

## Peasant Power and Politics in a Bangladesh Village

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**Abstract** *Bangladesh is a land of thousands of peasant farm families. The country is predominantly an agrarian society. A major portion of its population depends on agriculture, known as peasants.*

*Peasant society owns a traditional power structure and some specific social organization that influence the production system and livelihood of that class of people. Faction grouping and political change also influence farm household activities. This study was undertaken to focus on the peasant faction grouping and power structure at the village Heshakhal under Nangolkot Upazila of Comilla district. The major focus of the study was to comprehend the change occurring in social organizations within the peasant society, on faction grouping and also the changing power structure of the village. The study reveals how in last forty years a major change occurred in the traditional power structure of the village. In the last century, the villages were divided in three Samaj. Linkage with formal administrative unit was flexible. Salish system was the major feature of conflict resolution, specially in managing social conflict. At present the village is separated into several Samajs. The role of Samaj is decreasing day by day. Influence and role of national level political parties are also playing a strong role in leadership in the village, which was not seen thirty years ago. A major change was also seen in the social organization of the village. In the village, peasant families that once depended on agriculture are now trying to engage their manpower in non-farm activities. Marriage system has changed, due to intermarriage system among the Swandupi and deshi community.*

**Keywords:** *Peasants, Power Structure, Politics, Agrarian Society, Factionalism.*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Statement of the issue

Bangladesh is predominantly an agrarian society. A major portion of its people's livelihood depends on agriculture. The households who are living under an agrarian setting are commonly known as *krishak* which in anthropology and development studies, are called as *peasants*. The term 'peasant' was originated by the development academicians, meaning a transitional pre-industrial class mostly depending on agriculture at the subsistence level. According to the academic point of view, the peasantry has constituted the most numerous social group in all organized states, from ancient to modern times, that rests on traditional agriculture. (Encyclopedia of Social Science, 1977).

On economic criterion, peasant means a system of small producers, with a simple technology and equipment, often relying primarily for their subsistence on what they themselves produce. According to Eric Wolf "Peasants are farmers who grow crops and raise livestock in rural areas." A characteristic which is often stressed is that peasant societies in some sense represent a transition, that 'stands midway between the primitive tribe and industrial society' (Wolf, 1966).

According to the definition pictured by the academicians, the society of Bangladesh comprises a large portion of peasants. In the peasant society of Bangladesh some major features can be identified. These are: transition, market and exchange, subordination and internal difference. Transition implies change and adaptation but it must stress that the speed of change and its outcome are neither known nor determined in advance. Markets provide both opportunities and pressure for peasants. The idea of subordination implies unequal social and cultural status. Peasants in Bangladesh are identified as a distinctive social or economic group, and in stressing their subordination to other social groups, there is a risk of overlooking the differences in social and economic status within the peasant society itself. According to Abu Abdullah, "Bangladesh is a country of family farms. Most of the tenants depend on share cropping system" (Abdullah, 1980). The proportions of land owned by the peasant families were never higher than the land of a large farm household. This scenario is drawn from agricultural surveys conducted in the past decades. In the last agricultural survey done in 1996 and 2005 it is found that in the decades of 60s and 70s of the last century the area of farm holding is the same. The average farm holding was 3.5 acres. But in 1982 the average farm holding decreased to 2.4 acres. The growth of population was a major cause of that. Within the period between 1996 and 2006 the average holding decreased to 1.48 acres. The process of defragmentation of land is the

major cause of that. It is also found in the last survey that the rate of landless farm household have also increased. In 1960, 33% of peasants were landless. The ratio increased to 37% in 1982 and along with that the marginal farm families increased to 51.42%. The data on the number and area of farm holdings in 1996 to 2005 are shown in Table-1

**Table 1: Number and Area of Farm holdings and their Percentage**

Size of Farms(in acres)	Number of Farms (in thousand)		% Of Farms	
	2005	1996	2005	1996
Total Farm holdings	15089	11798	100	100
Marginal farm holdings (00.050-00.49 acres)	5829	3356	38.62	28.45
Small farm holdings (00.50-2.49 acres)	7523	6067	49.86	51.42
Medium farm holdings (02.50-07.49 acres)	1561	2078	10.34	17.61
Large farm holdings 07.50+above	177	298	1.17	2.52

*Source : Agriculture Sample Survey,2005*

## 1.2 Review of the Relevant Literature

In the last century village study or study on peasant society became popular among the sociologist/anthropologists of this part of the world. In Bengal, a pioneer work on peasant society was done by *Ramchrisna Mukherjee* (The Dynamics of a rural Society, 1957). His work was done in six villages of Bogra district of Bangladesh analyzing the economic and social changes occurring in peasant society during the year 1942-1944. That study first identified that the static village society was changing due to change in profession and development in communication. The study focused on the taxation, credit system of the *Mohajan*, the process of land losing of poor peasants due to credit, and the overall socio-economic situation of peasant life in East Bengal. The study focused on the process of reinvestment of the profit gained by Mohajans and the rich farmers. These profits came from the exploitation of the peasants and was invested in buying land from the same poor peasants class. The study was a milestone in the field of village study and a turning point in social sciences research in Bengal.

Hafeez Zaidi (1970), worked on the basis of "General Survey" of the socio-psychological aspects. His study area was two villages of Comilla district. He collected information regarding the village life through survey using a schedule

and through intensive field work. His studied villages were classified on the basis of landed property, education, age and power. In the study he highlighted on problems of human interaction. According to him, faction follows the kinship line but not exclusively. He also discussed on rituals, superstitions and fatalistic beliefs of the peasants of East Bengal.

The study titled "*Jhagrapur: Poor peasants and women in a village in Bangladesh*" (1977); and done by Dutch couple *Jeenek Arens* and *Jos Ven Beurden* focused on Marxist point of view of class struggle in a peasant society of Bangladesh. The study focused on the mode of production and production relation in a peasant society. Another major focus of the study was to identify the position of women in a Bangladesh village. In the study the kinship and the patron-client relation was not focused. The main focus was on the conflicting role of village social life. Another focus of the study was the relationship between men and women. They observed that the women enjoyed an inferior status. The wife was treated as personal property of her husband and she did not get recognition of her works.

