

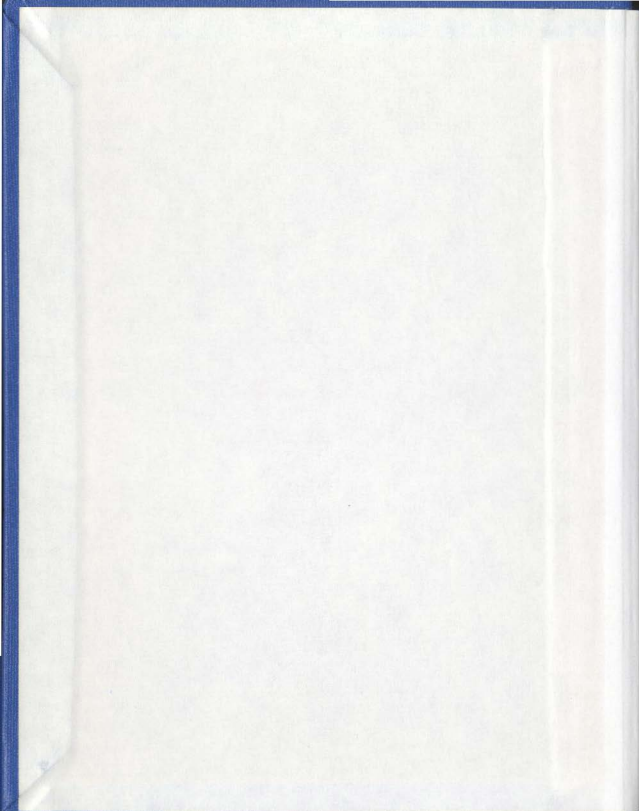
THE HINDU CASTE MODEL AND
THE MUSLIM SYSTEM OF
STRATIFICATION IN BANGLADESH

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THE HINDU CASTE MODEL
AND THE MUSLIM SYSTEM OF STRATIFICATION
IN BANGLADESH

by



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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology
Memorial University of Newfoundland
1975

St. John's

Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study social stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh. The thesis also aims at resolving the controversy over whether or not the Muslims of Bangladesh follow the Hindu caste system. In fact most of the authors who write on Muslim stratification hold that it is a form of Hindu caste. But my research indicates that the Muslims of Bangladesh do not follow the Hindu caste system; rather they follow closely the principles of stratification prevalent in early Islamic Arabia. For instance, it is found in the investigation that the fundamental basis of stratification in Bangladesh as well as in early Islamic Arabia is the reckoning of nobility of descent. Moreover, data on the Bangladesh Muslim society show some distinctive features which are different from the features found in Hindu caste. For example, unlike Hindu caste, Muslim stratification is flexible, wealth plays an important role in determining social status, and there is an absence of any purity-pollution distinctions. This thesis also includes twelve case studies from different authors. These cases are reflective of the basis, and the unique features of the stratification existent

among the Muslims of Bangladesh. The thesis has two basic conclusions: (1) the Muslims of Bangladesh do not follow Hindu caste model and (2) the application of the concept of caste in studying the Muslim society of Bangladesh is not suitable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis originated from a paper written on the Muslim "caste" in India for a course given by Professor Adrian Tanner during my study here. It was Professor Tanner who suggested that I write a thesis on the basis of that paper.

I would like to thank Professors George Park and Robert Barakat for their valuable comments and suggestions on my thesis. I would also like to thank Professor R. G. Stiles, my thesis supervisor, not only for his comments and suggestions but also for the mental strength which he provided me constantly during the painful process of writing.

The thesis is based on library research, and the bulk of the materials were supplied by the inter-library loan service of Memorial University of Newfoundland. I appreciated the help provided me by the people involved in that service. Thanks are also due to the Dean of Graduate Studies at Memorial, Dr. F. A. Aldrich, who financed my research work at the libraries of Harvard University.

Finally, I thank my friend, Miss Karen Szala, without whose suggestion and encouragement the present thesis would not have seen the light of day. I am also grateful to her because she took a lot of pain

in correcting my English.

H. K. E. Arefeen

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1. Bangladesh and West Bengal

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh. In this investigation an attempt will be made to resolve the controversy as to whether Muslim stratification patterns are based on the Hindu caste model or follow their own lines. It has been found that most authors who write on Muslim stratification on the Indian sub-continent (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) contend that it is a form of Hindu caste. For resolving this controversy we shall examine caste, its meaning and essential features. In the following section, I will review the ideas of some authorities on the system of caste in India.

Emile Senart, a Sanskritist, advanced what has been called the Indo-European "theory" of caste. He acknowledges caste's existence among the Indo-European races but he has made a distinction between Hindu caste and the caste found among the Indo-Europeans. Thus he states that "...the caste is clearly the fruit of the Hindu mind" (Senart, 1930: 219). Elsewhere, he shows the characteristics of this institution. He remarks that "The reason is that the organization of

the castes become the foundation of a veritable hierarchy; each one has its particular rank defined by tradition or public opinion, and each one maintains it at all costs or strives to advance itself. This is a trait which is entirely characteristic of the general nature of the institution" (Ibid 18). In his discussion, it is understood that caste emanates from Hindu religion. Moreover, no other caste is comparable to Hindu caste because of its uniqueness.

Cellstin Dougle also expresses an opinion similar to Senart. His conclusion regarding caste is that the features of caste may be found in other societies but they do not constitute caste in actuality. He also regards caste as a unique institution for India and Hinduism. In this context, he remarks, "At the very least it penetrates Hindu society to a level unknown elsewhere. It plays some part in other civilizations but in India has invaded the whole" (Dougle, 1971: 27). He shows that hereditary specialization, hierarchical organization and reciprocal repulsion in pure form can be found in India.

Hutton is another authority on caste who holds more or less the same opinion, that is, that caste in a pure sense can be found in India alone. But he still maintains that caste in other varieties exists

in other societies as well. When applying this term to societies outside of India, he says one must use it in a restricted sense. In Hutton's description, we can understand why he thinks that caste is the appropriate term in India only. He says that "... caste appears to be an institution of highly complex origin, an origin so complex indeed that in its very nature it must be limited to a single area; and that, no doubt, is why it is only found in India. For although social institutions that resemble caste in one respect or another are not difficult to find elsewhere... Yet caste in its fullest sense, caste that is, as we know it in India, is an exclusively Indian phenomenon" (Hutton, 1961: 47). He also points to its uniqueness, particularly that its structure is devised for the functioning of the Hindu caste system. In this connection, he says that "No comparable institution to be seen elsewhere has anything like complexity, elaboration and rigidity of caste in India" (Ibid, 46).

Max Weber also views caste as the "...fundamental institution of Hinduism" (Weber, 1960: 29). Edmund Leach affirms that caste has two meanings. He states that "In the writings of anthropologists and sociologists the word, "caste" is used in two different senses.

As an ethnographic category, it refers to a system of social organization peculiar to Hindu India; but as a sociological category it may denote any kind of class structure of exceptional rigidity" (Leach, 1960: 1).

Louis Dumont in Homo Hierarchicus (1972), reasserts the views of the above authors in stating that the basis of Indian society is hierarchy, i.e., caste. He has made a comparative study of Indian caste with western society, and for him the basis of western society is egalitarianism. Like the previous authors, he also understands "caste" to be essentially Hindu caste.

There is another group of authors who believe in the cross-cultural application of caste. Among these are Hocart (1950), Nadel (1954), Bailey (1959), Herreman (1960), Gould (1971), and Marriott and Inden (1974). I do not think an individual discussion of the ideas of the above authors is necessary, because a consensus can be found in their writings. They all hold that caste is applicable in cross-cultural situations, but at the same time they have recognized the uniqueness of Hindu caste. More explicitly, like most of the authors mentioned above, they recognize the two types of castes.

From the preceding discussion, we can see that several authors have taken into consideration the dual meaning of caste. According to them, caste in its pure sense can be found among the Hindus, and in the limited sense can be

found in other societies where exceptional rigidity is the basis of social order. However, in the writings of the above authors, a definite consensus as to the properties of pure caste can be found. In this thesis, the term "pure caste" will be understood to mean Hindu caste. The elements of pure caste are hierarchy, occupational ranking and the concept of purity-impurity. Actually, these features reflect the four-fold division of Hindu society, i.e., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. It is important to note that Hindu caste is unique because one cannot change his status during his life time. A Kshatriya cannot become a Brahmin, and vice versa. This is due to a belief in Karma (i.e., reincarnation), which stems from Hindu religion. In consideration of the above points, I draw the conclusion that caste is essentially a Hindu institution and is applicable to Hindu society only because no other form of caste has such unique and strong ties to a particular society.

My purpose here is not, however, to prolong a discussion of caste but rather to show the basis of Muslim stratification patterns. Most of the authors on Muslim stratification hold that the Muslims of India follow the Hindu caste model. I assume that they have arrived at such a conclusion by viewing only the similarities which Muslim stratification has with Hindu caste. This may be so because in fact, among the Muslims of India, hierarchy,

endogamy, occupational groupings, etc., can be found but only in a limited sense. If we want to take into account the views of the above-mentioned authorities on caste, we could have to conclude that Muslim stratification cannot be put on the same level as Hindu caste, but rather that such caste has a dual meaning; Muslim "caste" is certainly not to be confused with "pure caste".

Authors like Senart and Weber are also vague in discussing Muslim stratification. Without giving any convincing reason, they merely say that the Muslims of India imitate the Hindu caste system; nor do Dumont, Barth, and Leach substantiate in any satisfactory way their claims that Muslims of India practice caste. In this connection we shall examine a statement by Leach¹ which bears a seemingly inherent contradiction. For he states that:

In a formal sense, the 'caste' as it occurs in this volume should always be taken to have its ethnographic Hindu meaning. The arrangement in this book is that the first and the longest essay describes a typical example of caste organization in Southern India. The succeeding essays then describe variants of this pattern as they occur in Ceylon and Northwest Pakistan. These variants diverge further and further from the ideal type, though each of them has been derived historically from the Hindu model (Leach, 1960: 1).

If he considers caste in the ethnographic sense then how can he say that the Muslims of Northwest Pakistan practice caste, when he admits that caste in that area

differs from the ideal type? It seems that in accord with his previous statement, he could be seeing it more from the "sociological" point of view, i.e., as being a society of "exceptional rigidity" (op.cit., 1960: 1). Further, how can he generalize (I am concerned here specifically with the Swat-Pathan), that the Muslims of Northwest Pakistan derived caste historically from the Hindu model? for example, Leach never ventures to investigate whether or not the Muslims brought any type of stratification principles with them from the birth place of Islam. In the same vein, I view Barth as having inaccurately described stratification among the Swat-Pathan as caste. He states that his "concern is with social structure, not with ritual or religion...for his purpose(s) although the people of Swat, as Sunni Moslems, fall far outside the Hindu fold, their system of social stratification may meaningfully be compared to that of Hindu caste systems" (Barth, 1960: 113).

It is my opinion that the understanding of stratification patterns of Muslim society will not be furthered but rather confused by the application of Hindu caste in the sense in which it is used by some of the authors criticized above.

Relevant Literature

Compared to the bulk of literature that is found on Hindu caste, the literature on Muslim stratification in the Indian subcontinent is very meagre. But a recent trend among the social scientists is increasingly centered around the study of this social phenomenon in India. Authors who have studied this problem, however, do not vary in their theme to any great extent: a majority of them state that the stratification existent among the Muslims is caste. They are convinced that its essential features are borrowed from the Hindu caste system (Wise, 1896; Talke, 1914; Titus, 1930; Raghuraj Gupta, 1956; Mukherjee, 1957; Ansari, 1956, 60; Yaseen, 1960; Aggarwal, 1960; Leech, 1960; Barth, 1960; Eglar, 1960; Zarina Ahmad, 1962; Imtiaz Ahmad, 1965, 66 and 73; Guha, 1965; Beech et al 1965-66; Gardezi, 1966 and Bhattacharya, 1973). I do not deem it necessary to discuss the ideas borne by the above authors individually because a general consensus can be found in their ideas. It is interesting to note that they all hold that the Muslims of India follow caste, but at the same time they all admit that in certain respects they differ from the Hindu caste model. They

have agreed that (1) unlike Hindu caste, "Muslim caste" is flexible, (2) a mobility from one caste to another is found, and (3) the consideration of purity-impurity is not of great importance.

However, a small number of authors deviate from the above viewpoints. Blunt (1931), shows that one group of Muslims in India does not follow the Hindu caste model. They are the Ashraf Muslims who claim their descent from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia. He notes that this group practices the Islamic principles of egalitarianism. But in the case of converted Muslims, he supports the conventional notion that they practice the principles of Hindu caste. Although it can be said that he does not come up with anything striking, his idea carries nonetheless the indication that the Ashraf Muslims have different stratification principles, which are not caste at all.

We get another idea from Zillur Khan (1968), who has undertaken an empirical study specifically among the Muslim peasantries of India, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and Pakistan. Khan has gone a step further than Blunt; he subscribes to the conventional notion that the Muslims of India follow the principles of caste, but nevertheless he adds the important point that, although they follow caste structurally, they

are not totally unconnected with the stratification principles of the Muslims of other countries, particularly of the Arab Muslim nations. Mattison Mines (1972) in a recent article notes some basic contrasting features between Muslim stratification and Hindu caste which make them different structurally. For this reason, he feels that the term 'subdivision' should replace the term caste. However, Mines has raised some fundamental questions over the bases of the difference between Muslim stratification and the Hindu caste system. He also points out some inadequacies of the authors who studied Muslim stratification in India. In this connection, Mines states:

While these differences between Muslim and Hindu caste organization have been described several times, as yet no one has clearly shown basis of these distinctions. One can raise several questions, all frustratingly unanswered. What is meant when scholars describe Muslims as being organized into caste-like groups? What makes them caste-like and not simply castes? Further, what is meant when Muslim caste organization is described as looser and less rigid than the Hindu system? Finally, why is it that Muslim caste organization is looser and more flexible than Hindu caste organization? (Mines, 1972: 334).

