ABSTRACT

A BELIEVER AMONG BELIEVERS:

THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND MEANINGS

IN A VILLAGE IN BANGLADESH

By

Jean Ellickson

This thesis describes the religious beliefs and practices of a predominantly Muslim village in eastern Bengal and the interaction between the religion and the social system. The symbol system and the appropriate social relationships combined to produce in the minds of the villagers the conception of living a "good" Islamic life in an Islamic society.

The Bengali Muslim performed religious rituals in the context of a bilateral and affinal kinship group, the ātmīyo. Beyond this circle of kinmen, he interacted with other believers on many levels. A congregation of worshippers supported a local mosque, but outside acts of worship, interacted little within the mosque congregation as such. It was the Islamic world, at best a conceptual group, which took on great religious significance for the Bengali Muslim. No man is raised above any other in Islam, there are no priests. One is a believer among many believers. The villager found himself equal in rights in the realm of religion, but also equal in responsibility. He had to strive for the salvation of his own soul, at the same time striving for the

perfection of society according to Islamic law. Some men could not stand this emotional loneliness or were simply not satisfied to limit their religious experience to the ordinary round of prayers, fasting, and feasting. For these individuals there were the religious beggars and local saints and shrines dedicated to former saints, people believed to have special access to God. At these shrines and in the company of these men, people could find assistance for physical or emotional problems or ceremonies designed to give a mystical experience of God.

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By

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TO MY FATHER,

CURTIS ARTHUR ELLICKSON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Curtis A. Ellickson, who did not live to see the completion of these many years of graduate work. He and my mother, Laura M.; my brother, James Curtis; his wife, Mary Ann; and their daughter, Kimberley Jean gave their loving support during this time.

There were two major turning points in my life leading to a career as an anthropologist. The first was a telephone call from Washington a little over ten years ago asking if I would like to go to Pakistan with the Peace Corps. I had had a continuing desire to experience more of the world beyond the boundaries of the United States. The Peace Corps tour allowed me to see much of the world, but also focused by interests in South Asia. Though I returned again to eastern Bengal to do field work, the first two years living in another culture had the greatest impact on me as an individual.

The second major change occurred after I had returned from East Pakistan and was taking graduate courses at Michigan State University with no well-defined purpose. I started working in the Asian Studies Center as a student assistant. There I came in contact with the Director of the Center, Dr. William T. Ross and the Assistant Director, Dr. Ralph W. Nicholas. As anthropologists they encouraged me to enter anthropology. This began for me a wonderful association combining interests in anthropology and the Bengali people. Dr. Ross has remained

a steadfast guide, supporter, and friend. Dr. Nicholas has become the major influence in my academic career. His extensive knowledge of Bengal is coupled with a willingness to extend himself for his students that has made him an ideal teacher and an inspiration as a model for an aspiring teacher of anthropology.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Marc J. Swartz, Dr. Alfred B. Hudson, and Dr. Leonard Kasdan for their assistance and encouragement in class and in the formulation of my research. Dr. Iwao Ishino and Dr. Harry Raulet were very helpful to me at many times and assisted by reading this thesis. Dr. Rachel Van Meter and Dr. Gholam Sorrwar were excellent teachers of the Bengali language. Under their guidance, a dreaded task became enjoyable and relatively successful. To my fellow students in anthropology and those in other fields who were preparing to do research in Bengal, I owe a great debt for their intellectual companionship and the simple joy of knowing them. In the preparation of this thesis, I wish to thank Mrs. Nancy Morey for her editorial assistance and Mrs. Kathy Dunn for an excellent job of typing.

During my first trip to Bengal, I met a number of people with whom I was able to continue a friendship after my return to Michigan State University. I wish to thank Mr. Richard O. Niehoff, Campus Coordinator of the Pakistan Project, and all the people associated with the Mid-West Universities Consortium in Internation Affairs for making it possible for me to return to Bengal for field work. Dr. Edgar and Mrs. Kathryn Schuler were in Comilla, East Pakistan for the first part of my stay there as a Peace Corps volunteer. Dr. Schuler was an advisor to

the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development from Michigan State University. Their home has always been a place where I could go to share with them their love for Bengal and the Bengali people. In addition to being humanitarians, they are both scholars of great integrity and sincerity.

When I returned to Bengal in 1968 I was met and assisted by Dr. S. A. Rahim and his wife, Majida; Dr. Abdul Muyeed and his wife, Lenu; and Mr. A. B. M. Nurul Huq and his wife, Jahanara. These former colleagues at the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development made my return a true homecoming and continued their kind support during my stay there. I made many new friends and wish to express my gratitude to the entire staff of the Academy and the staff of the Kotwali Thana Central Cooperative Association. I am grateful to be able to say that I have learned that the faculty at the Academy came through the independence upheaval safely.

I have had no word about the fate of many other friends, those of the village and town. My closest companions were those who served me and assisted in my work. Much of what I learned about the meanings of things was gathered at informal bull sessions in the kitchen as the evening meal was being prepared. In addition to their friendship, I am grateful to Mr. Mohammed Hussain Majumdar, Mr. Taju Miya, Mr. Shafiq Miya, and Mr. Muksud Miya for the faithful and sincere manner in which they performed their services to me. Mr. Majumdar was my assistant, who translated rapid, garbled or village dialect Bengali into slow, grammar school Bengali for me. He helped me formulate questions and generally made the way smooth. Mr. Taju Miya was a cook

whose friendship was a continuation from the days of the Peace Corps. Taju was a stern watchdog who advised against behavior that might offend Bengali Muslim sensibilities. At the same time, however, there was never a task requested that he would not do. Mr. Shafiq Miya was my regular rickshaw puller; the first to approach the strange foreigner and announce he would work for her. Shafiq was a man, more a boy, at once part of the village and separated from it. Anthropologists use people for the purposes of their work, and for the year of my field work Shafiq and his family went through almost every major life crisis with me recording the events. But if I used Shafiq, I also loved him. Mr. Muksud Miya, another old acquaintance, was taken on as night guard only after circumstances convinced me of the need for such a post. Little did I realize what a treasure house of folk tales and folk beliefs was coming to spend the nights at my house. After Muksud came the evenings were filled by listening to him rather than typing the notes from the day's activities.

The people of the village which I have called Shaheenpur have my everlasting gratitude. They took me into their village and were patient with my interruptions to their work, my gauche mistakes, and my ridiculous explanations about Americans who went to the moon. Mr. Abid Ali introduced me to the village, and he and his family kept their home always open to me. Mr. Abdul Huq, who explained much of the village social structure for me, was a sensitive observer of the local scene. I shall never be able to decide who was dearer to me, Mr. Akmat Ali or his grandson, Joynal Abedin. It was from these two "brothers" that I came to understand the affection between alternate generations.

And for some reason they included me in this circle of affection. There are many more names which should be mentioned, but I shall simply extend my heartfelt thanks to all of the people of Shaheenpur.

I have left until last one of the most important people in this story, a man to whom I owe one of the greatest debts for his influence. I am certainly not alone in my debt to Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan. When I first met him he was the Director of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development at Comilla. It was under his guidance and because of his unstinting work that the villages of eastern Bengal were becoming better places in which to live, and the villagers could see some hope of more than unceasing hardship. My hope is that he will be able to continue his work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My first encounter with the people of Bangladesh was as a Peace Corps volunteer in the years 1961 through 1963. Having had no experience in the behavioral sciences, I can describe my reaction at that time as mere curiosity about what it was that made these people behave differently from me and my fellows, taking offense at what was not meant to give offense and then doing things that were quite distressing to us. This was my first course in cultural anthropology. When later exposed to formal anthropology, I resolved to study the belief system of these people as that which would best help me understand their culture. Still later, my study was narrowed to the only slightly more manageable topic of the religious beliefs and practices of rural Bengali Muslims.

When I worked in Bangladesh it was the eastern province of the country of Pakistan. In 1947 the people of eastern Bengal had hopefully united with the Muslim peoples of the Punjab, the Sind, the Northwest Frontier, and Baluchistan as the state of Pakistan, separated from Hindu India after independence from the British. After ten years of parliamentary democracy, the country was taken over by the military, led by General Ayub Khan. From the beginning of the nation, West Pakistanis had dominated the government and the country because of their greater number in the civil administration and the military,

though the population was larger in East Pakistan than in the western part of the country. The East also contributed the larger share of foreign exchange to the country through its production and export of jute. The military take over almost completely frustrated the development of the eastern wing of the country. The military rulers were West Pakistanis, and the western wing prospered. Ayub Khan managed to stay in power for eleven years through a system of indirect elections he called "Basic Democracies." In 1968 under increasing complaints of corruption, Ayub Khan's government began to crumble. In early 1969 martial law was again declared, and Ayub Khan handed over the reigns of government to his Chief of Staff, General Yahya Khan.

Ayub Khan had kept the resentment in East Pakistan under control by occasional token concessions to the Bengalis of a few more jobs in the civil administration and slightly larger shares in the national budget. Yahya Khan, however, declared that he was committed to returning the country to a parliamentary form of government. The way appeared to be opening again for the Bengalis to have a hand in deciding their own fate. Whatever little share the Bengalis had had in the running of a government at the lowest levels and the development of at least the agricultural sector, they and their leaders were ready. In the elections which were held in December 1970, the Awami League, which had almost its entire following in the eastern wing, won 167 out of the 169 seats allotted to East Pakistan. This would have given the Awami League the majority in the National Assembly, if the Assembly had ever been convened. Yahya Khan and the other West Pakistani leaders reneged when they saw the result would be a civilian government run by a Bengali

majority. They postponed the meeting of the Assembly to draw up a constitution and met the resulting protest demonstrations in East Pakistan with bloody repression. The Bengalis then had to endure nine months of terrible repression and a fourteen day war in which the armed forces of India interceded on their behalf before their new nation of Bangladesh was free. In this thesis I shall use primarily the past tense not only because I am reporting what happened during my fieldwork, but because I do not know if the village in which I worked still exists, nor the fate of its people.

Little work has been done by either anthropologists or sociologists in eastern Bengal, and very little has been written. Bertocci (1970) has written the first full length community study. There has been no study available, however, of the belief system of the eastern Bengali Muslims. One can occasionally find descriptions of some particular beliefs in fantastic beings and local myths in works on other subjects.[1] Books on Islam by Bengali scholars have tended to be exhortations to belief rather than descriptions of beliefs and local practices.

In my preparations for fieldwork, the study most influencing the formation of my hypotheses about the function of religion in the lives of Bengali Muslims was a short paper written by Glasse (1967) for the SEATO Cholera Research Laboratory. He did his research for the paper in the western part of Comilla district. Glasse found a prevalence of social groupings in which the members jointly feasted on religious occasions and met for prayers in the face of a common threat. A religious leader was hired to serve the members of the group. This group

also had the major responsibility for social control on the local level. An offending member, who found himself expelled from the group, was cut off from almost all social contact and from religious services. However, I found that these groups did not exist in the eastern part of Comilla district where I did my work.

Some of the most stimulating work on religion, rituals and belief systems, has been done by British anthropologists working in Africa. Turner (1957), in his work on the Ndembu, has described a society whose matrilineal descent and succession, coupled with virilocal residence, has produced a social system even more prone to social tensions than the ordinary. Overriding the fissioning tendency in the social structure were the belief system and rituals which emphasized the major values of the society. Among the Ndembu, when tensions in the community reached a breaking point, a curing ritual was held, which brought individuals from each side of the dispute together in cooperation as patients and practitioners. For the time being, at least, the crisis was avoided. The experience of the ritual brought tensions back to a manageable level.

Gluckman (1962:26-43) has explained why he thinks that social relations are ritualized in tribal societies but not in modern, industrialized societies. By "ritualized" he meant that an individual was given a particular role in a ritual because of a particular social role that he held. The individual and the members of the community were reminded of the importance of the social role through the ritual. Gluckman did not include in his typology the "peasant" society, the category of small agriculturalists into which most anthropologists would place the farmers of Bengal. He explained the "high

ritualization of tribal society from the fact that each social relation in a subsistence economy tends to serve manifold purposes." Tribal roles were "multiplex" or "diffuse" (1962:26). In addition, he stressed that because of the low level of technology and resultant uncertainty about crops and good health, there was a higher level of anxiety than in modern societies. The proper performance of a role took on "high moral import" (1962:28). The smallest disturbance, like failure to perform a role, seriously affected the whole community. Therefore social relations were ringed around with ritual. In modern societies where roles are "simplex," where a person's various roles are more often played out in separate settings, social relations do not need to be ritualized to separate the roles.

These ideas were of little help, however, in understanding a Bengali Muslim community. Conflict was common and illness was rife, but these problems were not dealt with ritually at the community level. There were almost as many possible types of curers available as there were illnesses to cure. The curers were sought out by individuals according to what was believed to be the cause of the disease and other factors that will be described later. The curing of physical illness, however, had no apparent effect on the ills of society.

Roles were only slightly less multiplex than might be found in a tribal society. The man who owned the village shop might be at the same time one's father's sister's son, one's creditor, the farmer who had the neighboring plot, and the elder on the village council to which one took his land dispute with his brother. The only individuals with whom one might have simplex relations were met in town or at distant

village markets. There the cloth merchant was no more to the buyer than a seller of cloth.

To satisfy Gluckman's other criterion, life could be no more anxiety-producing and precarious anywhere than on the densely populated Gangetic delta under conditions of monsoon agriculture. Yet to my knowledge, the community at any level did not take on mystic significance to be set right by the ritual performance of roles. Within the kinship group this statement did not hold. In rites of passage, kinsmen had their special roles to play that expressed their relationship toward the kinsman for whom the rite was held.

The group that takes on mystical significance for the Muslim is the Islamic world, at best a conceptual group. The people with whom I worked were Muslims operating in various groupings of Muslims. A man was a member of a family, a neighborhood, a community, perhaps, a market area, and a region. In each he was a Muslim among Muslims. In reality, beyond the family circle there might be individuals of other faiths, but it was the idea of a universal brotherhood which mattered. As long as there were like-minded individuals with whom to interact, with which particular group of Muslims they interacted was not of much significance. There may have been gaps in the knowledge of why something specific was done and misunderstanding on points of theology, but there was still a vague idea of what a Muslim community, a Muslim society, should be like. To this extent, Islam is a modernizing force, mitigating against parochial forces, at least on the local level. This is not to say that local loyalties did not exist. The religion, however, did not encourage them; therefore, the social and geographic groups tended not to be celebrated in religious ritual.

Geertz (1960) has worked in a similarly complex situation in Java where Islam has made inroads on an Indicized civilization which was itself overlaid on a nature-worshipping countryside. His definition of religion has proved to be quite useful in understanding Bengali Muslims. He said that "a religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and longlasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1966:4). Symbols, especially religious symbols, bring to mind such concrete examples as the cross in Christianity. In this realm, the Qur'an functions similarly for the Muslims. There is the same awe and reverence in the presence of the Qur'an. Special care must be taken of the book, and special preparations made by an individual before handling and reading it. The Qur'an is not only a book of religious instruction, but these are the actual words of God. As such, the words have intrinsic value and mystical power to the extent that repeating them or writing them is believed to cure illness. The tendency for these Arabic words to take on aspects of a magic formula is probably stronger in a society where the great majority of the people do not understand the Arabic language. As with all ritual, the rhythmic chanting of the Arabic prayers is comforting to the pious listener.

The words of the Qur'an are symbolically significant on more than just the awe inspiring level. In translation, they are the rules by which a Bengali Muslim should live. God has set forth a pattern for life. The Muslim identifies himself as one who tries to follow that pattern. The simple acts of daily life were therefore symbolic to the

villagers as their attempts to lead an Islamic life according to their understanding. The Muslims of eastern Bengal may be more self-conscious about their particular customs than in other parts of the world where Islam has predominated for a longer time. Bengali Muslims have had another life style stemming from another great tradition, Hinduism, available as a model. Indeed, prior to partition, Hindus dominated the economic and political life of the area. The Muslims were only dominant in number. It was the Islamic way of life by which a Muslim identified himself, a way of life which he still follows, self-consciously.

A Muslim villager in eastern Bengal can be identified by what he wears, by what he eats. A man's outward piety may even be measured by the length of his shirt. The Muslim village woman covers herself completely before strange men. All over the world Muslims refrain from eating pork. This negative injunction is not a very distinctive feature, however, as a contrast with Hindus, among whom only the lowest castes eat pork. In addition, a positive injunction has arisen that Muslims should eat beef. The origins of this belief may have been in hostility to the Hindu community and to antagonize, but beef eating has come to be simply an identification. Some of the poorer people may eat beef only once a year on the day all Muslims are supposed to sacrifice an animal. The religious literature describes a variety of animals which are permissable to sacrifice, including camels. In eastern Bengal the available animals are cattle and goats. To my knowledge, no one sacrificed a goat. (Hindus commonly sacrificed goats but never cattle.) Only beef was appropriate for the occasion. Muslims circumcize their sons and marry both their sons and daughters by contract.

Every act cannot be in contrast to those of the Hindus, but in general, acts, social relations, social structure and symbolic of an Islamic way of life.

I begin this study with a description of the social structure and organization of the village in which I worked. The ideal social structure is in some cases contrasted with the social organization, or the way in which interpersonal relations really operate. In addition to the organization of kinship groups and the community, I have described some of the social forms used for working out conflicts. Islam is primarily involved in the process of conflict resolution on an ideological level, dictating or at least influencing the rules. Religious ritual was seldom, if ever, used to resolve conflict. In chapter two, I describe how the religion of Islam, the rituals which are a major part of the world religion, was perceived and carried out on the local level. An arbitrary decision was made to make a separate chapter for rites of passage. Circumcision, marriage, and death rituals are described in Islamic literature. And the two great festivals of Islam are partially celebrated in the family setting as in common for rites of passage. Rites of passage, however, have many local additions to the rituals not found in the festival celebrations. The last two chapters involves individuals working out individual problems by means of mysticism and curing. Both of these activities used Islamic symbols. Under the cloak of Islam, many of these activities met needs not satisfied in the ordinary round of prayers, fasting, and feasting.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF A VILLAGE

The choice of Shaheenpur (pseudonym) as a research site was fortuitous. My assistant, whose home was three miles away in a village on the Indian border, met a cooperative manager at the Kotawli Thana Central Cooperative Association (Academy in local parlance) with whom he had attended high school. The cooperative manager invited me to come and do my research in his village. With the Academy for Rural Development in the area, the rural people were relatively familiar with the idea of research; people asking questions. I asked to be introduced to the leaders of the village to get their permission. The two leaders who were brought to meet me were the incumbent and the former Union Council members. The Union Council was the lowest level unit in what was then Pakistan's system of representative government called Basic Democracies. The village of Shaheenpur was large enough to elect its own representative to the Union Council. The two men were enthusiastic about my working in their village. I asked about the village sardār,[2] a term for traditional leaders, but was told that this village had none.

By Bengali standards, Shaheenpur was a nucleated village in that it was separated from other villages on all sides by paddy fields. This was not to say that Shaheenpur was nucleated in the sense that the villages of North India and the Deccan are; all of the homesteads were not

closely clustered. There were agricultural fields separating many of the clusters of homesteads, but an observer could clearly see, because of the extended open space around the village, the boundaries of Shaheenpur. It was one of the largest villages in the area; its boundaries corresponding to the old revenue and census mauza. For revenue purposes, the Moghuls had delineated these geographical units called mauza, and the British had retained them. Many of the mauza now contained more than one named social unit or grām (village) (Bertocci 1970:12-14). The mauza Shaheenpur and the gram Shaheenpur were identical.

Shaheenpur was not an isolated rural village. Though it might better be called urban influenced than a rural/urban village. It was situated about one and one half miles outside Comilla, the district headquarters town of Comilla district. In the 1961 Census of Pakistan, Comilla municipality was reported to have a population of 54,759 people. It was a town of some importance in eastern Bengal, though little in the form of significant industry had been developed. In pre-partition days, Comilla was known as a "cultural center," a reputation which it has retained.

Shaheenpur is here called an urban influenced town because, though the men of Shaheenpur could and did go into town with ease, about fifty-eight per cent of the men sixteen and over, who were not in school, reported that they worked exclusively in the village, mainly at agricultural pursuits. Twenty young men sixteen and over were high school or college students. Of the others, only eleven per cent worked exclusively outside the village at non-agricultural occupations. Thirty-one per cent reported that they worked partially in the village

and partially outside the village. Of this thirty-one per cent, one third were day laborers. The day laborers worked primarily in agriculture, whether in Shaheenpur or other villages, but they occasionally found such work as brick making in or near the town. About twelve men were included in the category of those employed partly outside the village because they traveled into town daily to sell milk. Most of them had a route and sold milk at the same houses every day. They sold milk from their own cows, plus, in many cases, the cows of their kinsmen and neighbors. An excellent cow at the peak of her production might give sixteen to twenty pounds of milk per day. Four to eight pounds a day was much more common. Most of the milk sellers were prosperous farmers, as a poor man with little land could not produce the fodder to feed the animals. One informant, who did not sell milk, commented on the low level to which the milk sellers had fallen. "In the old days, no respectable man would sell milk. One kept cows to supply one's own family and gave the excess milk to the poor in the village."

Of those who worked entirely outside the village in non-agricultural pursuits, most reported themselves to be brick masons' (rāj mistrī) assistants. Such work was better than day labor as it required more skill and offered higher pay, but it was only slightly more regular. Pulling a bicycle rickshaw was also in the category of semi-skilled hard labor outside the village. Seventeen men rented rickshaws from men in town, and one man owned his own. Those who rented usually had to pay one quarter to one half of what they could earn for the rent of the rickshaw. Even at that, one could make more money pulling a rickshaw than as a day laborer, but a good amount of

physical stamina was required. The day laborer usually worked at his own pace, but a rickshaw puller could not stop for a rest when he had a fare. The rickshaw transported people from the village to town and back again, but primarily plied the streets of the town.

A number of men worked block printing cloth in town, and a few had employment at a textile mill about three miles from the village. A few men had permanent employment as watchmen or messengers in government offices such as the East Pakistan Fisheries Department establishment five miles from the village and the East Pakistan Construction and Building Department office in town. Permanent employment with the government at even the lowest level bestowed a certain amount of prestige on a village man. Fourteen men worked for the East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority which had a large station about one mile from Shaheenpur and two miles from town. Two or three of these men had the prestigious permanent employment. The rest, however, were temporary linemen. Their temporary status was significant not only because of the insecurity, but it allowed the Authority to pay them less than the legal minimum wage.[3]

The influence of the urban center on Shaheenpur was strong. On Thursday and Sunday the large semi-weekly market (hāt) was held in Comilla town. Most men could not be found in the village Thursday and Sunday afternoons except in the peak agricultural seasons. They were in town selling, buying, or just talking. They attended the semi-weekly markets at other places within walking distance on other days, but not in such numbers. They bought from permanent town shops, saw town doctors, occasionally visited town mosques and shrines, and very occasionally went to the cinema in town. But economically most of them were

farmers, though aware of town possibilities and ideas.

So far, in considering urban influences, it has been the men who have been discussed. Boys could go with the men as soon as they were strong enough to make the mile and a half walk. Girls, when they became able to walk to town, were also at the age when their movements began to be restricted. Muslim women at puberty and beyond are not supposed to be seen by any but closely related males. The custom is called purdah, the "veil" or the "curtain." The women of the village visited other homes in their immediate neighborhood, and some, but not all, moved about the entire village. When women went beyond the village, they traveled in rickshaws draped with a curtain so as not to be seen. Few had kinsmen in town. An indication of the isolation of the women was their language. While men could speak the generalized urban Bengali dialect of the town, in addition to the village dialect, most women could speak only the village dialect.

THE POPULATION

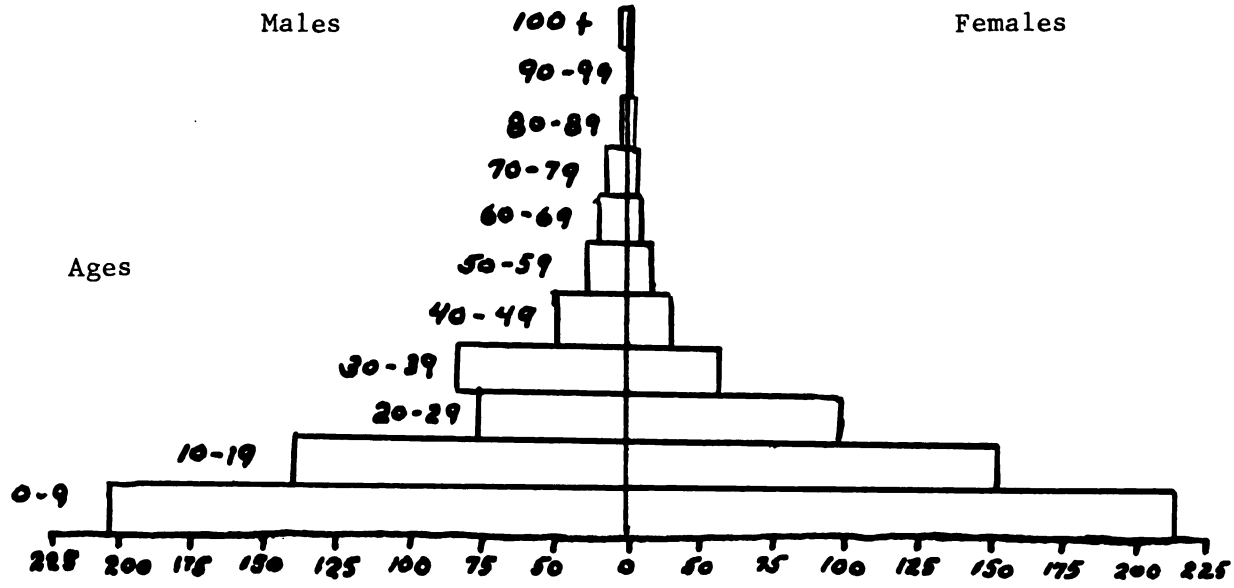
Shaheenpur was inhabited by 1317 men, women, and children. Of these, 1256 were permanent Muslim residents. There were ten resident servants, young people from outside Shaheenpur who did mostly household work. There were nineteen "masters" (tutors). Since Shaheenpur was near a town containing a number of colleges, young men from more distant places, while attending college, tutored the children of a family in exchange for room and board. I have not included these twenty-nine people in the population for the purposes of the present study. A very few servants and masters were kinsmen in the households in which they

resided. Most were not related. Though households which kept servants or masters did so as a general rule, the turnover of personnel was relatively high. During the year of this study three servants left and were replaced, and fifty per cent of the masters finished their higher education and left. Also excluded for present purposes is the one homestead of thirty-two Hindus resident in the village.[4] This is not to say that Hindus and Hinduism have not influenced the people of Shaheenpur. The influence will be discussed later in this thesis. Muslim customs and behavior, however, are to be considered here, and the inclusion of the Hindus, though residents of the village, would confuse the presentation unnecessarily.

Of the 1256 permanent Muslim residents of the village, 637 were male and 619 were female. The age range of the population is presented in Table 1. The reporting error on ages appeared to be large. One indication of this was that people beyond their twenties in almost all cases reported their ages at five year clusters, for example, 30, 35, 40, 45, etc. Even the ages of 20 and 25 were more popular than any of the other ages in the twenties, though there were some reported at all the other numerals. It was also noted that 8, 10, and 12 were more often reported as the ages for children than were 9, 11, and 13. Births were not recorded in the village, and birthdays were not commemorated. Consequently, people did not know how old they were with any precision. Mothers knew how old their infant children were. Half year ages were given by the parents for their children up to the age of three. But as age advanced, the precise age became more and more vague. Nor did people apparently remember ages by associating births with other events which happened about the same time. When asked, people

Table 1

Population in Shaheenpur by Age and Sex



Age	Male	Female	Total
100+	3	1	4
90-99	-	1	1
80-89	3	5	8
70-79	21	9	30
60-69	28	11	39
50-59	32	27	59
40-49	47	39	86
30-39	82	58	140
20-29	76	97	173
10-19	142	152	294
0-9	203	219	422
Total	637	619	1256

pointed out it was ridiculous of me to expect them to know when they were born if they didn't know exactly how old they were.

The statement of one's age appeared to be more a function of one's stage or status in life and how one felt. When a man married and had produced a small family, he became thirty or thirty-five. When his family was substantial and his own father had died, he became forty or forty-five. When his children began to marry, he was in his fifties and sixties. When his sons became family men and began to take over much of the work because their father was losing his strength, he was in his seventies and eighties. And when a man had lived a very long life and felt that his life forces had almost completely deserted him, he was one hundred. Indeed, two of the old men who said they were one hundred died within the year of my stay in the village. This assumption of age with increasing and then decreasing responsibility may help to explain the discrepancy for men in the age pyramid in Table 1 of only seventy-six males in the 20-29 category and eighty-two in the category of 30-39. The males usually married in their late teens and their twenties. Then when they and their wives had produced a couple of children, they considered themselves respectable family men of the village and took on the thirties age category. In fact, however, they might still be in their mid twenties. A young man of Shaheenpur might gain respect in a number of ways: by education, by acquiring permanent employment outside the village, or by wealth, that is, as the son of a wealthy father. But most men gained the respect of their fellow villagers, that is, they could speak out and their opinions were listened to, when they became the heads of small, but growing, nuclear families.

Age was respected in Shaheenpur, and from the foregoing one might say that men consistently overestimated their ages. There were exceptions, however, when my impression was that some men underestimated their ages. This could be explained by the fact that farming was a strenuous activity and required vigorous men. Then men who apparently underestimated their ages either were hoping to retain the vigor of youth or else did not believe that they had lost any. The ages of women, however, appeared to be consistently underestimated. It may have been that women died earlier than men on the average, succumbing in childbirth or to childbirth related problems. By averaging all of the live births for the women of the village forty-five (an approximate age for the end of childbearing) and over, it was found that the women of Shaheenpur had had an average of 6.27 children born to them in their life times. This is a relatively high birth rate. For the delivery of these children, the women had no assistance other than an untrained midwife. There were, however, no women who died in childbirth during my stay of one year in the village. The problem seemed rather to be the under reporting of women's ages by their husbands. Often I would stop to check an obvious discrepancy. "If your oldest child is sixteen, how can your wife be twenty-three?" The husband would then revise his wife's age up a couple of years to make his child's age at least possible. I found one other obvious discrepancy for those women who had been born in Shaheenpur and had married within the village. The fathers consistently gave their married daughters' ages as much younger than did the women's husbands. Whereas to me a woman might look thirty-five, her husband said she was twenty-five, and her father reported that she was fifteen.

The ages used in the statistics are those reported by the heads of households for their wives and children living within their households, married and unmarried. I did not try to revise the ages according to my own estimations, except for occasionally leading the informant as explained above. My revisions would probably have skewed the statistics even further with my cultural biases compounding errors introduced by the cultural biases of the informants.

TWO HOMESTEADS

As an introduction to the subjects of kinship and residence I shall describe two homesteads. These are not composite homesteads made up of "typical" people with "typical" characteristics, but two actual homesteads which existed in Shaheenpur. Their selection was based, however, on general principles of kinship organization which they illustrate. I hope to convey by this method the dynamics of kinship organization. Along with the description of the two homesteads, I shall investigate the Bengali terms used for kinship and residence groups. Not only groups, but roles in the homestead and some of wider community significance will be introduced in this section.

