In the *samaj* villages once again this escalted conflict and repurcussions.

In Hajipur it resulted in the splitting of the *reyai* led by the Mahisans and the Majumdars into the two which existed in the village at the time of my stay. The Mahisans were invited to a ceremonial meal by Ali Ajjam and in the end were inclined to support him. The Majumdars supported Junab Ali as did the Munshis. Junab Ali was reinstated, against the opposition of only two *sardars*, Zafar Ali Mahisan of Hajipur and the leader of another Mahisan family in Zindapur. The opposition of these two earned for them the hostility of all the other *sardars* and threats were made to the effect that these two would be boycotted, denied ceremonial invitations to dine, the usual slight to prestige which is employed. But while the second round of the Amirnagar affair brought the fluid inter-*sardari* politics of Hajipur to a boil, in Tinpara, where Pradhan Ali's dominance had been assured, the support of both him and Tara Gazi went to Junab Ali with no reported incident.

This general history of the conflict serves to throw light on the segmentation in Hajipur as opposed to its lack in Tinpara. The existence of three relatively wealthy lineages, in competition for power, whose continual latent hostility has been aroused periodically by events of the sort that I have related, has assured that *reyai* organization in the village remains at least symbolically strong. The attempt to demonstrate influence symbolically is most manifest at weddings, where the custom of limited invitation to the ceremony and feast is practiced with scrupulous attention to protocol. Tinpara, which has seen the consistent domination of a single lineage during the past 15 years has no vertical segmentation. Conflict in that village is horizontally structured, with "middle peasants" in occasional conflict with the dominant Pradhan Ali. Serious conflict in both villages always involves the rich and high status lineages, but its particular forms and cleavages differ in each case. In Hajipur the line of cleavage is between the competing *sardari* lineages. In Tinpara, only one man, with the preponderant share of the village's landed wealth, is able to maintain his position against any individual or groups

competing with him.

Case 2

In 1965 a village cooperative society was formed in Hajipur under the auspices of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development. The son of Fazar Ali, Monu Mia, was one of the founders, as were some of the younger and better educated members of the Majumdar family and the young school teacher, Hakim Ali, of the Kobiraj homestead. Hakim Ali was elected to the post of Manager[28] and the other various official posts were filled by the younger members of the three *sardari* lineages. In two subsequent annual elections, while individual personnel in these posts rotated to some degree, the control of the cooperative remained substantially in the hands of the *sardari* lineages, with the interesting exception of the prominence of another young and articulate school teacher, a Hindu of the nearby resident Debonath (*jugi* weaver) family and a young and enterprising member of the Barber (Hindu caste) family whose homestead lies just south of Hajipur's *mauza* boundaries. In the third election, Monu Mia, of the Munshi lineage, was elected Manager and he was the encumbent in that position when I arrived to do field work in Hajipur in late 1966. I have earlier noted the distrust with which the Munshi family had come to be regarded and the fact that in the summer of 1967 Monu Mia was accused by the Mahisans of having absconded with cooperative members' savings (Example 10, Chapter 5). The key mover in this accusation was Abdul Ali Mahisan, nephew of "rich peasant" Anwar Ali (see Example 9, Chapter 5), a man of sufficient education to be just literate, but possessed of considerable organizing skill. In the cooperative election of 1967, Monu Mia was voted out of office by a great majority and Abdul Ali replaced him as Manager. The weekly meeting place of the little society was shifted from the Majumdar homestead to that of the Mahisans, where most other collective activities in Hajipur also center. Abdul Ali then proceeded with methodical determination to increase the membership in the society. The cooperative had begun in 1965 with a membership of 11 and, at the time of my arrival nearly 2 years later, had increased to 26. As Manager, Abdul Ali undertook a personal, homestead-to-homestead campaign to increase membership and by the end of the summer had nearly doubled the membership list from what it had been at the time of his accession to the Manager's post.

Several factors outside Abdul Ali's control doubtless contributed to his success in building the cooperative. The rise in membership in Hajipur coincides with a generally large increase in membership in similar societies throughout the *thana* that year due to the constant drive by those in charge of the Comilla experiment to increase membership. Of particular importance is the fact that there had been great interest in the demonstrated usefulness of the deep tube well, an innovation of great consequence which the Central Cooperative Association, under whose aegis village cooperatives had been in existence for a period of 6 years, had begun to introduce with gradual success. During the summer of my stay in the *thana*, excitement over the tubewell and the possibilities of obtaining one through cooperative formation and membership had begun to catch the enthusiasm of rural cultivators who faced, as had all previous

generations of their forebearers, a long dry season with little chance of growing any crop whatsoever. Abdul Ali was himeself interested in getting a tubewell for the village and, knowing that the bestowal of this resource was dependent on demonstration of a strong cooperative society with good leadership and a record of conforming to the "rules of cooperation" as laid down by the Central Association, he was able to use the tubewell as a "selling point" to a number of villagers who had heretofore not been members.

Abdul Ali was also able to capitalize on the fact that, with the removal of Monu Mia from the post of Manager, some of the younger members of populous, but poor, lineages whose dealings with the Munshis had left them distrustful, were now willing to join. It must be added that Abdul Ali engaged in an admirable "door-to-door" campaign throughout the summer, persuading villagers to join. Moreover, he also spent some of his time attempting to organiza a cooperative in Reshompur, to the south of Hajipur, although this effort was initially unsuccessful. When asked about his zeal in performing these activities, Abdul Ali would inevitably repeat the developmental goals and ideology of cooperation with which the Comilla cooperative movement is imbued and I have no particular reason to doubt his personal sincerity in responding in this manner. It is, however, worthy of note the shift in cooperative leadership to the Mahisan lineage in Hajipur as a village, in particular its ascendency over the Munshi lineage, in that with the removal of Monu Mia from the Manager's position, no member of the Munshi family was left occupying a post of the Managing Committee. Cooperative meetings I attended during this period sometimes reflected the universal hostility felt by members toward Monu Mia. Abdul Ali, addressing the group about "past failures" and future goals, on several occasions referred to the incumbency of his predecessor with disdain, calling the "culprit" sarcastically "our friend Monu" (*āmāder bandhu Manu*) with an irony that appeared not to be lost on those present. (Monu Mia and his brother did remain in the society, but with greatly diminished influence.)

Abdul Ali's zeal in recruiting members was matched by his ability (aided by several key supporters, notably the young Hindus I have mentioned) in enforcing the heretofore laxly followed rules of the cooperative movement. It is a principle of the Comilla system that all members must attempt to save whatever money they can weekly, depositing these savings with the Manager who is entrusted to bring them to the Central Cooperative bank. This rule is ideally to be enforced by the fining or ultimate expulsion of members who do not save, for the idea behind the saving is to make the individual villager solvent enough to be able to borrow money from cooperative sources or, for that matter, governmental ones. Another rule of the movement is that of regular attendance at meetings, failure to do so being also punishable by fines. By December of 1967, just at the end of my stay in the villages, Abdul Ali had succeeded in pushing through a resolution in the cooperative to the effect that these rules would in fact be enforced by the fines. Also in December there occurred an incident in which the claim of the Majumdar lineage to any prerogatives in leadership in the cooperative - and perhaps in the affairs of the village generally - was, at least for the time being, denied.

At the time of increased growth in the Hajipur cooperative, a young man belonging to the Majumdar lineage, Ershak Mia, was to be married. He was the son of Tafat Ali, the wealthiest of the Majumdars, a "rich creditor" who leases out nearly one-third of his land holdings. Tafat Ali is not *sardar*, however, that position having devolved upon his patrilateral parallel cousin, Kala Mia.

Young Ershak had been active in the cooperative from its early days, and, as he was in training at a local *madrasa* to become an *imam*, he had been given the job of literacy training in Hajipur as part of the cooperative's participation in the "adult education" program of the Comilla experiment. Ershak was to be married in another part of the *thana*. Perhaps because of his sense of loyalty to the cooperative and of solidarity with his fellow members, he wanted to invite all the cooperative members to his wedding. So determined was his desire to do so that he went ahead with formal invitations to the members without consulting his father.

Upon hearing that such invitations, which crossed *reyai* lines due to the village-inclusive character of cooperative membership, old Tafat Ali was incensed. This procedure was improper, he declared, for it contradicted the principle of "*reyai*-invitation only" to weddings. To contravene this rule was to threaten the honor of the *reyai* and particularly of the *sardari* lineage by denying their ceremonial prerogatives in an important social affair.

Kala Mia, the *sardar*, was inclined to agree with his cousin, but the fact that his own son was on the Managing Committee (as "Model Farmer") and had been so since the society's inception put him on the horns of a dilemma; on the one hand there was a threat to the traditional prerogative of the *reyai* and its *sardar*, yet on the other hand the membership of his son and nephew in the cooperative represented key participation of the lineage's members in an all-village groupings.

Tafat Ali, however, was adamant and went so far as to insist that the other *sardars* in the *samaj* be consulted. So they were and the apparently unanimous agreement was in favor of Tafat Ali's position. Thus, the invitations to the cooperative members had to be withdrawn, much to the chagrin of Ershak Mia. (His wedding took place as planned, but the sole members of Hajipur village to attend were those of his own lineage.)

The day after the withdrawal of the invitations by Ershak, the cooperative met at the Mahisans' homestead, as usual under the leadership of Abdul Ali. Members were indignant about the withdrawal of the invitations and were in a mood to "punish" Ershak Mia and other members of his lineage for the affront the whole affair had been to the cooperative. As Abdul Ali himself put it, summing up their case, not only had some of the Majumdars been bad members, not brining their savings to the cooperative and not attending regularly, but they had insulted the members of the group. "How," queried Abdul Ali rhetorically, "could the society take this blow to its prestige?" Surely if the affair were allowed to stand the honor of the society would not last! (*sāmitite*

ijjat thākbe nā). The members agreed and suggestions were heard as to the fitting punishment. It was finally decided to fine Ershak a sum of Rs. 30 and further to fine his brother Rs. 20 for having aided and abetted the elders of the lineage in revoking the invitations Ershak had initially extended. The two had no choice but to acquiesce; Ershak paid the fine, but his brother refused and subsequently dropped out of the cooperative.

In January of 1968 the Hajipur cooperative society held its fourth round of elections to its Managing Committee. None of the members belonging to the Majumdar lineage was elected to it, although the son of the Majumdar's *sardar*, Kala Mia, stood as a candidate for the position of "Model Farmer" which he had held since the inception of the cooperative. In his place was elected a member of one of the poorer lineages in the village and the new Managing Committee further was comprised of new members from "middle peasant" families who had not previously belonged. Although Abdul Ali was reelected as Manager, this election marked the first decline in dominance of the Managing Committee by members of all three dominant *sardari* lineages; the two Hindu members who had always been active in the cooperative were elected, one as Chairman. Thus, the new leadership in the cooperative represented the latest constellation of forces in the village as a whole, with the Mahisan lineage at the center, the Munshi lineage minimally represented both in membership and on the Managing Committee, the Majumdras in retreat from participation in any significant way.