In fact, Mines has raised some very thought-provoking questions and also tries to provide answers as

well. First, he recognizes that scholars who have termed Muslim stratification patterns as caste have simultaneously shown that caste among the Muslims tends to be a variant of the Hindu form (as I have pointed out at the beginning of this discussion). He then draws attention to the important point that none of the authors have in fact explained clearly why caste among the Muslims is different from that of the Hindus. Second, Mines asks why the above authors do not term it simply caste, rather than say it is "caste-like" (e.g., Ansari, "caste in modified form"; Imtiaz Ahmad, "caste analogous"; Zarina Ahmad, "caste-like"; and Beech, et al "caste-like groups", to name a few). Mines' third question is why the above authors recognize that Muslim caste is looser and more flexible than the Hindu caste, without giving any convincing explanations or empirical evidence.

In fact, I am in total agreement with Mines on these points. He not only asks some pertinent questions but also tries to explain the bases of these differences. He has made the unilateral explanation that Muslim stratification derives its basis from the Islamic principles of social order, i.e., equality. This has been corroborated by a tendency which has prevailed among the Muslims of India to increase their individual

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social status in the social hierarchy. This certainly can be seen from the operation of the egalitarian principles of Islam. Indeed, Mines has arrived at a valid explanation but he has missed one very important fact, that is, he fails to see that Muslim stratification in India has any connection at all with early Islamic stratification patterns.

In the present investigation, I will examine whether or not Muslim stratification in Bangladesh follows the stratification patterns of early Islamic Arabia. It appears from the literature on the Muslim stratification in India, that none of the authors have considered the fact that Muslim stratification might have some connection with early Islamic stratification patterns.

A few words should be said about the significance of the present thesis. With regard to overall research carried out on stratification systems in South Asia, Bangladesh is the least studied area. Apart from this, Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. In understanding the bases of social structure, it is very important to know the difference between the Muslim 'caste' and Hindu caste. This will further reduce the ambiguity of the commonly held notion that Muslim stratification in India is an extension of the

Hindu caste system or follows its unique patterns.

The present study will also be a contribution to the meagre literature available, not only on Muslim stratification in Bangladesh but also on the Muslim stratification system of the Indian subcontinent in general (India and Pakistan). In fact, the literature on Muslim stratification in the Indian subcontinent is very small as compared to the literature available on the Hindu caste. An Indologist has estimated recently that over five thousand studies have already been done on Hindu caste alone.

Finally, implications for this study will not be found in South Asia alone but will have relevance to our understanding of stratification patterns in Muslim society in general.

Regarding the organization of the thesis, it has been divided into five chapters. Chapter 1, is the introduction to the thesis. Chapter 2 deals with social stratification patterns in early Islamic Arabia. This chapter is included here to identify the basic features of stratification patterns prevalent in early Islamic Arabia to see whether or not the Muslims of Bangladesh follow these features of stratification. Chapter 3 deals with social stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh.

This chapter also includes a brief history of Bangladesh in order to introduce the reader to background information on the Muslims of Bangladesh. Chapter 4 includes some case studies from different empirical works done mainly on the Muslim stratification in Bangladesh which are reflective of the Muslim stratification patterns. Chapter 5 deals with the summary and the conclusion of the thesis.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Leach is here making introductory comments to a collection of essays written by several different authors on caste.

CHAPTER 2

Social Stratification Patterns in
Early Islamic Arabia

Islam is based on the principle of egalitarianism.

There is ample evidence to show the importance of equality between man and man in Islam. The Koran says, "Men, We have created you from a male and a female and divided you into nations and tribes that you might get to know one another. The noblest of you in Allah's sight is he who fears him most" (Koran, 1966: 259). The Hadith¹ also abhor inequality between man and man. Goldziher remarks on this issue "...Islam was called upon to make effective the equality and fraternity of all men united in Islam. Islam was designed to level all social and genealogical differences...and there was to be no distinction of rank in Islam; between Arabs and Barbarians, freemen and freedmen...were to be only brothers in the community² (Ummat) of Muhammad, the distinction between Bakr and Taghlib (Arab tribes) Arab and Persians, were to cease and to be brand as specifically Jāhili"³ (Goldziher, 1967: 54).

Von Gruebaum, an authority on Islam, shows the stark difference between the theory and what was

practiced in early Islamic Arabia. He observed in this connection that, "the Muslim's personal equality with his fellows in the faith which is guaranteed, so to speak, by his right to direct relationships with his Lord, does in no way preclude elaborate social stratification systems within the community of Islam". He continues, "The Muslims share to a very high degree in the sensitivity about rank... Not only is he rank conscious but he is keenly concerned with expressing social distinction through a delicate system of etiquette" (Von Grunbaum, 1969: 170). The above remark leads us to assume that Muslim society is divided into different social groups. In the following section, an examination will be made of how stratification in Islam is evolved, and how these principals of stratification operate.


The discussion of stratification patterns in early Islamic Arabia warrants reference to pre-Islamic Arabian social structure, and the social conditions prevailing before the coming of Islam. The consensus among students of both pre- and post-Islamic Arab societies is that the social structure of these periods was based on tribalism, and that same tradition was carried over to early Islamic society in a modified form. Von Grunbaum clarifies the above matter. He

expresses the notion that Islam did not bring any revolutionary change to the existing social patterns despite its commitment to equality between man and man. But political considerations did not permit Muhammad to be firm to his principles... "while on the one hand, Islam promoted egalitarianism, on the other hand it strengthened the traditional aristocratic proclivities" (Von Grunbaum, 1969: 199). Elsewhere, he points out that "...Islam itself has given rise to a new set of criteria to grade and stratify society" (Ibid, 1970).

Arab society before the emergence of Islam consisted of several tribes, with each tribe maintaining a loose connection with its kindred either through a common leader or the recognition of common ancestor (Levy, 1957: 53). The reckoning of genealogies or descent was considered to be very important in determining the social position of a tribe, family or an individual (Baksh, 1948; Goldziher, 1966; Izutsu, 1966; Levy, 1957; Siddiqi, 1958; Smith, 1903; Von Grunbaum, 1959; Watt, 1961 and Wolf, 1951). Goldziher relates the significance of reckoning kinship specifically to the proof of gentile descent or genealogical ties in Arab society. He says that "The actual or fictitious descent from a common an-

cestor was the symbol of social morals, the measure by which people were valued. Men who could not boast of ancestors worth mentioning were despised, even if they lived in Arab territory and spoke the Arabic language..." (Goldziher: 45). He also mentions that most Arab tribes claimed their ultimate ancestors from two stocks. Dunlop quoted from Ahn Qutayba says that according to Arab tradition, the prophet Muhammed who died in A.D. 632 was twenty-one or twenty-two generations removed from Adnan, the ancestor of North Arabians, and Adnan himself was nine generations removed from Ishmael and ten from Abraham. On the other hand, South Arabian descent reckons thirty-two generations from Cahtan to Noah⁴ (Dunlop, 1971: 3).

Besides the importance of nisha or gentile name in genealogies (Smith, 1903: 5), priority is given to hasab or esteem of ancestors (Goldziher, 1966: 46), and muruwwa (good deeds of ancestors) (Ibid) in determining social status. It should be borne in mind that not all tribes could claim a gentile descent. Only inherited fame and inherited merit bestow the proper confirmation of lineages. For this reason, a man who cannot boast of ancestors tries to connect his lineage to nisha or gentile name (Goldziher: 47). Robertson Smith mentions that this



fictive kinship with noble descent is achieved through the insertion of "dummy" ancestors (Smith: 10).

Arab tribalism is also centered around tribal allegiance and the institution of patron-client relationships. Tribal allegiance is by far most important. To be tribeless is to be an outlaw. An individual can not survive without being affiliated to a tribe, it is the duty of that tribe to protect the individual from outside attack. The numerical strength of the tribe and strategic position occupied by it determines its power and prestige. To augment their numbers, Arabian tribes take strangers as clients (mawla pl. mawali), who may either be a freeman or slave (Siddiqi: 10). A client stands in relationships of dependency, called jiwat, to the patron or protector. The patron-client relationships involve a tie of ritual kinship (Wolf: 335), and is initiated through an oath (Ibid). Though theoretically, a client should be placed in an equal position with a full member according to tradition, in actuality, he never attains that position. Watt mentions that in a tribe there are various dependents who are considered to be inferiors (Watt: 150). Wolf, quoting a pre-Islamic poet, terms the distinction between dependents and full members as cousins of the same stock :

of birth, and a cousin knit by an oath (Wolf: 335). He again points out that "...clients, called cousins by oath, are contrasted with cousins by birth"

(Ibid). He further mentions that some patron-client relationships were transformed into exploitive relationships, particularly in the hands of Meccan Quraysh aristocrats. He argues that (the strong point behind) prophet Muhammad's deprecation of inequality in Islam is due to extreme social distance between the Quraysh patron and their client (Ibid). It should be mentioned here that patron-client relationships did not reach such extremity among the tribes scattered in the Arab desert (Ibid, for detail see Wolf). This patron-client relationship had taken a different form soon after the emergence of Islam, as such Arab and mawali relationships were the modified version of patron-client relationships of pre-Islamic Arabia. We shall discuss this point later.

Although Islam aimed at doing away with all the pre-Islamic practices, it could not succeed in weeding them out. Pre-Islamic practices of nisba, hasab and murawwa re-emerged in Islamic Arabia for determining social position of an individual family or a tribe. As for instance, the prophet Muhammed besides his Quraysh nisba and hasab has added more attraction to

his lineage through his personal muruwwa. Levy appropriately says that "Far from destroying the regard paid to hereditary greatness, the effect of the prophet's own success was to create a new object of veneration amongst a people in whom the instinct to pay homage to birth was strong. Henceforward, kinship with him was regarded as the touchstone of true nobility and even the slight degree of relationship to him which was implied in fellow membership of his tribe--that of Quraysh--was regarded as a patent of high distinction... it came to be said that no women of the prophet's tribe could be slave; certainly, no male Quarashite could be a bondman (Levy: 56). In the same vein, Von Grunebaum points out that Islam brings with it new principles of social stratification in its wake. He also shows how these principles are in operation in Arab society. He remarks, "Thus, there was added to the pagan nobility of descent of Ashraf, nobles, or the prophet's line⁶ of his clan, of his tribe, the offspring of the Meccan companions of migration, Muhallirum, and his Medinese helpers, Ansars. Throughout the Abbasid empire the Hashimids, the members of the prophet's family, enjoyed financial privileges (Von Grunebaum: 199). Smith mentions by quoting Sprenger that Caliph Omar I revitalized the practice

of genealogical importance in respect of pay distribution and pension. This gave impetus to the importance of connecting kinship with the prophet either real or imaginary. He maintains that "The backbone of the system was the pedigree of the prophet...every connection, real or imaginary...into prophet's stemma..." (Smith: 10). In this way, Karim observes, "Islam introduced a new type of social stratification, in which the highest were those who were closest to the prophet of Islam through blood, faith and geography. During the time of Caliph Omar I, the above principles were followed, i.e., the proclivities towards inequality in respect of the distribution of state money. As such he (the Caliph Omar I) placed Aysha (the wife of the prophet) at the head of the list and assigned her an annuity of 12,000 dirham...and anyone else who had enjoyed the special favour of the prophet, received an exceptionally high annuity..." (Karim, 1961: 127).

Although Caliph Omar I stressed equality, he was not ready to accept in matters of religious faith that all were on equal footing. For example, he said, "I will not make him who fought against the prophet the equal of him that fought with him" (Levy: 57). Despite the teachings of Islam, which preach against genealogical pride, the Meccan Quraysh

aristocracy took the leadership of the new Islamic community. Such a notion of aristocracy prevails in the Muslim world even today. The noblest of birth, therefore, is a person who can claim a real or fictitious line of descent from the prophet; next are those who can claim descent from his clan, i.e., Quraysh and so on (Karim: 125). These principles not only remain in vogue in Arabia but also spread to other Muslim countries. Goldziher cites further examples regarding this matter. The Negro Muslims of Africa make an effort to connect themselves genealogically with the Arab people. The traditions of the Bornu represent their pre-Islamic rulers as being descended from South Arabian heroes. "Popular legend and etymology show real orgies of invention in giving effect to this aspiration which is so widespread among the lowest nations of Islam", observes Goldziher (Goldziher: 135). In a similar way, principles of Muslim stratification are at work among the Muslims of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in determining social status. As we will see, claimants of descent from the prophet Muhammad and Arab are considered to be noble-born.

Soon after the emergence of Islam, the established patron-client relationships continued but in a different

form. Relationships between Arab and non-Arab Muslims had taken the form of previously practiced patron-client relationships of pre-Islamic Arabia. Levy remarks in this vein "Once Islam was adopted by peoples beyond, the confines of Arabia, the ordinary full-blooded free Bedouin tribesmen, the salah, inevitably regarded himself as superior of new foreign converts...so the inhabitants of Arabia as a whole refused to consider foreigners as being their peers in spite of their demand of their common faith that social and genealogical inequalities were to be wiped out... (Levy: 57). Goldziher shows that the distinction between Arab and non-Arab appeared because extensive Muslim conquests among alien non-Arab races resulted in a large scale conversion to Islam and these people were eventually incorporated into a purely Arab family or tribe by affiliation. For this, the word mawali was used, which was transformed to mean the opposite of "Arab by descent". Distinction was maintained between a true Arab and neo-Muslim or mawali, although the latter was assimilated into an Arab tribe. Mawali were looked upon as inferior by the Arabs, and even less respectful modes of address were used in reference to them (for details, see Goldziher, Levy, and Von Grunbaum). Goldziher describes not

only the aristocratic prejudice of the Arabs towards mawali but also the envy and jealousy of the Arabs against the intellectual and the material achievement of the mawali (Gildziher).

Because of the social distinction, mawali resorted to the practice of concealing their own identity in order to improve their lot. Levy cites how the Persian neo-Muslims changed their names to Arabic ones, even claiming fictitious Arab genealogies for themselves (Levy: 60). This practice was not only confined to mawali or Persians but also spread throughout the Muslim world. Levy remarks "It may be added that even comparatively late in history of Islam, entire people sought to enhance their status in the eyes of the Muslim world by claiming kinship with the Arabs of Arabia, and providing themselves with Arab ancestry" (Levy: 60). This practice is also found among the Muslims of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In this connection, Levy states:

Amongst the huge Muslim population of Pakistan and India...who are by tradition the upholders of the hereditary principles of Islam, the class of Saiyids is an important one. As elsewhere they trace descent from the prophet's grandson Husayn and form a distinct group...Rather lower in the scale of honour is the class of "Shaykhs"... (who) claim descent from the

first two caliphs or from Abbas the prophet's uncle. Other honoured classes are also the Afghans and Mughals (Moguls), persons of foreign descent whose privileged position is due to their being by origin natives of and nearer than India to the source of Islam (Ibid 72).

