

WOMEN, MEN, AND WORK IN A BANGLADESH VILLAGE:  
A TIME-USE STUDY

by

Habiba Zaman

A thesis  
presented to the University of Manitoba in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

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ISBN 0-315-77811-3

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HABIBA ZAMAN

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

Activity patterns and allocation of time in terms of gender, social class, and seasonality are explored in a Bangladesh village. I critically examine conceptual, definitional, ideological, and methodological issues linked to common underestimation of female labor force participation and women's contribution to household economy. A census of 342 households, focused on land ownership and work, was the basis for a detailed study of time-use among a stratified sample of households differentiated in terms of access to land. Interviews and participant observation supplemented these survey data.

Women's work that involves home-based and survival-related activities (e.g., molasses making, raising poultry, fetching water, collecting firewood) has remained outside the labor market and largely overlooked in economic analysis. A broader definition of labor force, designed to include all home-based activities that generate income, yields data indicating a high activity level of women. Labor force participation surveys must be sensitive to activities that are not only market-oriented but that also help sustain the economy of the domestic unit and contribute to the GNP.

Due to culturally structured gender roles in Bangladesh, women's work is more home or *bari*-based. However, some women in the study village reported off-*bari* employment involving work in field agriculture as wage laborers, in post-harvest operations, and in construction sites. Women who work in the field as wage laborers constitute a separate social category in the village by breaking into

the wage market. They are also breaking social taboos and *purdah* (seclusion) restrictions. Increased female wage labor in the village may result in an alternative form of resistance to seclusion and domination.

From the perspective of integrating women in development, research findings focus on three broad policy issues: (i) the need for an "extended" labor force participation approach for a better understanding of the significant role of women in field agriculture and post-harvest processing; (ii) creation of further non-traditional employment and business opportunities for poor women in the rural areas; and (iii) consciousness-raising and challenge of cultural barriers among women initiated by the poor women in the village

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge with great pleasure the important influence and encouragement of several people in completing this research on women and work in Bangladesh. My foremost thanks are due my adviser, Dr. Raymond E. Wiest, for his time and knowledge in discussing the issues raised here. I am heavily indebted to Dr. Wiest for his help in processing my field data and for constructive criticisms on earlier drafts. I wish to thank Dr. Louise E. Sweet for her intellectual and emotional support during my graduate studies at Manitoba. Drs. Dona Davis and Shiva Halli deserve special mention for their constructive critical comments on my work.

My greatest debts are to women, men and children of Tarapur and to my research assistants who helped me in carrying out the research and solving logistical problems of working in the field. A field research grant from the Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development enabled me to get to Bangladesh to conduct this research. I am thankful to the Winrock International Institute for their financial assistance.

I have to thank my family -- my husband and two children (Kusum and Asif) -- who never complained about my preoccupation with research and writing. My husband took special interest in my work and helped me in various ways to complete it. A special thanks goes to my sister, Irani, for her help during my fieldwork.

Finally, I thank Mrs. Jennie Stalker for her assistance in preparing the tables used in this study and for the help to finalise the dissertation in its present form.

H.Z.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: A SURVEY OF SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Third World countries, women are by and large regarded as economically inactive members by official surveys and censuses. They contribute, it is believed, very little to economic development. Therefore, survey and census data consistently undercount and underestimate female labor force participation despite women's significant role in domestic tasks as well as their contribution to the survival of peasant households and the national economy (Anker, Khan and Gupta 1988; Goldschmidt-Clement 1987; Nuss 1989). For example, in India, according to the 1981 census, about twelve percent of females are economically active; in Morocco, according to the 1971 census, eight percent of the country's women are part of the labor force; Jordan accounted for roughly six percent in 1975; and Pakistan only four percent in the 1976 census (Dixon 1982b).

Like other Third World countries, Bangladesh census data also underestimate women's labor force participation rate. According to one source (Jahan 1989), women labor force participation for Bangladesh was estimated as four percent in 1974, five percent in 1981, and eight percent in 1984-85. Analysis of this low participation rate is complicated further by abrupt variation in the percentage from one census to another. For example, according to the 1974 census, 53 percent of the males and less than three percent of females were involved in the labor force. However, according to the 1961 census, 56 percent of males and about eleven percent of females were in the labor force (Sattar 1979). This shows that the percentage of economically active members has declined by 1974, but in the case of women it has gone down by four times. One must consider these statistics with some caution, reflecting "definitional" problems; most activities of women within

the household and outside are "hidden" and culturally "invisible."<sup>1</sup> The conceptualization of "economic activity" in Bangladesh is largely derived from the Western notion of gainful "work." The definition of "economic activity" and the procedure of collecting labor force data are, therefore, quite inadequate due to the fact that women in most developing societies are either self-employed or unpaid family workers and are engaged in a variety of activities -- both agricultural and non-agricultural. I prefer the term "non-agricultural" to household/domestic activities. It allows a clearer and broader perspective of the wide range of women's activities. Non-agricultural activities include domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, collecting firewood, repairing the house/homestead, raising poultry, feeding animals, and taking care of the aged and children. Within the domestic domain, it also includes making *kanthan* traditional quilt), *madur* (mats), *pankha* (home-made fans) and preparation of *gur* (molasses) for family consumption as well as market-exchange.

A better understanding of women's activities -- both agricultural and non-agricultural -- requires a broader perspective than the current "statistical" treatment of women in the labor force. Many of the existing problems associated with census figures are derived from conceptual, ideological and definitional issues. Within the context of peasant household economy in a village of Bangladesh, this study takes a broader perspective by examining the demographic, economic and socio-cultural factors that define women's activities and employment opportunities.

## 1.2 Definitional and Conceptual Problems

The underestimation, inaccuracy and anomalies of census data on the female labor force are, in effect, products of methodological inadequacies and cultural biases. Each of these factors exerts a sex-specific effect on labor force statistics, and thus yields underestimation.

### 1.2.1 Conceptual Problems

To estimate labor force activities, census and survey designers use some key words such as "job", "work", "main activity", "main occupation", and "economic activity" (see Anker and Knowles 1978; Anker 1983). The use of these expressions is problematic. They are rarely and meaningfully translated into native languages where surveys are carried out. In addition, the meaning and the use of these phrases may vary culturally. For example, in Canada, when a woman says, "I work," it means that she has a paid job or she is earning cash. In Kenya, the term "work" refers to time-consuming activities that are required for the survival of a peasant family. Anker (1983:712) notes: "...respondents regarded a "job" as wage or salary employment, while "work" was considered to include time-consuming activities required for family survival." In the case of Chile, the conceptual problem is immense. Dixon (1982b:544) narrates

...if the wife herself works on the land to which the family has access, she may or may not regard this as agricultural work. We were struck in interviewing women in large estates by the number of women who defined even planting and harvesting as homemaking rather than agricultural work.

In the Indian Census of 1971, many women reported their "main activity" to be "housewife" despite being employed full-time (Anker 1983). To peasant villagers in Bangladesh, the term "job" (*chakuri*) means cash income through formal employment, especially in the urban sector; "work" (*kaj*), on the other hand, includes working in the field and other household activities. Villagers also often use a phrase (i.e., "*mather kaj*" ) to refer to activities specifically related to field agriculture. A woman working within the *bari* (homestead) for as much as twelve hours or more a day, if asked, would say: "we work hard because we don't have 'jobs'!" Therefore, ambiguity remains in the use of key terms like "job", "work," "main activity," "economic activity," "primary and secondary activity" and so on.

### 1.2.2 Ideological Problems

At the very early stage of my fieldwork (discussed in Chapter 3), I went to see a village leader to introduce myself and to discuss my research project with him. He was very respectful to me, but laughed when I told him that I wanted to study women and their work in the village. He said: "Our women do not work; they only eat and sleep."

The underlying assumption of this statement is sexist and lacks clear understanding of the role played by women at the domestic level. Similarly, in countries where women "work" outside, a statement like "my wife does not work" means that she does not earn a salary despite the fact that she possibly works longer hours compared to other members in the family. Benería (1982) notes that in some cultures, household work done by a woman in her own home is not even considered as "work"; however, if she helps the head of the family (e.g., her husband) in the field, she is identified as an "unpaid family worker," a concept linked to the ideology of cash income earning. These expressions, associated with patriarchal ideologies, view women's work as valueless, secondary, and invisible, and thus make their work and themselves subordinate to men.

### 1.2.3 Definitional Problems

Measurement of "economically active population" derives mainly from general population censuses until World War II. During the depression period of the 1930s, the League of Nations adopted a "Gainful Occupation Approach" (GOA) which emphasized earning a remuneration -- cash or kind. The objectives of the approach were primarily two-fold: (i) to help compare the labor force internationally; and (ii) to include both employed and unemployed population within an "economically active population." It therefore allowed measurement of available labor force in a country. Since then, the concept of labor force has changed. In 1966, the United Nations defined "Economically Active Population" (EAP) as "all persons of either sex who furnish the supply of labor for the production of *economic* goods and services" (quoted in Benería 1982:121; emphasis added).

The conventional definition of "economically active population" poses a number of problems. First, the key word "economic" begs the issue; it is important to know how the term "economic" is defined. Second, "economic" definitions comprise only market-oriented goods and services. For example, processed food is considered economic activity only when the food is marketed; processing food for storage and family consumption is not considered "economic" activity from this perspective. Many scholars have pointed out this ambiguity and the arbitrariness of the conventional definition of labor force, especially for subsistence and non-market activities (see Anker, Khan and Gupta 1988; Myrdal 1968; Standing 1982). Likewise, when a person (presumably a male) helps the head of the family in the family farm, the person is considered an "unpaid" family worker. However, when a woman performs domestic work, such as fetching water or collecting firewood, her work does not constitute economic activity. The underlying argument is that the former is assumed to be income-generating activity while the latter is not.

The concept of "income-generating" activity also raises inconsistencies. We are told that the wife's household chores do not constitute "work"; however, they are considered "income-generating" economic activities if performed by paid domestic servants. This inconsistency in the definition is best posed in the case when "the man who, by marrying his servant, reduces the economically active population by one unit, although his wife's activity remains completely unchanged" (Blacker 1978:48). In many countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, rich peasants have multiple wives to support the labor requirements of the domestic economy (see Boserup 1970). Should we therefore infer that "income-generating" activity is the one rewarded by some monetary remuneration? Not necessarily, since unpaid family labor generates many income earning opportunities, as will be illustrated in this study.

#### 1.2.4 Methodological Problems

The methodology of collecting labor force data on Third World women is beset with numerous problems. First, investigators in censuses and surveys are

usually male; for various socio-cultural reasons, educated women are reluctant to work as investigators in rural areas where the bulk of the population live. Second, the common practice of collecting data is to interview the head of the family unit, again a male member of the family. It is a recognized fact that male enumerators usually underestimate the activities of the females (see Anker 1983; Blacker 1978). In many Moslem societies (including Bangladesh), women are generally expected not to be seen in public. Therefore, a married woman is automatically recorded as a "housewife" without any additional probing. Third, the male data collectors with their urban middle class background and patriarchal ideology stay in the village for only a few days or weeks to complete their survey. As a result, male interviewers often have a tendency to under-report female activities and their use of time (Anker 1983). Finally, there is the issue of lack of privacy which may affect the output of the interview substantially. For example, issues such as female labor force activities that are culturally relegated to low status or affect family prestige may remain unreported if interviews are conducted in the presence of other villagers. The problem is enormous in Islamic cultures where seclusion is a cultural practice. For example, women rarely, if ever, report to male enumerators their work in field agriculture or wage labor for fear of loss of family prestige and status.

#### 1.2.5 Exchange and Use Value Problems

Internationally accepted definitions of "economically active population", particularly those of the United Nations, have different implications for industrialized and developing countries (Benería 1982; Blacker 1978). A major assumption underlying UN definitions is that goods and services are exchanged in a market context. In Third World countries, the labor market is not well developed. For example, many rural women in Bangladesh make *kantha*, *pankha*, and *jhuri* (bamboo baskets) and exchange them for cash or kind within the village among relatives or others who need them. These products, therefore, have definite exchange value, but they are rarely reported as productive or economic in census reports. Other productive activities (e.g., milking cows, preparing molasses, etc.) that women perform in rural areas have both use and exchange or market value;

however, they are again rarely acknowledged in census and survey data. Blades (1975) discusses several difficulties associated with valuation of non-market subsistence agricultural products in national accounts of Third World countries.

### 1.3 Socio-Cultural Institutions and Values

Aside from conceptual and definitional problems, the prevailing socio-cultural institutions and values of Bangladesh also lend to underestimating and undercounting women's contribution to family economy and sustenance of the household. Of these, *purdah* (seclusion), gender segregation (public/private domain), patriarchy, and the role of the state deserve special attention.

#### 1.3.1 *Purdah*

*Purdah*, which literally requires seclusion and segregation of women, is practised to a certain extent by both rural and urban women in Bangladesh as a symbol of respectability (see Papanek 1971; Abdullah 1974; Sattar 1974; Mandelbaum 1988).<sup>2</sup> *Purdah* observance in the rural areas restricts women's mobility in many ways. The first one is physical. It confines women within the households; the family maintains separate facilities (e.g., washroom) for women so that adults and distant relatives cannot see them. Only rich families can afford to do this, because they need to hire women laborers to perform household and some off-household tasks. A second type of *purdah* allows women to go out of the home, but only when they are veiled in a *burqah* (a head to feet garment). In the third type, upon leaving the confines of her home, a woman is required to cover her head and face with her *sari* or use an umbrella. The forms and also the formality of *purdah* are variable; for instance, young girls (10 years and under, especially before first menstruation) and elderly widows can move more freely than adolescent young girls and married women (see Miller 1982). Whatever the nature and extent of it, the institution of *purdah* prevents women from participating in activities outside the homestead; it literally forces them to confine their activities within the four walls of the *bari*, and obscures the value of their labor.



### 1.3.2 Gender-Segregation: Public/Private Dichotomy

The institution of *purdah*, as well as restricted mobility of women, segregate roles and division of labor between men and women. A woman's domain is the household (*ghorey*), and she performs all her activities "privately." A man's domain is "out-side" (*bahirey*), and he performs his activities in a "public" sphere. The activities that women perform even within the household (*ghorey*) can be categorized broadly under four headings: (i) domestic (cooking, cleaning, serving meals, collecting firewood, fetching water, etc.); (ii) reproductive (bearing and rearing children); (iii) non-agricultural (raising livestock, poultry, *gur* (molasses) making, vegetable gardening, making dung-cake from cowdung, handicrafts, etc.); and (iv) post-harvest activities (processing and storage of rice, wheat, mustard seeds, jute and other crops). Despite this wide range of domestic and non-domestic activities, women are often culturally identified as "parasitic dependents and are supposed to do nothing" (Germain 1976:20).

As a result of this sex segregation, men ordinarily mediate and market products made or processed by women at home. The absence of women in the "public" sphere (i.e., market) thus makes their labor power socially invisible, resulting in non-recognition of their contribution.

### 1.3.3 Patriarchy

Patriarchy plays an important role to devalue women's contribution to the economy.<sup>3</sup> In Bangladesh, a number of factors -- patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, inheritance, village exogamy, and control over women's sexuality and marriage -- are key mechanisms through which this patriarchy is maintained (Kabeer 1988).

Men in Bangladesh own the most important means of production -- the land. Although a woman can inherit a part of her father's and husband's landed property, she hardly exercises her rights for various reasons.<sup>4</sup> In case of the husband's death, divorce or economic needs, it is assumed that brothers and/or

sons will help the woman as she has no independent source of income. Therefore, most women do not claim their property rights. In addition, a woman, due to sex segregation, can neither cultivate the land nor market the products directly; she remains a dependent on the males in the family.

The practice of village exogamy and patrilocal residence forces women to renounce patrimonial property. Exclusive control of land helps men to exercise their power and to undermine the roles of women. Further, descent in Bangladesh is recognized along patrilineal lines. Children of a woman belong to the husband's lineage; the "identity" and power of a woman in the house of her in-laws is very much related to her motherhood. A newly married woman is expected to have a child within the first two years or sooner. The birth of a male over female child will further raise her status and power in the family. The descent rules along patrilineal lines thus enhance women's subordination and exploitation.

Marriages are also arranged by male guardians and relatives. Pre-marital virginity and post-marital fidelity of women are expected social norms. Like the control of the means of production, men also have control over women's sexuality and reproduction throughout their lives. Thus, as soon as a girl reaches puberty, she is under constant surveillance by her guardians until she is married. Even after marriage, as Kabeer (1988:101) notes, a "woman can be expected to be maintained by her husband as long as she is obedient, faithful and fertile." Therefore, patriarchy as a system denies women's socio-economic autonomy and diminishes the social recognition of the productive role of women at every stage of their lives.

#### 1.3.4 Role of the State

Despite enormous possibilities for change in the overall situation of women in post-liberated Bangladesh, we find cynicism at the core of state policy towards women. The Constitution adopted in 1972 grants equal rights irrespective of sex, but at the same time recognizes inequalities by making special provisions for women -- for example, reservation of thirty seats for women in the *Jatiya Sangshad* (national parliament). The result is that the regularly elected seats (300)

are seen as "male only." In addition, since the women members of the *Jatiya Sangshad* are nominated by the ruling party, their "status" as members of the *Sangshad* is never equal to their male counterparts who are elected.

During the Mujib era (1972-75), there was a marked improvement in the awareness among women themselves of the unequal social relationships in which they live. Mujib incorporated the principles of secularism, democracy, socialism and nationalism in the Constitution of Bangladesh. Although these ideals by themselves did not enhance the status of the women in Bangladesh, they were not contradictory with women's emancipation. In fact, these principles counteracted the theocratic politics of the Pakistani era (1947-71) which favored the extreme forms of gender subordination. The First Five-Year Plan (1973-78), initiated by the Mujib government, had no specific programs concerning the role of women in development except rehabilitating the war-affected women (widows, the deserted, and those violated by the Pakistani military) and their children through the Directorate of Social Welfare (Khan 1988). The rehabilitation, however, was very poorly carried out.

The growing international concern with the status of women as reflected in the propagation of the 1975 United Nations Decade for Women also contributed to the generation of a greater interest in women's economic roles in Bangladeshi society. General Ziaur Rahman came to power in the same year after a series of military coups and counter coups in which Sheikh Mujib was assassinated (see H. Zaman 1983). Zia skillfully used the international campaign in developing some strategies for integrating women into the development process. Steps taken include a ten percent quota for women for all jobs in the public sector, appointment of two women members in local council bodies, and new job creation for women (i.e., the women police force, the most visible program). A Women's Affairs Division was created in 1976 to advise and formulate policies for integrating women into development activities. The Division was upgraded in 1978 into a full-fledged Ministry of Women's Affairs to plan and coordinate diverse fields of development such as vocational training, skill development,

literacy, and rural development programs. Kabeer (1988:112) summarizes activities of the newly created ministry as follows:

Development programmes initiated by the Ministry have been hampered by the fundamental paternalism and class bias of the state. Their design reflects their urban middle class priorities and they rarely operate successfully at the village level. Population control remains the underlying objective for many of these projects.

The rhetoric of the Zia government began to wane with pressures from OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Export Countries) donor countries, particularly Saudi Arabia to declare Bangladesh as an Islamic state. Eventually, Zia deleted secularism from the constitution in favor of Islamic principles to strengthen relations with Muslim countries. In 1980, in order to appease the Saudi government, Zia withdrew the women police from the streets of Dhaka (see Kabeer 1988; Guhathakurta 1985).

The military regime of General Ershad (1981-1990) also emphasized the need for equal participation of women for balanced economic growth of the country. The Second (1980-85) and the Third (1985-90) Five-Year Plans carried out by his regime made many policy decisions to integrate women into the economic development process. Like the previous regime, General Ershad's government was also heavily tied to the United States and OPEC block countries. In several public meetings, General Ershad came very close to declaring Bangladesh a theocratic Islamic state. The government, on numerous occasions, faced massive demonstrations in Dhaka in opposition to "Islamic state." Kabeer (1988:115) notes that there are

... contradictions within the state policy [and that] the state itself regards the issue of women's rights in essentially instrumentalist terms ... The government has been able to accommodate the conflicting demands of the Saudis and Americans by preaching Islam while practising population control.

Thus, what we find, both at the political and ideological levels, is a lack of commitment to women's rights and recognition of the economic roles in Bangladeshi society. There is a need to understand women's issues and their situation in order to plan any successful development strategy.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **STUDIES ON WOMEN AND WORK: THEORIES AND PRACTICES**

The problem of women and work has been addressed in the social sciences mainly by economists, sociologists, and anthropologists using different perspectives and theoretical frameworks. This chapter focuses on three areas of inquiry relevant to the research. The first section reviews some of the important studies in the fields of economics and sociology and highlights the main themes for understanding women's work in the household. The second section consists of a discussion and a critique of anthropological literature, particularly the link between socio-economic and sexual hierarchy, the domestic/public distinction, and questions about universal subordination -- issues that are pertinent to this research. The third section reviews the major trends of women's studies in Bangladesh, with a view to examining their significance in the field of women and work in Bangladesh. This literature review sets the primary agenda -- the objectives of the study for understanding women's role in the household and in economic development.

#### **2.1 The Problem in Economics and Sociology**

Traditionally, economists, particularly those identified as neoclassical, have used the concept of "work" as direct income-generating activities (Benería 1982). As a result, women's work that involves time-consuming, home-based and survival-related activities (e.g., food preparation, child care, fetching water) outside the labor market have been excluded and overlooked in economic analysis (Ferber 1982). However, in recent years, we find that economists interested in

women's work (for example, Goldschmidt-Clermont 1982, 1987) have made a step forward by recognizing (i) the value of women's work, and (ii) the need to develop meaningful estimates of the market value of household work. Ferber (1982:279) states

... reliable data on the value of non-market work are needed not only to find more meaningful estimates for national output and to compare real income of families, but also, for example, to determine compensation in injury cases and to set awards in divorce cases. One recent estimate sets the value of home production at least 60 percent of family money income before taxes.

Ferber (1982) critically examined the value of household work in the developed industrialized world, particularly in the United States. In an agricultural economy like Bangladesh, compensation for injury cases, monetary benefits for divorce cases or the market value of household work for tax purposes may appear quite irrelevant. Instead, estimating the poverty level of peasant households and the use of time by adult females may be of significant importance to development planners and also international donor agencies for two reasons: (i) it may help assess the poverty situation of peasant households, and (ii) it may also help find out how adult females can use their spare time for income-generating development activities.

A great deal of estimating the market value of household work has been done by economists, using primarily two methods: (a) market-cost approach, and (b) opportunity-cost approach (for details, see Ferber and Birnbaum 1980; Robinson 1977; Alder and Hawrylyshyn 1978; Murphy 1978). Both approaches have used different and often competing methods of valuing household work.<sup>5</sup> Ferber (1982:282) observes

The allocation of home time (how much is available for volunteer work and leisure and how much is spent on different types of house work), as well as the allocation of time between home and market, might be expected to be related to the allocation of other family resources. Surprisingly little empirical work has been done so far on this subject...

By and large, economists have focused more on cost-benefit aspects (see Ferber and Birnbaum 1980; Murphy 1978); their approaches are directed towards market-oriented analysis of the domestic economy that seems to blur the distinction between exchange value and use value (Benería 1982).

In contrast to neoclassical economists, Marxists have stressed the distinction between exchange and use value to explain household work. Until recently, Marxist literature focused mainly on productive labor; reproductive labor such as childbearing, childcare, and household work was undervalued (see Sachs 1988). Today, the issue of "housework" is increasingly being discussed to understand the importance of unpaid household production and its implications for women's oppression both within the household and the capitalist production process (see Dalla Costa and James 1972; Gerstein 1973; Seacomb 1973; Coulson, et al. 1975). In contemporary Marxist literature on women and work, we find the following four broad and sometimes contradictory positions, however.

1. Housework is "productive" labor. Dalla Costa and James (1972) assert this view and argue that housework also produces surplus-value. "The community of housewives is the other half of the capitalist organization, the other hidden source of surplus labor," observe Dalla Costa and James (1972:7). Others, such as Largaia and Dumonlin (1972) support this position and consider that housework maintains the capitalist system through performing numerous functions, such as biological reproduction and the supply of humanpower, childcare, and socialization of the children.

2. Housework is unproductive but necessary labor. Seacomb (1973) maintains this position and considers housework as necessary but at the same time argues that it has no direct relationship to capital, and that it produces no surplus value. Therefore, according to Seacomb (1973), housework is not "productive." Fee (1976) is critical of this position, because Seacomb tends to have taken this position only to justify "Marx's description of an unproductive labor exchanged not with capital but with revenue, that is wages or profit" (Fee 1976:11).



3. Housework is necessary but constitutes a separate economic category. In evaluating the debate, Gerstein (1973) and Vogel (1973) developed another dimension in the discourse; both consider housework necessary but a separate economic category. Neither Gerstein nor Vogel attempted to analyse the nature of housework.

4. Housework is "valueless", but integral to the capitalist process of production (Fee 1976). Fee maintains that housework is neither productive nor unproductive labor but it "lies at the very heart of capitalism" (1976:7), because housewives are a cheap source of labor power required for capitalist development.

Marxist analysis has stressed the distinction between productive and unproductive labor. However, the debate on "domestic labor" (Marxists prefer this term over "household work") reflects that "housework" is no longer "invisible" and that herein lies the importance of housework to understand women's oppression both within the household and the state system.

In sociological literature, the Parsonian dichotomy of public/private spheres dominated women's studies for a considerable period of time (Parson 1949; Kyrk 1953; Bernard 1949; Lopata 1971). The Parsonian model assumes men's role to be in the public sphere and women's activities to be confined to the home. Beechey (1978), in her critique of Parsonian functionalism, points out that Talcott Parson (*Essays in Sociological Theory*, 1954) provides a framework for sociological studies of the family, but he subsumes women within the family structure. Beechey (1978:161) states

[T]he women's role in the family is portrayed in cultural terms, and the question of the economic role of the women's domestic labour which has been emphasized by many feminist writers is ruled out by a theoretical sleight of hand.

The objective of many sociological studies was to prepare women as mere efficient housewives (Lopata 1974). Glazer-Malbin (1976:905-906) points out that sociologists "... first became interested in the scientific analysis of

housework... to rationalize the job and prepare women better to carry out their responsibilities." Thus, until the 1970s, sociological studies were concerned with husband-wife relationships, problems of married women working outside the home, documentation of women's lives, female networks and division of labor (see Bott 1957; Bott and Tommey 1971; Bahr 1975; Blood, Jr. and Wolpe 1960). Glazer-Malbin (1976) defines this period in sociological studies as "prefeminist." The invisibility and non-recognition of housework in the literature represents, according to Oakley (1974), some sociological axioms; Oakley summarized them as follows: "(i) women belong in the family, while men belong at 'work'; (ii) therefore, men work, while women do not work; (iii) therefore, housework is not a form of work" (1974:25).

However, in recent years, sociologists, particularly feminist scholars, have come up with pioneering research about housework (see Lopata 1971; Vanek 1974; Hartmann and Strasser 1982); as a result, the visibility of women's non-market activities, such as child care, cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc., are now reasonably documented in the literature. Vanek (1974), using a Time Use survey, even elevated the visibility of housework in industrialized societies. Vanek (1974:120) observes that

... non-employed women outdo employed women in housework on both types of day (weekday and weekend) ... modern life has not shortened the woman's work day ... for married women in full time jobs the work day is probably longer than it was for their grandmothers.

Today, among sociologists, we find two streams of approaches to women and work. One approach emphasizes time-budget studies (for example, Oakley 1974; Vanek 1974); another approach emphasizes the connection between housework and the wider social context, i.e., the political economy of housework (see Hartmann 1981; Glazer-Malbin 1976).

## 2.2 The Problem in Anthropology

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of anthropological studies on women and work, both in developed and developing societies (see Leacock and Safa 1986; Afshar 1986; Dixon 1982a; Nelson 1981). However, until the 1970s one important theme in the anthropology of women was universal male domination and female subordination (see Evans-Pritchard 1965; Friedl 1975; Divale and Harris 1976). Feminist anthropologists, particularly Marxist feminist scholars (see Leacock 1972, 1980, 1986; Sacks 1979), have challenged this universality of female subordination and have asserted that the gender asymmetry and the origin of class exploitation are linked together; female subordination should be understood historically within the context of class formation and the development of state societies. The emergence of hierarchical societies is largely viewed as the result of women's loss of control over their labor and over the means of production (see Etienne and Leacock 1980; Turnbull 1981; Lee 1982). Leacock (1980:8) observes

...the origins of both socioeconomic and sexual hierarchy are inextricably bound together. In order to analyse the relationship between socioeconomic and sexual hierarchies, it is necessary to compare different types of societies.