Case 2 provides insight into the village level of organization, as represented by the inclusive character of cooperative membership. I have noted that, whatever the complex of his motivations may have been, Abdul Ali's success in increasing memebership had the effect of formally centralizing an all-village activity around his lineage, that of the Mahisans. This was merely one more collective village activity that focussed around the Mahisan lineage, which, at least during the time of my stay in the area, was the most powerful single group of families there. The action of the cooperative was taken in opposition to decisions made at the sub-village *reyai* "level" in one quarter and in retaliation against that decision despite the fact that it was supported by the *samaj*, the (traditionally) authoritative multi-village institution to which Hajipur is formally linked. The cooperative's response to the incident of Ershak Mia's wedding shows under what conditions the village - as opposed to the *reyai* and the *samaj* - can exist politically as an "intervening"

unit of organization between these two formal groupings. The conditions, furthermore, which permit the village to come into focus as an important grouping or "level of organization" depend, in addition to the ecological factors I have cited, on the existence of a lineage which dominates in such a manner as to create a kind of organizational clustering which crosses *reyai* lines. Thus, for Ershak Mia, the contradiction lay in the sets of obligations he held to two groups, one formed on a principle of exclusiveness, the other on that of inclusiveness; the former asserted his primary kinship and *reyai* group membership in contrast to the latter, which called upon his ties to a "secondary" group, the village as represented concretly by the cooperative. In inviting the cooperative members to his wedding, he squarely met the opposition of his father, a "rich peasant" who in this instance was exercising his responsibility to maintain the status honor of the Majumdar lineage and of the *reyai* in general. For, as I have suggested earlier, although the individual high status and/or *sardari* lineage may contain a number of "middle" and "poor peasant" families, the relative wealth of the "rich peasant" families and their actions serve to maintain the status of the lineage as a whole. Thus, for old Tafat Ali, the notion that tradition was to be contravened at his own son's wedding was unthinkable. Behind this particular issue lay the two decades of deteriorating relations between the three *sardari* lineages in Hajipur, whose background I have briefly summarized. To allow cooperative members to attend the wedding not only would have, in his view, broken sharply with custom, but also would have put him in a position of having to invite to a major ceremony members of lineages with which, over a large part of his life, he had been in constant rivalry. For this reason, it is probable that he had little difficulty in getting the actual *sardar*, his cousin Kala Mia, who was, for the reasons related in the case more hesitant about opposing the wedding

plans of Ershak, to consult the *sardars* in the *samaj* as a whole regarding the propriety of the invitations. In so doing, the conflict issue was briefly "escalated" to include a grouping much larger than the village itself, in which manner Tafat Ali was able to obtain primordial sorts of support for his position. For once the *sardars* had made the decision to deny the wishes of Ershak it would be all the more difficult for Kala Mia to go against the general feelings of the *sardars*, his own peers. In this case, then, the principle of *reyai*-invitation to weddings, was invoked to maintain the prestige and status of older men in the Majumdar lineage and bring into focus the structural fact of Hajipur's vertical segmentation, along *reyai* lines, as opposed to village solidarity, which tended otherwise to center around the rival Mahisan lineage, more dominant by all indices of power and influence than the Majumdars in general.

Conflict in Tinpara

I have earlier suggested that conflict in Tinpara was, at the time of my research, structured horizaontally, in that it revolved around land disputes between the relatively wealthy and dominant *sardar*, Pradhan Ali, and the several "middle peasant" families in the village. I had occasion to witness two conflict situations in Tinpara, one between Pradhan Ali and his kinsmen and another between him and a "middle peasant" *imam*, Azizuddin Khondakar.

At the time of my arrival in Tinpara, relations between all the contestants in the disputes I am about to relate seemed on the surface to be amicable. All were members of the village cooperative society which had been formed in Tinpara in 1965, and had built up a membership of around 35 by mid-1967. Its membership consisted largely of members of Tinpara as a

village, nicely overlapping this grouping as a "natural unit." Its Manager was a young man from a well-respected family who himself was affable and on generally good terms with all the villagers so far as I knew. But his leadership in the cooperative society was largely passive, especially when compared with that of Abdul Ali in Hajipur. Far more important in week-to-week cooperative activities were Pradhan Ali, who had taken the position of the "Model Farmer," and Azizuddin Khondakar, who had been elected Chairman. Both of these men took active roles as spokesmen at meetings. Because the cooperative so largely overlapped the village with respect to its membership, events within it both affected and were affected by those within the village as a whole.

Relations between Azizuddin and Pradhan Ali had been marked by tension over land disputes, as I have noted, although they seemed amicable enough at the time of my arrival. With his kinsmen, however, Pradhan Ali's relations were at best somewhat cool. Pradhan Ali's homestead consisted of two *bhadra* divisions (see above, Chapter 6, for description of this intra-homestead division). In one of these Pradhan Ali lived with his wife and widowed sister; he had no sons and his daughters were all married out. In the other *bhadra* were two *chulas* housing his cousins, Mohan Mia and Letu Gazi. These men, however, were not agnates of Pradhan Ali, in that they were the children of his father's sister who had returned to her natal homestead after being widowed, bringing her two young sons. As is commonly the case, Pradhan Ali's aunt had foregone her right to inherit land and so, when she returned to her homestead after the death of her husband, she was received with good grace, but her sons were in no position to inherit land from her agnatic kinsmen. Her brother, however, Pradhan Ali's father, was kind enough, in return for a stipulated period of voluntary labor, to grant both houseplot

and cultivation land to his newphews, Mohan Mia and Letu Gazi, when they reached maturity. This is how they came to live in the same homestead as Pradhan Ali, albeit in a separate *bhadra*. There arose, however, during my stay in Tinpara, a dispute between Pradhan Ali and his cousins over the disposition of houseplot land, the actual boundaries of the *bhadra* division being unclear. Despite his background of bad relations with Pradhan Ali, Azizuddin Khondakar attempted to mediate the dispute, using the offices of the cooperative society of which he was Chairman, which attempt embroiled him in the resurfacing of old conflicts with the latter. The long term result was a series of ultimately unresolved confrontations, an analysis of which yields useful conclusions about the play of organizational forces in Tinpara and its neighboring villages.

Case 3, Part A

In June of 1967, an *amin* (licensed surveyor) arrived at the homestead of Pradhan Ali in Tinpara. He had come to measure the plot on which the *bhadra* of Mohan Mia and Letu Gazi was located. These brothers had broken up into separate *chulas* some years earlier but had gotten into a dispute regarding division of the property between them and had resolved to have a measurement of its total size. They had been given the plot, its size being .24 acres, each with his own separate documents, by their uncle, Amad Ali. Letu Gazi had kept his, but Mohan Mia had returned the documents to his uncle, perhaps out of a sense of obligation to his uncle and not willing to require the latter to formalize the donation of the land.

Accurate measurement of the land, however, proved that the size of the plot was only .21 acres. Letu Gazi had documents proving his title to .12 acres of it, whereas his brother Mohan Mia did not. Nonetheless, the latter did not want to be deprived of what he believed to be his rightful half, the other .12 acres of the plot.

With the new measurements, giving a full share of .12 acres to each brother would require a shifting of ownership rights within the homestead as a whole, since the total plot the brothers claimed would encroach on the houseplot land of their cousin, Pradhan Ali. Pradhan Ali, however, refused to countenance the idea; the boundary between his and his cousins' plot had never been surveyed and with the new measurements it was found that for them to have what they felt to be rightfully theirs, Pradhan Ali would have to give up several valuable

betel nut tress which would fall into their houseplot. He proposed that the brothers, equally divide the property as indicated by the new measurements, and remain content with that. Letu Gazi strongly objected. "I worked without pay (*begār kām kheṭeci*) for my uncle for 11 years, as we had no land and I had no choice. Later when he offerred to leave me 4 *kanis* (1.60 acre) of land, I refused, taking only 16 *gandas* (.32 acre). Having worked freely and without complaint, having foregone what I could have had, I will not now give up what is due me."

Pradhan Ali, Mohan Mia and Letu Gazi were all members of Tinpara's cooperative society. The Chairman of the society, Azizuddin Khondakar, had earlier introduced a resolution in the cooperative, which was agreed upon by all members, to the effect that all personal disputes among members would be resolved amicably using the good offices of the society. Arguing that this dispute between kinsmen and members could adversely affect the cooperative, Azizuddin began to urge them to settle it within the cooperative fold, pleading further that the society must retain its unity. Pradhan Ali refused systematically to be party to any attempt at resolution of the conflict by the wociety. Mohan Mia and Letu Gazi, however, agreed to allow the cooperative to mediate. Thus encouraged, Azizuddin set a date for a hearing and announced that the case would receive judgement by cooperative members. Also to be invited to the hearing would be the locally respected Manager of the cooperative in Amirnagar, a member also of the large and dominant Amirnagar Mahisan lineage (whose members had figured importantly in the old *sardari* succession dispute described in Case 1). Officials of the Central Cooperative Association would be invited as well.

On a Friday in the middle of June, the hearing and judgement was called and the invited parties came, along with the members of the cooperative society. The Amirnagar Manager came as did an Inspector of the Central Cooperative Association. But while Letu Gazi and Mohan Mia were present Pradhan Ali did not come. His wife and sister reported that he had gone into Comilla town on business that morning, stayed for the *jumma* prayer at a mosque in the town and had still not come back. The assembled members of the hearing remained for a few hours, in which Mohan Mia and Letu Gazi aired their side of the case. No one present seemed willing to speak for Pradhan Ali. He himself did not show up at the meeting and those who had gathered in his *kachari ghar* for the judgement finally left.

This conflict was not resolved by the time I left the area nor was there another attempt to resolve it by group pressures of the sort that Azizuddin had tried to bring to bear on the disputants, particularly Pradhan Ali. It was clear that no solution could be had without his compliance and that he would not recognize the authority of his fellow villagers, regardless of the

external support Azizuddin had tried to bring about in pressuring him. In his attempt to play the role of peace-maker, Azizuddin had failed.

From that point on, his overtly cordial relations with his old enemy, Pradhan Ali, rapidly deteriorated. I was present several evenings in the latter's homestead when Azizuddin presented himself and insisted on raising the issue. On these occasions loud and vociferous quarrelling ensued between Pradhan Ali and Azizuddin, with Pradhan Ali's wife emerging from behind her *purdah* screen to plead with Azizuddin to leave the matter alone and prevent old wounds from re-opening.

Throughout the summer tension-ridden inter-personal relations smoldered in the monsoon heat. Old conflicts between Pradhan Ali and Azizuddin surfaced again. Finally in late September, Azizuddin made a point of taking me aside and informing me, with what I perceived to be a glint of triumph in his eyes, that I would have the occasion to see a true *bichar* ("judgement") and that "that guy will see" (*ōi beṭā dekhbe*).