In the following chapter, we will discuss in detail the social stratification patterns existent among the Muslims of Bangladesh.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2:

1. A revelation from God in the language of prophet Muhammad.
2. Several religious traditions have succeeded in creating in their followers a strong sense of fellow feeling. For example, Ummatu 'Isa, the people of Jesus, Ummatu Ibrahim, the people of Abraham, and Ummatu Muhammad, the people of Muhammad. But in Islam, a strong sense of belongingness to Umma is marked. Arabic word Umma, is often treated today as synonymous with nation but the Islamic Umma is considered more than a nation, in either the Roman or modern sense. What is the most significant about the Umma of Muslims is that it transcended national and tribal loyalties rooted in the accident of birth, and is a community of believers, bound together in a brotherhood more vital than that of blood.
3. From the Arabic work jahal which means ignorance. Pre-Islamic Arabia was called Jahiliya by the theologians for its ignorance of religious truths.
4. Bujra shows in his monograph on stratification patterns of South Arabian town an interesting fact regarding the reckoning of descent from Adnan and Cahtan by the two dominant groups of Huraidah. For details see Bujra (The Politics of Stratification, A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town. Oxford: At Clarendon Press, 1971).
5. From the Arabic word nasab which means family, race, and lineage. The term, in its legal sense, is generally restricted to the descent of a child from his father, but it is sometimes applied to descent from the mother, and is generally employed in a larger sense to embrace other relationships (Hughes, T. P., Dictionary of Islam, New Jersey: Reference Book Publishers, 1965, pp. 430-431).
6. Bujra confirms this fact in his recent stratification study of a Southern Arabian town. In that

study, he shows that the descendants of the prophet Muhammad are given the highest position in the society. The lowest position is enjoyed by the local people who can neither claim descent from the prophet nor from a gentile one. For details, see Bujra, 1971.

7. The following emic model of the Muslims of Bangladesh has a similarity with the above statement. This example comes from my own experience. When I was a student of sociology at Dacca University in my very first class there the professor asked all the students individually about their descent. Among the students, a few said that their forefathers were the descendants of Muhammad and were directly from Mecca, another student claimed himself to be a descendant of Muhammad and with his ancestors coming directly from Baghdad. The rest claimed descent from outside India. It is interesting to note that I too claimed descent from Northern India!

CHAPTER 3

Social Stratification Patterns among
The Muslims of BangladeshA Brief History of Bangladesh:

Bangladesh was born as an independent nation on December 16, 1971, after a bloody nine months' civil war with the then Pakistan's military rulers. The area which constitutes Bangladesh now, during the British Raj was known as Eastern Bengal, and after the partition of the subcontinent into Pakistan and Indian Union in 1947, became the Eastern part of Pakistan. The country has an area of 5526 sq. miles, with about 75 million people. It is one of the most densely populated countries of the world.

Bangladesh shares her border with the Union of Burma on the southeast; Bay of Bengal to the south; and on the other side faces Indian territory. Bangladesh is a riverine country. The major rivers being the Ganges and the Brahmaputra which flow from the north and merge, then fan out across the flat, alluvial countryside to form a delta with a complex network of branches emptying into the Bay of Bengal (Islam, 1974: 16).

The country consists of three administrative

divisions--Dacca, Chittagong, and Rajshahi. And, again these divisions are divided into 19 districts. Districts are also further divided into subdivisions. However, Bangladesh is more precisely a country of villages: there are about 62,000 villages, and more than 80% of the population lives in the village areas depending on agriculture. Moreover, more than 80% of the population are Muslims which makes Bangladesh the second largest Muslim country in the world.

The name Bengal or Bangala is derived from the ancient deltaic kingdom of Vanga or Banga. However, the early history of Bengal remains obscure until the 3rd century B.C. when it formed part of the extensive Maurya empire inherited by Asoka. We get a hint in the Mahabharata that this land was relatively free from the social and religious orthodoxy (Kabir, 1958: 2-3). But the country plunged into anarchy soon after the decline of Maurya power. In the 4th century A.D., it became a part of the Gupta empire of Samudra Gupta, to whom tribute was paid by the frontier kingdoms of Samatata (the delta of the Brahmaputra). It seems also that Harsha's empire (A.D. 606-647) included Bengal as well as the deltaic regions of Samatata. But very little is known after the death of Harsha and the rise of Pala power in the

second half of the 8th century. It is said that in that period, anarchical situations prevailed all over Bengal. The Pala dynasty ruled over Bengal from the second half of the 8th century to the 12th century. During that time, the Palas were confronted with many foreign invasions such as the powerful Gurjara-Pratiharas or Kanauj and the Rashtrakutas of the Deccan. The Pala Kings were Buddhists and so were the majority of the population of Bengal. This fact is also testified by the Chinese pilgrims, Fa-Haien in the 5th century and Hsuan Tsang in the 7th century. They found the Buddhist religion prevailing in Bengal, but it was already engaged in a fierce struggle with Hinduism. In the 12th century, the Palas were overthrown by the Senas who were the champions of Hinduism. Particularly of Vaishnavism (Ency. Brit.: 72: 474).

The Senas were Hindus, and during their rule Buddhism was actively discouraged. The best remembered king of this dynasty is Ballal Sen, who reorganized the caste system and introduced kulinism¹ among the Brahmins, Baidyas, and Kayasthas. However, the Sena dynasty came to an end with the Muslim conquest of Bengal. It is said that Muhammad Bakhtyar Khilji, an able general of Muhammad Ghori drove out Lakshman

Sena the last king of the Sena dynasty with his 17 followers between 1199 and 1202 (B(D).

Bakhtyar Khilji's invasion marked the introduction of Muslim rule in Bengal. The Muslim invasion met resistance in Bihar, but not in Bengal. Gaur of Laknauti, was made the capital of the newly conquered territory. From the beginning of the 13th century to the British conquest of the province in 1757, Bengal remained under Muslim rule, at times under the governors acknowledging the suzerainty of the Delhi Sultans, but most of the time remaining independent. Bengal was part of the Tughluq empire, but the decline of the Tughluq dynasty enabled its rulers to proclaim their independence. They continued to assert their independence until 1540, at which time the province was conquered by the Mugul emperor, Akbar, in 1576. However, Mugul administration continued until the arrival of the British in Bengal (Ibid).

✓ Muslim rule in Bengal brought a mass conversion to Islam. Mukherjee remarks, "...in the wake of Muslim conquest the zeal of conversion to Islam was felt in Bengal society, the people of East Bengal were converted in great majority" (Mukherjee, 1972: 266). Gaip accounts for some of the causes of this conversion. He states:

In spite, however, of the fact that cases of forcible conversion were by no means rare it seems probable that very many of the ancestors of the Bengal Muhammadans voluntarily gave in their adhesion to Islam. The advantages which that religion offered to persons held in less esteem by the Hindus have already been pointed out, and under Muslim rule there was no lack of pious pir and Fakirs (holymen and religious mendicants) who devoted their lives to gaining converts to the faith. There were special reasons which during the early years of the Muhammadan supremacy, made conversion comparatively easy. Although the days when Buddhism was a glowing faith had, long since passed, the people of Bengal were still to a great extent Buddhistic, and when Bakhtiyar Khilji conquered Bihar and massacred the Buddhist monks assembled at Odantapuri, the common people, who were already lukewarm, deprived of their priests and teachers, were easily attracted from their old form of belief, some to Hinduism and others to the creed of Muhammad. The higher castes probably found their way back to Hinduism, while the non-Aryan tribes, who had, in all probability, never been Hindus, preferred the greater attractions of Islam (Gait, 1902: 171)

Muslim rule also saw various religious movements like the neo-Vaishnava movement which laid great emphasis upon the Bhakti (devotion) cult and the Vaishnava Sahajiyā with its strong Yogic-Tantric bias.

With the decline of Mogul power during the first half of the 18th century, the provincial governors started to assume an independent attitude. In 1751,

Murshid Kuli Khan, the viceroy of the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, was overthrown by Ali Vardi Khan, a subordinate in charge of the administration of Bihar. However, Bengal lost its independence and transferred to British hands when Ali Vardi Khan's grandson Nawab Sirajud-daula lost the battle of Plassey in 1757 with the British General Clive.

In this way, British rule was introduced into Bengal and later it spread all over India. British rule continued until 1947.

During the British regime, the Bengali Muslims were alienated from the Bengali Hindus. The reason for this is that the Muslims were deliberately discriminated against in the field of administration and civic organization as well as in the economic activities pertaining to the interest of the East India Company and its officials. Moreover, the British looked upon Muslims with suspicion as direct representatives of the previous rulers, and on the other hand the Muslim aristocracy pursued a policy of aloofness from the company's activities. Consequently, they retreated to obscure stations or dispersed in the countryside, losing their position of leadership in society which previously they had held along with their Hindu counterparts (Mallick, 1961: 27-65).

Qureshi, 1962: 209-236).

The Hindus on the other hand, were favoured by the British who helped them to attain superior socio-economic positions in the society. They also appropriated almost all the facilities available for education and from which even the wealthy Muslims kept themselves away on various grounds (Mahmud, 1895: 53-54, 75, 147-148). These factors caused the Muslims to identify themselves as a separate community. The feeling of being a separate entity by the Muslims is significant because it laid the foundation for the creation of Pakistan, the separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.

The British patronage helped to create a strong middle class among the Hindus. On the other hand, we do not find the development of a middle class among the Muslims until the beginning of the 20th century. The development of the Muslim middle class is largely due to the major shift in the British policy towards the Muslims of Bengal. The British changed their pro-Hindu policy because of the anti-British policies held by the Hindus in the Sepoy Rebellion, and the active participation of the Hindus in the national movements from the 1890's. However, the Muslims of Bengal took advantage of the British

pro-Muslim policy to recover their status and position in the society. The leaders of the Muslim community persuaded the government to offer special facilities for education and jobs for the Muslims. A Muslim middle class thus began to grow in Bengal, especially from the beginning of the present century (Karim, 1961: 147-150).

Meanwhile, the rising Muslim middle class felt insecure in competing with the already established Hindu middle class. Mukherjee remarks, "The urban population, the educated community, landed interest, and the bureaucracy of Bengal, were still predominantly Hindu". He continues, "In the circumstances, the Bengali Muslim middle class envisaged a quicker and easier way for furthering its interest, by responding to the call of the All-India Muslim League which was steadily gaining strength with its demands for a Muslim homeland" (Mukherjee, 1972: 269).

However, the Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah was instrumental in the creation of Pakistan. In 1947, Pakistan was born with the Muslim populous areas of the Indian subcontinent. Bengal became two provinces of two states: West Bengal to the Indian Union and East Bengal to Pakistan (Mukherjee, 270).

Soon after the creation of Pakistan, the Bengali Muslims began to move away from rather than towards the west Pakistani Muslims, because they found that West Pakistanis began to exploit them in the same manner the British and the Hindus did in the past (Lambert, 1969). In fact, the breakaway of Pakistan is largely due to the political, economic and cultural dominance by the West Pakistanis upon the East Pakistanis. Politically, East Pakistan never got a chance to rule Pakistan inspite of the fact that the East Pakistanis formed the majority; economically, East Pakistan earned the maximum amount of foreign exchange and the major portion of that money was spent in West Pakistan; culturally, West Pakistanis continually tried to dominate, the best example of such an attempt was the plan to make Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan by supressing Bengali language which was spoken by 56% of the population. But the attempt to make Urdu as the only state language met with violent protest, and blood was shed on the 21st of February, 1952. The above factors with the language movement gave birth to Bengali nationalism in the rudimentary form, which after two decades culminated into the independent Bangladesh Movement.

Sources

Written materials on the Muslim society of Bangladesh are very limited. Social scientists, particularly social historians, anthropologists and sociologists face great difficulty in pursuing research in this area. The author here attempts to look at social stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh from an anthropological point of view.

Most of the data available were collected long before the birth of Bangladesh. Therefore, in most cases, data will cover the whole of Bengal. It is important to mention here that the province of Bengal underwent a rapid change in political boundary for the last century.² However, we will try to keep our range of study within the geographical boundary of then East Bengal which is now known as Bangladesh.

The present study aims at synchronic study of stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh. It is very difficult to approach such study from a historical point of view because there is little or no historical material available in that area. In our investigation, we will use two kinds of materials. Firstly, the reports and accounts of the British administrators which mainly dealt with administrative

and revenue problems, but which also tell something about the Muslim society of Bengal. In addition, the censuses of India are a rich source of study in which a deliberate attempt was made to register the existing 'caste' and 'class' divisions prevalent among the Muslims and Hindus of India. These reports contain valuable ethnographic materials. The second type of information is based on pure ethnography. These ethnographical data are the results of the few anthropological and sociological studies done on village life of Bangladesh.

The works of British administrators, although sketchy, nevertheless provide us with some information on the contemporary society. These include such authors as Martin (1838), Fisher (1840), Hunter (1875), Grant (1889), Hamilton (1833), O'Malley (1916), Playne (1917), Vas (1911), and Barton (1874). Among the authors mentioned above, Hunter's Statistical Account of Bengal and O'Malley's District Gazetteers are detailed but descriptive. In addition, Jack's Economic Life of a Bengal District and Wise's Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal are informative. Jack's effort was to write a social history of the district of Faridpur. His study is the first of its kind which studied the class composition of the district

from an economic point of view. On the other hand, Wise endeavours to study the existing races, castes and trades of Eastern Bengal. His work is also descriptive in nature, but nevertheless gives a good idea about the 'caste' composition existent both among the Muslims and Hindus of Eastern Bengal.

No sources are more relevant than the Census Reports of India for studying stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh. In those reports, particular attention was given to record the data on 'caste' prevalent among the Hindus and Muslims of India. Very little information on Muslim stratification is available in the census reports of 1872, and 1891. But in census of 1901 an exhaustive treatment of Muslim 'caste' was made. The Census of India continued its efforts to record data on 'caste' till the Census of 1931.