The 1256 Muslim residents of Shaheenpur lived in seventy-six homesteads (bāri). The homestead was a collection of dwelling structures and structures used for other household purposes clustered around one or more open compounds. One single dwelling structure, however, might be designated a homestead. The population size of the homesteads in Shaheenpur ranged from fifty-one people in the largest to single persons in the smallest. An old widowed woman, who had some land in the village

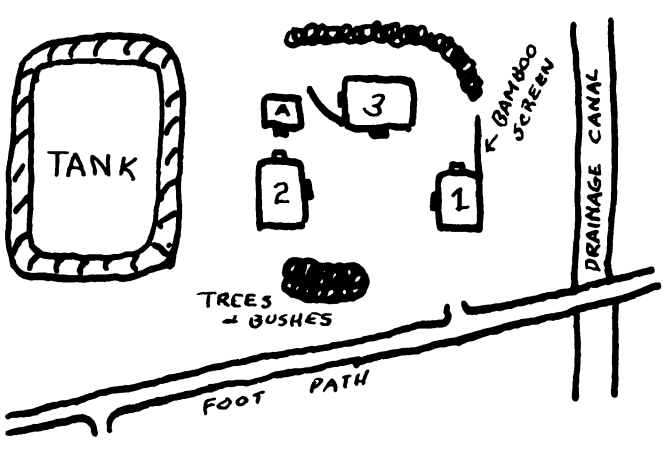
and only one married daughter living elsewhere, and a divorced man, whose sons deserted him when he divorced their mother, lived alone in their homesteads. The homestead was a geographic designation, a social unit, and usually a kinship unit. The Hindu homestead contained three unrelated kinship groups of the same caste, but they were recent arrivals and, in a sense, refugees. The inhabitants of the Muslim homesteads claimed kinship among all the members, though in a few the ties were untraceable.

In Figure 1, the layout of a relatively small homestead is shown. The three numbers indicate three dwelling structures. These three structures coincided with three culā. Cula meant hearth. The woman or women of the household prepared the meal for all the members of the household at this hearth. The economic activities of the household jointly provided the food to be prepared at the hearth. The members of the household who shared this food were known as paribār. Paribar comes the closest to meaning family, but it may also be used by a man to refer to his wife. Sharing of food symbolizes family unity, and cula symbolized the unified family, but it also designated a functioning economic group. I shall use the term household for cula. The homestead in Figure 1 contained four households according to the report of the inhabitants.

In this homestead lived three brothers whose father was dead.[5] The youngest brother was unmarried and had built no house, though he claimed to have a separate household. This simply meant that he was economically independent. He had employment outside the village. I have no information on what the arrangements were for his eating, if he ate in the homestead. In addition to the three brothers, the fourth

Figure 1

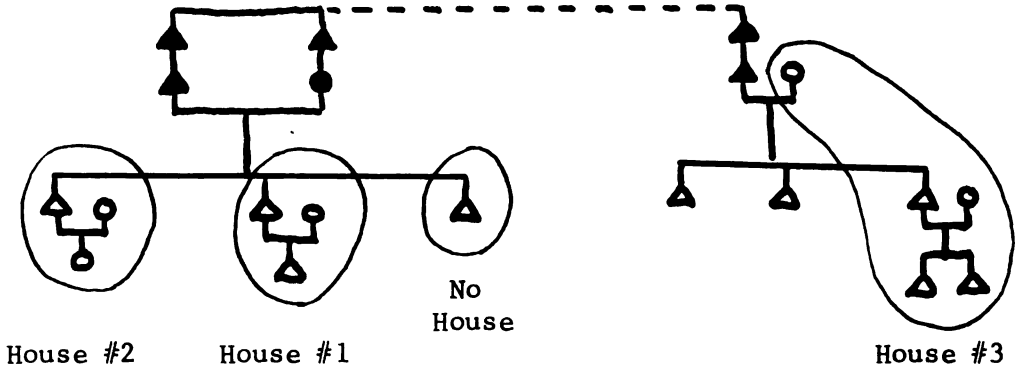
The Layout of a Small Homestead



1. house of the head of homestead.
2. house of older brother who worked in textile mill.
3. house of "distantly" related rickshaw puller.

A. cook house for house #2.

Genealogy for Small Homestead Shown Above



household was headed by a young rickshaw puller who was claimed to be the other men's father's younger brother's son. When the rickshaw puller did not appear in their genealogy, the brothers explained that he was really related to them through their grandfather's generation, but they could not trace the exact relationship. The rickshaw puller said that about ten years ago he had lived in another part of Shaheenpur with his father and two brothers. When his father died, he and his two brothers sold their small amount of land and house plot and went off in separate directions. Five years ago he had returned to Shaheenpur, and these kinsmen with whom he now lived had given him a small plot of land on which to build a house. In his household were his wife, two small sons, and his widowed mother. He had no agricultural land.

The middle of the three brothers who lived in the homestead declared himself to be its head (pradhān). He, his wife, and small daughter lived in house number one. The head of a homestead was usually the oldest male in the homestead, unless he was very old and retired. The middle brother explained that the reason he was head of the homestead was that he kept accounts better than his older brother. This statement was unlikely to have been true. The oldest brother was the only one in the homestead with any formal schooling--through class three. But he also worked full time in the textile mill, so he was not always around the homestead as was his younger brother. In a number of other homesteads, where older brothers had their primary responsibilities outside the village, younger brothers were designated as the head of the homestead. The eldest brother in the homestead in Figure B lived in house number two with his wife and young daughter and had

built a separate cook house for his wife.

The middle brother was the only one in this homestead who reported his main and only occupation on the census as grihastha. The word means householder, but in Shaheenpur it also meant a householder who owned agricultural land and, usually, who did agricultural work. A man did not have to be the head of a household to be a householder. Married sons, still members of their father's households, not owning land separately, were called grihastha. A different designation, however, was usually found for unmarried sons of a comparable age who did agricultural work, such as bārir kāj (work of the homestead). But men who had no agricultural land nor any future claim to any, though they had wives, children, and, indeed, households, described their occupations in other ways. The eldest brother in the homestead in Figure B reported that his main work was as an employee of the textile mill and his secondary occupation was grihastha. The youngest brother, who was unmarried, worked on the line for the East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority and named this as his occupation, not grihastha, though he owned land and claimed to have a separate household (cula).

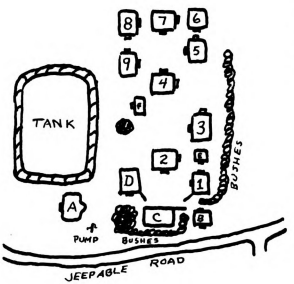
The middle brother farmed all of the land of the homestead: his own .20 acres and the .40 acres apiece of his brothers' which he worked on shares. The eldest brother, who had a monthly income from the textile mill of Rs.150[6] (a good income by village standards), was relatively well known as a money lender. (This information was acquired from others, not the man himself.) Taking interest on loans is forbidden by Islam. There were people, however, who lent money on interest, and the practice met a need felt by many people in the village. The money lenders (mahājan) were, however, criticized by others for their

un-Islamic behavior. It was suggested that they would pay for their crimes in heaven. (One story told that the interest the money lender had taken would have to be repaid at the day of judgement before he could enter heaven. Since there would be no money at that time, the payment could only be made in the money lender's flesh.) Money was also loaned on usufructuary mortgage. Such a loan was also very profitable since the lender received all the produce of the land until the money was repaid. The people, however, considered this to be profit and, therefore, approved, not as interest and un-Islamic. The type of lending engaged in by the oldest brother of the Figure B homestead was called tākā lāgid. For such a loan, one maund (approximately eighty-two pounds) of cāul (husked rice) must be repaid for every Rs. 25 borrowed. Unhusked rice cost about Rs. 25 per maund at harvest time when there tended to be a glut of rice on the market. Money lenders did not usually sell at that time, but waited until the price went up. So, depending on the state of the market and the rice crop for that year, the interest could be as high as one hundred per cent, though it was usually considered to be fifty to sixty per cent. Even the middle brother of Figure B homestead, who only had .20 acres of land, when he got a surplus of money by selling a cow, invested the money in a loan to another man at this very high rate of interest. There was no more profitable way to invest one's money than taka lagid, if one did not mind the religious injunction against the practice.

An example of a large homestead in Shaheenpur is depicted in Figure 2. There were forty-three people resident in this homestead which was divided into eight households. The mosque, shown in the

Figure 2

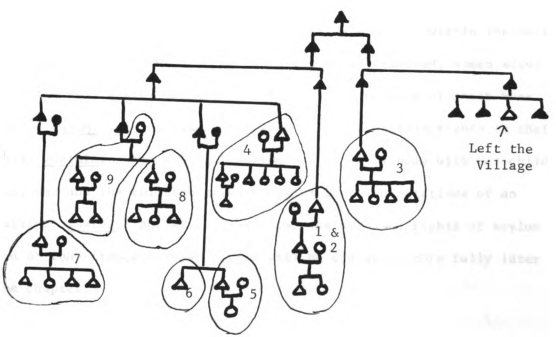
The Layout of a Large Homestead



1. head of homestead's house.
2. head of homestead's son's house.
3. FaFa younger BrSoSo's house.
4. Fa older BrSo's house.
5. Fa older BrSoSo's house.
6. Fa older BrSoSo's house.
7. Fa older BrSoSo's house.
8. Fa older BrSoSo's house.
9. Fa older BrSoSo's house.

A. mosque.
B. shop, head of homestead's.
C. cow shed, head of homestead's.
D. guest house and tutor's room for head of homestead.
E. cook house for head of homestead.
F. guest house for houses 3-9.

Genealogy for Large Homestead Shown Above



diagram, was built by the people of this homestead and the land donated by them for the use of the mosque. The founding ancestor of this homestead had two sons, each of whom had two sons, according to the memories of the inhabitants of the homestead. The names and existence of daughters was less well remembered. The fourth of these four men had had four sons who either died without issue or left the village. The other three men were represented in the homestead by living sons.

One gusthi (patrilineal descent group) lived in this homestead if we exclude the man who moved away, about whom little was known. The gusthi was all those people descended through males from a remembered male ancestor. The larger gusthis remembered great-grandfathers, none further back than that, and many of the smaller remembered only grandfathers. In addition to being a kinship group, the gusthi also appeared to be a locality group. It was generally true that if a part of one's gusthi moved away some time previously, facts about marriage and the birth of their offspring became vague or were completely forgotten. Facts about married sisters, however, who lived in the homesteads of their husbands' kin and often in other villages, were within the system and were usually known. As far as could be ascertained, women acquired almost a dual gusthi membership. They became members of their husband's gusthi upon marriage, but they retained certain rights in their natal gusthis. When a woman visited her parental home with her children, she and the children received gifts as representatives of an "allied" gusthi. But at the same time she retained rights of asylum and of inheritance. These rights will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.

Besides the gusthi, there was the ātmīyo, or all paternal, maternal and affinal kin. One's mother's kin could never be traced as far back generationally or as accurately as one's gusthi, but they were still known and important for their relations with one as a child and their possible use in alliance formation: marital and political. The recognition of affinal ties was variable and what gave the atmiyo its elasticity. The father and mother-in-law, son and daughter-in-law, and brother and sister-in-law all had prescribed roles in relation to an individual. These would be included in what was called the ghanistho atmiyo, or close kinsmen. When the atmiyo was mentioned, however, one had to inquire if it was the ghanistha atmiyo which was meant or the dūr samparko (distantly related). Two affinal links between an individual and a member of his distantly related atmiyo were not unusual, especially if there was some reason to recognize the individual as a kinsman. An individual in government office with whom one could trace kinship ties, no matter the type of linkage nor how far removed, was recognized as a kinsman, and one hoped that the recognition was reciprocated.

A third concept involving kinship was that of bańso. Banso is translated in the dictionary as family, lineage, pedigree, or parentage. An educated man of the region explained that banso meant one's direct lineal descent through males, and that at one time people referred to high and low banso. High banso meant ashraf status, or those who claimed descent from Arabs or other Muslim peoples farther to the west. As such, banso was a fixed category, except as upwardly mobile individuals made claims which were gradually accepted in their communities. My educated informant added, however, that in modern

Pakistan it was extremely poor taste to mention anyone's low banso.

The concept of banso was apparently quite different in the village of Shaheenpur. There the expression was bhālo (good) banso rather than high banso. On the other hand, people did not speak of bad banso, but adding the negative it became, "bhalo banso nai" (they don't have good banso). No one in the village claimed foreign blood, and it was my opinion that they did not even know that this was part of the banso concept for other people. Good banso was usually associated in the village with family names or titles bestowed by the government, such as, Majumdar, Choudhury, Bhuiya, etc. But the idea in the village was more that of an inherited reputation for good character held as a trust. The behavior and achievements of the present generation could improve or impair the banso of succeeding generations. Good banso was helped by money or wealth, but it was very important how the wealth was acquired. Money lenders were unlikely to have good banso, but if they had, were in the process of damaging the good banso of their patrilineal kin group. The listing of the attributes of good banso tended to parallel the attributes of a good Muslim. One example that was given: "A gusthi that produces maulavis (men with religious educations) is much more likely to have good banso than a gusthi that produces thieves."

When describing the type of girl a man wanted to find for his son to marry, it was always mentioned that she should be from a family with good banso. I asked if this could help the banso of the children of a man whose own banso was questionable. "Definitely not, children receive their banso only through their father." Then why was it so

important for the girl to be of good banso? "Families with good banso produce good girls, of course."

The banso of the gusthi in the homestead in Figure 2 was fairly good. The inhabitants of the homestead said that the name of their homestead was Maulavi Bari. The head of the household in house number nine was a maulavi. He was one of the younger males in the homestead, but the members of the gusthi were proud of his attainment. Other people in the village, however, sometimes referred to this homestead by the head of the homestead. He was one of the older respected men in the village, had the most land in the homestead (four acres), and was relatively wealthy by village standards. Finally, the fact that this homestead had contributed a mosque to the village increased their banso.

The household of the head of Maulavi Bari (Figure 2) was a lineal joint family (see Table 2, p. 33). That is, living in one household with pooled resources were the head of the household, his wife, their son and his wife, and the son's young son and daughter. The economic activities of this household were more than six people could handle comfortably. There were four acres of their own land to be cultivated, plus one acre that they cultivated on shares. Though he was seventy, the head of the household worked at the cultivation himself with the assistance of paid agricultural labor and the occasional assistance of the son, who was thirty-five. The son, however, worked about eight months of the year in Comilla town block printing cloth for additional income. There were three cows milked by the head of the household morning and night. He also spent a share of his time netting and trapping fish from the tank (a man-made pond) with his grandchildren.

The shop he owned, which sold such household needs as cooking oil, spices, lentils, husked rice, kerosene and tobacco, was open when there was someone available to keep it open. The grandson, who was twelve, went to a primary school about a half a mile away, so that he could help around the house and shop only occasionally. The granddaughter was only seven, but sometimes she could be found watching the shop for short periods. Young men from the homestead and even the neighborhood occasionally kept the shop open. But primarily it was the elderly head of the homestead who kept the shop and slept there at night to guard his stock. Items in the shop could be bought with money or with husked rice, and credit could be had for the asking both at this shop and at the other one in the village. No tea or other refreshments were served at these two shops, but they were still the places where the men of the village gathered to talk. Most of the more prosperous homesteads had guest houses in which male guests could sit, but one should be invited to enter a guest house or be on specific business. Small groups of men could be seen sitting under trees sometimes, or in other places outside, but the shops were the only two public places in the village where anyone could go and talk awhile or listen to local news.

The women of this household were also busy, but their work was all within the compound. The wife of the head of the household was in charge of husking the rice on a dheki, which in effect dropped a weight on the paddy to break off the husks. At least two women were required for this task; one to operate the dheki and the other to move the rice in and out from under the weight. The son's wife helped when she had time. Often husking rice became a group undertaking with women from

other households bringing their rice to be husked while they talked and sometimes sang during this cooperative effort. Poor women sometimes helped in return for a share of the husked rice from a more prosperous household.

As in all households with married sons at home, the son's wife had complete charge of cooking all the meals for the household members. In households with more than one married son, it was the wife of the oldest son, usually senior herself, who was in charge of the cooking. The junior wives helped her. The mother-in-law sometimes helped in the preparation of some of the things to be cooked, but she was relieved of all the actual cooking chores. At Maulavi Bari (Figure 2) the wife of the head of the homestead kept a large kitchen garden designated as "bushes" on the map. This was a veritable jungle of plants, vines, and bushes all of which produced some vegetable or spice. The garden also served to shield the compound from the eyes of people walking along the road. The women shared the tasks of breaking and chopping up firewood for cooking and repairing the mud walls of the houses after the monsoon rains had finished their damage for the year.

In Maulavi Bari house number four contained a lineal joint family like that of the head of the homestead. At this household lived the head of the household, his wife, their oldest son and his wife, one unmarried son of the head of the household and four unmarried daughters. This household with many more members was much poorer than that of the head of the homestead, holding one 1.40 acres of land and cultivating .80 acres on shares. Four of the remaining households at Maulvai Bari were simply nuclear families of a man, his wife, and their unmarried children. One was a supplemented nuclear family since the husband's

widowed mother lived with them. And one was the single person household of an unmarried male who had nonetheless separated economically from his married brother.

RESIDENCE

Of the twelve households in the two sample homesteads described above, only two contained joint families. These were lineal joint families where one married son and his family lived in the household of his father. A survey of the residence pattern in the entire village showed the same predominance of nuclear families. The accepted norm for this area has been that married sons should live in their father's household until his death. Brothers then separated shortly after the death of their father. Considering the predominance of nuclear families the question arises as to whether this norm is changing and what the residence rules really are.

Figure D is a list of the households found in Shaheenpur using those categories worked out by Kolenda (1968:346-347) for a comparison of family types in South Asia. In this classification a family is considered to be joint only if it included two or more related married couples. Therefore, a widowed or divorced head of a household living with a married son and his family would be considered a supplemented nuclear family in this classification. In Shaheenpur, unless the father were very old and retired, the family would operate as a joint family. There were, however, only two such cases in the village; they have been counted as supplemented nuclear families.

Table 2

Family Types

Definitions	Number of examples in Shaheenpur
1. single person household	8
2. subnuclear family--a fragment of a former nuclear family. Typical examples are the widow with unmarried children, or the widower with unmarried children, or siblings--whether unmarried, or widowed, separated, or divorced--living together.	13
3. supplemented subnuclear family--a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family, plus some other unmarried, divorced, or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family. For example, a widow and her unmarried children plus her widowed mother-in-law.	0
4. nuclear family--a couple with or without unmarried children.	131
5. supplemented nuclear family--a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated, or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.	35
6. lineal joint family--two couples between whom there is a lineal link, usually between parents and married son, sometimes between parents and married daughter.	24
7. supplemented lineal joint family--a lineal joint family plus unmarried, divorced, or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally linked nuclear families; for example, the father's widower brother or the son's wife's unmarried brother.	4
8. lineal-collateral joint family--three or more couples linked lineally and collaterally. Typically, parents and their two or more married sons, plus the unmarried children of the three or more couples.	5

Definitions		Number of examples in Shaheenpur
9.	supplemented lineal-collateral joint family--a lineal-collateral joint family plus unmarried, widowed, or separated relatives who belong to none of the nuclear families lineally and collaterally linked; for example, the father's widowed sister or brother, or an unmarried nephew of the father.	1
10.	collateral joint family--two or more married couples between whom there is a sibling bond--usually a brother-brother relationship--plus unmarried children.	2
11.	supplemented collateral joint family--a collateral joint family plus unmarried, divorced, or widowed relatives. Typically, such supplemental relatives are the widowed mother of the married brothers, or the widowed father, or an unmarried sibling.	1
12.	other--households which do not fit into any of the above categories. The example in Shaheenpur was of a childless couple who had living with them the man's older brother's married son and his wife.	1
	Total	225

The seventy-six Muslim homesteads in Shaheenpur were divided into two hundred twenty-five households. Nine per cent of the households were subnuclear or single person households. Seventy-four per cent were nuclear or supplemented nuclear households. Only about seventeen per cent of the households contained some form of joint family.

Table 3

Percentage of Nuclear and Joint Families

Specific Type	Number of Households	Per cent	General Type	Number of Households	Per cent
Single	8	3.6	Subnuclear	21	9.4
Subnuclear	13	5.8			
Nuclear	131	58.2	Nuclear	166	73.8
Supplemented Nuclear	35	15.6			
Lineal Joint	24	10.7	Lineal Joint	34	15.1
Supplemented Lineal Joint	4	1.8			
Lineal-Collateral Joint	5	2.2			
Supplemented Lineal-Collateral Joint	1	0.4			
Collateral Joint	2	0.9	Collateral Joint	4	1.7
Supplemented Collateral Joint	1	0.4			
Other Joint	1	0.4			
Totals	225	100.0		225	100.0

Though the households were predominantly nuclear, except for those homesteads which contained only one household, most of the homesteads (socio-geographic unit) contained some form of joint or extended family. There was only one instance of a son living in a different homestead

from his father within the village. The son was a man of forty-five who had six children of his own, one a married daughter. The father was seventy-five and living with his third wife (not the forty-five year old man's mother) and third family, of four small children. Even brothers who had separated economically after the death of their father usually continued to live in the same homestead, if not the same household. There were only eight examples of brothers living in separate homesteads. In two of these cases there was overt conflict among the brothers over land, and they separated into different homesteads. One instance was a case of half brothers, the sons of different mothers, living in different homesteads. In the other cases, the brothers were quite advanced in age, being the heads of relatively large homesteads of just their own progeny. These cases did not include brothers who were separated when only one migrated to Shaheenpur, or when one or more brothers were living as ghar jāmāi, that is, uxorilocally in the homestead of the wife's kin, while the other brothers remained in the homestead of their patrilineal kin group.

As has been mentioned, the ideal post marital residence pattern in Muslim Bengal and, therefore, in Shaheenpur was patrilocal; that is, residence of the son and his wife in the same household as the son's father with pooled economic resources. The collateral joint family, however, was not an ideal. Married brothers were expected to divide the land and separate economically after the death of the fathers. There were four instances in Shaheenpur of married brothers who had not divided economically after the death of their father, but lived in a household together. In only one of these was the widowed mother still living.

One hundred sixty-six, or seventy-four per cent, nuclear and supplemented nuclear families seems quite high if the ideal is for lineal joint and lineal-collateral joint families. One might suggest that the ideal norm was no longer reflected in real behavior. Sons must be setting up post marital neolocal residences, separating economically from their fathers immediately, or soon, after marriage. Such a practice did occur, but not with the frequency suggested by the statistics. Of the one hundred sixty-six nuclear and supplemented nuclear families living in Shaheenpur only twenty-eight or seventeen per cent of them could possibly have been living in lineal joint households and were not. That is, the father of the head of the household was dead or so old that he had not remarried when his last wife died, and he was retired. In addition, the sons of the heads of these households were not old enough to be married. This was a marital age and longevity problem. Men who did not marry until twenty to twenty-five and died by the age of forty to forty-five would never be the head of a lineal joint family. They would not live long enough to see their oldest son married.

Any categorization of types will mask the differences among the items lumped in a category. As has been mentioned above, some households were nuclear because a man made the choice to set up a household separate from his father. Whereas for others, no choice was involved. The household was nuclear because the father of the head of the household was dead and the sons had not yet married. In the same way, lineal joint families may result from a range of circumstances. I have selected fifty-three households for further explanation of how they fit into the different stages of the developmental family cycle. Table 4

below is a processual explanation of some of the statistics found in Table 2, from the father's point of view. For this chart, supplemented households have been combined with unsupplemented households.

Table 4

The Process of Residence

a. Categorization from Table 2.	b. Number of households which meet qualifications in column c.	c. Explanation.
1. lineal-collateral joint	5	The ideal, with all the married sons living in the household, economically joint with their father.
2. lineal-collateral joint	1	The head of the household and his wife, their daughter and her husband, and the head's younger brother with his wife.
3. lineal joint	6	The head of the household had only one son who was married and living with his father. These households do not have the possibility of becoming lineal-collateral joint.
4. lineal joint	3	The lineal link here was between the head of the household and his married daughter. These households have ghar jamai, or husbands in the house. There were no sons and these households could never become lineal-collateral joint.

Table 4 (Continued)

a. Categorization from Table 2	b. Number of households which meet qualifications in column c.	c. Explanation.
5. lineal joint	14	Only the first son of the head of the household was married and living with his father. There were other younger sons, and these households might become lineal-collateral joint as these sons marry. Or when another son marries, the older son might set up a separate household as is found in the next example, below.
6. lineal joint	5	One married son of the head of the household lived with him, but older sons with their wives had set up separate households.
7. nuclear	5	All of the married sons lived separately from their fathers, there were still unmarried sons in the father's household.
8. nuclear	1	This old couple lived alone in their household. Their sons, who had separated economically, gave a set amount paddy to the parent's household at each harvest. And the old man still cultivated a small plot.*
9. nuclear (supplemented)	4	For two old couples the sons had separated economically and the father had retired. One son was responsible for the

Table 4 (Continued)

a. Categorization from Table 2.	b. Number of households which meet qualifications in column c.	c. Explanation.
		support of one parent and another the other parent. Consequently, one parent was resident in one household and the other in another. These were recorded as four supplemented nuclear households rather than any kind of joint family.**
10. subnuclear	9	A widow living alone with only her unmarried child or children.
	53	

*There were other middle aged and old couples living alone who had no living progeny.

**One widower father and quite a few widowed mothers were reported to eat at a different son's household each month. This shared the responsibility and economic strain among the sons. Consequently, the household at which they were eating at the time of the census was recorded as supplemented nuclear. In another month, it would have been a different household, but this would not have changed the percentage of supplemented nuclear households.

From the above, no conclusive statements can be made about the trend for sons to set up separate households before the death of their fathers, or for them to stay in a lineal-collateral joint family. There were only five fathers (category 7) all whose sons set up separate households after marriage. But there were also five fathers (category 1) all of whose sons stayed with them after marriage in

lineal-collateral joint families. Another possibility was represented by the five fathers (category 6) whose youngest married sons stayed in their fathers' households, while the older married sons set up separate households. A number of people said that youngest sons got the house and house plot of their father upon his death. Others disagreed and said that such a practice was no longer observed. For the fourteen fathers (category 5) whose oldest sons only had married, we don't know the possible futures. They could remain only lineally joint, with the older son moving out as the next son married. Or they could become lineal-collateral joint families with the marriage of other sons.

One comparison that can be made between the lineal-collateral joint families and those families in which the sons were either totally or partially separated from their fathers is on the basis of land holdings. F. G. Bailey (1957: 92) suggested that one reason for the break-up of the joint family was poverty. Jealousy among sons and especially sons' wives over their share of the common pot was more of a problem when there was too little to go around in the first place. When the land holdings were so small that some of the sons had to bring in wages from other sources they were also more reluctant to put these cash wages into a common pool. Another factor was that fathers with little or no land or other economic resources to pass on to their sons, consequently had less control over the sons. In Shaheenpur, the five lineal-collateral joint families had average land holdings of 5.80 acres per household. Whereas, the eleven fathers who had completely or partially divided their land had an average land holding, theirs and the separate households of their sons combined, of 1.63 acres. Among

these eleven separated households, two of the groups were completely landless.

INHERITANCE

In addition to the general census of the village, I asked a sample of nineteen households more detailed questions on how they got their land, number and size of land plots, kind of land, and their debt status. In the sample, I tried to get an equal number of relatively wealthy, middle level and poor households. The first question was whether they received their land from their father before his death, or simply inherited it after his death. Two men replied that their fathers had had no land to give or pass on. Sixteen replied that they received their land after the deaths of their fathers. Only one man said that he got the land before his father's death. These findings appear as a contradiction when compared with the fact of thirteen fathers in Shaheenpur during fieldwork who had totally or partially parcelled their land before their deaths. There are three possible answers to the contradiction. The sample, which was not a random sample, may have been biased. The men may have been replying to an ideal mode of behavior rather than what actually happened. Or this may reflect an historical change. Fathers formerly did not parcel their land before their deaths, but now are beginning to do so.

One very good reason for a son to pressure his father to give him the title to the land before the father's death may be found in Islamic law. According to traditional Islamic law, if a man's son dies before him, the son's sons do not inherit. An interesting example of this

law at work occurred in Shaheenpur a couple of generations ago. A man had one son and two daughters. The son married and had two sons of his own. But the son died before his father did, leaving the two grandsons. The grandsons inherited nothing, and the land went to the oldest daughter for whom a husband was brought in as ghar jamai (husband in the house). The present inhabitants of the homestead were the two sons of the daughter and her husband. Of the two disinherited grandsons, one had died and the other lived in the homestead of his mother's brother in another village. The position of a ghar jamai is unenviable. He is open to ridicule as one who is not his own man, but under obligation to and control of his wife's kin. When the position of the head of the homestead is low, the status of the homestead in the village also suffers. Granting this, it is surprising that a man would pass over his grandsons for a daughter and her ghar jamai.

Another illustration of the rule took place at a dispute settlement council of village elders (bicār) called by an old man of sixty-five and his brother's son to try to get some land from the old man's father's brother's sons. The old man's father had died before the grandfather, so he and all of his brothers had been disinherited. This event must have happened many years previously, but the matter was still in dispute.

Such a disinheritance did not occur in Shaheenpur the year I was there, but I heard of a case from another village. A man brought his daughter-in-law in to the women working in the women's education and extension program at the Kotwali Thana Central Cooperative Association. He asked that his daughter-in-law be given work because his son had died leaving two small sons. The mother of these two small boys would

have a difficult time unless she could earn money to support them. The women of the program took the widowed mother aside and told her to ask her husband's father for some land so that she and her children would not be destitute. But the widowed mother said that she would not dare do that, and the women of the program were not so bold as to express their opinion to the father-in-law either.

Actually, a secular law, the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, had been passed by the national government which, in addition to other provisions, struck down the Islamic law of disinheriting grandsons. Whether the villagers knew of this, I don't know, but they were unimpressed by a number of other national laws which contradicted Islamic law or local tradition. I shall give an example later of their disdain for the law allowing women to divorce their husbands. And the law requiring girls to be at least sixteen and boys eighteen at marriage was ignored. There were, however, apparently contradictory feelings among the villagers concerning the disinheritance of grandsons. One of the religious leaders in Shaheenpur even commented that grandfathers who disinherited grandsons would have to answer to God in their afterlife for this action. He was very old, however, and had not studied for very long at the religious school. Even though the rule of disinheritance was criticized, it was apparently observed. Such a rule must have encouraged men to take their share of the land as soon as possible to protect their own sons.

Of the nine widows (Table 4, category 10) living with their unmarried children in Shaheenpur, five had land which their husbands had received before their deaths. Two, who were without land, lived in homesteads where no one had any land. One was a widowed daughter of

the homestead, none of whose immediate family was living, who had returned home with her children after her husband had died leaving no land. The ninth was landless, but the facts were unknown. Widow remarriage was practiced among the Muslims of Shaheenpur, especially if the woman was still young. Older women were less likely to remarry. Even an old man wanted a young wife. If a widow had children, however, she usually stayed with the children and did not remarry. In all, there were forty-four widows resident in Shaheenpur compared to only five widowers. Two of the five widowers were relatively young men whose wives had died only recently. They would probably remarry.

The general Islamic rules of inheritance are that sons share equally, while a daughter gets half of a son's share. In practice, girls did not generally take their shares in Shaheenpur. They allowed their shares to go to their brothers instead. This kept good relations for the sisters with their brothers, and after the deaths of their fathers provided a place for them to come where they would be welcome. So if her husband died before any children were born, or she and her children got no land because her husband's father was still living, she could go to her brothers' homestead. Or if her husband divorced her, her brothers would take her in.

MARRIAGE

One in six marriages in Shaheenpur ended in divorce. Three hundred fifty-eight marriages were recorded for the men of the village, and sixty of these had ended in divorce. No offspring were produced in forty-seven of the unions which ended in divorce. Some men took

advantage of the easy divorce for men to have a series of wives. The record in Shaheenpur was held by a landless rickshaw puller who was married to his sixth wife. His marriages had all been monogamous unions. His brother, on the other hand, had had a series of polygynous unions. This man's first marriage had been to his father's younger brother's daughter to whom four sons and a daughter had been born. While retaining his first wife, this man married and divorced two other girls. While I was in the village, he brought in yet another girl whom he had married in another village unknown to his family. The criticism leveled against him was that instead of spending the money on himself, he should have spent the money to acquire a wife for one of his older sons. Such an exploitative attitude toward the system, however, was not true of most of the other men of the village. From the statistics, we may assume that the most common and usual cause of divorce was a lack of offspring resulting from the union. Some divorces, however, resulted from incompatibility. On the other hand, extreme incompatibility from the beginning of the marriage may have been the cause of no offspring resulting from the union. It was not unknown for a very young girl to keep running away from a husband she didn't like until it was simply agreed to let her go home and stay.