Case 3, Part B

Azizuddin had arranged a meeting of the *samaj* in which an old land dispute between him and Pradhan Ali would be finally resolved. Some five years previously, Azizuddin had taken a loan of Rs. 100. from Gada Mistri, of the Tinpara Woodworker homestead. As security for the loan, he put up a plot of his wife's land without her knowing it (he had married a parallel cousin who had inherited her father's land which he subsequently engaged in leasing out as a means of supplementing his livelihood as an *imam*). His wife later discovered Gada Mistri working on her land and thus Azizuddin had to tell her what he had done. Now it happened that Pradhan Ali had wanted that land but had not succeeded in getting Gada Mistri to release it to him. Not long after the transaction between Azizuddin and Gada Mistri, the latter died. Pradhan Ali seized this opportunity to pay Gada Mistri's widow the Rs. 100 which her husband had originally lent to Azizuddin in exchange for the plot of land. Azizuddin, however, behaved as though the land were still in his wife's possession. Gada Mistri had conveniently died and who was left, then, to make him pay the original debt? Surely not a mere widow whose two sons were impoverished tenants and wood-workers! Azizuddin then proceeded to mortgage the land to another man living in a village some miles distant, Daiara. Pradhan Ali, however, complained; had he not,

after all, paid the original debt of Azizuddin? Did that not mean that the land was his?

The dispute over this plot of land remained unresolved for the following five years, during which time the cooperative society had been formed and the hostilities between Pradhan Ali and his kinsmen had taken place. The latter troubles had served to bring to a head the bad relations between Azizuddin and Pradhan Ali which stemmed from this, and other, older, conflicts. Thwarted in his attempt to "resolve" the dispute between Pradhan Ali and his kinsmen - in a manner which would have caused loss to Pradhan Ali - Azizuddin now resolved to bring the former matter to a head.

In September of 1967 the *bichar* of the Pradhan Ali-Azizuddin Khondakar dispute was held, in front of Pradhan Ali's own *kachari ghar*, from which the benches and a table had been removed to accomodate the guests. As the relevant *sardars* and others involved arrived, Pradhan Ali, showing both hospitality and respect, produced a water pipe (*hockah*), betel nut and *pan* leaves for his "guests." His demeanor among his peers was far more deferrent than the usual self-assertive manner with which I had seen him behave when dealing with Tinpara villagers, over whom he held unequalled sway.

Of the 14 *sardars* in the *samaj*, only 6 were present besides Pradhan Ali himself and I recognized these as the very men who had been aligned with Pradhan Ali in the *samaj* faction which had taken place over the Zindapur divorce incident (see above).

The *salish* began with a statement of claims by Azizuddin first and then Pradhan Ali. Witnesses to the whole affair were then questioned by the *sardars* sitting in judgement. The sons of Gada Mistri spoke, largely in support of Pradhan Ali who had paid back the loan of Rs. 100. and who had supported them in their own disputes with other villagers in Tinpara. The Daiara man to whom the land had been subsequently mortgaged by Azizuddin said that he had taken the land in mortgage in good faith and was thus concerned about the money he had lent in exchange for it. Other Tinpara villagers spoke, in favor of one or the other disputant.

After two hours of heated discussion the *sardars* were of two minds. Clearly, the land belonged to Azizuddin's wife and there could be no disputing that, even though Azizuddin had acted in bad faith first by not repaying the loan before repossessing the land he had mortgaged for it and then secondly by mortgaging it out again when its ownership was in dispute. On the other hand, Pradhan Ali, their peer, had acted precipitously in repaying the loan in his attempt to get Azizuddin's land. This action could not be justified. Finally, alas, there were no documents to attest to any of the reported transactions.

It is the ideal of all such *salish* in which complicated relations and events are invariably involved to attempt to reach a compromise (*mel*). The *sardars* chose the latter course. It was agreed that Pradhan Ali would receive from Azizuddin Rs. 80 (out of the total Rs. 100) he had

paid in repaying the latter's loan. Because of his hasty action in repaying the loan, he would lose the remaining Rs. 20. The land would be returned to its title holder, Azizuddin's wife, but not before Azizuddin himself had payed a "fine" of Rs. 35. in compensation for the trouble he had caused the widow and sons of Gada Mistri. Finally, the land would remain mortgaged to the Daiara man.

The incidents reported in Case 3 afford the opportunity of analyzing group processes at both the *reyai*/village and the *samaj* levels of organization. On the one hand, the way in which a single lineage - or in this case a sole individual - may dominate within the smaller unit - the *reyai*/village - is demonstrated. On the other hand, it may also be seen how and why an intra-*reyai*/village conflict can be "escalated" to the *samaj* level of organization, with differing consequences for the actions of those involved.

In his dealings with his land-poor matrilateral kinsmen, Pradhan Ali was scathingly contemptuous. Moreover, attempts to mediate the conflict between Pradhan Ali and his kinsmen by other members of the same *reyai*/village - through the medium of the cooperative society - may be seen to have failed simply becuase, at least at the time of my presence in Tinpara, Pradhan Ali refused, and could not be compelled, to cooperate with those efforts. It is possible to suspect that he saw in these attempts a challenge to his long-accustomed *de facto* role as "leader" in Tinpara village affairs. Moreover, given the long-standing tension between him and Azizuddin, he saw the latter's role in attempting to "mediate the conflict" as in reality an effort publically to embarrass him. There is good evidence that such a suspicion was justified. During the first several months of my stay in Tinpara, Pradhan Ali was my host. After I had been in his home as guest for 2 months, Pradhan Ali approached me a bit embarrassedly and requested that I prepare to seek lodging elsewhere. There were, he said, elements in the village who were back-biting him (and, it turned out, me as well), saying that by housing a non-Muslim

foreigner, a partaker of the forbidden flesh of the pig and drink of the vine, he, Pradhan Ali was acting in a most "un-Islamic" manner! His prestige, he said sadly, was being called into question. Shortly thereafter, I moved to other quarters in the area. The "elements" who had been so maligning Pradhan Ali proved to be only 1 in number: none other than Azizuddin who in his capacity as *imam* could be said to have a certain authroity, in the eyes of other villagers, in judging the Islamic purity of this or that act.

It is further to be noted that, if indeed the whole attempt at "mediation of the conflict" can be seen as Azizuddin's effort to embarrass Pradhan Ali, he was, at that point, playing by the rules with the effect that in his opposition to Pradhan Ali he was using rules as resources in political conflict (see Swartz 1968: 26-30 and Nicholas 1968b). Had there not been, after all, a resolution by the Tinpara Cooperative Society to the effect that all conflicts between members should be mediated by the group? And, in his capacity as the society's Chairman, was not he, Azizuddin, merely acting in a desired and appropriate capacity? Finally, by refusing to acquiesce in such a mediation procedure, was not Pradhan Ali "breaking the rules" and exposing himself to criticism thereby?

All that may be true, but as the events show, Pradhan Ali seemed not to be concerned with the possibility of any such criticism. His ability thus to flaunt attempts to mediate what for him was a personal matter demonstrates the manner in which one man or lineage can dominate a small *reyai* or village grouping, unless opposed by nearly equally powerful individuals or lineages in that same grouping. The conflict situations in Hajipur and Tinpara provide useful contrasts on this point.

I have earlier argued that the formation of small localized groupings such as the *reyai* or multi-*reyai* village depdnds on the coalescence of power

and influence around one dominant lineage. Where, however, as in the case of Hajipur the most powerful lineage can from time to time be successfully opposed by others of some economic and political substance in the grouping, that dominance can only be maintained by the more complex political process of gaining support and building a successful clique or faction which is more inclusive than a group of kinsmen can be. The events I have reported in the building of the Hajipur Cooperative Society, under the leadership of the Mahisans, are submitted as evidence for this generalization. Where, by contrast, only one lineage or individual dominates in a *reyai*/village grouping, the political process is simpler in the sense that that lineage or individual can behave more arbitrarily in most instances and retain sufficient power to stave off all combinations and coalitions which attempt to contain him or it. The ability of Pradhan Ali to resist what amounted to a political attack on him by Azizuddin in this respect, over and above the latter's attempt to gain support for this by bringing a certain incident to the attention of the village as a whole, can be taken as evidence for the second general statement.

As I have related, with the failure of Azizuddin's mediation attempt, personal relations between him and Pradhan Ali deteriorated rapidly into open conflict, taking their expression in the form of animosities regarding an old and unresolved dispute. As the events of Case 3 suggest, Azizuddin, seeing it impossible to best his rival in the political field represented by the *reyai*/village level of organization, moved to "escalate" the conflict by widening its field to include elements of the *samaj* level of organization. This move demonstrates the process of political escalation to include increasingly wider social groupings, the extension of the *reyai* to the *samaj* levels of organization. It suggests that when a man cannot gain political

ends at the interpersonal, *reyai* or village levels of interaction, he has an option to escalate the conflict by bringing in actors to whom he has access who have the requisite "countervailing power" to those forces which oppose him in various ways in a previously less complex and/or numerically smaller (in terms of number of actors) field.

In part the ability to do this depends on the individual involved. While I did not have occasion to witness many examples of the *samaj* operating in a *salish* of the sort described in Case 3, I suspect that a poor man from a low status lineage might have less easy recourse to the conflict resolution functions of the *samaj*, particularly if he is involved in a dispute with a *sardar* (e.g., Pradhan Ali). But, although he was only of "middle peasant" economic status, Azizuddin could nonetheless be seen as a man of some substance in Tinpara and its neighboring area. As a Khondakar, he was a member of a traditionally high status priestly lineage and one of previously noteworthy local status and power as well, in that prior to Independence and Partition the Tinpara Khondakars had enjoyed the favor of the Maharajas of Tripura. As had been his ancestors, Azizuddin was, along with one of his brothers, an *imam*, which status, irrespective of the personal regard in which he might be privately held, perforce assured him in a predominantly Muslim community of public respect. An intelligent and obviously self-assertive man, he performed the role of *imam* vigorously and with pride, leading congregational prayer in one mosque and teaching in a *madrassa* in another village. In the latter connection, he was in contact with officials of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development as a participating member of the "Feeder School" program, in which role of *imam* teachers is to be expanded to include teaching non-traditional subjects such as the Bengali language (in addition to Arabic) and some simple arithmetic. From this role as a "leader in rural modernization" he

seemed to derive not a little personal satisfaction and, at least in hiw own eyes, additional prestige. He was, in my judgement, the possessor of a remarkably wide fund of knowledge when compared to other villagers of my acquaintance and his eagerness to display this in conversation with his fellows in Tinpara invariably made him, in my observation, one of the centers of attention in any such casual bantering. (I once, for example, heard him cogently and accurately address a group of relaxing conversationalists on the subject of the origins of World War II, an event which I suspect for most of the chit-chatting participants only brought to mind what they might recall of troops and planes stationed in Comilla in the early 1940's for bombing missions in Southeast Asia.)

Such a man, then, though not outstanding in wealth, can nonetheless have access to powerful allies in a political conflict, and if an Azizuddin Khondakar called upon the *sardars* to adjudicate a conflict involving himself and one of their peers, it was to the call of a man of no mean personal and social standing that they were being asked to respond. Not all of the *sardars* came to the *salish*, however, as I have reported, and all of those who did were identifiable as men who at one point or another had sided with Pradhan Ali in the various disputes by which the *samaj* had been racked for two decades. His former allies though they were, however, Pradhan Ali's demeanor toward them stood in marked contrast to that he had displayed when earlier called to appear for the settlement of the dispute with his kinsmen. In the former situation, Pradhan Ali was acting in his own bailiwick, where he had long held sway without peer and if his actions there seem to have been cavalier and arbitrary they clearly should not be as surprising. However, confronted with a call to judgement by his peers in the *samaj*, he could hardly dismiss the *salish* to which he was summoned with the same contempt

without undergoing the risk of considerably negative social costs. Thus, in escalating the personal dispute to the *samaj* level of organization, Azizuddin, having been thwarted in his earlier attempt, was assured of success in forcing Pradhan Ali to a public confrontation.