We have mentioned the availability of a handful of pure ethnographies on the Muslim society of Bangladesh. In this regard, the works of Karim (1961), Mukherjee (1946), F. R. Khan (1962), Zillur Khan (1968), Bertocci (1969, 70, 72), and Islam (1974) are important.

Limitations of Data

The British administrators' investigations were of general type. They wrote about both the Hindus and Muslims. It is interesting to note that most of their discussion on the society covering the Muslims and Hindus originated from their investigation of revenue and administrative problems. They did not make an intensive study of the society since they were not so oriented. Such writers include Hamilton (1833), Fisher (1840), Burton (1874), Hunter (1875), and others. No doubt the above authors provide little information on either the Muslims or Hindus. Particularly, description regarding the Muslim society is very brief and vague compared to the description of the Hindu society of Bengal. A few authors were contented to write no more than a few sentences on the Muslims. On the contrary, it is marked that the authors devoted a considerable space describing the caste composition existent among the Hindus. Such an imbalance in the availability of data is found in most sources. As an example, we shall mention here the two works which can be qualified as good ethnographies on Bengal society. Jack's Economic Life of a Bengal District (1916) and Hunter's Annals of Rural

Bengal, two early attempts to write the social history of rural Bengal. In these writings, also data on the Muslim 'caste' are sadly lacking. On the other hand, the authors of those works treated the Hindu society particularly the caste system in detail.

Before we close our discussion on this issue, I want to add a critique regarding the general observation of the British administrators on the Muslim society of Bengal. It will be seen that the British administrators' idea of Muslim society is not clear. It will be observed that some authors have identified Muslim stratification as a form of Hindu caste. And again, some authors have hesitated to consider Muslim 'caste' as a form of Hindu caste. This kind of controversy over terming the Muslim stratification patterns as caste or not is entirely due to the authors' misconception of the mechanism of Muslim society in Bengal.

Pure ethnographical material on the Bengali Muslim society is very little as we have seen in the preceding discussion. Proper justice can not be done in building a model of Muslim stratification patterns in Bangladesh on the basis of this handful of materials.

General Characteristics of the Bengali Muslim Population

In the previous discussion, we have tried to talk about the sources and their limitation for pursuing research on the Muslim society of Bangladesh. In the following discussion, we will see some of the characteristics of the Muslims of Bengal in general.

The Census of 1872 revealed that the Muslim population was the greatest in number in Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh), particularly in the regions of lower Bengal. James Wise by quoting the 1872 Census regarding the rapid increase of Muslim population offers some valuable statistics on the Muslim population of the greater Bengal (comprising both East Bengal and West Bengal). Wise remarks, "In Dacca for instance, the Muhammadans were very slightly in excess of the Hindus; in Maldah (India), they formed 46 percent of the population; in Murshidabad (India), 45 percent; in Patna (India), 12 percent. On the other hand, in the swampy tract of Bagirganj, Tipperah (now the district of Comilla), and Mymansingh, they comprised nearly 54 percent of the people (these districts are now belonged to Bangladesh) (Wise, 1883: 28). The Census of 1881, and 1891 not only recorded greater number of Muslim population

but also the rapid increase of Muslim population in East Bengal. At the same time, those censuses also showed a considerable fall in the Hindu population. The authors of those censuses (Beverly, Bourdillion, O'Donnell et al), supply statistics of the increase of the Muslim population and decrease in the Hindu population. During the period of 10 years that is from 1881-1891, out of 10,000 persons, 57 ceased to be Hindus; whilst 49 of them have been replaced by Mussalmans.³ The percentage of advance of whole population during the same period (1872-1881) was 10.89. The increase in Mussalman population is 10.98 percent (O'Donnell, 1893: 144).

The Census of 1891 comments over the great growth of Muslim population. O'Donnell remarks, "It thus appears that throughout all three great divisions of Bengal proper and in nearly every district Hinduism has largely declined and Muhammadanism advanced during the past twenty years" (Ibid 46). The same report supplied some data on the population increase during twenty years (1872-91). The author of the same census says, "The great progress of Islam in Bengal proper is most marked in the Mainmangsingh district, and hardly less so in Dacca and Tippera, the transfer of people from Hinduism to Muhammadanism

exceeding 400 in every 10,000 persons in past twenty years (Ibid).

The authors (Karim, 1959; Wise, 1894; Mukherjee, 1973; Gait, 1901; O'Donnell et al) consider the following causes to be the significant ones for increasing Muslim population in Bengal: (1) immigration of foreign Muslims from upper India, Central Asia and some other places in those regions in the capacity of government officials of the Delhi administration, missionary and businessmen. Also many uprooted families of Central Asia like craftsmen, architects, poets and painters, who fled and settled down in the plains of Bengal to escape from the wrath of the rulers of that area. But the number of above kinds of immigrants in Bengal is very meagre; (2) mass conversion of local population to Islam particularly from the lower strata soon after the Khilji conquest in Bengal. There is a general agreement among the authors regarding the voluntary conversion of the local populace of Bengal into Islam (Karim, 1959; Wise, 1894; Gait, 1910, O'Donnell, 1891; and Mukherjee, 1973). We have already seen in the Census reports that there is a phenomenal increase of Muslim population throughout the Eastern Bengal. The authors of the Censuses of 1891 and 1901 show

some specific causes of this increase.. They reason that it was due mainly to mass conversion from Hindu and aboriginal religious groups. O'Donnell remarks by quoting Mr. Bourdillion that "Hinduism has proved itself incapable of proselytism..." (O'Donnell: 146). O'Donnell puts more reasons on the greater attraction to Islam than any other religions in Bengal. He says:

To the Mussalman Hinduism presents no attraction. There is no absolutely room for him in the Hindu system, even the scavenger caste would not accept him...the Muhammadan faith...opens its arms, to every comer and receives him on terms of the broadest equality if the profession he actually pursues is not an essentially degrading one. All the agricultural castes - Chandal, Kaibartta or Chase - on joining Mussalmanism develops into shaikh, and depends only on his worldly wealth to what rank he may aspire in seeking a bride for himself or a husband for his daughter. It is a matter of history that the republican character of the domestic constitution of Mussalman society won innumerable converts in Eastern Bengal when the Mughal supremacy was first established in that region a few centuries ago (IBID 147).

Apart from the above factors, the authors of the censuses of 1891 after a careful examination (O'Donnell and Gait), advanced the theory that physical factors are also responsible for such growth in the Muslim population. They found in their

investigation greater fecundity among the adherents of the Muslim faith. "In the first place, we find among Muslims a much larger number of potential mothers than among the Hindus. While the higher caste Hindus throughout the province, and in Bengal proper many of the castes of lesser importance rigorously prohibit widow re-marriage, on the contrary, the Muslim widow usually finds a second husband. Statistics show that of every 100 Hindu women between the ages of 15 and 40, more than 16 are widows prohibited to re-marry; among the Muslims, the percentage is only 12. O'Donnell observes that ill-assorted marriages are far more common among the Hindus. For example, a man well advanced in age marries a girl wife. As a result, it is observed in most cases, those girl wives are left widows. On the other hand, O'Donnell points out, such ill-assorted marriages are not a common feature among the Muslim population. Moreover, the Muslims of Eastern Bengal are polygamists, and whenever they get a chance, they take a second wife. Furthermore, he observes that the Muslim population, unlike Hindus, are well-fed, vigorous and less superstitious. He concludes that because of the above factors adherents of Islam in Bengal increased by leaps and bounds (Ibid).

The purpose of the preceding discussion is to show the basic difference between the Hindus and Muslim population of Bengal. The above discussion should enable us to see those unique features which structurally differentiate the Muslim society of Bengal from the Hindus.

Bases of Muslim Social Stratification

In the following discussion, we will see the basis of social stratification among the Muslims of Bangladesh from the ethnographical material.

It appears from the data that Muslim stratification in Bangladesh is based on the reckoning of nobility of descent (Hamilton, 1833; Fisher, 1840; Census of 1872; Hunter, 1875; Mukherjee, 1946; Maron, 1956; Beech et al, 1965-66).⁴ Data also indicate that the Muslim stratification is very flexible, and mobility from one stratum to another is clearly present, particularly from lower strata to upper. Data also give further indication that the people in the lower strata show a tendency to connect themselves with the claimants of upper strata who can claim nobility of descent. In the following discussion, we will try to construct a meaningful model by putting all the scattered pieces of information together.

The Census of 1872 supplied very little information on the Muslim population. Similarly, the Census of 1891 also contained little information regarding the Muslims, but we get some valuable data on the importance of reckoning noble descent. The report classified the Muslim society of Bengal into titled and occupational groups. In the titled category, the following groups are found: Gazi, Khan, Mir, Mughal, Pathan, Sarder, Sayid, and Sheikh; and in the occupational category groups like Darzi, Dhopa, Dhunya, Fakir, Hajjam, Jolaha, Kulu, Karigar, Kunjara, and Laheri are found. Of course, in the above classification the authors of the censuses did not show any specific cases of assumption of title by the occupational group. Their approach is more generalized, but there is an indication about the assumption of title of the descent group by the lower class. The same report also shows a considerable doubt about the authenticity of the descent group. For example, that the descent group that are found in Bengal can not be accepted as a real descent group has been found elsewhere in India. The report remarks, "It is quite certain that there are not a quarter million of true Sayyids or a half million real pathans. These titles are adopted by the families of the higher rank of

Muhammadian society, particularly by those whose ancestors came from Hindustan" (Census, 1891: 269-70).

Gait in the Census of 1901 reiterates the idea expressed in the Census of 1891, but his treatment is much more elaborate with some concrete examples which will enable us to build a model. Like the authors of the Census of 1891, Gait shows his doubt about the authenticity of four fold classification of the descent group in lower Bengal. He remarks that, "The conventional division of the Muhammadans into four tribes - Shekh, Said, Mughal and Pathans - has very little application to this province". He further shows, "In the proper sense of the words the Shekhs should be Arabs and Suids and descendants of Ali, include a great number of persons of purely local origin" (Gait, 1901: 439). Such idea is also found in the later censuses (1911, 1921 and 1931).

From the above remarks, it is apparent that the merging of the local origin group (in many cases they are an occupational group) to the four-fold pattern of descent groups is in vogue and widely practiced among the Muslims of lower Bengal. In the following discussion, we will present some interesting data showing how a member of occupation group merges himself with

the descent group when he becomes wealthy. Gait supplies an example of such process:

...any Muhammadan who is well off, though he can not go from one caste to another can gradually enter the ranks of Ashraf. The proverb "last year I was a jolaha this year I am a shekh; next year if prices rise I will be a Said", is well known, and it represents what often occurs through the process of promotion is not quite rapid in reality as it is in the proverb. A well to do man of a functional group, say a jolaha, will discard the word jolaha, call himself shekh and assume a more respectable name, and if he will slowly secure for himself a circle of friends from the poorer classes of Ashraf community. He will then marry into an Ashraf family, probably of doubtful status and his son will be recognized as a true Ashraf. The process is easier in towns than in the villages where people are more conservative, and is a distant place than near home, where a man's connections are well known (Ibid 441-42).

Gait supplies more information about the fictitious reckoning of honorific descents. He shows some historical facts indicating that the early invaders of Bengal were the Pathans but the number of pathans is very low, whereas the number of shekhs is very high and Gait shows the ratio between shekh and Pathans is 50 to 1. He also points out that the number of Mughals in Bengal is very insignificant. He was surprised at the higher number of shekhs in the province. He remarks, "...that the soi-disant shekhs is

more than twenty times as great as the estimated population of Arabia". He also reveals another interesting fact regarding the assumption of Shekh title by ordinary people. He further says, "Many of these 'Shekhs', moreover, have recently begun to claim this appellation. They are formerly known as Atraf in south and as Nasya in north Bengal, the latter word is still commonly used by outsiders though the people concerned now prefer to describe themselves by more pretentious names" (Ibid 166). Elsewhere, Gait gave us an intimate example of how a Muslim of low position gradually assumes a more high-sounding designation as he rises in life. He collected a very appropriate saying in Bengali which is a reflection in some ways of the common happenings of the society. The saying is as follows:

Age thake Ulla Tulla Sheshe hay Uddin
Taler Mahamud upare jay Kapāl phere
Jaddin.

Translation: When a man's fate changes his name also starts changing from Ulla then Uddin, and begins with Muhammad instead of ending.

Gait cites an excellent example of the above sayings. He says, "The saying can best be illustrated by the successive Meherullah who became Meharuddin, then Meharuddin Muhammad and then Muhammad Meharuddin.

He will probably at this stage prefix Munshi, then add Ahmed, and finally blossom into Maulvi Muhammad Meharuddin Ahmed. In North Bengal, a well-to-do Nasya calls himself Sarker, and if he continues to prosper, he becomes in turn Paramanik, Choudaries and Munshi, and eventually if his circumstances are sufficiently good, he assumes the title of Maulvi" (Ibid173). Wali also gives similar examples that show how lower class Muslims by virtue of their economic prosperity improved their social status by contracting marriages with better class Muslims. He says, "In parts of Nadia, Jossore, Bakergonj, Dacca and Faridpur, lower class families on account of prosperity of the one and the poverty of the other. When these unequal or Ghair Kafuv marriages take place, the lower class would assume such titles as Munshi, Mullah, Biswas, Jawarder and Miyan and give up handling ploughs. These men are called Atraf Bhalamanus or an Atraf made a gentleman" (Wali, 1894: Vol. vii, p. 108).

A similar situation from my own experience can be cited. This is the case of a person who assumed an honorific patronymic title when he became wealthy. In 1968, I went to my village home for a vacation. One morning, a man who lives next to my house came

to see me to write an application in English. I knew that man very well also knew that he had made a fortune recently. When I finished writing his application, I asked him to put his signature there. But I was surprised when he added the patronymic title majundar to his name. I knew that only one family has the privilege to use the patronymic title majundar in my village. I asked him "why have you put the Majundar title to your name?" He did not answer but instead he threw a meaningful smile at me.

In the Census of 1921, we get some useful statistics which very well reflect the continued process of assumption of noble descent by the occupational group. The statistical data show that there was a decrease in the number of occupational groups and conversely a rise in the number of claiming noble descent from 1901-1921. Among the occupational group, the 'castes' of Behara decreased by 17.4%, jolaha 42.9%, kulu 27.8%, and Nikari 16.3%, and on the overhand among the nobility of descent groups, Pathans have increased by 41.8%, Saiyad 16.4%, and Sheikh 21.5%. The following fact also affirmed that the practice of wide spread assuming of fictitious descent by the people who can not claim noble descent.