About six per cent of the marriages in Shaheenpur at the time of the census were polygynous. Eight men had two wives. None of these men could be considered leaders in the village. Most of them were in the middle to younger age groups. Islam allows a man to have up to four wives at one time with certain restrictions. A national law, however, has forbidden polygyny. Neither divorce nor polygyny added to a

man's prestige in the village. They were rather a source of gossip and embarrassment.

Marriages were arranged by the fathers or other older male kinsmen of the young people. It was the kinsmen of the boy who must actively seek a suitable girl as a bride for him. I was told a number of times that the father of a girl whom no one approached concerning marriage with his daughter would be left with an unmarried female on his hands. This could not have been a very serious problem, however, as there was only one old spinster in the village, and she was a misshapen dwarf. Even a deaf mute girl had been married by the son of a very poor landless family.

Some of the fathers of young men were asked what they looked for in choosing a wife for their sons. The first criterion was that she should know the work of a farmer's wife; husking rice paddy, cooking, and other housework. In addition, she should be pleasant to look at (sundar), be from a family of good banso, and she should know the Islamic prayers. If the boy was educated, then the girl should be educated, too, but then she would not be expected to know the work of a farmer's wife so well. The Islamic custom of marrying one's father's brother's daughter was not widely practiced in Shaheenpur. Of the marriages existing in Shaheenpur at the time of the census (269), seven were of FaBrSo to FaBrDa and two were of FaSiSo to MoBrDa. When asked if one should marry within one's gusthi (patrilineal kin group), the answer was, "not especially." One was already aligned with the people of the gusthi; it was better to establish a new alliance with a marriage. The most common reason for a patrilateral parallel cousin marriage was that one brother had no sons. A man with only daughters had the choice

of bringing in a ghar jamai for one of his daughters or marrying her to a brother's son in order to keep the land within the gusthi.

It was common, however, for people to be married within the atmiyo, especially the dur samparko (distantly related) atmiyo. For example, a man's brother's wife's sister's husband's brother had a daughter who was about the right age for his son. She might be a possible bride for his son. Such a marriage occurred while I was in the village. These people belonged to his dur samparko atmiyo, and, therefore, the father knew of them, but they were too far removed for any idea of an alliance to be in existence. Possible brides were to some extent limited by the father's circle of acquaintances. These acquaintances were his kinsmen (ghanistho atmiyo) and kinsmen of his kinsmen (dur samparko atmiyo). The other possibility was fellow villagers of kinsmen living in other villages. For example, the sister of the head of Maulavi Bari (Figure 2) was married into the village of Ghazipur. It was the duty of a brother to visit a married sister in her home periodically. While he was there he became acquainted in the village. Many years later, when it was time for his son to marry, the father found a wife for him in Ghazipur.

Young, unmarried men had some ideas of their own on the matter of marriage. Unmarried girls were generally quite young and the matter was too much out of their hands for them to have formed many opinions about their future marriages. Such opinions, in any case, if expressed would have demonstrated a lack of proper modesty. The young men, however took an active interest. They sometimes were even able to make their preferences known to their fathers, not about particular girls about whom they could know little, but about particular characteristics.

The young men were concerned about the appearance of a prospective bride. They hoped to get one who was fair and perhaps a little plump. The Bengalis, in general, did not care for extreme obesity, as is more the preference in Middle Eastern Muslim society, but neither was extreme thinness considered attractive, as was more usually the case in an area where food scarcity was a constant problem. The desire to have a "beautiful" bride was expressed in social terms. "People will laugh at me if they hear that my bride is 'ugly'."

Young men also expressed negative preferences. They said that one did not want to marry a girl from a household too much wealthier than one's own. The girl, used to a certain standard of living in her father's house, would be unhappy with less in her husband's poorer house. A young rickshaw puller from Shaheenpur married during my stay in the village. The father's younger brother of the prospective bride owned two shops in Comilla town and was comparatively wealthy. I asked the rickshaw puller before the marriage if the family of the future bride was not a bit too wealthy for her to be happy in his house, which was landless and poor. She would be making continual demands that he would find difficult to meet. He claimed that this was not at all the case, though her uncle was rich, her own father was a very poor farmer with little land of his own. A number of weeks after the wedding, however, the new husband told the following story.

> I don't get any respect (sanmān) in my wife's father's house. It has been weeks, and they have not invited me for a meal. They have given me no gifts. My wife's older sister's husband has permanent work at the textile mill. They gave him a new outfit of clothing and a gold ring after the marriage. They don't respect me like that. (He had bought some new clothes for himself and wore them around Shaheenpur, telling people that they were a gift from his wife's father.)

He was later invited for a meal at his wife's father's house, but by the time I left the village, he had still received no gifts.

When the same young man's father was still looking for a bride for his son, the father was having difficulty finding one because of his poverty. The fathers of girls made certain demands about what gifts should be given by the groom's party at the time of the marriage. The cost of these gifts was also prescribed by the girl's father. So I suggested as a possibility a local girl of about twelve whose father was dead. She and her mother worked at various households around the village for their room and board, though they supposedly belonged to one of the homesteads in Shaheenpur. It would probably not cost very much to marry her. But the young man was adamant that he would not marry an orphan.

> Then I would have no wife's father's house to which to take my friend. It is the custom that you can take your friend to your wife's father's house and stay for two days. They will feed you and treat you well. A husband is an important person in his wife's father's house.

The foregoing seemed to suggest the possibility of hypergamy. I have no other data, however, that would indicate that wife receivers consistantly had any higher status than wife givers; that there was a system of hypergamy. This may simply have been a case of the respect shown to any guest in the house.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS WITH KIN

Generally, the relations among affinal kin were formal and relatively respectful. The illustration of the daughter's husband has been given. There was a tradition of suppressed hostility between a man and

his wife's brother. This usually manifested itself, however, simply in maintaining formal relations. Relations between the husband's parents and the wife's parents were formal to an extreme, on the rare occasions when they met. I was told in town that a girl's parents never visited her in her husband's house. Such visits, however, did take place in the village. The exception to the principle of formal relations among affinal kin was with the son's wife and older brother's wife (bhabi). She became part of the household. A man and his older brother's wife were usually peers, and close ties between them were acceptable. On the other hand, relations between a man and his younger brother's wife remained distant.

Affinal kin of two or more steps removed, such as husbands of sisters, might become very close friends. There was a special type of friendship which could be set up between two young men. This was called dosta, a Persian word for friend, or duspan. One young man in Shaheenpur had a dosta relationship with his MoSiSoWiBr. As in finding a bride, one usually only came in contact with people outside the village through kinship ties. To formalize this dosta relationship, he had invited the young man to his house for a meal and in return had been invited to the young man's house for a meal. The appropriate behavior between dosta was to visit one another's homes, help each other in time of need, and give a gift at the dosta's marriage. An old man listening to the description, said that the dosta relationship was mentioned in the Qur'an, and also that it was very bad for dosta to see each other's wives. Dosta, like wives, were usually recruited from outside the gusthi, from the dur samparko atmiyo.

Visiting was a well established custom in the village. Married women regularly visited their natal homes, although less often as they grew older. The young bride's adjustment to her new husband's home was accomplished more gradually by these visits. After a month or less in her new home, she would go back to her father's for a month. And brothers regularly visited the new bride in her husband's home to see that her circumstances were acceptable and to make her less lonely.

Young children visited the households of their parents' siblings, especially their mother's brother's (māmā) household. Small children on the paths between villages with bed rolls under their arms were off to "mamar bari." Traditional children's songs related the delights of going to mamar bari. Girls, when they began to show signs of coming maturity, were more restricted and could no longer freely walk along public paths to visit the homes of nearby kinsmen. Boys continued to go until marriage kept them busy at home, and they had the additional duty of visiting their wife's father's house. When asked toward whom they felt the strongest ties of affection, men invariably mentioned their mothers. Mothers were very indulgent toward sons and made little effort to control them. Men came to idealize their mothers as they grew older. So, as young women looked forward to the comfort and companionship of their brothers' periodic visits, they communicated the affection they felt for their brothers to their small children.

There was, however, a possible bar to unrestrained affectionate ties between a mother's brother and a sister's son. Though women usually gave up their claims to a share of an inheritance in favor of their brothers, Islamic law did not recognize such a renunciation (Mulla 1968:45). The woman's right to claim her share of the inheritance

remained in abeyance. So, though the mother of a little boy may have relinquished her share in the inheritance to her brother, she might later make a claim to the land, which, successful or not, would result in a long and bitter conflict. The first step in a conflict which resulted in a homicide in the Shaheenpur area began when two sisters belatedly claimed shares of their brother's land immediately after his death. They claimed that the land was rightfully theirs as the legitimate inheritance from their father. The brother's son fought this claim in the courts for eight years, losing the remainder of his land to court costs.

Women indulged their sons, but controlled and disciplined their daughters. It was the duty of a mother to see that a daughter behaved modestly, did not go about too freely after she began to mature, and to see that a daughter learned the duties of a farmer's wife. In turn, girls were responsible for younger siblings. Soon after the toddler stage, boys were expected to behave in a respectful manner toward their fathers. In fact, boys and young men were expected to remain silent in the presence of their fathers unless directly questioned by them. These rules were relaxed after the young man married and became a householder in his own right.

A young man, who had recently married, continually had difficulty getting along with his father. One day the old man threw the young couple out of the house by simply placing the couple's few belongings in the middle of the compound while the young man was away from the house. They had to take refuge in a dilapidated shed in the homestead. After a few days the young man reported to me that the neighbors had come to see his father and had convinced him to take his son and the

son's wife back into the house. I asked the young man if he had told the neighbors about the trouble. He replied, "What kind of a son do you think I am? I would never speak badly about my father to the other villagers. Every evening I went to the shop near our house and sat there looking sad with my head in my hands. The people understood that there was trouble and came to talk to my father."

The principle of closer, more affectionate ties between alternate generations than between adjacent generations applied in Shaheenpur. Grandparents were affectionate and indulgent toward their grandchildren. Maternal grandparents gave gifts, but saw relatively little of the daughters' children. Children, however, usually lived in the same homestead with their paternal grandparents and saw them continually. Grandfathers and grandsons could address and refer to each other as brother (bhāi). For the Bengali Muslim boy, the paternal grandfather played the warm male role. This role, however, was lacking in the lives of many boys. As many men did not live to see the marriage of more than their eldest son, many more did not live to see their grandchildren. Of the four hundred sixty-three children fifteen years old and under in the village only one hundred forty-six had their paternal grandfathers living.

NEIGHBORHOOD AND VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

This large village of seventy-seven homesteads comprising two hundred twenty-five households was divided into five neighborhoods (pārā) which perhaps had more significance for social organization than did the village as a whole. These five neighborhoods were given

directional names, with one exception. They were south neighborhood (dakkhin para), west neighborhood, north neighborhood, and central neighborhood. The fifth, which was east of the others and I shall call east neighborhood, had the name of a Hindu goddess with the suffix meaning city or large town. This neighborhood may have had a separate status at one time. People in east neighborhood would occasionally refer to the "people of Shaheenpur" as though they were a different entity. When asked, however, they would reply that they were also people of Shaheenpur. I never solved this mystery except to say that there was something different about east neighborhood, but behaviorally they appeared to be a neighborhood of Shaheenpur in the same way the other four were.

Neighborhood (para) was a geographical designation and reyāi was the corresponding social designation. Ideally, all the members of one reyai lived in the same para. The social group, reyai, was led by a man in an hereditary position, a sardār. The sardar was assisted in his leadership and conciliatory duties by men called matbar. In reality, neighborhoods (para) were vaguely bounded. People in the same homestead disagreed among themselves about in which neighborhood the homestead was situated. Or homestead A would say that homestead B was in a different neighborhood from what homestead B itself had reported.

Reyai membership was even less regular in conforming to neighborhood boundaries. According to one informant, the reyai in which he had membership composed part of west neighborhood, part of central neighborhood, and one homestead in south neighborhood. But among all my informants, he was alone in the description of a reyai with that particular membership. Others whom he claimed, disavowed him, and in any case, no

one gave an identical membership list to his. The only place where complete consensus could be found was in south neighborhood. All the people of south neighborhood agreed that they all belonged to the same reyai except the previously mentioned homestead that all agreed was not a part of their reyai. In south neighborhood were one dominant gusthi with seven homesteads and four lesser gusthi. The present member of the Union Council was from the dominant gusthi. The dominant gusthi used the title Majumdar, indicating a former tax collecting status. There were others in the village who used the name Majumdar, but the Majumdars of south neighborhood did not acknowledge the other claimants to the title to be legitimate. The leadership of this reyai, however, was in dispute. The previous sardar had been the eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son of the founder of the gusthi in the village. The previous sardar had been the eldest of five brothers, but had produced no sons himself. Now both his surviving younger brother and his daughter's husband (ghar jamai) claimed the sardarship. Apparently each had followers.

One of the poorer homesteads in the reyai held a wedding while I was there. A primary function of the reyai was to determine who should be invited to feasts on such occasions as weddings (Bertocci 1970:160-163). It was the sardar's duty to invite reyai members to a feast. For this wedding, the father of the groom asked the sardar to explain to the reyai members that the household was too poor to hold a feast for the entire reyai. The father of the groom said that he had told the ghar jamai sardar of south neighborhood. The younger brother sardar said that that was a lie, and that he himself had been told by the father.

In north neighborhood there was also relatively good consensus about the membership of the reyai which conformed to a fairly well bounded neighborhood (para). Six of the eleven homesteads contained the members of one gusthi, and there were three smaller gusthis. The man who claimed to be the sardar of this neighborhood came from one of the smaller gusthis. People outside the neighborhood generally did not acknowledge his position as sardar. One informant from another neighborhood explained that the north neighborhood sardar claimant had simply invited a large number of men to his house for a feast. In appreciation, they named him sardar.

Any kind of consensus related to reyai membership was difficult to find in the remaining three neighborhoods. A wealthy and influential man in the central neighborhood even claimed to belong to the north neighborhood because his father's father's sister had married into the largest gusthi there. The north neighborhood, however, did not claim him, and his immediate neighbors insisted that he belonged to their reyai. In west neighborhood, however, lived the one sardar whom everyone in the village agreed was a sardar (notwithstanding that I was told when I first visited the village that there were no sardars). Some said that he was the only true sardar. His homestead was called Sardar Bari, the only one so called. He was the eldest son of an eldest son. His five younger brothers had either migrated from the village or had married uxorilocally as ghar jamai to other villages, but his father's younger brother's sons lived in the homestead with him. The seven households in the homestead (thirty-three people) had, in all, three and a half acres of land among them. This was a very poor homestead with most of the men working as day laborers and assistant brick

layers in addition to cultivating their small amounts of land. Sardar Bari was apparently a formerly prosperous gusthi which had produced too many sons and fallen on hard times. The sardar, who reported himself to be eighty, was very frail and shaky. He appeared at most of the dispute settlement councils of the influential men of the village, but had little to say.

VILLAGE COUNCILS

The occasions when influential men of the village met were meetings or councils called to settle disputes among the villagers. These were called bicār which means both judgement and discussion. There were no formal decision making councils at the village or neighborhood level. The bicar attempted to settle disputes and, when someone was clearly transgressed against, mete out punishment. The councils were usually composed of people from the neighborhood in which a dispute occurred. Only twice that people could remember had men from the whole village met for a bicar. Once had been when two relatively wealthy farmer brothers from the south neighborhood Majumdar gusthi had been in a dispute over land. "It took the whole village to make those two listen." The other time was when a young man from one of the poorer gusthis in south neighborhood had stolen a girl from the Majumdar gusthi, with her connivance. But even all the influential men in the village could not settle that case. Her father's brother (her father was dead) took the case to court. The young man kept his stolen wife, but lost all of his family's land in legal costs. The south neighborhood never forgave him, though he and his family continued to live there.

When he came down with small pox no one would help them.

Bicars were usually successful in effecting compromise, getting one or both sides to give in sufficiently for a satisfactory settlement. In fact, one villager who knew some English translated the word bicar as compromise. Bicar councils were less successful, however, at meting out punishment. In one case I witnessed, the punishment decided on by the council was carried out because the offending side agreed. A young man was caught visiting another man's wife late at night. He was caught by the head of her homestead, but managed to escape and avoid an immediate and perhaps severe beating. But when he was brought before a bicar council the next day they decided on a shoe beating of twenty strokes. His father and brothers were so angry with him for his behavior which cast shame on their family that they gladly set to beating him and administered forty strokes. The head of the girl's homestead, however, was not satisfied. He had wanted the young man to be paraded around the whole village and shamed for his crime. This would have better vindicated the name of the girl. But the council would not agree to this punishment as they knew the reputation of the girl and that such incidents had happened before. She had married a father's brother's son and so was not only a wife but also a daughter of the homestead. If she had been only a wife, she probably would have been divorced and sent home. An important man in her gusthi, who was also a friend of the offending boy's father, forced the head of the girl's homestead to accept the decision of the bicar council.

In another case, however, the influential men who had been called to the scene of a crime backed off from making a decision. Paddy had been cut and stolen from one man's field in the night. He had followed

a trail of heads of paddy to find it stored in another man's household. The man with the paddy in his house was obviously one of the culprits, but who were his accomplices to cut and remove a whole field of paddy in one night? The man who had had his paddy stolen decided that since he had gotten his property back he did not want to pursue the issue. It was reported that everyone knew who the thieves were; about eight rather tough young men from poor families. And the victim of the theft knew that some of them were from his own gusthi so that he did not wish to press for action against them. Later, however, one influential old man who had been there admitted, "We could have gotten their names there in the daylight. And we could have prescribed punishment for them. But we are old men. What happens when I am alone on a village path late one night coming back from a market? We were afraid. This is bad, too, because there were such thefts before, and we did not know who the thieves were. This time we knew and did nothing. There will be more thefts now."

These councils were not well constituted for the exercise of force. They were much more successful in simple dispute settlement. One of the duties of a sardar was to watch for disputes in his reyai. He would then suggest that some men be called for a bicar and the disputants try to settle their differences. Influential men, other than sardars, often took this third party role in Shaheenpur. Or if a dispute had reached the stage where one or both sides were about to start court cases, they were asked to try to settle their differences on the local level first with a bicar. Both sides could call men whom they respected to sit on the bicar council. A disputant could simply not cooperate and not come to the council. But the social pressure

apparently was strong enough in almost all cases for both sides of a dispute to put in an appearance whether they felt conciliatory or not. The only exception was a recent migrant to the village, an educated man with regular employment in town. His disdain for these simple villagers was quite obvious. He repeatedly ignored their entreaties to come to a bicar to work out a dispute he had with his brother over land. In the minds of the other villagers there were no names too harsh to call this man who disregarded the social pressure of the village.

The procedure at the bicar was for the influential men to ascertain the facts through questions. These questions, however, might be very pointed, indicating the opinion of the questioner, in the "When did you stop beating your wife?" form. In the process, these men would tell relevant stories and cite precedents. Gradually the questioning would turn to asking the disputants what they thought might be an equitable solution. The influential men suggested solutions and asked the disputants for their opinions of these solutions. The successful bicar ended with the disputants in agreement on an equitable solution. Land disputes between close kinsmen could sometimes be settled at this local level. But beyond close kinsmen, land was too important to be relinquished if one side or the other thought they could gain an advantage in the courts. Land disputes most often went outside the village. But the villagers always tried to keep village matters and village disputes within the village.

The one bicar which I witnessed from start to finish was a good example of, first, saving the reputation of the village and the villagers by keeping the dispute in the village. The bicar was held the day before the case was to appear before the Union Council. The second

principle it illustrated was the attempt of people to play the different systems: secular law, religious law, and local custom, one against the other. A young man had been divorced by his wife. Or rather, the wife's father had gotten a divorce for her. Though it was a simple matter for a man to divorce his wife under Islamic law, it was much more difficult for a woman to divorce her husband. And the villagers of Shaheenpur maintained that it was impossible for a woman to divorce her husband in Islam. But they were aware that a secular law of the government of Pakistan (The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961) made it possible for a woman to divorce her husband. They were not in sympathy with this law, but were occasionally forced to recognize its existance.

I could not understand what the young man hoped to gain from taking this case to the Union Council, which, in addition to legislative and executive functions, had judicial functions. He could not win in such a government court on the merit of his case. The law was against him and with his wife and her father. His strategy was made clear to me later. He did not expect his wife's father to appear at the Union Council, and the young man would win his case by default. It would be an extremely shameful thing for a father to go to the Union Council to ask for a divorce for his daughter from his peers. It was mentioned at the bicar in the village that the father would be shamed forever if he went.

At the bicar the husband and the father of the wife were questioned. A woman would not appear at such a gathering of men. "What did you do that your wife won't come back to you?" "Why don't you send your daughter back to her husband?" Interspersed among the other

questions was the general question seemingly addressed to neither side, "Who is at fault? Who is at fault?" The questioners turned to asking the husband and his step-father to make some improvement in the conditions for the wife at their house. They agreed. The bicar participants asked the girl's father if with these concessions he would send his daughter back. He refused. Though the father of the girl was wrong in the eyes of the villagers, he clearly had some of their sympathy. The husband was an outsider. His mother had married into the village recently and brought along her grown son from a previous marriage. After about four hours of discussion, the husband was finally worn down. He agreed to divorce his wife and pronounced the required phrase three times. The bicar was ended successfully. The rules of their religion and the village had been satisfied. The husband had divorced his wife in front of witnesses and could not take it back later.

INFLUENTIAL MEN

The traditional sardar system of leadership was clearly not in good repair in Shaheenpur. I wanted to find out who the leaders, or less specifically the "important" men, in the village were. I wanted to use a general term such as important and then subsequently ask what criteria were used to make the judgements. In this way I would discover not only who the important men were, but also more about the villagers' hierarchy of values. What qualities did they consider important. Unfortunately, the word "important" does not translate into Bengali. There was apparently no general term that could be used. People might be called "big" (boro), but this specifically meant

wealthy. I finally decided to ask people to give me a list of the names of the men who were the most "boro and khhamota" in the village. Khhamota means strong and powerful, but it also means ability and capacity. I was afraid the results would be unsatisfactory, but was pleasantly surprised. For a large percentage of the men placed high on the lists, the reason for their placement was given as, "He speaks well at the bicar." He spoke wisely and could convince people to settle their disputes. It was true that there were few, if any, poverty stricken men on the lists. This may have reflected the use of the word boro in the description, but I don't think this was necessarily so. Poor men had little scope to be active in the village. They were in debt to and dependent on others. The informants were not limited in the number of men they could name, but they usually named about eight or ten. Only on the longest list of twenty-two names did the name of the poor old sardar from west neighborhood appear. And on that list his name was third from the bottom. People were asked to give the names in order of importance. None of the religious leaders in the village appeared on the lists. Their absence might be questioned. But it is my opinion that the two religious leaders resident in Shaheenpur had character problems which excluded them from leadership roles. These two men will be described in the next chapter. They were respected for their religious learning, but not necessarily respected as men. The religious leader who was usually called to answer questions of religious law and custom was a resident of a neighboring village.

The man at the top of many lists, and highly placed on others, was the head of a large gusthi in central neighborhood. He owned four acres of land and the other shop in the village. The reasons given for

his high placement were his large gusthi, that people listened to his advice, and that he spoke well at the bicar. The nature of the village shop, giving credit upon request, also may have inclined people toward him. The other shop in the village at Maulavi Bari had only been in existence for about a year. The setting up of a second shop in the village may have been a move on the part of its owner for upward status mobility, power in the village. The owner of the Maulavi Bari shop was mentioned on the lists, but usually further down, and it was mentioned that he was more important in his own neighborhood than in the entire village. Another man who ranked high on the lists was a member of the largest gusthi in north neighborhood. He was not the oldest member of the gusthi nor apparently its head, but as much of a spokesman for the gusthi as any of its men. He was a good friend and could usually be found in the company of the sardar claimant of north neighborhood. The sardar claimant, however, ranked down in the lower half of the lists. It was the friend who was called the "wisest old man in the village." He had two acres of land (a minimum for relative self-sufficiency) and an even larger gusthi than the first ranked man.

The incumbent member of the Union Council ranked high on the lists. He was ranked first, however, only by a man who did so grudgingly and bitterly. "Certainly the Member. People will do anything he tells them to, even kill someone." He was a member of the south neighborhood Majumdar gusthi and had nine acres of land. Perhaps because of his wealth and banso position there was hostility toward him, but also any elected official has enemies. He was addressed as Member Shaheb. It was through the Union Council member that government resources came into the village, and he greatly determined how they were

to be used. That he was not more powerful may have reflected the fact that there were not more government resources to come in than there were. He saw that people got their ration cards to buy food at controlled prices. He arranged for relief in cases of natural disaster. If any government public works were to be undertaken in the village, it was through his efforts. For example, the bridge over the drainage canal in Shaheenpur had been destroyed in a flood two years previously. It had been restored temporarily by the villagers with a rickety bamboo bridge. One reason that the project of building a permanent bridge with government funds may not have been taken up to that point was that the bridge led to west neighborhood and the house of the former Union Council member. The former Union Council member's name appeared on a number of lists, but in the lower half. The incumbent Union Council member was also consulted by people on personal matters. His name, however, was not mentioned as one of the people often called to sit on a bicar. He was forty years old, relatively young compared to the other influential men.

Another man, high on the lists, was the head of one of the small gusthis in south neighborhood. About him it was said, "He never tells lies. People always believe what he says." On only one list was a man mentioned who typified what I feared the word khhamota might suggest, as one of its meanings was powerful. He was a man of some wealth with five acres and a large family of boys. This man was apparently not loathe to coerce other people. The informant who included him explained that he was boro and khhamota, but a bad one, phasani, a goonda.

RECENT MIGRANTS

So far, an element in the village which may have explained some of the confusion in the social organization of Shaheenpur has not been mentioned. Not counting the Hindu homestead, eleven per cent of the population in Shaheenpur were relatively recent arrivals. Fourteen of the homesteads in the central neighborhood were inhabited by Muslims who had come from Tripura in India five and six years previously. These homesteads had been occupied by Hindus who at that time migrated to India. The departing Hindus had set up an exchange of land with the incoming Muslims. Either a Hindu or a Muslim would first make a trip across the border to find a corresponding farm for which to exchange his farm. Then he would move with his family. Some of these recently arrived Muslims in Shaheenpur reported that they had been to many places in East Pakistan and searched for a long time before they found a Hindu farmer with corresponding land holdings with whom to exchange. The Muslim then had the Hindu's deed to the land plus a certificate of exchange (badli).

In 1962 there had been communal riots in India and Pakistan stemming from the reported theft of a hair of the Prophet Mohammed from a mosque in Indian Kashmir. There had been no violence in the area around Comilla town at that time, and the migrants to Shaheenpur reported that they had experienced no violence personally in Tripura. Rather, they said that they had heard rumors of violence in other villages and of impending violence. They had heard of forced migrations; Muslims being taken to the border in trucks and told to cross into Pakistan. They said, however, that they had personally experienced

economic harassment. Hindu neighbors would "borrow" their bullocks, and the Muslim owner of the bullocks could not do his plowing until the Hindus were done. Fruit was stolen from their trees, and they could get no satisfaction from the Indian police. (Even a Muslim might not get satisfaction from Pakistani police in such a case.) When the Muslims would take their produce to the market and set a price for it to a buyer, the Hindu buyers would lay down a small fraction of the quoted price and walk off with the goods. Finally, these Muslims felt that the climate in Tripura had become such that they should migrate to Pakistan.

Six of the homesteads had migrated from a single village in Tripura under the leadership of one man. He remained their leader and was designated their sardar. His name appeared on some of the lists of important men in the village. The ancestors of two of these six homesteads had migrated years before to India from Shaheenpur. These two homesteads were part of the south neighborhood Majumdar gusthi. The people in all of the migrant homesteads, except one, reported that either their fathers or their paternal grandfathers had migrated originally from what is now Pakistan to Tripura. Only one homestead reported that their people had been in Tripura for as far back as their knowledge of their gusthi went. The eight homesteads, which had not migrated with the other six under the leadership of their sardar, had each come separately to Pakistan. The people of these eight homesteads acknowledged no leader nor had they any local level organization. They had no sardar nor reyai.

The long time Muslim residents of Shaheenpur had little to say about their former Hindu neighbors except, "We always got along well

with the Hindus." They reported that there had been one Brahman homestead, one Kayastha homestead, one homestead of barbers, a homestead of washermen, one of potters and the rest were all weavers. The potter was reported to have been a very big businessman in town. The potter homestead and the Brahman homestead each had ten acres of land. The average land holding in Shaheenpur was 1.01 acres per household with an average of 5.4 people per household. About nineteen per cent of the households had two or more acres of land while seventeen per cent of the households were landless. The largest land owner was the older brother of the Union Council member with twelve acres. But compared to the 1.01 acre average for the entire village of Shaheenpur, the average land holding for the twenty-two households in the fourteen migrant homesteads was 3.15 acres per household. These newly arrived Muslims were relatively large and prosperous land owners in the village. They might have played a more important role in the social organization of the village if they had been better integrated into the village. They may do so in the future. At the time of this study they did not appear very strongly on the lists of important men. But the Hindus who had left five and six years before must have played important roles in Shaheenpur. Depending on the number of households per homestead and people per household, most of the former Hindu homesteads had enough land to free them from the fear of hunger and dependence on other men, criteria which allow a man to become influential in the village. I don't know what roles the influential Hindus played in the social organization of Shaheenpur.

VILLAGE IDENTIFICATION

The Union Council member played a village-wide role. He represented the village at the lowest tier of government and represented and explained the government to the people of the village. He was not, however, a decision-maker for the village as a whole. Internal village decision making was done informally by the members of households, homesteads, gusthis, reyais, and even friendship groups. Few village-wide activities occurred. A few religious and athletic events were scheduled which were open to the entire village, but these were identified with a particular neighborhood or group of people. Still, the people identified themselves all as members of a particular village. This was evidenced when they were outside the village or in concern about the reputation of the village. Shaheenpur boys defended other Shaheenpur boys in fights with boys from other villages when they were in town. A number of illustrations have been given in the chapter of the villagers wanting to keep disputes within the village. They thought that village affairs should be dealt with in the village. There was no suggestion of calling in the police to deal with the young men who stole the paddy, even when the influential older men of the village could not handle the situation. There was competition and internal conflict within the village, but as far as possible it stopped at the borders of the village. The following conversation between the Union Council member and another villager which took place in one of the shops concerned the problem of internal dissension versus village reputation.

Member Shaheb, I have received an invitation to a feast at my daughter's husband's village, but the invitation was not extended to the reyai or even to my brother, Yaseen. What are we going to do? This kind of thing is destroying the reyai system. (The Member replied) You should go to the feast or the name of our village will suffer. They will say that the people of Shaheenpur have hiṅsa, that is the reason we don't come to their feast. But first go to your brother and the other members of your reyai and tell them about the invitation, but that you won't go because it was not extended to the entire reyai. They will tell you that you ought to go anyway. Then there will be no hard feelings.

CHAPTER III

ISLAM AND THE VILLAGE

Bengal first came under the influence of Islam with the defeat of Lakhshaman Sen, ruler of Lakhnawti, by Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1201 A. D. (Rahim 1963:37). There was possibly some Arab settlement in the Chittagong coastal area prior to that. In the ninth or tenth century A. D. seafaring Arab traders were known to have been in that region. But after the Muslim conquest, Muslim teachers and preachers and Sufi saints followed the soldiers into Bengal to begin their missionary work (Rahim 1963:151-159).