Anwarullah Choudhury studied on social stratification pattern of a village in Dhaka district in 1978. This study shows that the village is stratified from three dimensions, namely class, status and power. The classes are based on the ownership of land. The Hindu Caste and Muslim status groups are arranged hierarchilly on the basis of high and low status. The village is again stratified on the basis of unequal distribution of power. In the study the researcher shows how few individuals control politics and how the rest remain out of the domain of power and politics. The basis of power in the village has also been focused. Inequality in the distribution of power is, to a large extent, related to the inequality of ownership and control of land

The review of studies shows that from the beginning of the last century, the so called calm and static village social structure started changing. Especially at the middle of the last century, due to independence and rise of nationalism and abolishing the zamindari system, the village people had an opportunity of having access to the national level political formation. Major development initiatives were also taken in that period of time that has had a great influence in the social life of Bangladesh villages, especially in the Comilla region. In the middle of the 1970s some pioneer studies were conducted that also focused on the changing peasant society of Bangladesh. But within the last twenty years there has been a gap in understanding the changing scenario of the peasant society. This study is an attempt to fill the gap.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The broad objective of the study is to find out the changes occurring in a peasant society. and long with that, to comprehend the influence of political changes occurring in the peasant society.

In specific terms, the objectives of the study are to:

- i. comprehend the traditional institution and power structure of a peasant society;
- ii. analyze the changing role of faction groups in a wider context;
- iii. Identify the changes in traditional power structure in the context of larger Bangladesh.

### **1.4 Importance of the Study**

The society of Bangladesh is changing rapidly due to modernization, development of communication and globalization. Thousands of peasant families are playing a vital role in the socio-economic structure. Increase of crop production, use of new technology in agriculture sector and development initiatives taken by the GOs and NGOs are acquiring changes in the peasant societies. The political change in the capital has also been vital for bringing change in the peasant society of Bangladesh. It was potted by many writings and myths that Bangladesh villages were calm and quite. Very little change occurred in hundred years. But in the study of peasants we find that the peasant society is always in a transition. In the last three decades major political and cultural change occurred leading to an independent state through a bloody war. After the independence, in last three decades Bangladesh adopted different types of government. Especially in the last two decades a large change has occurred from local level political unit to central level political structure. Decentralization of local govt. and introducing parliamentary form of govt. has influenced the political scenario. These changes are influencing the traditional power structure and peasant way of life. Peasant faction groups are not only involving themselves in internal village politics, but are also relating themselves with the local and national level politics. Now a day the village life is not separate and so called self sufficient. The peasant livelihood is very much dependent on government policy and programmed. In local development initiatives, political groupings and the influence of national political parties play a vital role. Those who have good relation with the local and national political institutions can easily get the benefits of development afford. This study would focus on the changing power structure and politics of the transitional peasant society.

The Bangladesh for Rural Development Council (BARD), is dealing with rural development initiatives, which is basically being implemented over the peasant society of Bangladesh. For development initiatives it is very much needed to know the internal dynamics of a society. This study would help focus on the internal dynamics of power structure of a peasant society that will be helpful for implementing new development initiatives at grassroots level.

### 1.5 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on two major issues: The first one is to identify traditional institutions related to the power structure. The second one is to identify changes occurring there and the influence of central political formation. For identifying these, following variables are used:

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Variables</i>
1. Existing Institutions	Household, Family, Bari, Gosti, Samaj, Faction groups.
2. Power structure	Decision making issues, Leadership development, factin groupings, Conflict and cohesion, Role of women leadership, etc.
3. Changing power structure	Influence of modernization, Formation of new institution, influence of political parties, new leadership, peoples mobility, gosti mobility, influence of local administrative units. etc.

Peasant society is very much covered. It is not an easy task to break out the cover and identify the problems. For that in-depth study and accurate methodological framework are needed to be built up. The study would be a micro level study covering a single village peasant community. It was not the representation of the whole scenario of Bangladesh but a case as to how things in the peasant society are changing rapidly.

## 2. Study Methods

The study is an anthropological type of study. Some PRA tools were used for collecting data from the field. The sources of information are basically primary. Along with that some quantities information was collected from sending data available for the agriculture extension office, administrative units of the upazila headquarters and some local NGOs. Information the land pattern, soil, classification of peasants, type and characteristics of climate and soil, ownership of land was collected from the agriculture extension department of Nangolkot

upazila. The study of a village with specific objective requires a theoretical framework/background. The duration of the study was one and half years. First three months of the study were spent on building a strong theoretical background as well as selection of the study area. The team needed to stay and travel the selected village for a period of time. The team visited several villagers for selecting the specific village for collecting data.

## 2.1 Selection of village

The study mostly depended on some primary data collected from field. This study tried to follow the tradition of studying only one “specific village for getting the in-depth scenario of a peasant society. Primarily the study area was of some interior part of the Comilla region. After visiting several villages the village named *Heshakhal* under *Nongalkot* Upazila was selected. The special characteristics of the village were:

*Firstly*, the village is big in respect of population and territory. There are more than 800 families separated in different subgroups living in the village.

*Secondly*, the village is a complex one with a variety of people living there.

*Thirdly* the village is named after Union. In the power structure of the village the interrelation with the Union is present there.

*Fourthly*, the village consists of a large number of peasant households.

*Fifthly*, the village contains more than five para (neighborhoods) that maintain their own political identities in some matters, and the last cause of selecting the village is that, peasant activities still dominants are the village.

Paddy is the mostly grown crop in locality. Their economic activities are in subsistence level.

The following tools/methods were used for collecting data:

### i) Observation

Observation method is the key method to closely understand issues of a community. This method was used to get idea of faction grouping, formation of groupings, power structure, and role of various *Gosti* etc.