The Census of 1921 continues, "Since 1911, the number of Saiyads in the Chittagong Division appears from the statistics to have decidedly decreased, probably due to a similar reaction to that to which reference has already been made against extravagant claims amongst those who have risen in the world" (Ibid 364).⁵

Similarly, Arefeeh (1966-67) shows an interesting example from his study of a Muslim Zamindar Family. Originally, the family used the patronymic title Patwari, but later on the members of that family changed their title to Choudhury in protest of the mushroom growth of the patwaries in that locality

Smith (1946) gathers some relevant data from a village in the district of Sylhet. Although she could not show any specific cases of assumption of noble descent by one group by another. She shows that among the six groups Majumdar, Partan, Mughal and Pathan and Syod, any one of them can assume the title Syod when an individual person acquired wealth and prestige. She points out "...the descent is more honorary than real" (Ibid. 581):

Karim (1961, 62) gives some examples from his impressionistic works about the importance of Sharafati or noble descent in marital connection

vis-a-vis its role in determining social status. He specifically mentions that "promotion" and "demotion" are made to Muslim 'caste' through the marital connection. His study of Nayanpur village and the social stratification patterns in certain districts of Bangladesh contains such data. We will present here his impression about the nature of stratification patterns in the district of Barisal. In Barisal district in Bangladesh, he observes six feudal sharif families. He specifically mentions that families have lowered their position because of some marital connection between a member of lower strata of the people. We will quote Karim: "If there is a matrimonial connection between a member of the upper social grade with one of a lower social grade, it is still talked about in the district that there has been an unexpected "promotion" of the members of the lower "caste" while there has been an uncalled for "demotion" of the members of the upper "caste" although many members of the so-called "lower caste" occupy very important positions under the government or have made their mark in business, industry and professional fields" (Karim, 1962: 138, for detail see Karim). Zillur Khan (1968), Begum (1966), Arefeen (1966-67) and Bertocci (1972) came across

similar data in their empirical studies. Zillur Khan reports from the village Bhandarikandi in the district of Faridpur how the Khankars have lost their social status for having marital connection with the wealthy Dhalis (shield-bearer). The Dhalis of Bhandarikandi established marital connection with the Khankar family by paying them money. In this case, Dhalis wanted to improve their social status but failed because of the non-cooperation of the other Khankars of the area. Begum in her study of a village in the district of Comilla shows some interesting cases of how the nobility of descent determines one's social status. She shows how the retired government school teacher, a doctor and a rich agriculturist raised their social status through good social connections (see cases 2, 4 and 5). At the same time, she also points out how a person's social status goes down because of low marital connection. She mentions two cases: the first one is the case of a college professor who in spite of being from a Khandan family, degraded his social status for his marriage to an ordinary farmer's family (see case 3); the second case is the case of a government high official whose status has gone down in the eyes of the villagers because he married the daughter of a petty clerk (see case 1). Arefeen's (1966-67)

study of a Muslim Zamindar family reveals the process of achieving social status of that particular Zamindar family through the establishment of marital connection with other aristocratic families. When this family consolidated its social standing in the locality people with a newly acquired wealth started establishing marital connection with this family and subsequently they improved their social status (see case 7). He also shows how an individual member possesses lower status within the same family for being a son whose mother was from an ordinary peasant family (see case 7). Bertocci (1970) also observes some cases how the occupational groups aspire to merge themselves with the nobility of descent group. Thus he found in his study the presence of Dak (so-called) Majumdar and Asoi (original) Majumdar.

Mukherjee (1946) shows two examples of how one couple was ostracized and the other was welcomed by their respective communities. The case 1: a general Muslim (upper class) was forced to leave his community because he married a Khulu girl (lower class). Case 2: a Khulu Muslim married a general Muslim girl as a result girl's relatives broke off all relations with her. But when the couple reached the Khulu community, the girl was heartily welcomed by that

community. These cases are illustrative of the importance of the nobility of descent. The general Muslim broke off all relations with the man and the girl because they married a Khulu woman and Khulu man respectively. Such ban was imposed on them in order to keep their social status from down grading. Karim, Zillur Khan, Arefeen and Begum show also how social connection is correlated with social status. On the other hand, the Khulu community welcomed the Muslim general girl because her marriage in the community is the indicative of "social promotion" (c.f. Karim), although her marriage was not recognized by her community at all.

In the preceding discussion, we have tried to see the probable basis of Muslim stratification patterns and have seen the reckoning of nobility of descent to be the fundamental basis of the Muslim stratification patterns in Bangladesh. Of course, we cannot say for sure that such reckoning is the cardinal basis of stratification in Bangladesh. Although, whatever data we have at present does support this connection, we need to have a more definite empirical verification.

Muslim Stratification and Hindu caste

The present discussion aims at looking at the

basic features of stratification existent among the Muslims of Bangladesh. It appears from the material that most of the authors on this area termed Muslim stratification as a form of Hindu caste.⁶ At the same time, the authors also noted some distinctive features which are different from the features found in the Hindu caste system (Decennial Census Reports from 1872-1931; Mukherjee, 1946: 57; Maron, 1956; Karim, 1961; F. R. Khan, 1962; Beech et al, 1965-66; Guha, 1965; Zillur Khan, 1968; Bhattacharya, 1973). It seems that the above authors have formulated the idea that Muslim stratification is the same as Hindu caste because they see that some features are identical with the Hindu caste. In fact, like the Hindus, the Muslims are hierarchically organized, with the practice of endogamy and hereditary occupation.

In the following discussion, we will see those distinctive features and will try to build a model of the system from the available data.

James Wise (1894), one of the earliest investigators of this problem, observed the existence of over eighty 'caste' among the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. He terms these as a form of Hindu caste. His remarks leaves us to mark two interesting facts which are antithetical to the concept of Hindu caste.

He says, "The Muhammadans of Bengal have followed in many respects the system of caste as practiced by the Hindus although the principle that a son must carry on the trade or occupation of his father has never been reduced to a formula" (Wise, 1894: 60). In the above statement, we find two important points which do not conform to the principle of Hindu caste. These points are (1) the absence of ritual sanction attached to particular occupations because of the lack of an imposed formula. More explicitly, unlike Hindu caste, Muslim 'caste' is free from ritual sanction. (2) Absence of such formula (ritual) upon a system pre-supposes the blatant presence of social mobility. It seems that most of the British administrators are guilty of misinterpreting Muslim 'caste' as a form of Hindu caste by seeing some superficial identity with the Hindu caste. The decennial census reports contain a more or less similar view. We will specifically mention Gait's (1901) Census Reports and his views because he made a detailed treatment of the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. I do not deem it necessary to discuss the censuses of before and after Gait's observation. In fact, Gait did not come up with any new ideas rather his report is the reiteration of Wise's ideas. In fact,

he quotes Wise very often in his description.

Gait classified the Muslims of Bengal into three broad groups: (1) Ashraf or better class Muhammadans; (2) Ajlaf or lower class Muhammadans; (3) Arzal or degraded classes. In the Ashraf, the following groups can be found: (1) Said, the true Said holds the first place in the Muslim social system; (2) Shekh; this head involves only a genuine Shekhs of foreign extraction and converts of good social position, but not those who are converts from low Hindu castes; (3) Pathan; and (4) Mughal.

In the Ajlaf and Arzal categories, Gait observed over fifty occupational castes. He observes that these occupational castes practice endogamy (Ibid 440). The Panchayat (roughly caste court) is always vigilant to check the violation of the rules of endogamy. Gait at the same time finds a certain amount of flexibility in such rules. He cites some examples where an individual changed his status from occupational caste to Ashraf class through wealth which I already mentioned in the preceding discussion (see Page 20). In fact, Gait sees the endogamy practiced by the Muslims as being "as strictly endogamous as Hindu Caste" (Ibid 441). Gait does not recognize that the endogamy practiced by the Muslim

occupational 'caste' differs from that of Hindus. For example, it appears from the data on endogamy supplied by Gait, that the Muslim occupational 'caste' follow the preferential rather than prescriptive type of endogamy practiced by the Hindus. Why does a Jolaha (weaver) prefer as a bride from another jolaha family? Not because of Hindu endogamous ideology but for the occupational necessity of the weaving. No religious or ideological justification is advanced for this type of endogamy. The motivation behind this preference is that a girl from a weaving family will be in a better position to help her husband in weaving activities. Gait mentions how the panchavat leaders are strict about the observance of endogamy in different occupational castes (see Gait p. 440). My own observation on the weaving class regarding its marriage rules in a village in Bangladesh re-affirms the above explanation. Eglar (1960) in her study of a Punjabi village came across similar data. There a barber prefers to marry the daughter of a barber because both the barber and his wife have to perform certain related functions.

Admittedly, Gait also observes that the practice of endogamy is much less common among the Ashraf and

the cultivating sheikh of Eastern Bengal. Regarding the nature of occupational 'caste', Gait again observes that these 'castes' tend to be hereditary, but he admitted that the strict practice of hereditary occupation is not a vogue as it is among the Hindu occupational castes.

A note should be added here to clarify certain points regarding the controversy over preferential and prescriptive types of endogamy. In the above examples, I showed from Eglar as well as from my own experience, that the Muslim occupational groups follow a preferential type of endogamy. In fact, a statistical trend is found among the Muslim occupational groups to marry within their own occupational group. From the statistics and from the studies of authors like Gait, it appears that the Muslim occupational groups follow the Hindu form of endogamy. To resolve this controversy, we have to differentiate between preferential and prescriptive types of endogamy. Endogamy practiced by the Muslim occupational groups is preferential because under this system an individual has an alternative as to who he can marry. It has been found in the investigation that whenever an individual of Muslim occupational group desires to improve his economic status, he tends to marry into better class family. Gait cites such an example in

the previous discussion. On the other hand, the endogamy practiced by the Hindus is of the prescriptive nature. Under this form, an individual must marry into his ascribed occupational caste, for him, no alternatives are available.

Gait supplies some interesting data on the rules regarding commensality. It seems that commensality restrictions are fewer and these restrictions have no ritual sanction like the commensality prevalent among the Hindus. Gait's following observation reflects the nature of commensality existent among the Muslims. He stated:

The rules regarding commensality are not at present very rigid, and judging from the conflicting reports received from the different districts, practice seems to vary a good deal. It may be stated generally, however, that in the case of the Ashraf, the question is purely a social one, just as it is amongst Europeans. A man of high position will not sit down to eat from the same dish or in some place, with a man who is distinctly his inferior, but he has no objection to taking food prepared by Ajlaf any more than a European has. He may also, in special circumstances e.g., when on a journey, eat with an Ajlaf without any loss of respect, although a man might make an exception of this sort, his wife would under no circumstances do so. In the case of Ajlaf castes, the commensal rule appears to be that each caste should eat alone, but on this subject, I can not do better than quote the following remarks from an excellent report by Mr. Muddiman, subdivisional officer of Gopalganj:

"With regard to the question of eating with outsiders I have, after conversation with many Muhammadans of all classes, come to this conclusion. All Muhammadans are in actual practice more or less infected with their Hindu prejudice as to eating with outsiders. Curiously enough, educated Muhammadans, while denying that they have no prejudice on this point, probably infringe their own pronouncement more frequently than others. On the other hand uneducated men freely protest that they will not eat with certain classes (e.g., sheikhs Dhobi) but in practice they often do so. I was amused to see a sheikh peon quietly eating with a Nath (sic) just after denying that he would do anything of the kind. There is no doubt that the vast majority of the Muhammadans of this subdivision look upon eating with outsiders of lower status as a thing which, if not forbidden, is to be kept quiet on social grounds, if no other" (Gait 442).

In Gait's observation, we have noticed some unique features of stratification patterns existent among the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. Moreover, it has been noticed in the reports that wealth is one of the determining factors of social status. More explicitly, through the possession of wealth, one can change his social standing. Some examples we have shown already. In fact, most of the descenial census reports contain information on the above fact. But the information is so scattered in those reports on the above matter that a considerable space will be required to order such information (Census 1872, 1881, 1901, 1911,

1923 and 1931).

In the following discussion, we will present some data from some recent anthropological and sociological studies on the Bangladesh Muslim society in order to see the basic features of the system.

Smith (1946) gathered data on a village organization of East Bengal from a Bengali resident of New York City. She observes in the village of Alankar in the district of Sylhet eight Muhammadan groups such as Soyad⁸, Choudhury, Shekh, Mughal, Majumdar, Partan, Gulam and Maimal. Smith terms those hierarchical groups as "class" with its ordinary connotations of wealth and social prestige. The stratification of village Alankar is characterized by flexibility in the hierarchy. One of the fundamental features of stratification systems in the village of Alankar is the importance of wealth in achieving social status.

However, Smith continues that the first six of these groups consists of persons who are primarily land owners who may engage in trade. Members of these six may inter-marry. The Soyads are the highest in status and are believed to be descendants of Muhammad. Smith reveals the importance of wealth in determining social status as such. She says, "One of these six groups who has wealth and

prestige may assume the name or title of soyad" (Smith, 1946: 581). Her informant further told about the importance of equality in Islam that Muslims are all alike and attend mosque together without prejudice or distinction. But it is interesting to note that the last two groups such as Gulam and Maimal are distinguished from the first six groups by occupation and the practice of endogamy. Gulam may own land but in most cases, they farm rented land and work as farmhands. Smith's informant also told her that the gulam also act as waiters at feasts, clean and repair shoes, fill the water pipes with tobacco and serve the smokes. The word gulam is said to mean "servant" (Arabic gulam: slave). The informant further mentions that even if a gulam owns land and wealthy, he cannot associate freely with other Muhammadans outside the mosque; they go barefoot except in privacy of their own house. This remark regarding gulam reflects the differential nature of their 'life style'.

The informant mentioned that maimal are net workers and fishermen. She says, "Despite this emphasis upon occupational castes, six groups of Muslim land owners mentioned seem neither to be very strict about refraining from other occupations

nor about marrying within the occupational group. The informant's uncle was a carpenter and his sister married a shopkeeper...At the same time, the informant insisted that no one of the six talugdar groups (six groups) would marry a gulam or maimal" (Ibid 582).

