

LANDHOLDING AND KINSHIP IN A BANGLADESH VILLAGE: A STUDY

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This article attempts an exposition of the nature of the relationship between landholding and kinship in a traditional rural setting. The kinship system itself, by and large, regulates social behaviour and determines the possession of ancestral property in the semi-feudal social structure of Bangladesh. Genealogical relationship, deeply ingrained in the pattern of landholding in a traditional Bangladesh village, is very important so far as patrimony — strategic to the social system — is concerned. The possession of this scarce valuable land resource is regulated through locally accepted sets of rules and customs. The existing tenurial arrangement is a clear pointer to the organisational context of the kinship-ridden semi-feudal social institution. The network of kinship embedded in the three types — consanguinity, affinity and fictive relationship — shapes the configuration of economic relations based absolutely on traditional obligations. This empirical study presents some reflections on the economic basis of kinship by revealing a precise coordination between the pattern of landholding and the structure of kinship.

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Introduction

It is axiomatic that agrarian relations among peasants are greatly shaped by the pattern of landholdings. The overall economic situation of the peasant community is mirrored by the availability and use of land. Land constitutes the economic foundation of peasant society. The type of social structure and, with it, the system of social stratification are discernible from agrarian relations based on varying possession of land.

The main purpose of this article is to probe the existing patterns in the relationship between kinship and landholdings. The analysis is based on the observation of village Ratanpur (fictitious name) in Pubna district in northern Bangladesh. The social fabric of the village contains all the attributes of traditionalism. The ascriptive institution of the prominent figures corresponds much to the traditional mechanism of control, arising chiefly from the existence of a host of traditionally dominant land owning lineage groups. It remains for us to view economic relations through the ties of kinship to see how the convergence of interest and sentiment provides an indispensable tool for understanding the existing patterns.

The rural economic scenario is characterised by the preponderant influence of the land owning families which maintain large agricultural complexes and control the employment situation. They continue to invest money in land in order to make a mini estate attached to the residence.

Land determines the peasant's placement in the hierarchical setting. The peasants are differentiated in terms of differences with regard to possession of land. Land generates economic polarisation and social differentiation. The phenomenon of class stems largely from inequalities inherent in the distribution of land. Land continues to maintain the existing structure of social relations of production,

apportioning roles, status and power to the individuals. With it the institutional conditions of peasant life are patterned and reinforced. The relations between landlord and tenant, between large farmer and small farmer, and between landholder and share cropper, revolve around control over the principal means of production — land.

Such a vertical relationship, with the dominance of the landed aristocrats, contains the trappings of feudalism. Feudalism in this current state of rural affairs looms large in the matrix of social relationship. The rural status holders, mostly landlords and rich farmers, maintain feudal traditions by way of forcing the small farmers and the landless into perennial submission. They use this class of ruralites as material resources, as animated tools for agricultural operations in expectation of a bonanza. Their institutional position with corresponding privileges, internal sources of manipulation and external blessings enables them to dictate the terms and conditions associated with tenurial arrangement. The lopsided relationship has been developed by the instrument of sharecropping, control over the employment of labour force and the tendency of the large farmers to shift from labour-intensive technology in order to control the labour market. The capitalistic mode of production coupled with increasing commercialisation of agriculture make them utilitarian about labour recruitment. Economic interests get precedence over all other considerations. So, capitalism operates within a semi-feudal social structure to sharpen class contradictions.

The great value of land prompts many people to invest money in it. In Ratanpur, some occupational groups, other than peasants, put in a great portion of their earned money to acquire land. Sirajuddin, a graduate teacher, and Dr. Kazi Alim, a medical practitioner, are examples. But they do not work on land either by directly participating in production activities or by supervision. They are rentiers only, leasing their land to the poor farmers on the basis of receiving fifty per cent of the crops. Some of them purchased land in anticipation of the increased money value of the land. Succeeding generations would utilise the purchased land fully and appreciate the sagacity of their forefathers. Some people, who were once enjoying the status of medium farmers have risen to a higher level (large farmers) by purchasing land. Furthermore people want to have affinal relationship with a family which ranks high economically.