### ii) Focus group discussion (FGD)

The FGD method was used to get qualitative information on the key issues from the studied area.

### iii) Using key informants

Key informant method was used for identifying some in-depth and touchy issues relating to the objectives. Elderly members, faction group members were used as key informants. The elder one gave information about the change occurred in social and political structure of the village in the last focus decades.

### v) Informal Interview

Open ended checklist was used to collect some basic information through gossiping and exchange of views.

## 2.2 Organization of fieldwork

The study was an anthropological/qualitative type of study. Observation was the major method that was used in the fieldwork. The research team used to stay in the field during the day time, and maintained diary, log book for accumulating data from the field.

## 2.3 Limitations of the Study

- 1) One of the limitations of the study was that the study was in a single village. The findings may not represent the whole scenario of the peasant society of Bangladesh.
- 2) Another limitation of the study was that the quantitative data were collected through recall method and from secondary data of agriculture department of *Nangolkot* upazila office. That might not be hundred percent accurate.

In spite of these limitations, the researcher tried to fulfill the objectives of its study and indicate the features of a peasant society specially the characteristics of change in the power structure. That would provide some important guidelines for future research of the peasant society in Bangladesh.

## 3. Ecology and Social settings

### 3.1 Selecting of the Village

For collecting data from the field the village name *Heshakh* was selected. It was selected for its distinct characteristics and the presence of a large number of peasant households. The village is large in size and in number of population. Several Para and presence of several Samaj make the village attractive for the study. . The village is an ancient village where Hindu and Muslim communities are living from time immemorial. Along with that three subgroup of Muslims are living in the village. So selecting the village for studying the peasant culture and



life style as well change in power structure and influence of modernization make the village attractive for study.

### 3.2 History of the Village

For collecting the history of the village information was gathered from the village elderly. According to the view or oral story from the most elders of the locality, *Heshakhal* village is one of the oldest settlements of the locality. The name of the village derived from the stream flowing at the southeastern part of the village. The canal is a very old water body that originated from the *Muhuri* river of *Feni* district. The canal is more than two hundred years old. The stream had created a large Jola (big swamp) in this part of *Nangalkot* region. The swamp was also famous for many varieties of local fish specially big cat fish (*Magur*). At that time fishermen communities were living on the bank of this place. The local people used to rear duck (*Hash*), because of the presence of a large water body. By the name of *Hash* the canal was named as *Hesakhal*. The village was also named as *Heshakhal*, by the name of the canal.

The Hindu population dominated the village before the separation of the Indian subcontinent. Most of the elite of the locality were Hindu family elders. The Muslim population was a minority. The Samaj leaders were mostly Hindu. Relation between the Hindu and Muslim community was good. Muslim community used to participate in the Hindu religious programmes as guests. The Hindu also used to come to Muslim festivals. Especially the lower caste Hindu had a very good relation with the Muslim as they were in the same class. In course of time the proportion of Muslim community had increased due to Muslim population from southeast portion of Bangladesh started settling in the area of Comilla. This Muslim population is locally known as '*Swondupi*'. Almost all of the inhabitants were peasants. So a good working and social relation was seen among the Hindu and Muslim community at that time.

After the separation of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Hindu community especially the rich families started migrating to India. Most of them migrated without settling the ownership of their property. Some families migrated through exchanging their property with Muslim families willing to live in *Heshakhal* village. Thus 27 Muslim families settled in *Heshakhal*. These families are locally known as *Rewaji*. There is distinctness among the *Rewaji Deshi* and *Swondupi* Muslim community living in the village both socially and culturally. At present the Hindu communities are living at the Hindu para situated at the middle of the village. This part is one of the original settlements of the locality.

### 3.3 Climate

The study area *Heshakhal* is situated at the flood prone zone of Comilla district. *Heshakhal* is locally known as a paddy-growing village. According to the statement given the peasants living in the village that the soil type and its condition is favorable for growing paddy.

According to the Bangla calendar there are six seasons committing of twelve Bangla months. The dry and hot season is known as *Grismakal* (Summer) consisting Bangal month of *Baishak* and *Jaista*. The monsoon is known as *Barshakal*. Autumn is known as *Saratkal*, winter is known as *Seetkal* and spring is known as *Basantakal*. But to the peasant community of the studied area there are three seasons summer, Monsoon and winter are mostly important, temperature, humidity and rainfall is important for agriculture activities, especially for paddy cultivation in the village *Heshakhal*.

It was found that the peasant community living in the village is very much dependents on nature. Especially on rain, temperature and humidity. for the production of paddy along with other crops water and temperature are two major factors. During the fieldwork a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was done among the peasant of the village. It was found that the highest temperature of the year is the summer and autumn time. Most period of the year, temperature remains moderate. In winter time temperature remains low.

Rainfall is important because rainfall means drought, and less production. A good harvest of paddy needs much rainfall during the seasons of Aush and Aman heavy rainfall. Often becomes a problem. As the area is poor in drainage of water heavy rainfall cause water logging. Water logging which sometime cause crop damage, especially in the Aman season. According to the villagers in last ten years the peasants of the locality faced four times Aman crop losing situation due to water logging caused by heavy rainfall in the locality.

### 3.4 Inhabitants of the village

The village *Heshakhal* is administratively situated in *Heshakal* Mouza of *Nangalkot* upazila. The village is large in size. The total land area of *Heshakhal* village is about 686 acres (including homesteads, roads, ponds, bazaar) where about estimated 825 families living. The village has two major religious groups. The Hindu and the Muslim. Muslims were a minority in respect of population before the separation of India. After 1947, the Hindu families started migrating to India in a large number. During that period two-thirds of Hindu inhabitants migrated to India. Among the migrated portion of Hindu families most of them

were in rich and influential. Among them some were “*Samaj leader*” of the then time. Some families exchanged their property with Muslim families who migrated to *Heshakhal* from *Agortala* of India. These portion Muslim families are locally known as *Rewaji*. In most cases the Hindu families migrated to the India without settling their property specially land. At present only 71 Hindu families are living in *Heshakhal* village.