In Shaheenpur, one informant told about Bakhtiyar Khalji when asked how Islam first came to Bengal. In his recitation, however, Bhakhtiyar Khalji himself was the converter, and the conversion was accomplished by the sword.

> Bhakhtiyar Khalji with seventeen men was the first to come to Bengal and preach Islam. At the time there were many Sen banso. "Accept the Islamic religion. If you don't accept Islam I shall make war." At his words, many people accepted Islam.

Perhaps the people of the rural areas saw their religion more as a religion of the sword as many non-Muslims do. Scholars of Bengali history, however, give overwhelming credit for conversion to the wandering preachers and Sufi mystics who came in the wake of the invaders. The rural people, who have experienced or have at least heard of communal disturbances in recent times, preferred to think in terms of force

against non-believers than of gentle preachers bringing a message of equality to an oppressed people at the lower reaches of a hierarchical system.

Another villager gave credit for the introduction of Islam into Bengal to a much more contemporary figure, but this was a man of religion rather than an invader or ruler. He was Maulana Karamat Ali. The stories this villager associated with Maulana Karamat Ali were of miracles he had performed. One such story involved a large gathering of people who wished to be cured of various diseases and had come to the Maulana with empty bottles to be filled with water which he had blessed. There were too many people, however, for the Maulana to see each personally. So he waved his handkerchief around his head, and with that all of the bottles were filled with water. The Maulana Karamat Ali of the village stories appeared to have been a fakir, that is, one who practiced miraculous cures. The informant, however, gave the additional information that Maulana Karamat Ali had died in Rangpur, a district in northern Bengal.

An important religious figure in nineteenth century Bengal was Maulana Karamat Ali. This may or may not have been the same person about whom the villager spoke. His life style was not that of a fakir. I assume, however, that this was the man about whom the villager had heard, but to whom were attached popular stories. The historical Karamat Ali was born in Jawnpur in the United Provinces in 1800 and came to Bengal in 1835. As a young man he was an adherent of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah (path of Mohammed), a religious movement founded in Delhi in the seventeen hundreds, which rejected the schools of Islamic law: Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki, and Hanbali, as final and

advocated a return to the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions. When Maulana Karamat Ali came to Bengal "he found the Muslims of Eastern India plunged so much in superstitious beliefs, customs, and ceremonies that he became apprehensive of Divine retribution" and decided to dedicate "his life to the propagation of the true doctrines of Islam amongst the Muslims of Bengal" (Khan 1965:lxxiv). He died in Rangpur, as did the man of whom the villager spoke, in 1873 (Khan 1965:liii).

Diverging from his earlier position as a follower of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah, Karamat Ali became the spokesman of what came to be known as the Ta'aiyuni movement in Bengal. His position then was that the four schools of religious law had exhausted the possible interpretations or paths of Islam. The Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions could not be understood outside one of these schools (Khan 1965:lxxiv-lxxvi). In effect, Maulana Karamat Ali reversed his position. After the death of the Prophet, situations arose which were not specifically described in the Qur'an. To decide what should be done in those situations the followers of the Prophet related what they remembered the Prophet doing in a similar situation. These reports of the Prophet's life became known as the Traditions (Hadith). But later as times changed and Islam had gained adherents in cultures far removed from the original Arabic culture, further interpretations for quite different situations were needed. These interpretations varied slightly and were codified in the four separate schools of Islamic law. Later in the history of Islam revitalization movements arose among Muslims in which the followers demanded that all interpretations be rejected and Muslims return to the purer Islam of the Prophet's days. The most famous of these movements was Wahhabism which arose in Arabia in the eighteenth century.

Followers of similar revitalization movements after that acquired the name Wahhabis, but because of certain political connotations associated with Wahhabism subsequent and similar movements often rejected the term (Lewis 1966:160). Maulana Karamat Ali had been a member of a Wahhabi-like movement, but then reversed his position.

Maulana Karamat Ali and the Ta'aiyuni movement, which stood for the finality of the religious schools of law, found themselves in opposition to an indigenous Wahhabi-like movement in Bengal, the Farā'idīs. The Fara'idi movement was begun by Haji Shari'at Allah of what is now Faridpur in eastern Bengal. The Fara'idis rejected the four schools of religious law and were dedicated to wiping out all "sinful innovations" (bid'a) not found in the Qur'an and the Traditions that had crept into the religious practice of the Muslim Bengalis. The Fara'idi movement became very popular with the poorer sections of rural Muslims. Shari'at Allah, and later his son Dudu Miya, advised the Muslim cultivators not to pay the illegal puja taxes imposed by their Hindu landlords for the performance of local Hindu religious celebrations. Many of the cultivators gladly obliged, and the Hindu landlords saw this as defiance of legally constituted authority. The Fara'idis were in periodic trouble with the British authorities.

The primary conflict between the Fara'idis and Maulana Karamat Ali was over whether or not the 'Id Jum'ah (Friday) prayers could be held in a country ruled by the British or, as the Fara'idis held, Dār al-Harb. The 'Id and Jum'ah prayers may not be held by a Muslim community in a country which is not ruled by Muslims, that is, does not have the requisite Muslim officials in charge. Such a country is Dar al-Harb. On the other hand, Maulana Karamat Ali contended that since

the British guaranteed religious freedom, and their religious practices would not be interfered with, 'Id and Jum'ah prayers could and should be held (Khan 1965:89-102).

Maulana Karamet Ali was a moderate influence between the followers of local customs and the Fara'idis who would abolish all activities not found in the Qur'an (Khan 1965:sc-sci). Muslim immigrants to Bengal from the west had brought some of the local customs with them. They celebrated Milad al-Nabi, or Milad Sharif, the birth of the Prophet Mohammed.[8] A milad could be celebrated at any time. "Its observation consists of three parts, viz., a) the narration of events immediately preceding the birth of the Prophet, b) the description of the occasion of his birth, called tawallud sharīf, and c) exposition of his teachings" (Khan 1965:lxxxiv). During the second part when the Prophet's birth was described, all of the participants stood up and sang the chorus loudly. It was believed that at this point in the service the soul of the Prophet was present. The Fara'idis condemned the whole service as a sinful innovation, and found the idea of a visitation by the soul of the Prophet especially abhorrent.

Another such custom brought from the west was the fātihah, or prayers to be said for the dead at periodic intervals after a death. The term fatihah derived from the recitation of the first chapter (sūrah) of the Qur'an, or surah al-fatihah, at the first stage of the ritual. Then some other portions of the Qur'an were read. The guests were then fed a small meal. The final stage was a "prayer to God for bestowing the rewards of the recitation and of the feast to the soul of the person or persons in whose remembrance the fatihah is held" (Khan 1965:lxxxv). Maulana Karamat Ali differentiated between sinful

innovations to be discarded and good innovations to be promoted. The milad and fatihah he labeled good innovations. They increased people's knowledge of the Prophet and of his teachings. There was also the tendency to approve innovations coming from the west, that is, those which had their origins among Arabic people. There was a certain snob appeal to that connected with the people who were the Prophet's people. As was mentioned when describing banso, those who could claim Arab or other Middle Eastern descent had increased prestige.

A third innovation was the 'urs, which was a fatihah at the death anniversary of a pir, a religious teacher and sometimes a saint. On this custom Karamat Ali agreed with the Fara'idis in condemning it. He believed that this activity placed too much importance on the individual, and often verged on the worship of the pir, a man. Islam forbade the raising up of any individual.

All three customs were practiced in and around Shaheenpur at the time of this study. The term fatihah was not used. The religious commemorations held the fourth, fourteenth, and fortieth days after a death were called jephat or Qur'an Sharif, but followed the form of the fatihah. The Milad al-Nabi, or Milad Sharif, or simply called milad, in addition to being commemorated on the twelfth of Rabi, the day set aside to commemorate the Prophet's birthday, was held on any occasion for thanksgiving: the completion of a new household building, the start of a new shop or business, a good harvest, passing a school exam, recovery from an illness, or, in town, the birthday of a family member. In the town, the workers in a machine shop would not start to operate a new lathe until they had held a milad for it. The reason was not stated, but apparently the workers were asking God not to let them be

injured by the machine. The machine shop, however, was a cooperative, and they may have considered the machine theirs and were thanking God for it.

There was no opportunity to observe an urs, but they were reported to be held at a number of the local shrines in and around Comilla town which were the tombs of religious teachers and fakirs. Disciples came and stayed at the shrine for two or three days. During that time feasts were served for the worshippers. Khan (1965:lxxxv) described the sacrifice of animals to feed the participants at the urs in nineteenth century Bengal. In Comilla the urs were marked by prayers and recitations from the Qur'an. The local sect of Sufis, or mystics, were called Maijhbandaris. The shrines dedicated to Maijhbandari pirs marked their urs with instrumental music, singing, and, at some shrines, dancing.

THE PRACTICE OF ISLAM

The basis of the Islamic religion are the so-called five pillars of Islam. They are: the confession of faith (kalimah, There is no God but God and Mohammed is his Prophet), the five daily prayers (nāmāj), fasting (rojā), charity (jākāt), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). Most of the men in the village could enumerate the last four. No one that I asked in the village knew the first, the kalimah. A number of people said that jihad (war on non-believers) was the fifth pillar. Even an educated man from West Pakistan agreed, when I asked, that jihad was the fifth pillar. This is not to say that the people could not recite the confession of faith: "la ilaha ill' Allah Mohammad i

Rasul Allah." They simply did not know that it was one of the pillars of Islam. In fact, the first half of the kalimah was often used as a chant on religious occasions. As far as the practice of these, I was not concerned to take statistics on such matters. Many people performed the five required prayers per day, some did not. Many people fasted during the month of fasting (Ramzan), some fasted on other days in addition, and some did not fast. The practice of giving jakat (charity) and performing the hajj (pilgrimage) were only required of these who had the economic resources to do so. No one living in Shaheenpur was a haji, or one who had performed the hajj. One of the homesteads, however, was called Haji Bari. The present head of the homestead, who reported himself to be one hundred four years old, said that it was his father who had performed the pilgrimage.

The people of Shaheenpur may not have thought of the confession of faith as a pillar of Islam because the remaining four pillars were actions, tasks to be performed. Though the confession of faith must be repeated and then believed, or kept in mind, it was not an action like the other four. Jihad (war on non-believers) was a more appropriate action to group conceptually with the other four. The emphasis in Islam tends to be on action. One point of difference between Maulana Karamat Ali and the Fara'idis was according to Khan (1965:93) faith versus practice. For Karamat Ali faith was enough without the practice of performing the prayers, fasting, giving charity and going on the pilgrimage. The Fara'idis denied the Islamic funeral prayer for a Muslim who had not performed the daily prayers and fasted. In their eyes, the confession of faith was not enough to make a man a Muslim. Without the practice, the man would be a kafir (non-believer). Maulana

Karamat Ali sanctioned the funeral prayer for an individual on the basis of confession of faith alone.

The proper performance of the daily prayers was extremely important. Von Grunebaum (1951:10) described the five daily prayers (namaj) which are composed of a number of rak'a. A rak'a has seven portions: 1) calling "God is great" standing with the hands at the side of the face, 2) the recitation of the first chapter of the Qur'an and other Qur'anic passages while standing with hands down at the sides, 3) a bow from the hips, 4) straightening up to a standing position, 5) sliding down to the knees and touching the forehead to the ground, 6) sitting back on one's haunches, and 7) again forward and touching the forehead to the ground. Subsequent rak'a begin with the second portion, and at the end of the kalimah is recited and a ritual salutation. For each of the prayers at daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and early evening a set number of rak'a are performed. A sixth prayer is appropriate later at night for those who are getting old and closer to death.

In a discussion with two men with madrasah (religious school) educations and the son of one of them, who was then attending a madrasah, I asked what one thinks about when performing one's prayers. The reaction was swift and fairly shocked, "We think of nothing, absolutely nothing. If we think of something while we are praying (namaj) it is a sin, and our prayers (namaj) will be no good. After the prayer (namaj), then we pray (du'ā'). When I pray (du'a') then I ask for a good harvest; that the insects will not destroy it. I ask that my family (paribar) and my kinsmen (atmiyo) will stay well." I asked if one also thanked God in the du'a'. They replied that when thanks

were due a more elaborate ritual, the milad described previously, was appropriate. They obviously considered that to "think of something" during namaj was to think of something irrelevant to the prayer. My command of the Bengali language was inadequate to the occasion. But as Von Grunebaum (1951:12) quotes al-Ghazzali, the Arab mystic, during prayer (namaj) one should strive toward the loss of natural powers, a purity of heart, and a state of perfect contemplation.

THE ISLAMIC CALENDAR AND COMMEMORATIONS

The Muslim year is composed of twelve lunar months with three hundred fifty-four days. The Muslim year moves through the seasons in about thirty-three years. The religious commemorations are reckoned by the Muslim calendar and, therefore, do not fall in any particular natural season. The Muslim months are:

Muharram
Safar
Rabi al-awwal (I)
Rabi as-saani (II)
Jamadi al-awwal (I)
Jamadi as-saani (II)
Rajab
Shaban
Ramzan
Shawwal
Ziqad
Zil Haj

Two other calendrical reckonings were in use in the area. Official business was conducted by the Western (Roman) calendar. There was also a Bengali calendar which was solar. The villagers generally knew the date by the Bengali calendar. They also knew the date by the Muslim (Hijri) calendar. But in local business it was the Bengali date which

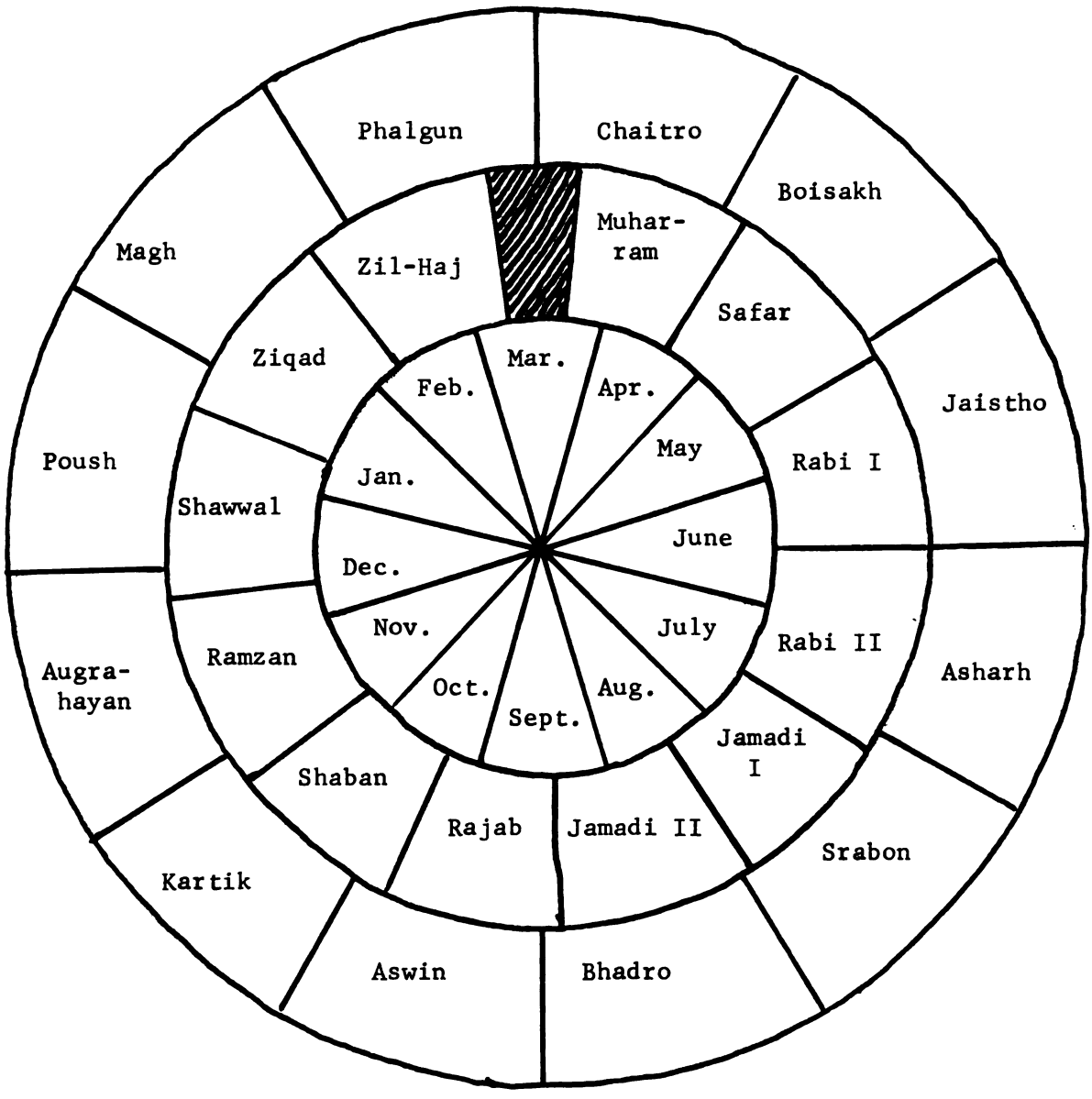
was cited. They occasionally asked me for the Ingriji (English) date. In general, a calendar or some other outside source was consulted for the date by the Western calendar. Figure 3 is a representation of how these three calendars integrate, using the year 1969, the year I was in the field. What is really shown is part of March through December 1969 and January through part of March 1970.

The Islamic new year was not celebrated in the village. An educated informant explained that celebration would be inappropriate as the first of Muharram is the beginning of a time of mourning. In his home, however, he said that the night before guests were invited to a feast. The Bengali new year (Boisakhī) arrived in mid-April and was celebrated by all with the holding of and attendance at fairs (melā). These fairs were large markets. The major impression was of a fish and toy market. At least half of the area was taken up by the sellers of very large fish which went for very large prices. The other half comprised the sellers of small, hand made toys and brightly painted clay dolls and figurines for only a few small coins. There were available also some sweets and candy and a few vegetables. It was as gala an affair as one could see as huge crowds of people celebrated the arrival of spring and the new year together. The lunar character of the Islamic calendar removed any aspect of seasonal celebration from their religious commemorations. But the Muslim Bengalis celebrated this one seasonal rite in common with Hindu Bengalis and Bengalis of whatever faith. Though winter, when it is cool and dry, might be considered the ideal season for foreigners to visit Bengal, the vegetation dries up and everything becomes covered with dust during that time. In the month of Boisakh the rains and storms from the northwest

Figure 3

A Comparison of Three Calendars: Bengali, Islamic (Hijri) and Roman

Outer ring: Bengali 1376
Next ring: Hijri 1389
Inner ring: Roman 1969



begin. It is with mixed joy and fear that the people face this month. These rains are needed to plant the first rice crop, aus. The storms may bring death and destruction, but the rain brings life. Boisakhi was the one secular holiday in which everyone participated. The national patriotic holidays were barely noticed in the village.

The reason the first part of the month of Muharram was a period of mourning was to commemorate the death of Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet. He and his followers were massacred on the tenth of Muharram (Ashura) at Karbala in Iraq. This event was of chief significance to the Shi'a, a large sect of Muslims. The people of eastern Bengal are almost all Sunni Muslims, as the largest sect in Islam are called. Shi'a are mostly found in Iran, but there are a few scattered throughout the Muslim world. In eastern Bengal, the Shi'a are located mostly in the towns; small pockets of Muslims who migrated from northern India. The Shi'a commemorate the first nine days of the month of Muharram with fasting and prayer. On the tenth, or Ashura, they fast and take out processions with replicas of the tomb of Hussein and march through the towns beating themselves until the blood flows and crying out. This is a solemn occasion, but an emotional one. Non-Shi'a may participate in the occasion in peace, but violence has been known to break out between Shi'a and Sunni or between Shi'a and Hindus. Later in the day groups of boys and young men go out and engage in mock battle with bamboo staves. This part is not so solemn; the boys are showing off their skill to the spectators. Any group can participate; in Comilla even a group of Christian boys went out. But this lāthi khelā is still in the martial spirit of Karbala and Ashura.

The year I did my field work no procession was held in Comilla town. The Martial Law Authorities did not allow the procession to be held for fear of violence. General Yahya Khan had taken over Pakistan only four days before. A fire of unknown origin had gutted a large area of the town market, and the feeling in town was tense. Consequently, I do not know how much the people of Shaheenpur would have participated, if at all. They were all Sunni Muslims. Upon inquiry a few men in the village said that they knew nothing of the battle at Karbala and the death of Hussein. One does not need to know, however, the exact significance of such an occasion to participate in it. A village woman said that she had fasted the day before Ashura, as Hussein's mother had fasted on that day. She said, "Many women fast in memory of her grief." Ashura was not, however, apparently of major religious significance to the people of Shaheenpur.

The next commemoration is Milad un-Nabi which takes place on the twelth of Rabi al-awwal, the third month in the Muslim calendar. This is the commemoration of the birth and death of the Prophet Mohammed on the date of his death, the origin of which was described previously. Milad were performed in the mosques. In Shaheenpur, two private homesteads also had milad performed. An English language newspaper, the Pakistan Observer, reported that discussions on the life and teachings of the Prophet were held in the public halls of most of the district headquarters towns. The participation of government officials in an official capacity on this and other religious occasions brought the legitimacy enjoyed by the Islamic religion to bear to increase the legitimacy of the government establishment in the eyes of the people.

On the twenty-seventh of Rajab, the seventh month in the Islamic year, Shab-i-Mi'raj, or Mi'raj un-Nabi, or Mi'raj Sharif, is commemorated. This is the night that the Prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven and unto the "presence" of God. Mi'raj means ascending. The ascension is described in the Traditions (Hadith). The ascension and return to earth are supposed to have taken only seconds. On and around the twenty-seventh of Rajab, articles appeared in the Pakistani newspapers describing the event and discussing various theological points such as whether this was an ascension of the body or of the soul. A few years earlier a director of the Islamic Academy in the provincial capital, Dacca, wrote an article questioning whether on this occasion Mohammed had seen God or not. The man lost his position. To suggest that any man, even Mohammed, had seen God was blasphemy. In any case, Mohammed was supposed to have communicated with God on this occasion and been reinforced in the truth of his mission on earth. It was on this occasion that God instructed Mohammed to have Muslims pray (namaj) five times a day.

On the night of Shab-i-Mi'raj men gathered in the mosque to pray for the first half of the night. Women prayed at home. The occasion of the first Shab-i-Mi'raj was described for me by one of the imams (prayer leader in a mosque) in Shaheenpur.

> Hajrat (honored) Mohammed Nabi (Prophet) was given an invitation to come up in the sky. Allah spoke 90,000 words to the Prophet (nabi). When the Prophet spoke with Allah there were seventy purdah curtains in front of him so that the Prophet could not see Allah. Allah spoke loudly with the Prophet. Allah gave the Prophet 30,000 Qur'ans. Every Muslim must read this Qur'an-Sharif. Then Allah spoke 60,000 words softly to the Prophet.

The imam did not state that he was describing Shab-i-Mi'raj. He made quite certain, however, that we understood that Mohammed did not see

God, using local idiom to impress us with how well hidden God was: seventy purdah curtains. Associating the acquisition of the Qur'an with the ascension was his own or local confusion. The tradition is that the first portions of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet during the ninth Islamic month, Ramzan, though the entire revelation took twenty-three years.

I spent Shab-i-Miraj in 1969 at a Maijhbandari (Sufi) shrine. At this shrine, most evenings were spent drumming, singing, and dancing. The activities on Shab-i-M'raj were little different from any other evening I was there, except that about eleven o'clock in the evening a meal of beef curry and rice was served to all the participants. The fakir who led the activities told me that the food was to commemorate Shab-i-Mi'raj. Some other people with whom I spoke had no idea of the name of the evening or its particular significance. They simply said, "It's a good night to pray." Proceeding along the road through the country on the way home worshippers could be seen in the lighted mosques.

Shab-i-Barat, or Lailatul Barat, occurs on the fifteenth of Shaban, the eighth Muslim month. The occasion of Shab-i-Barat was first described to me as the night on which one's fate was written for the coming year. People often phrased this by saying that if one were going to die in the coming year, on that night it would be so written. For fear of one's possible fate, they said, people spent the whole night, or as long as they could remain awake, praying. Consequently, I was surprised to see the joyous, if subdued, atmosphere which appeared to reign at my first observance of Shab-i-Barat. I went out to a shrine where many men and boys came to observe Shab-i-Barat. Two or three

hundred people were there, and stalls selling sweets and other food had been set up at the foot of the hill where the shrine was located. The shrine and adjoining mosque were decorated with flickering candles. On the three mile rickshaw ride back to town at about midnight we met groups of men and boys marching along carrying candles and chanting the first half of the kalimah, "la ilaha ill' Allah" (There is no God but God). The mosques along the road from which one could hear the chant of prayers were also decorated with candles and, in some cases, leafy gateways. A later description of Shab-i-Barat as a time when God bestows his blessings for the year was more in keeping with the apparent attitude of the celebrants.

My second observance of Shab-i-Barat was in Shaheenpur. Services were held in the mosques and in the small local religious school in the first part of the night. If some men prayed for the entire night, as reported that one should, they finished in their homesteads. At one mosque, food was served to the participants after the services. Especially the young men, however, went into the town to visit the shrines and town mosques and see the lights. On this night God was believed to descend closer to the earth with his angels. On any night but this, the country roads were relatively deserted. There was a fear of human thieves, but more of evil spirits which might attack and possess a person. These spirits will be described more fully in a later chapter. But on this night, the young men seemed to have no fear to be out on the roads. Perhaps with God and his angels so near they believed that the evil spirits would not dare attack or might in fact be powerless. Another factor, however, may have been that the young men found safety in numbers.

In town, in addition to the lights and busy mosques, one found the streets lined with crippled beggars. One should give charity on this night: money and sweets. In Dacca, other places of activity were the pastry shops. They remained open in the evening to sell sweetened bread, often in decorated shapes, made for the occasion. In larger cities, such as Dacca, the newspapers decried a riotous atmosphere shattered by the continual burst of firecrackers as unappropriate to the occasion. But if people appeared not to harbor any fear for their fate for the coming year, the joyous character of Shab-i-Barat may be derived partially from its calendrical placement. Shab-i-Barat occurs approximately fifteen days before the beginning of the month of Ramzan, the month of fasting, general abstinence and pious thought. Shab-i-Barat is the very subdued Carnivale before Ramzan/Lent.

Ramzan, the ninth Muslim month, is observed by the faithful Muslims, who are able, by ingesting nothing from sunup to sundown for the entire month. Much spitting goes on as people try not to swallow their own saliva. One must also abstain from sexual contact between sunup and sundown, bad language and actions, and sinful or lustful thoughts. Reading the entire Qur'an once or more during the month of Ramzan was considered a meritorious act. The fast was broken at sundown each day with a meal called iftar. And a few hours before dawn a crier went about calling people to wake them so that they might eat before the sun rose. If people did eat during the day in the month of Ramzan, they did so in private. One did not wish others to see one breaking the fast, but, also, it was bad to tempt others just because one was not observing the fast oneself. It was, however, difficult to hide the smell of cooking food coming from the house. In Shaheenpur,

as the month wore on one could occasionally get a whiff of cooking food. In town, the restaurants stayed open to customers, but the doors and windows were shrouded in curtains so as not to offend the pious and to hide the impious. If you must break the fast, do not flaunt it in the faces of those who are fasting.

During the month of Ramzan work slowed down. People rested for longer periods in the afternoon. Since Ramzan may occur in any season it is easier some years than others. In the winter the days, and therefore the length of the fasts, are shorter. Fasting during the long, hot days of summer while continuing to work in the fields is quite difficult. In the Comilla area, however, planting an irrigated winter crop of rice has become quite common. With three crops of rice, then, there is really no slack agricultural season, except perhaps between the planting and harvesting when there is slightly less work. But for the winter crop, using improved varieties of rice, more work is required supplying water, fertilizer, and insecticide, and weeding the crop. The year I was doing my field work, Ramzan came in November and December. I was warned by a number of people in town and in the village not to antagonize people with too many questions at this particular time. "After all, fasting is difficult for people." But even those who warned me claimed that the warning did not apply to them. They were not out of sorts or cranky. No one would admit that fasting was difficult for him personally. Fasting in the individual case was claimed to be no ordeal, but a joy and a privilege. It made one feel physically better, not worse. People were ready with all kinds of claims for the physical, moral, and social benefits which fasting bestowed.

The first day of Shawwal, the tenth month, the day after the new moon has been sighted, is 'Id ul-Fitr (Feast of Breaking), or in the local idiom, Roja 'Id (roja means to fast). On this day people received new clothes. The men and boys in their new clothing proceeded to the prayer grounds, or 'Id ghā. Women did not take part in any form of public worship. In Shaheenpur the prayer ground was on a raised portion of earth next to the largest tank in the village. Von Grunebaum (1951:63) described the service as being composed of two rak'a of prayer and a sermon, or khutba, led by an imam.

Roja 'Id was a day marked by visiting and giving sweets (sewai). In town only sweets were served. But in the village a meal of rice and beef curry followed the sweets. The day before Roja 'Id the women of the village rolled out the noodles by hand from sweetened dough for the sewai. The sewai contained the noodles in a milk and sugar or molasses sauce. In any meal which included sweets, the sweets were served first, and then the rest of the meal followed.

The next religious commemoration is 'Id ul-Azha, or Qurban (sacrifice) 'Id in the local idiom. On this day an animal is sacrificed. The sacrifice coincides with the sacrifice of an animal by the pilgrims on the Hajj at Mecca in Saudi Arabia on the tenth day of the month of Zil Haj, the last month in the Islamic calendar. The sacrifice was also said to commemorate the near sacrifice of his son Isaac by Abraham, a story found in both the Qur'an and the Bible. In Bengal those who could afford to sacrified a cow. Poorer people might sacrifice a goat. But many people made no sacrifice. They received a share of the meat from their wealthier kinsmen and neighbors.

The weeks before Qurban 'Id saw the countryside dotted with large cattle markets. People came to buy, but also to look. Many of the cattle were beyond the means of any of the local people. Wealthy men came out from the cities of Dacca and Chittagong to buy the huge bulls weighing hundreds of pounds. These creatures were never seen in the countryside prior to Qurban 'Id, but at that time they were led along the roadway, lumbering to the 'Id market. In the markets they were garlanded with flowers and held down with many ropes. Thousands of people swarmed in to stare with watering mouths. The larger the animal a man sacrificed, the greater was his prestige. He also acquired merit from God because he gave much of the meat away to the poor. This largesse, of course, also added to his prestige and following in this world. One could, to some extent, measure a man's political ambition by the size of the animal he sacrificed at Qurban 'Id. The Union Council chairman of a neighboring Union was known for sacrificing very large animals each year and distributing the meat generously. This year was no exception. He had bought one of the larger bulls in the market. The day before Qurban 'Id some of the poorer people told me with glee that they had heard that his bull had died the night before. These people claimed some distant kinship to the man and would have gotten some of the meat. But this loss did not dampen their pleasure at the misfortune of a locally powerful man. The rumor proved untrue, and the Union Council chairman sacrificed his bull on schedule.

The morning of Qurban 'Id began much as the morning of Roja 'Id had. The men and boys of the village met at the 'Id gha for congregational prayer. After they returned home, an imam came to sacrifice their animal. He called out in the name of Allah and slit the animal's

throat. To be proper food for a Muslim an animal must have its jugular vein severed by a man of religious learning, who has first given the proper prayer. Then all the blood of the animal must be removed. This is done by pumping the animal's legs. Not just for Qurban 'Id, but to be edible for a Muslim, all meat must be slaughtered in this way. For Qurban 'Id the men of the household then skinned and carved up the animal. Portions of the meat were put on banana leaves and given to boys to carry to recipient households. Members of one's reyai too poor to sacrifice their own animal received portions of the meat. The women, meanwhile, remained busy cooking pots of spiced meat for the household which performed the sacrifice. The 'Id day feast was finally ready relatively late in the afternoon. But there would usually be enough beef curry left to feed the household for two or three days after 'Id. For many rural Bengali Muslims the only beef they ate was on Qurban 'Id and at the feasts associated with marriages and other rites of passage.