Leacock (1980) presents a comprehensive picture of gender relations cross-culturally based on the Marxian concept of relations of production. Gender relations in non-class societies, Leacock argues, are equal, based on equal access to all basic resources marked by individual autonomy within intergroup dependence. Using ethnohistorical data derived from different societies, Leacock persuasively presents the negative impacts of colonialism, trade and missionaries on the status of women and establishes a clear distinction between pre-contact and post-contact societies in terms of gender relations. Finally, Leacock strongly recommends that the study of women in society should be examined in the context of history and cultural experience.

Leacock's work and also that by other feminist scholars (see Draper 1975; Brown 1975; Buenaventura-Posso and Brown 1980; Bell 1980) can be used to raise certain theoretical questions relevant to this study. First, to what extent does socioeconomic hierarchy define female-male relationships among peasant villagers in Bangladesh? Second, to what extent does Islam -- both as a religion and a culture system -- contribute to male domination in the Islamic Middle East or Moslem dominated countries like Bangladesh? Finally, how much do sex segregation and the public-private dichotomy contribute to the invisibility of women's work?

To address the first and second questions, I shall briefly review the nature of ownership and control of property by women in Islamic societies, including Bangladesh. For the last, in addition to reviewing some anthropological literature, the present study will explore how much gender segregation and the private/public dichotomy are responsible for the invisibility of women's activities.

Islamic laws deal explicitly with the inheritance rights of women.<sup>6</sup> I have briefly mentioned inheritance laws in Chapter One. The general principles may be summarized as follows:

1. Women always inherit property but their shares are never equal to those of men. According to Islamic laws, two daughters inherit property equal to one son. In other words, a daughter receives one-half of the share of her father's property compared with her brother.
2. A wife inherits one-quarter (if she is childless) and one-eighth (with children) of her deceased husband's property. Jointly owned property by husband and wife is strongly discouraged.
3. Women also receive property in the form of jewelry and gifts at marriage -- a form of indirect dowry known as *mehr*.<sup>7</sup> Generally, upon marriage, the husband gains control of gifts and other materials received at the time of wedding.

Most Muslim countries (except Turkey, whose inheritance laws are different), including Islamic Middle East, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, follow the above inheritance laws. Pastner (1978:437-38) points out

The paradox is that while they are legally recognized as "economic persons" capable of receiving property, it is difficult for Muslim women to exercise full economic rights because of other aspects of their status that define them as "protected persons." Consideration of physical seclusion, better known as *purdah*, require that women in Muslim communities be severely constrained from economic (and other) activities taking place outside the home.

The domestic/public distinction has been used as a key to explain gender asymmetry. According to Rosaldo (1974), domestic and public spheres provide the structural basis of social, cultural and economic evaluation of sexes. Rosaldo (1974:24) observes that

...the domestic orientation of woman is felt to be the critical factor in understanding her social position. This orientation is contrasted to the extra-domestic, political and military spheres of activity and interest primarily associated with men ... the opposition between domestic and public orientation ... provides the necessary framework for an examination of male and female roles in any society ... it permits us to isolate those interrelated factors that make women universally the "second sex."

Mukhopadhyay and Higgins (1988) have criticized this dichotomy on a number of grounds. For example, the domestic/public dichotomy may not be equally applicable to non-state or even some non-western state societies. Further, the public/private domain, instead of being considered the spheres of the same sociocultural system, have been treated as separate and independent domains. Other scholars (Bjorkman 1986; Tiffany 1979) consider the domestic/public sphere to serve as an explanatory tool for some societies, e.g., the Middle East and South Asia; a wide range of activities -- economic, political and social -- are performed at the domestic level of these societies (see Sweet 1967, 1974; Nelson 1974; Matthiasson 1974; Bjorkman 1986). Many Middle Eastern anthropologists (Sweet 1967; Davis n.d.; Beck and Keddie 1978; Altorki 1986) argue that women form crucial connections between kinship groups, maintain a diverse range of contacts among themselves, and perform many economic, political and social functions in the domestic sphere. These studies therefore suggest that despite women's public "invisibility," they perform important sociopolitical activities.

If we accept this position, it follows that women are powerful within the domestic sphere and exert influence in social decision-making. An analysis of domestic production is, therefore, important to further focus on this debate.

### **2.3 The Problem in Bangladesh Women's Studies**

Interest in the study of women in developing countries is by no means new. However, during the last two decades or so we find a resurgence in women's studies with objectives to integrate women in the development process. A few cross-cultural studies (see Boserup 1970; Reiter 1975; Tinker, et al. 1976; Rohrlich-Leavitt 1975; Buvinic, et al. 1983; Benería 1982) have provided baseline data for, and theoretical arguments related to, research and policy-making for the integration of women in development. As a result, women in development and the feminist movement have gained momentum as parallel trends in the last few years. Issues like subordination of women, origins of subordination, impacts of colonialism and capitalism on seclusion of women, and the implications of seclusion have appeared in many studies (see Etienne and Leacock 1980; Omvedt 1980; Meillassoux 1981; Saffioti 1978; Jeffery 1979; Abu-Lughod 1986; Collier and Yanagisako 1987).

Scholarly interest in the study of women in Bangladesh is relatively recent; it began with rural development experiments in Comilla (see Abdullah 1974; Abdullah and Zeidestein 1982). This interest was stepped up with the formation of a group called "Women for Women: Research and Study Group" in 1973. Further, with continued efforts to integrate women in the development process since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the World Conference of the International Women's Year in 1975, and the emergence of the worldwide women's movement, have given a special new impetus to women's studies in Bangladesh in the past few years. As a consequence of this development, the amount of published materials dealing with women's issues has increased markedly, and from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives. A growing amount of literature focuses on the significance of women's role, women's work

and problems, the traditional division of labor between the sexes, and the nature of inequality that characterizes patriarchal society.

### 2.3.1 Status of Women

The major body of literature on women's studies in Bangladesh concerns the "status" of women in the society (Lindenbaum 1974; Jahan 1975; Alamgir 1977; Sobhan 1978; Chaudhury and Ahmed 1978; Noman 1983). Many scholars have used the term "status" in a broad sense to assess both socioeconomic and legal status of women in Bangladesh, e.g., laws and customs related to women's inheritance and property rights, marriage and divorce, and employment of women. Attempts also have been made to examine the dichotomy between the legal status and the actual socioeconomic status of women.

Alamgir (1977) reviewed women's legal rights of inheritance, marriage and divorce in Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Part of the work is devoted to rural women, their work, and the problems of defining women's work. The important point made by the author is that there exists information gaps about rural women in Bangladesh. Chaudhury and Ahmed's work **Female Status in Bangladesh** (1978) focuses on the socioeconomic and legal status of women and the implications of "status" for future fertility reduction in the country. The authors consider that *pardah* and seclusion -- as symbols of Islamic ideology as well as Islamic teachings and practices -- are responsible for the "subordinate position" and "inferior status" of women. Education of women and extension of the employment frontier are prescribed to enhance economic independence and improved status of Bangladeshi women. Sobhan (1978) considers that constitutional and various other laws of the country contribute to the denigration of women irrespective of religion; she further questions the usefulness of the laws of the country that relate to women's rights and status.

Noman's study (1983) brings into focus the condition of women in the society and factors contributing to their perpetual bondage. She deals at length with economic, social, educational, health, legal, political, and nutritional status

and their relationships with fertility behavior pattern. Noman emphasizes that unless potentialities of human resources -- both men and women -- are equally utilized, it is almost impossible to achieve any fundamental change in Bangladesh society. Jahan (1975) depicts a general picture of the situation of women in Bangladesh based on her own personal observations and interviews. Jahan skillfully points out some of the stereotypic characteristics about women in Bangladesh: (i) a good marriage is the ultimate goal of a woman's life; (ii) the security of a marriage and the status of a wife having a son as the male heir; (iii) little say over vital decisions, e.g., marriage in a woman's life; and (iv) unquestioned loyalty and submissiveness to husband as "virtues" of a good woman.

### 2.3.2 Women and Education

Research on women's education reveals lower female access (12% -- about one-third that of men) and clearly shows social ambivalence towards educating women (Islam 1975, 1982; Fayzunnessa 1978; Husain 1981). A publication of the Women for Women Group (1978) highlights a number of issues worth mentioning here. For instance, the formal and informal education systems in the country encourage acceptance of current discriminatory, unjust, and unfair values toward women. The aim of both types of education is to make a girl "a better housewife and mother." Second, there exists gross inequality in terms of institutional support. For example, there is a 7 to 1 ratio in the number of schools; roughly about one-fifth of the student population at Grade X are female; there is also a high percentage of female drop-outs at junior and high school levels. Finally, there is clearly a lack of income-generating formal and non-formal education and training for women.

### 2.3.3 Demographic Studies

Demographic studies constitute an important area of research, particularly relevant to questions of fertility, family planning policies and reproductive behavior (see Elahi 1985; Akbar and Halim 1978; Mabud 1985; Paul 1990;



Chowdhury and Bairagi 1990). One of the recurrent themes in demographic studies is that reduction in the rate of population growth will bring social and economic change. Many studies in this area emphasize that skill development, vocational training and employment have positive relationships with reproductive behavior and family size (see Mabud 1985). However, data on female access to health, nutrition, sanitation, child care and mortality, and quality of health are very limited.

#### 2.3.4 Women and Poverty

Poverty-related literature and institutional factors such as *pardah*, violence against women, women's organization affecting women's behavior, and women's role in household and inter-household decision-making are available only in some selected social and anthropological works (Alam 1985; Arens and van Buerden 1977; Abdullah 1974; Abdullah and Zeidestein 1982; Westergaard 1983; Kabeer 1991). A majority of households face poverty in the countryside; their contribution to household income and sustenance is significant despite the fact that their work is culturally undervalued. Women not only work inside the house, but women from small and poor households seek off-*bari* employment to supplement their income. However, off-*bari* employment reportedly does not increase the role of women in decision-making nor does it alter their inferior position in the sex hierarchy (see Westergaard 1983). Thus, the poor women in Bangladesh villages, to use Arens and van Buerden's (1977) word, are "doubly exploited."

#### 2.3.5 Women and Development

Literature on women in development reinforces the concern for integration of rural women in development programs through women's co-operatives, mother's clubs, vocational training, community development teams, adult literacy and functional education, and other income-generating programs (Chen 1983; Yunus 1984; Epstein 1973; Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1982; Jahan 1989). It is possible to summarize some of the important aspects and strategies in the women and development field as follows:

1. Some scholars (see Chen 1983; Rahman 1987a) consider the strategies of generating rural employment and institution-building to be an important transition in the process of involving women in development.

2. After the Comilla model, women's co-operatives are often seen as the most significant organizing force for income-generating activities and improving the status of rural women (Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1982).

3. It is also recognized that there is a lack of systematic and in-depth studies on the role of women in development and problems and issues that affect integration of women -- for example, organizational problems to incorporate rural women, and social attitude toward working women (Rahman 1987b). Many scholars (Jahan 1989; Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1982) have emphasized the need to undertake further studies of rural women in Bangladesh.

## **2.4 Objectives of the Present Study**

A wealth of material on women's issues in Bangladesh is available. Most reviewed studies recognize the significance of women's roles and contributions of female labor to household economy and sustenance. However, there is a dearth of literature measuring the contribution of female labor in domestic as well as non-domestic activities. In addition, existing studies tend to focus primarily on women largely as independent rather than complementary to males in the household. A major objective of this study is to examine and measure the contribution of both male and female labor to domestic and non-domestic activities. As I mentioned earlier, in a peasant economy like Bangladesh the distinction between domestic and non-domestic activity is not always clearcut, and many activities cannot be measured in terms of monetary value. Domestic and other related activities are always part of the broader category of productive activities, sometimes also called subsistence, non-market or non-monetary activities (see Goldschmidt-Clermont 1987).

It is precisely due to the inherent difficulties in drawing meaningful distinctions between the so-called domestic and non-domestic activities in peasant economies that some scholars have turned to a more appropriate method of collecting information on the allocation of time to all kinds of activity (see Standing 1982; Anker 1983; Dixon-Mueller 1985). Thus, the study of time allocation has become a major tool to measure activity patterns and contributions of women to household income and subsistence.<sup>8</sup> Many anthropologists have used this approach from time to time in a wide range of societies (see Sahlins 1972; Lee 1968; Evenson 1978).

Time-use studies in Bangladesh are rare. Cain (1977) and Khuda (1982) carried out studies on time allocation focusing particularly on women's and children's activities using an "economic" approach to assess productive use of time. Farouk and Ali (1977) and Wallace, et al. (1987) examined allocation of time by men and women to different productive and domestic activities. These studies have very little information on activity patterns and allocation of time in terms of seasonality, gender and social class. The theme of the present study is to examine whether there are differences in the use of time by gender, class, and season and to what extent socio-cultural factors, such as *purdah* and patriarchy, affect use of time, particularly by women. The setting, methodology and sampling procedures of the study are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH TECHNIQUES AND METHODOLOGY

The data sources, methods of collecting information, problems and experiences of the researcher, and limitations of the research methodology are discussed in this chapter. The chapter is divided into five sections. The selection of the study area and the experiences encountered in the selection process are discussed in the first section. In the second, the general methodology and techniques of field data collection are discussed. Advantages of time-use methodology and selection of the sample households, and the procedures of in-depth interviews are analyzed in the third section. Problems that I encountered and the gender-based experience of fieldwork, as well as the advantages and difficulties in studying one's own culture, are examined in the fourth section. In the final section I discuss some general limitations of the data and the methodology of the study.

#### 3.1 Selection of the Research Site

Today there is an increasing trend in anthropology to study one's own culture. Within the last few years, several female anthropologists have undertaken fieldwork in their own countries (for example, Morsey 1988; Altorki 1988; Shami 1988). I returned to Bangladesh in 1984 for fieldwork after being away for three years for graduate studies at the University of Manitoba. During this period, I was on study leave from my teaching position at the University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh. The University of Rajshahi, established in 1955, is located in a rural setting in the northern part of the country on a 300 acre plot of land acquired by the State from peasant villagers without adequate compensation.

Upon my return in April 1984, I decided to resume my teaching position and conduct fieldwork in a village close to the University. But very soon I became aware of some incidents that took place during my absence. In the past, villagers around the University mounted pressure on the administration for fair compensation for the acquired land and new job opportunities at the University; on some occasions there were even protest meetings and blockades around the University. Between 1981 and 1984, the University authorities had to close the institution *sine die* several times to avoid serious conflict between the local villagers and university residents. Since I planned to stay for one year or so, I did not want to take any chance to conduct fieldwork in such a setting. My initial plan for selecting a village close to the University thus faded away. Still, I visited two villages adjacent to the University. It appeared to me that they no longer were "typical" villages; large numbers of residents had off-farm employment. Agriculture was not the main economic activity of the villagers; many worked as unskilled laborers and in offices at the University; others worked as rickshaw pullers, hawkers, and vendors in Rajshahi town which is only about three miles away.

A colleague of mine suggested the name of another village in Charghat *Upazila* (sub-district) -- about 25 minutes driving time from the University. I went to see the village in Charghat and found that the Department of Social Work, University of Rajshahi has a pilot project there; in addition, the Family Planning and Population Control Department, Government of Bangladesh has a large and active office in that area. I realized that if I chose to work in the village, the villagers might identify me as a family planning officer or a project worker. I also thought it wise to avoid a village already exposed to any kind of research and investigation. I finally made a trip to Puthia *Upazila*, a thirty-minute bus ride from the University campus on the Rajshahi-Dhaka highway. I was received by S. Tipu, a former student of mine who happened to be from Puthia. His elder brother owns a pharmacy in the market square in front of the bus stop. I spent about an hour there before we went to meet the *Upazila Nirbahi* Officer -- a member of the Bangladesh Civil Service and the chief executive of the *Upazila*

*Parishad* (Council).<sup>9</sup> I introduced myself to the *Nirbahi* Officer and told him the purpose of my visit. He quickly extended his warmth and co-operation toward me for several reasons. First, the *Nirbahi* Officer was a faculty member in History at the University of Dhaka before he joined the civil service in 1974. Second, we found out that both of us went to the University of Dhaka at the same time to earn our graduate degree. Finally, to my surprise, I found out that a good friend of mine in Winnipeg was his first cousin! All these factors made our first introductory meeting informal and easy going. The *Nirbahi* Officer introduced me to the chairman of the *Upazila Parishad* and his office assistant. The assistant said that he was a student of mine at Rajshahi.

The *Nirbahi* Officer and chairman of the *Upazila Parishad* suggested to me names of two villages; one of them had already been taken up by the *Upazila* administration as a "model village" for development. CARE (Christian Association for Relief Everywhere) was working in the second village, particularly among poor women, involving them in rural road construction and maintenance. Each woman in the project received Taka 300 (US\$10) per month for her work. I declined their suggestions politely and tactfully for many reasons. The "model" and the CARE villages are visited by local officials regularly, which most certainly would have affected my research environment. I was told that villagers in both villages were recently surveyed by local family planning workers. Tipu said, "Madam, if you select one of those villages, the villagers are going to be asked the same questions repeatedly. They have now started disliking the 'outsiders'."

I finally selected Tarapur (pseudonym) as my study village. The selection was influenced by a number of factors. Puthia *Upazila*, indeed all of northern Bangladesh, is known for rice and sugarcane cultivation. My research interest was to investigate women's time use in domestic and agricultural activities, particularly in rice cultivation and processing. Therefore, I was interested to work in a village where rice is a major crop in terms of village land-use pattern over sugarcane -- the principal cash crop in the region. Women possibly spend more

time in pre- and post-harvest rice cultivation than sugarcane, because peasant households that cultivate sugarcane are required by laws to sell a larger portion of their yield to local sugar mills instead of processing it to make *gur* (molasses) for consumption and local marketing. According to the *Upazila* Agriculture Office, close to two-thirds of cultivable land in Tarapur is used for rice cultivation. The presence of large in-migrant groups in the village from other districts of Bangladesh (e.g., Dhaka, Noakhali) and India was an additional reason for the selection. This allowed me to examine the varied attitudes of the different groups in the village to women, their work and status.

### 3.2 General Methodology and Field Data Collection

Ethnographic research entails use of many different methods and techniques of data collection. However, the most widely used method is "participant observation" which involves participation in the social system under study while making systematic observation of ongoing events (Ellen 1984; Spradley 1980). It generally means as complete an immersion as possible in the culture and everyday life of the local people. My initial plan was to stay in the village for a period of one year and commute to the University two days a week to teach my courses. However, I had to change my plan eventually due to important personal and family reasons. In August of 1984, my husband and I decided to adopt a one-week-old baby girl from Dhaka. I realized that it would be far easier to care for and raise her by living on campus than in the village. My husband was unable to assist me, for he was involved in carrying out a research project in Serajganj district with a team of researchers from the University of Manitoba (Canada) and Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh. I immediately hired a full-time *aiya* (maid); also, my youngest sister, who had just finished her M.A. in Management from Rajshahi, lived with me during the fieldwork to help take care of my daughter.

My residence on the University campus did not hamper my research activities. Instead, it eventually proved more useful. I was in the village at least

five days or more a week, from about eight o'clock in the morning till sunset, working with my respondents, meeting local officials as and when necessary, socializing with other villagers, and supervising my research assistants in the field. Even if I were to have stayed in the village, I was not, as a single woman, culturally expected to visit at night any household in the village for any kind of research work.<sup>10</sup> As a result, I had enough time at home in the evening to write my field notes and to check research work done by my research assistants. In addition, since I did not stay with any particular family in the village, I enjoyed equal access to all households irrespective of classes and factions in the village.

My "participant observation" was, therefore, more in the form of first-hand observation through participation in various household work, watching and listening to village men and women, and making "sense" of the social context of their behavior, and having culturally appropriate roles. I always dressed myself with ordinary *saree* and covered my head by *gumta* (a form of *pardah*) to respect the local cultural practices. However, my teaching position with the University and my research work in the village allowed me some flexibility in terms of *pardah* restrictions. My command over the local dialect was also very helpful to work with the village women; therefore, I enjoyed a good research environment, support and cooperation while working in the village.

### 3.3 Time-Use Survey and Sampling Methodology

The principal research technique I used is the time-use survey of households in the village. Since the publication of Szalai's (1972) **The Use of Time: Daily Activities of Urban and Suburban Population in Twelve Countries**, time-budget studies have been carried out in many countries (see Nag, White, and Peet 1978; De Tray 1983; Mueller 1984; Hart 1980; Dixon-Mueller 1985; Pittin 1984; Anker and Anker 1989). There seems to be a broad agreement among scholars who have used the time-budget approach that the way people regard and employ the phenomenon of "time" is largely dependent on economic conditions and the organization of daily life in a cultural setting (see Gross 1984). The time-use



survey, therefore, has a number of definite advantages: (i) it allows exploration and documentation of the diversity of activities that a household performs; (ii) it is useful for analyzing time spent on individual items of work, both domestic and non-domestic; (iii) it assists in discerning possible seasonal variations in time-use and activity pattern; and finally, (iv) it also is a useful tool to examine the effect of socio-economic differentiation on the allocation and use of time.

The time-use approach is not, however, without fault. One can face difficulties while using this approach, particularly in developing countries. The peasant villagers in developing countries do not work by hours or read the clock to sign out; therefore, estimating time can be problematic. In addition, some people often get involved in a number of activities simultaneously and may mention the most significant or time-consuming work for recording purposes. Further, if the allocation and use of time by a household is not recorded either through observation or interviewing at the end of the day or the following day, the estimate of the use of time on individual activity is liable to distortion. A careful and meticulous field study is required to eliminate these probable limitations.

There is a growing interest in time-use survey in Bangladesh rural studies, particularly in the field of women's studies and the use of child labor in peasant agriculture (see Farouk and Ali 1977; Cain 1977; Cain, et al. 1979; Khuda 1982; Wallace, et al. 1987). Cain (1977) made a study of use of child labor in Bangladesh agriculture and allocation of time by children in various types of activities related to agriculture and household works. Khuda (1980, 1982) employed the time-use method to examine the division of labor by age and sex, and how men, women and children allocate their time to productive and other non-work activities. The primary focus of Khuda's (1982) study is seasonal fluctuations in the employment structure in the rural areas. There is a clear lack of emphasis on female labor-use pattern and the extent to which they contribute to peasant household economy. Wallace, et al. (1987), using a time-budget approach, carried out research in two villages to examine the role of women in agriculture in Bangladesh. The study focuses on the activity pattern (household,

agricultural and non-agricultural) of rural women and tries to correlate farm size and women's activity. Wallace found that poor women work more hours than any other classes of women; next to them, according to Wallace, et al. (1987), are women from "large farm households" who spend more time on "economic activity" within the household. The study is more sociological in its methodology; it is based largely on survey data, and therefore lacks insight on how rural social institutions such as *purdah* and other religious practices within the village system affect women's work and involvement in extra-household activities. Further, as pointed out by Feldman (1988:99-100), the "study is based on a poor research design, does not offer an accurate description of the relationship between socio-cultural and demographic factors and their impact on productive labor, and misrepresents what is a dynamic picture of gender relations in rural Bangladesh."

In the present study I have made attempts to investigate the activity pattern of a sample of 34 households (husband and wife) of different social classes on the basis of their use of time. The sample was derived from a census survey of the village carried out by a team of four research assistants (a married couple and two male assistants) under my supervision. S. Tipu, one of the four research assistants, was from the study village. They all had completed the Master's degree in social sciences (two in sociology and two in political science) from the University of Rajshahi and had worked previously in rural research projects with faculty members of Rajshahi. The in-depth study was carried out by Tipu and four other male research assistants (students of the local college) from the village. As "village boys," they had easy access for interviewing both women and men of the sample households even after sunset. The allocation of time to different work items by members of the households was routinely recorded by my research assistants in the same evening. On the next day, I personally cross-checked much of the information thus collected. The in-depth portion of the study was the most laborious and at times difficult; however, I tried to make it as easy as possible by personal visits to the household prior to the in-depth interview. I explained to my respondents the importance of the work and their co-operation with my research assistants. I also made frequent visits to those households to get some additional

data about other social aspects of village life, particularly about women in the village.

The census schedule consisted of seven pages and was pre-tested for improvement and modifications. It took, on an average, about an hour-and-a-half to complete the schedule. The survey generated a lot of information about village Tarapur -- its demography, economy and distribution of land, village agricultural technology, occupational diversity, and other aspects of social life and cultural system. The research assistants were also asked to write a fairly detailed comment on the overall interviewing environment and a descriptive impression of the household. The activity schedules of the female members of each household were always done either by myself or by female research assistants.

According to the census I carried out in 1984-85, village Tarapur has 342 households distributed in ten different *paras* (neighborhoods). Out of this, I developed a ten percent stratified sample for an in-depth time-use survey. First, I divided the village households on the basis of ownership of land (including homestead land) into four major categories: landless, small peasants, middle peasants, and rich peasants. I am aware of the difficulties of classifying peasants based entirely on ownership of land. Arens and van Beurden (1977) have listed some of the difficulties associated with such classification. For example, the amount of legally owned land is not a sufficient indication of a class position; use of cultivable land, sharecropping, trading and often illegal control of land by households may make peasant classification a difficult task. In addition, the relations of production are still semi-feudal in some areas while more capitalist in others (see Jahangir 1979; Wood 1981; Arens and van Beurden 1977).

My four-fold classification of the peasant households of Tarapur is based on (a) cultural perception of peasant household types, and (b) productivity of land in the region. Local villagers, using their traditional knowledge and general well-being of different peasant households in the village, classify them into (i) *bhumihin gorib krisak* (landless poor peasants); (ii) *chhoto/khudra krisak* (small

peasants); (iii) *maddhaya krisak* (middle peasants); and (iv) *dhoni krisak* (rich peasants). I discussed with several knowledgeable villagers the amount of land ownership that may qualify individual households to be ranked into one of the four different types. I further compared my notes with the *Upazila* Agricultural Officer and the local Block Supervisor. According to local agricultural productivity criteria (e.g., quality of the land, use of modern inputs, yield per acre, etc.) set by the *Upazila Krishi Office* (Agricultural Office of the Subdistrict), a family of six members (the national average) needs up to nine *bighas* of agricultural land (three *bigha* = one acre) per year for food and to support family expenses. This appears to be quite high compared to other regions within Bangladesh, in Comilla, for example, where agriculture has undergone modernization since 1960 (see Raper 1970). In the Comilla area, a peasant household with one acre of cultivable land can moderately support its members (see Wood 1976). However, the extent of the use of modern inputs, improved seeds or chemical fertilizer has been reportedly low in Tarapur village and the region in general.

Based on my discussion with a cross-section of peasant households and local agricultural officials, I used the following four classes of peasant households to develop the sample for the in-depth time-use survey. This classification is based primarily on ownership of land; however, I have also considered other socio-economic aspects in my attempt to classify peasant villagers of Tarapur.

1. **Landless Peasants:** Landless peasants are those who have very little means of production (e.g., land); they may or may not have land for homesteads. It is thus possible that they live on land provided by others, like relatives or village landlords. They are not self-sufficient; they depend heavily on selling their labor and occasionally remain unemployed or under-employed. They are also in debt and want, or in danger of being so, throughout the year. Those who own up to one *bigha* of land in Tarapur and other local villages are considered functionally landless, because they also suffer from a high degree of economic insecurity.

2. **Small Peasants:** The small peasants are those who have cultivable land up to nine *bighas* or three acres; they lack technological and economic self-sufficiency. The small peasants in the village often work as hired laborers to support family expenses. Many are engaged in sharecropping with landowners from Tarapur and other neighboring villages. The small peasants are small not only in their farm size but have very little market interaction or political power. However, several small peasants in the village carry on petty trading or vending in the local market centre. This group of peasants need careful policy support to hold their existing land from being transferred in future, particularly during economic crisis, crop failure or even famine.

3. **Middle Peasants:** The middle peasants have between 9.1 to eighteen *bighas* or six acres. They are generally self-sufficient; some of them even hire labor during the harvest. Within the village context, this group of peasants uses modern inputs in agriculture to earn better yields. According to my village respondents, the middle peasants can lead a moderate and secure life with efficient farm management and careful expenditure.

4. **Rich Peasants:** The rich are those who own over eighteen *bighas* of cultivable land. They have technological and economic self-sufficiency; they employ hired labor for cultivation and sublet part of their land to sharecroppers. The rich peasants do not work on the land themselves like middle or small peasants; they mostly supervise hired laborers. They generate a lot of agricultural surplus; also, their production is market-oriented. The rich peasants lead a very comfortable life according to village standards; they also have the capacity to withstand economic adversity. Local villagers variously refer to them as landlords, *jotedars* (large landowners), and *borolok* ("big men").

Based on the above criteria, Table 3.1 lists the total number of households in each stratum and the number of sample households within each.