In field work it was found that the Muslims are major religious group in the village which on their origin can be classified into three groups:

These are:

1. *Deshi* (Original settlers of the village)
2. *Swondupi* (Originated from south western Bengal)
3. *Rewaji* (Migrated muslim from India)

The portion of Deshio community are 44.6% (368) of the total households. These people claim themselves as the original settler started living with the Hindu community from the very beginning of the village incisory. Swondupi community started settling in these region of Comilla and NGO Kuali due some natural causes. They migrated from southern part of the region and started settling here. Among the total househol 43.52% belong to Swondupi Community. Rewaji Muslim community has started settling in the village after the separation of India and Pakistan. In last five decade a large portion of hindu families migrated to India. Specially within the period of 1947-1970. Most of those families migrated selling the property to the Muslim Community. Some families exchanged their property with the Muslim furilies willing to settle here in Herhakhal. The newly settled Muslim families are known as rewaj. A small number of Rewaji families (3.28%) are now living in the village. They have good influence over the power structure of the villages.

### **3.5 The Peasants of Heshakhal**

The village *Heskakhal* is within an agrarian setting where a major portion of its population is peasant. Almost all of the total population are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. The presence of a large portion of peasant families plays a vital role in the socio-economic structure of the village.

### **3.6 Origin of Peasantry**

The elderly people living in the village told that, the locality was a large swamp. Inhabitants living in that time mostly belonged to fisherman community. Among them only a small portion of peasant community were living. The Hindu

population were depending on business and other activities. The cultivable land was not large in size, because of the presence of the swamp. Most part of the locality was low lying not favorable for agrarian activities. In course of time peasant families from south east part of *Noakhali* started settling in this part of *Noakhali*. They are locally known as *Swondupi*. About a hundred years ago the *Swondupi* peasant community started using the swamp land for cultivating paddy, specially local variety of paddy which can sustain in fresh flood water. In late thirties, of last century the villagers started developing the low land. In late 70s, high yielding variety of rice started growing in the village. Agriculture technology started introducing, in the village at that period of time. The peasants of the village were aware of new HYV seeds irrigation, line sewing use of fertilizer and pesticides. Road communication was not in standard form in that period.

Migration of Hindu families and the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act enacted in 1950 played a dominant role in the evolution of peasant societies in the village. The Hindu community owned most of the cultivable land before 1950. The Muslim populations were mostly share croppers of the Hindu landowner. After the tenancy act of 1950, Muslim peasants became landowner in the village by buying land from the migrated Hindu families. Land is the major capital and asset of the peasant families. Increase of population and scarcity of land is making the asset more valuable. In the present context the villages own several disputes over the ownership of land among some families. It is also a major cause of faction grouping and conflict. In such context the peasant communities are now facing several types of problems in land operation which are discussed in the later part of the report.

### 3.7 Share cropping

Share cropping is an important livelihood among the peasants of *Heshakhal* village. Generally large farmers give their land to the share croppers. The system of share cropping in this part of *Nangalhot* is known as *Bhaga*, which also means share. A share cropper in the village explains the system of share cropping.

Along with the share cropping system there are other common systems in the village like renting out. One of them is locally known as poshani mortgage.

The rich farmers cultivate their land by using day labors. Share croppers in some cases use to work in rich farmer's plot. This is because they need money in the production period. Working in other land as day labour may bring some money, which he spends in his own plot.

Though paddy is not a very profitable crop, most of the peasants in the village like to cultivate paddy for food security. According to them growing rice is a very easy way of living.

In Bangladesh agriculture has traditionally formed the heart of rural livelihoods. However, this is changing fast. Nationally, agriculture was the slowest-growing sector during the 1990s and, gradually, declined in importance in the share of GDP. Despite its poor performance relative to other sectors, the agriculture sector did however still continue to grow. However, the type of growth has been different from the rice-led growth of earlier times. Crop diversification, farm mechanization (notably the expansion in the use of power tillers for land preparation) and the exploitation of new ecological, technical and economic niches (such as vegetable production and integrated fish-rice production) contributed most to economic growth in the crop sector. The livestock and fisheries sub-sectors have been particularly vibrant, despite the fact that there was a decline both in access to, and status of, common property resources, particularly aquatic and fisheries resources. However, the nature of agricultural growth has not always been labour-absorbing. This raises questions about who has benefited from agricultural growth.

The traditional image of the peasant farmer sitting at the centre of the rural economy has long disappeared from much of rural Bangladesh. The reality is that rural households are as likely to be involved in non-agricultural livelihoods as they are in farming and, increasingly, they derive incomes from multiple sources. The greatest expansion has been in the services sector. The number of small shops in villages has increased substantially, as have tailoring and other craft enterprises, rickshaw pulling and petty trading in villages and local bazaars.

In Heshakhal village, too some peasant families are trying to shift their manpower to other sectors. Nonfarm sectors like small business, rickshaw pulling, carpeting and working in urban centre are becoming important sources of income for the peasant household. But, still, agriculture activities play a dominant role in their livelihood.

#### **4. Social Organization of the Village**

For understanding a society, the behavior and characteristics of various institutions/organizations need to be studied. According to the behavior scientists the basic human social organization is marriage and family and the largest organization is the state. In Bangladesh, a village consists of several institutions. In the following sections various social organizations and changes taken place are analyzed.

#### **4.1 Family, Household and Kinship**

Family and kinship are the core of social life in Bangladesh. A family group residing in a bari would function as the basic unit of economic endeavor, landholding, and social identity. In the eyes of rural people, the chula defines the effective household—an extended family exploiting jointly held property and being fed from a jointly operated kitchen. A bari might consist of one or more such functional households, depending on the circumstances of family relationship. Married sons generally live in their parents' household during the father's lifetime. Although sons usually build separate houses for their nuclear families, they remain under their fathers' authority, and wives under their mothers-in-law's authority. The death of the father usually precipitated the separation of adult brothers into their own households. Such a split generally causes little change in the physical layout of the bari, however. Families at different stages of the cycle would display different configurations of household membership.