The men of Shaheenpur participated in these religious occasions at various levels of organization. Men joined their mosque congregations for the observance of Shab-i-Mi'raj and Shab-i-Barat. For the two 'Ids the entire male population of the village came together for the congregational prayer. From there, they went back to their households for Qurban 'Id to prepare the sacrificed animal. At both 'Ids, however, there was visiting, reinforcing old ties among the reyai, others in the village, and with kinsmen in other villages. For Ramzan, a man fasted alone. Or as the more sophisticated Muslims of town would point out, a man also fasted with the whole Muslim world. Regardless of geographic or social position, fasting made all Muslims one in this

united endeavor. Even if unspoken, the villager also felt this unity through common ordeal.

LOCAL RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The landscape of Shaheenpur was dotted with three mosques (masjid): one in south neighborhood, one in west neighborhood, and one in east neighborhood. Central neighborhood boasted a maktab, that is, a school for teaching Arabic, the reading of the Qur'an, and the daily prayers to small girls and a few small boys. The emphasis was on teaching Arabic to the girls as they were considered less marriageable if unable to read from the Qur'an. Women were expected to pray as men did, but in the confines of their homes. They also sat for a short time each day reading from the Qur'an. Reading Arabic did not necessarily imply understanding. Indeed, men who had attended the madrasah, from which one acquired one of the religious titles indicating how many years one had studied,[9] often did not read with understanding. Deriving from the belief that the Qur'an contains the actual words of God as communicated through Mohammed his Prophet, the mere act of reading or reciting these words was believed to give merit.

The man who taught at the maktab was also the imam, or leader of the Friday (Jum'ah) prayers, at the west neighborhood mosque. He was not originally from Shaheenpur, but moved there about sixteen years previously from the southern part of the Comilla District. He had attended a madrasah in Comilla town and said that he came because the people of Shaheenpur needed someone to teach Arabic to their children. The maktab teacher estimated that ninety-five children studied at the

maktab at that time. In the census of the village thirty-seven girls (about twenty-five per cent of the girls from five to ten) and seven boys were reported to be attending the maktab. The latter number need not be considered any more accurate than the former as the question on the census concerned whether the children attended school. The term for secular school was iskul. The question was intended to mean secular school. Some parents may have interpreted the question the way it was meant and not reported some children attending the maktab. In any case, even forty-five students were never observed in the maktab at one time, the few times I chanced to observe it. The maktab met in the morning at about six o'clock. The teacher of the maktab said that the children came from all over the village to attend the religious school.

The administrative committee for the maktab reflected this village-wide concern. Members of the ten man committee were drawn from all five neighborhoods. The president of the committee was a young man of about thirty who was employed as a tahsildar (tax collector) in a nearby thānā (next administrative unit larger than a union). He was educated, as would be appropriate for such a position, having passed at the intermediate level, or two years of college. An unusual feature of this young man, in such a position of leadership, was that he was ghar jamai, living uxorilocally, in the home of his wife's father. The position of a ghar jamai was usually an unenviable one which left the individual open to ridicule. With this young man, however, his official position as a tahsildar may have relieved him of the ignominy of his marital position. The man who donated the land on which the maktab was built shared the position of secretary with the teacher of the maktab. He was also the man who ranked highest on the lists of

village men who were the most boro and khhamota. Included among the members of the committee were the former Union Council member and the older brother of the incumbent Union Council member, who was also the headmaster of a nearby secular school. The other members of the committee were all respected older men, men who were said to speak well at the bicar. The second ranked man on the list of important men was among them. Except for the president, whose position was rather surprising, one could not imagine a more prestigeful group than the maktab committee members. To my knowledge, however, they met only once while I was in the village, concerning the payment of the maktab teacher. The teacher reported that his yearly payment for teaching was thirty pounds of paddy rice from every homestead in the village.

The maktab represented the entire village. The 'Id prayers brought the male population of the whole village together. Another type of function was organized for the participation of the whole village. These were large "prayer meetings" called mahfil. A well known religious leader would be invited to conduct prayers, recite from the Qur'an, and deliver sermons over a loud speaker to an assembled crowd from about three o'clock in the afternoon until about three o'clock in the morning. These sermons exhorted people to proper behavior. An excerpt from such a sermon, which I heard from a proper distance for a woman of the other side of a large tank, decried the behavior of girls in town who went around unveiled and were allowed to meet with boys. This mahfil was held at the 'Id prayer ground in Shaheenpur. The whole village had been invited to attend, but though some of the young boys from the east neighborhood came, the men did not. The mahfil had been organized by some of the congregation of the west

neighborhood mosque. A few weeks later the east neighborhood organized and held a mahfil near their mosque. Later they complained that it was poorly attended.

Most of the religious activity was organized around the three mosques in the village rather than on a village-wide basis. In the census, the men were asked which mosque they attended. Of the two hundred twenty-five Muslim heads of household interviewed, only two stated that they did not attend any mosque. One of these two men stated his reason that he was a Maijhbandari, or Sufi mystic. Though many Sufis did attend mosques, Sufism was occasionally an excuse for unorthodox behavior. Two or three men on the census said that they might go to one or another mosque. All of the others appeared to have firm allegiances to one of the neighborhood mosques. Whether they attended regularly or not was not the question.

Two of the village mosques were constructed of puddled mud walls with metal roofs. The third was a burnt brick building with a metal roof. They consisted of one room with a mihrāb, or niche, in the wall facing west toward Mecca. In some areas of the Muslim world women attend the mosque, and a room or partition is set up for their accommodation. This was not true in eastern Bengal, where women did not attend. All three mosques were situated next to tanks where the worshippers could perform the required ablutions before entering the mosque.

The burnt brick mosque was in the south neighborhood. The mosque was reported to have been built by the present imam's grandfather, who was also the imam in his day. The father of the present imam had also served as imam, and he had given half an acre of land to the mosque

(waqf). The proceeds from that land became the remuneration of the imam of the mosque received for his services. The present imam and his predecessors belonged to the large Majumdar gusthi of south neighborhood. The imam reported that there was no mosque committee. When something was needed for the mosque, such as new straw prayer mats, the richer men were simply informed of the need, and they supplied the needed items. One of the imam's sons was studying at a madrasah. When asked if he planned to become the imam of south neighborhood mosque as his father and father's father had before him, he replied, "Only God knows."

The mosque in west neighborhood was reported to have been built about sixty-five years previously by a munshi. Munshi was a title appropriate for a man who had read to one of the lower levels at the madrasah. The imam of south neighborhood mosque was a munshi, and the imam of west neighborhood mosque was a kāri, a slightly higher level. The munshi who built the mosque in west neighborhood was apparently a man of great reputation. When I asked if there had ever been any pir in Shaheenpur this munshi's name was mentioned. A pir was a religious teacher; a man of such reputation for holiness and religious learning that many students came to learn from him, and people came to him for help. Often their tombs became places of pilgrimage, or, at least, people came to pray to the soul of the pir for help. The tomb of the munshi from west neighborhood never acquired that status.

The kari who was the imam of west neighborhood mosque was the same man who taught at the maktab. He reported that forty people attended west neighborhood mosque. About one hundred ten heads of household from west neighborhood, north neighborhood, and central neighborhood stated in the census that they attended west neighborhood mosque. I

did not have the opportunity to observe the attendance at that mosque. The choice of mosque of the people in west and north neighborhoods was unanimously the west neighborhood mosque. Central neighborhood was divided between the east mosque and the west mosque. The long time residents of central neighborhood chose the west neighborhood mosque, and the fourteen homesteads of those who had recently come from India chose the mosque in the east neighborhood. The unity of mosque choice by the immigrants was not reflected in other aspects of their lives. They divided on a number of other issues.

The west neighborhood mosque was administered by a ten man committee with representatives from west, north, and central neighborhoods. The other tahsildar, resident in the village, was on the committee, and was its only young member. The imam reported that he got from five to ten pounds of paddy from each homestead per year depending on the economic position of the homestead. In total he received about three hundred thirty pounds of paddy for being the imam of the mosque. In addition to collecting the imam's stipend, the committee met monthly to take care of repairs needed on the mosque.

The mosque in east neighborhood was built about thirty-five years previously. This was the mosque adjacent to Maulavi Bari (Figure 3). The head of the homestead had donated the land, and the people of the homestead had put up the mud walls. The head of the homestead described the history of the mosque and its administration. He said that a man from another village a few miles away had donated the metal roof for the mosque. He had no connection with Shaheenpur, but was simply a good man doing good work. I later learned that the roof donator's wife had come from east neighborhood in Shaheenpur. The head of Maulavi

Bari said that before east neighborhood had had a mosque the people had gone to west neighborhood mosque. East neighborhood mosque had no mosque committee. Rather, the whole congregation met after each of the two monsoon rice harvests and made their donations of paddy or money for the wage of the imam and the upkeep of the mosque. Contributions were also made the night of Shab-i-Barat.

The mosques were organized in various ways. The mosque of south neighborhood was attended only by the people of south neighborhood. As the Majumdar gusthi dominated the neighborhood, so they dominated the mosque. The pay of the imam, a member of the dominant gusthi, had been provided for, and no cooperation was necessary. In east neighborhood the entire congregation met to make the decisions for the mosque and their contributions for its continuance. The west neighborhood mosque with the largest and most diverse congregation from different parts of the village had the most complex organization with a committee for the administration of the mosque.

MEN OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING

Any Muslim who had the required knowledge could conduct prayers in the mosque. Usually a man had studied at least for a few years at a madrasah before he became an imam, or prayer leader, at a mosque. An imam, however, was not a part of any priestly group. He was respected for his learning. The imam was in no way a personal counselor or a go between with God. People might come to him to ask questions about religious law, or "what does our religion say" on some subject. The Qur'an was theoretically not open to interpretation. Of course,

interpretations had been made, but that was a task for great scholars, not humble villagers. The imams were interpreting the religion, however, by the simple act of explaining to the best of their abilities what their religion said to the villagers. For example, there was the elderly imam who thought that God would punish a man for disinheriting his grandsons after the death of their father. Islamic law states that the inheritance should go to the remaining sons and daughters of a man rather than his dead son's children.

The imam had a number of other functions to perform in the lives of the members of his congregation besides leading the Friday prayers. But, again, a man did not need to be an imam of a mosque to perform these services, only a man of religious learning. Usually, however, it was the local imam who was called when someone wanted a milad performed in his house. It was the local imam who was called for the celebration after a boy's circumcision, and to officiate at marriages and funerals. On one occasion in Shaheenpur when a visiting older kinsman died at a very poor homestead, the imam of west neighborhood mosque went off to town to buy the shroud and did not return. He had been called into another village where the young daughter of a very wealthy homestead had died. Their imam was away from the village, and they asked the Shaheenpur imam to officiate. He did so, and missed the funeral in Shaheenpur for which another man had to be brought in. He had sent the shroud back with the rickshaw puller. The people of the Shaheenpur neighborhood were very angry, but understood that the wealth of the homestead in the other village and the greater remuneration for the imam there made the difference. Greater religious learning was not necessarily expected to make a man any better than his fellows.

Religious learning did not cancel out greed.

The maulavi who gave the name to Maulavi Bari (Figure 3) was not an imam in Shaheenpur. He had been the imam for east neighborhood mosque adjacent to his homestead for awhile, but then he was offered more money by a mosque congregation in a nearby village. He became their imam, and another maulavi was brought in from another village to be the imam for the mosque in east neighborhood. The imam of east neighborhood mosque, as a maulavi, had attended the madrasah for more years and was more learned than either of the other two imams in Shaheenpur. He appeared to be greatly respected by all of the people of Shaheenpur. He was the head of a large and prosperous looking homestead in his own village. At the two great 'Id festivals he was the imam who led the services at the prayer ground to which most of the men in Shaheenpur came.

When there was a dispute in the village involving a religious question, it was usually the imam of east neighborhood mosque who was called to give expert religious opinion. The north neighborhood sardar claimant related an example, though he himself went to the west neighborhood mosque. This case involved a young man who had, in a fit of anger and in front of witnesses, pronounced the irretrievable words, "I divorce you," three times to his wife. For a man, this was all that was required to effect a divorce under Islamic law.

> I heard that Lal Miya, son of Chand Miya, had divorced his wife, Taju Bibi. When I went to see him he was no longer angry with his wife. I was upset because there were two small boys by this marriage, and besides Taju Bibi's people were bad people. I was afraid they would take revenge on Lal Miya and his people. I called the maulavi who is imam of east neighborhood mosque because he is more learned than any of the others. I asked the maulavi, "Can Lal Miya keep his wife?" The maulavi said, "Having divorced his wife he cannot keep her in the house. Our religion forbids

> it." Saying this, he left. Four or five days later I went to see the maulavi and this time asked, "How can Lal Miya keep his wife?" Then the maulavi said, "Lal Miya must give his wife in marriage to another man, and for three months and thirteen days she must stay in the house of the other man. After this man divorces her, Lal Miya can marry her again. This is what our religion says." So I got Lal Miya's wife married to another man, and after three months and thirteen days Lal Miya married her again.

The imam of east neighborhood mosque was respected in the whole union as well as Shaheenpur. The imams of the union were organized into a committee of which he was the secretary. There were approximately one hundred imams from all over the union on the committee. Membership on the committee was not based on educational qualifications, or how far one had read at the madrasah, but on the moral character of the imam. The incumbents on the committee decided on the qualifications of new members. The activities of the imam committee were limited to social control within the union. When an imam committee member heard of misbehavior on the part of a Muslim in his village, such as not performing prayers or not fasting during the month of Ramzan, a delegation of imams from the committee was sent to warn the offender. If he did not mend his ways he would be boycotted by all imams. No imam would come to his house for a wedding, a funeral, or a milad. The secretary of the imam's committee described the non-performance of of prayers and not fasting as the kinds of offenses with which the committee was concerned. But though many people in Shaheenpur performed these religious duties, some did not, and no delegation from the imam's committee came to Shaheenpur while I was there. Perhaps if someone had flaunted his non-compliance, however, the committee would have come. I suspect, however, that it took a more serious infraction, such as keeping a wife in the house whom one had divorced, to bring the

committee to one's door.

The other two imams in Shaheenpur were not accorded as much respect as the non-resident imam of east neighborhood mosque. Neither of them had the title, maulavi; they had not completed class ten at the madrasah. The munshi in south neighborhood gave the least amount of his time to his duties as an imam. In fact, in the census he gave his main occupation as a writer of amulets. He mentioned imam as only his secondary occupation. The amulets contained Qur'anic passages believed to be beneficial for certain illnesses. This occupation was respectable, it did not reduce his prestige in the eyes of the villagers, but it took him out of the village on visits to patients. He was not available all the time to keep an eye on his congregation and correct their lapses. What apparently did reduce the south neighborhood imam's prestige was that he was married to his third wife. His first wife had died, but he had divorced the second wife. When he reported this fact for the census the young men standing around started laughing and shouting in derision. An imam was expected to be human, but too human and his prestige suffered.

The imam of west neighborhood mosque took his duties as an imam and the upholder of right behavior very seriously. One day, as I was sitting in the shop in central neighborhood, some young men in front of the shop were engaging in some rather loud horseplay. It wasn't bothering any of the older men in the shop, nor did they appear to take any notice of it. Suddenly the imam, who lived nearby, charged out of his house in a rage, wielding a stick and thrashing the air, upbraiding the young men for their behavior. The young men only laughed and ran. The older men in the shop turned away to hide their smiles from the

imam. "We pay no attention to him when he is like that." The status of imam was not automatically accorded respect, except the respect for education. The man had to deserve respect to be accorded any more than the minimum. The two resident imams in Shaheenpur were not disdained, but neither were they village leaders.

OUTWARD APPEARANCES

In Islam the community of believers is very important. Though it is permissable to perform one's prayers in solitude, it is preferable to perform them in congregation. At least a few of the men did not join the rest of the village at the village prayer ground for the 'Id services. They went into town where the largest number would be praying together. They said that the larger the congregation in one place the more merit accrued to the individual worshipper, and so they went. It was significant that one of the men who went to town for 'Id was the sardar claimant from north neighborhood. He was apparently politically ambitious in the village, but did not see the need to attend the 'Id prayers with the other villagers. This was one indication that the act of coming together in congregation twice a year had little, if any, significance for the integration of the village. If there had been, this politically astute villager would have been there.

The duality of the outer and inner Muslim was best explained for me in a conversation with an educated urban woman who had taken a master's degree in religion at the university. She and her husband were both adherents of a Sufi sect, and we were talking about how a person would acquire a pir, or spiritual teacher. She explained that

she had never studied under a pir because it would be inappropriate, though not unheard of, for a woman to do so. She said that a pir would not take you if you had previously committed some grave sin, so, of course, you would not tell him. I was confused, how could one hope to get any benefit from his teachings if one were not perfectly honest with him? She replied that he could be of no help to you if you did tell him, only God could forgive. But the pir would not take you if he knew of your sin, and he would prefer not to know. His teachings might help you, and it would be better to become his student than not to, even if you had to lie. There is no concept of confession to anyone except God in Islam. No one can tell a person that he has been absolved from his sin. The Muslim stands alone before God with no intermediaries. In a religion which has been depicted as very practical, the Muslims are again practical. One can observe the performance of one's fellow Muslims, but he can never know what is in another man's heart. That is between him and his God. There is little prying into the heart.

But it is the business of a Muslim to see to the outward conformity of other Muslims. The imam's committee was concerned with the conformity of the inhabitants of the union. There were organizations beyond the local level, also. One such organization, called Tabliga, was described to me by some educated urban people. Members of Tabliga were pious men who concerned themselves with ignorance of the proper practice of Islam in the rural areas. Members of this missionary group sometimes gave up lucrative secular positions to devote more time to correcting wrong practices in the villages. As one might expect, Muslim villagers did not always appreciate being shown the error of

their ways and told they were poor Muslims. The respected imam of east neighborhood mosque said that he had heard of the Tabliga, but shrugged them off as just a group of town people. To many pious villagers it was the town people who were allowing Islam to be corrupted. It was in town that women went around freely, and unveiled and had lost their modesty. It was in town where men engaged in sharp business practices, gambled, and sometimes drank alcoholic beverages. It was they, the Muslims of the villages, who were preserving the true Islam.

CHAPTER IV

RITES OF PASSAGE

The major points in an individual's life, that in most societies are marked by some form of ritual activity, or rites of passage, are birth, puberty, marriage, and death. The term rites of passage was first used by Van Gennep (1960). He described how at these crisis points in an individual's life the culture prescribed rituals which marked 1) the chief participant's separation from the community in his old role, 2) a period of marginality or liminality, and 3) his re-joining with the community in a new role. Nevertheless, I shall not limit the description of the rites of passage in a Bengali Muslim village to the stages of separation, transition, and reincorporation, but shall concentrate on the meaning of the symbols and social relationships involved.

BIRTH

To the best of my knowledge, little ritual activity and nothing specifically Islamic attended the birth of a child in Shaheenpur. There were only a few special activities, and these were intended to promote the health and well-being of the mother and child. The child's umbilical cord was saved; it might later be used in preparations for

the curing of illnesses to which infants were prey, such as fevers and digestional upsets. The mother and child were closed in their house with a smoldering fire of rice chaff; this was believed to be good for the health of the child. The mortality rate of newborn infants was quite high, and the women did what they could without medical assistance or knowledge to save the newborn.

There is, however, a naming ceremony prescribed in the books of Islam for the seventh day after birth (Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam 1953). This rite was observed by some of the people in the town, but rarely on the seventh day. The one naming ceremony (ākikā) that I observed was held in town by a Fourth Class (lowest level) government employee in honor of his two month old son. The man was very poor, and the ceremony was modest; but he was an urban dweller and more sophisticated than many villagers. The occasion began with a meal of both mutton and fish curries for seven guests and an imam. The house consisted of a main room and a kitchen. The wife and a kinswoman stayed in the kitchen; other children of the family brought the food to the main room, where the father served. After the meal, a milad was performed by the imam. Then, just before the final prayer, the father of the infant called out to the kitchen to ask his wife what name she wanted to give their son. She answered, "Mohammed Ishmael." The father consulted the imam, the name was discussed, and the imam gave his approval of Mohammed Ishmael as a proper Islamic name. After the final prayer small patties of hardened molasses (gur) were served to the participants. People of the town said that these patties were the appropriate thing to serve at a milad. I rarely saw this

particular type of sweet in the village. In the village, the imam of south neighborhood had never heard of the naming ceremony, akika; but his son, who was attending a madrasah in Dacca, described it for the two of us. The young man attributed the lack of its performance in the village to the poverty of the villagers. As an anthropologist, I would suppose that the natural act of birth was not a culturally significant transition for the rural Muslim Bengalis.

ISLAM AND THE RITES OF PASSAGE

The imam had a part to play in all of the rites of passage ceremonies in Shaheenpur. Yet, with the exception of the funeral ceremony, his role was relatively small. In each of these ceremonies there were prayers and recitations from the Qur'an. But many of the other activities that took place cannot be found in any Islamic literature; they were simply customary activities associated with these events by the local people. The interpretation of these activities that will be made here is that of the observer; the people would give no interpretation. They ascribed all of these activities to custom, with no meanings attached. What gives these rituals meaning is the social setting in which they take place. Aspects of particular social roles are emphasized and at times even satirized. Certain ritual items and activities take on meaning for the observer from values that have been expressed and conflicts that have been observed.

A few of the elements used in the ceremonies reminded one of Hindu rituals. Up until a few years before, the people of Shaheenpur had their Hindu neighbors whom they could observe. Moreover, it is

probable that the majority of the ancestors of the people with whom I worked were converted from some variety of what we now call Hinduism, or were, like contemporary villagers, descendants of converts to Islam and, in fact, possessors of a syncretic religion similar to that described by Geertz (1960) in Java or as exists among the Hindu Vaisnavas of West Bengal. But of course the practice of any of the "world religions" in a given area is partially syncretic as the religion takes on local colorings and customs.

There was a conscious effort on the part of the imams and some concerned citizens of Shaheenpur to purge their community of things they considered unIslamic. Such things were only occasionally criticized as specifically Hindu; rather, they acquired the more general opprobrium of being unIslamic. In Shaheenpur, music, which in many places was played on a phonograph at full volume over a loud-speaker, was banned at the celebration of weddings by order of the imams. The imams stated that such music was unIslamic, though they added that it was also a frivolous expense that people could ill afford. A number of the villagers commented that, although they enjoyed the music, they were not sorry it was banned. It is difficult enough to accumulate sufficient money to marry a child without the added expense of renting the equipment for the music. Amplified recorded music was commonly played at the marriages in West Bengal, but neither the content of the music nor the practice of playing it was specifically Hindu. In what were thought of as "traditional" marriage ceremonies of the Hindus, Muslim musicians played the sānāi, an oboe-like instrument, near the doorway through which the guests entered.

MARRIAGE

Marriage was the most elaborated rite of passage in rural Muslim Bengali society. Events connected with the marriage usually went on for a week. Marriage marked the entrance of an individual into most of the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood. With marriage a young man might even begin thinking of setting up his own economically separate household. And, for the patrilineal kin group, marriage usually meant establishing a new alliance or reinforcing an old one with another such kin group. As described before, these alliances were important for economic security and local level political organization.

For the arrangement of a marriage, the representatives of the groom's family made a number of preliminary contacts with the father or other male kinsmen of a prospective bride. If the marriage appeared satisfactory to both parties, then the father of the young man and a few of his male kinsmen paid a formal visit to the home of the prospective bride. The business of this pān-phul, as it was called, was to set the date of the wedding, decide on the gifts to be given the bride and groom, and set the amount of money (mahr) to be pledged to the bride at the time of the official registration of the marriage, in case of divorce later on. As an indication of their sincerity at this first formal meeting with the girl's kinsmen, the boy's kinsmen bring gifts. These gifts should include a sari, a blouse, a petticoat, and a gold nose ornament for the girl, plus sweets, milk, betel nut and betel leaf. After the guests have been fed and agreement reached on the business at hand, the representatives of the groom were given pan

(prepared betel leaf with betel nut) and phul (a flower); it was from this presentation that the occasion derived its name. The pan and phul were taken back to the home of the groom where, the next day, his mother added some unhusked rice--the primary food grain of the area--and some dūrbā, a variety of grass used as an element of Hindu sacrifice since Vedic times. All of these items she threw in the tank (man-made pond). Almost every homestead had such a tank which supplied water for drinking, cooking, washing, and often irrigation.

The night before the wedding the bride and the groom had their hands dyed with henna in their respective households. Their young kinsmen and neighbors often joined them in having their hands dyed to participate in the festive mood. Then the bodies of the bride and the groom were rubbed with a mixture of henna, tumeric, and mustard oil which they would wear until they were bathed and dressed in their wedding clothes. The use of the mixture was said to be for cosmetic effect, to give the body a good skin tone. I know of no other use for henna except as a cosmetic, but tumeric was also a very common spice and used in the cooking of almost all meat and vegetable dishes. Mustard oil was commonly used as a lubricant for the hair and body, but was also the most favored cooking medium. Also, on the day before the wedding, the groom was given a silver chain to wear around his neck. I was told that formerly a silver rupee was tied to his wrist in a handkerchief, but there were no longer any silver rupees available. The chain was a symbol rather than an ornament. As it was silver, therefore, money, it symbolized the groom's future prosperity and his family's present wealth. Only gold was worthy to be given as an ornament at a wedding. Of course, the amount of gold given

demonstrated the wealth of the groom's family, but even the poorest would give at least gold earrings to the bride.

The next day the wedding preparations began in earnest. The barber was called to the groom's house in the afternoon to shave the young man and cut his hair. The young man squatted on a small stool for this operation, while the women of the household held a sari over his head as a canopy and sang marriage songs. One such song told of how the bride could have anything she wanted at her father's house, but would suffer at her husband's house. (When I later questioned men about these songs, they were very disdainful and claimed to know nothing about such women's songs and their content.) This was generally a time of gaiety for the assembled women and children. Some of the smaller girls might dance. Dancing was considered a lewd and lascivious act for sexually mature women, and they would not even dance when only other women were present. The women and children teased the groom, but here in his own home he answered back in kind. I was puzzled about why the canopy was held over the groom's head. Here we may find the answer in Van Gennep (1960:185-186).

> Carrying and being carried is one of the practices which is found more or less universally in the various ceremonies through which a person passes in the course of a lifetime . . . . It is intended to show that at the moment in question the individual does not belong either to the sacred or to the profane world; or, if he does belong to one of the two, it is desired that he be properly reincorporated into the other, he is therefore isolated and maintained in an intermediate position, held between heaven and earth.

As the stool separated the young man from the earth, so the canopy separated him from heaven. But why did the women hold the canopy? Was it they who held him in a state of liminality? At this juncture in his

life he broke farther from their control, so for a moment they held him entirely in their power. Though he would bring the bride back to his father's house to live, he would return as a householder, a husband, in a higher status; no longer a boy.

The other man involved in this ritual was not safe from the women either. As soon as the barber finished his work, the women grabbed him and rubbed mustard oil on his face and in his eyes. Mustard oil in the eyes stings painfully. For his trouble, the barber received a prestation of mustard oil (here an ambivalent symbol, as it is the instrument of his suffering but also a tool of his trade, the lubricant he puts on faces before shaving them), a few pounds of uncooked rice, durba grass, some coin money, betel nut, and betel leaf. The women of the household, except for small daughters, were almost all in-marrying affines. At the wedding they remembered their own marriages, when they were taken, frightened, from the permissiveness of the father's household to the continuing and unappreciated labor of their husband's household. For them the wedding of a son of the household was a time of ambivalence; the groom was one's own son who was growing up and taking on the responsibilities of a wife, but he was also a man, one of those who must be obeyed and who was often a source of abuse. A wedding was the one time the women could take ritual license to express these conflicting emotions.

After the haircut and shave, the groom was carried by a kinsman to the place where he was to be bathed. (Again we find the element Van Gennep observed of the groom being held between heaven and earth.) From that time on, for the rest of the week, the groom's feet should not touch the ground unless shod. He was placed on another small stool,

and his mother held a corner of the end of her sari over his head. A number of his kinswomen held onto the cloth, too. Then the cylindrical stone (sil) used for grinding spices and other edible items was held vertically over the cloth. Paddy, curba grass, tumeric, betel nut, and betel leaf were placed on the cloth under the stone, and the mother simulated the grinding of the ingredients on her son's head. Mustard oil was then poured over the stone and onto the sari cloth, and the whole was passed three times down the front of the young man. The grinding stone, which made a fine phallic symbol, was used to transform "natural" items into "cultural" foodstuffs as marriage transformed "natural" sexual intercourse into "cultural" wedlock.

As the first bath water was poured over the young man, the assembled women splashed it around at one another and at any by-standers. A water and mud fight among the women often accompanied such a bath. Here the women's aggression was directed at one another, but usually the younger first attacked the older, daughters-in-law against mothers-in-law. The groom's own mother did not participate in bathing her son. This was left to two or three kinswomen. The mother was in charge of the pre-bath ritual, but then she relinquished him to other hands as later she gave over the major responsibility for taking care of his needs to his bride.

After his bath the groom was carried back into the house and dressed in his wedding clothes. A meal was then served before the wedding party left for the bride's house. The groom ate together with close kinsmen and friends of his own age. The groom usually shared his plate with friends of his own age group; but at one such meal I observed, his mother's father and his own younger brother shared the

groom's plate with him. At first I was confused by the old man's presence, but then I remembered that these two generations were equivalent. Very affectionate behavior was appropriate between them, unlike between father and son where relations were formal and distant. At this meal the father of the groom fed the guests. The head of the household always served male guests, but serving his own son indicated the boy's elevated status.

The final course for the meal, after sweets, then pullao (a fancy rice preparation) and kormā (a rather sweet meat dish), followed by plain rice and curry (jhal), was milk and plain rice. At the bachelor dinner I observed, the groom's mother's father took a handful of rice from this last course, squeezed out the milk and laid the rice aside on a cloth. The next day the mother of the groom threw this rice in the tank, as she had done previously with the pan, the flower, the paddy, and the durba grass after the pan-phul.

It was generally late in the evening by the time the groom's party started on its way to the bride's house. From the moment the groom left his own house he was supposed to cover his mouth with a handkerchief, keep his eyes downcast, and not speak except in whispered asides. This was a show of modesty he was supposed to maintain throughout the period of the wedding activities. As they proceeded along the road they were usually stopped one or more times at a table which appeared to be set up for a meal. The progress of the party was obstructed, and the groom was lifted down from his rickshaw or other conveyance and seated at the table. At the table he was given water to wash his hand, a glass of sherbet (sweetened milk or water usually flavored with mashed fruit) to drink, and a pan to chew, then more

water to wash his hand when he was finished.

In order to proceed on the journey, his false hosts, who had taken advantage of his weak, transitional state, had to be paid for this repast the large sum of Rs. 5 or Rs. 10. The table was set up and the groom stopped in the spirit of fun; but as with most practical jokes, the recipient of the attention did not always see the humor. It is not very amusing to part with Rs. 5 when one has spent all one could borrow on the wedding requirements. I was with one groom's party that was stopped at a table within his own village. The father of the groom was beside himself, shouting in anger that the people of one's own village were not supposed to do this, and he would give no money. Members of his own party finally convinced him to come up with Rs. 2 for this pseudo feast.

At the entrance to the bride's house such a table was always set up under an arch of banana plants. This exchange of refreshments for money was expected and necessary for entrance into the homestead. Therefore, the money came forth more readily from the groom's father. If the homestead had a special building for accommodating male guests, the groom's party was seated there. If not, one building in the household complex was given over to them. The inside walls of the building were hung with draperies, nowadays normally rented for the occasion. The floor was covered with straw mats over which cloth was spread; and pillows, on which the guests might lounge, were scattered around. In a more elaborate set-up, the ceiling might even be draped with cloth. The creation of an Arab nomad's tent in Bengal was perfect. And, at least for the educated, this was a conscious image. When the guests were all seated, water was supplied for them to wash their

hand, and sherbet was served.