It is more difficult to analyze the outcome of the *salish* itself, although it is not crucial to my purpose in relating these events to do so. After it was over, I found most participants other than Azizuddin (who considered it his victory) reticent in discussing it and individual motivations are thus difficult to fathom. I have noted that the ideal norm in such a mediation is compromise and, for whatever it might have ultimately been worth, this is clearly what the *sardars* were trying to do. Though all the *sardars* present were, so far as I could tell, amicably disposed toward Pradhan Ali, it was clear that they regarded his role in the affair as improper. At the same time, Azizuddin's delay in repaying the loan and subsequent irresponsible action in utilizing and re-mortgaging the collateral land could hardly be taken as evidence of great uprightness either. The compromise worked out has all the earmarks of attempted fairness in the judgement of two men caught in qually subtle acts of thievery. It did not, I might add, result in the immediate smoothing over of relations between the two, at least insofar as I was able to observe them during the subsequent few months of my stay in Tinpara. Perhaps the great gainers were the widow and sons of Gada Mistri, who in the end were accorded Rs. 35 more than the original amount of the loan for their sufferings. The incident serves to underline, among other things, the practical difficulty of actually collecting on loans in Tinpara and Hajipur. For much of the incessant money lending goes on without benefit of document and even if legal evidence of transactions were consistently kept the problems involved in the enforcement of rights of contract in rural Bengali

society are great. Perhaps for this, if no other, reason the *sardars*, most of whom are "rich" peasants themselves with much at stake in creditor transactions, have a particular interest in attempting to enforce the norms of honesty and fairness in those situations where they are called publically to exercise judgement.

Summary

I have attempted in this chapter to show by means of the analysis of cases something of the actual dynamics of social organization in Hajipur and Tinpara. I have discussed the way in which some semblance of village unity is developed in the face of inter-lineage rivalry expressed at the *reyai* level of organization in a multi-*reyai* community. By contrast, I have tried to show the politics of dominance in a village where there is only one center of preponderant power and influence. Finally, I have wanted to show what I consider to be the most significant feature of social organization in this part of East Bengal, the symbiotic relationship between small, intensive and immediately exclusive groupings and larger, extensive and more generally inclusive ones.

It should also be evident that the formal characteristics of conflict in these villages are more complex than a brittle application of "class analysis" would reveal. I have noted the omnipresence of "atomistic" conflict, which occurs within and between the lines of economic class and social status, however these may be drawn. Factional conflict does, however, inevitably involve the more wealthy and powerful of peasant proprietors who, as the cases I have reported suggest, fight among themselves with such regularity as to render simplistic any attempt to characterize them as a solidary rural "ruling class." Thus, in the analysis of mundane, everyday conflict situations, observation of the lines of cleavage in the given instance is important. As

the case of Hajipur shows, where there is a rough balance of economic power between two or three dominant lineages, the competition between them will tend to produce vertical cleavages in the "universe" of the conflict group involved. Where a group is dominated by one lineage, as is the case in Tinpara, the line of cleavage will be horizontal, as members of non-dominant lineages come into dispute with the most powerful individual or lineage in the group. It is in such situations, I tentatively conclude, that the external linkages to larger groupings - such as that between the *reyai* or village and the *samaj* - will be brought into play, and the arena of conflict be thus escalated, as the weaker disputants attempt to gain support from more powerful allies. In this sense, the lines of economic class and political power I have sought to demarcate become meaningful. For to the extent that the *samaj* serves to regulate political relations among the most powerful men in each localized sub-grouping, calling it into play allows the less powerful, utilizing the norms of the "system," to gain assistance against their stronger adversaries. This political process in turn gives the social organization of Comilla *thana* communities their territorially extensive and "multi-tiered" character.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

This thesis has emphasized the structurally ambivalent character of the villages in Comilla *thana* in relationship to the larger organizational ensemble to which they contribute and in which they are embedded. They are not, as I have suggested, residential social systems in a holistic sense, in that as social groupings they do not emcompass the whole of rural people's activities. While this study has been concerned with Comilla *thana* villages, I think that they are somewhat representative of social organization in other parts of East Pakistan. My brief and impressionistic visits to some of the other most populous districts of the province lead me to suspect fundamental structural similarities elsewhere with regard to rural social organization. I gained this impression in the watery terrain of Barisal, for example, and the streat-crossed plain of Mymensingh, where in both districts the "village" also seems to be an ephemeral entity. Glasse (1967: 205), while mindful as I have been of these activities which lend unity and substance to village organization in his research area, nonetheless writes of Matlab *thana* in northern Comilla District:

> "Seen from the air, it is difficult to distinguish where one village begins and the other ends, so dense is the population, so unpatterned the agglomerations of dwellings. This difficulty does not exist, to be sure, in people's minds and everyone knows to which *gram* he belongs and the geographical boundaries of the *gram* are familiar to most. But one may be skeptical of the social unity of the *gram*. It has no collective activities, no communal property, nor has it any headman or administrative structure; there is no meeting place nor village square." (my translation).

Yet to readers familiar with the patterns of residence which obtain in many parts of northern and central India, the patterns of social organization

I have described will not seem totally unique. Indeed, it is probably not far-fetched to see the villages of both East and West Bengal as part of a North Indian continuum, with general similarities in residential lay-out modified by regional variations in population density, environment and the resultant settlement patterns. The Bengali *para* or ward builds into villages in much the same way as do the wards and other sub-divisions of villages in the Punjab (Smith 1955: 148), Delhi (Lewis 1965: 22-26), Uttar Pradesh (Cohn 1955: 56-58) and parts of Central India (Mayer 1960: 132-139). But the non-nucleated character of deltaic Bengali villages greatly mitigates the spartial, and thus in part the social, solidarity which is found in the "hamleted villages" of these other regions. Similarly, because the *reyai* and *samaj* serve in fact to negate the solidarity of the village as a grouping, community organization reflects at best an extreme on any hypothetical continuum of social structural forms one might postulate for northern South Asia. This is one reason for my suggesting that in Comilla the market area be taken as focal to rural social organization; the market area is, in effect, "the village," if one is in fact seeking whole residential social systems to analyze.

But if the organization of Comilla's rural communities is seen as broadly analoguous to that of their North and Central Indian counterparts, an attempt at processual, as well as structural, analysis of their workings may hopefully contribute insight into general structures and processes in rural South Asia. In the end, this thesis hopes so to contribute.

I have tried to show how economic class, social status and political power relationships in these East Bengal communities bring the formal and informal groupings which comprise them into being. As the description and analysis of Chapter 8 attempts to demonstrate, the social reality of the *reyai* and *samaj* as groups is seen most clearly in essentially political

processes. That is, their reality as social groupings is ultimately and fully *emergent*, "called into being," as it were, by activities which are either overtly political or symbolically reflective of political relations. Furthermore, the importance of the *reyai*, the *gram* or the *samaj* as groups which organize rural people's activities - and the manner in which this organization of activities occurs - is *situationally dependent* on the particular expression of underlying social structural factors - those of class, status and power - at any given point in time. Close examination, with this kind of focus, of communities elsewhere on the Sub-continent might yield fruitful contributions to our overall understanding of them.

I might add in further conclusion that the principles of rural social organization in Comilla *thana* - involving "compounds" of "social structures" as Geertz, quoted earlier, suggests - seem operative in peasant societies elsewhere in the world which are characterized by similar population densities and similar histories. Thus, for example, Geertz (1968: 83-103) describes the history of the Javanese village over 150 years of colonial domination and alternating intervention and non-intervention in the rural economy of Java by colonial authorities as an "advance toward vagueness." I have argued that the social structure and institutions of Hajipur and Tinpara reflect in part ecological adaptions under conditions of historical neglect by the colonial power and its minions. East Bengal has in common with Java a similar ecology and partially similar history of colonial neglect, and its villages seem to exhibit at first glance the kind of "flaccid indeterminateness" which Geertz attributes to the Javanese village, although the processes to which their social forms are adaptive are not exactly parallel. Other cases in which there has been historically an absence of effective external control of rural areas may provide comparatively useful insight.

Hobsbawn (1965: 30-56) traces the origins of the Sicilian Mafia to circumstances not unlike those of Bengal under first Hindu, then Muslim, and finally British, rule. Under the Bourbons and later the Piedmontese rural Sicily was in effect controlled by a "shapeless" and "decentralized" "parallel system" of government which gave rise to the Mafia. It emerged in the 19th Century as a patronage-linked complex of organizational ties which centered around a local "boss" whose influence was channeled through his informal linkages with his dependents. Such a constellation of patron-client relationships - known in Sicily as a *cosca* - was relatively independent as a power base for local leaders, but informal kinds of understandings created the potential for occasional combination with like entities, thus allowing the development of a kind of "invisible government" in the hold of which estern Sicily is gripped even today. "In lawless communities," Hobsbawn tells us, "power is rarely scattered among an anarchy of competing units, but clusters around local strong points," and is exercised by reciprocal patronage understandings of local leaders. "What characterized Sicily was the universal prevalence of such patronage and the virtual absence of any other form of constant power" (Hobsbawn 1965: 32-33). Overgeneralization in comparison is not meant here, but it is clear that rural Bengal in the 19th and early 20th Centuries was in fact relatively lawless, if by that adjective one means the general lack of constant externally enforced administrative and social control. In this sense, in a manner appropriate to their own ecological setting and responsive to the internal pressures of population growth with its attendant economic deterioration, Bengali Muslim peasants allowed political power to coalesce under the aegis of locally dominant families - a "clustering around local strong points" seems clearly to have taken place. Thus, the background for the development of the ensemble

of institutions and social forms I have described is one of historical conditions which permitted largely autonomous growth.

My attempts at historical cross-cultural comparison here are meant only to be suggestive. For any such effort to claim even near definitiveness we must await a much more comprehensive social history of Bengal which will elucidate the ways in which local peasant communities were established and integrated into historically changing types of state systems - Hindu, Mughal and British. Indeed, we have no such study for any region of the South Asian Sub-continent and perhaps the time is ripe in Indian studies for a major work of "social anthropological history" akin to the admirable efforts of Geertz (1965) and Wolf (1959).