In Smith's observation, we see that the last two groups (gulam and maimal) have lower status, and association of the first six groups with them is very rare. Elsewhere, we have found data indicating that a particular occupation may carry lower status. For instance, all the data confirm that the occupation of a fisherman is lower throughout Bangladesh. We will present here a demonstration of this. Begum's study of a village community reveals the interesting fact that a person got his social status down graded for taking up fishing as a profession (see, case 6). Islam (1974) affirms the above facts by saying, "Fishing for a living is not an honourable profession, but fishing for domestic consumption is quite acceptable" (Islam: 53).

It is quite apparent that the gulams of village Alankar possesses lower social status because of two reasons. First, the stigma attached to slavery, as the ancestors of the present gulam were slaves. Karim also makes this point (Karim, 1961: 161). Second,

the occupation they practice is degrading like waiters at feasts, cleaning and repairing shoes, filling the water pipes with tobacco, etc. Of course, I cannot present here any specific data regarding the above occupations excepting shoe cleaning and shoe repairing. From my own observation, I can say that the profession of cleaning and repairing shoes is very degrading because it is considered as dirty work.⁹

R. K. Mukherjee (1949) in his empirical study of six villages in the district of Bogra in Bangladesh, shows the existence of caste among the Muslims and Hindus of that era. He noted some distinctive features in the Muslim 'caste' system. However, he classifies the Muslims of that region into general Muslims (Upper class) and Khulu Muslims (oil presser). He shows social distance between these two castes is great which is caused by economic disparity. Side by side, we get a comparative picture of caste existent among the Hindu population and the author pointed out some unique features of the Muslim 'caste'. He says that unlike Hindu caste, endogamy and commensal restrictions are not rigid, for instance, intermarriage and inter-dining is allowed, although it seldom actually takes place between these two groups.

It is clear that 'caste' among the Muslims of Bogra

district lacks the ritual sanction as we see in the case of the Hindu populace of that area. Also it is clear that there is a determining role for wealth in social stratification. In this connection, I want to cite some examples from Uma Guha's (1965) study of the Muslims of 24 pargana in West Bengal. Although Guha terms the social inequality existent among the Muslim population as being due to the operation of Hindu caste principles. But a close look at her data reveals that the 'caste' barriers among the Muslims created by social, economical, educational factors rather than by the operation of any ideological factors. She says specifically: "Socially, economically and educationally, the Sheikhs are very much superior to other groups (Guha, 1965: 168). This statement very well reflects the weight of my argument. Moreover, I get further support of my argument from her statistical data. She points out that 91% of the Sheikhs are literate, while 16.04% and 1.64% cultivators and fishermen respectively are literate. The statistical figures are illustrative of the fact that social interaction is likely to be minimal between these two groups.

Karim (1961) studied the stratification patterns of village Mayanpur in the Eastern part of Bangladesh.

He observed nine rigid classes in that village. They are as follows:

1. Choudhuries - They claim to have once been the feudal chief of the village.
2. Khundakars - They claim to have once belonged to the priestly class.
3. Muhuris - They claim to have once belonged to the writer class.
4. Bhuyas - "Wealthy" peasant proprietors.
5. Agriculturists - Having their own cultivable lands.
6. Landless agricultural labourers.
7. Wage-earners of other sorts.
8. Wood-cutters in the neighbouring wood.
9. "Slaves" of Ghulams once they were slaves.

Stratification patterns in Mayanpur village is rigid, but unlike Hindu caste hierarchy it is flexible to a great extent. Marriage between different groups is allowed with certain restrictions. The author shows that the marriage relations between Choudhuries and Muhuries and Bhuyans are rare, and almost none between choudhuries and agriculturists, wage-earners of other sorts, wood-cutters, and impossible with the group of slaves. From the following facts it appears that marital relations between upper and lower classes are evident but rare. The author mentions that

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whenever a marriage takes place between a member of lower social groups with that of higher social groups, people think a "promotion" has taken place. Karim reveals that another important feature of stratification of Nayanpur village is the importance of wealth in determining social status. For instance, Choudhuries one time maintained marital connection with the sharif families of the district are no longer able to maintain similar connections. The author maintains, "The present economic position of the 6 Choudhuries is extremely precarious and their marriage connections during the last half a century have been gradually 'deteriorating'" (Karim, 1961: 62). He also shows an example how the choudhuries, Khundakars and Muhurics who once held imposing position, now because of precarious economic conditions became agriculturists and wage-earners in factories.

P. R. Khan studied the caste system of the village Dhulandi in the district of Dacca. His data clearly shows the differential character of the 'caste' prevalent among the both groups. From a comparative look of the data, caste among the Hindus is very rigid in respect of endogamy and commensality and retaining the hereditary occupation. But in the Muslim case, it is stratified, yet at the same time it is flexible.

For example, inter-marriage between the Bhadralok, or high Muslim and low Muslims (Shek, Shikdar, Mandal, Kuly or Jolaha, Nikuri and Bediya) is very rare but allowed. Important features of Muslim 'caste' of Dhulandi does not create social barriers among the people as in Hindu situations. Khan points out "There may not be marital relation among the high Muslims and low Muslims, but sometimes they sit together, smoke a common 'hukka' and pray side by side. The only element which is responsible for the minimum degree of caste tendency in these two groups is that of occupation" (F. R. Khan, 1962: 227).

Khan shows that there is a marked tendency of the occupational group to practice endogamy and hereditary specialization of their occupation. He observes that marriage statistics show that there are certain professional groups which inter-marry freely. Begum (1966) supplied similar data. In her study, she shows the case of Saiyal (patched house builder) whose father, grand-father, father-in-law, sons-in-law and his sons are and were Saiyals (Begum, 1966: 53).

However, Khan's study reveals clearly the flexible character of the system, i.e., "change of identity are easier to effect than changes of caste among the

Hindus" (F. R. Khan: 225). Importance of wealth is considered a fundamental determinant of social status. These two features are unique to the stratification system of Bangladesh.

Zaidi's field study of village life in the district of Comilla found completely different indicators of social status prevalent among the Muslims and Hindus. In the Muslim case, his samples identified social differentiation and considered wealth and education to be the determinants of social status. On the other hand, Hindu samples could not see any difference among themselves because they all belong to one single occupational caste of weaving. His respondents mention that they do not regard any families as higher or lower, which means that all belong to the same social category despite the existence of poor and rich within the same category. It should be noted here how the folk model suggests the complete absence of inequality within the same jati; it is beyond the range of the individual's knowledge to see social distinction, because they belong ritually to the same category. It is indicated, therefore, that it is difficult to change the jati status of a Hindu through the possession of wealth (Zaidi, 1970).

Bertocci's ethnographic study of the stratification

patterns in villages in Bangladesh reveals a distinctive stratification system. He observed that the stratification in that area is based on the following factors: (1) wealth, (2) lineage. However, the importance of wealth is marked most important in determining social status in that area.

Bertocci noted some symbolic indicators and he specifically mentions, "With respect to symbolic indicators of relative status, it is to be noted that in villages and in Comilla thana generally, lineage and homesteads bearing specific titles or names are commonly found. Lineage title denoting high status often function as patronymics, whereas other titles do not. That is, a man born into a family with the title of Majumdar will retain that title as a patronymic, whereas a man born into an untitled family will be known as simply, for example, Abdor Rahman, son of Jainul Abedin, Village X, thana x, etc." (Bertocci, 1972: 38).

There are four kinds of names or titles commonly associated with lineages and homesteads in Majipur and Tinpara. Among these two kinds are what may be called "traditionally high status", titles or names associated with (a) landed aristocracy, positions in revenue collection system of pre-Independence times

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or in government administration, and (b) religion. Among these are to be found lineage titles which function as patronymic, although not all have these characteristics. Two remaining kinds of titles, of better put names on common appellations, some are associated with (c) occupation, in a service or artisan capacity, (d) personal characteristics. The latter are not patronymics, but merely localism by which neighbouring families in a village have come to call a given homestead.

However, in Bertocchi's study there is a strong indication that wealth is the primary mover of social status. He identifies three groups of people on the basis of their possession of land. Such groups are landless, marginal and surplus farmers. He shows that the bulk of surplus farmers are associated with traditionally high status titles. At the same time, he points out that a majority of the traditionally titled groups are landless and marginal farmers. Bertocchi supplies such statistical data: 36% of traditionally high status titled groups belonged to landless peasant category, 41% belonged to the marginal and 23% belonged to the surplus farmer category. He also mentions that 2% of non-titled farmers belonged to the surplus category. "These data"

remarks Bertocci, "show two general things. On the one hand, possession of the trappings of rank (a high status title) is in absolute terms the sole possession of no one peasant type in this village. To this extent they reflect the comparatively remarkable social and economic egalitarianism of Bangladesh peasantry" (Ibid 41). He further shows that a particular lineage group could not maintain economic solvency vis-à-vis social status for a long period of time because of ecology and the unique inheritance system. Therefore, he shows that the stratification reflects a good deal of openness in social stratification as far as status is concerned. In the preceding discussion, we have tried to discuss the basis of stratification in rural Comilla village from Bertocci's empirical study. In my opinion, Bertocci's analysis of the system can be used as a meaningful model of stratification existent among the Muslims of Bangladesh. The following is his model.

A high degree of mobility¹⁰ of individual families between economic classes and status groups is an important feature of social stratification in Hajipur and Tinpara and probably has been so for a long time. It should not be forgotten that the economy of this village is one of general scarcity, given the population size and the vicissitudes of agriculture in a monsoon climate. Under such conditions

it is unlikely that a family can maintain superior wealth over a long period of time without some difficulty. This is partly the case because ownership of property is individual, not corporate or communal. Inheritance is partible and stresses equal division among males, with a certain portion of patrimony legally designated for females in shares which proportionate to that given males, are also equally divided among those women who inherit. Thus over time, unless land is consistently accumulated, a given lineage taken collectively becomes vulnerable to the inexorable problems of agriculture in a monsoon environment, in that as its property is progressively divided into smaller and smaller shares, the size of its individual segments' holdings progressively diminishes and renders individual members of the lineage each less capable of maintaining amounts of lands sufficient to ensure adequate production. Hence over time, unless accumulation of land is kept up, a lineage's collective wealth stands to be dissipated. At the same time, other families with subsistence holdings or little more may be rising, especially if they are able to engage successfully in lending activities, in particular the taking of land in mortgage, over a given period of time. Thus there appears to occur a regular rise and fall of families, the decline of wealth (and hence a key basis for power) for some and the increase of these for others, in a process which probably evinces a three to four generation periodicity.

The assignment of status seems to follow the rise and fall of various families in this respect. Villagers in Hajipur and Tinpara are quick to distinguish between long-standing and recently acquired titles. For example, they will readily inform one of which local families, among say, the Majumdar homesteads, are real or original (Ashol) Majumdars, who are perceived to have gained the title "legitimately" in

the past for performance of the requisite services, and which of them are merely "So-called" (dak) Majumdars, in those cases where the title has been merely been recently adopted by rural upstart Parvenus. Similarly, members of poor peasant families will sometimes claim to have enjoyed the status of a secular title in past generations, but will end their tale of woe by stating that they can no longer claim it. One is reminded, in short, of the proverb common to Muslims everywhere on the sub-continent which states: "Last year I was a Joláha (weaver), this year I have become a Shekh, and if next year's crops are good, I shall be Syeds...the process of this proverb reflects has a double cutting edge as it works itself out, in both upward and downward directions. (Ibid 47-48).

By taking into consideration the discussion in the first part of this chapter, I have found that Bertocci's analysis of the system of social stratification in two villages in Comilla district can be used as a suitable model of social stratification patterns for the Muslim society of Bangladesh.

The basic features of the Muslim stratification system in Bangladesh, outlined previously, include:

- (1) importance of wealth in determining social status,
- (2) importance of nobility of descent, (3) importance of marital connections; and (4) presence of social mobility.

My reason for employing Bertocci's model is that he explains very clearly from empirical data the op-

eration of these features of stratification in a village level.

There is a limitation in his model, however. Proper justice can not be done by treating his model as a representative of the Bangladesh system of stratification at a macroscopic level. Despite this drawback, I have used his model because ethno-graphic data on Bangladesh is generally insufficient. Moreover, the most important point in using his model is that it presents us with a sample of the social stratification system in Bangladesh society even if it is only on a microscopic level.

Summary

This chapter deals mainly with the social stratification patterns among the Muslims of Bangladesh. It also includes a brief history of the country; a brief discussion about the sources available to pursue further research; and a discussion of the differential social characteristics of Muslims and Hindus.

Data from the investigation indicate that the reckoning of nobility of descent is the basis of social stratification among the Muslims of Bangladesh.

The data supplied give ample examples of the above fact.

Data also show the basic features of the Muslim stratification patterns in Bangladesh. Unlike Hindu caste, Muslim stratification is characterized by flexibility, the importance of wealth in determining and achieving social status, and the absence of the concept of purity population. The chapter ends by suggesting that Bertocci's study of two villages in south eastern Bangladesh contains the most suitable model of social stratification patterns existent among the Muslims.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. The section of the caste that has highest position. Owing to old conventions, a few Brahmin families in Bengal were regarded as superior in respect of social prestige and their boys obtained high dowries in marriage. The result was that each of them married a large number of wives, sometimes as many as fifty or sixty or even more. These wives lived in their father's house and many of them scarcely saw their husbands after their marriage. According to social usage, many girls could be married only to kulin's and, therefore, had to remain unmarried until their death. It was not uncommon for a number of such girls baring in age between 20 and 50, were together married to an old man just to remove their maidenhood, which was considered a disgrace. However, kulinism did not disappear from the Hindu society of Bengal till quite late in the nineteenth century.
2. The geographical limits of Bengal have varied throughout the centuries. Its boundaries have been altered either as a result of conquest or, for administrative reasons. Before the 1947 partition, it stretched from the Puras immediately south to Sikkim and Bhutan to the Sunderbans and the mouth of the Ganges. It was bounded on the west by Bihar and on the east by Assam and that part of Burma which lay to the east of the Chittagong coastal tract. It included the marshy, submontane Terai known as Duars. It was felt in 1905 that Bengal had become too unwieldy a charge for a single administration and in spite of violent Hindu protests, it was partitioned into two provinces, (1) Western Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and (2) Eastern Bengal and Assam, each under a chief Commissioner (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 3 pp. 473-75). In 1947, the partition of India caused East Bengal to become East Pakistan, and in 1971, the province of East Pakistan became the independent country of Bangladesh.
3. Same as Muslim or Moslem.