In Ratanpur most households own a small amount of land. This fact may be imputed to the application of the law of inheritance. The household properties are divided into smaller and smaller shares with each succeeding generation. Some farmers, became landless after selling out the small amount of landholdings they had inherited.

Commencing our analysis of the kinship position in the structure of propertied relationships in the area under study, we need to clarify that the term 'kinship' implies fellowship — a social grouping based on intimacy, affection, reciprocity and solidarity. Based on the census survey of a particular village as well as intensive field work, we may record here three types of kinship: consanguinal, affinal and fictive. The functional basis of kinship organisation is patrilineage, in which members are consanguinally related, tracing their agnatic connection with remembered ancestors. The

villagers use the word *gushti* to denote patrilineage. They are agnatically related, sharing the property of their ancestors. The kinsmen who are referred to as *sharik* (sharing ancestral property) fall within the bounds of *gushti*. The study, by conceptualising kinship system in this way, emphasises the economic aspect. This is characterised by the functioning of the lineage segments as economic units in relation to paternal property, especially landed property which is so strategic to the system. Nevertheless, economic factors or interests exist in other elements of kinship relations, for example, in the affinal and fictive.

Kinship as a whole constitutes the ideological base of solidarity. 'The extensive network of kinship relations' (Jahangir, 1982: 2) links people with divergent economic positions binding them into a well-knit group of relatives responding to one another's behaviour cooperatively and sharing some common traits, traditions and value orientation patterns. The kinship organisation with inherent values and ideology fosters a somewhat stable relationship of 'mutual trust and dependence in times of need' (Zaidi, 1970:61); the atoms or segments of this larger arena are held together tightly by mutual obligations and role expectations. However, some questions may arise: Are traditional obligations, specified by the ideology of kinship, reflected in the area of economic functions? Or, is economic interest itself a determining criterion in interpersonal relationship? Are kinship and class isolated variables or do they interpose themselves in the complex relationship? The answers to these questions are not far to seek. They will be answered in the concluding section in the light of research findings.

Kinship Composition and Population

Like other villages of the district, Ratanpur is densely populated. The size of an average household is 7.2. The average size of the Hindu households is 6.9, whereas the size of the Muslim households is 7.3. The total number of households is 249. Of them, Muslims have 228 households (91.6 per cent) and Hindus have 21 (8.4 per cent).

After the partition of India, in 1947, into Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the number of Hindus in the population decreased. Many original Hindu inhabitants sold their property and migrated to India. Some of them fled leaving behind their landed property. There were long-standing disputes between the principal land-owning families over the acquisition of the property left by the Hindus. They became litigants, registering cases in the courts for the settlement of disputed properties.

The Muslims of Ratanpur are divided into a number of kinship groups. Table I shows the kinship composition and population in the village. The homestead, households and population of all these kinship groups have been shown in this table. The Hindu elements of the population are deleted, because we limited ourselves only to studying the Muslim kinship patterns in relation to landholding. The study of the Hindu households has been excluded as the Hindu kinship behaviour is very complex in the realm of economic relations and patrimony. Furthermore, it would have created a methodological problem.