Meanwhile, it is hoped that the present study, in addition to providing socio-cultural information on a heretofore badly neglected region of the Sub-continent, will furnish interested scholars with some modicum of insight into the ways in which dense populations living in scattered rural settlement patterns are integrated into increasingly complex social structures. Lauriston Sharp (1958) once wrote a stimulating article in which he tried to show that the Yir Yoront of northern Australia were a "people without politics." Later critics of the piece have argued ironically that in fact Sharp was describing a political system while trying to deny its reality. I might well place myself in an analoguous position if I were to argue too strenuously that rural East Bengalis are "peasants without villages." Yet the basic finding of this research has been that the "villages" of Comilla *thana* are at best "sometime things" and that their inhabitants are directly enmeshed in simultaneously operative levels of social organization which both structurally and territorially engulf their "villages" to the point of irrelevance in many social and political situations. Bengali peasants themselves, however, do identify cognitively

with social groupings known as "villages." Moreover, in using throughout the term "village" I too show myself to be mentally bound by the vocabulary of an older ethnographic tradition which assumed that a local community could be perceived as a territorially bounded social system for purposes of holistic analysis. Nonetheless, I am driven close to suggesting that the rice farmers of southeastern Bengal can be - indeed, must be - viewed as "peasants without villages" if some coherent description of their society is to be made. Finally, although I am curiously enamored of the monsoon-boiled delta of Eastern Bengal and its irascibly sociable inhabitants, I would in no way claim for its society and culture a "special uniqueness" as regards basic processes, as my brief foray into cross-cultural historical comparison above indicates. But meaningful comparisons of this sort must await a larger synthesis which I would be presumptuous, to say the least, to attempt here.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A book-length village study by Hafeez Zaidi is in press (East-West Center), but as of this writing it has not appeared. Of the published field reports I have reviewed, I judge those of Qadir (1960) and Glasse (1967) to be the most useful. Also of some ethnographic and sociological utility are articles by Fazlur Rashid Khan (1962) and Nizam Uddin Ahmed (1962). Some culturally descriptive material can be gleaned from certain development-oriented, primarily social psychological, studies, most notably that of Rahim (1965). Economic, sociological, and some ethnographic data can be extracted from a careful review of the reports of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development at Comilla, as well as its (now defunct) Journal (of the East Pakistan Academy for Rural Development). I am persuaded on re-reading an attempt by myself and two co-authors to utilize these and other secondary sources, however, that at best only a very general overview of East Bengali village culture can be attained, one which is greatly lacking in crucial detail (see Beech, Bertocci and Corwin 1966). These materials, plus a judicious use of agricultural statistics and census data, can render a good second-hand description of the political economy of the East Pakistani rural scene, as the first chapter of a recent work by Rehman Sobhan (1968) admirably suggests. Finally, there is an older body of work on East Bengali Muslim society, that of British administrators, often scholarly students of Indian society, some of whose studies I have found helpful both for sociological and historical purposes. The bibliography provided by Nazmul Karim (1956) includes many such references.

[2]I am departing from scholarly custom in including Indic words in the text without transliterating them with each appearance. I do so frankly because the practice appears to be tedious for both typist and non-specialist reader. Thus, Indic words, regardless of origin, will appear in the text spelled either according to their most common English rendering or in a form deemed most amenable to accurate pronunciation by readers of English. Recognizing both the proclivities and the needs of the specialist, however, I provide a glossary in Appendix I in which most Indic words appearing in the text are transliterated as spelled in Bengali and explained. This procedure will be followed except where whole sequences of Bengali dialogue are quoted in the original in the text. In these few instances, the words will be transliterated and translated. Where possible, the Bengali spelling followed will be that found in Dev (1963). For many words, however, I can find no readily available dictionary reference and their spelling will be my own rendering. In the case of all transliteration, I use the system proposed by Inden and Dimock (1970).

[3]The *thana* is a unit of political administration which corresponds roughly in function to the American county. It is in turn composed of units known as Unions, themselves agglomerations of villages and *mauzas* which together comprise a residential population of about 1,200. *Thanas* are in turn grouped into Subdivisions, the latter into Districts and finally Divisions. The term *Kotwali* refers to that *thana* in which a given District's headquarters are located.

[4]*Mauzas* are administratively defined revenue and census units. More about them in relation to the problem of village definition will be explained in Chapter 2.

[5]I am grateful to Mr. Boujra of the Department of Anthropology of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, for having suggested to me the possible derivation of the Bengal term *reyai* from the Arabic *ra'iyyah*, meaning follower or citizen. I have found in Mitra (1923) the following similar words in Bengali, cited here as further evidence for my interpretation of the word: *reyāt*: remission, indulgence, favor, pardon; *reyātī*: favorite, protegé. Given the character of the *reyai* as a social grouping, this etymological interpretation seems most nearly accurate.

[6]Population density figures are taken from Haroun Er Rashid (1965: 356), p. 356. The data on size of farms are calculated from the Pakistan Census of Agriculture (East Pakistan I: 46-85), tables 5-9.

[7]The term "conruration" is that coined by Robert Glasse, to whom I am indebted on several counts in addition to this most apt description of the rural East Pakistani countryside. A draft copy of his now published paper (Glasse 1967) was the first piece of useful ethnographic description of Bengali Muslim peasantry I had seen prior to going to the field and it served as a useful guide to the beginnings of my own study. I am also grateful for his comments on a paper I have earlier prepared for the Fourth Annual Conference on Bengal.

[8]Along the western border of Comilla District where the flooding of the Meghna River has necessitated the raising of banks (*kāndi*) along which while villages have come to be settled, such names as Daudkandi (*dāud kāndi*), "David's Bank," Korikandi (*kaṛi kāndi*), "bank of shells," and Kawlakandi (*kalā kāndi*), "banana tree bank," seem common. By contrast, where villages have been established in the Lalmai Hills, a low range of foothills in the western end of Comilla Kotwali Thana, such names as Dhanmura (*dhān murā*), "hill of rice paddy," and Vaishnabmura (*baiṣnab murā*), "hill of the Vishnuites," are found. The attachment of such appelations to settled agglomerates reflect the geographical features which dominate in determining the character of settlement. (I hasten to add, however, that by no means are all place names in Bengal limited to geographically derived aphorisms.)

[9]The *Jugi* (*Yogi*) Weavers are a good example of the distinctness of "caste subcultures" within the vast Hindu fold. At least one respected scholar (Dasgupta 1962: 368-70) associates them with the *Nath* cult, from which they apparently draw their surnames and preferred caste name. Perhaps because of their religious deviation from more Sanskritized practices in Bengali Hinduism, they have been traditionally low-ranked. For example, they do not follow the custom of cremation of the dead, but rather bury their deceased members in flexed position. Brahmans will not take water from them nor will they consent to administer ritual to the *Jugis*. Rather, the *Jugis* have their own "caste priests," variously called *Goswami* or *Mahatma* (Webster 1910: 25-29). Webster reported that in the Census of 1901 the caste priests of the *Jugis* wanted to be recorded as "*Jugi Brahmanas*" and listed as a separate community. The family of *Jugi* Brahmans I knew gave a Brahman surname, their male members wore the sacred thread, and they were referred to by other villages as *thakur*, the locally

common referent for brahman. Among the several *Jugi* Weaver families I knew of, Vaishnavism seemed common and in several cases individual members of these families had become "caste *Baishnabs*" (see Nicholas 1969 for an account of these).

[10]It is a principle of the Comilla cooperative movement, to which I shall refer importantly in another context, that the cooperative societies be formed in localized "natural" social groupings; hence the name "village level cooperative societies" (see Fairchild and Huq 1961: 10-12; 19-21).

[11]For a discussion of some aspects of the "relocation policy" of the Government of East Pakistan, see Sophur (1963). His report deals primarily with the problem of relocating Chakma tribals from the Rangamati area to make way for the large lake which the damming of the Karnaphuli River at Kaptai would produce. Sophur hints at a distinct bias of the Government in favor of settling Muslim Bengali peasants along the hilly India-Pakistan-Burma border areas, a preference from which villagers in crowded areas like Comilla *thana*, such as those described in Example 6, have benefitted. The Chakma tribals, however, seem to have fared less well as this whole process of settlement and relocation has unfolded.

[12]Theodore W. Schultz (1965) has cogently discussed the inadequacies of "traditional" agriculture in this regard. During the period of my research in Comilla, the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development and the Government of Pakistan had spear-headed the introduction of the new high-yielding varieties of rice developed on Taiwan and at the International Rice Research Institute at Los Baños in the Philippines, especially IRRI-8, IRRI-9 and Taipei-177. The diffusion of these new varieties, along with the technological and agricultural practices of an innovative sort which must accompany them, had begun to take hold among certain groups of cultivators. But the experience at Comilla, as well as elsewhere, provides a caveat to unduly high hopes for immediately spectacular results from the "miracle seeds," as they are sometimes called. Among the attendant difficulties associated with their introduction are new problems of disease (to which lower yielding native varieties are resistant), new needs for fertilizer and insecticides, and the need for innovations in behavior required for their correct use. Moreover, these impending technological changes are fraught with sociological, economic and resultant political implications. Discussing the latter with respect to India, for example, Nair (1969: 220-234) raises the possibility of too "technocratic" a solution to the problem of inducing adoption of the new varieties, in which the large cultivators are likely first to respond with subsequent efforts at throwing smaller and less efficient cultivators off the land. Wharton (1969) discusses this problem as well, in his general overview of the difficulties engendered by the "green revolution."

[13]One *maund* is equal to approximately 82 pounds (lbs). One rupee (abbreviated sign: R.; plural Rs.), at currently official rates of exchange, is worth approximately US$.21.

[14]In the "Tebhaga Movement" in Bengal between 1945 and 1947, the peasants' demands seem to have been exceedingly modest. The slogan of the movement reflected their wish that rents be reduced from half (*ādhār*; hence the tenants' appelation *ādhiār*) of the crop to merely one third of it (*tin bhāg*or "3 divisions"; hence *Tebhaga*). Legislation to this effect was never passed, however, and so the common "50/50" basis remains "legal." For a political analysis of the Tebhaga

Movement, see Sen (1947) and Gankovsky and Gordon-Polonskaya (1964: 42-45). Hamza Alavi (1965) provides a brief description and sociological analysis.

I have noted that outright tenancy appears to be non-existent and "owner-cum-tenant" farms relatively few in Comilla District. This seems to be the case for the most populous districts in the province generally, as contrasted with those of less populous North Bengal. For example, Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogra Districts all have nearly 50 percent and above of their farms in the "owner-cum-tenant" category, and outright tenancy varies from between 1 and 8 percent for all three.

[15]Women participate in production activities by carrying out the tasks of threshing, winnowing, and husking rice once it is brought in from the fields (*purdah* proscriptions prevent their working in the fields, although they may be seen on specially made platforms near homesteads where these activities are carried on). Poor widows or the wives of the less wealthy cultivators earn some income by working in the homesteads of the more prosperous, helping the latters' wives in their tasks. Payment for these services is usually in kind. For example, women husking rice are commonly paid at a rate of 1.75 *seers* per *maund* of husked rice; I was informed that a pair of women working steadily can husk rice at a rate of 1 *maund* every 2-3 hours. The work is exhausting, however, and to work at it more than this amount of time is rare. (There are 40 *seers* in a *maund*; 1 *seer* equals approximately 2.1 pounds.)

[16]The rate of payment for day labor in the fields (*muni*) varies between Rs. .75 (12 *annas*) and Rs. 2., depending on whether or not one or more meals are provided by the employer. Rickshaw pullers rent their vehicles from both town and country-based *mahajans* at a common rate of Rs. 3. per day. [1 *anna* is equal to approximately US$.013; there are 16 *annas* in a rupee, although this old and time-honored division of the rupee has been officially changed to a decimal system (100 *naye paise* equal Rs. 1.; 4 *annas* equal Rs. .25).]