Patrilineal ties dominate the ideology of family life, but in practice matrilineal ties are almost as important. Married women provide especially important links between their husbands' brothers' families. Brothers and sisters often visit their brothers' households, which are in fact the households of their deceased fathers. By Islamic law, women inherited a share of their fathers' property and thus retain a claim on the often scanty fields worked by their brothers. By not exercising this claim, however, they do their brothers the important service of keeping the family lands in the patrilineal line and thus ensure themselves a warm welcome and permanent place in their brothers' homes.

Marriage is a civil contract rather than a religious sacrament in Islam, and the parties to the contract represent the interests of families rather than the direct personal interests of the prospective spouses. In Bangladesh, parents ordinarily select spouses for their children, although men frequently exercise some influence over the choice of their spouses. In middle-class urban families men negotiate their own marriages. Only in the most sophisticated elite class does a woman participate in her own marriage arrangements. Marriage generally is made between families of similar social standing, although a woman might properly marry a man of somewhat higher status. Financial standing came to outweigh family background in the late twentieth century in any case. Often a person with a good job in a Middle Eastern country was preferred over a person of highly regarded lineage.

Marriages are often preceded by extensive negotiations between the families of the prospective bride and groom. One of the functions of the marriage negotiations is to reduce any discrepancy in status through financial arrangements. The groom's family ordinarily pledges the traditional cash payment, or bride-price, part or all of which can be deferred to fall due in case of divorce initiated by the husband or in case the contract is otherwise broken. As in many Muslim countries, the cash payment system provides women some protection against the summary divorce permitted by Islam. Some families also adopt the Hindu custom of providing a dowry for the bride.

A woman being to gain respect and security in her husband's or father-in-law's household only after giving birth to a son. Mothers therefore cherish and indulge their sons, while daughters are frequently more strictly disciplined and are assigned heavy household chores from an early age. In many families the closest, most intimate, and most enduring emotional relationship is that between mother and son. The father is a more distant figure, worthy of formal respect, and the son's wife might remain a virtual stranger for a long time after marriage.

The practice of *purdah* (the traditional seclusion of women) varies widely according to social milieu, but even in relatively sophisticated urban circles the core of the institution, the segregation of the sexes, persists.

The segregation of the sexes extended into social groups that had rejected full *purdah* as a result of modern education. Although urban women could enjoy more physical freedom than was traditional and the opportunity to pursue a professional career, they moved in a different social world from their husbands and often worked at their professions in a specifically feminine milieu.

#### **4.2 Family (Paribar) in Heshakhal**

In *Heshakhal* village most families are in extended form which means few nuclear families living within a bari may or may not cook in the a hearth. In such a case, land is the basic factor to unite the members of an extended family. Another form of family found in the village is the nuclear form of family, where father, mother and children live within a hearth. These types of families are mostly seen in the village who own less cultivable land or have secondary professions.

Joint family system is the most traditional and formal family form in the peasant society of Bangladesh. Joint family means more than three generations of family members are living within the same hearth, having a family head (who generally is grandfather). These types of family were more in Heshakhal years ago.

Decision making and utilization of resource was the major feature of the joint family. But this type of family system is in a transitional form.

Among the 825 households of *Heshakhal*, more than four hundred and fifty households are in extended form. The second largest number, close to four hundred households, are in nuclear family form. There are few families living in joint form of family system.

A major research question in the field was what is the major course of changes occurring in the families. The key informant, mostly the elder ones have given the answer. The changes are as follow:

1. Decay in Family values;
2. Decrease of respect to the elder one;
3. Out migration;
4. Degradation of family unity.

Another major finding was, the role of family is now changing. Three decades ago the member of families were mostly involved in agricultural sector. But at present families are trying involve family members in non-farm activities. Out-migration is another major feature of families of *Heshakhal*. Though the number of out-migration is not in large form but families are trying to send their members out of village for non-farm activities. According to the peasants of the village, agriculture is not a profitable sector. But it is important for family's food security. Some families own secondary homesteads at Nangolkot Upazila.

### 4.3 Bari/Homestead

Bari is considered as pioneer social organization in Bangladesh villages. In common meaning bari is homestead. The name of homestead is synonymous with the family name or occupation.

In *Heshakhal* village bari is considered as an important unit of social organization. In common bari is considered as an individual's identity. A person introduces himself by his name along with his bari. Generally bari consisted general homesteads of affinal related kin groups. In *Heshakhal* village some bari owns title, which is an important factor for identifying the bari. Some bari's title is used with its genealogical identity (*Hazibari, pal bari, Miaji bari*). Some bari's title is used along with its professional activities (*Dhopa bari, Mistri bari*); Some bari's title is used by its special characteristic (such as *pagal bari, Fakir bari*). In the village there are also many baris having no title.



The role of bari in social formation in the village is very important. Status and position some time vary from bari to bari. Specially in economic activities and in marriage system bari is considered a prime issue. Professional activities also relate with the position and status of bari. Generally most of the people, though directly related with agriculture, do not directly relate with agriculture or work in the field.

#### 4.4 Gusti/ Bangsha

Gusti or Bانشa (lineage) is another important social organization in peasant society of Bangladesh. The Gosti is the basic organization related with kin group. In general, Bانشa is blood related kin members generally living in a cluster of homesteads. The term Bانشa originated from the term bamboo bush. The process of Bانشa formation is very much similar with the growing of bamboo bush. In rural Bangladesh kinship plays a vital role in social and economic activities. Bangsha is the formal representation of kin group.

In village *Heshakhal* the original or first Gusti was the Hindu Gosti. At present *Majumder*, *Bhuiyan*, *Vaisha* Gosti are the dominated Gusti. Gosti feeling and unity is related with status and power. Those Gustis whose members own position and status in the society are considered big and powerful. The members of those Gostis identify and unite themselves with Gosti feelings. Gosti feeling is much seen among the families which are well off.