Table 1
KINSHIP COMPOSITION AND POPULATION OF RATANPUR

<i>Name of the gushti</i>	<i>No. of homesteads (ban)</i>	<i>No. of households (ghar)</i>	<i>No. of persons in the (gushti)</i>
Paramanik (Karim)	1 (14.0)	14(7.2)	102
Paramanik (Gafoor)	2 (4.0)	8 (7.3)	58
Paramanik (Abdul)	2 (5.0)	10(7.0)	70
Paramanik (Sattar)	2 (2.5)	5 (7.4)	37
Paramanik (Natal)	1 (8.0)	8 (6.0)	48
Paramanik (Bishu)	1 (5.0)	5 (7.8)	39
Molla (Jabed)	1 (14.0)	14(7.4)	103
Molla (Jabbar)	2 (6.5)	13(6.9)	90
Molla (Abed)	1 (8.0)	8 (7.0)	56
Molla (Sobahan)	1(1.0)	3 (8.7)	26
Shaikh (Ahbar)	2 (6.0)	12(9.6)	111
Shaikh (Madari)	1 (6.0)	6 (8.0)	48
Shaikh (Dhiraj)	1 (6.0)	6 (6.8)	41
Shaikh (Ajmat)	1 (1.0)	6 (6.8)	41
Majumdar (Rashid)	1 (7.0)	7 (6.3)	44
Majumdar (Bari)	1 (7.0)	7 (8.0)	56
Sarkar (Tasher)	1 (9.0)	9 (6.2)	56
Sarkar (Amin)	1 (8.0)	8 (7.3)	58
Mandal (Habibur)	1 (6.0)	6 (5.2)	31
Khan (Idris)	1 (7.0)	7 (8.4)	59
Khan (Makid)	1 (3.0)	3 (5.3)	16
Haji (Rahmat)	1 (10.0)	10(8.0)	84
Mirza (Rahim)	1 (9.0)	9 (9.8)	88
Sardar (Ayenuddin)	1 (6.0)	6 (7.5)	45
Sikdar (Belayat)	1 (2.0)	2 (8.6)	16
Kazi (Alim)	1 (5.0)	5 (7.0)	35
Biswas (Rahman)	1 (9.0)	9 (7.0)	63
Mallick (Barkat)	1 (5.0)	5 (7.0)	35
Mallick (Qasem)	1 (6.0)	6 (6.3)	38
Mallick (Ibrahim)	2 (3.5)	7 (7.0)	49
Mallick (Samad)	1 (2.0)	2 (6.5)	13
Mirdha (Golap)	1 (2.0)	2 (9.0)	18
<i>Total</i>	<i>38 (6.1)</i>	<i>228 (7.3)</i>	<i>1674</i>

Notes: Hindu households are deleted.

The *gushtis* are identified by the names of their leaders given in parenthesis.

Permanent Settlement and the Present Land-tenure of the Village

Like other villages of Bangladesh, Ratanpur was also a part of the *zamindari* system. The permanent settlement introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 made the *zamindars* supreme, recognising their absolute right of proprietorship over the land. The *zamindar* owned all the land within his jurisdiction and was responsible to the government for the payment of the fixed revenues and failure to pay would result in the confiscation of property. This system resulted in the creation of a "loyal class of *zamindar*" — a class which Cornwallis thought to be the real force behind the perpetuation of British rule and administration.

This permanent settlement enhanced the miseries of the Bengali peasants. They were reduced to becoming subjects of *naibs*², *gomastha*³ and other middlemen. To quote Shamsun Nahar (1976:107): "The *zamindars* in order to save their *zamindari* mercilessly exacted land taxes from the peasants. The *gomasthas* or agents of *zamindars* frequently harassed the poor peasants for goods and taxes". The villagers of this region including Ratanpur were exposed to the ruthless exploitation of these intermediary classes. As revealed by an old man of the village, the rural scene of Pubna presented a desolate picture. The fear of hooliganism by the *zamindar* and the intermediary classes, gripped the rural area with fear. The *raiyat* (tenant) exposed to whim and caprice of the *zamindars*, *talukdars*⁴ and their henchmen who frequently exacted illegal tax from them. Ellit Tapper (1966: 8) has described the conditions of rural Bengal during that time in the following way:

The proprietors and the cultivators of land grew increasingly distant from one another. The Floud commission considered it one of the most serious defects of the permanent settlement that a large number of rent receivers interposed themselves between the *raiyat* and the *zamindars*. Sub-infeudation had occurred in 'fantastic proportion...'. Illegal exactions on the cultivators were imposed by all revenue collectors including the *zamindar* at the top. The total result of the system made the *raiyats* an increasingly depressed class losing more and more of their rights. The commission concluded: 'a large increasing population of the actual cultivators have no part of the elements of ownership, no protection against excessive rents and no security of tenure'.