[17]About a half dozen members of the villages under study engage in petty trade, either as a major or supplemental source of income. Some of them sell in local rural markets (*hat*), selling betel nut and *pan* leaves, or other similar items. Most often they sell items procured in the central markets of the town, bringing their wares to the countryside. Others rent stalls or uncovered spots in the Chauk Bazar (the major market of Comilla town) where they sell goods they have gotten from town warehouse agents at wholesale prices. Thus they serve as agents for the dispersal of goods manufactured locally or elsewhere to the general public; it happened that most of those I knew engaged in this way were sellers of *lungis*, the inexpensive and brightly colored ankle length waist cloth worn nearly universally by Bengali Muslim peasants.

[18]I have noted the fact that the appelation *Sheikh* is one of comparatively recent adoption in Comilla District. It may be that the massive "ashrafaization" process took place concommitant with the graduate growth of Muslim communal consciousness in the 19th Century, certain movements associated with this process explicitly condemning the religious syncretism of rural Bengali Muslims. The Faraizi Movement (see M.A. Khan 1965) is a good example of an orthodox Islamic revivalism which had great impact in rural areas, and in promoting a more "correct" awareness of the Islamic great tradition, it may well have helped to induce rural Muslims to call themsevles by one of the other *Ashraf* titles.

[19]In the area around Hajipur and Tinpara, the Hindu serving castes have ample demand on their special wares. The Tinpara carpenters are reknowned in the *thana* for their expertise in making plows and other agricultural implements and in early spring and summer it is rare to enter their homestead compound and not find several Muslim customers patiently waiting their turn for a plow to be made. The barbers who live just south of Hajipur's core are constantly employed in hair-cutting and shaving, both on the basis of a payment in kind with villagers from all over the Alirbazar area, and also on market days with payment in cash from all comers. In fact, the Hajipur barbers, with a constant store of rice received in *jajmani*-like payment from regular customers, are great creditors in rice lending. Similarly, the *jugi* weavers (*debonath*) still practice their trade with some profit, as do the younger and more able washermen, in the area at large. To the south of Hajipur and Tinpara are villages dominated by potters (*kumar*), seen daily trudging through Alirbazar with a shoulder-load of wares being taken to town. Leather-workers from Comilla town make constant forays into the Alirbazar area in search of hides.

In short, the lower-ranked Hindu artisan and serving castes still carry on important functions in the rural and urban economies of East Pakistan and while great emigration of Hindus appears to have obtained over the years since Partition, there remains at least a minimal economic incentive for these groups (in contrast to the higher castes) to stay.

[20]Nazmul Karim (1962: 141) comments with reference to patterns of social stratification in Noakhali District that while historically a distinction obtained between *Ashraf* and non-*Ashraf* classes, it was nonetheless acceptable for an *Ashraf*-titled person "to have marital ties with *sat-gerastha* or cultivators who have no social stigma, i.e., those who do not belong to the lowest strata ..." Given the proclivity of Hajipur and Tinpara villagers to name any given homestead if possible when asked to do so, it seems reasonable to conclude that the *Sheikh* and non-*Sheikh* distinction was not really relevant (since nearly everyone is a *Sheikh*), but rather that if no special title could apply, such a family would simply be labeled *gerastha* in the absence of any title.

[21]The relationship of land ownership to creditor activities was tested with Fishers Exact Test of the following hypothesis: creditor activities (lending money, renting land out) are associated with land holdings above the median amount at a statistically significant level. A positive relationship was demonstrated at a level of $p = .0033$.

[22]The relationship of complexion to standards of physical beauty, in Bengal at least, is more subtle than commonly believed by Westerners familiar with India, and thus draws my comment here. Sophisticated, Calcutta-oriented Bengalis with whom I have discussed the question make a distinction between the words *pharsā* ("fair-skinned") and *sundar* ("beautiful"), pointing out that the latter word, when used to describe a person, is more general in meaning, referring to the quality of physical features, as well as complexion. It is thus common to attribute beauty to a person (especially a woman) whose physical features are pleasing but who is not "fair-skinned." For example, cne may describe such a person as follows: "*sundar hoy, kintu pharsā noy* ("he or she is beautiful, but not fair-skinned").

It is my impression, however, as a result of my own attempts to use the word *sundar* in its correct context (and often failing), that among villagers, as well as town-based "middle class" people in East Pakistan, the above distinction is blurred. I relate an instance of this.

In the early days of my field work I was once engaged in a discussion with hangers-on at an Alirbazar tea shop. The subject of marriage came up and I queried at one point about the appropriate age of marriage for a girl. One wag produced the following facetious response: "*Saheb*, is she is *sundar*, she will be snapped up at the age of 10; if not so *sundar*, she shall have to wait until she is 13 or 14; but if she is black (*sic*), even at age 30 she will not be married" (*jodi kālō hōche, tiris barcar parjantya tār biye habe nā*). This response was met, needless to say, with peals of laughter. What should be noted, however, is the juxtaposition of the words *sundar* and *kālō* (black; "dark-skinned") in the speaker's sentence as denoting opposite qualities: *sundar* (beautiful) versus *kālō* (black; "dark-skinned"). Now, there are two questions involved, one pertaining to "native categories" of physical beauty, the other pertaining to what might be called "prestige of the personage" and prestige derived from association with another "prestigious personage." The questions are separate, but related. With regard to the speaker's meaning as it might reflect native standards of beauty, the following semantic analysis might be proposed:

	sundar	:	*kālō*
	beautiful	:	"dark-skinned"
hence	beautiful fair-skin	:	not-beautiful dark skin

But it has been noted that educated speakers of Bengali when asked will make a distinction between fairness of complexion and physical beauty, that is, between *pharsā* and *sundar*, insisting that there is no necessary relationship between the two. Thus, to understand what my fellow tea shop conversationalist had in mind, perhaps another "dimension of contrast" must be sought, that of prestige.

I found it common for educated men of my acquaintance to refer in English to their wives and daughters in some instances (and a bit embarassedly) as "my black wife" or "my black daughter." Significantly, one of them referred to his two-year old little girl as follows: "Oh, she is so black, she is ruining all my prestige, but I love her so much I don't mind." Thus, whether or not the female in question would be considered beautiful has nothing necessarily to do with the fact that her dark complexion has implications not merely for her "prestige of personage," but also and importantly for the social prestige of males associated with her as either husband or father. Thus, the words used by the amusing conversationalist might be semantically juxtaposed in another simple contrast set:

	sundar		*kālō*
literally:	beautiful	:	"dark-skinned"

implied:	beautiful	:	not beautiful
hence:	fair-skinned	:	dark-skinned
also:	prestigious	:	not prestigious

The implication of this (admittedly divergent from the main point) foray into "ethnoscience" is simply that color distinctions commonly made by Bengalis with reference to all persons, and women in particular, relate more to considerations of prestige than to abstract categories of physical beauty. Thus, the translation of the tea shop humorist's answer to my question might be glossed as follows: "If a girl is fair-skinned, she will be desirable for marriage and thus likely to be married at an early age; but because a dark-skinned girl is less prestigious, i.e., because having her as a wife contributes nothing to a man's status honor, she will be less desired as a marriage partner on that count alone and thus be married at a later age."

Statistically speaking, however, my own data on age of marriage for women indicate 14 years to be the average age of marriage. Moreover, despite their adherence to the larger tendencies of the culture with respect to standards of physical beauty and related matters of personal prestige, it is my impression that ordinary villagers in Hajipur and Tinpara are more significantly concerned with economic and social status when it comes down to actual choice of marriage partners.

[23]On the basis of genealogical analysis, I hypothesized that there would be a systematic tendency for titled lineages to intermarry at a higher rate than that at which *gerastha* lineages marry into them. They hypothesized relationship between title and marriage proved to be statistically significant in correlation using Fisher's Exact Test ($p = .0079$).

[24]The fact that a man who lives "uxorilocally" - the benighted *ghar jamai* - usually accepts such a post-marital residence situation becuase of his own unfortunate economic or social circumstances, but has no assurance that he will get any of his father-in-law's property, and further is deprived of passing descent to his own children, seems to account for the universal opprobrium in Bengal in which *ghar jamai* status is held. There are many proverbs which express the wisdom of the culture" in this regard, e.g.: "If one has any brains, he does not work for his meals in his father-in-law's house" (*ākkel thākle śbaśūr-bāṛīte kheṭe khāy nā*).

It might be suggested, moreover, that the anthropological term normally employed to describe this type of post-marital residence - *uxorilocal* (or "with the wife") - probably does not aptly reflect Bengali thinking on the matter. For the crucial relationship implied in the Bengali term for a man in such a situation - *ghar jamai* ("a son-in-law who lives in his wife's father's home") - is between the "resident" husband and his wife's father; the former loses his right to transmit descent to his children. Moreover, a *ghar jamai* accepts the authority of his father-in-law and, as the above-quoted proverb suggests, is seen as "working for" him. This role relationship and implied subordinate status is quite different from those which obtain when the more respectable patrilocal residence norm is followed (see discussion in the text).

[25]Upon obtaining *mauza* maps, which clearly delineate land plots as they stood at the time of the last settlement survey (in 1899), I used them often in the villages for the purpose of map-making and the location of property held by my informants. I was often struck by the interest displayed in these old maps by my village acquaintances and in a number of instances I was asked if I had maps pertaining to other *mauzas*. When I queried as to the reason for the interest, as often as not a man would state that through some matrilateral or affinal connection either he, or his wife, had claim to property in the *mauza* in question and, "if he only had a good map," the issue as to who had just claim to the property could be profitably raised with kinsmen currently claiming or utilizing it. I understand that a large number of litigations in Comilla's civil courts involve just this kind of dispute between kinsmen, although I did not collect data specifically on these cases.

[26]Calkins (1969), in a recent study, has shown that under the Mughals the collection of revenue was characterized by the maximization of individual self-enrichment at every level of the revenue system. "Cheating," he states baldly, "was an expected and accepted part of the Mughal system." Conditions of transportation and communication in 18th Century Bengal must have severely limited the possibility of adequate check and surveillance at every level of the revenue collection hierarchy. Thus, for the Mughal administrators, the most efficient method - not to say the path of least resistance - may have seemed to lie in allowing the men at each level to act in accordance with their self-interest in the hope that eventually sufficient yields of revenue would accrue to the ruling power.

Such a revenue system seems hardly to have provided a framework upon which a socially responsible, humanely benevolent, and administratively competent "squirearchy" could be grafted. Re-evaluation of the *zamindari* system under the British is currently being undertaken, I am told, by historians. No doubt newly conflicting interpretations will result. But if the research of Calkins (and others who are focussing on later periods) influences the eventual conclusions regarding the *zamindari* system of the 19th Century, it may be seen as an outstanding example of "cross-cultural" blundering in a program of "planned" change. Given fairness toward the motivations of early British administrators, this may come to be the most charitable view, divorced, of course, from the emphasis on economic exploitation with which Indian nationalist historians have traditionally viewed the Permanent Settlement.