#### 4.5 Samaj

Samaj is another important social organization among the peasant society of Bangladesh. In general the meaning of Samaj is living together. "Samaj is founded upon reciprocal relationship, common identity, and strong neighborhood generated by the proximity of residence" (Mashreque, 1985). To the villagers the meaning of 'Samaj' is a platform from where socio-economic activities are done as well as managing conflict within it. According to the writing of P.J. Bertocci "It is a council build up by the elder members living within it". Samaj is the unique social organization in peasant society of Bangladesh.

In Heshakhal village the villagers use the concept of samaj in varied ways. Sometimes it represents territorial unit, sometimes it represents religious activities and sometimes this is a platform related to Gusthi activities. One major linkage of forming samaj is growth relationship. It is very often found that two rival Gustis solve their problem with an affinal relationship and transformed into a single samaj.

#### 4.5.1 The Roles of Samaj

1. Conflict Resolution among the members of it;
2. Arranging social gathering;
3. Arranging social/cultural programmes.

In *Heshkhal* village, more than ten Samaj were found. It was observed that though the number of Samaj increased, their role has decreased. Originally in the village there were two major Samaj, the Hindu Samaj and the Muslim Samaj. The role of Samaj was much more effective then compound to the present. In course of time, belief and dependency among the Samaj members have decreased. At present the major and the only role of the Samaj is conflict resolution.

#### 4.6 Affinal Relationship: Alliance between faction Group

Marriage system plays a vital role for establishing alliance among the conflicting Gostis. According to the fieldwork in Heshkhal village, both Gusti marriage and inter-Gosti marriage were found. In conflicting situation among the Gustis, marriage may play a vital role for establishing alliance among the Gustis. Generally the dominant Gusti wants to raise its support by establishing affinal relation with Small Gusti.

In *Heshkhal* village Miaji Gusti is one of the powerful Gustis. *Majumder* and *Vaisha* are other two influential Gustis. These three Samaj originated from Deshi Samaj. Miaji Samaj established affinal relation with *Vaisha* Samaj and *Majumder*, which was not only marriage, but also established alliance among three Deshi Samaj in the village.

The political significance of marriage, therefore, leads us to say that marriage alliance creates new groups of relatives and regulates recruitment in factions and as such affects the power structure (Mashreque; 1985).

#### 4.7 Changes in Social Organisation in the Village

According to key informants and informal talking with the respondents in the village it was found that changes were occurring in the social organizations, viz, family, gusti, and samaj. Regarding change in family, it was found that joint families are breaking down and transforming to extended family and nuclear family. The changes in gusti are visible in that the Gusti feeling is decreasing and Gusti title is not always used among the Gusti members. Moreover, the affinal relation among the Gusti members is decreasing.

Finally the change in structure and role of Samaj is very much visible in the village. Due to the increase of households and the process of settlement of households in different para of the village, the Samaj is becoming smaller than it was forty years ago. Because strong of the presence of Union Parishad, Upazila administration and court system, people do not not fully depend on Samaj for conflict resolution. For these reasons the role of Samaj leaders is decreasing. At present many young people in the village, especially the educated ones have connection with outside power yielder. So the young ones show less respect and obedience to the Samaj leaders. Another changing role of Samaj is in its social activities. In social and religious gathering such as wedding ceremony, rituals after death, Khatna programme of the members of Samaj, the leaders used to play a strong role. But it has become more flexible how. Distrust among the members within a Samaj is a major cause of this type of change.

## **5. Factionalism and Power Structure**

### **5.1 Factionalism: Context of Heshakhal**

Factionalism is the basic feature of social structure of peasant society. The term “factionalism” derived from the basic word “Faction” which means grouping. In the peasant society in Bangladesh, faction grouping can be seen. In the decade of 1470s. American Anthropologist P.J. Bertocci identified faction grouping as a non-corporate group in the villages of Comilla (P.J. Bertocci, 1970).

A major question arises how the faction groups are formed and how they work. The research team has identified various types and features of faction grouping in Heshakhal village, which are reported below.

### **5.2 Power Structure of the Village**

The word power is closely related with the word authority. The peasant society of Bangladesh formed a traditional type of power structure, which are: patron client relation; encapsulation and factionalism.

Patron-client relationship in peasant society is nothing but the substance of founded relationship. In peasant society a significant number of members are clients who are dependent on patrons in various socio-economic factors. Among the factors land is the most vital. Along with that decision making depends on patrons in social activities. Patron is a person of power status, authority and influence (Max Weber, 1962)

In peasant society the politics among the peasants is controlled in two centers, one is the village and another is the state. State indirectly play is role by imposing law

and control over land. In Bangladesh the role of state is played by the Upazila administration in the local level. Union Parisad also plays a vital role in peasant politics of Bangladesh. Along with that, in national politics the influence of localism is very much clear. The parliamentary form of govt. is such a type of system where localism is playing a vital role.

In determination of power in Heshakhal where three subgroups of Muslim communities are living, the political relation among the subgroups are shaped by informal political consideration. Education and linkage with formal institutions, specially linkage with national political party, play a dominant role in power practice of the village. In other part of Bangladesh it is seen that power is strictly related with quits structure. But in Heshakhal it was found that relation with formal govt. institution and political parties plays dominate role in power structure of the village.

### **5.3 Evolution of Power Structure in the Village**

Before 1947 the major power structure was based on the Hindu traditional power elite of the village. A major change occurred during the era of 1950-70. The migration of Hindu families to India was one of the major incidents of the village. Along with that political formation in state level influenced the traditional power structure of the village. In the decade of 1950s, the Muslim middle/rich farm families became power elite of the village. The Muslim community of the village was divided in to two major fragments. The Deshi population became the dominated group because the settlements of the Deshi community were scattered in the village. The *Swondupi* community, though Shall in number, tried to enter the vacuumed power structure of the village. They developed the *Swondupi* Samaj that was united both culturally and affinally. In this period of time few Rewaji Muslim families started living in the village.