As a result of the scheme of permanent settlement a class of wealthier people appeared in the form of small landlords and *jotdars*⁵ in course of time, by purchasing land and *bhitas* left by the *raiyats*.⁶ Taking full advantage of the depressed economic conditions of the downtrodden tenants they made fortunes and turned into parasites fed by the toil and sweat of the labourers. Cornwallis settlement went a long way in intensifying social discrimination. A mushroom class with no substance and background developed into the so-called noble families, who exacted land tax from the tenants by adopting unscrupulous means of misleading them about the actual rate payable.

During this time this village was under the hegemony of the local landlord Rahimuddin Munshi. He was an employee of the celebrated Rani Bhabani of Natore. She was the wife of Ram Kanta. The ancestors of Ram Kanta and the members of their families were once sole proprietors of all the *parganas* comprising Pabna district at the time of its formation in 1832 (Hunter, 1876: 310). At the time of the incumbency of Raja Ram Krishna, son of Rani Bhabani, the *zamindari* of Natore came to the verge of complete collapse, because he failed to pay the fixed revenues in time.⁸ As a result "almost all the family estates fell into arrears, and were bought at the public sales ..." (Hunter, 1876: 310).

Rahimuddin Munshi bought on auction a huge amount of land and became a landlord of Dulai *thana*⁹ (now union). He was succeeded by his son Maulavi Azimuddin Choudhury who contributed towards establishing Dulai dispensary in 1867 (Hunter, 1876:376).

During the incumbency of Haiderjan Choudhury, the son of Azimuddin Choudhury, the rural areas including Ratanpur were subjected to indescribable oppression by the various intermediaries. The number of *jotdars* proliferated and made the lives of the tenants miserable. The agents of Haiderjan Choudhury encroached upon their rights, sometimes openly kidnapping young women from the house. They went so far as to propose to the tenants, marriage with their pretty daughters. The tenants were also threatened that failure to pay the taxes would result in the burning of their houses to ashes, kidnapping of their daughters and permanent ejection from the paternal *bhita*. Many tenant families were rendered homeless and many took shelter elsewhere to preserve their daughters' *izzat*.¹⁰ These facts were revealed by an old small farmer who had suffered harassment at the hands of the intermediaries and their henchmen during the days of landlordship.

The East Bengal Estate Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950, however, sounded a death knell to the *zamindar's* overlordship, recognising the rights of the tenants over the land. With the promulgation of this Act the tenants of the village became safe from the clutches of *zamindars* and their henchmen.

The permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis had strong repercussions on the shaping of the present economic structure of rural Bangladesh. The existing tenurial arrangement and the structure of economic relationships between the landowners and the tenants and labourers, are a reflection of the permanent settlement. The tenancy situation of Ratanpur, as shown in Table 2, reflects the skewed distribution of land. The ownership is concentrated with a handful of families comprising wealthy kinship groups. Besides, the other kinship groups also won land in smaller amounts.

Table 2
DISTRIBUTION OF FARM LAND OF THE HOUSEHOLDS

<i>Farm size (in bighas **)</i>	<i>Number of householders*</i>
NIL	32
1 - 8	68
9- 15	32
16-24	10
25-32	9
33-40	8
41 -48	7
49-56	7
57-64	2
65 and above	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>177</i>

* Households of Weavers and Hindus are deleted. The weavers, having no farming activities, do not possess cultivable land. They have a small amount of land covered by the homestead.

** *Bigha* is a unit of measuring land in Bangladesh. It is equal to nearly .33 acre.

The economic foundation of the village is characterised by classification based on the ownership of land. This economic categorisation determines the hierarchical arrangement and social ranking. Here the criterion of class has come to the fore with the emergence of private property and unequal distribution of peasants' land.