After the guests had been properly greeted in this manner, the groom's party laid out the wedding paraphernalia they had brought for the scrutiny of the bride's kinsmen. Though all of these things had been agreed upon at the pan-phul, and in some cases representatives of the bride might even have accompanied the kinsmen of the groom to buy the items; I have yet to see wholehearted approval of the gifts by the bride's people. For the modestly situated village household, the groom's party should have brought: a wedding sari to be worn when the bride is on display after the wedding ceremony; a blouse and petticoat; two less good, usually cotton, saris; a bed coverlet and straw sleeping mat; plastic bracelets; a hair tassel; plastic shoes; a black cord to be tied around the waist; gold ornaments; soap, hair oil, talcum powder, a comb, and a mirror; sweets, betel nut and betel leaf. The quality of these items was a matter determined at the pan-phul; the last three items should be in sufficient quantity to serve all of the guests. The most common additional items were clothing for the bride's mother and siblings.

The bride was supplied by her new husband's family with all the things she would need to start life in her new home. She needed to take nothing from her father's house with her. Later, however, when she made visits to her father's house, he would, whenever possible, give her a new sari and other gifts when she left to return to her husband. The groom received gifts from the girl's family after the wedding. An educated boy might receive a bicycle, a transistor radio, or a wristwatch. To obtain a really promising husband for his daughter, a father might even give some land or offer to finance the boy's

education. But most commonly the groom received an outfit of clothes and perhaps a gold ring.

After the gifts to the bride had been evaluated, and if nothing was seriously amiss, the imam proceeded with the ceremony (nikah). He went into the house where the bride was seated and veiled, surrounded by her kinsmen. He asked her three times if she agreed to the marriage. With much prodding by her kinsmen, she would give her assent each time by saying, "Bismillah" (in Arabic, "with God's name"). According to Islamic law, two witnesses were required for the marriage. And according to Comilla custom, one of the witnesses had a pan (the prepared betel nut and betel leaf) provided by the groom. The witnesses and the pan went with the imam into the presence of the girl. After her consent had been given by the girl, the party went out to ask the boy for his consent in the same manner. The imam then led a prayer in the guest house, thus completing the Islamic requirements for the marriage. The imam consumed the "wedding pan," as it was called. He received a few pounds of uncooked rice, some durba grass, and a monetary payment for his services and then joined the wedding feast that was served at this time by the male members of the bride's family to the groom's party.

The Islamic wedding is not a religious ceremony except as it conforms to religious law. It is rather a contract between two parties and between two families. For this reason, Muslims of the subcontinent usually married their children at a later age than the Hindus. The girl should theoretically be of an age when she could reasonably consent to the marriage. The age of consent in the village might be as young as ten years old, but it was usually between twelve and sixteen.

The girl had a representative, usually her father if he was living, whose responsibility it was to see that she did marry and to take care of the marriage arrangements, but he should have her consent. Her reluctance to give her assent immediately when the imam asked her was attributed to shyness.

As soon as the bride's kinswomen could get away from their cooking duties, the bride's bath began. Her bath followed basically the pattern of the groom's except that the barber had no part in it, and, in addition to her kinswomen, female friends and neighbors participated. Another difference was that the mood of the participants was subdued compared to the mood of the groom's bath. The bride was not only moving from one role to another, she was moving out of this household to another. After her bath she was arrayed in the finery brought by the groom's party and seated in her father's dwelling, with her sari covering her head and face.

The groom was then led in and seated next to her on the coverlet brought for the occasion. The mirror was placed on the ground in front of the bride and groom to enable them to see one another for the first time. One of the bride's young, unmarried female kin was assigned the task of helping the bride and groom feed one another. She put some sugar on the bride's little finger and led it to the groom's mouth. This was done three times and repeated with the groom's finger to the bride's mouth. The girl then similarly assisted the couple in feeding each other a pan. This was a time of much hilarity among the assembled women and children at the groom's expense. "Did he bite your finger?" the bride might be asked. But unlike in his own home, the groom did not answer back. He kept his head bowed in embarrassed silence. For

these women the groom was no son but only a young man whom they tried to make as uncomfortable as possible. Finally, a new paddy winnowing tray (kulā) was placed in front of the couple. Some paddy and durba grass (dhan-durba) was placed in the hand of the groom; he dropped it onto the tray. The bride did the same. The dhan-durba was later thrown in the tank, but the tray was kept by the couple. Beautifully decorated wedding kula might be seen in some homes as wall decorations. The groom paid a sum of money to the girl who had assisted them in the ceremony.

There was immediately a great commotion, as the bride embraced all of her kinsmen and bid them goodbye between sobs. She would return to her home in a few days as a part of the ceremony. and in any case did not go alone to her new husband's home this first time. One or two of her kinsmen accompanied her and the groom's party to the groom's house. But leave taking, especially among women, was usually a time of emotional display. The wedding festivities went on for approximately a week. The bride and groom were not expected to take up household or other duties for that week. When she was at her husband's house during the week the bride was on display for neighborhood women and closely related men to come and see. They came out of curiosity and to pay their respects to the family; a monetary gift to the bride was expected for the privilege of seeing her. The day after the ceremony at the bride's father's house another feast was held at the groom's father's house. The bride and groom returned to the bride's father's house one more time for one more feast. Their permanent residence was usually at the groom's father's house, if not in his household at least in his homestead. To mark the end of the wedding period the bride cooked a meal

for her husband's household. After she had cooked in her husband's house, she was no longer a "new bride" but an "old bride." Then she took up her household duties. The period of wedding visiting and feasting might vary according to the distance between the two houses and the economic position of the participants.

CIRCUMCISION

From the point of view of economic investment, numbers of people involved, and extent of ritual activity, next in importance in Muslim Bengali society after the wedding would be the funeral. Nevertheless, the circumcision of boys will be considered next, because the ritual activity bore closer resemblance to the wedding than did the funeral. Circumcision was not mentioned in the Qur'an. It was the practice, however, of Arabs in the time of Mohammed and became incorporated in the religion. Some schools of Islamic law consider circumcision for boys to be required, but for other schools it is merely commendable (Levy 1957:251-252). The people of Shaheenpur considered that circumcision was required for a Muslim male. Some males, however, were not circumcized because of the poverty or laxity of their families. Generally boys were circumcized somewhere between the ages of four through fourteen. A family with a number of sons, as far as possible, had them all circumcized at the same time to save expense. This was one reason one found the younger boys being circumcized; his older brother was ready. A circumcision for only one individual usually involved an older boy. Though circumcision might be considered a puberty rite, in Shaheenpur economic considerations appeared to outweigh

the fact of whether a boy was physically mature or not.[10] The actual circumcision involved little but the operation. Then one week hence, after the wound theoretically had healed, a feast was held in honor of the boy or boys, and they were given gifts of clothes and money. The whole process was known as a musalmānī (literally, "of a Muslim").

The position of the circumcisor (hājjam) was inherited, and each circumcisor had a delimited geographical territory in which he worked. After the circumcision operation he was paid in uncooked rice. At an operation I observed, the twelve year old boy insisted that, in addition to the rice, five pieces of turmeric, five pieces of durba grass, and five paisa (the smallest denomination of Pakistani money) also be given. I asked the significance of the number five, but no one knew. This was not even custom (niyom), but some people did it, it was their wish (iccha). The circumcisor said that some people did not give all these things; others added betel nut and betel leaf to the list. In addition to this payment after the operation, the circumcisor received a monetary fee when he returned in one week to see that the wound had healed properly and to participate in the feast. After the operation, the severed foreskin was tied on a string and hung from the rafters of the house over the cooking fire. As the foreskin dried, so dried the wound. All of the blood from the operation was caught on a piece of cloth, wrapped in a piece of banana leaf, and thrown in the tank.

One week later on the day of the feast, the circumcized boy was given a bath similar to that given the groom. The boy's hands were dyed with henna, and the barber was summoned to give him a haircut. The women of the household held a sari as a canopy over the boy's head

during the haircut, singing songs appropriate for circumcisions. On the canopy were placed turmeric and five paisa. The barber received some uncooked rice and durba grass (dhan-durba) for his services. Then, as with the groom, dhan-durba, tumeric, betel nut, and betel leaf were placed on the end of the mother's sari, as if being ground on the boy's head with the grinding stone; mustard oil added, and all drawn down in front of the boy three times; water poured over the whole thing; and the bathing with women other than the mother doing the washing. After the bath the boy was dressed in some of the new clothes he received as gifts that day. Much of what has been said about the groom's bath held true for the bath of the circumcised boy, except that the women tended to be more subdued. Though the ritual might not coincide with actual physical maturity, this was approximately the time when women lost much of their control over their sons. The boys started to take more part in the man's world of their fathers. At about the age of ten or twelve boys were given agricultural duties more complicated than merely keeping grazing animals out of the rice fields, as the younger children did.

DEATH

There was, of course, a much different mood at a funeral than at a wedding or circumcision, which were joyous events. Consequently, there are few parallels to be drawn between the rituals of marriage and circumcision and that of a funeral. My curiosity was aroused by the repeated use of dhan-durba, betel nut and betal leaf, tumeric, henna, and mustard oil at the first two rites. These elements were

completely lacking at a funeral. Nevertheless, the two elements, Islamic recitation by a religious leader and the feeding of guests, were present at all three. And a third element that was constant was the bath.

For the death of a male, the imam directed the washing of the corpse with the assistance of the kinsmen of the deceased. At the death of a female, a woman called a dhowyānī betī was summoned to wash the corpse. She was usually a widow, as were midwives, and this was her regular occupation. The kinswomen of the deceased assisted her. I was able to observe the funeral of one woman while I was in the field. A kind of raft was made by peeling layers from a banana plant. The body was laid on this in front of the house in which the woman had died, with bamboo doors set up as a screen to cut off the general view. The dhowyani beti was allotted a portion of the new white cloth bought for the shroud. This she tore into a number of small squares. The first wash water was boiled with two kinds of leaves (nim and borui) and a piece of thatch from each of the four corners of the house. The hair of the corpse was washed thoroughly with soap and water and was parted into three sections.[11] Each portion of the body received an application of soap and water two or more times. This was no mere ceremonious splashing on of water. After the final washing of each portion, the dhowyani beti took a clean square of white cloth and rubbed it vigorously on the skin of the corpse. Then she showed the cloth to the assembled women so they could see that there was no dirt remaining. The women explained to me that this was the deceased's final bath before she entered heaven, and she must be clean for that. On the other hand, I had been told that one should strive to be clean at

all times because one never knew when he might die. And if a person died dirty, he would meet God in that condition. I cannot rationalize these two statements except to say that there was an emphasis on cleanliness in the culture. The shroud in which the corpse was wrapped was also clean, as it had to be newly bought cloth. For her work the dhowyani beti received a monetary payment and the clothing the dead woman was wearing.

One might be tempted to look for the origins of the emphasis on bathing in the Hindu traditions. The use of water and bathing are important in Hindu rituals. But bathing also figures strongly in Islamic tradition. The ablution before each of the five daily prayers is almost as important as the prayers themselves. A deletion in the ablution cancels out the effect of the prayer. The funeral is not mentioned in the Qur'an, but the Hadith, books of customary religious law, go into detail on bathing the corpse (Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam 1953:89-90). On marriage, the religious books are mainly concerned with the contractual duties of the two parties. But Granqvist (1931) mentions the bath as a part of the marriage ceremony for Palestinian Muslims. Certainly the form of the bath would be different in riverine Bengal from that performed in the desert areas of the Middle East. One might say that the former Hindu neighbors of the Muslims in Shaheenpur reinforced the emphasis on the bath and influenced its form. Marriage, circumcision, and funerals are all rites of passage, at the completion of which one acquires a new status. Therefore, before one can embark in this new role a very special bath is required.

The cosmetics of the wedding and the circumcision were the red of henna and the yellow of tumeric, but at the funeral it was the black of kohl (surmā). The eyes of the corpse were ringed with kohl, and a line was drawn down the middle of the forehead. Camphor (karpūr) was sprinkled in the folds of the shroud. Just before the departure for the burial ground, rose water was sprinkled on the corpse and on the assembled mourners. The corpse was placed on a form of wooden cot enclosed on three sides by a railing. The women stayed behind in the homestead while the men carried the cot with the corpse on their shoulders toward the burial ground.

It was somewhere along on this last trip that the men put the cot down, lined up behind it facing west, and the janaz namaj, or funeral prayers, were said. Usually this was done in front of a mosque. The male mourners then proceeded to the burial site, where the body was placed in a grave with its head to the north and its face turned toward Mecca in the west. Pieces of bamboo were placed across the body; upon these, straw mats were spread before the grave was filled in with earth. I observed a woman's funeral and was told that though a man's grave need only be chest deep, for a woman it should come to the shoulders, a protection for her. Another example of the protection of women, even in death, was an attempt to keep her shrouded corpse from the eyes of strange men on the way to the burying ground. On the fourth, fourteenth, and fortieth days after a death prayers were held for the soul of the departed as described in the previous chapter.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A theme which ran through the wedding activities was that of throwing certain items in the tank. In two instances this seemed to symbolize the uniting of two families or two individuals from these families. The pan-phul came from the bride's father's house, the groom's mother added the dhan-durba (paddy and grass); then she threw all the ingredients in the tank. Also, there was the dhan-durba from the bride's hand and dhan-durba from the groom's hand dropped on the winnowing tray and thrown in the tank after the first meeting of the bride and groom. The third instance concerned only the groom's family. Food from the common plate at the bachelor dinner was put aside to be thrown in the tank. This last symbolized the unity, eating together, of the groom's kin group or at least those who ate from the same plate with him.

Does throwing something in the tank suggest an offering? An offering could also be equated with a sacrifice. In Islamic ritual, the animal sacrificed to commemorate Abraham's near sacrifice of Issac is consumed by the people. Another offering, common at least locally, was the sweets brought to the shrine of a deceased holy man when a previous request had been granted, such as recovery from an illness. The sweets were consumed by poor people who frequented the shrine for this purpose. Prasad, the food offering at a Hindu ritual, is also consumed, but this food then contains some of the "grace" of the god to whom it had been offered. To the best of my knowledge, for the

Muslim, the food did not change in any way or become sacred after it had been offered at the shrine.

So what kind of offering was that which was thrown in the tanks by the local Muslims? There were tales current of fantastic beings or things which lived in tanks. They were primarily blamed for pulling people under and drowning them. But these tank-dwelling beings were a rare topic of conversation. One had to ask about supernatural beings to hear of them. And these creatures were generally said to be found in the huge tanks, not the friendly little household tanks into which the ceremonial items were thrown. It is unlikely that offerings were being made in this way to the creatures believed to be in the tanks. Another possible consideration might be in relation to the immersion of Hindu images. The image is immersed in a tank after its worship ceremony (puja) and subsequently dissolved, but the deity symbolized by the image lives on. Perhaps the unity of the individuals and groups, which I have suggested these ingredients symbolized, lived on after and because of their immersion in the tank. The affinal ties which they symbolized were extremely important to the strength and continuity of the family and the patrilineal kin group.

A number of items were repeatedly used in the wedding and circumcision ceremonies: rice and grass (dhan-durba), betel nut and betel leaf (pan, when prepared together for chewing), mustard oil, turmeric, and henna. Henna was introduced to the sub-continent as a cosmetic by the Muslims. Rubbing the mixture of henna, turmeric, and mustard oil on the body was said to give the skin a good tone. But the use of the other items and why they were given, exchanged, or applied was almost universally simply ascribed to "custom" by the informants. The

local imam with the highest level of attainment in religious education told me with disgust that these were all Hindu practices. "These villagers are all ignorant and don't know they are doing Hindu things."

At one point after I had gotten the answer, "oh, just custom," from yet another lay person, I tried leading the informant by suggesting that the use of betel nut and betel leaf symbolized respect, hospitality and unity. He would not be led, however, and insisted that it was only a matter of custom. Regardless of the informant's negative answer, I believe that betel nut and betel leaf did symbolize respect, hospitality and unity when used in the ceremonies. Every visitor to a rural Bengali home, for whom there was any amount of respect or good feeling, was offered a prepared betel leaf with betel nut. If there happened to be none in the house, a child was sent out to get some. A saying was current in the area that though a man was served the finest foods, he was not properly honored if his host omitted the betel nut and betel leaf.

The rice and grass used in the ceremonies were referred to as dhan-durba, as though one word. When the durba grass appeared in a ceremony it always accompanied uncooked rice. The rice, however, might very well be husked rice (cāl) rather than the unhusked paddy (dhan). It did not appear to make any difference whether cal or dhan were used, except when rice was given as payment for ritual service, cal was always given. The expression used, however, was still dhan-durba. The durba grass was a particular variety of grass with small, delicate branched stalks, which was used extensively in Hindu rituals. When translating a local song of great popularity, I thought I had found an historical Islamic reference to grass used in a symbolic manner. I

took this reference to the learned imam for an opinion. The story was that when Hajrat Ali first met Waz Koroni, the former gave the latter a handful of grass. The lyric said ghās (the general Bengali word for all kinds of grass), not durba. The imam agreed that Hajrat (holy) Ali (son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed) and Waz Koroni were historical persons, but they lived in the Middle East at the time of the Prophet, never came to India, and one never gave the other a handful of grass. This was just a local song with Muslim characters, but using local, Bengali images.

Rice and pan were important items in Bengali life. Rice, in addition to being the staple food, symbolized productivity and perhaps fertility. These items were used for the marriage and circumcision ceremonies. These ceremonies concern young people coming into their productive lives. Levi Stauss (1966) has written much on universal mental categories, especially dyads contrasting cultural and natural things. In dhan-durba is found the domesticated plant, rice, with or opposed to the wild plant, grass. Though I have not written much about sweets and sugar, they also were used as a symbolic greeting, similar to pan. The groom was stopped on the way to the bride's house at tables where he was served sweet sherbet and pan. On one hand was the processed sweet, and on the other was the unprocessed betel nut and betel leaf--culture and nature. For the ritual bath, oil was poured first and then water. The oil was processed from mustard, and the water was unprocessed or natural. In the circumcision and marriage rites of passage ceremonies, the individuals were passing from more "natural" states to positions of more responsibility in their society and of more significance in their culture. Every Muslim male should

be circumcized, and marriage was the proper state for all adult males and females. The natural and cultural items used in the ceremonies symbolized this passage.

What we find is a symbolic pattern using many items and images from the local environment interwoven with Islamic symbols. To know that these people professed Islam helps us understand much of their behavior. Prayers and Qur'anic recitations had a part in every ceremony. But to know that the people were primarily rice farmers in a deltaic land where population was dense and land was scarce helps to complete the picture. Items of food played a large part in the ceremonies. And when food was not being used symbolically, it was exchanged in the form of feasts to cement the social ties which facilitated survival.

CHAPTER V

SHRINES AND THEIR ADHERENTS

A Muslim grave in eastern Bengal was usually unmarked. Graves proliferated on raised ground among the paddy fields and even on some wide shoulders along the roadways. One had to be careful not to walk on this holy ground shod, and often the only indication of a graveyard was where the earth had fallen in on some of the graves. Here and there, however, an edifice was built over a grave. The basic construction was a wall of about two to two and a half feet high outlining the grave with slightly raised pillars at each of the four corners. Often one saw trees growing from the ground inside the walls of the grave, since in this small area the sapling was protected from the foraging of cows and goats. The edifice was built of brick and plastered with cement. A more elaborate tomb might not be left open, but covered over with brick and cement. These marked burial sites were usually the graves of wealthy or important men of the area.

Similar tombs might also be built for men who were believed to have had some mystical religious power in their lifetimes, generally a fakir, in the local idiom. A fakir might simply be a religious beggar, but miraculous cures might also be attributed to him. When a fakir engaged in curing by using certain articles or chants and rituals, he might alternately be called a kobi rāj ("king of poets," a Bengali

title for physician). Or when he took students and instructed them in the arts of mysticism, he might be called a pīr.

The mystic element in Islam is called Sufism. The term Sufi was first applied to one group of mystics in Arabia because of their custom of wearing woolen robes, suf; the term was later applied to all mystics. Though mysticism and the abstinence and self-mortification of mystics was condemned in the Qur'an, this element in society was evidenced in the days of the Prophet and has continued in popularity to the present day throughout Islamic countries. Rahim (1965:136), writing of the important Sufis who came to preach in Bengal, referred to them as pirs. When he turned to write of the Qalandar sect of Sufis, however, who were usually eccentric wandering mendicants, he used the term fakir. He defined the word pir as simply meaning "old" in Persian or Urdu, however, in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, it came to mean "mystic guide" or refer to one who initiated disciples into the mystic orders. Rahim also differentiated a Sufi, as anyone who practiced mysticism, from a pir, who was a teacher in mysticism. Sufi adherents in the Comilla area referred to their living teacher in mysticism as their pir. We shall see that some of the men buried at the shrines in Comilla appear to have been pirs in their lifetimes, but are now referred to as fakirs.

FAKIRS

There were no fakirs resident in Shaheenpur, but there were many who lived in and around Comilla town. The fakir was supposed to gain his supernatural powers by faith, abstinence, and meditation. He might

be recognized as he wandered around by his disheveled appearance; his unconcern for his body indicating his disdain for worldly things. In the initial stages of my field investigation, I was concerned to differentiate the holy personage of the fakir from that of the mentally deranged person. Later I was told my informants, "The fakir is slightly insane," then in a voice soft with awe, "He would have to be." One person explained that to attempt to communicate with Allah, to come close to Allah, was a terrible thing; it caused one to lose his mind.

It is my impression that certain manifestations of insanity by themselves suggested holiness. On my first trip to eastern Bengal, I observed an emaciated young man always lying by the side of the road at the main intersection of Comilla town. He never bestirred himself to get any sustenance. People told me he was crazy. At times, however, I saw people crouched talking to him, with a few dishes of food they had brought on the ground. It was then further explained to me that since he did not provide for himself, but still survived, it must be God who took care of him. Since God was looking after him, he must be a holy man; and people came to ask things of him. But when I returned to the same area five years later, no one remembered him. He either got up and walked away or lies buried somewhere in an unmarked grave; his holy status did not outlive him.

Of those called fakir whom I knew, one did not appear to be in any way mentally deranged. He had a thriving business in curing and an establishment set up by the tomb of an earlier fakir. Another fakir with flowing, long white hair had a beatific smile and continued an apparently happy babble. This fakir was the subject of the conversation when it was explained to me that attempting to communicate with God

caused one to become deranged. It was said, however, that I would be amazed at the miraculous things this man could do. I never had the opportunity to observe any of his miracles. A third fakir was the father of a close friend of mine. This fakir continued to live with his wife and family, but no longer contributed to their support. My friend had to take over the support of his mother and younger siblings at a young age when his father gave up worldly things to become a fakir. The father went about begging for alms, but gave all the money he received to mosques and religious shrines. When I saw the old gentleman at home, he was always absorbed in reading the Qur'an. I was with the man's son one day when someone asked him, "I hear your father is crazy?" The young man answered, "My father is a fakir." He did not say, "No, he is not crazy, he is a fakir." A fourth fakir, whom I never met, but saw often, wandered around the countryside completely naked. He was labeled a "crazy fakir."

Insanity, however, did not always connote holiness. One cause of insanity was believed to be spirit possession, something of which to divest a person. An exorcism ceremony was performed for the person; but if the person did not recover, then it was explained that spirit possession had not been the cause of his derangement. One could be possessed by a spirit, or jinn, possessed by the love of God, or something might simply be "wrong with the head (māthā khārāp). One man in Shaheenpur was convinced that he was seriously ill and that no one would help him. He came from a middle income family which could have afforded medical assistance for him. He wandered around begging for help and interrupted village meetings shouting for someone to give him the money to see a doctor. People told me to ignore him, that there

was merely something wrong with his head. His particular derangement, however, did not seem to confer any holiness of him.

THE HISTORY OF LOCAL SHRINES

When a fakir died his tomb was usually built by contributions from the people. Consequently, if a fakir had been successful in granting the requests of supplicants, he was more likely to have enough of a following to have a tomb built for him from their contributions. Especially miraculous occurrences connected with a fakir brought even more adherents. The tombs or shrines were called dargā or mājār. Sometimes these shrines were built where the fakir had merely sat, the whereabouts of his body being unknown. He had wandered off, but his works were remembered. The shrine continued to have the miraculous power attributed to the fakir.

There was a shrine a few miles outside Comilla town dedicated to a very famous saint from Sylhet, Shah Jalal.[12] It was said that the saint was making a journey from Sylhet in the north to Chittagong in the south. He stopped and rested on a hill overlooking the Gumpti River. While he was resting, he had his hair cut and his nails pared. According to the keeper of the shrine, the shrine was built about six hundred years ago by the Maharaja of Agartala over the place where the saint's hair and nails were buried. Shah Jalal's shrine was more elaborate than the tombs of wealthy villagers. Two concentric six foot walls enclosed the central tomb structure; the inner wall had arched entrances on all sides, and the outer wall, with one entrance from the outside, had niches which held religious reading material, candles, etc.

A number of the more important shrines in the vicinity were enclosed by a roofed building. One such shrine was in a room at the end of one of the mosques in town, called Darogabari mosque; dāroga indicated the rank of a police officer and was the name of a large house near the mosque. This was the tomb of Al Haj Maulana Hafij Kari Sufi Shah Abdullah of Gazipur, Uttar Pradesh, according to the keeper of the shrine. Shah Abdullah was apparently a pir rather than a fakir, as I have described the two roles. But it was not certain if he was a mystic from what information I could gather. He was a teacher at a local madrasah and lived at Daroga Bari. He was a learned Arabic scholar, and people came to learn religion from him. He took no money, even for his services at the madrasah. The people at the shrine explained that there were two kinds of fakirs: majub and salek. The majub had no students (murid); the salek did have students. Shah Abdullah was a salek, according to the people at the shrine; consequently, as has been explained above, he may have been called a pir during his lifetime. Though Shah Abdullah apparently did not engage in curing practices, after his death his shrine became a pilgrimage spot for the afflicted.

One of the smaller but important shrines in Comilla town was the tomb of Majnu Baba. Baba means father and is often attached to the names of fakirs. Majnu or majnun is an Arabic word meaning crazed. Any night one might travel down the main street of Comilla town, one could see the shrine of Majnu Baba alight with flickering candles, candles being one possible offering at such a shrine. The shrine of Majnu Baba consisted of only the tomb and a low outer wall. There was no regular caretaker for this shrine, but an old man in a nearby tea

shop told us the story of Majnu Baba as he knew it.

> Majnu Baba died about twenty-five years ago, and the people of the neighborhood immediately built this shrine. In his life, he spent his days lying in the dust by the side of the road at this spot, with his hands clasped and staring at the sun. He did not give people anything to cure them of their illnesses, but simply stared at them as a cure. One time in a village miles away many people were afflicted with small pox. One hundred fifty people died of the disease in that village alone. Majnu Baba made one visit there, and after that there were no more cases of small pox in the village.

The old man had a personal story to tell of Majnu Baba involving the man's own family.

> My younger brother worked in the hills about five or six miles to the east. He would come home from work at about two o'clock in the morning. One night Majnu Baba came to our house about that time. My brother offered the fakir a mattress and a quilt on which to sleep. But the fakir did not eat or sleep. At our house was a large fruit tree. The fakir just sat under this tree and stared at my brother for a long time. Then the fakir left our house. A short time later my brother hanged himself from that tree. My mother came and found him hanging there dead.

Did the fakir's stare cause the young man to hang himself? Or did the fakir's stare simply indicate that he knew what was going to happen? I could not ascertain from the old man. This was simply an amazing incident connected with the fakir. During my field experience I heard a number of such stories which left many questions in my mind or were without a point from my cultural point of view. And the story teller could not, or would not, answer my questions. This was such a case.

On the north side of the town on the edge of a large graveyard was another shrine, this one consisted of five graves surrounded by a low wall. These were the graves of four fakirs and the keeper of the shrine who had died recently. The keeper's widow and son could tell me little about two of the fakirs except their names. The name of one was

Sylheti Baba because he came from Sylhet. The other was Nawab Shah because he had stayed at the Nawab's house in his lifetime. A third grave belonged to Aman Shah Baba, who always sat on the veranda of one of the local courts. As claimants in a case went by the fakir on their way into the court, they might ask him to pray for their success (also giving a gratuity) and then they would win their case. (My informants did not know what would happen if both sides in a case asked him to pray for them). But one day a district judge threw the fakir's bedding and other things off the veranda and told him to go. That night the judge's bowels and urine both stopped. The next day the judge and his wife got in their automobile and drove until they found Aman Shah Baba on the road. After they brought the fakir back, the judge recovered his health. When Aman Shah Baba died he was first buried in another place. When his body was exhumed to be reburied at the shrine, they found that it had suffered no decomposition.

The fourth fakir buried at the shrine by the graveyard was Phuk (pōkā), insect) Shah Baba. It was said that his hair was alive with insects. He was also known as Pagli (crazy) Baba. The two names could conceivably be connected. The informants said that during World War II, when there was bombing by the Germans (sic.), Phuk Shah Baba called all of the bombs on his own head to save the people. (There was a military airport at Comilla, and Japanese bombs fell there. Phuk Shah Bab, however, may very well have been able to deflect all of the German bombs.) All of these men had been noted for their curing abilities during their lifetimes, and the shrine had maintained this reputation.

Near the shrine of the four fakirs was another more elaborate shrine with multiple tombs. The area of the town, Kaliyajuri, gave the

shrine its name. The central, main tomb belonged to Ainuddin Baba Shah.

> Ainuddin Baba Shah came to the area from far to the west: maybe Arabia, maybe Iran. He wandered around the Comilla area and worked for a time at the home of a local zamindar (land owner), Babri Miya. While he was working there a cow died. Ainuddin Baba hit the cow on the foot with a stick, and the cow came back to life. From this, the people knew he was a fakir. Ainuddin Baba continued to wander from place to place until he came to this place in Kaliyajuri which was then a jungle. He sat here for three days and three nights, and then he died. On the day he died, he was reported to have appeared near the police station at Daudkandi, a town about forty miles to the west. He had his hair cut at the place. There was also a shrine built at Daudkandi, therefore, containing his hair. With money from Babri Miya's son and contributions from other people this shrine was built. To the right of Ainuddin Baba, Babri Miya Zamindar was buried. And to the left was buried Golap Shah Baba. Golap Shah came and sat at this place after the death of Ainuddin Baba. He was famous for his curing ability. The shrine was built one hundred fifty years ago. At first, a panther visited this shrine every Thursday evening.[13] One only comes occasionally now. (Panthers were not uncommon in the area even twenty years ago, but there had been no recent reported sightings.)

About twelve miles south of Comilla town on the road to Chittagong, there was a very attractive shrine to which panthers were also reported to have come. Not only panthers, but elephants were reported to have come to this shrine in the past. The shrine contained the tomb of Bajlur Rahman Khandakar. It was topped by a whitewashed and decorated dome and a veranda surrounded the building on all sides. This shrine was reported by many people to be very garam (warm or hot), which meant that it was very effective for curing illness. Bajlur Rahman was born in the village of Candsri, a few hundred yards to the east of the shrine, according to the keeper of the shrine; the shrine took its name from the village. The keeper told me very little about Bajlur Rahman, except that he had died seventy years ago. He added, however, that at first a two story corrugated metal shrine was built. About twenty years ago the brick building had replaced it. When I visited

the shrine, many people came out from the village to see me. I asked if any of them could tell me more stories about the fakir. They apologized that they could not because the fakir had died seventy years ago, and none of them were alive at that time. They said that they had heard stories, but could not attest to their validity. It would be wrong, they said, to tell falsehoods about the fakir.

On the way back to the road, a man with a fishing net caught up with me. He said that though he was on his way fishing he would tell me a few things about Bajlur Rahman.