**Table 3.1. Peasant Classes, Distribution of Households  
and the Sample**

Peasants Classes	Total HHs	%	Number of Sample HHs (10% of the total)
Landless Peasants (0 to < 1 bighas)	135	39	14
Small Peasants (1.1 to 9 bighas)	122	36	12
Middle Peasants (9.1 to 18 bighas)	44	13	4
Rich Peasants (18.1 and over)	41	12	4
Total	342	100	34

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Since the census data and other techniques of data collection are inadequate to understand everyday activities and time-use, the head and the wife of the sample households (n=34) were interviewed using a time-chart (starting at 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.). Three seasons were selected for variations of time and activities: busy season (November to mid-February), intermediate (March to May) and slack season (June and July). Allocation and use of time by the head of the household and the wife were recorded by the research assistants for seven consecutive days during all three seasons. Each research assistant was responsible for seven households. Time-charts were filled out in the evening; when respondents were not available in the evening, the assigned research assistant visited the household in the morning. I double-checked many of the time-charts through a follow-up visit to test the accuracy; this also allowed me to observe activities of the sample households, particularly women working both inside the house and in the field.

In addition to data collected by census and in-depth sample interviewing, I conducted unstructured and informal interviews of many villagers irrespective of age, gender and class. I also collected local history documents, government reports of agriculture and rural development. Finally, I also gathered good qualitative data through my informal meetings and discussions with local leaders and *upazila* officials which have been helpful to develop the social and economic perspectives of the role of women in rural life in Bangladesh.

### **3.4 Field Encounters: Native Anthropology and Gender Issues**

Anthropologists encounter diverse and wide-ranging situations in the field, from specifics of the research topic to personal and emotional adjustments in the field. My own experience has two broad dimensions: one as a "native" anthropologist, and the other as a "second sex."<sup>11</sup> Being a woman and a native I enjoyed some advantages in carrying out my fieldwork; however, my native identity, status, and my sex created some difficulties. I will briefly describe my fieldwork experience keeping these two dimensions in mind.

The study of one's own society through the technique of "participant observation" is well-recognized in the discipline of anthropology (see Altorki and El-Solh 1988; Islam 1982); some even consider that it is useful methodologically and should be encouraged in future (see Lewis 1973; Nakhleh 1979; Stavenhagen 1971). I was born in Barisal town in the southern part of Bangladesh and grew up there in a large joint family in my mother's father's house due to the premature death of my father at the age of 35 years. My mother's family was relatively open to the idea of female education; as a result, my mother was able to finish high school in the mid-1940s. She passed the qualifying test for medical school in Calcutta, but my grandfather did not allow her to study medicine on the ground that it was not an "appropriate" vocation for an unmarried Moslem woman at that time. When my father died, I was only seven years and the oldest of four children -- all daughters! My mother took up a job, raised us as a widow, and now feels satisfied to find all her daughters well educated and working. I finished my high

school and college in Barisal and earned my first graduate degree in political science from the University of Dhaka in 1974. I joined the Department of Political Science at the University of Rajshahi in 1975; at that time I was one of the eighteen female faculty, out of a total of 350 faculty members of the University.

Upon my return to Rajshahi in 1984, I had to make many different kinds of adjustment to the local cultural setting, including "proper" dress and sex-biased "role-taking." From the very beginning of my fieldwork, as a "native" I always had to observe *pardah* at least by covering part of my head with the traditional *sari* and had a less flexible role than foreign fieldworkers (see Papanek 1964). However, my status as a university teacher and a researcher allowed me to move around in the village; I could talk freely with men and women in the village. Early on in the research I would take a long walk with my male research assistants to the market centre to familiarise myself with the locality and the physical setting of the village. Despite being a native, my class position helped me to override culturally expected gender behavior in this situation. I was thus easily accepted by the villagers due to my institutional affiliation with the University. The village women were impressed with the idea that I would use the materials to write a book on their work and their lives in the village. Therefore, my native identity and the ability to relate myself to the women and their work were important factors for easy rapport-building.

However, as a native I was emotionally moved and my work was often interrupted by repeated student riotings on campus and political turmoil in the country against the military dictatorship of General H. M. Ershad. In 1984, on a December morning, a student leader was gunned down by the military police during a nation-wide protest meeting; several students were arrested. A faculty member was severely wounded while trying to intervene in the student-police confrontation. Finally, the army closed down the University and asked students to vacate their residence immediately. All local and national transportation systems were shut down in response to the national strike (*hartal*). This led to chaos on



campus because students had no place to move; female students had to live with families on campus for about three days. The military surrounded the campus that night to pick up "trouble-making" students; I was very concerned about the students who took refuge in my residence. My former research on student leadership and politics (see H. Zaman 1981) aroused significant interest to follow the developments closely. At times, I thought to change my research topic to student activism and politics in Bangladesh!

Meeting family and kinship obligations can often be an asset or liability for native anthropologists in fieldwork. Even under time constraint, I had to make visits to my in-laws in Comilla and Dhaka and also my mother in Khulna. On one occasion, my mother asked me to take two weeks off from my work to visit my maternal relatives in Barisal. In retrospect, I now realize that the two-week "vacation" was necessary to overcome occasional boredom typical of long-term fieldwork. I was, however, also very much helped by my relatives during the research. My youngest sister stayed with me all along to help me with my baby. In the absence of my husband, who was simultaneously carrying out his anthropological fieldwork in Serajagnj District, the support of my family and relatives was absolutely crucial to my fieldwork.

As a woman, I had to perform several roles during my fieldwork: as a mother, a wife and also as a daughter. Many thought that with my new baby I would not be able to conduct my fieldwork. It was definitely difficult, but for sure it was a rewarding experience. The moment I returned home from a day's fieldwork I forgot all my fieldwork agonies and frustrations with her loving and good company. I was worried only when she was sick. My husband used to be home once every four or six weeks for two or three days. During his visits, we used to invite people over to our place. His short stays were always busy and demanding! However, it also provided me opportunity to check my field notes with him, share some of my experiences, and evaluate my progress. One evening, while I was planning with my husband my field trip for the next morning, my mother suddenly came with my aunt to visit us for a few days. My husband insisted that I cancel

my trip and stay with my mother. I had a scheduled meeting with the *upazila* officer; I discussed the matter with my mother who realized its importance. I eventually made my appointment. Throughout my fieldwork, I had a feeling that my relatives and colleagues viewed my husband's fieldwork as more important than mine; I was always reminded by my colleagues, friends, and relatives to give him time and free him from all kinds of family and social responsibility. My early socialization never dared to defy the cultural norms!

In the field, I always experienced some kind of gender bias, especially when I was interviewing local officers or local leaders. The presence of my husband in the field allowed me to observe and understand these cultural biases. During the initial period of my fieldwork, I took my husband to the field whenever possible to establish with my respondents that I was married, had a child and a family life -- culturally appropriate roles for women in Bangladeshi society. On one occasion, we went to see the *upazila* officer to talk with him about a local development project. The officer talked to my husband for most of the time as if it were his research and not mine! I was a quiet listener. He repeatedly addressed me as *bhabi* (literally, brother's wife; people also address unrelated women as *bhabi* to show respect to them) and asked us to visit his family at his residence. For a woman, this is the most appropriate role! The officer was, however, very helpful in carrying out my research. My husband and I paid social visits to his place a couple of times.

Village women were always curious about my husband. Many asked me to bring him along so that they could see him. In fact, I had to take my husband to one family in the village. An old woman of about 65 years did not believe that I was married; she said that it was not appropriate for a young woman to work with male workers (assistants). I called her *nani* (grandmother), which allows for a culturally appropriate joking relationship (see Aziz 1979). This helped me to overcome some of her stereotypic ideas about the role of women and man-woman relationships in Bengali society. Initially, some villagers thought that I was a family planning worker. A village leader once said, "Family planning has

corrupted our girls; they can do anything now and go for abortion..." I did not want to argue with him and politely told him that I was doing research on women in the village. He replied, "Well, that's the same."

I enjoyed my work with village women. I found them intelligent and humorous. Many asked me how much I earn as a university teacher. Others wanted to know about my relationship with my husband, and so on. Some village women said that my *sari* was ordinary for a university teacher. That took me by surprise! One woman said, "Everybody has eyes, me too! I can't read, but you can." She took all my attention by what she said. I tried to understand the meaning and find an answer. She further said that she respected my work and liked my freedom.

Finally, I found the village children a source of joy and attraction. On my every visit to families in the village, the children surrounded and observed me from my head to feet. They were alert, hardly shy, and always asked for candies that I used to carry in my bag. To many of them, I was "the lady with candy." This helped me in two ways: first, I could very quickly develop a social relationship with the family; and second, while the children went away with candies I had quiet time to talk with females of the households. I collected much of my case material through lengthy interviews which also provided me opportunity to understand the various dimensions of domestic and non-domestic agricultural work performed by women in the village.

### **3.5 Limitations of the Study**

Despite careful design and implementation of the census survey and in-depth household studies, some limitations of the survey can be summarized as follows. One persistent problem was the deep rooted cultural bias toward female labor. As a result, undercounting of the female labor in terms of time-use remains a possibility. Second, even after pre-testing and improvement in the final questionnaire, some concepts (e.g., work, employment) appeared occasionally

difficult to communicate accurately in local dialect to the respondents. Third, the study focuses on allocation and use of time by men and women in the village; no attempt has been made to estimate productivity or opportunity costs of the time used. A further possible source of limitation is the apparent small sample size for in-depth time allocation study. These qualifications, however, do not appear to pose any serious drawbacks to the potential scope and contributions of the study. The village census survey provides adequate and systematic data on village demography, economy, technology, and resource structure for examining issues related to time allocation based on age, sex, gender and class. Further, my long-term anthropological research in the village, and my interviews with local officials and development workers offer a substantial basis to analyse the role and status of women in Bangladesh society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### VILLAGE TARAPUR IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL SETTING

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of different aspects of the study village and its relationship to the wider society. The first section briefly narrates the physical features and history of the village. In the second, I discuss demographic characteristics of the village. The village economy will be explained in the third section with particular reference to ownership of property, occupation, and use of labor in agriculture. The fourth section focuses on social organization and village social life by analyzing the nature of village customs and norms, *samaj* (local kin-based corporate group), attitudes of villagers toward female education and employment, marriage, divorce, family planning practices and the *purdah* system. Finally, I shall briefly describe various village-level development programs, particularly those focusing on women and development.

#### 4.1 Location, History, and Ecology

Tarapur is located about seventeen miles east of Rajshahi town and two miles to the north from Puthia *Upazila* headquarters. The *Upazila* consists of six union *parishads*,<sup>12</sup> namely, Baneswar, Belpukuria, Bhalukgachi, Jeopara, Puthia, and Shilmaria. Tarapur is one of the thirteen villages of Puthia Union *Parishad*. It has a total area of 821.05 acres. The village is well connected by all-season roads with Puthia *Upazila* town -- an important administrative and commercial centre in the region. It is a well-known daily market place; however, it also functions twice a week as a regional market centre. The Rajshahi-Natore-Dhaka highway runs close to the village. It takes approximately thirty minutes by bus to Rajshahi and about eight hours to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh (see Figure 4.1).

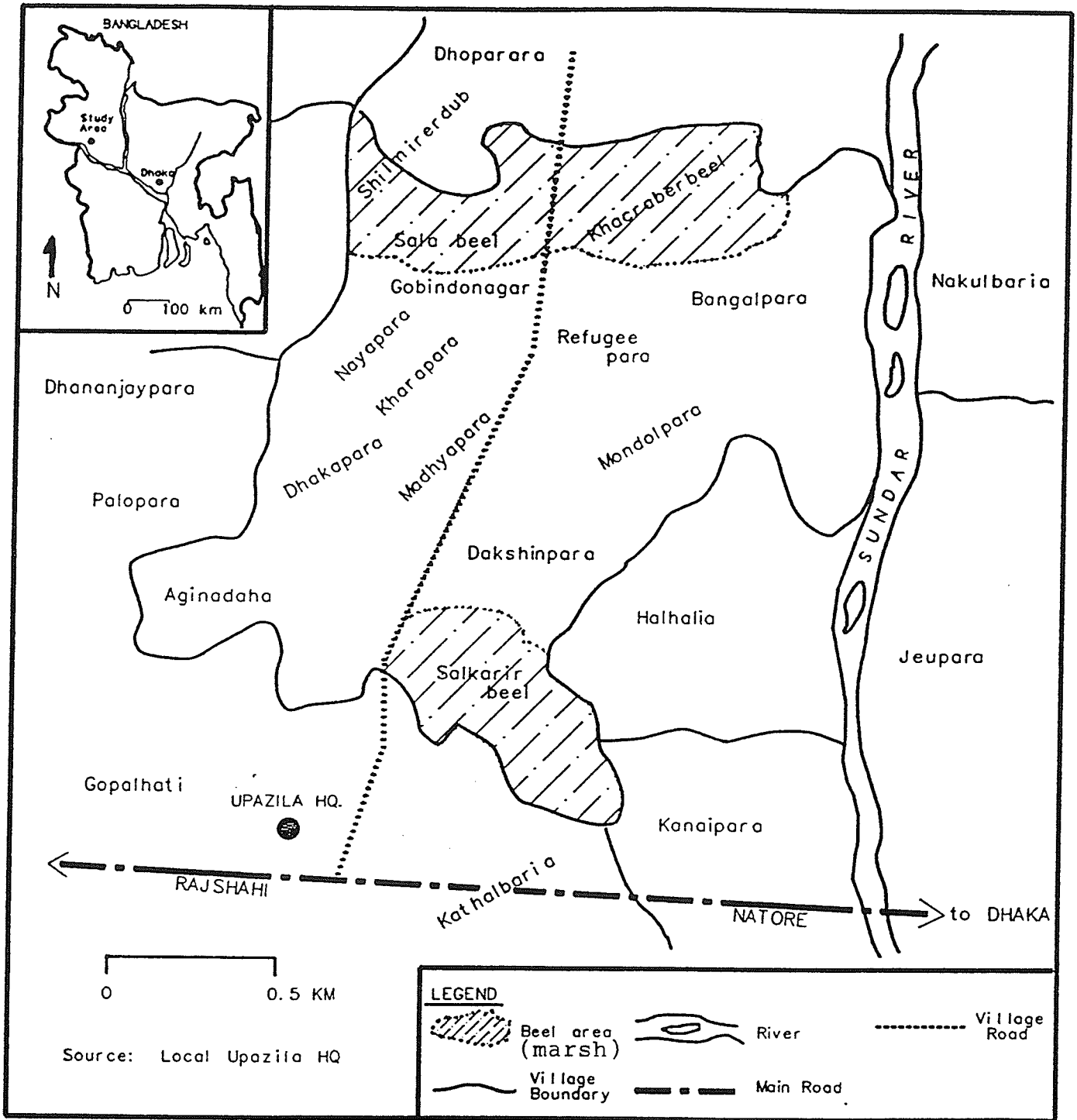


Figure 4.1: Village of Tarapur

Tarapur is a fairly old settlement. It is believed that most of the early settlers were of Hindu origins because Hindu burial sites have been found in a number of places (Tipu 1983). The village formed part of the old Puthia *zamindari* owned by local Hindu *zamindars*. Historically, Puthia was an important and thriving town until about 1891 when the Census Report of India dropped Puthia from the list of towns in Rajshahi district due to population decline caused by malaria (Nelson 1923). Many people died and hundreds migrated from waterlogged areas of the local Hoja and Sundar rivers which dried up in some places due to changes in the river courses. The marshes in the waterlogged areas were a breeding ground for mosquitos, making Puthia the worst affected by the "ravage of malaria" (O'Malley 1916:49). Today, there still exist a number of *beels* (marshy depressions) in Tarapur and also in the neighboring villages.

#### 4.1.1 Village Settlements

Village settlements are dispersed in Tarapur. The villagers define, both geographically and socially, ten *paras* (neighborhoods) distributed all over the *mouza* (land revenue unit) (see village map, Figure 4.1). There are several reasons for this dispersal. First, the population composition of the village is quite diverse. One can easily identify three major groups of people: local (original settlers), muslim migrants from India following the 1947 partition (locally called refugees), and in-migrants from other districts of Bangladesh, particularly from Dhaka, Jamalpur, Tangail and Pabna. Second, development of village settlements require relatively elevated and flood-free land. Therefore, the local ecology constrains the nature of settlement. Finally, migration and kinship play important roles in neighborhood settlement. For example, Dhakapara in Tarapur is inhabited by in-migrants from Dhaka district. People who migrated from India (mainly West Bengal) live in "Refugeepara." A *para* may often be named after an influential leader such as Mondolpara. Other *paras* are Bangalpara, Nayapara, Madhyapara, Dakshinpara, Gobindonagar, Aginadaha, and Kharapara.

Based on the origins, dialect and "culture," villagers maintain a clear distinction between "local" (*deshi*) and "non-local" (*bideshi*) in the village. Such a

distinction is typical of villages in northern Bangladesh (see Khan 1977; Mashreque 1980) where one encounters a large migrant population from India and other parts of Bangladesh. Local villagers view the non-locals as "low status" people, and tend to maintain a social boundary as far as possible. They have separate *samajes*, and instances of inter-marriage between local and non-locals are rare.

#### 4.1.2 Climate and Land-Use Pattern

Puthia enjoys a tropical monsoon climate with a fairly distinct seasonal variation. The summer (March to May) is characterized by high temperature (65 to 90 centigrade); a tropical monsoon climate during the rainy season (June to September); and a moderate winter (November to February). The average annual rainfall is close to sixty inches; about fifty inches occur in the months of July and August. The rain is of great importance for the *Bhadoi* (a variety of rice) crops which are sown at the beginning of the monsoon.

Although this area is generally known as a flat alluvial plain, the surface level is not uniform. It is possible to distinguish three types of land in Puthia: (i) *diara* or high elevated land above flood level; (ii) *mathan* or flat fields of intermediate land which is partially flooded during the rainy season; and (iii) *layal* or low land, which is submerged in floodwater during the rainy season (Hossain, et al. n.d.). Tarapur has 200 acres of *diara* land, 400 acres of *mathan* land, and 221.05 acres of *layal* land. The cropping intensity of land in the village is 1.12 (the national average is close to 2.0) due to large tracts of low land (27% of cultivable land) in the village. In addition, sugarcane -- the principal cash crop of the region -- requires one full calendar year to grow; land used for sugarcane cultivation is single-cropped.

Table 4.1 shows the land use pattern in Tarapur. There is an obvious bias to rice cultivation. Several *deshi* (local) and high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice are cultivated. The allocation of land to cash (sugarcane, jute) and winter crops is much lower compared to rice. I shall discuss more about land use pattern in Tarapur in Chapter Five (section 5.2).



**Table 4.1. Acreage of Land-Use by Crop in Tarapur**

Crop	Type	Land in Acreage
Rice	Aus Deshi	100 acres
	Aus HYV	18 acres
	Ropa Aman Deshi	70 acres
	Ropa Aman HYV ( <i>upashy</i> )	55 acres
	B-Aman-Deshi	143 acres
	Boro	50 acres
Jute	Tosha	20 acres
	Deshi	15 acres
Sugarcane		100 acres
Wheat		41 acres
Mustard Seeds	HYV	8 acres
	Deshi	8 acres
Lentils		40 acres
Vegetables		15 acres

Source: Upazila Agriculture Office, Puthia, Rajshahi, 1985.

The soils of agricultural land in the village require regular manuring for better production. Peasants usually use organic manures like cowdung or burnt aquatic vegetation. Chemical fertilizers are available in the market or through the agriculture office, but poor peasants cannot afford them. Overall, peasants use very little chemical fertilizer.

### 4.1.3 Types of Houses and Village Sanitation

House type is often used as an indicator of overall socio-economic status of individual households. The following four types, from low to high quality houses, are found in the village: (1) roof and walls made of straw; (2) straw roof with bamboo and mud walls; (3) tin roof with brick/tin walls; and (4) tile roof with brick walls or *pucca* houses. They by and large are representative of the socio-economic status of households from poor to middle to upper middle and rich peasants. In Tarapur, each household owns an average of 2.5 structures; this average includes homestead, kitchen, and cowshed. Table 4.2 provides a complete picture of the distribution of house types by *para*.

The largest concentration of structures with straw roof and walls in the village occurs in Refugeepara (37% of 618 straw structures), followed by Dhakapara (16%). However, Refugeepara also has the largest proportion of structures with tin roof and brick walls (40% of 80 tin roof and brick wall structures). Mondolpara has the highest proportion of better quality structures within its neighborhood, combining types 3 and 4 (47% of its 62 structures). Traditionally, Mondolpara has been home to wealthy landlords and rich peasants in the village. All 39 house structures in Nayapara are made of straw roof and walls. Residents in Nayapara are all in-migrants from Dhaka district. In sum, we find from this table that three-fourths of houses in the village are made of straw roof and wall (74% of 833 structures); houses of this type occur more in neighborhoods with in-migrant population, and is indicative of their relative poverty and landlessness.

The sanitary situation in the village is deplorable. Out of 342 households in the village, only 41 have latrines. Often, several families within the *bari* share a common latrine. Most villagers do not have any system for human waste disposal. Both men and women go out to the bushes, in open fields and marshes very early in the morning; children use places within the vicinity of the homestead. These patterns of defecation or waste elimination are common practices in rural villages in Bangladesh. While villagers are aware of health hazards associated with the

absence of solid waste disposal, for most people it is a matter of affordability when they do not have a piece of land for their homesteads.

**Table 4.2. Types of Household Structures by Para**

Para	Straw/Straw Straw/Bamboo	Straw- Bamboo roof with mud walls	Brick/Tin Tin/Tin	Brick/Tiles <i>Pucca</i> House	Total Number of Structures
Aginadaha HH# 10	19 (67.9) (3.1)	08 (28.6) (6.5)	0	01 (3.6) (9.1)	28 (100.0) (3.4)
Bangalpara HH# 3	08 (80.0) (1.3)	02 (20.0) (1.6)	0	0	10 (100.0) (1.2)
Dakshinpara HH# 25	49 (71.0) (7.9)	07 (10.2) (5.7)	07 (10.1) (8.8)	06 (8.7) (54.6)	69 (100.0) (8.3)
Dhakapara HH# 60	101 (66.0) (16.3)	44 (28.8) (35.5)	08 (5.2) (10.0)	0	153 (100.0) (18.4)
Gobindonagar HH# 10	17 (85.0) (2.8)	03 (15.0) (2.4)	0	0	20 (100.0) (2.4)
Kharapara HH# 30	55 (87.3) (8.9)	08 (12.7) (6.5)	0	0	63 (100) (7.6)
Madhyapara HH# 35	74 (77.1) (12.0)	14 (14.6) (11.3)	08 (8.3) (10.0)	0	96 (100.0) (11.5)
Mondolpara HH# 19	29 (46.8) (4.7)	04 (6.5) (3.2)	25 (40.3) (31.3)	04 (6.5) (36.4)	62 (100.0) (7.4)
Nayapara HH# 15	39 (100.0) (6.3)	0	0	0	39 (100.0) (4.7)
Refugeepara HH# 135	227 (77.5) (36.7)	34 (11.6) (27.4)	32 (10.9) (40.0)	0	293 (100.0) (35.2)
Total Number of Households 342	618 (74.2)	124 (14.9)	80 (9.6)	11 (1.3)	833 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Note: Total number of Households is 342;  
Total number of Structures is 833.

## 4.2 Demographic Profile of the Village

The 1974 Census recorded a total of 1,771 people (908 males, 863 females) in Tarapur. According to the census I carried out in November-December 1984, the village has a population of 1,981 in 342 households. The average household size in Tarapur is 5.79, which is close to the Rajshahi district average (5.90) but lower than the national average of 6.14 per household (BBS 1984). One important reason for this variation is the overall low population density in northern districts (e.g., Rajshahi, Jessore, Dinajpur, Bogra) compared to eastern and mid-central districts (e.g., Comilla, Noakhali, Tangail, Mymensingh) of Bangladesh.

### 4.2.1 Age and Sex Profile

Table 4.3 presents the distribution of sexes in various age groups. Of the total population, 967 (48.8%) are female, and 1,014 (51.2%) are male, for a sex ratio in the village of 100 females to 105 males.

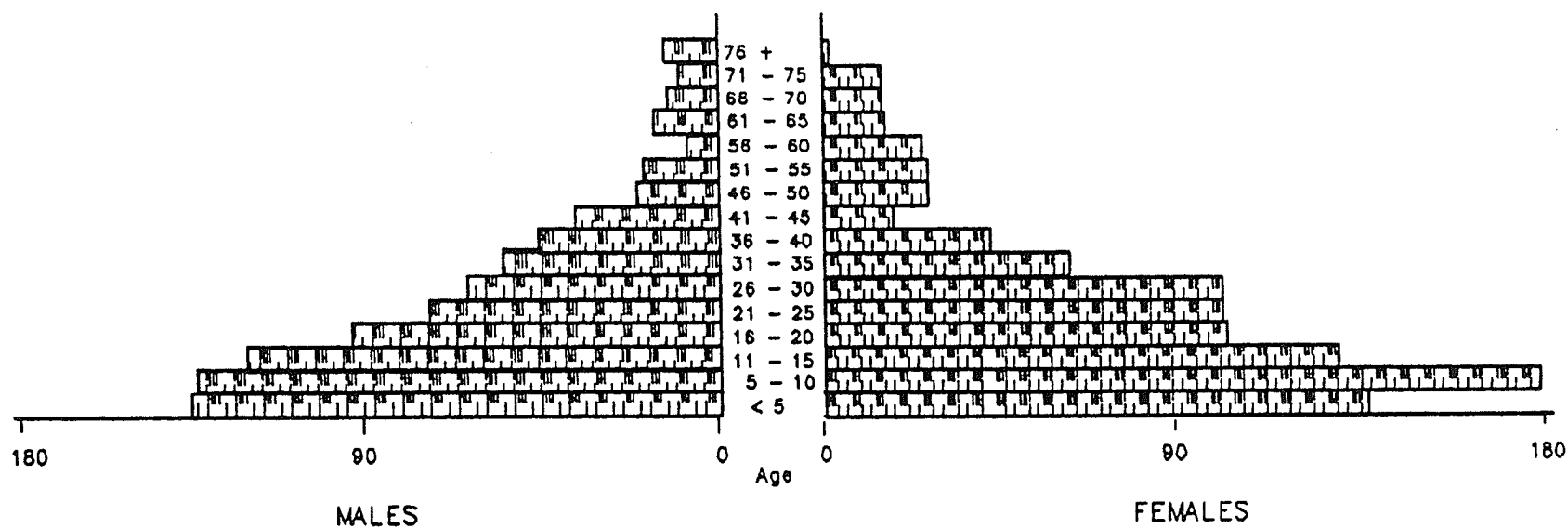
The bar chart (Figure 4.2), based on the population profile of the village, highlights several important demographic features. For example, 45 percent of the village population is fifteen years or under;<sup>13</sup> about 48 percent of the population is adult (16 to 55 years); and six percent are over 55 years. The village, therefore, consists of a fairly young population with a relatively high dependency ratio in many household units. Also, the sex ratio is sharply imbalanced in the early age groups. Females are outnumbered by males (100 females for 116 males) in the age group five years and under. The variation may have resulted from age misreporting so commonplace in rural Bangladesh. It is also possible that there is a higher female mortality rate in the age groups up to five years. I do not have data to either establish or refute this observation.

**Table 4.3. Population of Tarapur by Age and Sex**

Age	Females		Males		Totals
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Less than 5	137	6.9	159	8.0	296
5 - 10	179	9.0	158	8.0	37
11 - 15	128	6.5	143	7.2	271
16 - 20	100	5.1	111	5.6	211
21 - 25	99	5.0	88	4.4	187
26 - 30	99	5.0	77	3.9	176
31 - 35	60	3.0	67	3.4	127
36 - 40	40	2.0	55	2.8	95
41 - 45	16	0.8	43	2.2	59
46 - 50	25	1.3	24	1.2	49
51 - 55	25	1.3	22	1.1	47
56 - 60	22	1.1	9	0.5	31
61 - 65	12	0.6	17	0.9	29
66 - 70	11	0.6	14	0.7	25
71 - 75	11	0.6	12	0.6	23
76 and above	3	0.2	15	0.8	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>967</b>	<b>48.8</b>	<b>1014</b>	<b>51.2</b>	<b>1981</b>

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Figure 4.2 POPULATION PROFILE OF TARAPUR



Source: Field Survey, 1985.

The adult working population of the village (both females and males between 16 and 55 years of age) constitutes close to 48 percent of the total population, with women making up nearly half (49%) of the working population. However, due to sex-segregation and patriarchy, women work within certain boundaries, both spatial and social. As a result, the domain of female economic activity is largely confined to household work such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children and the aged in the family, raising poultry, and occasionally agriculture-related activity. The varieties of economically productive work that women perform within the house are addressed in Chapter Five.