4. The writings of above authors are very brief and incomplete regarding the Muslim stratification system. Nevertheless, they hold above idea on the nature of Muslim stratification patterns.
5. Similarly, in the district of Sylhet in Bangladesh, soon after the partition of India in 1947, it was noticed a rapid increase of patronymic title of Choudhury. Persons who make fortune soon after Pakistan started assuming the title choudhury. The Choudhuries who assumed the title after the creation of Pakistan came to be known as Pakistani Choudhury. What follows is that many genuine Choudhuries gave up their title Choudhury.
6. It will not be irrelevant to mention here the caste composition existent among the Hindus of Bengal. This will help us to identify the unique characteristics of the Muslim 'caste' in Bangladesh. Sanyal's article on the Hindu caste of Bengal gives a good idea about the types and the nature of caste found among the Hindus. He says "Practically speaking the Hindus of Bengal are divided between Brahmins and Sudras, two other groups of the Varna system, namely the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas, being represented by a handful of scattered migrants. Generally speaking, Brahmins of Bengal belong to two major varieties, the clean and unclean. The unclean variety includes patit (fallen) Brahmins who polluted themselves by violating the code of conduct of the highest caste and the Varna Brahmins who minister to the unclean Sudra castes. The Sudras incorporate a number of endogamous groups called jatis who can be broadly divided into the following varieties:

(a) Clean Sudras: Castes that enjoy the right to offer drinking water to the clean Brahmins in religious functions are considered to be clean Sudras. Apart from the Vaidyas and Kayasthas, the clean Sudra caste of Bengal are grouped under the common denomination of Nayasaka-Sudra. The Sadgopas and the Tilis are Nayasakas enjoying the rank of a clean sudra. They are also known as jalacharaniya, i.e., whose water is acceptable to a clean Brahmins for the purpose of drinking).

(b) Jalacharaniya castes with degraded Brahmins: Since these castes are not entitled to receive the services of clean Brahmins in religious functions and have degraded varna Brahmins as priests, they rank below the Navasakhas. Two castes, e.g., the Gopas who figure prominently in the case of the Sadgopas and the Mahishvas belong to this group.

(c) Unclean Sudras: Caste whose water is not acceptable to a clean Brahmin are considered to be unclean sudras. This group includes Telis.

(d) Degraded and Untouchable castes: These form the lowest stratum of the caste hierarchy.

Although all the non-Brahmin endogamous jatis are taken to be Sudras for technical reasons, each of the jatis has its own place in the local variant of caste hierarchy in Bengal in addition to sudra identity. In other words, although the four-fold varna system of caste hierarchy has always been considered as the model of reference, individually each non-Brahmin jati forms as much as part of the caste hierarchy as the Brahmins. Thus, in the context of Hindu society of Bengal, caste means all the non-Brahmins jatis as well as Brahmins who often referred as jati. For details see his (Sanyal, H.) article "Continuities of Social Mobility in Traditional and Modern Society in India: Two case studies of caste mobility in Bengal", Journal of Asian Studies 30 (2): 315-340.

7. Islam's observation gives a clear idea about the differential character of occupational caste prevalent among the Muslims of Bangladesh. Islam shows "These occupations are ones that the individual can choose for himself, and not occupational caste groupings which individuals are committed to at birth and which are connected by jajmani relationships. There is, nevertheless, a statistical trend for a farmer's son to become a farmer, a barber's son to become a barber, and a boatman's son to become a boatman. (Islam, 1974: 89).

8. In this description, we have all the traditional classes of Indian Muslim society, such as the

Syed misspelt, and probably mispronounced by the informant as Soyad, Sheikh (similarly misspelt and mispronounced as Mugal and Pathan). The informant of Marion Smith's pronounces Pathan as Partan. In East Bengal, sometimes 'p' is pronounced as 'f' and 'r' is added (Karim, 1961: 165).

9. c.f. Donoghue shows in his study in the Eta community of Japan a similar data. Eta community possesses a degrading status in Japan because of its occupation of slaughtering meat. This occupation is considered to be dirty there (John D. Donoghue, "An Eta Community in Japan: The Social persistence of Out-caste Groups", American Anthropologist, 11 (1957) 1000-17).
10. A few words should be said about the social mobility patterns existent among the Hindus of Bengal. This will help us to see the difference in the mobility patterns existent both among the Muslims and Hindus. Sanyal studied the mobility patterns among the Hindus of Bengal. He shows in his investigation that Hindu caste has a corporate intra-caste mobility. Moreover, he points out by showing two case studies how the unclean jatis in Bengal succeeded in improving their jati status to clean ones. His two specific cases are the Tili and the Sadgopas jatis, which upgraded their status from unclean to clean by changing the profession of the entire Sreni-Samaj (sub-caste). For details see Sanyal.

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CHAPTER 4

Case Studies of Muslim Stratification in Bangladesh

In this chapter, I will present some specific cases reflective of the basis and the features of Muslim stratification patterns in Bangladesh. These cases are collected from studies conducted by several authors (Begum, Arefeen and Bertocci) on Bangladesh society.

Begum

Milufar Begum conducted research¹ on stratification in the village community of Gulbahar in the district of Comilla, Bangladesh. In her study, both income and education are used as an index of social status. Both income and education have reflected the combined influence of a number of factors relating to social status as will be seen in the 6 case studies I have selected from her study.

The whole population of the village was divided into twenty-nine income groups using income and education as bases of such classification. In her study, she has chosen 96 samples through the random sampling technique. Only the heads of families belonging to the above mentioned 29 income groups were selected as subjects. Also, to make up a total.

sample of one hundred, four old women were selected through the random sampling technique out of ninety-one old women of the village. Furthermore, the 29 income groups were also ranked A-B-C-D-E in order of perceived social status or prestige. For example, 'A' represents highest social status grade, 'B' middle status grade, 'C' lower middle, 'D' lower and 'E' lowest. Each of the 100 subjects who took part in this inquiry was asked to put each of 29 income groups into one of the five social status grades.

Case - 1 Government High Officials.

In this income group, the per capita annual income on an average is Rs. 2165.00. Five families of this village belong to this income category. As for the social status grade of this income category, out of one hundred samples, ninety-six have placed them into grade 'A' and the remaining four have put them into grade 'B'. It is seen that the majority of the samples have classified them as belonging to the grade 'A' which is the highest social status grade.

These families are considered to be the most educated families in the village. Higher education, government service and landed property have raised

these families to the highest social grade..

Four samples have put these families in 'B' grade because they have no paternal Talukdary or Zamindary (both mean estate) which gives pride of birth. Formally, villagers were not willing to attach any importance to mere education but now it is noticed that the outlook of the villagers has undergone change.

Among the five, four samples have special status as their wives have university degrees. Moreover, they are either the daughters of high officials or ex-Zamindars.

All the samples have the Master's degree except one. He is a graduate and his wife has no university degree, and his father-in-law is a clerk. Lack of university education of his wife and low status of his father-in-law have lowered his status among four other samples.

They have landed property which they let on a share-cropping basis to cultivators or lease the land and take the advance payments. Although all of them live in cities or towns, they have not totally cut off their connection with the village. They visit their village home periodically to see their relatives, or take part in social ceremonies like Idd

festivals, marriage etc.

Here high education, income and good social connections played an important part in raising these families to the highest social status in the village.

Case - 2 Retired Government School Teacher

In this income category, the per capita annual income is Rs. 750.00. Only one family of this village belongs to this income group. As for the social status grade of this income category out of one hundred samples, seventy-eight have put them in grade 'A' and the remaining twenty-two have placed this family in grade 'B'.

It is seen that the great majority of the samples have listed this family as belonging to grade 'A' which is the highest social status grade.

This family is considered as one of the most educated families of the village. Higher education on modern lines and employment in the teaching profession have raised this family to the highest social status grade.

The head of the family is a retired government school teacher who is also the first Muslim graduate of Chandpur subdivision of Comilla district. All his

sons and daughters are educated. All his sons are high government officials. He also married the daughter of an ex-Zamindar.

It is interesting to note that the twenty two samples have put him in grade 'B' because he is a son of a cultivator.

Another interesting fact is that nearly one hundred per cent of the sample do not hesitate to put his sons in the grade 'A' which is the highest social status in the village. These respondents pointed out that his sons are the sons of a graduate school teacher, but he is a son of a cultivator. It should be noted here that there is a difference in social status between father and sons.

Here it is evident that higher education plays an important role in determining social status in the village.

Case - 3 Professor

In this income group, the per capita annual income is Rs. 1000.00. Only one family of this village belongs to this income category. As for the social status grade of this income group out of one hundred samples eighty-five have put them into

grade 'A' and the remaining fifteen have placed them into grade 'B'.

It is manifest that the majority of the samples have categorized them as belonging to grade 'A' which is the highest social status grade.

This family is formerly considered as one of the most khandan or sharif families of the village. High birth, vast landed property and a professorship helped to raise this family to the highest social status. The fifteen samples have put this family in grade 'B' because the professor, the head of the family, married the daughter of an uneducated rich cultivator of another village. Moreover, his wife has no higher education.

This family is very conservative in outlook. Except for the professor, all members of the family are very conservative. An instance may be given about their conservative attitude. One educated service holder who is the son of a wealthy cultivator wanted to marry the daughter of the professor's brother. Except for the professor, all the members of the family opposed that marriage. The reason is that the bridegroom comes from a low family; subsequently, the daughter married an orphan illiterate person having a khandani background who works in the town

as a hotel cook, and is now a Ghar-zamal.³

Added to this, this family is not in a position to keep the paternal property intact. Every year they sell off more of their landed property.

It is clear that the high birth, landed property, higher education and professorship are important factors for the highest social grade in the village. But the marital connection with an insignificant family, lack of education of his wife and economic insolvency placed this family for fifteen per cent of the sample into 'B' grade.

Case - 4 Homeopath Doctor⁴

In this income group, per capita income annually is Rs. 900.00. One family belongs to this economic group.

The following is the per centage of sample placing this group into three grades. Out of one hundred sample, thirty-five have listed this family in grade 'A', fifty-five have put this group in grade 'B' and only ten have graded this family into 'C'.

Here in this case, the majority of the samples have graded this family into 'B' which is middle social status grade. The head of the family who is

homeopath doctor read up to Intermediate standard and got a Bachelor degree in homeopath medicine. Although practicing in his main occupation, he is serving as a teacher in the local Madrasa (religious school) and post master in the village post office simultaneously. These are his subsidiary occupations.

This family possesses considerable landed property and is sound economically. The head of the family married the daughter of a well known Khandan of another village by giving dowries and money. This matrimonial relation has raised the status of this family among the villagers.

This family is progressing both in respect of education and wealth yet ten samples have put it in grade 'C1', which is third status grade, as his father and grandfather once served as day labourers before the pre-partition days (before the birth of Pakistan).

In this case, occupation, education, wealth and marital connection all play a vital role in determining social status.

Case - 5 Rich Agriculturists

In this income group, the per capita income is

Rs. 625.00. There are ten families of this village which belong to this economic category.

As for the social status grade of this income group, out of one hundred samples, twelve have graded them in grade 'A', sixty-four have placed them in grade 'B', and the rest (twenty-four) have put them in grade 'C'.

It is evident that the majority of the samples have put them in grade 'B' which is the middle grade of the social status.

The main source of income of these families comes from agriculture. These families are becoming wealthy which enables them to buy new plots of land every year at a competitive price.

Previously, they did not have a "modern" outlook but they are keen in sending their sons and dependents to schools and colleges. Moreover, their economic strength has contributed to raise their status among the villagers. Their former marital connections were mostly with the same status of people they themselves belong to. Now by virtue of their increasing economic solvency, they are in a position to establish matrimonial connections mostly with khandan families both inside and outside of the village.

Although they have achieved a considerable social status by virtue of their economic solvency through marital connection, twenty samples have listed them in grade 'C' which is the lower status group in the village because some members of these families were once day labourers or part-time agriculturists. This fact has down graded their social status to some extent. For this reason, almost all of them are eager to make matrimonial connections with the khandan families by spending a considerable amount of money.

In these cases, wealth plays the significant role in determining social status.

Case - 6 Fisherman

In this income group, the per capita annual income on an average is Rs. 160.00. Only one family of this village belongs to this group. As for social status grade of this income group out of one hundred samples, eleven have listed them in grade 'D' which is a lower status grade and of the rest, eighty-nine have placed it in grade 'E'.

This family took up the fishing profession due to extreme poverty five years ago. It is interesting to note here that the relative of this family raised

an objection when the head of the family decided to take up fishing as a profession. Moreover, one of the daughters of the family was sent back by her father-in-law because of her father's present occupation.

This family is placed in the lowest of social status by the majority of the samples. This family is known to the villagers as a Machua or Jalia family.

This family is placed in the lowest social order not because of his meagre income but for taking up the profession of a fisherman.

Arefeen

Arefeen studied a Muslim Zamindar⁵ family, particularly its quest to achieve khandan or Sharif status. The following is a paraphrase of his study:

This is the case of a Muslim zamindar family, particularly its ascendancy towards aristocracy. The founder of the family was Abbas Patwari⁶ who lived sometime in the 18th century in the village of Sreeramdi in Chandpur locality. He became rich by dint of his merit, industry and labour. He also obtained a bit of Zamindari from the then Nawabs of Bengal. But

he could not gather anything about his father particularly his occupation.

However, Abbas Patwari was a clever man. It is a matter of controversy whether his ancestors were originally from here or migrated from some other places. It is evident from the interview with some members of the family that this family can not claim any foreign ancestry. Moreover, their social connections prior to becoming khandan reveal that the family has an obscure origin.

Abbas Patwari was gradually establishing his position in the locality. His son Abul Patwari also amassed much wealth by carrying on cane trade with Calcutta. Later on, Abul Patwari's son Abdul Patwari joined his father's business and earned much money, and with that money they furthered their property, e.g., they acquired a new zamindari estate. In course of their trade with Calcutta, they came in contact with some English merchants who wanted them to supply jute. Thereupon Abdul Patwari, with his father, started establishing a jute (operation) at Chaudpur and continued trading on jute with the English merchants. They made a huge fortune out of the jute business. It should be noted here that both the father and sons are said to be the first

native jute merchants of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

When they took up the jute business, they abandoned their former cane trade. Moreover, Abdul Patwari took a contract with the then Assam Bengal Railway Company to construct the Railway tract from Laksham junction to Chandpur (32 miles) which was completed in 1895. With the railway contract, they greatly increased their wealth. It is also found in the family history that this family was instrumental in establishing Chandpur town and its municipality.