> When Bajlur Rahman was quite young a fakir came to talk to him. The other fakir asked Bajlur Rahman what he wanted. Bajlur Rahman replied that he wanted no gifts or wealth. So the fakir said that he would return on Thursday night. When he returned he brought cooked rice (bhāt or cooked rice is also the general term used to mean food). When Bajlur Rahman had finished eating the rice, the other fakir told him to eat the tip of a gourd (lāu) he had brought. After eating the tip of the gourd, Bajlur Rahman went out of his mind. A few days later and still in a crazed condition, Bajlur Rahman wandered off into the jungle, where he stayed for twelve years. One day a panther came up and bit Bajlur Rahman on the hand. After his encounter with the panther, Bajlur Rahman came back to the village; from that time on he sat under a mango tree staring into the sun all day. From this, people said that he was a fakir. One day a man came to Bajlur Rahman as he was sitting under the mango tree. Bajlur Rahman hit the man with a bamboo stick and also cut his body in many places. But when Bajlur Rahman poured water on the man, he walked away unhurt. From this, people said that he was a fakir.

Here we have another enigmatic story. This is the one case, however, of a local boy who became a fakir. The others apparently just wandered in one day. The other fakir in this story, if he did not give Bajlur Rahman the ability to experience God or the supernatural, at least started him on the way to becoming a holy man or fakir. I am tempted to say that the panther was a sign to Bajlur Rahman to return to the world of man. The villagers, however, would probably say that this

convinced Bajlur Rahman that the jungle was no place to live, and he would be better off at home. The other parts of the story simply indicated that Bajlur Rahman could and did do miraculous things that other men were incapable of doing.

One of the newest shrines in the area was dedicated to Noor Shahinshah Baba, which translated loosely as Light of the King of Kings Father. This was certainly an impressive name, but from my point of view cast doubt on the credibility of this fakir's existance. The shrine had only been there for about ten months when I first visited it. The story of this shrine began when the owner of the land was plowing one day and decided to cut down a mound of earth in his field and cultivate it. That night it came to him in a dream that this mound was a fakir's grave, and he must not disturb it. The next day he cut into the mound of earth in spite of the dream, and that night his wife and child died. After that, he did not touch the grave again. Two years before the shrine was built a woman from Sylhet came to the place and built herself a little house by the side of the road. She put four flags in the field where the grave of the fakir was supposed to be. She had come to Comilla thirteen years before that and had stayed at the shrine of Shah Jalal already mentioned. She died soon after the shrine of Noor Shahinshah Baba was built. After that, a woman of the area became the keeper of the shrine. Many people knew of this shrine as the "woman's shrine" (bedir majar), not that it was dedicated to a woman or that women particularly came here, but it was unusual for a woman to be the keeper of a shrine. She and her family lived in the little house built by the Sylheti woman.

Stories of holy men who did such miraculous things as stare at the sun all day, injure people only to cure them of their wounds, suddenly appear at another place at the moment of their death, or whose shrines were visited by wild animals were not original with the fakirs buried in and around Comilla town. One can find in the literature similar accounts from other places in the subcontinent far from eastern Bengal.[14]

ACTIVITIES AT SHRINES

Except for the "woman's shrine" all of the foregoing shrines were referred to me by people who had visited them previously with a request or knew of someone who had. In other words, they were shrines in whose power some people had faith. This is not to say that no one had faith in the "woman's shrine," merely that I did not personally meet one. I went there because it was on the road which I traveled every day. The "woman's shrine" was very new. Crooke (1893:224) mentioned shrines that were built where people had dreamed that a holy man was buried. He added, however, that these shrines existed under some suspicion unless, or until, sufficient curing or other miracles occurred in connection with them to give them legitimacy. Some educated town people informed me that the "women's shrine" was bogus. Monetary contributions were connected with these shrines so that it was conceivable that a person might set one up given nothing more than a profit motive. It would be interesting to follow the fortunes of such a new shrine over an extended period of time.

The keeper of the shrine, or kademdar, received money for saying a jeyārat for a petitioner. Properly, a jeyarat was a prayer one said

to God for the peace of a deceased person's soul. The kademdar, however, for the payment, said a jeyarat to the soul of the fakir to intercede with God on behalf of the petitioner, to grant the petitioner's request. Another form of petition to a shrine was called manusi. The petitioner went to the shrine and promised that if his request was granted, he would perform manusi, or bring a thank offering of sweets to the shrine. Though people might request material benefits, such as success in an economic venture, it was my impression that the requests usually concerned recovery from an illness. When, and if, the request was granted, sweets were prepared at home, or occasionally bought, and brought to the shrine. The petitioner and the recovered person knelt and prayed at the shrine while the kademdar distributed the sweets to the poor. I participated in one such manusi for a child who had successfully recovered from an operation. Surgical operations were very rare and relatively dangerous in the rural area, and the parents were terrified. We stopped at the shrine with the child on the way home from the hospital. Little children came running from all directions with pans and banana leaves in which to collect the sweets to take home. Later that day the father of the recovered child lit candles in thanksgiving in most of the shrines and some of the mosques of the area.

Many of the shrines commemorated the death anniversary of the fakir buried at the site with a function called an urs. People came from long distances for the urs at the more famous shrines. To the shrine of Muinuddin Chisti, the founder of the Chistiya sect of Sufis, at Ajmer in India, people came from all over the subcontinent. The Indian Government made special arrangements for Pakistanis who wanted

to make the pilgrimage. People came from all over the province of East Pakistan for the urs at the major Maijhbandari shrine near Chittagong city. None of the shrines in the Comilla area, however, were so very famous. For an urs, a large meal was cooked to feed all of the visitors. In the evening, there were prayers and Qur'anic recitations, and religious songs were sung by individuals practiced in the art. Most of the Comilla shrines had an urs, their size relative to the fame of the shrine and the fakir buried there. The Shah Jalal shrine, east of Comilla town, had no urs as the saint was not buried there. Large crowds from the surrounding area, however, came there the night of Shab-i-Barat to pray.

The urs was the practice most universally condemned by the Muslim reformers of the mid-nineteenth century in Bengal, as mentioned in chapter three. There was criticism of the whole institution of pirs and their students, as it had developed in South Asia. The main criticism was that the pir often became an intermediary between the student and God. The Fara'idis condemned the institution of pirs when they believed it had taken on this intermediary aspect. Shari'at Allah, the founder of the Fara'idis, was himself initiated in the Qadiriyah Sufi order; yet, as long as the pir-murid relationship was limited to one of a teacher and his student, this was not believed to be counter to the true Islam. Performing an annual urs at the death anniversary of a pir, however, raised him above mortal men and was not in the traditions of the Prophet; it was a sinful innovation. Despite the efforts of Shari'at Allah, Maulana Karamat Ali, and other such reformers, however, the urs continued to be celebrated in Comilla as well as many other areas of the subcontinent.

SUFI SHRINES AND ACTIVITIES

One man in Shaheenpur reported that he attended no mosque because he was a Maijhbandari. The Maijhbandari were a particular sect of Sufis, seemingly an eastern Bengali sect. I have been able to find no references to them in the literature. Among the villagers and less educated of the Comilla area, the term Sufi seemed to be unknown; though the Maijhbandari were a particular sect, the people apparently used the term Maijhbandari to mean Sufi. The Maijhbandari sect had their major shrine in a village near Chittagong city. When I asked the meaning or derivation of the name Maijhbandari, I was told that it was simply the name of the village where the major shrine was located. Bandar can mean port, but I was not able to trace any meaning for "maijh."

The organization of the Sufis consisted of a man-to-man relationship between teacher and student, pir and murid. The Sufi pir appointed his successor from among his students, perhaps his own son. He might also send others of his good students out to minister to students in another area. All of the students or adherents of Sufism, however, were not, or did not aspire to be, full time mystics. That is, they did not aspire to attain the status of a pir; they had ordinary occupations but depended for their religious guidance on their pir. One might hear a man defend his apparently unorthodox behavior with the excuse that his pir had instructed him to behave in this manner. For example, on the subject of not fasting, I heard this excuse: "My pir told me not to fast until I am over thirty." There was also the example of the man in Shaheenpur who did not attend any

mosque. One cannot generalize such unorthodoxy, however, to all those who claimed some adherence to Sufism (Maijhbandari). Sufis could also be strict adherents to all the forms of Islam. An educated Maijhbandari explained his belief that although one might faithfully perform all the rituals of Islam, this meant little without the love of Allah in one's heart. Being a Maijhbandari helped him to experience this love. Though for some Sufism might merely be a cover for deviant behavior, for most it provided an emotional outlet not available in the daily round of Islamic ritual.

Two of the shrines in the area were said to be Maijhbandari shrines. The fakirs buried there had belonged to the Maijhbandari sect. These were Kaliyajuri and one which has not been described yet. The latter shrine was in a village which I shall call Tintala. Tintala was less than a quarter of a mile from Comilla town. The shrine was built much like a mosque structure, with a full veranda on the eastern side. Inside was one long room and another small room at the north end in which the tomb was located. At the north end of the long room was a bedstead covered with a white cloth, a number of pillows, and decorated with paper flowers. This was where the fakir to whom the shrine was dedicated sat in his lifetime. Rather than the tomb, this bedstead seemed to be the object of veneration. I had been to quite a few other shrines before I came here, so I started asking what miracles this fakir had performed. "He had a lamp which never needed more oil." But the main things the people around the shrine emphasized were that the fakir could play the harmonium, the flute, the tablā (two small drums which were set on the ground when played), the dal (a double headed drum), and the dutara (stringed instrument). The

Maijhbandari rites were usually associated with music. Whether the people thought it was especially significant that the fakir could play all of these musical instruments, or whether they were simply stating a fact, I do not know.

Behind the shrine was a labyrinth of houses built one right next to the other, with winding little alleyways leading between them. The manner in which the dwellings were crowded made one think of a very poor neighborhood in a large city, but this cluster was set out in the open countryside. Land was scarce in the countryside, too, but in no other place were houses to be seen so closely clustered. Here many of the Maijhbandari adherents of the shrine lived, some of them descendents of the fakir buried there. Of course, people from outside the village also came to the shrine. To the south of the main shrine was another long building. This was the establishment of a living fakir who engaged in curing practices. He was not a local man, but had come a few years previously. When I first met him there were four ill people waiting to see him. One man had walked eight miles to get there.

At Tintala there were prayers, music, and dancing every night in the building of the living fakir, Abdul Rashid. At two other places in Comilla town, groups of Maijhbandaris met for prayers and music every Thursday evening. At the meetings in town, prayers were performed, and then someone read from the Qur'an. At one such meeting I attended, a portion of the Qur'an was read in Arabic and then explained in Bengali. The people who attended the town meetings came from a wide spectrum of the society in terms of their education, wealth, and occupation. Here the equality which was supposed to exemplify Islam was practiced. The poorest landless laborer was welcomed as a brother

Maijhbandari by the educated government service holder. Men of musical ability were especially welcome. In town one might hear beautiful plaintive songs about the founder of the Chistiya sect of Sufis, Muinuddin Chisti, or the martyrs, Hasan and Hussain. The songs were usually accompanied by a stringed instrument and drums. The non-musicians kept up a continual chant of Allah's name and swayed slightly. The music, the chant, and the body motion were all calculated to induce trance, to facilitate a communion with or knowledge of the Almighty. Occasionally one of the simpler men went into a more violent trance, shouting, falling to the floor, and shaking.

The music and participants at Tintala were much less sophisticated. The accompaniment consisted of three drums, a metal gong, and a set of cymbals, effectively, for me, drowning out the lyrices of the songs. Here the participants were mostly on their feet dancing, though there were observers sitting to the side of the dancers, and occasionally a dancer became exhausted and sat down. The dancing consisted mostly of jumping back and forth from one foot to the other with head lolled back and eyes half closed. All of this activity faced Abdul Rashid where he sat on his bed. He occasionally arose and danced on his bed. Then he would fall down as if in a trance and remain prone for a period of time. When people came in from outside or dropped out of the dancing to leave, they came to Abdul Rashid and placed their foreheads on the edge of his bed. He might grasp their forehead with his hand, strike them on the head, or strike them on the back. A few he even stomped on the back with his foot. In addition to leading these "worship" services, Abdul Rashid practiced curing, so I was not

certain if this treatment was for the good of the peoples' souls or their physical bodies.

As the readers may ascertain from the fact that I attended these meetings, the Maijhbandaris were more liberal in their attitude toward the participation of women in religious functions than were most other Muslims. It was said that at the main shrine in Maijhbandar, Chittagong one could see many women dancing, playing musical instruments, and singing, as well as in attendance at the shrine. On one occasion at Tintala, two women danced in front of Abdul Rashid with the men. The men, however, were careful to give the women a space of their own in which to dance, so that there was no physical contact between men and women. One of the women appeared to have quite a bit of freedom and perhaps some importance at the shrine. When she was not dancing she ministered to the fakir, bringing more incense and candles, a new paper flower garland for his neck, and even some rose water to sprinkle on him. At all times there was someone fanning him.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A variety of activities and attitudes surrounded the many shrines in the Comilla area. A few had a faithful group of regular adherents. Some were relatively well known locally for successful cures attributed to them. Ill health and the lack of sufficient medical services were serious problems in eastern Bengal. The place of shrines in the system of disease causation beliefs and curing practices will be explored further in the succeeding chapter. The percentage of the population which resorted to shrines either for worship or for the granting of a

request would be difficult to determine. One criterion on which to judge, however, might be the fact that only slightly more mosques than shrines could be seen dotting the countryside.

The majority of the population, except in times of great personal crisis, were satisfied to attend the mosque occasionally and perform the rituals of Islam more or less regularly. There were some people, even at a time of personal crisis, who would not resort to attendance at a shrine. The approved role in Islam for the individual with a greater interest in religion than the ordinary person was to attend the madrasah and become a man of religious learning. Actually, it was usually a father who decided that it would be meritorious to have a son who attended the religious school and became a religious leader. But for some the pedestrian performance of religious ritual was not enough. Nor was the memorization of a foreign language (Arabic) and further memorization of the Qur'an inspiring as the way to religious fulfillment. The role of the fakir, and in some cases even the pir, provided the unstable but creative person a significant place in society. Whereas the imam could only tell the troubled worshipper what the rules of the religion were, not whether God would forgive him or even if God accepted his prayers and fasting, the fakir or pir could, and would, tell a man exactly what to do to gain grace. For those people who needed an intermediary with God, who needed peace of mind, the fakir or pir provided this function.

The mosque functioned on a neighborhood level. People who lived in the vicinity of the mosque usually attended that mosque. A shrine drew a more cosmopolitan clientele. It was true that sons of Maijhbandari fathers themselves were often Maijhbandaris. At Tintala all of

the members of a number of patrilineal kin groups who lived there were all Maijhbandaris. In any case, most of the adherents of the sects or shrines were individuals who had felt this need for a personal religious experience.

CHAPTER VI

DISEASE AND CURING

Life in the villages of eastern Bengal could be very uncertain. Disease was a constant threat, and modern medical curative assistance was almost non-existant. Cholera was endemic to the area; it and small pox were seasonal and struck every year. The government had programs for the control of these two diseases and malaria. Young men from the health departments of the government made regular visits to the villages. There was a mass innoculation program for the children against small pox. Upon occasion, to disperse a band of persistant children, someone would call out that I had come to give innoculations. The children would then disperse in all directions, not waiting for a demonstration. I wondered how the innoculator went about his work. Then one day I saw him cheerfully prying screaming toddlers out from under bushes to innoculate them. The man from the malaria section also came periodically to take blood samples from anyone in the household who had had a fever since his last visit. I do not know, however, if free medication was forthcoming when he found a case of malaria. The shots for cholera were neither very effective nor universally given. A cure for cholera was being developed by another government program with apparent success.

In the 1961 Census of Pakistan for Comilla District, the statistics showed one hospital bed for 12,575 people. About one hundred of

these 325 beds were not open to the public. Most of the beds were in Comilla town, a great distance from much of the population in the district. The situation had improved somewhat since the compilation of the 1961 census. An important clinic concerned with cholera research was set up at Matlab Bazar on the eastern edge of the district. Though primarily concerned with developing a feasible cure for cholera, it took the patients who could be moved there.

Cholera, small pox, and malaria were the most infamous, but not necessarily the most bothersome, diseases that bedeviled the Bengalis. There were hundreds of internal disorders, skin diseases, and fevers which laid them low. Fever was described by the people of Shaheenpur as being of three types. A mild fever of short duration was influenza. A medium severe, recurring fever was malaria. And a severe fever, especially if the patient died, was typhoid. The woman whose funeral I attended was said to have died of typhoid. She had a fever which gradually got worse over a period of about a month. It was only in the last week before her death that the fever became severe. In the first stages of her fever the neighbors suggested various herbal medicines for her. In the last week, a local, slightly trained doctor came to see her and prescribed some kind of inexpensive medicine or tonic, but to no avail. Her family was poor, but they were doing the best they could for her, and what they thought necessary. The last day before her death, they talked of taking her to a fully trained modern medical practitioner in town, but it was too late.

THE DOCTOR

The problem was twofold. People in the village were continually having fevers, stomach and bowel upsets, and various pains. Most of them recovered with no assistance at all. Some seemed to be cured with herbal remedies and charms. And some worsened almost overnight, and the person died. It was difficult to judge the seriousness of an illness. I saw people almost out of their minds with fear over an illness. The example was given in the previous chapter of the deranged man in Shaheenpur who continually begged people for money to see a doctor. The other side of the problem was the variety of types of "medicine" from which one could choose. Since Shaheenpur was less than two miles from town, people could go to trained physicians. These physicians were extremely overworked with too many patients, but often did not charge the poor for their services. The medicines they prescribed, however, such as antibiotics, etc., were much more expensive than the kinds of medicines the villagers were accustomed to, such as herbal concoctions and tonics.

Modern medicine as it is known in the west was given the name allopathy in eastern Bengal. The name derived from its comparison with another system of medicine, homeopathy. Homeopathy was developed in Europe, and there are still schools of homeopathy in Europe and at least one in the United States. The system gained great popularity in South Asia. Homeopathy was based on the proposition of administering drugs which produced a similar reaction in the body to that of the disease. Also, homeopathic drugs were given in minute quantities. The homeopathic practitioners contrasted their system to allopathic (modern,

western) medicine in which counteractants were given. Their claim was that the allopathic medicines were actually poisons that could kill given in the wrong dosage or for the wrong illness. Even many urban people who saw trained modern medical doctors (allopaths) for their own illnesses took their infants only to a homeopath. They said, "The medicine of an allopathic doctor is too strong for a baby."

There were three men in Shaheenpur with homeopathic training. One practiced and had his dispensary in a rural bazar about a mile from Shaheenpur. Another was one of the recent migrants from India, and he closed his shop near the village while I was there. He said that the owner of the building he was renting evicted him, as another business was going in there. I suspected that he had not gained the confidence of the local villagers and lacked patients. The third man with some training in homeopathic medicine did not have a regular practice, he was a farmer, but treated other villagers at their request.

THE KOBI RAJ

Many people had some knowledge of herbal medicines. Children might be seen on the village paths collecting this or that flower or root or leaf. Neighbors willingly exchanged advice on what they had heard was good for a particular pain or upset. The village midwife knew of only one thing to do if the baby did not come in its regular course. She gathered a particular leaf and soaked it for a time in a glass of water. Over this glass of water and leaf she said a <u>mantra</u>, i.e., she said a few phrases from the Qur'an in Arabic and blew on the water. The water was then poured on the expectant mother's head and

rubbed down across her face and belly. Then she drank the rest of the water. The midwife said that his medicine was so powerful that she had been able to save the life of a cow whose calf had died inside her. The midwife applied the medicine to the cow in the same way she would for a woman, and the cow expelled the dead calf. Often people who knew of more than one or two such herbal remedies were called kobi raj by their neighbors. One of the homesteads in Shaheenpur was called Kobi Raj Bari. The head of that homestead was a practicing kobi raj, but for animals.

In the literature, to be a kobi raj means to be a practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine, the ancient philosophy and science of medicine developed by the Hindus and a part of their religious tradition. There is little likelihood, however, that any of these Muslim, so called, kobi raj had any knowledge of Hindu Ayurvedic literature, except what they might have picked up by word of mouth. The practice of using herbal medicine, however, need not be of Hindu origin. The Arabs had a system of medicine which was followed by the Muslims and their converts. Their system was called Unani, which means Greek. It was adopted from the science of medicine developed by the Greeks. It was then further embellished by the Muslims. Unani also made extensive use of natural herbal medicines. The practitioner of Unani was called a hakim. I knew of no one, however, practicing in the area who was referred to as hakim. Those people called doctor generally practiced allopathic or homeopathic medicine. All others, regardless of their accoutrements, were called kobi raj. Many of the kobi raj in Comilla had nothing to do with prescribing herbal medicines. Some practiced various forms of faith healing.

FAITH HEALING AND CHARMS

Islam has a tradition of faith healing. Mohammed the Prophet was said to have healed people by laying on of the hands and prayer. One of his prescriptions for illness was reading the first chapter of the Qur'an (Elgood 1951:64-65). In this tradition, one older man in Shaheenpur, speaking specifically of his disdain for innoculations, said that he believed that proper Islamic practice and strong faith in Allah were all that were needed for good health. On another occasion, I heard an old woman comment on a man who was dying slowly and painfully of blood poisoning, "He doesn't have enough faith" (otherwise he would be getting well).

Probably the most extensive healing practice was written charms. The patient wore the charm to effect the cure. The charms consisted of an Arabic passage from the Qur'an written on a piece of paper and contained in a metal cartridge sealed with wax. Books of instruction for writing such charms, called tābij, could be purchased in the bazar. These books also explained which Qur'anic passages were good for which illnesses. Consequently, anyone who could read and write could also write tabij. But there was the matter of the patient having faith in the tabij writer (also called a kobi raj), so that not just anyone wrote his own tabij or could take up the practice easily. The words of the Qur'an were believed to be the actual words of Allah, only communicated through Mohammed his Prophet. Consequently, these words had a special power of their own, sufficient to cure a person of illness.

The imam of south neighborhood in Shaheenpur received the major portion of his income from writing and selling tabij. One usually saw him on the road on his way to deliver a tabij or in his house or in the mosque writing tabij. He explained that to write some of the more powerful tabij it was necessary to pray first and get in the proper state of mind. Though he was an imam and supposedly knew the Qur'an relatively well, he also used a tabij-writing book to write tabij. I observed him give a tabij for dizziness to a man. The imam (kobi raj) and the patient went into the mosque and knelt facing one another. The imam grasped the man's forehead and pressed his eyelids. At the same time he repeated some Arabic phrases and blew in the patient's face (blowing a mantra). Then, gesturing with his hand in the air, the imam crossed the patient's forehead, drew imaginary lines down his arms, and circled the patient's forehead. Then the patient received the tabij to wear on a cord around his upper arm. Where the patient wore the tabij was part of the prescription. The tabij could be worn on a cord around the neck, the waist, the arm, and occasionally for headaches and mental derangement it might be attached to the hair.

When asked what diseases he could cure with a tabij, the imam of south neighborhood immediately mentioned cholera, small pox, and malaria. I asked about kālō ajar (black fever), a disease which had killed many people in the early part of the century. His reply was, "No, there is an injection for that now." So to some extent, traditional curing practices stepped in where modern medicine had not yet been able to completely take care of a disease. Though children were fairly well covered by small pox innoculations, this was not true for adults. Also people did not differentiate between small pox, chicken

pox, and measles. There was simply terror when the pox came. It was called basanto because it was most prevalent in the spring. Since small pox and cholera were quite contagious, there was usually more than one case at a time in a village. The south neighborhood imam told of another method of cure he used for these two diseases when a village was attacked by one of them. He kept a vigil, sitting outside all night in the village reading from the Qur'an. People expressed admiration for the old man staying out all night all alone performing this service. There was a common belief that evil spirits (jinn) attacked at night. He explained that he was not afraid because he had strong faith in God. For this service he received Rs. 50 per night, collected from the entire village.

The imam did not say so himself, but while talking to him about tabij the women of his household interjected from the kitchen where they were gathered listening that he could also write love tabij. That is, if a boy and girl who had been married to each other did not like one another, a tabij could be written to change their minds. Or if a young man caught a glimpse of a girl he thought he would like to marry, but his father objected, a tabij could be written to change the father's mind. The imam chuckled and denied that he wrote that kind of tabij. I also heard from less conservative tabij writers that one could write a tabij so strong that it would make a woman rise up in her house and come to the man who desired her. But no one would expect the imam of a mosque to have anything to do with writing that kind of tabij.

JINN

The existance of jinn, or spirits, was sanctioned in the Qur'an. As Allah made man out of clay, so he made the jinn from fire. The village people explained that Allah made two jāti: man and jinn. Jati is translated variously in English as caste, race, nation, kind, etc. When the people of Shaheenpur spoke of jati they usually meant the various religious persuasions. And they also spoke of jinn as being of various religions, just like man. There were Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist jinn. Jinn were believed to populate the world, they were simply unseen by man. In fact, there were many more jinn than men, and they lived quite a bit longer, but they did die eventually. Also like men, there were good and bad jinn. Jinn could give men a lot of trouble; they very occasionally helped. They took possession of human beings, and this always caused misfortune to the host. The most commonly related cause for a jinn to attack or take possession of a human being was that a jinn of the opposite sex was attracted to a person. One should be very careful of going out at night wearing a pleasant smelling scent. Perfumes attracted jinn. Only once was I told that someone was attacked by jinn because he had sinned or done something bad. Usually no fault attached to the victim except that he or she had been unwary.

There was confusion in the terminology involving jinn. One often heard reference to bhut. Bhut was the word the Hindus used for ghost. The Muslim informants, however, defined bhut as bad jinn. "They are all jinn, but we call the good jinn, jinn and the bad jinn, bhut." There may have been further mixing of these two ideas beyond terminology,

because jinn-bhut were said to live in trees. Hindu bhut (ghosts) lived in trees. From general descriptions of jinn, however, they were everywhere, not only in trees. Everyone I talked to on the subject assured me that they did not believe that souls wandered after death. The soul stayed in the grave with the body until the day of judgement. As a check, I asked if they were afraid to go to the graveyard at night. They said that they were. Why? Because jinn also liked to frequent graveyards at night. I shall continue to use the term jinn throughout, although my informants when telling about the bad effects of jinn usually said bhut.

When a person was attacked by a jinn he might go out of his mind, he might become ill, someone in his family might become ill, or there might simply be general misfortune. Babies that cried excessively and would not drink their milk were said to be bothered by a jinn. One old and childless widow in Shaheenpur was attacked periodically by a jinn. When in the possession of the jinn she would argue with people continually and refuse to keep her clothes on. The south neighborhood imam (kobi raj) claimed that he had exorcised the jinn from her on a number of occasions. His description of the exorcism involved putting mustard oil on a plate and blowing the proper Qur'anic phrases (a mantra) onto the oil. The oil was then rubbed on the eyelids of the patient. Holding the little finger of the patient while reading from the Qur'an, the imam-kobi raj then blew on the patient's forehead and asked the jinn where he lived. The jinn replied, telling where his tree was, and the imam said, "Go." The jinn replied, "I go," and went. After that the patient was unconscious for a short time, but then regained her senses and was all right, for awhile.

A SEARCH FOR A CAUSE

As mentioned before, a person attacked by a jinn did not necessarily lose his mind or, indeed, always appear to suffer any ill effects himself. This is the story of a family whose infant son died of diphtheria. The newest arrival in a Muslim Bengali family usually was much fondled and doted on by his parents. The infant son of Lal Miya and Safia Khatun was not only the last born, but fat and healthy looking and much lighter complexioned than his older brother and sister. Lal Miya liked to boast that people often guessed that his nine month old son was three years old. The baby had what appeared to be a slight cold for about a week. Then his cough became much more severe. In three days the child was dead from diphtheria. Lal Miya borrowed some money to buy some especially large bamboo to lay over his son's body in the grave so that the jackals could not get the boy. Infants were buried in shallow graves, and jackals almost always devoured the body. Then the daughter, about five years old, developed a hacking cough. The cough proved not to be diphtheria, but it was enough to drive the parents to try to do something about the misfortune that had befallen them. All four remaining members of the family got new tabij. One night soon after the death of the son, a jackal crept into the cow shed and bit the leg of a new calf. This clinched the case, something was wrong. A kobi raj who lived nearby was called.

The kobi raj came in, sat down, and began to chant softly in Arabic while staring into a mirror. He asked Safia Khatun to come and sit opposite him. She held the mirror and gazed into it. He continued chanting and at intervals blew in her direction. As he chanted he

tapped the ground with one knuckle. Soon Safia Khatun began to shake. She appeared to be quite distraught by the whole affair. Just before he finished, the kobi raj pressed two fingers on her eyelids and grasped her right forearm. The chanting and blowing was repeated with the two children, but not with Lal Miya. Then the kobi raj announced that Safia Khatun had been attacked by a jinn. This was why their son had died. He told the couple that if they had only brought the baby to him, he could have saved the child. But there was a second element here. The house was also contaminated by the jinn. There was bad air here. The kobi raj would have to treat the house as well as the woman. Lal Miya agreed, he had been considering moving the house. Their house faced west so that it did not get the prevailing winds which for most of the year moved from south to north. It was very hot in the house. But the kobi raj said no, that it would not be necessary to move the house. He was not interested in how hot it was inside the house. He would cleanse it. The kobi raj ordered a glass of water and a dish of mustard oil brought. He said some mantra over the oil and water. Then he instructed Safia Khatun to rub the oil on her body and in the evening sprinkle some of the water in the house and circle the outside of the house sprinkling the rest of the water.

After these instructions had been carried out, however, Lal Miya's mind was still not at ease. He didn't seem to believe that anything had been changed. Other villagers came over in the evening and sat around agreeing that there definitely was bad air in the place. They talked about this and that powerful kobi raj of whom they had heard, some from distant places. They spoke of Ghalib Miya who was said to have control of jinn who worked for him. Ghalib and his jinn could do

many amazing things. Lal Miya, however, could not afford Ghalib's price. So Lal Miya decided to go out and see Abdul Rashid, the fakir at Tintala. He went in the evening and told this fakir-kobi raj about the death of his son and other misfortunes. Abdul Rashid told Lal Miya to come back the next day and bring his family.

The next afternoon Lal Miya and his family arrived at Tintals. The family went in and seated themselves on mats in front of the fakir's bed. Abdul Rashid first asked Lal Miya if he read from the Qur'an. Lal Miya admitted that he was not able to. Then the fakir asked Safia Khatun if she read from the Qur'an. She said that she did. As stated previously, more emphasis was given to teaching girls to read Arabic than was given to teaching boys.

Lal Miya was sent to the tank to bathe in the manner one bathes before saying prayers (namaj). Safia Khatun said that she had done so before leaving home. Everyone, including the children, was taken in to the shrine of the dead fakir. There they knelt down and placed first their finger tips and then their foreheads on the bed of the dead fakir. After this brief ceremony they all returned to Abdul Rashid's building and again seated themselves in front of his bed. Lal Miya had brought a bottle of water and a bottle of mustard oil which he handed to the fakir. Abdul Rashid in turn put the mouth of each of these two bottles over his big toe and made sounds as if simultaneously injesting air and liquid; one might say gulping sounds. Then he returned the two bottles to Lal Miya. The water was to be drunk by Safia Khatun, and the oil rubbed on her body. It was apparently still the mother who was judged to be in need of the cure. After this, Abdul Rashid took a small commercially made biscuit from a package and

touched it to his own tongue. He gave one such sanctified biscuit to each member of the family to eat. Rather than using mantra, it seemed that Abdul Rasid imparted power to his medicine by putting it in contact with his own body. The oil and water touched his big toe, and the biscuit his tongue. With the eating of the biscuit, the session was over for the day, but Lal Miya was told to return alone in one week and to bring three tagi. A tagi was a black cord which many people wore around their waists. It might also be used to hang a tabij on the body.