**Table 4.4. Distribution of Population by Birthplace and Sex**

Place	Female	Male	Total
Same Village	597 (30.1) (61.7)	759 (38.3) (74.9)	1356 (68.5)
Same District	217 (11.0) (22.4)	84 ( 4.2) ( 8.3)	301 (15.2)
Other District	77 ( 3.9) (8.0)	76 ( 3.8) (7.5)	153 ( 7.7)
India	75 ( 3.8) ( 8.0)	95 ( 4.8) ( 9.4)	170 ( 8.6)
Pakistan	1 ( 0.1) ( 0.1)	0	1
Total	967 (100.0)	1014 (100.0)	1981 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Since Bangladesh is a patrilineal and patrilocal society, a large number of married women in the village come from neighboring villages. Exogamous mate selection in rural villages leads to a network of useful kinship ties involving a radius of fifteen to twenty miles (Aziz 1979). There are, however, incidences of marriage within the same village; Qadir's (1970) study of villages in Mymensingh

district shows that 23 percent of marriages occurred with husband and wife both from the same village. Table 4.4 lists birthplaces of Tarapur inhabitants by sex.

Close to 32 percent of the inhabitants of Tarapur were born outside the village. In other words, nearly one-third of the villagers are in-migrants who resettled in Tarapur voluntarily or came to live with a spouse. About 23 percent of the females came from other villages in the same district compared to only eight percent of males. Most of the females from other villages came to Tarapur upon marriage as spouse.

#### 4.2.2 Literacy and Level of Education

In Bangladesh, the definition of literacy differs from census to census. The definition that I have used is close to the last census carried out in 1981; consistent with international usage, a literate person is one who can read and write some language. Table 4.5 displays the literacy level by sex.

**Table 4.5. Distribution of Population by Literacy and Sex,  
Five Years and Older**

	Female	Male	Total
Not literate	598 (58.5) (35.5)	425 (41.5) (25.2)	1023 (100.0) (60.7)
Literate	232 (35.1) (13.8)	430 (65.0) (25.5)	662 (100.0) (39.3)
Total	830 (49.3)	855 (50.7)	1685 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Village Tarapur has a literacy rate of 39 percent, much higher than Rajshahi district average (17%) and the national literacy rate of 24 percent in 1981. When



we disaggregate the literacy rate by sex, we find a significant sex bias: males have a higher literacy rate (26%) than females (14%) in the village. This gender bias is evident in district and national level statistics. In Rajshahi district, according to the 1981 Census the average male literacy rate is 23 percent, whereas only ten percent of females are literate; at the national level males have a 24 percent literacy rate and females thirteen percent.

There are several reasons for the overall higher literacy rate among the villagers. First, the village has had a "model" primary school since 1954. The villagers also have easy access to primary and high schools located in Puthia. The P.N. High School in Puthia is one of the oldest of its kind in Rajshahi district; in addition, there is a separate high school for girls in Puthia. The Puthia College, established in 1974, has opened up further opportunities for higher education to local youths.

I have mentioned earlier that there exists a systematic sex bias in education in traditional Bengali culture. A son is always preferred over a daughter for schooling; parents consider boys to be "assets" who remain in the family to carry out responsibilities in later life. In contrast, a daughter is likely to be regarded as a "burden" by her own family. Physical care of the daughter and her schooling have been compared to "watering the neighbour's tree; you take all the trouble to nurture the plant, but the fruit goes to someone else" (Kabeer 1988:101).

Table 4.6 examines the distribution of population by educational level and sex. It shows a declining trend in the female literacy rate as education level increases from Grade V and upward. By the time girls finish Grade V, and attain puberty, there is serious concern among parents to protect their daughters' pre-marital chastity. Thus, there is a considerable pressure in the rural areas to arrange marriage because it is seen as the ultimate goal of a girl's life (Jahan 1975). The institution of *pardah* further restricts her movement and interaction with men outside the immediate family. Girls who continue their education beyond primary (Grade V) and high school levels (Grade X) are mostly from relatively well-off

families who can support both boys and girls in school; however, parents take the first available opportunity to marry off their daughters, provided a good groom is found. Today, especially among rich peasants, there is an emphasis on educating girls in order to have a good and educated groom with urban employment. In essence, girls are sent to school to get better value in the marriage market. Therefore, it is clear that girls experience systematic discrimination when it comes to education.

**Table 4.6. Distribution of Population by Educational Level and Sex, Five Years and Older**

Levels of Education	Female	Male	Total
Literate No Formal Schooling	22 (31.9)	47 (68.1)	69 (100.0)
Grade I - V	136 (42.4)	185 (57.6)	321 (100.0)
Grade VI - X	60 (30.1)	139 (69.9)	199 (100.0)
Grade 11 - 12 (including SSC pass)	11 (25.6)	32 (74.4)	43 (100.0)
Grade 13 - 14 (including HSC pass)	2 (20.0)	8 (80.0)	10 (100.0)
B.A. Pass	0	15 (100.0)	15 (100.0)
Other	1 (20.0)	4 (80.0)	5 (100.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>662</b>

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

#### 4.2.3 Marital Status

Table 4.7 shows that the proportion of married women is higher (412 or 42%) than ever-married men (393 or 39%). There are also many more widows (53) than widowers (3) in the village. Incidences of widowhood, divorce or desertion in the village are

largely associated with poverty and landlessness. Wiest (1991:253, see Table 3) found that nearly half of women-headed households in three erosion and flood-affected regions in Bangladesh (Kazipur, 17%; Bhola, 4%; and Chilmari, 7%) are associated with widowhood. In Bangladesh, it is relatively difficult for a widow to be remarried unless she is young and beautiful. Her future marriage prospect is also dependent on the wishes and attitudes of her family members (i.e., parents and brothers). Widow marriage is not very much culturally favored. However, a widower, irrespective of his age, can and does marry quickly. The same is true of male divorcees, whereas divorced women seldom remarry. I encountered many cases of divorce and abandonment among women in the village which I shall discuss later in this chapter. In Bangladeshi culture, the social status of a divorcee or separated woman is low and marginal; she is always dependent on her family and needs to be protected.

**Table 4.7. Marital Status by Age and Sex**

Age	Marital Status									
	Married		Unmarried		Widowed		Divorced		Separated	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Less than 10	1	0	315	316	0	0	0	0	0	0
10 - 20	64	8	160	247	0	0	3	0	1	0
21 - 30	173	111	9	54	7	0	6	0	3	0
31 - 40	90	121	1	1	5	0	4	0	0	0
41 - 50	35	67	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
51 - 60	32	30	0	0	14	0	0	0	1	0
61 and above	17	56	0	0	20	3	0	0	0	0
Total	412	393	485	618	52	3	13	0	5	0

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

### 4.3 Village Economy and Land Distribution

Land is the primary source of subsistence in rural Bangladesh. It is also an important indicator of wealth, status and power in everyday village life. An understanding of the ownership and distribution of land among the villagers requires a discussion of inheritance patterns and customs, especially with respect to rights of women.

#### 4.3.1 Inheritance Laws and Women's Share

According to the inheritance laws of the country that closely follow the Islamic Laws, women always inherit less than men. For example, a wife inherits only one-eighth of the property left by her deceased husband if they have children. Otherwise, a wife inherits one-fourth of his property. Again, a daughter inherits only half of the amount a son inherits. Women always inherit in legal terms less than men in Islamic cultures. As discussed in Chapter One, women seldom claim even their due share of land. When they do inherit property, particularly land, it is either their husband or some male member in the family who controls the property.

#### 4.3.2 Landholding and Tenorial Status

According to the definitions outlined in Chapter Three, 135 households (39%) in the village are landless (0-1 *bigha*); of these, only five households have cultivable land under one *bigha*. The small peasants (1.01-9 *bigha*), 122 households, constitute about 36 percent of the population; middle peasants (9.1-18 *bigha*), 44 households make up thirteen percent; and 41 or twelve percent of the households are rich peasants (18.1 *bigha* and above) (see Table 3.1). Table 4.8 provides a general picture of landholding and tenure status of land owned by the villagers.

**Table 4.8. Landholding and Tenure Status in Tarapur**

Ownership/Use pattern of Land	Response		Total
	Yes	No	
Homestead land	284 (83.0)	58 (17.0)	342 (100.0)
Cultivable land	212 (62.0)	130 (38.0)	342 (100.0)
Irrigated cultivable land	86 (25.1)	256 (74.9)	342 (100.0)
Insharing	29 ( 8.5)	313 (91.5)	342 (100.0)
Outsharing	54 (15.8)	288 (84.2)	342 (100.0)
Mortgage Out	28 ( 8.2)	314 (91.8)	342 (100.0)
Mortgage In	44 (12.9)	298 (87.1)	342 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

We find a number of interesting insights into the landholding and use pattern among the villagers. First, seventeen percent of the households do not even have homestead land. They are the most impoverished section of the population, dependent on others (e.g., relatives, patrons) for homestead land. Second, only 25 percent of the households have land that is irrigated. Third, the incidence of sharecropping out (*borga deoa*) is higher (16%) than sharecropping in (*borga neoa*) (9%). *Borgadari* or sharecropping is a traditional economic system that provides access to land by the poor peasants to cultivate under circumstances where land is rather scarce or expensive. Finally, 72 households (21%) are involved in land mortgage (*bandoki*) practices; of these, 44 (61%) have mortgaged in land from residents of Tarapur and other villages. Land mortgage is for a fixed period of time, usually one year or more, where the owner gives up operational rights in lieu of cash. The incidence of mortgage is high among small peasants who cannot cope with increasing costs and new technology for crop production (see Wood 1981).

### 4.3.3 Livestock, Tools, and Technology

Since the economy of the village is agricultural, livestock is vital to the functioning of the crop sector. Animals are used for preparing the field for crop production, threshing, and for transporting crops from fields and to the market. Besides, some animals (e.g., cows, goats) are sources of milk for the villagers. According to my survey, the villagers have 443 cattle, 44 buffalos, 328 goats and one horse. The number of livestock per household is 2.38; the national average per household was 3.46 in 1970 (Rashid 1981). This difference in capital stock may be due largely to lack of economic and technological self-sufficiency of many poor and small peasant households in the village.

Goats usually are dependent on naturally growing grass available in the homesite. The poultry population of the village consists of 126 ducks and 1605 chickens. Women are responsible for feeding the cattle; often they take cattle for grazing. Goats, ducks and chickens are raised by women. They are good sources of income for village women, especially the poor. Chicken or duck eggs are either consumed or sold in the market. Poor women use this additional income to buy groceries or clothes for the family.

The core of village agricultural technology consists of the *nangal* (plough), *moi* (ladder), *haisa* (sickle), and *kodal* (spade). These are traditional simple tools that have been used since time immemorial, yet many villagers cannot afford to have them. Only 32 percent of the households own ploughs; about 34 percent have ladders; and 32 percent have sickles. Two-thirds (66%) of the total households in the village have spades. It may be mentioned here that most of the tools (plough, ladder and sickle) are sex specific; only men use them to work in the field. Women commonly use a spade to work in the field and also in vegetable gardening. The village survey also shows that 31 households (9%) own carts driven by oxen or buffaloes. Twenty-two households (7%) have tubewells for pure drinking water. Also, 94 households (28%) have traditional *dheki* -- the most commonly used and manually operated husking mill in the village.

#### 4.3.4 Primary and Secondary Occupations

Occupation refers to the types of work men and women of the village are engaged in. The Bangladesh Census and other socio-economic surveys consider income-generating activities as "work"; as a result, only 2.33 percent of females and 62.64 percent of males are considered economically active (Pilot Manpower Survey 1979, quoted in BBS 1980:456). It is a recognized fact that women in rural Bangladesh spend between ten and fourteen hours in different kinds of domestic and productive work (see Farouk 1973, Khuda 1982). The census data and surveys always misrepresent these activities by identifying rural women as "housewives." Table 4.9 shows the primary occupation of the villagers.

Nearly 99 percent of the women are unpaid household workers; only men are said to be involved in income-generating activities (self-employed labor, farm wage labor, government and private office workers, etc.). Eighty-seven girls (10%) reported helping mother as their primary occupation, while 22 boys (3%) reported helping father as their primary occupation. It is a socialization process for future work. In case of girls, helping mother as a primary occupation trains them for future motherhood as well as unpaid household labor roles. In Bangladesh, as soon as a girl reaches the age of eight years or so, she begins to receive training for culturally approved sex-specific jobs. This is further confirmed if we consider education as a primary occupation. A total of 108 girls (13%) reported education as their primary occupation compared to 205 (24%) boys in the village. Girls are expected to stay home and help their mother in household chores. In all, only three women reported farm wage and non-agricultural casual labor as their primary occupations. In my later discussion, it will become evident that far more village women work as farm wage and non-agricultural casual laborers; however, the fact is obscured by acceptance of the culturally appropriate gloss of "household activities" as their primary task. The survey data also show that 28 women work as maids (*kajer beti*) and 27 men have yearly contracted jobs as house servant (*rakhal*). Women who find work as maids during the slack agricultural season prefer to work as wage laborers during the

peak agricultural season due to higher wages and cash income. During my fieldwork, I found that villagers tend to socially denigrate those women who work in the field. One village leader said to me, "Who knows what they (women) do in the field while working side by side with men! These women are poverty-stricken; they can do anything they like to earn money. We don't care because they are not part of our *samaj* (kin-based corporate social group)."

**Table 4.9. Primary Occupation by Sex\***

Occupation	Females		Males		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Unpaid Household Laborer	456 **(54.9)	98.7	6	1.3	462
Self-Employed Farmer	2 (0.2)	0.9 (26.2)	224	99.1	226
Education	108 (13.0)	34.5 (24.0)	205	65.5	313
Wage Laborer	3 (0.4)	1.9	154 (18.0)	98.1	157
Never Employed	141 (17.0)	56.0	111 (13.0)	44.1	252
Government Office Work	0	-	13 (1.5)	100.0	13
Helping Mother/ Father/Brother	87 (10.5)	79.8	22 (2.6)	20.2	109
HH Servant/Rakhad	28 (3.4)	50.9	27 (3.2)	49.1	55
Other	6 (0.7)	6.1	93 (10.9)	93.9	99
<b>Total</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>49.3</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>50.7</b>	<b>1686</b>

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

\*Table 4.9 excludes children less than five years old.

\*\*Figures in parentheses are row percentages.



**Table 4.10. Secondary Occupation by Sex\***

Occupation	Females		Males		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Never Employed	792 **(95.3)	55.3	640 (74.9)	44.7	1432
Unpaid Household Laborer	8 (1.0)	88.9	1 (0.2)	11.1	9
Self-Employed Farmer	0	0	42 (4.9)	100.0	42
Wage Laborer	0	0	37 (4.3)	100.0	37
Helping Mother/Father/ Brother	29 (3.5)	34.9	54 (6.3)	65.1	83
Household Servant	2 (0.2)	20.0	8 (0.9)	80.0	10
Construction/Small Business	0	0	50 (5.9)	100.0	50
Other	0	0	23 (2.7)	100.0	23
Total	831	49.3	855	50.7	1686

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

\*Table 4.10 excludes children under five years old.

\*\*Figures in parentheses are row percentages.

In terms of secondary occupations, it is evident from Table 4.10 that men are deemed to outnumber women. In all, 39 women reported to have secondary occupations; of them, 29 reported helping mother as their secondary occupation and eight said that they work as unpaid household laborers. A total of 214 men reported to have a secondary occupation. About 25 percent of them said that they help father and/or brother as their secondary occupation, followed by being a self-employed farmer (20%), and occasional farm-wage laborer (10%). Among all

other secondary occupations, the incidence of small business is fairly high (6%). Twenty-three respondents reported in the "other" category, including occupations like non-agricultural casual labor, and rickshaw peddling.

#### 4.4 Social Structure of the Village

Social structure refers to the complex network of relationships that exists among members of a society. I examine here the nature of relationships among the villagers in terms of household, marriage, kinship and *samaj*.

##### 4.4.1 Household and the Family

The household is a sufficiently universal and recognized unit of analysis in social science survey and research. In my census, I defined the term household as a corporate body where members live and work together as an "eating" (*khana*) or cooking unit (*chula*) (see Cain 1978). As fundamental social and economic units, households are "task-oriented residence units," whereas families are viewed as "kinship groupings that need not be localized" (Netting, Wilk, Arnould 1988:XX). Cross-cultural and comparative work on households and domestic groups make a distinction between household and family, although both are culturally defined (see Wiest 1973; Yanagisako 1979; Collins 1986).

The most common domestic unit consists of a man and his wife (or wives) and their unmarried dependent children. This nuclear family type is the modal household form in Bangladesh villages; however, the composition of households may vary due to many socio-economic factors (discussed below). It is the primary arena for sex roles, socialization, and economic cooperation. Within each household there is a division of labor and division of authority. The oldest male -- the father, the grandfather, the oldest brother or son -- is usually the recognized head of the household. Only in cases of death, divorce or absence of the male head for a prolonged period of time, do women take responsibility as head of household. There are seventeen (5%) women-headed households in the village

compared to seventeen percent in Kazipur villages (Wiest 1991). Women-headed households, according to Wiest (1991), are more vulnerable in a male dominated society and are likely to experience severe hardship in making a living (see also Cain, Khanam, Nahar 1979).

Table 4.11 presents types of households in relationship to ownership of land in the village.

**Table 4.11. Household Types in Relation to Ownership of Land**

Class	Household Type				Total
	Single	Nuclear	Extended	Joint	
Rich Peasants	0	21	20	0	41
Middle Peasants	2	20	22	0	44
Small Peasants	1	88	33	0	122
Landless Peasants	3	115	17	0	135
Total	6 (1.8)	244 (71.3)	92 (26.9)	0	342 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

From the table, it is clear that the nuclear household (married couple and their dependent unmarried children) is the most common domestic group, constituting 71 percent of the total households of the village. Ninety-two households (27%) of the village are extended (married couple, one or more married sons and their children and lineal dependents). The ideal "joint" household (two or more married brothers and their children, unmarried siblings) is a myth in the village; there is not one joint family in the village. In the survey, we found six households as "single," meaning that the household consists of only one person. In sum, we find that the poorest are most nuclear and the richest are extended.

We find no clearcut or direct relationship between household composition and ownership of landholding. As in Table 4.11, rich and middle peasants are more or less equally divided into nuclear and extended types. The presence of extended types among small and landless peasants deserve special mention. Wiest's (1991) study of three Bangladesh regions suggests that extended households provide some sense of security among landless and small peasants because they can pool together and share their meagre resources to survive.

#### 4.4.2 Marriage, Divorce, and Widowhood

Marriage is considered an important turning point in women's lives irrespective of age. It is normally arranged by members of the families of potential spouses. In some instances, men may have some choice or influence in the selection of wives; women's choices, particularly in rural areas, are rarely considered and their consent is taken for granted. According to my informants, a typical marriage in the village today involves a girl between twelve and fourteen years of age and a man at least ten years older or more. Early marriage is common in poor peasant families; rich peasants and high status men in the village send their girls to school and tend to offer them in marriage around sixteen or eighteen. The parents of the bride incur the largest expense in the marriage; the amount of dowry to be paid to the groom's family varies depending on the economic and social standing of both parties. For example, marriage between two families who are both poor requires only a few hundred *taka* which is spent to exchange gifts and to host the occasion. Rich peasants spend thousands of *taka* in dowry to attract well-established and educated grooms for their daughters. However, in all cases -- whether poor or rich -- the groom's family pledges the traditional Islamic *mehr* -- an amount of money for the bride in case of divorce initiated by the husband. In practical terms, such *mehr* is rarely paid to a woman after divorce.

According to my survey, there are 414 married women with husbands in the village. Fifty-three women are reported widowed; thirteen are divorced, and five are separated. Monogamy is the standard practice in the village, although a few men have multiple wives.<sup>14</sup> The incidence of polygynous marriages is limited in

Tarapur; only fourteen married men (4%) have two or more wives. This is largely true for the rest of the country (see Qadir 1970:10, Aziz 1979:60).

As I found in Tarapur, polygynous marriages involve a strong relationship between rich older men and younger second wives (also, see Jansen 1987:82-83). In such cases, the first wife always enjoys higher status and the first marriage is considered the "real" marriage, because the second or third wife comes from relatively lower status families. Since the first wife is older than the others and already possibly has grown children, she is the decision-maker in the family and supervises the rest of the team of wives. It is a functionally useful strategy taken by many large farmers to exploit free labor. For example, Barkat Mondol is a rich peasant and a man of high status in the village. He has four wives. In addition to his large agricultural operation (he owns about 100 acres of cultivable land), the family makes *gur* from sugarcane grown in their own field. The wives are responsible for taking care of the molasses industry at home. I was surprised to see the huge pan which is used to boil cane juice. Between six and eight persons are needed to get the container down from the furnace. It takes about twelve to sixteen hours to complete the cycle from crushing cane to making *gur* ready for market. Mondol's second and third wife told me that they always work to keep the husband happy. When I asked Mondol why he needs four wives, he smiled and said, "You need more women to work at home. If you have more wives, you don't have to hire maids... Further, you can not trust maids. They steal your property... Wives are to keep your property." All of his four wives have independent *ghor* (houses); Mondol sleeps with any one of them as he pleases. The first wife said, "He (Mondol) sleeps with the youngest wife because she is beautiful and attractive."

Amir Ali, a middle peasant, has two wives. When I asked his first wife why her husband married for a second time, she replied, "I am blind at night ... can't see well. So he got a second wife." Both of them said that they are beaten by their husband for reasons such as delay in serving the food or questioning his bad temper. Abdul Rahim, a landless peasant in the village has three wives. But he

lives with and maintains only one wife; the other two work as maids for rich peasants. They, however, consider themselves "separated." The incidence of unstable marriage and divorce is higher among poor peasants due to lack of resources to support family members. In one case, a landless peasant married as many as six times. In every case, the wife left him due to his inability to feed the family.

In Tarapur, about eight percent of once married women are widowed whereas only two men are widowed -- both in their early 80s. The widowed women are between the age of fifteen and 75. One important reason for widowhood is the age difference between the husband and the wife at first marriage. For example, Kabiraj Mondol (age 80), a rich peasant, married for a fourth time a teenage girl of sixteen years. When I asked Kabiraj Mondol whether he would like to marry again, he smiled a big toothless smile and said, "Yes, if I get a girl again." A widower immediately remarries. The chance for a widow to remarry is slim, especially when she has minor children.

The survey data show that thirteen women in the village are divorced; there was no reported male divorcee. It is difficult to assess the real reasons for divorce in any given case due to contradictory opinions held by the spouses. The most important cause cited by husbands in divorce cases in the village relates to a wife's illicit sexual relationship with another male. Many also mentioned that their wives were unlucky (*kulakkhana*) and that having to live with such women is "disgusting." Divorced women mentioned two important reasons: wife-beating and other unbearable physical abuses, and inability of the husband as a provider. I discuss below two divorce cases to illustrate the problem.

### **Case Study 1: Kabiraj Mondol Divorces his Young Third Wife.**

The most discussed divorce case in the village is that of Kabiraj Mondol (age 80). After the death of his second wife, Kabiraj fell in love with a sixteen-year-old maid servant -- Kamala. Despite opposition from his family, particularly from his sons, Kabiraj Mondol married Kamala. Later on, it came to be known that Kamala had love affairs

with a male servant and a grandson of Kabiraj Mondol and slept with both of them. Kedar Mondol, son of Kabiraj and a very powerful leader of the village, never liked his father's choice and was looking for an opportunity to kick her out. One morning Kedar Mondol alleged that Kamala was seen talking suspiciously with the male servant on the previous night. She was severely beaten by Kedar Mondol and he forced her out of the house. Kamala had to leave to save herself from physical torture. Later on, Kabiraj Mondol divorced Kamala under pressure from the family.

In this case, Kamala, being poor and dependent on Kabiraj, had no choice. She possibly always had doubts about the future of the marriage. As a helpless young maid in the family, she was also forced into relationships with others. Poor young women in the village are always lured by powerful people for sexual relationships. Women do not talk about their abuses in order to protect their personal "honor" (*izzat*).

#### Case Study 2: A Poor Young Girl Married to a Handicapped Person

Saber Ali is a landless poor peasant with a fairly large family. He occasionally works as a porter in a wholesale shop in the Puthia market centre. To save the family from starvation, he arranged the wedding of his daughter Laila with a handicapped person whose father owns a good business in the *bazaar*. Laila, a tall and thin girl, was not considered "beautiful" by her husband and members of the in-law family. She was asked to do all kinds of work in the family and had to work late into the night. The in-laws never accorded her "status" in the family because of her poor background. She said she was not even properly fed. Her husband also did not take any care of her; instead, he used to mistreat her. She also found her mother-in-law very unsympathetic -- one who often used abusive words for lack of "perfection" in her work. Laila eventually left her husband and got a divorce. Many women in the village still consider Laila a "virgin" due to her disabled husband.

A divorced woman is insecure and dependent on her family; people always look down on her. Parents or guardians try for remarriage which is always difficult. Even in cases when it is possible, a woman always enjoys a lower status in her second marriage. The onus is on the woman; "if she were a good woman, she could live with her first husband" -- thus goes a local proverb! Taboos against widowed and divorced women exist; they are not particularly welcome in wedding rituals because of their own unlucky marital lives.

#### 4.4.3 Kinship and Social Networks

The importance of kinship in village life is immediately revealed to an outsider. People are rarely called by their proper names; use of kin terms is part of everyday social relationship (see Aziz 1979:133). I was adopted into various kin-like relationships by my respondents throughout my fieldwork. The use of fictive kin terms to address nonrelatives, as I found, are based on age, gender and socio-economic status. Since I was married and had a faculty position at Rajshahi, I received considerable respect from the village leaders despite my sex. Most of the village leaders addressed me with a culturally appropriate term -- "*bhabi* (wife of elder brother). However, women in the village addressed me as *apa* (elder sister). I myself became very conscious about the use of fictive kin terms during my research. They proved very useful to obtaining permission for interviewing, socializing, and getting involved with my research population. Depending on age, I called village women *bon* (younger sister), *bhabi* (wife of elder brother), *chaci* (wife of father's brother) or *khala* (mother's sister). Likewise, I addressed male respondents of my age as *bhai* (brother); I treated all senior village men as *chaca* (father's brother).

Some *paras* in the village consist of consanguineally-related families (for example, Mondolpara). People who belong to the Mondol lineage live together in one locality in order to solidify their strength in village-level politics. Despite divisions within the Mondols internally, they are united at village-level political struggles and beyond.<sup>15</sup> In-migrants in Tarapur have established homesteads in various *paras* (e.g., Dhakapara, Refugeepara) because of their kin relationship.

The local villagers maintain a distinct social boundary between themselves and in-migrants on the basis of social "dialects." Both speak Bangla, the native language, but there is a certain variation. Local villagers consider that they are more "cultured" (consequently have higher status), and use standard Bangla, such as *khabo* (eating), *jabo* (going), *natun* (new). Migrants, on the other hand, use *khamu*, *jamu*, *naya* for the same standard Bangla words. Even the names of some



*paras* (e.g., Bangalpara, Nayapara) reflect the local perceptions about in-migrants. *Bangal* is a derogatory term used for eastern Bengal and construes a people as having "low status" and being "uncultured."<sup>16</sup> As mentioned earlier, there is very little inter-marriage between in-migrants and the local villagers. The in-migrants also have separate *samajes* (discussed below).

#### 4.4.4 *Purdah* and Female-Male Relations

The institution of *purdah* puts several restrictions on women's lives and defines the female-male relationship culturally. The first restriction is "the domestic boundary": a woman's world is inside home, and a man's world is outside home. *Purdah* clearly defines "separate worlds" (Papanek 1973:298). for men and women based on sex. Thus, a woman does all household activities -- such as cooking, cleaning, washing, child-care -- and also is responsible for feeding livestock. On the other hand, men work in the field, market all products (including those made by women) and have access to and control all public affairs for the households. This results in a social restriction in terms of public/private domains that eventually domesticates women within the household. In the rural villages, a girl enjoys her freedom of movement until about the age of eight or, at the outside, ten years. After that, she starts to become aware of her social position. The moment a girl reaches puberty she is not allowed to talk to or even to see unknown males or prospective grooms (which may even include her cousins). In some cases, it is not uncommon to find girls dropping out of school if parents cannot take "proper" care, such as escorting them to school by a male guardian or by her female classmates. At this stage, parents start to look for a suitable groom. The consent of the girl is rarely sought; marriage is always arranged by the parents or other relatives.

After marriage, a girl must obey her in-laws. In the rural areas, a newlywed girl is not expected to talk to or see her husband in the presence of other relatives. As a cultural rule, the husband is considered above the wife, meaning that he is superior in ability and knowledge. Even the fate of a wife in the after-world is tied to her husband; there is a strong belief among village women that "heaven lies on

the feet of the husband." Thus, the husband-wife relationship is always unequal. A husband can pronounce the name of the wife, but under no circumstances can a wife reciprocate. The status and future of a marriage is dependent upon child-bearing. Due to patrilineality, the more sons a woman will bear, the more status she will earn in the house of her in-laws. Therefore, the most important choice for a married woman is to bear children. If she is childless after five or six years, the marriage is not only at stake, but the wife is considered infertile. This gives her husband a right to a second wife.