After the election of 1954 Jukta front became the most influential party of East Pakistan instead of the Muslim league. Muslim league was supported by the rural urban rich class. In Jukta front the leadership was from the middle class Muslim. The rural peasants used to support the party. The era of Ayub khan changed a lot in the local and national level politics. General Ayub khan introduced a special type of democracy which was known as basic democracy. In this system of democracy people cannot vote directly to nominate their representative in the parliament or the presidency. Instead of that they voted to select the local representatives. These local representatives were known as basic democrats. The basic democrats would select the president. The system of basic democracies

consisted of four tiers. The first was the organization for villages. In rural areas, a number of villages grouped together to constitute a union. A union council was set up for it. The second tier is thana council. Third one is district council, fourth one is divisional council.

The basic democracy system for the first time directly involved the rural power class with the state level political process. Before 1950 the peasant farm families of East Bengal were indirect tenants of the Government. They were direct tenants of Zamindars of East Pakistan. The Land reform law in 1950 established the process of their becoming direct tenants of the Government. The basic democracy system influenced the power structure of Heshakhal village. Union Board was another important platform for exercising power in the village. The chairman was nominated by the people. Along with that, traditional Samaj structure was much strong to reform its activities.

#### **5.4 Historical Context of Factionalism in Heshakhal Village**

Before 1947 Heshakhal village was dominated by the Hindu population. The Hindu social leaders used to play dominant role in socio-cultural activities in the village. The Union Board of Nongalkot was dominated by Hindu leaders. No political party was active that at time. When any dispute arose within the village the Samaj leaders used to solve it. Before 1947 there was a distinct difference in two groups of Muslim population. The Deshi inhabitants were not socially or afinally related then with the Swandupi population. Economically the Swondupi people were less advanced than the deshi. Another factor was that their language and way of life was not adjustable with the deshi population. Very few Swondupi family could establish marital relation with the deshi inhabitants of Heshakhal village.

After the separation of Indian subcontinent a major change occurred in the village Heshakhal. Most of the rich and influential Hindu families migrated to India. Some families exchanged their assets with the Muslim families of Agartala that were willing to settle in Heshakhal village. These new Muslim families in the village are known as Rewaji family. In 1950 Govt. abolished the zemidari system. The tenants became direct tenant of government.

In earlier 1960s, the basic issue of factionalism in the village was ownership control over land. Like in other peasant society, land is the most important asset of farm families. In Heshakhal village the same scenario was seen. Along with that most of the landowner Hindu families migrated to India without settling their asset specially land. They left East Pakistan out of fear or security threat. Few families was able to sell their

land and did not provide full document/papers to its Muslim owner. A few Muslim families from Agartala also exchanged their property with a few Hindu families of Heskakhal. In late 1960s faction grouping arose on the basis of control over the land left by the Hindu families. The then Muslim community became segmented in to three subgroups, *deshi*, Swondupi and Rewaji.

The major issue of faction grouping among the segmented groups was also control over own group members, especially in the election process of local govt/UP election. A member in the UP can provide a group enough support solving conflict in local level. The members also work in Salish process in the village. They maintain good relation with the government officials. That's why each segmented subgroup tries to support their own member in voting. Even in M.P. election if a subgroup supports one candidate the other supports another.

In Salish system, the leaders of subgroups try to play their role. But if the conflict arises in the same Samaj, the elder member tries to solve it without the help of the elder members of other Samaj.

Faction grouping plays its role in various committee of formal institution within the village. It is deeply seen in the Bazar committee, school committee, and even in various social programmes.

### **5.5 Major Events in Political change and faction grouping in Heshakhal**

#### **1947-60**

Influential and landowner Hindu families migrated to India. The Rewaji families started settling in the Heshakhal village. Land reform act was passed and the inhabitants of the village became the direct tenant of government. Union board was transformed as Union council.

#### **1960-70**

Basic democracy was introduced in the state level, which influenced the power structure of the village. Ayub Khan brought a dimensional change among the Muslim faction group in Union council election and selection of basic democrats.

#### **1971-1975**

The war of independence influenced the inhabitants of the village. Some young members took part as freedom fighters. They were in support of Bangladesh. Some opportunist traditional leaders were in favors of Pakistan.

After independence of Bangladesh a new and young power group rose in the village. Part of these power elite were Swondupi community. But the *Deshi*

community leader took advantage as they had good relation with the local govt. In 1973 Union Parsad replaced union council.

### **1976-1990**

Many development initiatives were taken in this period. Communication facility developed. In political arena of the village, the Rewaji families started involving in with the *deshi* community. They became advanced in education sector and in out migration.

In 1978-80 President Ziar Rahman introduced Gram Sarkar system. The village power got their link with the state level political formation.

Four national level elections were held in this period of time. The most significant change was decentralization of local govt. Nangolkot became a separate *upazila* in 1984. Upazila election was held in 1985, which directly related the local power group with the upazila level. The power elite started to relate themselves with upazila administration, specially the court. According to the elder members in the village, the role of Samaj decreased due to the presence of upazila headquarter five kms close to the village. Inhabitants started to depend on court instead of the traditional *Salish* system.

The peasant community was dependent on BADC for seeds and other agricultural support. At the end of 1980s the dependency had transferred to nongovernmental sector specially to the dealers. In this period of time farmers started producing HYV crops specially HYV paddy.

### **1990- Present**

In state level a change occurred. Parliamentary form of government system was introduced. The system involved the traditional power structure with the national level political parties, because the members of parliament now became more influential than in any other time. Though their main role is to make laws in practice they became the centre of the power structure of their constituency. The local power yielder was becoming more close to the central political system. The same scenario was found in the studied village. A portion of power elite supported Awami League. Most of the supporters of Awami league were *Deshi* inhabitants of the village. On the contrary, the Swandupi inhabitants supported B.N.P. But not all were directly involved with politics. Most of the inhabitants supported one of the other party as they had to support someone in the M.P election. If one faction group supported one party, group supported the other. In 2002 the village along with some areas of Addra union became a new union, which was named as the Heshakhal Union. The Gram Sarkar system was reintroduced by the B.N.P govt.