Although they become the dominating figures of that area, they were not recognized as khandan by the old khandans of the district. For this reason, both the brothers, Akkas Patwari and Abdul Patwari, married a Damudardi Choudhury family. This Damudardi Choudhury family was considered to be one of the oldest khandan families of the district. Akkas Patwari married the elder sister and Abdul Patwari the younger sister of the same parents. It was said that the marriage with that family took place in exchange of a huge amount of money. There is an interesting story regarding their marriage. It is said that the two sisters were placed in one scale and in another scale money was

kept, and when the scale was balanced, the parents of the girls handed over the daughters in marriage.

In this way, they 'bought khandan' status, with these marriages they established themselves as khandan in the locality.

Another interesting fact is that when the family of Abul Patwari became big, he married for the second time in an ordinary peasant family. He had one son by his second wife whose name was Kalu Patwari; he was considered low born because his mother was from an ordinary peasant family. This fact contributed to an attempt to prevent him from inheriting property by his nephew Bahar Patwari who was at that time very powerful in that area. Kalu Patwari, however, realized his legitimate share through the legal procedure. An instance of Kalu Patwari's low status will be revealed from the following example. One of the in-laws of the family was asked not to visit Kalu Patwari's family. However, his son, Hakim Patwari, improved his status by marrying into a Chittadda Choudhury family, zamindar of Dullai Pargana. Later on, two or four daughters of Hakim Patwari were given in exchange of money. The exchange of money took place because the bridegrooms were said to belong to a low status, although they

were infact very rich.

Abdul Patwari's first son Bshar Patwari married an old khandan family in Paridpur district. The third son of Abdul Patwari was married in Tangirpar, Mai Bari which is also a khandan family. His fourth son is a bachelor. Similarly, Abdul Patwari's four daughters were married to four khandan families. His first daughter was married to Dargah Bari (Syed Family) in Mehar Sreepur, his second daughter was married to his nephew, his third daughter was married to Choudhury Bari in Gopinathpur and his fourth daughter was married to Kazi Bari in Raipu.

Abdul Patwari established two educational institutions at Chandpur town and named them after his first and second sons. With the establishment of these educational institutions, the family further consolidated its social status.

It has been noticed in this family that wealth played an important role in achieving khandan status in the locality. Originally, it is seen that the family was an obscure one; when it became sound economically, it acquired khandan status by contracting marriage with other khandan families of the locality. In this way, the family established itself socially.

Bertocci

Bertocci undertook a field work on village life in the district of Comilla, particularly on social structure and community organization. I will present some of his case studies⁷ which reflect unique stratification patterns in the rural areas of Comilla district.

Case - 1 The Hajipur Mahisans

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

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

Anwar Ali is not only a large land holder and money lender, but also has

obtained the rights to run the sole government ration shop in Alirbazar, which returns him an acceptable of modest profit. Because of his large holdings, he can afford to hoard rice to a period well beyond the harvest time and thus obtain maximum prices for it during the "lean months" of the year. His sons are often seen selling his stocks in small amounts during the Fall and Winter on-market days in Alirbazar. In November of 1967, I once sat next to his grandson in the market while that latter sold 10 seers of the previous year's crop. The young man, a high school graduate with some knowledge of English, casually told me that the family still had 60 maunds of the previous year's amon season alone and had harvested recently 250 maunds of which they had sold or kept for consumption 110 maunds. They would, he said, be sure to keep a certain amount for sale during the crisis period of Jaista and Kartik months, late summer and early fall.

The Mahisans are the truly dominant lineage of Hajipur. Collective activities in the village center around their lineage. They have constructed a cement platform for prayers near a pond on the outskirts of their homestead and during certain religious holidays in which villagers gather collectively to celebrate and perform prayer... During my (author's) stay, the leadership of a newly formed village co-operative society under the aegis of the Pakistan Academy of Rural Development came to be lodged with members of the Mahisan lineage. All of these activities cross reyai lines, and are part of the reason that Hajipur is a multi reyai village. Though there is some vying for influence between the Mahisans and the other 2 sardari lineages in Hajipur, the Mahisans were constantly central to life in the village throughout my stay there and had probably been so for years before then.

Case - 2 The Hajipur Munshis

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

Fazar Ali and his sons are regarded with wide-spread distrust and disaffection in the village and the samaj of which it is a part. Much of the distrust stems from the fact that Fazar Ali is said to have utilized his prestige as a revenue accountant to enrich himself at the expense of the neighbours. He is further said to have been associated with a great amount of unsavory scheming and plotting in the politics of the samaj (discussed below), which has earned for him a great deal of continuing hostility. His son, Monu mia, is regarded as the same light, always suspect for behind the scene manipulations, when I arrived in Hajipur, Monu Maj was the chairman of Hajipur's cooperative society (mentioned in Case 1), but during my stay, he came under criticism for having stolen the cooperative's fund and was ousted from the Chairmanship, which went, as 4.52 acres, of which nearly half is mortgaged out. He holds no mortgage from others so far as I could learn and others said that he was untrustworthy that they would never go to him for money. Fazar Ali's personal property has diminished and his lineage status is threatened not only by the problem of maintaining wealth but also by declining esteem in the eyes of the other villagers. Fazar Ali's sister married a man who came to live in the Munshi Bari after marriage (Ghar Jamai: see discussion

below). This man, Rajab Ali, is a middle peasant with over 3 acres, whose sole daughter Fazar Ali arranged to have married to his eldest son, Amirul Islam. Thus, the losses in mortgage sustained by Fazar Ali may be recouped in this manner, by his sons.

One member of the Munshi lineage is a debtor middle peasant, the owner of less than 1.5 acre most of which is mortgaged out to various other families. This man is obliged to earn his living share-cropping his own land held in mortgage by others. The fourth family in the Munshi Bari is that of Bashar Mia, the eldest man in the lineage, now blind. He has several sons, who can work his land holding of over 4.5 acres, but he occasionally hires labor as well, since one of his sons is employed as a clerk in Comilla town.

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

Case - 3 The Hajipur Kabiraj Homestead

Hajipur's Kabiraj Bari is the home of the descendants of Doma Mia who moved several generations ago from another village nearby. The sons of Doma Mia have managed to amass a land holding of over 7 acres, part of which is held by the eldest, a man of seemingly ancient vintage, Akkas Ali, a rich peasant with over 4 acres. Kayam Ali, his younger brother, is a creditor middle peasant, who rents out a small portion of his land and has lent a little money, thus

holding land in mortgage. Akkas Ali's grandson holds an Intermediate Arts (2 years of college) degree and is a high school teacher in Comilla town. For this reason, Akkas Ali, and his son and grandson, among whom land is held jointly, regularly hire labour. Moreover, Akkas Ali has begun to register his land in his grand-son's name, for he is afraid that his daughters, who have married without inheritance might at some point return to claim inheritance, thus threatening land loss to the lineage as a whole.

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

Case - 4 The Kazis of Mauza Imangaon

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

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

Case - 5 Shona Mia Tinpara

Sona Mia is a member of grihasthi lineage, only one of whose individual families is a middle peasant in economic category. Sona Mia owns only .06 acres of land, which has been mortgaged off: he is in effect, landless. He earns his living by rickshaw pulling and day

labor in the fields of others. He and his agnatic relatives are rarely seen as participants in collective activities in Tinpara and with exception of Shona Mia, are fearful of many of their neighbors. Sona Mia claims that they were once called Kazi, but neither they nor their neighbors use the title at the present time.

Bertocci's above examples show some unique features of stratification existent among the Muslims of the rural Comilla district. As evident in Case 1, this lineage group is stable in respect of maintaining its wealth, status and power. Indeed, it is also succeeded in improving these factors. Case 2 reflects the process of decline of the Munshis, particularly where a powerful man of that lineage began to lose his land. Case 3 shows the gradual rise of a family to economic and social "respectability". Cases 4 and 5 show the condition of poor peasant families. For them it seems the chance of gaining status and wealth is very remote.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Note some changes are made in case studies without author's permission. These have been done in order to eliminate the facts which are not relevant to the present study.
2. Rupee currency.
3. The son-in-law who lives in the house of the father-in-law.
4. A system of medical practice that treats a disease specially by administration of minute doses of a remedy that would in healthy persons produce symptoms of the disease treated. Practice of homeopath medicine is widely practiced in Bangladesh.
5. The 'zamindars' is a class of men standing between the king and the actual cultivators and serving as collector of revenue, while possessing some sort of ownership in land, were known in the Hindu period; the name was first given by the Muhammadan government to its agents in the collection of revenue, who had no permanent right to the land. But the fact of Bengal being a frontier province far away from the capital of Mughal empire and the overshifting character of its rivers and alluvial land surface (which made a new survey necessary every 2 or 3 years) enabled zamindars in the Seventeenth century to acquire in practice a hereditary ownership of soil with many powers of feudal barons (J. N. Sarker, Economics of British India, M. C. Sarker and Sons, 1917, p. 199).
6. In each village a 'patwari' or village accountant was appointed, whose functions in the village resembled those of the 'Kaanungo' in the 'Pargana'. In this sense, we can term patwari as village zamindar in Bengal (Jadunath Saker, History of Bengal, University of Dacca, 1948, p. 29).
7. These cases are taken from Bertocci's unpublished Ph.D. thesis in an unchanged form.

8. By reyai, the author means here that "...within the 'village' there exists several subgroupings whose members are variously loyal to one or the other or several sardars. These groupings are designated locally by the term rayai, word apparently from Arabic, rayah meaning 'citizen' and whose derivations in standard Bengali (e.g. reyati) carry the connotation of 'protege'. Hajipur, for example, has three sardars and consequently three reyais. Where, as in the case of Tinpara, one sardar dominates local affairs, the term reyai corresponds in fact to organizationally formal and interactionally constant links to surrounding similar groupings" (Berlucchi, 72: 30).

CHAPTER 5

Summary

In this thesis, I have discussed the social stratification patterns existent among the Muslims of Bangladesh. In discussing these patterns, reference has been made to the stratification patterns prevalent in early Islamic Arabia as well, in order to see whether or not the Muslims of Bangladesh follow the early Islamic stratification principles.

Islam is based on equality. Contrary to this principle, even after its inception, it gave birth to a stratification system which was primarily based on the reckoning of nobility of descent. In fact, the reckoning of nobility of descent was carried over from the pre-Islamic practices of determining social status. For example, boasting of ancestry was considered to be of supreme importance in pre-Islamic Arabia and a man who could not boast of ancestors tried to connect himself to a nisba or gentile name.

In this way, Islam gave birth to a stratification system, contrary to the notion of equality, which was based on the following principles: (1) counting of descent from the prophet Muhammad is given supreme

importance, and (2) then from the Arab and finally to non-Arab.

It appears from the data that the social stratification patterns of Bangladesh Muslims is based on the reckoning of nobility of descent. Evidence is amply provided by both census reports and recent sociological and anthropological studies done on Bangladesh society. However, the present study is an impressionistic one. This calls for further investigation at an empirical level.


The data also revealed that Muslim stratification patterns in Bangladesh follow a unique pattern. Unlike Hindu caste, Muslim stratification is characterized by flexibility, the importance of wealth in determining and achieving social status, and the absence of the concept of purity-pollution.

This thesis also includes 12 case studies from different empirical work done on Bangladesh Muslim society, particularly the stratification patterns. In fact, these cases support the contention indicated above that Muslim stratification in Bangladesh is primarily based on the reckoning of nobility of descent. These cases have further indicated that Muslim 'caste' is flexible, i.e., mobility from one caste to another is very easy, and wealth is the prime mover of social status.

Conclusions

It is evident from the data, then that the Muslims of Bangladesh follow a different pattern of social stratification which cannot qualify as a form of Hindu caste. In fact, we have seen that most of the authors on Muslim stratification in the Indian sub-continent hold that Muslim stratification is an extension of Hindu caste. But our data revealed that the Muslim stratification in Bangladesh bears a close resemblance to the principles of stratification prevalent in early Islamic Arabia. In fact, it has been found in the investigation that the reckoning of nobility of descent is the fundamental basis of stratification both in Bangladesh and in early Islamic Arabian society.

Data on Bangladesh Muslim stratification show several unique features which differentiate it from the Hindu system of caste. For instance, unlike Hindu caste, Muslim stratification is flexible; there is mobility from one 'caste' to another, a great importance is attached to wealth in determining social status, and there is an absence of the concept of purity-pollution. By comparison, the Hindu system of caste is rigid, with no inter-caste mobility; wealth does not play any significant role



in determining social status; and finally, much importance is attached to the concept of purity-pollution.

A word should be said about the applicability of the concept of caste in studying the Muslim stratification system in Bangladesh. It seems from the data that Muslims follow different stratification principles, and therefore, that the application of the concept of caste will not explain the system but rather will bring confusion as to its proper structure. In fact, most of the authors who write about Muslim stratification in India applied the caste concept to the Muslim situation and came up with an idea that the Muslim stratification is simply an extension of the Hindu caste. For example, the use of concepts like 'caste-like', caste-analogous, etc., by some authors indicate that Muslim stratification is basically an off-shoot of the Hindu system of caste. It also suggests that Muslim stratification resembles early Islamic stratification patterns.

The caste concept, in a limited or sociological sense, may be applicable to the Muslims of Bangladesh. But its application involves serious pitfalls; e.g., the caste concept does not carry the full conceptual meaning of the Muslim stratification system in

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Bangladesh, as we have seen in the investigation. In this connection, Pitt-Rivers' (1971: 231-233) comment is highly relevant. He raised similar points in his article on caste. For him, science requires precise words. A scientist needs a suitable concept which effectively explains the social phenomenon which he studies. He warns that the application of the same concept simultaneously to different levels or kinds of social reality will bring confusion. Likewise, the application of the same concept in studying both the Hindus and Muslims of India may distort and confuse understanding. Students of this area need a suitable concept which really explains Muslim stratification, not only in Bangladesh, but also in Muslim society in general.

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