In a relative sense, a woman enjoys more freedom in her natal home. As a wife in her in-laws' house, her movements are restricted in front of elderly in-laws. For example, she has to cover her head with her *sari*, talk in a low voice, and should eat only after serving the rest of the family members. A woman is considered "ideal" if her voice is not heard by any stranger; she can attain more respect by wearing a *burqa* (veil) if and when she needs to go outside the homestead. The less a woman goes outside, the more respect she gains. A woman under no circumstances can look at an unknown male face (a man can look at least once!); if she does, quite often it may raise doubts and controversies regarding her chastity. These cultural virtues of woman are controlled by the villagers through gossip, ridicule and social restrictions.<sup>17</sup>

Economically, the *purdah* system determines the sexual division of labor. Women are responsible for all sorts of work inside the house. Men are legally and socially responsible to support the family and therefore have to work outside. This division of labor clearly benefits men in terms of work hours, and also in the nature of their leisure and socialization. Women bear the burden of all household chores, raise children, and support home-based income activities.

The *Purdah* system, therefore, controls a woman's life in several spheres. However, the degree of its rigidity depends upon a number of factors such as age, status, wealth, education and locality. Older women, irrespective of socio-economic status, have more freedom of movement than younger women. Also,

the social status of a household determines the pervasiveness of *pardah*. For example, the wife of a religious leader will never go outside without a *burqa*. The rich peasants are also very careful about their women wearing *burqa*. Household activities which require going outside (e.g., fetching water, washing clothes) are performed by maid servants. Women of poorer families do the work themselves. They do not wear *burqa* (indeed, they cannot afford it!) and they even work in the field with male co-workers. Poverty thus curtails *pardah* restrictions and extreme poverty forces defiance of cultural norms and practices.

Today, *pardah* observance is more a status matter in the village. Some of my respondents said that even a wealthy person cannot earn high status in the village unless women in the family maintain complete *pardah* restrictions. "If people can see the feet of your wife in the street, you cannot claim a high status," said a village leader. He further said, "Women must be covered from head to feet by *burqa*!"

#### 4.4.5 *Samaj* and Village Leadership

*Samaj* is an important social unit of political and ritual significance in Bangladesh villages (see Bertocci 1980; Islam 1974; M. Q. Zaman 1982; Jansen 1987). It is also probably the most important intra- and inter-village social organization in the rural areas. Bertocci (1980) defines the *samaj* as a "religious corporate group" which performs functions of social control and dispute settlement. Membership in *samaj* is based on kinship, neighborhood, and patronage. The leadership in village *samajes* comes primarily from rich and wealthy peasant families. Despite the informal basis of the *samaj* organization, the leaders of the *samaj* are empowered to mediate disputes and pass judgement on village conflicts.<sup>18</sup> The *samaj* enjoys traditional "authority to inflict punishment on people who deviate from the established norms" (Jansen 1987:86).

**Table 4.12. Distribution of Households on the Basis of *Samaj***

Name of <i>Samaj</i>	Number of Households	Percentage
Aminul Islam	25	7.3
Bangal Para	3	0.9
Gazi	8	2.3
Gobindonagar	10	2.9
Innas Ali	3	0.9
Jamalganj	8	2.3
Jolongy	70	20.5
Kabir Mondol	35	10.2
Kamar Mia	18	5.3
Karimullah	14	4.1
Keramat Ali	10	2.9
Kutibari	65	19.0
Mainul Mondel	19	5.6
Moyen Mia	21	6.1
Nayabari	1	0.3
Quddui Kabiraj	11	3.2
Rahim Ali	7	2.0
Shahjahan Dalal	6	1.8
Shamsul Hoq	5	1.5
Umar Molla	19	0.9
Total	342	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 1985

Table 4.12 gives the distribution of households on the basis of *samaj*. There are twelve *samajes* in Tarapur village. The high number of *samajes* in Tarapur is due to diversity in population composition and the relatively large size of the village. As we can see in the table, various migrant groups in the village have different *samajes*. In most cases, the *samajes* are named after individual leaders which signifies control of the patron-leader over the entire *samaj*. The *samaj* is a local "power domain" of the village leaders, locally called *mondol* and/or *paramanik*. Historically, these leadership titles derived from economically and politically powerful lineages by the same titles in villages in northern Bangladesh (Nelson 1923).

During my fieldwork, I found it increasingly difficult to define both physical and social boundaries of individual *samajes*. Some smaller *samajes* (e.g., Bangalpara, Innas Ali, Umar Molla, and Gazi) have members in neighboring villages. However, I have included only those households that live within the defined territorial boundary of village Tarapur. Another possible reason for the small size of some *samajes* is that a *samaj* is liable to breakup over time if the leadership fails to resolve any outstanding dispute among members of the *samaj* group. According to my respondents, about eight new *samajes* were established in Tarapur over the last few years. So there is a lot of fission and fusion in village-level *samaj* organization that defines interaction of individuals and households within the village social system. The following case studies illustrate the processes.

#### **Case Study 1: Moyen Mia *Samaj* divides**

Until 1982, Moyen Mia and Kamar Mia (*samajes*) were united under one *samaj* led by Moyen Mia. On a stormy night in 1983, one Abdul Salam's house was badly affected and five pieces of his tin roof were blown away by the heavy wind. Salam found only three on the following morning. He suspected Akram Ali of the same *samaj*, who was building a house with roof tin at that time. When Salam asked Akram about it, Akram became furious and told him that he bought those used tin sheets from Tebunia Hat, about fifteen km from the village. Salam took the case to Moyen Mia. There were two meetings of the *samaj* with no results except exchange of verbal abuses between

the parties involved. Moyaen, a close relative of Salam, alleged that Ali was a possible suspect and asked him to return the roof tins. Kamar Mia, a traditional rival of Moyaen for *samaj* leadership, made alliance with Akram to challenge the decision. There was no clear evidence, and therefore the *samaj* became divided on this issue. Kamar Mia, with support from Akram and another twenty households, established a separate *samaj* in 1983.

### Case Study 2: Shahjahan Dalal breaks away from Kutibari *Samaj*

Shahjahan Dalal and his supporters were members of Kutibari *Samaj*. As an influential member of the *samaj*, Shahjahan was treasurer of the *samaj* funds. The *samaj* regularly raises money for the mosque; money is also raised by imposing a fine on offenders. Some members of the *samaj* alleged that Shahjahan did not maintain proper accounts of the fund, and that he used it in his business to earn a profit for himself. Shahjahan was also very irregular in attending prayers at the mosque. During a Friday congregation, Hamid Ali of the same *samaj* raised this issue in the mosque and asked Shahjahan to return the money and resign his position. Shahjahan personally felt very insulted and responded to Hamid by saying that he would not refund the money and would see what the *samaj* could do to him! People present in the mosque were surprised by the arrogance showed by Shahjahan. The *samaj* reached a decision to boycott (*atok*) Shahjahan until the money was refunded. As a challenge to this, Shahjahan established his own *samaj* with some of his close relatives and followers.

### Case Study 3: Innas Ali expelled from *Samaj*

This case study relates to a woman by the name Sakina. She was married four times, but never stayed with any of her four husbands for long. The villagers consider her a "loose" woman who makes money by sleeping with youngsters in the village. People even do not address her by her name; instead, they ridicule her as *khemta magi* (dancer woman). About two years ago, Sakina's younger brother Innas Ali was told by the *samaj* people to take care of his sister's bad conduct, otherwise he would be expelled by the *samaj*. Innas Ali, himself a poor peasant and dependent on his elder sister Sakina, failed to do anything about it. Innas Ali with his sister have now formed a separate *samaj*.

The three case studies show both the fluidity of *samaj* organization and the way it can regulate and control behavior of villagers. The composition of *samaj*

may change over time by taking up a few new households or expelling some old ones. Thus, the formation or breakup of an existing *samaj* is largely dependent on the personal advantages or gains of its leader; strictly speaking, the *samaj* organization in rural villages is an instrument to maintain political power and influence by the villager leaders (see Bertocci 1980; M. Q. Zaman 1982).

#### 4.5 Women and Village-Level Development Programs

Focus on women and development in Bangladesh began with the establishment of Women's Affairs Division in 1976, later upgraded into the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The Second Five-Year Plan (1979-84) undertook diversified programs to integrate the women labor force into the development process. I shall briefly examine two important programs that are currently in operation in Puthia villages.

##### 4.5.1 Population Control and Family Planning Program

The widely publicized program in Puthia is in the area of population control and family planning. Several objectives of the program include (i) development of awareness among the people about the two-child "ideal" family; (ii) popularizing various contraceptive methods; (iii) increase in the female age at first marriage; and (iv) increase in access to health care and education of rural mothers.

It is claimed that population growth in Bangladesh declined from three to 2.3 percent between 1961 and 1981 largely due to an increase in contraceptive use. According to Puthia Health and Family Planning Office, 44 percent of all married couples within the *upazila* have adopted family planning practices. In Puthia Union alone, 56 males and 537 females have adopted permanent family planning methods (i.e., vasectomy or tubal ligation); 623 adults have adopted temporary methods of various kinds (e.g., pills, condoms). According to 1984 statistics, 73 females and nine males of Tarapur have adopted permanent methods.

In both village and *upazila* statistics, it is found that the rate and number of permanent method adoption is higher among women than men. Men are opposed to permanent methods for culturally-based prejudices. However, the impact of permanent methods on women is adverse. In Tarapur, I found cases of serious complications which were never followed up by the local family planning agency. Poor women are often lured to tubal ligation at a young age by providing cash. Amena, the wife of a poor peasant, was only eighteen years old in 1984 when she underwent a tubal ligation. She has only one daughter. Her husband now wants to marry again to have a son in the family. Women who take pills often suffer from various side effects due to malnutrition and poor health. The problem is compounded by lack of good health care and shyness to share "personal" issues with outsiders. Some women told me that they prefer the use of traditional herbs over modern practices to avoid examination by male doctors.

#### 4.5.2 Women's Co-operative Program

In all, there are 34 women's co-operative societies in Puthia *Upazila* established under the aegis of BRDB (Bangladesh Rural Development Board). Tarapur Women's Co-operative was established in mid-1984, almost around the time I began my fieldwork. The general objectives of women's co-ops are: (i) to encourage saving habits among rural women; (ii) to develop, with government assistance, local cottage industry (e.g., handicrafts) for "self-help" development; (iii) to find out ways and means for income-generating activities for rural women; and (iv) to educate rural women about population problems and the need for planned parenthood. Members of each co-op elect and/or select once every year their own officials (president, secretary, manager, etc.) who are responsible to run this village-level women's organization.

Members of the *Mahila Samity* (women's co-operative) are expected to meet at least once every week to discuss their problems and organizational issues. The co-operative is open to all women (18 years or over) in the village irrespective of social class. A member is required to pay two Taka as membership fee, and must deposit one Taka every week to raise running capital. The *Upazila* Office of the



BRDB advances loans based on the amount of capital generated by membership of individual societies. It works almost like matching funds for income-generating activities. Tarapur Women's Co-op raised a total of Taka 3,000.00 within a year; membership rose to 37 when I left the village in July 1985. Until then, members of the co-op had no definite development projects; however, many were talking about poultry and handicraft projects. These are typical development projects in other women's co-op societies in Puthia.

The officials (manager and secretary) of the village-level co-operative society meet once every month at the *Upazila* BRDB Office. The *Upazila* Office is called the "federating unit." I attended a couple of meetings of the *Upazila Samaboy Samity* and interviewed several managers of women's co-ops who came to Puthia for monthly meetings. The attendance at those monthly meetings is generally poor. On two occasions that I attended, half of the village-level *kormi* (officials) were absent. The meeting was presided over by a male officer; the deputy director position (usually a woman officer) was vacant for months. Nearly all of the women *karmi* were veiled. The meetings hardly generated any discussion. The officer made some remarks on defaults in weekly savings, and informed that some senior officials from Rajshahi would pay a visit to some women's co-ops in Puthia.

Several women told me that they could not come to meetings regularly because they need a male companion for the long walk to Puthia BRDB Office. Khadeja Khatun (age 35), manager of Shibpur Women's Agrani Co-operative, attended meetings on both occasions, escorted by her ten-year-old daughter. "You always need someone to be with you," she said.

Another woman told me that she bought two goats with her loan money, raised them for a year and finally was forced to sell them to pay the debt for her daughter's marriage. Amina Bibi, a widow, received Taka 500.00 from BRDB Puthia Office as a special loan for a small business. She invested the money in rice processing. Amina said that the loan has helped her to earn a living and survive.

Out of the 35 village-level women co-ops, only eighteen co-ops received loans during the 1984-85 fiscal year. The loan amounts varied from Taka 6,000 to 20,000. However, only one co-operative received Taka 20,000; the average is under Taka 10,000. The BRDB Co-operative Officer told me that only those societies which received some grants are working; others exist "only on paper."

In addition to government-sponsored co-op programs, at least one non-government organization (NGO) has a project which involves women in development. CARE (Christian Aid and Relief Everywhere) has an income-generating program in a neighboring village. It has involved women in rural road maintenance -- a team of women work as a group to maintain a large section of a rural road. Each woman in the group receives Taka 300.00 as a monthly salary. Many poorer women in village Tarapur expressed interest to work in similar projects, but CARE reportedly does not have any plan to extend the program in other villages.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### WOMEN, MEN, AND WORK: ACTIVITY PROFILES

The objective of this chapter is to focus on gender roles and patterns of activity in Tarapur village. The first section presents occupational categories based on gender. The second discusses male roles and male activity, particularly related to agriculture. The role of women in village agriculture (both pre- and post-harvest processing) will be dealt with in the third section. The fourth focuses on various kinds of household activity women perform as housewives. The final section describes women's child-care activity.

#### 5.1 Village Occupations and Gender Roles

As mentioned earlier, division of labor is gender-based in Bangladesh. Women are expected to remain inside the house. "We are destined to perform domestic activities and serve our men," said one woman. This cultural perspective was clearly reflected in our discussion on primary and secondary occupations in the previous chapter (Section 4.3.4). In the village, men are involved in income-generating activities whereas about 99 percent of the women are unpaid houseworkers. However, on close scrutiny we find that women are involved in productive and income-generating activities on a much larger scale than is recognized in the current literature. For example, a total of fifty males in the village reported small business and/or trading as their secondary occupation (see Table 4.10). The nature of small business/trading is temporary and seasonal, e.g., buying and selling rice, *gur*, *rabi* (winter) crops, and so on. Most of these occupations are associated with small, middle, and rich peasant households. In Tarapur, I found that some small peasant households are engaged in rice trading

(*dhan-chaler bebsha*). They buy *dhan* (unprocessed rice) from the local market; then process it (boiling, drying and husking) at home with the labor of household women, and finally sell it to the local market for a profit. This is also true of *gur* business -- both from sugarcane and date juice. Women are largely responsible for boiling the juice and making molasses for marketing and home consumption. However, in all such cases, women never mentioned "small business" as their secondary occupation. Since only men can market these "home-made" products, they report small trading or business as "their" occupation even though women provide almost all of the labor inputs.

The occupational profiles, particularly of the women in the village, deserve further discussion and analysis. We find, for example, that women tend to conform to their structured roles as "housewives" while reporting their occupation. Even some village women who work as wage laborers on a regular basis reported "household activity" as their main occupation. While interviewing my female respondents, I found that village women tend to view all kinds of work (domestic and productive and/or market-oriented) as "household" activity, because they are required to perform those activities to support and sustain their family. Consequently, the nature and variety of "household" activity in a peasant economy can only be appropriately documented by careful and long-term study and analysis of data. Survey research alone simply cannot provide an adequate basis for understanding women's productive role in peasant cultures.

## **5.2 Peasant View of Agriculture: "Men are Masters"**

The village economy, like the rest of the country, is dependent directly on agriculture. Land is the source of wealth and the principal means of production and subsistence. In cultural terms, men not only control this means of production; they feel pride in working on the land as owners, sharecroppers, tenants, and wage laborers. Ownership of a piece of land is of great importance to establish one's status and power as a *malik* (head of household) in the village. The *malik* has absolute mastery over his land and has the right to make decisions about what to

produce and how to use and exploit the land (Thorp 1978). To understand this traditional female-male dichotomy in labor-use in agriculture in Bangladesh, it is important that we see the role of men from the point of view of the peasant villagers, or the "peasant view of agriculture."

From the peasant point of view, men as *maliks* should play the major role in cultivating land, because *Allah* (God) created men much stronger than women. Accordingly, men are destined to do the hard work of exploiting the land to produce food and feed the family. A man "must exercise his mastery (*adhikar*) over his land in the many decisions necessary to farm it successfully and to his own greatest advantage" (Thorp 1978:26). The *malik* must have intimate knowledge about his field, soil texture, climate and monsoonal floods and all the intricacies of crop production and the market place. My male respondents said that only men have the ability (*khamata*) and power (*sakti*) to cultivate and use the land which *Allah* created for mankind (*manobjati*) (cf. Thorp 1978). Given this view, women's labor input in agriculture, like all other productive inputs, engender different social relationships within the village economy and beyond, depending upon their social classes. I shall further illustrate this point when we discuss cropping patterns and use of the women labor force in the village.

The total land area available for cultivation in Tarapur is 615 acres; however, the total acreage cultivated is 683 acres. The difference is due to double cropping of some land, especially for winter crops. Table 5.1 shows acreage of land used for different crops in the village.

Bangladesh is typically a rice culture area. As we can see in the table, over 80 percent of the total cultivable land in the country is used to grow rice. In Tarapur village, about 64 percent of the land is used for rice cultivation. Next to rice is sugarcane cultivation. The villagers use fifteen percent of their land for sugarcane cultivation; this is almost thirteen times higher than the national average which is 1.2 percent. Sugarcane is the principal cash crop in the northern part of the country; it is extensively grown in the districts of Rajshahi, Rangpur, and

Dinajpur. Most of the sugarcane produced by the villagers is sold to the local sugar mills. However, many villagers make molasses (*gur*) from sugarcane; it is more profitable but very labor intensive. The villagers also produce jute, wheat, lentils, mustard seeds, and winter vegetables of different varieties (e.g., dikon, egg plant, potato, etc.).

**Table 5.1. Acreage of Land Used for Different Crops:  
Tarapur and Bangladesh**

Crops	Land Use in Tarapur	Percentage Tarapur	Percentage Bangladesh
Rice	436	63.8	81.8
Sugarcane	100	14.6	1.2
Jute	35	5.1	4.8
Wheat	41	6.0	N.A.
Lentils	40	5.9	N.A.
Other	31	4.5	12.2
Total	683	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 1985.  
Government of Bangladesh, Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, 1975, BBS.

Men play important roles in cultivating and harvesting these crops. I shall briefly discuss the kind of work men perform in the field to cultivate some major crops in the village. The role of women in crop production and the use of their labor is presented in the next section.

**Rice:** Rice, also called paddy (or *dhan* until post-harvest processing is completed) in Bangladesh agricultural studies, is the major crop in Tarapur. The villagers invest close to two-thirds of their cultivable land to different varieties of

rice over the agricultural cycle year. I found two principal methods of rice cultivation in Tarapur: *Bona* or broadcast rice, and *Ropa* or transplanted rice. For broadcast rice, the field needs at least four or five ploughings to make it ready for use. The *malik* may acquire help to perform this task by hiring laborers to work with him. He may use traditional manure or chemical fertilizer to improve the strength (*khamata*) of the land to produce more. The seeds are then broadcasted. In most instances, the *malik* himself will broadcast the seeds as evenly as possible so that sufficient quantities of rice straws are produced without overcrowding. It is a delicate job and the *malik* always seeks *Allah's* help and favor while broadcasting the seeds. Within a month or so, the land needs weeding; and usually, has to be cleared two or even three times.

Broadcast rice is a mixed crop of *aus* (March/April to June), and *amon* (March/April to November) -- two principal rice varieties in Bangladesh. The *aus* rice is harvested after about three months. *Amon* still remains in the field to mature and grow by rain and flood water. It is harvested around November. *Ropa* or transplanted rice is more labor intensive. At first, a small plot of land is prepared as "nursery" bed to grow the plants. The land may require both ploughing and irrigation. When the rice plants in the nursery are about one-and-a-half months old, they are removed and transplanted to another field prepared beforehand with fertilizer and intensive irrigation. Transplanted rice thrives upon irrigation water and requires periodic clearance of the weeds. The villagers grow *aus*, *amon*, and *boro* (often called IRRI) by using this method.

**Sugarcane:** Sugarcane is a major cash crop in the northern districts of Bangladesh. About one-sixth of agricultural land in Tarapur is devoted to sugarcane cultivation. It takes about a full agricultural cycle (November to September) from planting to harvesting. My village-level crop production statistics suggest that the middle and rich peasants use at least one-third of their land for sugarcane production. It is costly and labor intensive but less risky, and does not require constant attention like rice. There are several steps in the preparation of a sugarcane field; the most important are ploughing, furrowing,

planting, raking and weeding, and finally harvesting. A sugarcane field is ploughed five or six times to mix the manure and/or fertilizer and make the soil as soft as possible. At this stage, the farmers make long narrow furrows in the field to plant sugarcane in rows. When the canes grow about two feet or so, raking and weeding are done to keep the plants healthy. This phase is completed by March. Around July and August when the canes become long enough, they are tied up in bundles to prevent them from falling down. Harvesting begins around September. Men perform most of the job in sugarcane production, although women are involved, particularly during the planting stage. Until recently, *deshi* -- a local variety of sugarcane -- was cultivated in the region primarily for *gur* production. Today, a large majority of farmers use a high yield variety and sell their cane to the local state-owned sugar mill.

**Jute:** Jute is not as important as sugarcane in Rajshahi villages. About 35 acres of land (5%) in the village is used for jute production. Jute is a competing crop with *aus* rice in the sense that it is grown in the same period of the year as *aus* (May to August). Its cultivation requires far more labor than rice (Rashid 1981). In Tarapur, two kinds of jute are cultivated -- *Deshi* and *Tosha*. The *deshi* variety is cultivated in lowland areas and the *tosha* in high and flat land. The preparation of the field requires five to six ploughings, followed by sowing of the jute seeds. Within a month of sowing, weeding has to be done to wipe out any competing grass in the field. The jute field is ready for harvest between June and August, depending on the variety of jute. The plants are tied into bundles and kept under deep water for three to four weeks so that the plants rot; the fibre is then separated from the jute stalk. Women play an important role in the post-harvest processing of the jute.

**Wheat and other Winter (*Chaitali*) Crops:** Wheat and a variety of pulses (*masur, mug, kalai, khesari*) are cultivated by the villagers during winter seasons. The production of wheat as a staple has increased dramatically in the past few years. In Tarapur, it occupies third position in terms of land-use in the village. Rajshahi district is ranked as one of the eight major wheat producing areas in the



country (Rashid 1981). With high prices of rice in recent years, wheat has become a popular staple among the poor in the village.

Despite the important role of men in terms of labor-use in agriculture in the village, I found continued engagement of women in agriculture, both in the field and in post-harvest processes. The next section focuses on the nature of labor-use and the role women play in village agriculture.

### 5.3 Village Agriculture and Female Labor Force

Studies to date on women's role in agriculture in Bangladesh is limited to post-harvest rice processing (see Sattar 1975; von Harder 1975; Alamgir 1977; McCarthy 1981; Westergaard 1983). However, in Tarapur village, I have found many village women work in the field with men as agricultural wage laborers. Women not only participate in rice crop production and processing; they are also involved in the production and processing of other major crops such as sugarcane, jute, wheat and other winter crops. Village women assist mostly in preparing the field and in transplanting the crop. On one occasion, the wife of a middle peasant was helping her husband transplanting rice in the field next to their homestead. When she saw me approaching the field, she quickly vanished into the house. It is still not culturally appropriate for women to work in the field, especially women belonging to a high status family. Poor women in the village prefer working in the field in contrast to working as a maid in rich peasants' houses. One poor woman said, "It is better to work in the field rather than to work in somebody's house. If I work in a rich peasant's house, only I myself eat in his house. But if I work in the field, my children can have a meal."

#### 5.3.1 Crop Production and Processing

Women play active roles in post-harvest rice processing. When *dhan* is brought home from the field, women immediately become involved in the processing. There are eight major stages in *dhan* processing. First, women assist

in threshing (*marai*) the *dhan* which is done on the threshing court/floor within the homestead, largely using family labor. Women are required to prepare and clean the threshing floor beforehand with mud clay and cowdung. In the village, threshing is mostly done by using bullocks. However, women from poor households do threshing by feet. Where threshing is done by bullock, women help spread the straw bundles on the threshing court. Threshing activity during the harvest may often go late into the night. Once threshing is done, the *dhan* has to be winnowed (*urani*) at least two or three times to clean the dirt off. A kind of gentle breeze is required for winnowing; women often wait days for such wind from the north. Then comes the third stage -- parboiling (*siddah*). *Dhan siddah* is exclusively women's work. Women make a special kind of oven (*chula*) for parboiling. The *dhan* should be soaked in water overnight before parboiling. Rich peasants hire female workers to assist the family members, because it is considered a huge task if the volume of *dhan* is high at one given time. Normally, women start parboiling very early in the morning so that it is ready before sunrise. At this time, the courtyard is cleaned once again by women. The boiled *dhan* is then dried in the sun; it takes two or three full days consecutively if there is no rain. During *aus* season, it may take a week due to periodic rain. This is a critical stage in the processing because the *dhan* has to be dried properly in order to avoid loss of rice while husking. Therefore, it is important that the *dhan* be turned periodically. While drying the *dhan*, women must also be watchful of poultry and birds to prevent them from eating the *dhan* in the courtyard. The dried *dhan* is now ready for husking (*dhan bara*). Villagers still use traditional *dheki* (husking implement)<sup>19</sup> to take the shell off from *dhan*. Once the shell is taken off, it is known as rice. It is a laborious job and requires a team of at least three women. Two women operate the *dheki* and a third woman does the sifting. An estimated one *maund* of rice can be husked by three women in eight hours. Rice husking (*barani*) has been a good source of employment for village women. However, it has nearly disappeared with the establishment of two rice mills in Puthia market centre. Finally, storing (*gola*) is also an important post-harvest process. Women use various methods to store both *dhan* and *chal* and to prevent loss from insects, dampness and rats. In Tarapur, villagers typically use earthen pots (*motka*),

bamboo baskets (*basher gola*), and drums. Women coat these containers (especially bamboo baskets) with a mixture of mud and cowdung -- both inside and outside. Use of mud and cowdung prevents possible damage by rats.

Village women in Tarapur are directly involved in the production and processing of sugarcane. During my fieldwork in the village, I found many women working in the sugarcane fields -- planting, raking and weeding. Also, many families crush sugarcane for molasses. It is an important industry in Puthia. Village women spend hours in cane processing, from crushing to boiling the juice, to making molasses. Women's labor and their role in cane processing have never been documented as an important economic activity. I shall discuss more about this industry in the next section.

Women also provide substantial labor in the production and processing of jute and wheat. As mentioned earlier, jute is a very labor-intensive crop. Much of the labor input is for rotting the bundles to obtain fibre, stripping the fibre from the stick, and then drying and bundling the jute fibre for the market. Women play important roles in stripping the fibre, and in drying and bundling the jute. In fact, women are responsible for the entire post-harvest period from stripping to storing the jute. Women are also involved in threshing, winnowing and drying wheat. Often they make flour at home by pounding the wheat in *jata* (traditional stone disk). They also make thick soup out of broken flour.

In addition to these major crops, the village women spend time in vegetable gardening, in banana plantation within homesteads, and in the production of a variety of fruit crops such as pineapple, sweet potato, mango, and so forth (see Wilson-Moore 1990).

### 5.3.2 Other Home-Based Productive Work

Due to socially structured gender roles in the rural areas, men's and women's agricultural labor is divided: women's work is more home-based. Thus, they do all preplanting and processing activities that are carried out within the home (*bari*)

compound. A brief discussion of women's *bari*-based activities in Tarapur will reveal the nature of women's involvement in productive work.

It is recognized that *gur*-making is a major home-based industry in Puthia. Locally *gur* is made out of two kinds of juices: sugarcane and date. I mentioned earlier that sugarcane as a cash crop is produced extensively in the village. *Gur*-making from sugarcane is a labor intensive work. A traditional sugarcane crushing machine (*gati*) requires at least eight people to crush cane into juice and to simultaneously boil it. The following proverb rightly mentions the labor-intensive character of *gur* industry in the village: "*Ghare achhe nati puti, Shei kore akher gati* (Those who have lots of grandchildren in the family can undertake *gur* business).