[27]Orthodox Islamic law stipulates that for a man to remarry his divorced wife she must first wait a period of 90 days ("until she has passed her course thrice"), then remarry another man, be divorced by him, wait another 90 days, until finally she can remarry her first husband once again.

[28]Under the Comilla project system, village cooperative societies are directly linked to a (Kotwali Thana) Central Cooperative Association, which has a bank for the deposit of their savings and dispensation of loans to members, runs programs in the teaching of improved agricultural techniques, and generally administers a *thana*-wide cooperative system. At the village level, cooperative groups are run by an elected Managing Committee. Its officers are designated as: Chairman, Vice Chairman, Manager, "Model Farmer," and two elected at large from the membership. The effective administrative office is that of the Manager, who is expected to take a preponderant role in the organization of

the group and its activities. It should be noted that he is responsible for the collection of members' savings and depositing them in the Central Cooperative bank. The "Model Farmer" is elected to attend the classes in improved agricultural practices and he is expected to transmit their content to the general membership.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Glossary

Indic words which in the text have not been transliterated are transliterated and explained here. The system of transliteration follows that of Inden and Dimock (1970) as closely as possible. Also, where possible, the transliterated spellings are those of Dev (1963).

Words as in Text	Transliteration	Translation
abastha	abasthā	condition; situation
adhar	ādhār	half
adhiar	ādhiār	sharecropper; from *ādhār*
Ajlaf	ājlāph	low-born (Muslim)
amin	āmin; āmīn	surveyor
amon	āman	A wet-rice growing season; specifically from *ca.* July -November
anna	ānnā	A sub-denomination of the rupee prior to post-Independence decimalization; still used; 16 *ānnās*=R.1.
ashol	āsal	real, genuine
Ashraf	āśrāph	noble; high-born (Muslim)
ataliya, atal	āṭāliya, āṭāl	a type of soil
atiyo	ātmīyo	kinsmen (general)
aus	āuś	A wet-rice growing season; specifically *ca.* March-July.
baliya, bele	bāliya, bele	a type of soil

bandak	bandak	mortgage
bargadar	bargadār	sharecropper
bari	bāṛī	homestead
bata	bātā	a bamboo lath, used as slat in home-building
bel	bel	woodapple fruit
bhadra, bhadrashan	bhadrā, bhadrāsan	a division of the homestead
bhagina	bhāginā	sister's son
bhagini	bhāginī	sister's daughter
bhiaderi	bhiādari	endogamous grouping among *Ashraf* status groups; especially N. India, Punjabi Muslims
bichar	bicār	judgement; trial
boro	bōrō	a growing season; *ca.* December-March
burka	bōrkā	veil; face and body cover for Muslim women observing *purdah*
Baishnab	baiṣṇab	Vaishnavite; worshipper of Vishnu, more specifically Krishna
chal	cāl	husked rice
chanda	cāndā	dues; fees; subscription money
Chandal	caṇḍal	common name for a major cultivating and fishing caste, Hindu, of Bengal, especially East Bengal; see *Namasudra*
chula	culā	hearth; oven; a division of the homestead
chutar	chutār	carpenter caste, Hindu; see also *sutradhar*

dak	dāk	call (n); as used adjectivally in text, "so-called"
Debonath	debanāth	preferred caste name of *jugi* weavers
do-as	dō-ās	a type of soil; sandy loam
dohitro	dowhitro	daughter's son, children
ghar	ghar	literally, room; in rural context, household dwelling
ghar jamai	ghar jāmāi	daughter's husband who lives in her natal home; a man living "uxorilocally;" as in text: "resident son-in-law"
gomostha	gōmastā	a revenue collection agent of a *zamindar*
goswami	gōsvāi	usually, a Vaishnava religious teacher; as in text, the name of priests to the *jugi* weavers; see also, *mahatma*
gram	grām	village
grihasti, gerastha	(Snskt.) gṛihasthā	local pronunciation; literally, householder; in rural context, an "ordinary person" but respectable
gusthi	guṣṭhī	patrilineal kin group, Bengali Muslim especially
hadith	hadis	Traditional books of Muslim law, based on utterances of the Prophet
hajjam	hājjām	circumcisor
Haliya Kaibartta	hāliyo koibarto	a wide-spread cultivating caste in Bengal; see also *Mahisya*
hat	hāṭ	local market

hat heyat	hāt heyaṭ	a "water shovel" used in irrigating
heyat	heyaṭ	a two-man swing basket used in irrigating
hingsha	hiṅsā	greed, envy; interpersonal malice
hishya	hisyā	same as *bhadra*
hookah	hukā	a water pipe for smoking tobacco; "hubble bubble"
Id	Id, Īd	Islamic religious holidays; see below
Idgah	Idgāḥ, Īdgāḥ	special field for celebration of *Id* prayers only
Id-ul-Azha	Idul Ājhā	commemorates Abraham's sacrifice; also called *Korbani Id*
Id-ul-Fitra	Idul Phitra	commemorates the end of fasting during *Ramadan*; also the day for payment of yearly religious tax (*zakat*); a feast day
ijara	ijārā	system of revenue collection in Comilla *thana*; the collection agency for taxes due on land held by a commercial bank
ijaradar	ijārādār	one who holds rights to collect rents under the *ijara* system
imam	imām	mosque congregation leader
izzat	ijjat	personal honor; status honor
Jaista	joiystha	Bengali month, from *ca.* May 15 to June 15
jajmani	jājmāni	system of hereditary, economic patron-client relationships between individual families of different castes
jamai	jāmāi	son-in-law; see *ghar jamai*

jat, jati	jāt, jāti	caste, race, nation, ethnic group; usually refers to a subcaste
jolaha	jōlā	Muslim weaver
jomadar	jomādār	a tenure-holder; low-level revenue collection agent in the *zamindari* system
kacha	kāccā	literally, raw, uncooked; with reference to roads, unpaved; with reference to building construction, no concrete or steel; in general, "low quality"
kachari ghar	kācāri ghar	guest room
kammi	(Hindi) kāmmi	literally, worker; reference to Muslim serving castes in N. India, Punjab
kani	kāni	a unit of land measurement; in Comilla area, .40 acre; varies elsewhere
Kartik	kārtik	Bengali month, from *ca.* October 15 to November 15
khal	khāl	canal
khana	khānā	food; in social context, "eating group," a division of the homestead referred to in text as household; see also *chula*
khas	khās	untenanted land
khasai	kasāi	butcher
kobiraj	kabirāj	native doctor
kotwali	kōtayālī	refers to the *thana* in which district headquarters are located
kumar	kumōr	potter caste, Hindu
lajja	lajjā	shyness, shame; refers to norms of feminine modesty

lungi	lungi	anke-length waistcloth worn nearly universally by Bengali Muslim (men) peasants as daily dress
madhya-bangso	madhya-bańśo	a lineage of middle rank in status
madrassa	mādrāsā	Islamic school
maghribi namaz	māghribi namāj	evening prayer, Muslim
mahajan	māhājan	literally, "big man;" generally refers to a patron, creditor; specifically, money-lender
mahatma	māhātma	"Great Soul;" the name preferred by the priests of the *jugi* weavers; see *goswami*
maharana	māhārānā	bride-price; see also *maher*
maher	māhār	see *maharana*
mahfil	maḥphil	musical gathering, usually religious
Mahisya	mahisya	cultivating caste; see *Haliya Kaibartta*
mama	māmā	mother's brother
masjid	masjid	mosque
maund	man	a unit of weight measurement used for grain; *ca.* 82 lbs.
mel	mel	compromise
methar	methar	Hindu sweeper caste common in East Bengal
milat	millāt	community; Muslim religious community or group
momin	mōmin	"believer;" term of self-reference to denote Muslim status

Mughal	Mōgal	Islamic rulers of non-Indian origin whose rule lasted from the 16th to 18th centuries; a high status title in Muslim Bengal; one of the *Ashraf* categories
muni	muni	day-labor for wages
mustajir	mustājir	an official in the Mughal revenue system
naib	nāyib	an official in the *zamindari* system of revenue collection
Namasudra	namaḥśudra	cultivating and fishing Hindu caste; see *Chandal*
namaz	namāj	prayer (Muslim usage)
napit	nāpit	barber caste, Hindu; see *sil*
naya paisa	nāyā poisā	"new pice;" smallest unit of the decimalized rupee; 100 *paisa* = R.1
nichu-bangso	niccu-bańśo	a lineage of low rank in status
pan	pān	betel leaf
Pathan	pāthān	ethnic group of the North-west Frontier; but generally used in Bengal with reference to Afghans and the descendents of their rule in India in the 15th Century; refers historically in Bengal to any group of foreign, but non-Mughal, origin; one of the high status *Ashraf* categories
Paundra Kshatriya	powndro kshatriyo	preferred sanskritized title of the *Pods*, an important cultivating caste, Hindu, in Bengal
Pod	pad	see *Paundra Kshatriya*

poribar	paribār	family; "wife and children;" general reference to one's family of procreation
pukka	pakkā	literally, ripe; cooked; with reference to roads, paved; to buildings, of concrete construction, in general, "high quality"
pukur	pukur	pond; "tank"
purdah	pardā	literally, screen, partition; social reference is to the practice of seclusion of women
puskarini	(Snskt.) puskariṇī	pond; "tank;" see above, *pukur*; this form most often used by Comilla villagers
Raj	rāj	rule; reign
raja	rājā	king; ruler
Ramadan	ramajān	Islamic month during which day-time feasting is enjoined
reyai	reyāi	a social grouping in Comilla villages
salish	sālis	arbitrator in a dispute; colloquially, an arbitration
samaj	samāj	society; association; a social grouping of several villages and their sub-units in Comilla *thana*
sari	śāṛi, śāṛī	women's standard dress
Sayad	sayad	one of the four *Ashraf* categories; denotes direct descent from the Prophet
seer	ser	a sub-division of the *maund*

Shab-e-Barat	sābe bārāt	Islamic holiday associated with the beginning of the new year
shawara	seōṛā	a small tree (*trophis aspera*); because it often grows near cremation grounds it is popularly associated with ghosts
Sheikh	sekh	one of the four *Ashraf* categories; denotes descent from the tribe of the prophet
tahsil	tahasil, taḥsil tasil	collection of taxes; an administrative unit comparable to the *thana* (of East Pakistan) in use in West Pakistan
tahsildar	taḥsildār	tax-collector
tahsil kachari	taḥsil kācāri	tax collection office
tarabi namaz	tarabi namāj	special prayer during *Ramadan*
thakur	thākur	"leader;" commonly used as appelation for Brahmans
thana	thānā	administrative unit it East Pakistan's Basic Democracies system; police station
"toli"	tali	"at the foot of" a tree, plant (suffix)
ucho-bangso	ucco-bańśo	a lineage of high rank in status
urs	urus (?)	a religious gathering, usually to meet or hear a well known religious person
zakat	jākāt	religious tax the payment of which for purposes of charity is enjoined on Muslims deemed wealthy enough to pay it

zamindar	jomidār	**landlord**
zamindari	jomidāri	**a landlord's estate**

APPENDIX II

Family Types and Land Ownership Types

Table 1 in this appendix classifies the various types of land ownership arrangements in Hajipur and Tinpara. It will be noted that I attempt in this table a more discrete classification than that afforded by a simple "individual versus joint" dichotomy. The aim in so doing is accurately to reflect the technicalities of land ownership in each case, since actual legal ownership in each case, since actual legal ownership of land by women as well as men is a matter of some consequence in these villages. Thus, for example, a man may live in a single household with his wife and children, cultivating his own land as well as any which may be registered in her name. While such a household is in effect a single owner farm as an economic unit, the legalities of ownership are important.