The next week Lal Miya brought the tagi plus an offering of incense, candles and biscuits. Abdul Rashid blessed the tagi and returned them to Lal Miya for his family to wear. Then Abdul Rashid spoke softly with Lal Miya, and Lal Miya began to cry. When I asked Lal Miya later what the fakir had said to him or asked him, he declined to say. But he mentioned a couple of times later that he had not been as good as he could have been in his life. It is my belief that the fakir asked Lal Miya if he had not committed some sin which contributed to this misfortune. And this struck home with Lal Miya who had some real or imagined sin on his conscience. A bad conscience might have helped to explain Lal Miya's frenzied search for a cause and cure for his son's death and other misfortunes. He loved his son very much, as did his wife, but even she mentioned with a bit of surprise the extent of his grief. She had had to hide all of the things which had belonged to the infant so that Lal Miya would not see them. Anything that reminded him of his son sent him into the depths of despair. His behavior was in contrast to a few men I observed, who barely seemed to notice the wailing of their wives over the death of an infant. Perhaps

the continuing efforts to exorcise a jinn helped to exorcise the grief and perhaps the guilt of Lal Miya.

THE CONTROL OF JINN

Lal Miya had thought of going to Ghalib Miya for help in his troubles, but knew he could never find the money to pay this man. Other kobi raj charged a few rupees, or even five or ten. Ghalib Miya, however, had a reputation for charging exorbitant sums. His avarice and, perhaps, his life style got him in trouble on occasion. Jealousy was a factor. Though I had met the man previously, I first heard of his unusual powers while listening to a conversation among some people from his village. An old man of some substance and a number of younger men were sitting around chatting. The old man began:

> Fifteen days ago a man came from another union to Ghalib's house. The man told Ghalib that his son was lost, and he was unable to find the boy. Ghalib told the man that a jinn had taken his son. If the man would give Ghalib Rs. 100, his son would be returned in three days. The man gave Ghalib Rs. 50 as a down payment, but returned in three days to say that his son had not returned. So Ghalib told him to wait seven more days. After a lapse of seven days, the man returned and demanded his money back. Ghalib gave the man Rs. 25 and said he would return the other Rs. 25 in a week.

At this point, a man from another village blurted out, "Why don't the people of your village do something about this devil?" The old man replied, "We tried, we had a meeting of the village elders (bicar), and we gave him a good beating. But the man has no shame, he won't stop." Then a young man diffidently interjected, "Once a man came to Ghalib and asked for help because his son was not yet married. Ghalib told him to go home and within one month his son would be married. Exactly

one month later the son was married. That time Ghalib told the truth." But the old man went on to grumble, "I have twice as much land as Ghalib, but he has more money than I have. He has such a big house, compared to my small house." Many people of his village distrusted, envied, and disliked Ghalib, but he had his own small following in his neighborhood. These were not, however, the influential people in the village.

When in the right mood, Ghalib liked to talk about his work as a kobi raj. He willingly described to me the herbal cures for small pox, cholera, diarrhea, uterine tumors, kidney stones, menstrual problems, sterility and impotency. He was more reluctant, however, to give out his specific remedies for snake bite or the bite of a rabid dog.[15] This led me to doubt his belief in the prescriptions he so readily gave out. Here was a sophisticated man who could see that it might be useful to have the anthropologist as a friend, but had no intention of being used himself by the anthropologist. In any case, his reputation was not as an herbalist, but as a kobi raj for whom jinn worked.

One day Ghalib showed me a letter he had. The contents of the letter, dated August 1959, stated that, "This man, Ghalib Miya, is possessed by a jinn named Maulavi Abdur Rab. The jinn uses the man to give medicines to the people, and from this the man receives no profit." The letter went on to say something about assisting this man and not hindering his work. There were some hand written endorsements in the margin of the letter. One was from a local civil administrator to the effect that, "This man does no harm and actually seems to help some people." The letter and endorsements were all in English. The letter was probably meant to keep him out of trouble with local officials and

perhaps influence an educated, urban clientele. The part about receiving no profit, however, was either very out of date or else quite mistaken. He wanted me to get an updated version of this letter for him. He was disappointed to learn that I was not a close friend of the local civil administrators and had not even met most of them.

I had only one opportunity to observe Ghalib with patients. Two women came to his house from a residential village north of town. They said that they knew of someone in their village with a problem similar to theirs who had been helped by Ghalib. One of the women was the second wife in a polygynous marriage, whose husband no longer paid any attention to her. She wanted Ghalib to help her regain her husband's interest. He was very sympathetic and said that this was a very bad thing. He talked to the woman for quite awhile, but then said that there was nothing he could do for her. This rejection may have resulted from my close observation of the whole conversation. He was afraid of my reaction.

I asked Ghalib many times to let me observe the jinn who helped him to help people. I wanted to observe them in action with a patient, but that was denied me. The jinn performed for me alone just before I left Comilla. Ghalib and I sat in a room with all the doors and windows shut at about eleven o'clock one night. It was completely dark inside the room. We were seated on grass mats facing a small rug on the floor and one hung on the wall. The rugs probably were there for the effect they had on the sound phenomenon. As we sat there in silence, I first heard some knocking on the metal roof of the building, then some small bits of earth fell on me from above. Finally a voice said, "Salam alaikum, I am Maulavi Abdur Rab." Then I heard the voice

of Ghalib next to me tell me to ask some questions of the maulavi. I asked where he came from and about his work. Then a higher pitched voice joined us. She introduced herself as Mariam Bibi. She told us that Karim (another jinn) was busy elsewhere and would not be able to come this evening. This was a very convincing performance which I'm certain would have fooled anyone who had never heard of the ability to throw one's voice. I inquired of some educated Bengalis, and they were not familiar with this phenomenon. After the jinn had departed, Ghalib went on to tell of other jinn who had previously or still worked for him. A Hindu jinn had died recently at the age of seventy. Another maulavi came occasionally, and at one time a deaf-mute jinn had worked for Ghalib. He said that he knew when the deaf-mute jinn was around by what he did.

Of all those whom I met who claimed to have some extraordinary power, Ghalib was the one whom I judged to be fully aware of his deception of his clients. It was quite likely that the others believed as fully in their own powers or the powers they used as did the people who came to them for help. When asked his occupation, Ghalib said that he was primarily a grihasta (householder), but he did not cultivate his two acres of land himself. His two secondary occupations were cloth middleman and contractor. The cloth middleman bought the cloth from wholesalers and resold it to itinerant merchants who sold in the local bazars. To say that a man was a contractor was almost as damning as to say he was a money lender (mahajan). The profits were good in contracting, and the opportunities to increase those profits by using shoddy materials and receiving kickbacks from the laborers were equally good. I never saw Ghalib, however, engaged in either of these

secondary occupations. I knew him only as a kobi raj and a man about the village. But these secondary occupations give some idea of the entreprenurial character of the man. His was a polygynous household with two wives and six children, three by each wife. This in a society which no longer considered polygyny prestigious. He took delight in threatening pretty little neighbor girls with marriage. Here was a man who did not care for the good opinion of the influential elders of his village. He had at least the sneaking admiration of the teenage boys and the open admiration of his immediate neighbors. He flaunted village norms, and though it was said he was beaten once, generally got away with it. Though the people of his own village called him a charlatan and a man of bad character, he apparently never lacked for clients.

BLACK MAGIC?

In many parts of the world disease is commonly attributed to the enmity of other members of the society. A particular group of people in the society, such as wives or affinal kin, are constantly suspected of witchcraft or sorcery. This was not a common phenomenon in eastern Bengal. Disease was blamed on jinn, relatively anonymous entities with no relation to the social structure. Or the blame was turned inward, and illness was said to be caused by sin or an individual's lack of faith in God. Or God might even be blamed; that is, illness was simply a matter of fate. On only one occasion did I observe illness blamed on another person.

A young man of Shaheenpur had been suffering from continuous stomach problems. He had seen every possible type of practitioner with no satisfaction. A neighbor suggested that about ten years ago he had had similar problems, and a kobi raj from about twelve miles away had discovered evil charms secreted in his house. The charms had caused the illness, but someone with a grudge must have had these charms written and hidden them in the house.

This kobi raj, a Buddhist, was called to try to help the young man. First, the kobi raj got a large pot of water over which he said mantras (in this case, perhaps not in Arabic, but in Pali, the language of the Buddhist religion). Some of this water was sprinkled on the kobi raj, who then fell into a trance. He began to worm his way along on his belly with one hand stretched out in front, as if searching. In his manner, he proceeded into the house of the patient. There he found a charm under one leg of the patient's bed and another under the front door stoop. These charms only needed to be covered with a little soil, and it was believed that they gradually worked their way down into the earth over time. After finding the charms, the kobi raj wormed his way back out of the house and rolled over on his back, mumbling and still in a trance. When some more of the water was sprinkled on him, he came out of the trance. People said that if the water were accidently spilled while he was in the trance, he would stay in that trance forever. After the kobi raj had revived, he put the two charms in the water remaining in the pot. One charm was a small piece of burnt brick with some marks on it, and the other looked like a tabij. According to the informants, the paper in the tabij was supposed to have the image of the intended victim on it, some written

charm, and a spot of red. The water had obliterated much of what was on the paper, but one could see what might have once been the outline of a face, and there was some blurred red coloring on the paper. After the two charms were defaced, they were thrown into the tank.

The kobi raj said that the charms had been placed in the house by a women of the homestead, but he would not name anyone. He told the patient to take some of the water over which mantras had been said, put it on his head, rub it down his face, and call out the name of Shah Jalal of Sylhet. The patient was told to repeat this procedure again after one week. His mother, wife, and sister should cleanse the house with this water, also. No other women should come near this water, however, especially no woman in her menses. I left the area too soon after this event to know if the patient was satisfied with his cure by this method.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The use of traditional herbal medicines need not be predicated on any particular theory of disease causation. One's mother and father told him about the remedy or a friend told him, and it worked, so it was used. There was no need to know why. The exorcism of jinn, however, is based on the assumption that jinn cause disease and misfortune. The use of tabij is a little more complicated. The power of the tabij is the power of the words written on the paper, words from the Qur'an. The reading of the Qur'an, even without understanding, is considered beneficial because these are the words of God. So, wearing the words of God may also benefit a person in a similar way, only in

this case curing him. Or it may be that the words of God keep away evil forces, as holding the Christian cross in front of one is a protection against vampires and the like.

The rural people also have some inkling of the scientific ideas of disease causation. No one resisted the innoculation of children for small pox, though some had their doubts. Most of the people who had the money for the medicines went to modern, western (allopathic) doctors, though the allopathic doctor might be one of a number of practitioners consulted. The question was whether the illness was serious enough to merit the expense of an allopathic doctor. The man who was dying of blood poisoning was finally taken to an allopathic doctor when it became evident that he was seriously ill. He and his family, however, rebelled at the diagnosis and projected treatment: amputation of the affected leg. When they finally agreed to amputation, even that was too late. Allopathic doctors probably had as many failures as any kind of practitioner, given the uncertainty about the seriousness of a person's illness and the body's ability to heal itself.

There was one type of curing based on a specific theory of disease causation not discussed so far. In the winter season, the women of a gypsy-like group of people made the rounds of the villages offering to cure "bugs" (poka) of the hair, eyes, teeth, and fingernails. Certainly hair may have "real bugs" in it, but what are the bugs which attack the eyes, teeth, and fingernails? The people were unable to describe these diseases with any precision, but assured me that they were bothered by such "bugs." My surmise was that these "bugs" may have been based on a misunderstood explanation of the germ theory of disease, germs described as little bugs causing disease.

Though people were occasionally open to the suggestion that they were ill because someone wished them ill, the suggestion was seldom made. The hostility engendered by day to day social contact was not often covered over with accusations of blame for disease. Conflict was open, limited only by the generally accepted definitions of role behavior among kin and public opinion.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I have tried to describe the religious beliefs and practices of one particular village in eastern Bengal and the interaction between the religion and the social structure. The village as a unit was only a loose structure. It was seldom an interacting social group as a whole body, or even representationally. Religious ritual was performed on a village-wide basis twice a year at the 'Id celebrations. That the greatest proportion of the village males met together for the prayer was not significant, however, for the village as such. The men came as individuals and prayed as individuals. If a section of the village men had decided to go to an 'Id prayer in another locality, the only difference this would have made would have been to lessen the number at the Shaheenpur prayer ground. It was believed that the larger the group of 'Id worshippers with whom one prayed, the more merit accrued to the individual. The particular group with whom one prayed mattered little.

Nicholas (1967) has described a village in West Bengal where eighty-six per cent of the villagers were equal in caste rank. While dwelling in a relatively equalitarian society, the villagers attempted to replicate what they conceived of as the hierarchy of castes appropriate to the great tradition of Hinduism in their community. Though

Shaheenpur was also a village of the Bengal Delta, the great tradition which these people were trying to emulate was quite different. Their problem was rather to create and maintain a society of complete equality among believers.

Shaheenpur was even less economically differentiated than many of the other villages of the locality. There were no very large landowners. Though the difference between twelve acres and landlessness made a big difference in the standard of living which could be maintained, the major gap was between those men who had enough land to maintain their independence (approximately two acres) and those who were dependent on others at various times. No man had enough land to have a large group of tenants or sharecroppers. The equalitarian nature of the village was reflected in the fact that no powerful, hereditary sardars existed. Quite a number of men were considered qualified to sit on the local adjudication, or mediation, councils (bicar). It was not so much wealth as reason which determined whose opinion would be heard at these councils. There were leadership roles in the village: the union council member and the informal role of men called often to sit on the adjudication councils. With a few exceptions, the advice of these men was usually heeded. The ideology of Islam called for a universal brotherhood of Muslims, an ideology closely paralleled by the social system in Shaheenpur.

On the sub-village level, the reyai was an interacting social group, described in chapter two. There was an exchange of food among the members, mainly in the form of feasts. The exception was at Qurban 'Id when meat from the sacrificial animal was given by those reyai households that could afford the purchase of an animal to those

reyai households too impoverished to perform the sacrifice. At other times invitations were sent to all the members of the reyai for any feast held to mark the rite of passage for a reyai household member. Invitations to the entire reyai was the ideal behavior. Even on this sub-village level, however, reyai boundaries were ill-defined, with conflicting testimony on the membership of a given reyai. The rule of inviting all reyai members and only reyai members to a feast was honored mainly in the breach. Some people denied the rule; others made excuses of extenuating circumstances. It certainly must have been difficult to invite reyai members when few people could agree on who the members were.

The area of society in which real social relations came closest to the ideal was within the ghanistha (close) atmiya, bilateral and affinal kin. Within the atmiya, proper relations were maintained, invitations were extended and accepted, or a serious breach resulted. Individuals broke the rules, as in any area of society, but there was much less ambiguity about the rules, and breaking the rules was not ignored as it might be among members of a reyai. There was a reaction to improper behavior, and relations usually became strained. It was only at this level of society that integrative ritual had a part to play. Atmiya were invited to rites of passage and participated in the rituals. For example, at marriages, kinsmen participated in making the arrangements, and kinswomen had roles in the performance of some of the rituals. As shown in chapter four, the symbolism of these rituals emphasized and reinforced the important ties among the atmiya.

Gluckman (1962:33-34) has described how the simple act of ritual is believed mystically to transform an individual from one role to

another in tribal societies. In such a society, a boy could never be a man without participating in the initiation. There is believed to be an actual change which takes place because of the ritual and only by means of this ritual. This was not true in Shaheenpur. A Muslim male with poor or careless parents could still take on the responsibilities and privileges of adulthood without the circumcision ceremony. The only exception was the funeral. The lack of a funeral, funeral prayers, and proper burial would have a negative mystical effect on the progress of the soul. After death there is little that can be done to or for a person except through the supernatural.

Etiquette, or proper behavior, was also found to take on mystical aspects in tribal society according to Gluckman. It is difficult to say when an act takes on mystical importance. Certainly proper behavior, especially toward kinsmen, was highly valued in Shaheenpur. Proper behavior toward other guests was also to be desired, but its lack was attributed to ignorance. One would not be ignorant of how to behave toward kinsmen. The son who spoke out in the presence of his father or showed disrespect in some other flagrant manner was more than just disrespectful or a bad boy. There was a strong revulsion at such behavior. To illustrate, I was continually warned about a particular area of the village: they were a bad group (kharāp samāj), and I should avoid them. People were reluctant, however, to tell me what was bad about them. Finally someone explained, as an example of how bad they were, that in one homestead, the oldest son of the head of the homestead had run off at the age of eighteen and deserted his family. And this was not the first time--the same thing had happened in the previous generation. In another part of the village a murder

had taken place some time previously. I have already mentioned that there was a band of thieves in yet another part of the village. But I was never warned about those people or those parts of the village. An individual, however, who cut all ties, rejected the values of the village, and ran away; this could not be dealt with and was horrifying. This was only one example and perhaps should not be generalized too far, but it gives an idea of the importance to the villagers of maintaining kinship ties through proper behavior toward kinsmen.

Occasionally when trying to discover the meaning and origins of elements of ritual such as surrounded various rites of passage, I asked people if they thought that this or that act was "Islamic." The answer was often some variation of, "Our parents did it this way, and they were good Muslims, so it must be a Muslim thing to do." This conforms to what Weber (1946:296) called "traditionalism," or the merit which accrues to the performance of everyday routine. The best model for understanding the religion of the people of Shaheenpur, however, remains the definition of religion by Geertz (1966:4). Religion, according to Geertz, is a "system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." "Motivations," Geertz (1966:9-11) explains, are favorable dispositions toward action; they are not actions, but encourage the believer to conform to the values of the religion and society. "Moods" refers to a state of mind that is conscious when the believer is involved in a worshipful act. Outside the religious act, the mood still influences the attitudes of society.

These moods may be awe, reverence, or fear, or, for the Sufi, ecstacy. The symbol system for the Muslims of eastern Bengal consists not only of the obvious prayer cap on the head, the neighborhood mosque, the Qur'an, the rhythm of the prayer, and the periods of special commemoration, but also of the social institutions and the behavior prescribed within the institutions. This system of symbols produces in most of the inhabitants of Shaheenpur the "moods and motivations" of living in a society which is striving to fulfill the injunctions of their religion, the result of which will be a vaguely conceived, but good, Islamic society. It is believed that God himself has set forth the rules for society. It is the duty of society to teach or convince man to conform.

In an earlier work, Geertz (1957:32-54) cited a situation in Java where the moods and motivations produced by the symbol system no longer meshed with the reality of the society. A segment of the population rejected Islam, but found themselves at a loss as to how to bury a person without Islamic ritual and the ritual specialist. There were potential conflicts in Shaheenpur between the concept of an Islamic society on the local level and laws passed on the national level for what was then Pakistan. The law which gave orphaned sons the right to inherit from their paternal grandfathers apparently coincided with much of the existing sentiment in the community. The law fixing for marriage a higher age than was the custom was ignored and unenforced, though it conflicted with no religious injunction. The laws of Islam state only that the individuals to be married should be at an age of consent. The age of consent was defined as being lower in the village than it was in the national law. Laws, for example, the new divorce law, giving greater rights to women, however, faced

opposition from the village men. This was the situation in Pakistan when I was doing my field work. The new state of Bangladesh may be more sensitive to the desires of the people, rural as well as urban. On the other hand, the trend may be toward greater secularization, overriding traditional village sentiments.

Geertz (1968:13-19) recently has tried to compare Islam in Java and Morocco in their respective historical and environmental settings. One of his conclusions about Islam in the modern world is that Muslims are engaging in self deception in trying to make a fit between the revealed world according to Islamic teaching and the modern world in which they must live. To argue this point is beyond the scope of this thesis. In his statement about self deception, however, Geertz has considered mainly the urban, educated Muslim. The Muslims of Shaheenpur did not need to engage in self deception. Their religion explained quite well the world in which they lived. The problems and misfortunes experienced were the result of living in a society which did not conform in all ways to the teaching of the Qur'an.

They were aware that life was easier for some people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, than it was for them, especially in material wealth. There were varying levels of sophistication in the conception of the rest of the world. Some few people had traveled outside eastern Bengal during World War II. More had been as far as the provincial capital of Dacca. The simplest idea of the world that I came across was a woman who divided the world into Bengalis and Panjabis (an ethnic group in West Pakistan and northwestern India). Even the relatively isolated Bengali villager came in contact with Panjabis as they were the people who predominated in the civil administration and the military. Ideas

about the life of other peoples were minimally available in the schools and in the mass media. Also, life was apparently easier or more prosperous formerly, within the memory of the older inhabitants of the village. One must be careful of taking the nostalgic statements of the elderly at face value, but most explanations of the reyai included statements about how much more feasting used to take place within the reyai before people became so poor. The last devastating famine took place in Bengal in the early forties, and the epidemics of cholera and smallpox have become less severe with preventive measures. The recent decrease in famine and disease has added to the natural increase of the population. There are more mouths to feed from the increasingly fractioned land holdings.

One need not go far to find the reason for the difficulties according to the villagers. Men were not behaving as good Muslims. There was lying, cheating, stealing, and improper behavior between the sexes. The lie was not, saying what you believed someone wanted to hear rather than what you believed to be the truth; such untruths were accepted and right. The lie that was condemned was a claim to a certain plot of land which was clearly not that of the claimant, who ordinarily paid an official a sum of money to decide in his favor. He had lied; he had cheated the other man and had stolen the other man's land. This was not to say that one side was always clearly in the wrong in such a dispute. Both sides might equally be convinced of the legitimacy of their claims. But depending on which side one was, the other side was composed of liars, cheats, and thieves. It was this behavior which was ruining society, so the villagers said; men did not say their prayers regularly or keep the Ramzan fast; the wealthy (in town) did not give

a fair share to the poor. The blame was not fixed on the individual, as no one could hope to be a good Muslim in an un-Islamic society. The argument was circular. It was difficult, if not impossible, to be a good Muslim in an un-Islamic society, and the good Islamic society would never be achieved as long as people did not conform to the rules.

For some of the radical Islamic political parties the argument was not circular. They fixed the blame squarely on the national government that was not set up according to the rules outlined by Mohammed for society in seventh century Arabia, although members of those parties favored the Government of Pakistan against the Awami League and Bengali nationalists during the national liberation struggle in Bangladesh. The argument of these parties was of little interest to the villagers. They directed the blame closer to home. They were critical of what they understood urban life to be. There was also diffuse criticism of other villages and other neighborhoods within one's own village, coupled with the apparent assurance that life would be much better if only everyone obeyed the rules. Each person, according to his understanding, could pick out the institution or practice he believed to be most detrimental to society. "Female education is destroying the modesty of women." "The venality of local officials who take bribes is destroying society." God had laid out the plan as to how man should arrange his society. If man chose to ignore these words, he would suffer. There was one area, however, in which responsibility was fixed. Each man was responsible for the salvation of his own soul. He tried to conform for his own good. If other men tried harder, it might not be so difficult.

Buddhism is primarily an ethical system directed toward other-worldly goals. Spiro (1967:264-271) has studied Buddhism in Burma and described how the accompanying spirit worship concerns worldly desires and goals not covered by Buddhism. As has been shown, the Muslim by conforming to the same set of rules was striving both for advancement in his world and for a place in the other. Islam is concerned with the proper order of life in this world. In Islam it is difficult to separate the secular and sacred spheres. The Prophet of Islam lived to see the beginning of an Islamic state, and rules were set up for heretofore secular institutions, making the institutions and society itself sacred. No priestly roles were set aside to be elevated above those of other believers. One man might become a religious scholar and another a merchant. One was not more "holy" or "sacred" than the other--ideally. Society needed both. Of course, in the "real" condition, some men were accorded more prestige than others, and where religion was important the religious scholar was honored. All society, however, was equally sacred. No aspect of the society was more or less sacred. Marriage was not thought of as a "mystical" rite, or sacrament, where that which was two was somehow transformed into one. There were simply rules to be followed if the marriage was to be considered proper and legitimate. The rules concerned a contract to be entered into, a contract which like all contracts could be broken. There were Islamic prescriptions for social roles and institutions, but little that was specifically set apart as particularly religious.

If Buddhism is too quietistic and otherworldly, Islam may be said to be too pedestrian or mundane. It was even difficult to separate time into secular and sacred. Friday, the day of the congregational

prayers, was not considered a day of rest in the village. Men simply took an hour from their work at noon to participate in the congregational prayers. In a religion which concerns itself with every aspect of life, the people tend to be deprived of the momentary flights of exaltation associated with the particularly sacred. For most people a crisis came sometime in their lives; when their needs were beyond the ordinary. It was then of little comfort to go to a man who could only tell one what the rules were. Often at such times, Bengali Muslims resorted to men believed to have special access to God--fakirs and pirs--and to their belief in spirits (jinn). Others who were drawn to the periodic exaltation from the mundane attended the saint cults regularly.

Islam puts no man above any other. Each man must make his own peace with God. In Islam the layman is denied any dependence on a priest. The only authority is the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet. Religious scholars have interpreted these writings, but this does not remove individual responsibility. Some men cannot stand such emotional loneliness; they need assurances and they go to shrines, pirs, and fakirs. In one sense, given the philosophy is Islam, this is a legitimate path. There is no human authority to tell them they are wrong. The needs of most men most of the time, however, are sufficiently satisfied by the "moods and motivation" produced by living an Islamic life in an Islamic society, however poorly realized.

FOOTNOTES

[1] One example is a book by Hafeez Zaidi (1970) on village modernization. Nazmul Karim (1956) has written an article specifically dealing with some of these supernatural creatures. There are also the writings of the British civil administrators in the censuses and gazateers. These included some of the beliefs of villagers as observed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[2] The transliteration of Bengali words follows the system proposed by Inden and Dimock (1970). These words are spelled as found in Dev (1961) or, when not found in the dictionary, as spelled by literate Bengalis in the Comilla area. Words of Arabic or Persian origin, not found in Dev, are recorded as found in such works on Islam as Levy's The Social Structure of Islam (1969).

[3] In 1969 some of the East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (EPWAPDA) employees in Comilla gheraoed some of the high officials of EPWAPDA in the EPWAPDA guest house. To gherao means to force management to stay in their offices or other such places without food and amenities until they agree to certain demands. By this forceable tactic the EPWAPDA employees won an agreement to take all temporary employees on a permanent basis and to give a general increase in wages. After the change of government a short time later, however, when General Yahya Khan reinstituted martial law, those concessions, gained through force, were not allowed.

[4] This homestead of Hindu fishermen had originally come from a village a short walk north of Shaheenpur. In 1963 they had gone to Tripura, India, in a general exchange of populations that took place at that time. But they could find no work or land in India, so they returned. They could not return to their old village, however, as their former homesteads had been taken over by others. The head of one of the homesteads in north neighborhood gave them land on which to build their houses for a nominal yearly rent of Rs. 1. He also bought them a large net with which to fish very large tanks (man-made ponds). When they fished a tank, fishermen got one-third of the catch. They paid back the cost of their net in one year. The other villagers said that it was good to have fishermen around. Most homesteads could not afford to own a large fish net exclusively for their own use. And they said that Muslims preferred not to do that work.

[5] Often homesteads were given names. These names might simply describe some attribute of the homestead such as new (Notun Bari) or big (Boro Bari). A number of other names were titles acquired by an ancestor or

living inhabitant of the homestead, such as Maulavi Bari, Munshi Bari (titles earned by studying at a religious school), Fakir Bari (a religious beggar), or Haji Bari (one who had been on the pilgrimage to Mecca). Some of the smaller homesteads in which no one had any particular title were simply referred to as the homestead of someone who lived there, usually the head of the homestead or former head. Occasionally, when I asked the name of the homestead in my census of the village, a quick conference was held by the men present to come up with a suitable name for their homestead. It became obvious that the names were sometimes made up for my benefit when people were later mystified when I tried to refer to the homestead by its new name. The brothers in this homestead decided to honor their deceased father by giving the homestead his name. This was a new name as far as the other villagers were concerned.

[6] Rs. is the abbreviation for the rupee (thāka), the unit of Pakistani currency. At that time, one rupee was worth about U.S. $ .21.

[7] The problem of people and groups of people having hinsa for one another was a common topic of conversation and concern. English speaking Bengalis always translated the word as hate. I never felt that hate quite conveyed the meaning. The dictionary says malice and envy. These words get closer to the meaning, but do not exhaust the meanings. Very poor people feel hinsa for those better off-envy. But the wealthy also have hinsa for the poor, dirty peasants--contempt and disdain. Sometimes when I would come into a very poor house and sit on a straw mat, I would hear the people whisper, "She has no hinsa." The word appears to go along with a hierarchical system. Not to accept an invitation or proffered food indicates hinsa. "So he thinks he's too good to come to our house or eat our food."

[8] G. E. Von Grunebaum (1951:72-77) described the origin of the maulid in Iraq and Egypt in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D. It was originally performed on the twelfth of Rabi, the date of Mohammed's death. As the birth date was unknown, the birth and death were commemorated together. Von Grunebaum saw it as an attempt by the Muslims of that time to compete with the Christians who placed such importance on the person of Jesus and his miracles. Islamic leaders of the time and region denounced the maulid as an innovation. The performance of the maulid was limited to the twelfth of Rabi, except in Mecca where it became the custom to hold a maulid on the seventh day after the death of a kinsman. The current practice in Bengal is to hold a milad (maulid) on any occasion of thanksgiving.

[9] The Islamic schools of religion are called madrasah. Usually there are ten grades in a madrasah. When a man passes class ten he is given the title maulavi. Some madrasah have twelve grades, and passing the twelfth class entitles one to be called maulana. There were no maulana in Shaheenpur. Men who had only studied to some of the lower grades had other titles. These titles included mollah, munshi, and kari.

[10] Hilma Granqvist (1947) observed a similar age span for the circumcision of boys in Palestinian Muslim villages, but also noted that

previously circumcision had been followed closely by marriage and was considered a preparation for marriage. At the other extreme, in the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam (1953:254-255) it was reported that in some Muslim areas circumcision took place at the seventh day naming ceremonies for boys. I had thought that circumcision might be also a kind of confirmation. But when I asked if the circumcision took place after the boys had learned their prayers, the informant looked startled and replied that this sounded like a good idea, but was not true.

[11] It was from the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam (1953:89-90) that I discovered that the parting of the hair into three sections was significant, and, indeed, prescribed by Islam. Though I had noticed at the bath of the corpse that the hair on the top of the head was divided from the hair on each side, this had made no impression on me at the time.

[12] M. A. Rahim (1963:100-103) states that there is no authentic account of the life and career of Shah Jalal. He has recounted, however, some stories which he says were based on local traditions. In one story, Shah Jalal was the warrior-saint who with his followers defeated the Hindu ruler of Sylhet. In the other story, he and his followers simply joined with the invading Muslim forces and lent their moral support to the army in the defeat of the Hindu ruler, Gaur Govinda. The informants in Comilla repeated the former account and made Shah Jalal the invading warrior who defeated the Hindu forces.

[13] For the Muslim the day begins at sundown. For example, the month of fasting, Ramzan, begins with the sighting of the 'Id moon. The last day of fasting has ended, and the first day of the next month has begun. Friday is the most holy day of the week for Muslims. Though it is good to perform any and all of one's daily prayers in the mosque, it is most important for men to attend the mosque for Friday noon prayers. At that time a "sermon" is also presented by the imam. Sundown on Thursday is the beginning of Friday. Commemorations at shrines occurred and Sufi groups met Thursday evenings. In the stories about fakirs, the things which happened to them often happened on Thursday.

[14] Two works in which similar tales may be found are The Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India by William Crooke, originally published in 1896 and reprinted in 1968 by M. Manoharalal, Delhi and Islam in India and Pakistan by Murray T. Titus, Calcutta, Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1959.

[15] Many informants described the effects of being bitten by a rabid dog. After being bitten, a person would have puppies grow in his stomach, and he would die. People were quite frightened of this, and many seemed to think it would result from the bite of a dog, rabid or not. Another belief was that dogs, especially puppies which tend to chew on anything, including people, would stop biting people once they had tasted human milk. In an experiment, we were able to prove this belief to be untrue.

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