Rich peasants have their own *gatis* for processing sugarcane. Women in the family provide most of the needed labor for *gur* production. For example, during my research I found Mariam and Samiran -- two of the four wives of Mazhar Mondol -- working near the boiler. Mondol told me that multiple wives are "assets" for agricultural work and save labor costs. Mondol also informed me that sale proceeds from his homemade *gur* in 1984 was over Taka One Lakh (US\$3,000.00).

Date palms are grown within the family courtyard and also on the narrow boundaries (*ails*) between plots of land and by road sides. *Khejurer gur* is made out of date juice extracted from the stalks and fermented. The juice can be extracted for *gur* production for about six months (October to March) of the year. The palms also bear fruit, but the date juice is what is popular as a drink in the village. An estimated eighty households in the village make *khejurer gur*, both for household consumption and the market. The production of *gur* from date juice is done entirely by women in the family without any help or assistance of male members. In winter mornings, it is a common scene to find village women boiling date juice for *gur* production. It takes at least three to four hours of boiling to make very thick syrup like *gur* from juice; more time and work are required to

make it thicker and solid so that it may be divided into pieces. Ali Ahmed, a middle peasant in the village has thirty date palms. He earns between five and six thousand Taka (US\$200.00) every year, depending on the local market price. Date palms are productive and an economic asset.

Village women are also engaged in other kinds of home-based but marketable products. For example, they make traditional quilts (*katha*) as bedding, mats (*pati*), and handfans (*pakha*). No capital investments are made to manufacture these materials which are primarily used by the family. However, some women, particularly the poor and the widows, reported that they exchange *katha*, *pati*, and *pakha* within the village for rice, and sometimes even cash. In most cases, mats and handfans are sold in the market place. This can bring a modest income for the family. Saleha, wife of a small peasant in the village, told me that she earns about Taka 200 a year by selling mats in the market. Thus, village women provide labor to generate cash income for the family, but their contributions remain unaccounted for in national censuses and other socio-economic surveys.

#### **5.4 Grihini: Women as Housewives**

A typical village woman starts her day before dawn. "We wake up with the light in the east," said one woman. In the village, the day begins with early morning prayer (*namaj*). However, very few women perform their *namaj*; "I know *namaj* but don't practice it" was a frequent statement made by my female respondents. I found that women from higher socio-economic classes practiced *namaj* more often than not. It enhances their status in the community as "good women."

Village women perform some cleaning tasks (e.g., cleaning dishes from the previous night, sweeping (*jharu*) the house and the hearth (*chula*)) routinely in the morning. At this time they also clean the barn (*goal ghar*), fetch water from nearby tank or tubewell, and take out goats or any other small animals they may have. This is all done within the first two hours or so in the morning.

The next chore is making breakfast (*nasta*). In economically well-off houses, the breakfast may consist of *ruti* (bread), vegetable *bhaji* (fry), and occasionally tea. Often puffed rice (*muri*) is served with *gur* and tea for breakfast. In poor peasant households, rice from the previous night with chili, called *panta*, is a regular course. If fresh *ruti* is made, the quantity is always small and is served with *gur*, particularly during the winter. For many peasant families, the breakfast is the only meal until evening. Rice cakes (*peetha*) are made in some houses for breakfast during winter months.

After the breakfast is over, poor women go out around the village or nearby bush to gather wood and straw of any kind for fire. In some households in the village, I found women making cakes from cowdung for fuel. It is often sold in the market to earn a living, particularly by poor families. They collect cowdung mostly from grazing fields and wherever they can find it in the village. In contrast to this, a woman from a wealthier family spends her morning making bed and breakfast. She is normally assisted in the kitchen by a maid. She also takes care of her children's study and prepares them in the morning for school.

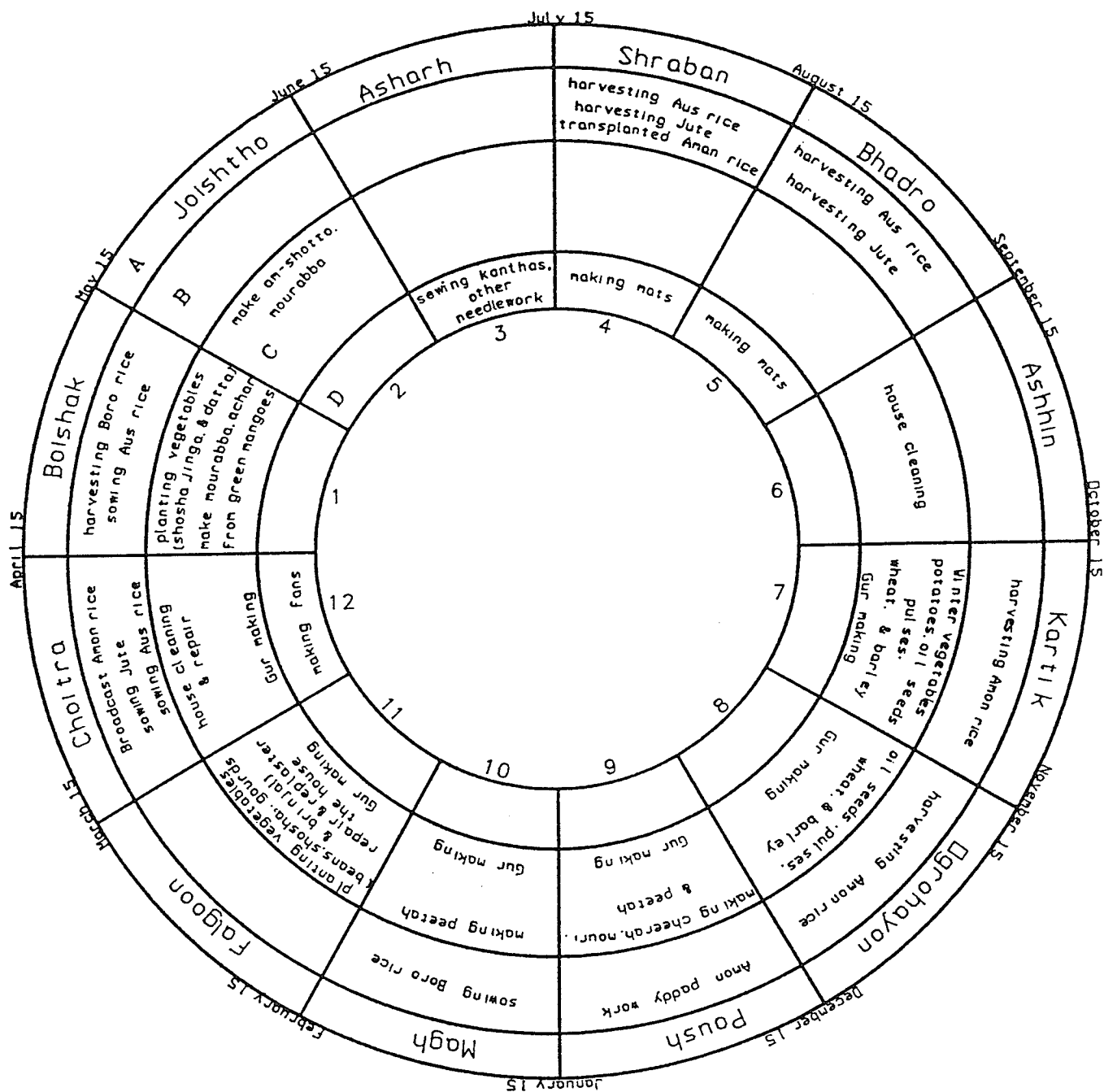
An important household task of the day is preparing the mid-day meal. It is a major meal in Bengali culture. Village women spend hours cooking several courses, depending on the social class of the households. The traditional Bengali proverb -- "*Machhe-bhate Bangalee*" (rice and fish make us Bengali) -- is the ideal meal. Women begin to work for the mid-day meal around ten o'clock in the morning. The spices used in preparing the meal are ground every day. The grinding itself is time-consuming work. A regular meal in a rich peasant's household consists of rice, fish, vegetable, and lentils. Middle class households can also afford rice with fish, at least occasionally. Lentil is always served in the mid-day meal. Poor families in the village rarely cook the mid-day meal. If there is anything left from the morning breakfast, the children in the family are fed at noon time. One day, accompanied by my research assistant Tipu, I was interviewing a widow named Julekha Begum. While talking about the meal pattern of the household, Julekha told me that she had half a piece of bread and a

glass of water as her meal. My research assistant later said, "Madam, since I was with you I should tell you that this woman was shy to tell that she did not eat anything. I know, she starves for days sometimes." I realized that she tried to preserve her dignity and respect before her fellow villager. Tipu told me that it was true of many poor families in the village.

After serving the meal to her husband and other members of the family, the wife cleans the kitchen, and does the dishes. She then goes for a bath if she has not done it previously in the morning, and then has her meal. Women are the last ones to eat; culturally, it is appropriate for a "good wife" to wait until her husband has finished his meal. They rarely dine together with other members of the family. Some women rest for a while after the mid-day meal. Others engage themselves in work like sewing, herding small animals near the homestead, fetching water again for drinking and cooking the evening meal. The evening meal consists of two or more courses (e.g., rice, fish, vegetable, etc.). For poor peasant families, the evening meal is the only major meal after a long day of work. Fish is not a common course unless they catch fish from the *beel*. Vegetables and lentils are common courses. Poor families eat a lot of chilies and onion with their meals.

The early hours in the evening are quite hectic. Women are responsible for taking care of the poultry, and the cattle must be fed when they are home. Sometimes, cooking the evening meal may start late after sunset, especially on local market (*hat*) days held twice weekly. Men usually go to the market in the early afternoon to sell and buy products they need. They return home with groceries in the evening or immediately after, depending on the distance to be covered. The cooking then is not done until about eight o'clock in the evening. During this time, women in rich peasant households spend their time helping kids in preparing homework for the following school day. By nine o'clock in the evening, it is time for most villagers to go to bed.

Figure 5.1: Women's Annual Work Pattern.



Legend:

- A: Bengali months with corresponding English calendar, Boishak (April 15 to May 15) is the first month of the Bangla calendar.
- B: Major agricultural activities throughout the year
- C: Home based activities
- D: Handicrafts

Sources:

Field Study 1984 - 1985  
Sattor 1975



The household or domestic activities described above may vary from season to season, from month to month, and even from day to day in a week. For example, village women wash their clothes at least twice a week. On a washing day, it means an additional three or four hours of work. Often women clean and plaster their homestead, walls, and also the kitchen with mud at least once every two weeks. This is an arduous task and it takes between four to six hours depending on the volume of work. I have found that many women in the village do two or three tasks at the same time. For example, a woman who is nursing her child also simultaneously works on a quilt and dries paddy on the family courtyard. In another case, I found a poor woman, while grazing her goats, also collecting wooden fuel from the field with her baby on her right arm. Patterns of household activities are closely related to the extent of resources of a household -- both material and human. For example, in a household where there are several adult females (such as wife, daughter, mother-in-law), they share the domestic activities. In extended families in the village, mothers-in-law normally take care of the children and perform other light tasks; the daughters-in-law are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and other heavy tasks, including post-harvest agricultural processing. If a peasant household runs short of female labor, there are two choices open to the *malik*. First, he can hire female laborers as and when necessary to assist the wife in the family. Second, he can bring a second wife in the family. It is fairly common in the village, especially among rich peasants, to have two or more wives to meet the labor requirements in the family. Figure 5.1 illustrates women's annual work pattern by month and seasons.

### 5.5 Child-care Activity

In rural Bengali culture, when children are about six years or above, they are considered relatively independent. They spend most of their active time outside the home in school or socialize with peers in the village. By the time they are ten years, children from poor families begin to work to earn a living. Use of child labor in agriculture and herding animals is common in Bangladesh villages, as presented in the next chapter. In this section, I discuss activities that require parental care for children under six years of age.

According to the village census, 240 of 342 households (70%) have children six years or under. Of these 240 households, 103 (43%) households have one child; another 100 households (42%) have two children under six years. Thirty-seven families (15%) have between three and seven children up to six years of age. In most instances, these units are extended with two or more married couples and/or multiple wives in the family. Therefore, they can share child-care responsibility.

Child-care activity begins with pregnancy. Village women, especially upon a first pregnancy, are shy to talk about it. Nevertheless, in-laws come to know about it quickly. A pregnant woman may occasionally be relieved of heavy work in the family, particularly in the early period of the pregnancy. After the child is born, ideally the mother is expected not to work for about forty days because it may endanger the life of the newborn by exposing her or him to many evil "spirits" (see Blanchet 1984). The mother is also considered "polluting" during the first forty days. This, however, provides an opportunity for development of emotional bonds between the mother and the child; also, it allows necessary resting time for the mother. The mother is responsible for feeding, cleaning, health, well-being and protection of the child until he or she is about seven years of age. Women with multiple young children spend a lot of time on child-care activity.

In sum, the discussion in this chapter reveals that women's labor contributes significantly to the production and processing of rice, jute, sugarcane, wheat and other winter crops. Further, women are also engaged in other kinds of home-based but marketable products. Thus, village women, in addition to performing all domestic chores, provide labor to generate cash income for the family. I shall return to this in the next two chapters (Chapters Six and Seven).

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PATTERNS OF ACTIVITY AND THE USE OF TIME: CLASS, GENDER, AND SEASONAL VARIATIONS**

The objective of this chapter is to analyze patterns of activity and use of time among adult members (conjugal pairs) of 34 sample households in Tarapur. First, I shall discuss the socio-economic background of the sample population. This will be followed by discussion of the use of time by women and men in various activities like domestic chores, agricultural work (field and post-harvest processing), supervision, prayer, recreation and personal care, crafts, and marketing, using gender, class, and season as important variables. Previous studies on time-use in Bangladesh villages (see Cain, et al 1979; Khuda 1982; Wallace, et al. 1987; and Farouk and Ali 1977) have not given adequate attention to variation by gender, class, and season. In my study village, the use of time varies by gender, class, and season. My purpose then is to compare the general findings of these studies with Tarapur.

#### **6.1 The Sample Population**

In Chapter Three I discussed the methodology used in the selection of the sample. Based on the ownership of cultivable land, I have grouped 342 households of Tarapur into four classes: rich peasants (41 households), middle peasants (44 households), small peasants (122 households), and landless peasants (135 households). I then randomly selected ten percent of the households in each stratum for a time-use survey and for further in-depth interviewing. A total of 34 households were thus identified. Of them, four are rich peasants; another four are middle peasants, twelve belong to the small peasant category, and fourteen are landless peasant households.

Of the four rich peasants, three combine their agriculture with business and wholesale trading at the local market centre -- a characteristic typical of rich peasants in the region. For example, Khatak Mondol owns a large brick-making plant (locally called "brick field") in the village. Brick manufacturing has become a lucrative business in the area since the establishment of the decentralized *upazila* system in the country. It has also turned out to be a steady source of employment in the *upazila* centre due to new construction and expansion of government departments, and the increasing demand for better housing for government officials of the *upazila* administration. Moinul Islam, another rich peasant, has a *gurer arat* (wholesale shop for molasses) in Puthia. As I found in the village, there are several important characteristics of rich peasants' farm operations. First, the agricultural operation is primarily carried out by hired laborers; farm owners typically work as managers or supervisors. Second, the farm enterprise is totally market-oriented. Third, there is a strong emphasis on cash crop production. Production of cash crops (e.g., sugarcane) is labor intensive and requires a fairly large investment. The rich peasants have cash (derived partly from business) or access to government credit programs for crop production. Since hired labor is used for field agriculture, the rich peasants have plenty of time to spend in public affairs, in market places, and in village meetings for resolution of local disputes.

The women of rich-peasant households observe strict *purdah*. They rarely go outside the boundary of the homestead. This strictness in *purdah* observance raises their status as well as the status of their family. The wives in the family perform a lot of household chores, but they are always assisted by extra helping hands (maids, co-wives, and daughters-in-law). During the busy season, they hire additional maids for post-harvest activities.

The heads of the four middle-peasant households in the sample work in the field themselves; however, they occasionally hire wage laborers to help them, particularly during peak seasons. All four are also active in small business. Three sell home-made *gur* in the local market (*hat*) twice a week. Another one has a small fruit shop in the Puthia bus station. He sells green coconut, banana, papaya,

watermelon and other locally available fruit. Puthia is famous for green coconut. It is a popular drink during the summer season.

The wives of middle-peasant households, in contrast to the rich, participate in agricultural activities quite extensively. In addition to regular household chores, they make *gur* (both from sugarcane and date juice), perform all tasks related to rice processing, livestock, and poultry, and also make cowdung cakes for fuel. Two of the four households have more adult females (such as mother-in-law or sister-in-law) to share the work load. For example, Majeda Bibi gets help from her mother and sisters-in-law for rice and *gur* processing. Her sister-in-law cooks for the family when she is busy with other important activities such as house repairing or vegetable gardening. Middle-peasant families rarely employ maids. As a result, the wife in the family works long hours, because she is responsible for all work done within the household.

In addition to meagre land holding, the small-peasant households in the sample exhibit a variety of occupations. Some of them combine agriculture with wage labor (often seasonal migrant labor), small business, and employment; these are considered secondary occupations. A typical year-round small business in the village is rice processing or vending in the local market. In the case of rice processing, the family would buy unprocessed rice (called paddy) from the market, and then sell it in the market as parboiled rice. This brings in a good profit to supplement family income. However, many small peasants do not have the minimum capital to run a rice-processing business. For those who do, the major task of processing falls on the shoulders of women in the family. Women in small-peasant households also engage in craft-making, particularly during the slack agricultural season.

Landless families in the village live a precarious life. Some of them even do not own their homestead land. Their houses are built on land owned by relatives (e.g., father-in-law, brother-in-law) or rich peasants in the village. In the case of the latter, the dependent peasant households work occasionally for free in the

house of the landlord. They also remain "loyal" to the landlord in case of any political struggles at the village level. Therefore, there is a land-based dependent "patron-client" relationship among the landless households and local large landowners. Adult males of landless households are by and large wage laborers. They work in agricultural fields, in construction sites, or in the brick factory. One landless person said, "I am ready to do any kind of job if I am paid for it. Poor people should not have a choice!" Some work as rickshaw peddlers; two landless families have a small business. The nature of the work often depends on the season. Women in landless-peasant households are also involved in many subsistence related activities. Fourteen women in the village work as wage laborers in field agriculture and occasionally in construction sites (to be discussed in the next chapter). Poor women spend time collecting wood from the field and/or forest; they also pluck different kinds of *sak sabji* (edible grass and leaves) from the field for the family. One poor woman said, "Often we have to steal palm tree leaves from others' houses to make mats for market."

While working in the village, I have noticed some interesting issues in terms of relations between women and men in poor peasant households. For example, gender roles tend to cut across culturally set boundaries. Men do not hesitate to work with women in rice processing, or to share domestic chores. Similarly, women work side by side with men in the rice field. Further, poor women attend the local market whenever necessary to buy essentials. They observe *purdah* only in a limited sense (i.e., they cover their head with a *saree*). One day I found Jorimon, a poor woman, working amongst other men in the village brick factory. When I asked her about *purdah*, she replied, "*Purdah korley khamu ki?*" (How shall I eat if I maintain *purdah*?).

## 6.2 Time Spent on Daily Activities

Time-use studies in Bangladesh to date (Khuda 1982; Wallace, et al. 1987; Farouk and Ali 1977) have examined use of time in rural areas only in two time periods (i.e., busy and slack seasons).<sup>20</sup> In this study, I have investigated the use

of time in three periods, namely, busy season (November to mid-February), intermediate (March-May), and slack season (June to August). The "busy season" begins with *aman* rice harvest and processing in November, followed by land clearance, preparation, and levelling for cultivation of sugarcane, jute, *boro* rice, and a wide variety of winter crops (e.g., wheat, mustard seeds, lentils, etc.). The range of activities slowly continues, particularly those activities associated with winter crops, up to mid-May. I have defined this period as "intermediate," which essentially represents a continuum between busy and slack seasons. The use of the traditional "busy-slack" dichotomy gives us a limited understanding of the nature and scale of work and variation in the use of time in a year-round agricultural cycle. The "slack season" begins with monsoonal rains and continues until the end of July or early August; peasants bring home two important crops (namely, jute and *aus* rice) during this season. The activity cycle begins to pick up again from November (see Figure 5.1).

Table 6.1 gives a clear picture of the total time used in work and recreation by gender and season. Here "work" refers to domestic chores, agricultural activities, employment/supervision, business and marketing. Recreation and personal care include time spent in social visits, recreation, meals, rest, and sleep.

**Table 6.1. Mean Time Spent Daily on Work and Recreation by Season and Gender**

Season	<u>Hours Spent on Work</u>		<u>Hours Spent on Recreation and Personal Care</u>	
	female	male	female	male
Busy	13.0	10.6	11.0	13.4
Intermediate	12.2	8.8	11.8	15.2
Slack	10.5	8.3	13.5	15.7
Mean Hours/Day	11.9	9.2	12.1	14.8

Source: Field Survey 1985.

The table shows that a rural woman spends between ten-and-a-half hours (slack season) and thirteen hours (busy season) a day for work, whereas a man spends between eight (slack season) and eleven hours (busy season) a day. This also means, as the table indicates, that men enjoy more hours of rest and recreation both during the intermediate and slack seasons. It is also evident from the table that women work two to three hours more daily in all three seasons. This is further established if we consider the mean hours (all 3 seasons) per day; women work two-and-a-half hours more than men. Also, men spend more time on rest and recreation than women.

Khuda's (1980:120, Table IV) study reported lower daily average working hours for men (6.8 hrs) and women (8.6 hrs) per day, possibly because Khuda considered use of time by the villagers within a fourteen hour range (7 AM to 9 PM daily), having defined it as economically productive time. Farouk and Ali (1977:30) found that men usually work between nine and ten hours a day and women spend ten to fourteen hours a day during the busy agricultural season. Use of time by women and men in Tarapur is similar to that reported by Farouk and Ali (1977). Wallace, et al. (1987) did not mention women's working hours.

Table 6.2 shows that women spend a major part of their time on domestic chores, from seven to eight-and-a-half hours. Time spent on domestic chores in the busy season appears to be the lowest of all three seasons reported.

Several explanations are in order. First, during the busy season, women are required to allocate their time more to agriculture and post-harvest operations, consequently they spend as little time as possible on domestic chores. In rich peasant households, in particular, there are always extra hands available, which reduces the per person work load in domestic chores. Second, poor and small peasants either work in the field or spend more time in post-harvest activities. They also spend time in collecting "left-over" paddy from the field after it is harvested. In all three seasons, men spend the least amount of time (about half an hour daily) on domestic chores.



**Table 6.2. Mean Daily Time (Hours per Day) Spent in Various Activities by Season and Gender**

Season	Domestic (clean, prepare meal, fuel, child care, other)		Agriculture (animal, wage labor, own field, gardening)		Personal Care (eating, rest, sleep)		Recreation (visit, talk, recreation)		Supervision and Praying		Private/Public (crafts/market, meeting)		Total Hours
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
Busy Season	8.2	0.2	3.9	6.9	10.5	11.8	0.5	1.6	0.5	1.0	0.4	2.5	24.0
Intermediate	8.4	0.4	2.8	4.9	10.8	12.3	1.0	2.9	0.4	0.5	0.4	3.0	24.0
Slack Season	7.2	0.2	1.9	4.9	12.0	12.9	1.5	2.8	0.3	0.5	1.0	2.6	24.0

Source: Field Survey 1985.

Men spend more hours in field agriculture in all three seasons than do women. However, they also spend more hours on personal care. Farouk and Ali (1977:54 Table 4.3) reported that men spend a total of eleven to thirteen hours a day for personal care. There is not only gender discrimination in personal care, but women are subservient to men and their personal comfort. For example, women are expected to eat after men are finished eating; also, men always have preference for rest. A wife must always be attentive to her husband and his needs. An age-old and widely revered proverb goes like this: "A woman's heaven is beneath her husband's feet. As long as the husband is happy and pleased with her, Allah will also be pleased with her."

In terms of recreation, men spend at least twice the time that women do. Most respondents reported time spent in local tea shops as recreation. The villagers consider a visit to tea shops as a pleasant break. Further, tea shops play an important role in networking and local politics. Important local and national political issues are informally discussed and debated in tea shops. Local tea shops are, therefore, a focal point of recreation for men in the rural areas.

Supervision and praying time do not vary significantly in terms of gender and season. However, the table points out a big gap between the sexes in terms of private/public activities. In all three seasons, men spend more time than women in outside/public activities such as meetings and markets. They visit the local market centre at least twice a week to buy and/or sell agricultural goods and to meet public officials for credit or for other government assistance for agriculture.

### 6.3 Time Spent on Domestic Chores

In Tarapur, like any other village in rural Bangladesh, the area of domestic chores is gender specific. Culturally, domestic chores are women's domain; men are unwelcome in the kitchen area. When a man tends to direct or supervise activities in the kitchen, an immediate cultural response would be: "Why are you here? Have you become a *maggi*?" (slang for woman). Women of Tarapur spend

a major portion of their daily time in cooking, cleaning and in childcare activities typical of women's work in Bangladesh villages. In addition to this, they also spend a great deal of time and energy collecting firewood or preparing cow-dung cakes for fuel.

Table 6.3 indicates the average use of time by women on domestic chores. Cleaning includes a wide range of activities such as picking up ashes in the morning from the earthen stoves, cleaning dishes, making beds (twice daily), mopping the house and the yard (twice daily), washing and drying clothes (twice weekly), and plastering mud walls and floors (at least once a month). Meal preparation is time-consuming work and includes the following: fetching water, cleaning cooking pots, grinding spices, cleaning and washing rice and lentils, cutting fish, meat, and vegetables. The use of time for meal preparation may vary by class and season. For example, in rich peasant households, women normally prepare a breakfast in the morning, and two major meals (noon and night) everyday, whereas poor women prepare only one major meal in the evening.

Of the major domestic activities listed in the table, rural women allocate most of their time to cleaning and cooking -- about six to eight hours of their total working hours a day. Childcare is a major responsibility of the women, but the table does not confirm this. A woman in the village spends about half an hour on childcare activities; young girls in the family (6 to 8 years) share childcare responsibilities to a great extent in the rural areas. There could be an error in reporting. I have found that village women often engage in multiple tasks simultaneously. For example, a rural mother may nurse the child and cook at the same time. However, it might also be that women simply do not classify childcare as "work."

Fuel collection constitutes another important task relegated to rural women. Women from middle, small, and landless households spend time collecting fuel. The dry season helps peasant households to dry and store rice straw as fuel; further, they also prepare cow-dung cakes during this time for use in the rainy season.

**Table 6.3. Class and Seasonal Variation in Mean Use of Time  
(Hours per Day) by Women in Domestic Chores**

Activity	Season	Peasant Classes			
		Rich	Middle	Small	Landless
1. Cleaning	Busy	1.9	2.2	2.7	2.7
	Intermediate	2.6	2.4	3.1	2.8
	Slack	1.9	2.7	2.5	2.3
2. Meal Preparation	Busy	4.5	4.5	3.5	3.8
	Intermediate	5.7	4.2	4.2	3.8
	Slack	4.2	5.0	3.6	3.4
3. Fuel Collection	Busy	0.9	1.2	1.0	1.1
	Intermediate	0.1	0.7	0.2	.7
	Slack	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.6
4. Child Care	Busy	0.4	0.5	0.9	0.6
	Intermediate	0.4	0.9	0.9	0.7
	Slack	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.3
5. Help	Busy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Intermediate	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.0
	Slack	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
6. Other	Busy	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Intermediate	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
	Slack	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1

Source: Field Survey, 1985

The respondents used very little time in the "help others" category. On social occasions (e.g., marriage, birth, death, sickness), help is often sought and offered along kinship line.

**Table 6.4. Mean Use of Time (Hours per Day) on Domestic Chores by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	7.9	0.1	8.4	0.2	8.1	0.3	8.4	0.1	8.2	0.2
Intermediate	9.0	0.5	8.7	0.2	8.5	0.3	8.2	0.6	8.6	0.4
Slack	6.6	0.5	8.5	0.3	7.4	0.4	6.8	0.1	7.3	0.3
Mean Hrs/Day	7.8	0.4	8.5	0.2	8.0	0.3	7.8	0.3	8.0	0.3

Source: Field Survey 1985.

Table 6.4 shows the number of hours spent per day on domestic chores by class, gender and season. It is clearly established that women spend a large part of their time on domestic chores irrespective of class. However, we find a pronounced variation in time-use on domestic chores by women in rich and landless peasant households during busy and slack seasons. Women from small and landless households, in addition to their involvement in field and post-harvest operations, also spend more time in domestic chores compared to rich peasant households. Women from rich peasant households spend more time on domestic chores during the intermediate period than during busy and slack seasons, although their total time spent on household chores appears lower than other peasant classes. In the busy season they are aided by helping hands; and in the slack season the reduced workload is due both to change in the activity pattern and help by permanent maids. Women from poor peasant households also spend less time on domestic chores during the slack season. What is interesting in this table is that women from middle-peasant households spend nearly the same amount of time in all three seasons. They rarely hire maids as extra hands to work. Over all, the evidence suggests that women from middle, small and landless households

spend more time on domestic chores than those of the large or rich peasant households.