Table 2 here compares land ownership with corresponding household types. It will be seen here that by far the largest single correspondence (in 43 out of 104 cases) is that between the nuclear family household and the single (individual farm) ownership of land. Although there is considerable variation, a general tendency may be seen for landless and single ownership families to be nuclear or sub-nuclear in type, while joint ownership seems in most instances to be associated with lineal or collateral joint family types.

These data, then, generally corroborate findings on the relationship between land ownership and family type found elsewhere in Bengal (Nicholas 1961) and in South Asia generally (Kolenda 1967). The well known process of household build-up and subsequent partition is substantiated for this part of East Bengal as well. Here, as elsewhere, a man retains his agricultural land at least until his sons are old enough to cultivate on their own - and often beyond that point. However, some fathers, as they grow older, may begin the process of devolving "ownership" to their sons, often initially be registering it in their names with the understanding that the fathers are still "owners" and the sons have no independent rights to usage or sale. This procedure is carried out usually to insure against the possibility that any daughters who marry out will not attempt to inherit, since as long as the land is in the sons' names, the application of Muslim law regarding women's rights to inheritance would be difficult, since the patrimony would have already been distributed.

As shown generally in Table 2, the "rise and fall" process is reflected in the predominance of single ownership cross-cutting nuclear, lineal and collateral joint household types, and in the existence of examples of

HAJIPUR AND TINPARA: HOUSEHOLD AND LAND OWNERSHIP TYPES

Homestead	House-hold #	Household Type	Household Population	Land Ownership Type*
Hajipur				
Mahisan	1	suppl. N	7	LCJ (Br's + Mo)
	2	N	4	S
	3	LCJ	10	suppl. S (Hu+Wi)
	4	LJ	8	S
	5	suppl. N	6	S
	6	N	5	S
	7	suppl. N	5	S
	8	N	6	S
	9	N	3	S
	10	suppl. N	5	C (2 Br's, 1 married, 1 unmarried)
	11	LJ	10	unequal LJ (Fa+So, most by Fa)
Abdur Rouf	1	LJ	10	S (all owned by eldest male, Fa)
	2	N	6	S
	3	suppl. N	6	S
	4	N	4	S
	5	N	3	S
	6	N	3	S
	7	LCJ	13	S (all owned by eldest male, Fa)
Amir Gazi	1	N	5	S
	2	N	5	S
	3	N	3	S
	4	N	5	S
	5	N	4	S
	6	sub-N	3	S
	7	suppl. N	6	no land
	8	LJ	6	unequal LJ
	9	N	6	S
	10	N	7	S
Khondakar	1	suppl. N	6	unequal LJ (Mo+Da+DaHu)**
	2	LJ	6	S (all owned by eldest male, Fa)
Haji	1	LJ	7	S (Fa+Da+DaHu; all owned by Da)

Table 1, continued

Homestead	Household #	Household Type	Household Population	Land Ownership Type*
Majumdar	1	suppl. N	4	suppl. S (Male + BrWi)***
	2	LCJ	11	suppl. LCJ (Fa+So+Da+DaHu)**
	3	suppl..N	6	S
	4	N	4	no land
	5	N	4	S
	6	N	3	S
	7	S	1	no land
	8	LJ	8	suppl. S (Hu+Wi)
	9	LJ	11	unequal LJ (Fa+So, most by Fa)
	10	N	2	S
	11	suppl. N	4	S
Sayadur Rahman	1	N	6	S
	2	sub-N	4	S
Munshi	1	suppl. N	7	LJ (Fa+Da+DaHu)**
	2	N	4	S
	3	N	5	S
	4	LCJ	10	S (all owned by eldest male, Fa)
Kobiraj	1	LCJ	8	unequal LCJ (most by So+SoSo)
	2	N	6	LJ*****
	3	N	5	LJ*****
	4	suppl. N	8	suppl. S (Fa+DaHu)**
Fakir	1	suppl. N	4	unequal LJ (Mo+So, most by So)
	2	sub-N	3	S
	3	N	5	S
	4	LJ	6	no land

Table 1, continued

Homestead	House-hold #	Household Type	Household Population	Land Ownership Type*
Tinpara				
Tara Gazi	1	N	6	S
	2	N	7	S
	3	suppl. N	6	CJ (2 Br's, 1 married, 1 unmarried)
	4	N	6	S
	5	N	4	S
	6	N	4	S
	7	N	4	S
	8	N	4	S
	9	N	5	S
	10	N	7	S
Pradhan Ali	1	suppl. N	3	suppl. S (Male+widowed Si)
	2	N	7	S
	3	N	7	S
Fazlur Rahman	1	suppl. N	5	LJ (Mo+So)
	2	sub-N	3	CJ (Mo+ 2 small So's, land latter's)
	3	suppl. N	8	S
	4	N	7	S
	5	sub-N	3	no land
Khondakar	1	S	1	S
	2	N	5	S
	3	N	5	suppl. S (Hu+Wi)
Mohammed Ali	1	LJ	9	S (owned by So, not Fa)
	2	N	2	suppl. S (Hu+Wi)
	3	N	5	S
	4	N	6	S
	5	N	6	S
	6	S	1	no land (widow)
Arab Ali	1	LJ	10	unequal LJ (Fa+So, most by Fa)
	2	N	3	S
	3	N	5	suppl. S (Hu+Wi);(n.b. polygynous marr.)
	4	S	1	S (widow)

Homestead	House-hold #	Household Type	Household Population	Land Ownership Type*
Ashan Ali	1	N	7	S
	2	N	5	S
	3	suppl. N	5	no land
	4	N	2	S
	5	N	4	S
Abul Hossain	1	LCJ	16	LCJ
Carpenter	1	N	7	suppl. S (Hu+Wi)
	2	sub-N	4	S
	3	LCJ	14	CJ (2 Br's, 1 with marr. So, non-owner)
Washerman	1	N	3	no land
	2	S	1	S
	3	N	2	no land
	4	S	1	no land (widow)
Chanu Mia	1	N	4	S
Woodworker	1	N	3	S
	2	suppl. N	9	S
Widow	1	sub-N	2	no land
TOTALS	104		566	

average land holding size per household = 1.5 acres

Table 1: Explanatory Notes

Household types taken from categories as defined by Kolenda (1967: 149-50)

Single (S): single person household

Sub-nuclear (Sub-N): fragment of a former nuclear family, e.g., a widow plus unmarried children

Nuclear (N): Hu+Wi+unmarried children

Supplemented nuclear (suppl. N): Nuclear family plus unmarried adult kin, e.g., widowed or unmarried Br or Si of Hu or Wi

Lineal Joint (LJ): Parents plus 1 married So or Da

Lineal Collateral Joint (LCJ): Parents plus married children, So's and/or Da's

N.B. Other types are possible, e.g., Collateral (joint among Br's) but do not occur in this sample (see Kolenda 1967).

*Land Ownership Types

Single (S): 1 person owner

Supplemented single (suppl. S): 1 person owns most of the land, but also farms that of kinsmen or affines which technically he does not own, i.e., it is not in his name

Collateral Joint (CJ): joint ownership of land by brothers

Supplemented Collateral Joint (suppl. CJ): joint ownership of most land by brothers, who also farm land owned by co-residents in the household

Lineal Joint (LJ): Joint ownership between Fa and 1 So or Da, equal shares

Unequal Lineal Joint (unequal LJ): Joint ownership between Fa + So or Da, where one party, usually Fa, retains the major share, except where indicated in Table 1. This category created to show the process of gradual devolution of land from Fa ro So, discussed in the text.

Lineal Collateral Joint (LCJ): Joint ownership among Fa plus So's and/or Da's; may be equal or unequal

**Cases in which daughters have been given or otherwise obtained land:

Hajipur Khondakar #1: Widow with Married Da+DaHu resident; the land has passed from the Widow to the Da who has listed most of it in her Hu's name.

Hajipur Majumdar #2: Fa+So (who works away from village + Da + DaHu; the latter is a service holder from another district; Fa and So are joint owners, but some land given to Da; DaHu purchased land locally, put some of it in Da's (his wife's) name.

Hajipur Munshi #1: Fa (himself a *ghar jamai*) + Da + DaHu (the latter also a "*ghar jamai*" who is Da's cross-cousin, resident in the household of Fa); the land passes from Fa (who got it from his WiBr) to Da and then to DaHu, who is FaWiBrSo; a complicated full circle in which the land is retained in the original household.

Hajipur Haji #1: Fa (himself a *ghar jamai*) + Da + DaHu; in this case all the land is owned by Da who will pass it directly to her children.

Hajipur Kobiraj #4: Fa retains all his own land; DaHu a *ghar jamai* who owns land in his natal village.

Other cases warranting special explanation:

***Hajipur Majumdar #1: Owners are household head (male) + his BrWi; this situation could perhaps equally be classified as *collateral joint*, since the household head farms the land by his BrWi; although she is from the same village (Hajipur Munshi *Bari*), she remains as a widow in her Hu's homestead, since she inherited land from her Hu, has only one Da who married out; the arrangement benefits her HuBr.

****Hajipur Kobiraj #2 and #3: A case in which there is *lineal joint* ownership between Fa + So, but separate households; rare

TABLE 2

Household and Land Ownership Types Compared

land ownership/ family type	none	Sin.	sup. S	Lin. Jt.	Uneq. LJ	sup. LJ	LCJ	Coll. Joint	Totals
Single Person	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Sub-Nuclear	2	4	-	-	-	-	-	1	7
Nuclear	3	43	4	2*	-	-	-	-	52
Suppl. Nuclear	2	8	3	-	2	-	1	2	18
Lineal Joint	1	4	1	-	4	-	-	-	10
Lineal Coll. Joint	-	2	2	-	1	1	1	1	6
Totals	12	64	10	2	7	1	2	4	N=104

*Case of Linear Joint Ownership between 2 separate households.

lineal joint, both unequal and supplemented, types of ownership. The variation evident in Table 2 reflects the position different families at different stages in the overall process. It should be further noted that collateral joint ownership - joint ownership among brothers - is rare and can be a stage in the process of transfer of ownership in which a man has given land to two or more adult sons, while still retaining a share for himself.

Thus, the general correspondence between types of farm ownership and types of household shows the process of transition referred to in the main text. Single owner farms based on the nuclear family predominate, with a number of joint owner farms built around supplemented nuclear and joint families also present. That this general correspondence also reflects the manpower needs and division of labor on each type of farm need hardly be pointed out; the patterns of arrangements reflected here seem to be consistent with those characteristics of peasant societies generally (see Wolf 1966: 61-81).