After the election of 2001 the influence of local M.P became very much dominant even in the local faction grouping in the village. Young members in the village started became leaders of local student front. In this period of time Jamate Islami Bangladesh became one of the dominant parties in Nangolkot region.

For the vast majority of Bangladeshis, politics revolves around the institutions of the village or the union of neighboring villages. Traditionally, the main base for political influence in rural areas has been landownership. During the British colonial period, zamindars controlled huge estates as if they were their personal kingdoms. With the abolition of zamindar tenure in 1950, a new local elite of rich Muslim peasants developed. The members of the new elite owned far less land than the zamindars had once possessed, but they were able to feed their families well, sell surplus produce, send their children to school, and form new links with the bureaucracy of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh. Amid the large majority of poor and generally illiterate peasants, well-to-do farmers formed a new rural leadership that dominated local affairs.

Village society is often divided into a number of factions that follow the lines of kinship. At the center of each faction is a family that owns more land than most of the other villagers. In the colonial and Pakistani periods, local leaders were old men, but the trend since independence is for younger men to head factions. The heart of the local elder's authority is his control over land and the ability to provide land or employment to poorer villagers, who are often his kin. Land control may be an ancient prerogative, stretching back to the zamindars, or it may be the result of gradual purchases since independence. A village may have only one faction, but typically there will be several factions within the village, each competing for influence over villagers and struggling for resources from local administrative and development offices.

The leaders of local factions exercise their influence in village courts and as managers of village affairs with other administrative units. The traditional means for resolving local disputes is through the village court, which comprises leaders of village factions and other members of union councils. Throughout Bangladesh, village courts address the vast majority of disputes, but it is rare for the courts to decide in favor of a poor peasant over a rich peasant, or for the weaker faction over the stronger. The relative security of village leaders makes it possible for some of their children to attend secondary schools, or even colleges or universities; some factions also base much of their authority on their knowledge of sharia. Education is much esteemed in Bangladesh, and degrees are tickets to highly prized government positions or to urban jobs that give the involved families a cosmopolitan outlook. These contacts outside the village include



necessary links with bureaucratic institutions that ultimately bring economic aid and patronage jobs to the village. In these ways, the factional leadership of the village provides vital links to the development process, while retaining its traditional position at the top of village society.

Local leaders who control land, people, and education also tend to control the disbursement of rural credit and development funds through their positions in union and subdistrict government. Studies of the leadership of union council members have demonstrated this dominance of local elites over rural political and economic life.

## 6. Conclusion and Remarks

This study has sought to enquire into the nature of village social organization, faction grouping and power structure related to peasant way of life. The major focus of the study was to identify the changes occurring in the social organization of peasant way of life as well as the influence of modern formal institution over the traditional institution of the village. It was found in the study that due to influence of modernization, education, influence of modern technology, state policy as well as influence of external formal institution the peasant social structure is changing rapidly.

The social organizations remaining in the village are in transitional form. In traditional peasant society joint family was ideal for land operation and handling the natural resources. It was found in the village that the Joint families are transformed into extended family or into nuclear family. The families that own less land transform to the nuclear family system. Those families who own much land transform to extended family system. Non farm activities among the family members are increasing day by day.

There is a major change in the *Gusti* structure and in Samaj system. *Gusti* is still playing vital role in faction grouping but there are how enough families who do not depend on *Gusti* . Many families in the village do not use *Gusti* title. Their relation with their kin group is flexible. The role of Samaj has changed in the last 30 years. Before that the major role of Samaj was arranging *salish* and social activities. At present Samaj has broken to several *Samaj*. The relationship within the *Samaj* structure now is just like between patron and client. The role of union parisad members has been increasing. They are playing role in conflict management and in connection with government institutions.

The leaders of local factions exercise their influence in village courts as managers of village affairs with other administrative units. The traditional means for

resolving local disputes is through the village court, which comprises leaders of village factions and other members of union councils. Throughout Bangladesh, village courts address the vast majority of disputes, but it is rare for the courts to decide in favor of a poor peasant over a rich peasant, or for the weaker faction over the stronger. The relative security of village leaders makes it possible for some of their children to attend secondary schools, or even colleges or universities; some factions also base much of their authority on their knowledge of sharia. Education is much esteemed in Bangladesh, and degrees are tickets to highly prized government positions or to urban jobs that give the involved families a cosmopolitan outlook. These contacts outside the village include necessary links with bureaucratic institutions that ultimately bring economic aid and patronage jobs to the village. In these ways, the factional leadership of the village provides vital links to the development process, while retaining its traditional position at the top of village society.

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**Glossary****Appendix*****Local area measures***

Decimal	Area measure, 100 decimal =1 acre, 247 decimal= 1 kaeter
Gonda	Six decimals of land constitute a Gonda (0.06 acres)
Kani	Twenty Gonda constitute a Kani (1.2 acres)

***Bengali month***

Baishak	Mid April to mid May
Jaistha	Mid May to mid June
Ashar	Mid June to mid July
Sraban	Mid July to mid August
Vadra	Mid August to mid September
Aswin	Mid September to mid October
Katric	Mid October to mid November
Aghrahan	Mid November to mid December
Poush	Mid December to mid January
Magh	Mid January to mid February
Falgun	Mid February to mid March
Chatre	Mid March to mid April

***Other Local Term***

Aman Paddy	The seasonal rice crop grown in the late summer and fall.
Aus Paddy	The seasonal rice crop grown in the spring and early summer
Krishak	Peasant
Mohajan	Traditional money lender
Bebsha	Business
Bari	Lineage where descendants live together
Bhagha	Sharecropping
Chakri	Service
Chula	Cooking Hearth
Gusti	Lineage group
Masjid	Mosque