#### 6.4 Time Spent in Agricultural Activities

This section deals with the amount of time spent in agricultural activities by men and women. It also provides an account of the variation in time-use by class and season. Here, agriculture refers to four broad categories of activity, namely, (i) post-harvest tasks; (ii) animal tending; (iii) field agriculture; and (iv) wage labor. Field and post-harvest agricultural activities include all aspects of agricultural operations -- both paid and unpaid. Animal tending (including chickens and ducks) involves various kinds of work like cleaning pens, grazing animals, feeding and care-taking at home. Wage labor refers to paid work -- both cash and customary payment in kind.

Table 6.5 presents a comparative view of all categories of work under agriculture by women of all classes. There are several interesting points to be noted here. First, women from all peasant classes allocate more time to post-harvest tasks. In most cases, these women work as unpaid family laborers. However, their labor is essential for economic survival of the household. Second, women from middle and small-peasant households appear to be active in agricultural operations in all three seasons. This is also true in the case of animal tending. Rich peasant households have permanent *paitt* (year-round contract labor) for animal herds. The poor peasants rarely own any animals except goats. Third, as we find in Table 6.5, only women from small and landless households are involved in field agriculture and wage labor. As I mentioned earlier, field agriculture and wage labor are related to *izzat* (honor) of the household. As a result, those who work in field agriculture and earn a wage to live are viewed as low status women in the village.

**Table 6.5. Amount of Time (Hours per Day) Spent by Women in Agricultural Activities by Class and Season**

Activity	Season	Peasant Classes			
		Rich	Middle	Small	Landless
Post-harvest tasks	Busy	3.7	4.8	3.1	1.8
	Intermediate	1.5	1.9	1.5	0.8
	Slack	0.5	2.1	1.0	0.4
Animal tending	Busy	0.9	0.7	0.9	0.5
	Intermediate	0.7	1.6	1.1	0.8
	Slack	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.9
Field agriculture	Busy	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2
	Intermediate	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.2
	Slack	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Wage labor	Busy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
	Intermediate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
	Slack	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2

Source: Field Survey 1985.

Table 6.6 lumps together four categories of activities (i.e., post-harvest tasks, animal tending, field agriculture, and wage labor) under agriculture in order to examine class, gender, and seasonal variation of the allocation of time to agriculture. It appears from the table that men from the rich-peasant households invest very little of their time in agriculture (mean 1.6 hours per day), lower than women in the family (mean 2.8 hours per day). Rich peasants hire laborers to do work for them and thus can free themselves from working directly in the field. They spend time mostly in a supervisory role. The abundance of wealth frees men, but not women, from many kinds of work. As Cain, et al. (1979:418) observes "substitution of hired labor for own labor that seems to occur for men does not occur for women, at least not to the same extent. Men gain because expenditure on wages for female servants or rice milling charges is avoided. This gain is at the expense of women."

Compared to women from all other farm classes, women from middle-peasant households invest more time in agriculture in all three seasons. This is plausible given the fact that they rarely, if ever, hire maid servants to assist in post-harvest tasks. Further, the middle-peasant households are economically and technologically self-sufficient. Consequently, it means more work for women within the domestic domain. Table 6.6 also indicates that landless women spend less time in agriculture compared to women from all the other peasant classes. This, however, does not mean that they have more "leisure" or "rest" time. Indeed, they have more idle time because there are not enough income-earning opportunities in the village. The patriarchal bias in the agriculture labor market prefers men over women for field agriculture. Women are recruited only when the male labor supply is exhausted.

**Table 6.6. Amount of Time (Hours per Day) Spent on Agriculture by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	4.7	2.3	5.6	9.1	4.0	7.3	3.2	7.2	4.4	6.5
Intermediate	2.2	1.3	3.5	4.7	3.3	5.5	2.4	5.4	2.9	4.2
Slack	1.5	1.1	3.0	7.6	2.3	5.0	1.5	5.3	2.1	4.7
Mean Hrs/Day	2.8	1.6	4.0	7.1	3.2	5.9	2.4	6.0	3.1	5.1

Source: Field Survey 1985.



## 6.5 Time Spent on Supervision

Supervisory or managerial activity is very much connected with control of land resources and of wealth. Typically, only large landowners spend time in agriculture as supervisors. In Tarapur, rich peasants, in addition to hiring year-round permanent laborers, hire even more wage laborers during the peak agricultural season. Table 6.7 presents time spent in supervision by class, gender, and season. The data confirm that "supervision" is a rich-peasant phenomenon. There is, however, gender variation within the rich-peasant class. Men spend almost three times more in supervision than women. Women spend more time in supervision during the busy season only. They work side by side with female wage laborers within the homesteads. For example, Kabir Mondol employs 25 to thirty wage laborers everyday during the busy season for field and post-harvest work. His wife, assisted by two maids, is responsible for cooking and feeding the family and hired laborers. Women's supervisory roles decline with reduced field and post-harvest activity during the intermediate and slack seasons.

Women from middle, small, and landless peasant households spend no time in supervision. However, men from the same peasant classes spend time in supervision during all three seasons. Such supervision is distinctly different from farm supervision by rich peasants. In the case of other peasant classes, supervision invariably coincides with manual work in the field by themselves.

When we aggregate time spent on agriculture and supervision, it provides a better picture of how men and women spend time in varying periods of the year. Gender, class, and seasonal variation comes out prominently in Table 6.8. In all three seasons, men from all four classes work more hours (mean 6 hours per day) than women (mean 3 hours per day). It is further evident that middle peasants allocate much more time (mean 7.6 hours per day) in agriculture than those of any other class; this is also the case for women of the middle-peasant households (mean 4 hours per day).

**Table 6.7. Amount of Time (Hours per Day) Spent in Supervision by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	1.2	4.6	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.4
Intermediate	0.7	1.9	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6
Slack	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Mean Hrs/Day	0.6	2.8	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.8

Source: Field Survey 1985.

Cain, et al. (1979:417) suggested that women's working hours increase and men's working hours decrease with rising economic status, and that poor peasants work longer hours. Data from Tarapur village do not support these propositions. As we find in Table 6.8, women from middle-peasant households work longer hours in all three seasons (mean 4 hours per day) compared to women from all other classes (mean 3.2 hours per day), because the middle-peasant households utilize more family labor than, for example, rich peasants who mostly rely on hired laborers. Further, the table suggests that men from middle-peasant households work longer hours in all three seasons (mean 7.6 hours per day), followed by men from small-peasant (mean 6.1 hours per day), landless (mean 5.9 hours per day), and rich-peasant households (mean 4.4 hours per day). The higher working hours for middle-peasant households may also be due to their involvement in small business (e.g., *gur* making). Cain, et al. (1979) used only two peasant classes in his study -- the rich and poor peasants; as such my data are not totally comparable with those of Cain. However, the broad generalization that

comes out clearly is that men in rich-peasant households work fewer hours (mean 4.4 hours per day). This is about one-and-a-half hours lower than the mean (6 hours per day) in Table 6.8.

**Table 6.8. Amount of Time (Hours per Day) Spent on Agriculture and Supervision Together by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	5.9	6.9	5.6	9.8	4.0	7.7	3.2	7.2	4.7	7.9
Intermediate	3.0	3.2	3.5	5.4	3.3	5.5	2.4	5.4	3.0	4.9
Slack	1.5	3.2	3.0	7.7	2.3	5.1	1.5	5.2	2.0	5.3
Mean Hrs/Day	3.5	4.4	4.0	7.6	3.2	6.1	2.4	5.9	3.2	6.0

Source: Field Survey 1985

## 6.6 Time Spent in Prayer

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Tarapur is an all-Moslem village. There are seven mosques in the village. Mosques are considered important cultural centres in Islamic societies. The mosque has both symbolic and religious value; it unites a local population into a community of believers. The mosque-based religious school -- *maktab* -- teaches basic tenets of religion, including *namaj* (prayer). The mosque is also an important rural organization for social control and law and order. Islam encourages its followers to congregate in mosque for prayers. Moslems are required to pray five times a day -- early morning before sunrise (*Fajr*), around noon (*Juhr*), early afternoon (*Asar*), evening (*Magreb*), and late evening (*Esha*).<sup>21</sup> Of all, the mid-day prayer on Friday (called *Jumma*) is considered most important by the villagers and by Moslems all over the world.

Table 6.9 shows the daily amount of time villagers spend praying; variation is recorded by class, gender and season. Despite the fact that every adult person in the village knows how to perform prayer, and that they are supposed to say prayer five times a day, not very many people practice *namaj*. The table indicates a positive relationship between prayers and wealth. Men and women of the rich peasant class allocate more time to prayer than those of the other classes. Indeed, we find a consistent increase in time allocated to *namaj* from small to rich peasant classes.

**Table 6.9. Amount of Daily Time (Hours per Day) Spent Praying by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.3
Intermediate	1.4	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.3
Slack	1.2	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.3
Mean Hrs/Day	1.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.3

Source: Field Survey 1985.

In my in-depth survey, there is hardly any mention of prayer time by either women or men among poor peasants. Sattar (1974:39) mentioned in her study of a Comilla village that about 93 percent of the women in the village say prayers. Based on my experience in Tarapur, it is possible that the responses to Sattar's survey were expressions of the cultural ideal rather than actual allocation of time. In my study village, I found a general indifference to *namaj* by the poor people. Poor women repeatedly told me that they cannot say prayer due to lack of good

clothing; most of them have only one *saree* to wear for all purposes, and they cannot always remain *pak-saaf* (meaning "clean") for prayer.

The village leaders are fairly regular in *jumma* prayer on Friday, which brings good name and reputation to a social leader. Regular prayers at the mosque help the village leaders to further establish their leadership status and thus empower them to enforce the ideology of Moslem "moral order" in social control and dispute settlement in the village (see Bertocci 1980; Thorp 1978).

### 6.7 Time Spent on Personal Care

Personal care is a type of activity that helps to keep oneself physically fit. Time used for bathing, eating, resting, and sleeping has been included in this category. "Rest" and "sleep" need to be explained here, however. In the village I often found it difficult to differentiate these two concepts, particularly when talking to poor men and women. For example, when I inquired about use of time for rest and sleep, a typical response was: "Oh! I did not have any *kaj* (income-earning activity) today. I spent all day resting and sleeping." During the rainy season, a woman said, "We don't have any work, even nothing to cook for the family. So, we rest all day!" Therefore, in the case of poor peasants, the amount of time used for rest and sleep may be misleading. Very often, the amount of time used for rest and sleep was a mere function of lack of employment.

Table 6.10 focuses upon the amount of time spent on personal care by class gender and season. We find a fairly wide seasonal variation in the use of time for personal care by women in rich peasant households. They have the least time for personal care during the busy season; personal care is reduced to eating and sleeping. The table suggests that landless men and women have more time for personal care in all three seasons. Among women, the average number of hours spent daily for personal care increases with lower economic status. The poorer a woman is, the more time she can spend on personal care. But, as I mentioned earlier, this may include time spent at home without any work or employment, and thus it is misleading.

**Table 6.10. Amount of Daily Time (Hours per Day) Spent on Personal Care by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	8.3	11.2	9.2	10.9	10.4	11.7	11.5	12.5	9.8	11.6
Intermediate	9.4	12.0	10.2	12.5	10.3	11.7	11.8	12.9	10.4	12.3
Slack	12.5	12.0	10.2	11.9	11.7	12.9	12.7	13.4	11.8	12.5
Mean Hrs/Day	10.1	11.7	9.9	11.8	10.8	12.1	12.0	12.9	10.7	12.1

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Sattar (1974:40) reported that poor women are the busiest of all classes of women and have very little free time. Khuda (1982:135) found hardly any difference in the amount of time spent in personal care by women of different peasant classes. Farouk and Ali (1977:43-44) mentioned that men spent more time than women in personal care. In Tarapur, as we find in this table, poor women have more "free time." There is a fair range of variation across classes, and men, in contrast to women, spent more time in personal care. The "free time" of the poor women however means "idle time" for them, which may be invested in income-generating activities; however, they do not have the necessary minimum resources to utilise their time to earn a better living.

### 6.8 Time Spent on Recreation

Recreational activities in village life are few in number. Nonetheless, villagers spend part of their time in recreational activities that include listening to the radio, watching television, going to the local movie theatre in Puthia *Bazaar*,

playing cards, and above all spending time in *adda* (chatting) in tea shops. People in Tarapur also consider visiting friends and relatives as recreation.

There is a strong gender variation in recreation. Women in the village cannot normally use recreational facilities like movie theatres or tea shops. It is not culturally appropriate for women to sit in a tea shop in the local *bazaar*. Women spend most of their recreational time talking to friends and relatives in the village or on *naior* (trips to their natal home). In actuality, time in the natal home may not be recreation time because women tend to help parents in cooking and other domestic chores, while the visiting *jamai* (son-in-law) relaxes during this time. The *jamai* always has a "guest" status among his in-laws while his wife works like a "maid" in her in-laws house.

**Table 6.11. Amount of Daily Time (Hours per Day) Spent on Recreation, by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	0.0	3.4	0.2	0.8	0.4	1.3	0.7	1.5	0.4	1.8
Intermediate	0.9	4.3	0.6	2.7	1.1	2.6	1.1	2.6	0.9	3.1
Slack	1.1	3.2	0.6	2.4	1.3	2.1	2.0	3.4	1.3	2.8
Mean Hrs/Day	0.7	3.6	0.5	2.0	0.9	2.0	1.3	2.5	0.8	2.5

Source: Field Survey, 1985.

Table 6.11 shows a comparison of recreation time for women and men. We see that men of all landholding groups spend more time in recreation than women. Men of the rich peasant class spend more time in recreation in all three seasons. Women of the rich peasant class spend the least time in recreation among all

women. Surprisingly, as the table suggests, women from the landless class spend more time in recreation than others. As mentioned earlier, poor women spend much of their idle time visiting friends and relatives. Such visits are often essential to gain economic support and fulfill some of their household needs. Poor women reportedly visit their natal homes more frequently than others.

### 6.9 Time Spent on Other Activities

Other activities refer to some gender-specific work not included in any of the previous categories. For example, women spend a good deal of their "idle" time making *katha* (quilts), *sikka* (hanging ropes), *pankha* (hand fans), *pati* (mats), and pillowcovers. These are often considered past-time activities. However, these activities help many to earn supplementary income for the family. For men, "other" activities include those which are largely in the "public" domain -- marketing, business, settlement of disputes, and meeting public officials for agricultural loans. Due to the close proximity of the Puthia *Bazaar*, villagers from almost all peasant classes have different kinds of business and regular contacts with the market.

Table 6.12 focuses upon the use of time on "other" activities. We find that men, irrespective of class, spend more time on "other" activities than women in all three seasons. Women spend over an hour daily on these other activities during the slack season. Rich peasants spend a good amount of time in dispute settlement within the village; often they are also required to attend meetings in other villages. Men in middle, small, and poor peasant households spend nearly the same amount of time on other activities. During my fieldwork, I was told by my respondents that all village meetings for dispute resolution are well attended by people from all peasant classes due to multiplex relationships among the villagers. Further, people who have small businesses spend a lot of time in the local *bazaar*.



**Table 6.12. Amount of Daily Time (Hours per Day) Spent on "Other Activities" by Class, Season and Gender**

Season	Peasant Classes									
	Rich		Middle		Small		Landless		Mean Hrs/Day	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Busy	0.3	1.9	0.1	1.7	0.7	2.9	0.3	2.7	0.3	2.3
Intermediate	0.3	3.5	0.3	2.5	0.5	3.4	0.5	2.5	0.4	3.0
Slack	1.0	4.5	1.2	1.2	0.9	3.3	1.0	1.8	1.0	2.7
Mean Hrs/Day	0.5	3.3	0.5	1.8	0.7	3.2	0.6	2.3	0.6	2.7

Source: Field Survey, 1985

In my study village, gender, class, and seasonal variations are prominent in major activities involving agriculture and domestic work. I shall discuss the implications of the general findings of this chapter from a development perspective in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WOMEN IN THE FIELD: LABOR AND CASH INCOME

This chapter focuses upon the use of female labor in village agriculture in Tarapur and the types of activities village women perform for paid and unpaid work. In section one, I narrate diversified field activities of village women. In section two, an account of the history of the female labor force use in Tarapur as well as in northern Bangladesh is presented. In section three, I discuss the socio-economic background of female laborers. In the fourth section, I present some case studies to further illustrate their situation and to identify the needs of the rural women for developing some policy recommendations later in this study.

#### 7.1 Women and Diversified Field Activities

Literature dealing with women in Bangladesh has focused on rural women's participation in post-harvest activities (see Sattar 1974; Alamgir 1977; von-Harder 1975; McCarthy 1981; Huq 1979; Salauddin 1981). These studies list a wide range of "home-based" activities (e.g., rice processing, livestock and poultry raising, and kitchen gardening) in post-harvest operation. Women's role in pre-harvest agricultural activities (e.g., working in the field as wage laborers) and other "off-*bari*" work has never been accounted for. Even long-term ethnographic accounts of rural women's work (Westergaard 1981; Arens and van Beurden 1977; Abdullah and Zeidastein 1982; Hartmann and Boyce 1983) rarely mention women's involvement in pre-harvest field agriculture. During my fieldwork in Tarapur, I have found that some women in the village actively participate in field agriculture, such as levelling and preparing the field for sowing and planting, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, and fixing demarcation or boundary of plots. The

number of village women working in field agriculture (along with men) is not very high; nonetheless, it alone is an interesting and unique phenomenon given the "invisible" status of the female labor force in Bangladesh women's studies.

In most instances, women from poor and small peasant households are involved in agricultural wage labor. However, it is also not uncommon to find women from the middle peasant household working in the field. They work on their own land close to the homesteads, largely in the form of assisting their working husbands. In one case, the wife of a middle peasant was helping her husband in his sugarcane field, located next to their homestead. The cane was fairly tall and the wife was able to "hide" and thus was able to maintain seclusion as well. She was helping her husband to bundle up the cane. This is a necessary step in sugarcane cultivation in order to keep the cane straight. It also ensures a better harvest.

The status of a family in the village is undermined if women are found to work in the field. For small and poor peasant households, use of female (family) labor is a cost-saving technique, for they cannot afford to hire laborers to work in their fields. On one occasion, while I was walking through the village, I found a husband and wife pair working together in their yard winnowing wheat. The husband said, "I cannot afford to hire a laborer. That's why both of us are winnowing." They even permitted me to take a picture!

When working on family land, women typically work either early in the morning or late in the afternoon until sunset. During this time, the husband is usually away working as a wage laborer on the land of other people. During the winter season, women assist male members in the family in vegetable gardening and irrigation. Often, I found, women take the most arduous task of irrigating winter crops and vegetable gardens by what is locally called "pot irrigation." Women bring water from the local tank by earthen pots (*kolshi*). Pot irrigation is popular in this region due to the lack of adequate mechanized irrigation. Rich peasants in the village, however, have their own shallow tube-wells for winter irrigation.

Rural women perform a variety of field-based agricultural activities, and work for long hours from morning to evening. This is particularly the case for those who work for wages. However, differential wage rates exist for men and women, both in the agricultural and non-agricultural (urban) sectors. Table 7.1 gives a brief picture of the situation in the country as a whole.

**Table 7.1. Average Per Day Rural/Urban Wage Rates  
(in addition to a Meal) in Bangladesh, 1984-85**

Agriculture Wages per Day		Non-Agriculture Wages per Day	
Male	Tk.14.1	Male	Tk.18.1
Female	Tk.7.1	Female	Tk.7.2
<u>Urban</u>		<u>Urban</u>	
Male	Tk.15.3	Male	Tk.19.6
Female	Tk.13.3	Female	Tk.9.6
<u>Rural</u>		<u>Rural</u>	
Male	Tk.14.7	Male	Tk.17.6
Female	Tk.7.0	Female	Tk.6.9

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh (1984-85) quoted in Salma Khan, 1988, pp. 68.

Both in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, women earn half of what men earn doing the same job for the same number of hours. There is a tremendous wage gap nationally. In Tarapur too, differential wage rates exist for women and for men in all types of work in the agricultural sector. For example, a male laborer planting sugarcane for a full day gets Taka Sixteen (US\$1=Taka 32 in 1984/85), with a meal consisting of either rice and curry or bread and vegetable; a female laborer is paid only Taka Twelve for the same work. Again, a male laborer is paid

Taka Ten for half a day of work during the winter season; a female laborer gets Taka Eight.

In the village, employers prefer customary wages over cash for harvesting rice, wheat, and a variety of winter crops. Customary wages reduce demand for cash; the laborers also like payments in kind, particularly rice. Men and women who work in the rice harvest (and also work later to process the rice, i.e., threshing) receive six *seers* (about 3 kg) per *maund* of harvested rice.<sup>22</sup> The laborers are also provided with a late breakfast or a mid-day meal.

However, both men and women are paid equal wages only during harvest time. The harvest season is short (less than 2 weeks), and therefore, there is competition in the rural labor market. Wages, if they are cash, often go up during this time. Women's work is valued equally with men during the peak agricultural season primarily due to a temporary labor shortage. At other times, for example, during the monsoon period or slack agricultural season, demand for labor in the rural labor market is low. So, the employer can hire a female laborer at a lower wage rate. I discuss some cultural "myths" and views about female laborers in the next section.

## **7.2 Use of Female Wage Labor in Tarapur: An Account**

The use of female labor in field agriculture is not new in Tarapur or even in the region. The villagers have always hired aboriginal Garo and Santhal women as wage laborers to work in the field. It has been, so to say, a tradition for a long time, particularly in the northern districts (e.g., Rajshahi, Rangpur, Kushtia, Dinajpur) to employ aboriginal women in agriculture. Local villagers informed me that during peak agricultural seasons (both sowing and harvest), "tribal" men and women temporarily migrate to Puthia and other adjacent areas from Godagari. I have found quite a few tribal women working in the field. Tribal women are paid wages equal to men, because they are, said one villager, "hard working, can do men's job, and work like men!" The villager continued, "Our women cannot

work like the Santhals." The "village-view" is that women are physically weak (but not when they are tribal!),<sup>23</sup> and do not have muscular strength like men to perform hard work in the field. The hidden ideology is that men are "masters" of agriculture and that it is not women's work.

In village Tarapur, not only tribal women, but nineteen poor women in the village regularly work in the field as wage laborers. One villager pointed out that their number is increasing every year. In fact, there has been an increase in the use of female labor nationally since 1971, but more so following the 1974 famine in which close to 50,000 people starved to death. The northern districts were hardest hit by the famine. As a result, since 1975 the Government of Bangladesh has encouraged employment of women in the "Food for Work" (FFW) Program in rural road projects, embankment construction, irrigation and canal projects, and other infrastructural and maintenance works. Even though such employment is temporary and seasonal, the opportunity to work helps the rural poor to cope with their endemic poverty. Under the FFW Program, a woman is paid about one-and-a-half kilograms of wheat for an estimated eight hours of work per day.

**Table 7.2. Number of Food For Works (FFW) Projects For Women and the Percentage of Total Tonnage of Wheat Distributed to Women Labourers**

Year	Number of FFW Projects for Women	Women FFW Project as Percentage of Total Tonnage of Wheat Distributed
1977-78	91	3.1
1978-79	49	2.5
1979-80	73	4.9
1980-81	90	5.9

Quoted in Quddus, et al., 1985, pp. 23.

Original source: Marum, M. Elizabeth, Women in Food For Works Projects in Bangladesh, USAID, Dhaka, 1981, p. 3.

Table 7.2 illustrates the extent of such FFW projects nationally. The table indicates that only a small percentage of all the wheat distributed between 1977 and 1981 has been used for women's projects. Quddus, et al. (1985) has pointed out in their report that women employed by the FFW projects were mostly widowed, divorced and/or deserted, and very young. A village adjacent to Tarapur had one FFW project during my fieldwork. The project was run by CARE (Rajshahi), with assistance from the local *Upazila Parishad*. Women were employed in groups of five to ten for earth work to maintain and fix the existing village road. The *Upazila* chairman told me that "the repair work done by the women in that village was not as good as that done by men in other projects." This reflects the typical male perspective about women's work.

In Tarapur, villagers do not recognize the fact that women do work in the field and often earn a wage. In my village census, only three women reported wage labor as their main occupation. My village research assistant once told me, "Madam, you won't find many women working in the field; maybe four or five." Local villagers do not consider any work (both *on-bari* and *off-bari*) by rural women as earning a wage unless it entails "cash" income. It was only through my long-term fieldwork and in-depth interviewing that I was able to identify nineteen women in the village who work primarily to earn a living for the family. At times they earn cash; on other occasions, the payment is in kind (e.g., during rice harvest). Thus, if the current emphasis on "cash" income continues in our definition of female wage labor, women's work may still remain elusive.

### 7.3 Socioeconomic Background of Female Laborers

According to my census, Tarapur has a total of 53 widows. However, there are eighteen women-headed households in the village. These eighteen households comprise five percent of the total households in the village.<sup>24</sup> There are many social and cultural reasons for this small percentage of women-headed households in the village despite a higher number of widows. It is recognized in Bangladeshi culture (see Jahan 1975; Ellickson 1975) that a woman is economically and

socially dependent upon males throughout her life-cycle. First, as a daughter, she is dependent upon her father. Second, as a wife, she is dependent upon her husband. Third, as a widow (and mother), she is dependent either on her sons or her male relatives. Thus, despite 53 widows in the village, only eighteen have set up independent households. This indicates that the majority (66%) of widows have become members of male-headed domestic units of various types. For example, a widow may live with an adult married son or with her in-laws. Only in cases where the son is a minor, the widow and/or divorcee may temporarily act as the head of the household. Even in such a situation, the minor son will be the "socially" recognized head of the family. This represents clearly another dimension of patriarchal society.

Of the eighteen women heads, not all work as wage laborers in the village. Only five of them work in the field, three beg for their livelihood, and six live either with married sons or with a minor grandson, and work as maids in households of rich peasants. Two widows reportedly live independently, but take meals with their married sons on a rotation basis. I was told that they previously worked as maids in other peoples' houses. Their sons would not allow them to work any more. My village informants said that they may start working as maids again if they cannot get along well with their daughters-in-law. The relationship between the mother and daughters-in-law in Bengali culture has always been quarrelsome and a quiet struggle to control decisions within the household (see Davis 1976).

As mentioned earlier, nineteen women work as wage laborers in the village. Golapi (age 26), currently separated from her husband, claimed that she was the first one in the village to have "broken" the village norms in 1982 by working in the field and in local construction sites as a wage laborer (see case study 3 below). Considering that this is a recent trend in the village culture, the number appears quite large, and reportedly on the increase every year. In 1984, a couple of months after I began my fieldwork in the village, I came to know Zakia (age 10), youngest sister of Golapi, very well. She was then working as a maid in a rich peasant's



house in the village. By the end of my fieldwork in July 1985, she joined her sister Golapi in the field as a wage laborer. There are several advantages of working in the field over work as a maid. The work hours are fixed -- an eight-hour contract for a wage. As a maid, the work is "endless," from morning to evening, and often into the night. Further, the work of a maid is stressful; harassment and maltreatment by the employer and/or other members of the family are part of everyday life. For Zakia, as a child laborer, working in the field was attractive because she could stay with her sister which was emotionally fulfilling. Further, she was able to earn cash as opposed to only a meal as a maid. Women who work as maids are rarely paid cash. A good employer would at best give his maid a *saree* as a gift if she works for one whole season.

A brief socio-economic analysis of the nineteen wage labor families follows. All but one are in the poor peasant category with no cultivable land. The lone exception is a small-holding peasant household. Sakhina (age 25), the head of the household, is a young divorcee. She lives with her elderly mother Rahima (age 55), herself a widow. The family has no male members. They have about one acre of land, all rented out on an annual basis. The income from land rent is insufficient to support them throughout the year, so Sakhina works for wages whenever available. The lack of a male member has made the family vulnerable to poverty despite some land resources. This partly explains the cultural bias in favor of male children in Bangladesh. The presence or absence of male members in the family thus can significantly influence the household economy. Wiest (1973:195), in the context of wage-labor migration from a Mexican village, maintains that female heads, particularly elderly widows, face more difficulties to secure an adequate income and subsistence.

There is a wide range of variation in the marital status of these women laborers. Five of them are married and largely work with their husbands on their family farms to support their large extended families. Six are divorced and live with their parents. In all six cases, trouble with the marriage began over the dowry. Since their parents are equally poor, the only way these poor divorced

women can survive is to sell their labor power. In a way, they also support their poor parents by their income. Two of the nineteen are co-wives of men who took a second wife. In my census survey, these two men (heads of households) did not admit that their wives work in the field, or the fact that the wives support themselves. In cultural terms, such an admission amounts to shame and dishonor, especially when talking to a female researcher! Of the rest, three are widows, two separated and/or deserted, and one unmarried. The ages of these female laborers in the village ranges from ten to forty years.

In sum, these women have joined the rural labor force due to poverty. Many are divorcees and widows who desperately need support for survival. To them, as one woman put it, "Life is a nightmare! Every day of the year is a day of struggle. We cannot eat a full meal... Think of our children..." When asked if she is afraid of village leaders for breaking village norms, the woman said, "Are they going to feed us? I am not a man. I cannot steal from others' houses. Do I have any choice?"

#### 7.4 Female Wage Laborers: Three Case Studies

The case studies discussed in this section will provide insights into the life histories of female wage laborers in the village. I have selected three women for more detail of their daily struggles. All three are fairly young; in all three cases, their marital life was short and unpleasant. One became a widow, another was divorced and the third was separated. However, all three are tied together in one sense -- they work in the field, along with men, to earn a living. They have defied the traditional village norm of segregation, do not maintain *purdah*, and have challenged silently the traditional power and authority of the village leaders. One village leader said, "We don't know anything about these women. They are definitely not part of our *samaj*." Another equated the women and their work in the field side by side with men as "prostitution." He further said, "What a shame for Tarapur and for the village leaders! We cannot keep our women inside!"

### Case Study 1: Jahanara: A Widow with Four Children

Jahanara (age 30) is a lively and hard-working woman in the village. When I first went to see her, she was home without work. She took out a *madur* (mat) from the house and asked me to sit down inside the courtyard. I introduced myself to her and told her why I was walking around the village for the past few months. She informed me that she already knew about my work from her fellow women in the village. I was glad to hear that and it made my interview with her rather easy and informal. Since our first encounter, we met each other many more times during my research.

The courtyard was fenced by jute-sticks, bamboo and banana leaves. This is fairly typical in the village; the fence creates a secluded area within the homestead where women can walk freely without being observed by any outsiders. Jahanara appeared an intelligent village woman. Her husband, Rajab Ali, had a small plot (40 decimiles) of agricultural land. He used to supplement his income from the land by wage labor. One day, according to Jahanara, Rajab went to work for his employer. He was cutting wood in the forest; suddenly, a huge branch of the tree fell upon him. He received injuries and complained about chest pain after that. After a prolonged illness, Rajab died in 1982. During his illness, Rajab never allowed Jahanara to work. Instead, he sold his land to pay for medical expenses and to buy food for the family.

Jahanara began to work only after the death of Rajab. She has four children from her marriage: two sons and two daughters. The eldest son Jahangir (age 10) works as a *rakhal* (goat herder) for one of the rich peasants in the village. The employer provides him three meals a day and no cash wages for his labor. The other son Alamgir (age 7) and two daughters -- Sharifa (age 5) and Beauty (age 3) -- live with her. Jahanara's parents live almost next door. Her father has been blind for the past twelve years. She has a young unmarried brother who is the only earning male member in the family. Her mother Sahijan (age 52) also occasionally works in the field to support the family.

Jahanara said that there is no difficulty in finding work during the busy winter season. The difficult times begin with the monsoon. The family is then forced to starve, often for days. She said, "We can hardly afford rice during the rainy season. The usual meal is just a plain *ruti* (home-made bread). That's what the children eat for months. With my meagre income I cannot save anything. So we struggle with hunger and starvation." "The situations," she continued, "often force me to work as maid for Mondols in the village. I don't like this. Rich people can be very abusive and may take advantage of your poverty, especially when

you are poor, divorced, widowed and young. This is why I don't like to work in anybody's house. But when my children are hungry I don't have choices." Jahanara almost began to weep. I did not want to know more.

### Case Study 2: Golenur: A Young Divorcee

Golenur (age 22) is fairly tall and dark. Whenever I met her, she appeared to be depressed and quiet. Golenur was married briefly for four months as the second wife of a local rickshaw peddler. She now lives with her mother, Saberjan, a widow.

Saberjan was married twice. She has one son from her first marriage. The first husband died prematurely; she then married for a second time. She had three children (1 son and 2 daughters) from her second marriage. Golenur is the youngest of the three children. Golenur's father was a wage laborer all his life. He died about five years ago. Her mother Saberjan began begging since the death of her father. Saberjan goes to different local villages, and also to Puthia market on *hat* days for begging. The two sons, now married, live separately with their families. Both are poor -- one is a wage laborer and the other is a rickshaw peddler. Golenur's marriage was arranged by her rickshaw peddler brother.

Her husband, Ramij, was paid Taka 200 as dowry by her brothers. Ramij had troubles with his first wife and in fact was separated for a while. Ramij reportedly told Golenur's brothers that he had divorced his first wife and wanted to remarry. It was only then the brothers agreed. However, the first wife returned weeks after Golenur's marriage. It was a shock to the family. Golenur, having no alternative, stayed as a co-wife and tried hard to adjust to the situation. Ramij had three children from his first marriage. So the first wife had senior status and the strongest voice in any family matters. Ramij's earning as a rickshaw peddler was not sufficient for the family. There was constant bickering between wives. This was always a source of anger and frustration for Ramij.

Ramij was abusive to both wives. He often returned home drunk. Golenur said that her husband regularly drank *tari* (indigenous cheap beer) in Puthia market center where he worked as a peddler. He also smoked *ganja*. On several occasions, Ramij physically abused Golenur after being instigated by the first wife. One day, finding it unbearable, she challenged Ramij. She then was forcibly brought to her mother's

house by her husband who later divorced her in 1982. Since then, Golenur lives with her mother. For a few months Golenur worked as maid in many houses in the village. She now prefers to work in the field. When she does not have any earnings, she shares food with her mother who always has something from begging.

Golenur told me that she is interested to marry again. She wants to live a family life with a husband and children. She said, "It gives you some security. It is socially difficult to remain unmarried." When I left the field in July 1985, I was told that negotiation for her marriage was taking place. It may have happened by now, but due to poverty among the poor, marriages are not stable in the village.

### Case Study 3: Golapi: A Struggle for Survival

Golapi (age 26) impressed me the very first day I met her in December 1984. She was intelligent and straightforward. Within minutes of our introduction I felt that I knew her for a long time. She made the whole environment very informal by addressing me as "*apa*" (sister). She, in fact, initiated the interviewing process on the first day by asking some personal questions about me and my family which made me feel good. Not very many respondents do this.

Golapi was married three times. She was living in her deceased father's house with her second mother. Her father, Kinar Ali, had two wives. Golapi, three other sisters and one brother are from the first marriage. When her mother died, Kinar Ali married again. He has one son from the second marriage. Of the four sisters from the first mother, Golapi is the second. Her eldest sister is married and has one son.

"Of the three husbands," Golapi said, "the first one was the best." She continued, "The first marriage is always the real marriage; others are trials to cope with your situation. Sometimes it works, sometimes not..." She told me that her first marriage failed due to her parents' inability to pay dowry. She was co-wife in her second marriage. Both her second husband and the senior wife maltreated her. She lived with her second husband for about four months. Golapi's third husband, Younus Ali, is a mason. She worked with him in road construction sites as a wage laborer. They were in love and eventually got married. She again became a co-wife in the third marriage. She told me that she did not go along with the first wife even for a single day, so she left. Golapi wishes to keep her marriage but insists that she would stay independently in her father's house. After she left, her husband, Younus, visited her many

times. When Golapi found that she was pregnant, Younus asked her to have an abortion. She refused to do it. Younus threatened her several times and finally said, "If you don't, I shall not recognise the child as mine." Defiant, Golapi then went to the local court and filed a case against her husband, claiming maintenance allowance.

I found Golapi to be a woman of strong personality. She started working in the field even when her father was alive. Her two younger sisters and her stepmother also work with her. They have formed a team to work together. Golapi said, "When we work together, men working with us in the field cannot be abusive. Being together helps us."

These three case studies illustrate a number of features of female laborers and their social life in Tarapur. First, poor women, particularly those without a husband or any male member in the family, are in a desperate situation. Their overall economic situation becomes even worse during the slack agricultural season. Many reported starvation or being near starvation with their children. Second, in all three case studies, women received some social support from their families after divorce. Poverty and dowry appear to be important reasons for breakdown of marital relationships in the village. Therefore, the frequency of divorce and remarriage is higher among the poor families than among other social classes. Third, the case studies suggest that a strong kinship network exists among female laborers in the village. Given the increasing trend of female laborers willing to work in the field, an alternative form of resistance against seclusion and domination may eventually grow in the future. There is some evidence in that direction in the form of kinship networks and mutual interdependence and support among the female wage laborers in the village. Women who work in the field have already challenged the traditional authority in the village and established their own new roles in the domestic as well as the local labor market.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study I have explored activity patterns and allocation of time in terms of gender, social class, and seasonality in a village in Bangladesh. The study of time allocation to develop an activity pattern has become a major tool to understand contributions of women to household income and subsistence both in agricultural and developed industrial societies. In the last two decades or so, this approach has been used by anthropologists in a wide range of societies (see Sahlins 1972; Lee 1968; Evenson 1978; Nag, et al. 1978; King and Evenson 1983). However, research into the allocation of time and activity patterns to date has inadequately treated important issues like socio-economic differentiation, gender roles, and seasonal fluctuations. Further, the vast literature on women's studies tends to consider gender issues largely as independent rather than complementary within the household.

Most studies recognize the importance of women's roles and contributions to peasant household economy and sustenance. Nevertheless, there is gross underestimation of, and inaccuracy about, the extent of contributions women make in the peasant household production system. Many of the existing problems are products of conceptual, definitional, and methodological inadequacy. Each of these factors, as discussed previously, exert a male bias effect on farm labor statistics, and thus result in underestimation. Keeping these limitations in mind, this study examines the contribution of both females and males to domestic and non-domestic activities within the context of a peasant village in Bangladesh. This said, I shall briefly summarize the chapters, and follow these summaries with major research findings and conceptual and policy implications of this research. I shall also identify some issues as part of a future research agenda.

In Chapter One, I have critically examined a number of conceptual, definitional, ideological, and methodological issues that are intricately linked with underestimation of female labor force participation and women's contribution to household economy. Chapter Two offered a critique of theories and practices in women's studies and development. The chapter highlighted some of the important studies in the field of economics and sociology for understanding women's work in the households. I also briefly examined the contemporary debate in the anthropology of women, i.e., universal male domination, female subordination and the origins of socioeconomic and sexual hierarchies, taking Leacock's (1980) work among the Montagnais Indian women as the basis of discussion. This was followed by a discussion of the major trends in women's studies in Bangladesh. The objectives of the present study were also outlined in this chapter. Chapter Three explained the setting, methodology and sampling procedures, and how peasant households were classified. In Chapter Four, I presented the physical setting, history, and demographic characteristics of the village. I also discussed social organization and village social life by analyzing the nature of village customs and norms, *samaj*, attitudes of villagers toward female education and employment, marriage, divorce, family planning practices, and the *pardah* system. In Chapter Five, occupational categories based on gender were presented. The role of men and women in village agriculture (both pre- and post-harvest processing), and the various kinds of household activity women perform were presented in this chapter. Variation in the use of time by gender, class, and season was presented in Chapter Six, followed by a discussion of the female wage laborers in the village in Chapter Seven. A summary of the major research findings is presented in the next section.

### **8.1 Major Research Findings**

Past studies of time allocation by men and women in Bangladesh villages have followed an "economic" or income-generating approach to assess productive use of time (see Khuda 1982; Farouk and Ali 1977; Cain 1977; Wallace, et al. 1987). As a result, women's work that involves home-based and survival related



activities (e.g., *gur* making, raising poultry, fetching water, collecting firewood) has remained outside the labor market and largely overlooked in economic analysis. Materials presented in this study demonstrate the need to refine some of the conceptual and methodological issues in the collection of data on women and work; further, the study presents useful data on home-based production and market-oriented work. The case study of Tarapur thus illustrates the usefulness of adopting an anthropological approach to understand allocation of time by men and women from the perspective of household production and the local economy and culture.

In Bangladesh studies, time-use surveys have usually compared two seasons (busy and slack) for possible variation by season only. In this study, I have investigated the use of time in three periods, i.e., busy, intermediate, and slack seasons to examine the variation in time use by gender. Further, in contrast to previous studies, I have examined use of time by gender and class, as well as season. The findings of this study contradict some of the earlier assumptions on the use of time in rural Bangladesh. The following discussion presents the major findings; I shall provide some comments on the general significance of these findings in view of integration of women in development.

1. In Bengali peasant world-view, men are considered "masters," and thus play a significant role in agriculture. As *malik* of the household, the man is destined to exercise his mastery, because *Allah* created men much stronger than women. He has the right to make decisions about what to produce, and how to use and exploit the land. Given this view, women's labor input in agriculture will always be culturally undermined. It is important that we see the role of men from local cultural perspective in understanding the traditional dichotomy in agricultural labor in Bangladesh.

2. Due to culturally structured gender roles, women's work is more home or *bari*-based. An important but "invisible" *bari*-based productive activity is *gur*-making out of date juice or sugarcane. In addition to this, women are also

engaged in other kinds of home-based but marketable products such as rice processing, mats, and handicrafts.

3. In Tarapur, like any other villages in Bangladesh, activities are gender-specific. Thus, men work outside the home and women are responsible for most or all household and domestic activities. The activity pattern varies from one season to another, and also across social classes. For example, women spend a major part of their time in domestic chores, ranging between seven and eight-and-a-half hours. Time spent on domestic chores during the busy season is the lowest of all three seasons (see Table 6.2), whereas Khuda (1982) and Wallace, et al. (1987) did not find any significant seasonal or gender variation in the use of time. Further, I have found that gender roles among the poor peasants cross-cut culturally-set boundaries; the rich and the middle-peasant families maintain strict culturally specific gender roles.

4. Some women in Tarapur reported off-*bari* employment involving work in field agriculture as wage laborers, and in post-harvest operations. Women who work in the field come from poor-peasant households and are widowed/divorced. Several respondents reported working in construction sites. Others work as maids. In all cases, the earnings (both cash and kind) derived from work is critical for the survival of the household. They are the poorest of the poor in the village.

5. Rich-peasant farm families combine their agriculture with business and wholesale trading. The agricultural operation is almost entirely carried out by hired laborers except for some forms of supervision. The rich peasants in the village specialize in cash crop production; their food crop production (e.g., rice, wheat) is also market-oriented.

6. The middle-peasant households in the village stand out prominently in terms of time allocation. Both female and male members work longer hours in all three seasons than any other social classes (cf. Cain, et al. 1979). Poor-peasant households have more leisure or "idle" time due to lack of employment, especially during monsoon season.

7. Cain, et al. (1979) reported that women's work hours increase with rising economic status; for men, it decreases by at least two hours a day. In Tarapur, I found that men and women in middle-peasant households work longer hours than those in rich-peasant households due to dependence on family labor.

8. A strong gender variation exists in recreation time. Men from all four peasant classes spend more time in recreation than women. Male members of rich-peasant households have more recreation time in all three seasons primarily due to their managerial role in farm management.

9. The institution of *purdah* appears to be a class phenomenon. In the village, *purdah* observance is a function of "status." Thus, women in rich-peasant households observe strict *purdah* restrictions. They are involved only in *bari*-based activities, mostly assisted by maids or hired female laborers. Poor women cannot afford to remain home and confine themselves to domestic chores only. The economic survival of the domestic unit forces the poor women to work in the field and occasionally alongside male co-workers.

10. Women who work in the field as wage laborers constitute a separate social category in the village, because they are breaking into a new wage market. They are also breaking social taboos and *purdah* restrictions. Given the increasing trend of female wage laborers in the village, an alternative form of resistance against seclusion and domination may eventually grow in the future. These women have already challenged the traditional authority in the village and established their own new roles in the domestic as well as in the local labor market.

## 8.2 Conceptual Implications

A great deal of ambiguity and arbitrariness exists in defining the term "labor force." In fact, the anomalies, inaccuracy, and underestimation of female labor in census data are products of methodological inadequacies and cultural biases. This

study illustrates the need for a broader definition of "labor" to accurately document women's activities -- both agricultural and non-agricultural or domestic -- in rural areas. The Bangladesh Censuses of 1974 and 1981 took a narrow view of the working age population by defining the labor force as all persons age ten years and above and the "economically active" population as persons who are engaged or desirous of engaging themselves in the production of economic goods and services (World Bank 1990). In contrast, the 1984-85 Labour Force Survey (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 1984) defined the "economically active" population as (i) those age ten and over, (ii) who were either employed during the week before the survey, or (iii) unemployed and actively looking for work during the previous two months, or willing to work.

In light of the general findings of this study, we can identify several limitations in these definitions. For example, we have found in this study that women are, much more than men, casually employed, often on a daily basis. Therefore, the time reference of one week used by the Labour Force Survey is inadequate to capture the varieties of work women perform in the rural areas as part-time workers or daily wage laborers. Another equally important limitation is how to define the "economically active" population, or what constitutes work. In Bangladesh, official enumerations "require that all productive activities performed within the home, even when directly income-earning or contributing value-added products (such as homestead horticultural production, crop processing, crop and seed storage, etc.), be considered as part of domestic work and excluded from 'economic activities'" (World Bank 1990:26). A more realistic estimate of female labor force participation in Bangladesh is possible if these widely used definitions are further broadened to include the following.

1. When labor force participation is conceptualized, such as in the present study, to include all home-based activities which generate income (e.g., rice processing, *gur* preparation), the data indicate a high activity level of women; this dispels the mistaken notion that women are economically inactive. Therefore, any labor force participation survey must be sensitive to activities that are market-

oriented but also help sustain the economy of the domestic unit. Further, the measurement objective should be to estimate female labor force contributions to GNP rather than a vague assessment of the cash value of their contributions.

2. An extended labor force definition should include all expenditure-saving activities (e.g., gathering and preparing fuel, water fetching, etc.). Such an approach to the female labor force may be a useful tool to examine time allocation for basic needs satisfaction in Bengali rural society. An extended labor force statistic based on time-use studies will generate comparable useful data for planning purposes and cross-cultural analysis (see Anker, Khan, and Gupta 1988).

3. The use of "market-oriented" and "extended" labor force participation approaches may initially encounter some practical difficulties in nation-wide surveys, particularly in terms of devising a standard and appropriate survey tool and methods of field data collection. In the context of rural Bangladesh, perhaps the best strategy would be to begin with some pilot surveys in different areas of the country. The use of an "activity" schedule over a structured questionnaire based on *a priori* assumptions, use of both male and female interviewers, and recruitment and training of local investigators for survey and data collection, can help improve the accuracy of female labor force participation. Improvements in fieldwork and questionnaire design can eliminate the statistical invisibility of much of the economic and labor force activity of women (Anker 1983:721).

### **8.3 Policy Implications**

The findings of this study focus on three broad policy issues: (i) the need for a better understanding of the significant role of women in field agriculture and post-harvest processing, (ii) creation of further non-traditional employment and business opportunities for poor women in the rural areas, and (iii) consciousness-raising and challenge of cultural barriers among women (initiated by poor women in the village).

1. Many contemporary studies on women in Bangladesh tend to establish that women in Bangladesh are involved only in post-harvest and domestic activities. The results of this study suggest the fact that much of the scholarship on rural women and work is erroneous. Women are involved in field agriculture and many home-based market-oriented productive efforts that help sustain household units. The lack of understanding of this significant role has two important public policy implications for rural women. First, rural women benefit very little from agricultural programs and rural development projects. Second, this also means that they are largely isolated from all kinds of institutional support (e.g., credit, agricultural, or business loans) to maintain or expand their productive base. The experience of the Grameen Bank may be useful in the creation of further non-traditional employment for the rural poor. In recent years, the Bank has been fairly successful in developing an excellent credit program for rural women; further, the training programs and social development activities (including consciousness-raising) have received wide attention (see Rahman 1987b).

2. It is widely held that women's role in agriculture is changing as a direct result of deterioration of the general socio-economic conditions, increasing landlessness, and high pressure of population on land in the country side (World Bank 1990). Indeed, many women in Tarapur have joined the rural labor force due to poverty. Among the rural poor, the women-headed households are in a desperate situation (Wiest 1991). Although their numbers are not high, one study suggests that the number of women-headed households is rising nationally since 1971 (Alam 1985). In any future programs, the needs of this particular group should be recognized and addressed.

3. Rural women, particularly those who need employment and are involved in market-oriented production, should be the target of mainstream development activities in future planning. Programs directed to women in poor and landless families will enhance returns of economic development. This could be done effectively by forming small groups over any conventional large projects. For example, rural women's potential can be maximised by developing new programs

for small business, intensification of vegetable gardening, livestock and poultry raising, and an increased role in field agriculture and crop production. There is a need to increase agricultural credit to poor women for new productive activities. Women's issues and their needs should be addressed in all economic development projects. Government plans and projects in the rural areas should recognize the need of the poor women to earn an independent living to support the family.

4. The integration of the female labor force in economic and social development is largely dependent upon improved data on women's participation in field agriculture, post-harvest operations, and all other economic and productive activities. New data are critical to understand the situation of women, their changing needs, and their skills in order to design policy and program interventions to meet needs of rural women.

#### **8.4 Future Research Agenda**

The majority of rural women in Bangladesh are not only poor but also caught between a male-dominated patriarchal society which confines them within the four-walls of the homestead and the increasing demand to work outside in the wage market for survival. As we have found in this study, women's needs are changing due to changing economic, demographic, and social developments. Future research should focus more on women's role in field agriculture, crop production, and home-based market-oriented activities. Within the context of Tarapur, the following issues may be identified for future research.

1. The *gur* industry is a major source of income for peasant households in the village. Women put in a large share of their productive hours on *gur* preparation and other home-based activities. To my knowledge, there has not been any study on women's role in *gur* production. Future studies should look into the cost-benefit aspect of *gur* production and the use of women's labor time.

2. Further research should be undertaken to understand the causes for the formation of women-headed households, their socio-economic implications, and also the survival strategies of the women-headed households. This area of research needs more attention due to the rising number of women-headed households in the country.

3. My research indicates that poor women have come out of the traditional *purdah* restrictions and village customs into the rural labor market. To date, this area appears to remain untouched. Future research should be directed to understand systematically a number of related issues involving female wage laborers, namely, women and the nature of the rural labor market, wage variations and causes, and employment opportunities for women during the slack agricultural season.

4. Finally, Bangladeshi female researchers are largely interested in doing research in urban areas. Not many female researchers are to be found working in the rural areas due to logistical and other practical difficulties. Further research on women in Bangladesh should be undertaken, but much more attention is owed to rural areas as a simple matter of reflecting where the vast majority of women in Bangladesh are to be found!



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The "definitional" problems have been addressed by several scholars in recent writings on women and development (see Anker 1983; Dixon 1982b; Benería 1982).

<sup>2</sup>For a feminist perspective of the institution of *purdah* and its significance in historical context (see Joarder and Joarder 1980; Jahan and Papanek 1988).

<sup>3</sup>Marxist-feminist anthropologists and social scientists have defined patriarchy in different ways (see Cain, Khanam and Nahar 1979). There is no consensus as to the meaning of the term; however, the usefulness of the term is universally recognized. Following Mies (1986), I have used the term "patriarchy" in a broad sense, meaning the rule of men in socio-economic and political institutions. Thus, it refers to the rule of fathers, of brothers, of husbands, of sons, as well as of "ruling men in most societal institutions, in politics and economics" (Mies 1986:37).

<sup>4</sup>The laws of inheritance are complex, especially since Islamic laws allow multiple wives. In addition, in traditional Moslem laws, agnatic relations occupy a major share in inheritance. A wife inherits only one-eighth of her deceased husband's property; a daughter inherits half as much as a son receives. In the absence of children, the wife gets a fixed share of the property; the rest is divided among other agnatic relations like brothers of the deceased husband. In any case, men inherit more than the women (see Chaudhury and Ahmed 1980).

<sup>5</sup>Ferber (1982) has made a good critical analysis of the two approaches.

<sup>6</sup>I am not dealing with the complexity of inheritance laws or the fundamental differences between Sunni and Shiite codes. Interested readers can consult major works like Beck and Keddie (1978) and Smith (1980).

<sup>7</sup>*Mehr* is different from bridewealth. In the case of bridewealth, a bride's parents or relatives receive goods or material gifts from the groom's relatives/parents. *Mehr* consists of material gifts or gifts after marriage from the husband (groom) to the wife (bride). Pastner (1978) identifies *mehr* as "indirect dowry."

<sup>8</sup>The tradition of time allocation studies began with the seminal work by Szalai (1972) in industrial and post-industrial societies.

<sup>9</sup>The *Upazila Parishad* is the main administrative unit in Bangladesh with an average population of over 200,000 people. It is responsible for local planning and development. Nearly all government ministries/departments responsible for rural development are represented at this level. Bangladesh has close to 500 *Upazilas*.

<sup>10</sup>Therese Blanchet (1982), a Canadian anthropologist, carried out fieldwork in a Bangladesh village. She discusses the inconvenience of working in the field at night even as a foreigner.

<sup>11</sup>A girl in Bangladesh, from birth onward, is always treated inferior to a boy (see Jahan 1975). Further, social-cultural values also discourage her from claiming equal opportunities within the family even when she is an adult, for example, equal access to education and employment. Thus, on the basis of gender roles, a woman's status is always "secondary" to the opposite sex.

<sup>12</sup>A *parishad* is the local self-governing unit made up of elected representatives chosen by local voters (age 18 and over). The average *parishad* contains about fifteen villages and a population of about 20,000. An average *upazila* has six to eight union *parishads* with about 200,000 people.

<sup>13</sup>In Bangladesh, voting age is sixteen years. I have defined the adult labor force as those between fifteen and 55 years of age. However, use of child labor (under 15 years) is common in the rural areas (see Khuda 1982).

<sup>14</sup>Islam permits polygamous union. It allows a man to have as many as four wives simultaneously provided he can afford to maintain and support all four families equally. In Bangladesh, Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961 regulates measures for polygamy, child marriage, maintenance, and arbitration in divorce cases (see Qadir 1981). The MFLO requires that a person intending to have a second wife must submit a written approval of consent from the first wife to the local union *parishad* for permission. Since women do not have any voice in their marital choices, this rule makes no difference to them.

<sup>15</sup>A senior Mondol was an elected M.P. (Member of Parliament) during 1978-81. The Mondols of this village still have considerable political strength in the region.

<sup>16</sup>Historically, parts of eastern Bengal (e.g., Dhaka, Comilla, Faridpur, Noakhali districts from where Tarapur in-migrants originate) were marshy, low-lying tracts of land inhabited by "primitive" agricultural tribes and castes who made their livelihood by clearing forests and jungles along the riverine areas (see Mukerjee 1938; Nicholas 1962).

<sup>17</sup>I tried to observe *pardah* practices as much as possible during my fieldwork. I always covered my face with my *sari*, always wore a full-sleeved blouse, talked in a low voice with my respondents, and was quite humble and modest in my manner. The villagers seemed to like it, especially from an urban, educated woman.

<sup>18</sup>The formal and primary unit of administration in the rural areas is the Union *Parishad* which is responsible for tax collection and maintenance of law and order in the villages. However, the traditional *samaj* system has been found more effective in the sense that villagers resort to the *samaj* for resolution of dispute (see M. Q. Zaman 1981).

<sup>19</sup>The *dheki* is made of a heavy piece of long wooden beam, in one end of which is fitted the pestle and the other end is provided with a fulcrum. Generally women use this equipment for husking rice grains, rice powder, wheat, and many other domestic jobs. It is the most commonly used and manually operated husking mill in the village.

<sup>20</sup>Wallace, et al. (1987) used three seasons, but the classification appears ambiguous since the focus is on quarters (i.e., January-April, May-August, September-December) rather than on seasonal variation.

<sup>21</sup>Prayer is an important ritual in Islamic religion. It is regarded as one of the five pillars of Islam. The other four are (i) *kalema* (believer in one God); (ii) *roja* (fasting during the month of Ramadan); (iii) *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca); and (iv) *zakat* (alms-giving to the poor).

<sup>22</sup>The amount of paddy (or rice) also depends on the quality and the variety of rice. For example, in case of *amon* rice, a laborer receives five *seers*.

<sup>23</sup>Some villagers consider tribal women less than human. In general, tribals are viewed as "primitives" (*ashabhoy jati*), meaning less civilized.

<sup>24</sup>Ellickson (1975) and Wiest (1991) found a higher incidence of women-headed households in their study areas. For a good analysis of the implications of women-headed households in a male dominated rural society, see Wiest (1991).

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