As land is the source of power and influence, it is conventional to rank peasants as large, medium, small and landless depending on the size of farm land.

In our scheme of categorisation a large farmer owns about 15 *bighas* of land. Ownership of land by the landowning large peasant in this village ranges from 16 *bighas* to 65 or above. The middle peasant maintains a middle position possessing land ranging from 9 to 15 *bighas*. A small peasant owns a meagre amount of land ranging from 1 *bigha* to 8 *bighas*. Landless farmers have been identified as having no arable land. They may secure access to a tiny plot of land covered by the homestead and vegetable garden.

The above categorisation may be supplemented by two other types: marginal and surplus. Marginal farmers produce crops that do not suffice to make both ends meet. The household head and his dependents, belonging to this strata, live at the level of subsistence. Surplus farmers produce sufficient quantity of crops for generating surplus. The surplus crops that are generated are sent to the market. It is mostly the large farmers who belong to this category.

This pattern of distribution of landholding and of ranking farmers is common to most villages of Bangladesh as presented in Table 3.

Table 3
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE OF FARMERS

<i>Type of farmers</i>	<i>Number of households</i>
Large farmers	45
Medium farmers	32
Small farmers	68
Landless	32
Total	177

The striking feature of the land tenure is the preponderance of landless and small farmers. The small farmers and the landless have complicated the rural crisis. When we talked to the landless and small farmers it appeared to us that many of them are clients of the principal land-owners and as such have offered their services to their families for a long time; some of them are day labourers on remuneration basis and some cultivate the land of large farmer as share croppers.

Economic Basis of Kinship: A Study of the Existing Patterns in Kinship-Land Relationship

In this section we will try to delineate the economic aspect of kinship in relation to landed property. Though the phenomenon has been studied at some depth, this research does not necessarily profess to make any generalisation of recognising the traditional value of kinship to be the only overriding principle in economic activities.

Table 4 shows the distribution of farmers of different *gushtis* (lineage segments). From the Table it is, however, clear that any lineage group, occupying a homestead, may have all types of farmers and is a collection of households of different class categories. The Table also shows the concentration of large and middle farmers in

a number of kinship groups. This does not mean that all are economically dominant groups, because there may be wide variations among large farmers as to the size of farmland. However, in some *gushits* there are large farmers who possess large amount of landholdings and add to the economic strength of the lineage group.

Table 4
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY GUSHTI AND FARMER

<i>Types of farmers</i> <i>Name of gushiti</i>	<i>Large farmer</i>	<i>Medium farmer</i>	<i>Small farmer</i>	<i>Landless farmer</i>	<i>Total No. of households</i>
Paramanik (Karim)	2	3	5	4	14
Paramanik (Gafoor)	2	1	4	1	8
Paramanik (Sattar)	2		2	1	5
Molla (Jabed)	4	2	4	4	14
Molla (Abed)	2		6		8
Molla (Sobahan)	1		2		3
Molla (Jabbar)	2	1	8	2	13
Shaikh (Akbar)	1	1	2	8	12
Shaikh (Madari)	3	1	1	1	6
Shaikh (Dhiraj)			4	2	6
Majumdar (Rashid)	4	3			7
Majumdar (Bari)	2	3	1	1	7
Sarkar (Tasher)	3		5	1	9
Sarkar (Amin)	1	1	5	1	8
Mandal (Habibur)	1	3		2	6
Khan (Idris)	2	3	1	1	7
Khan (Makid)	1		2		3
Haji (Rahmat)	2	6	2		10
Mirza (Rahim)	4	1	3	1	9
Sardar (Ayenuddin)	3		3		6
Kazi (Alim)	2	3			5
Sikdar (Belayat)			2		2
Biswas (Rahman)	1		6	2	9
Total	45 (25.4%)	32(18.1%)	68 (38.4%)	32(18.1%)	177

Note: Weavers' households are deleted.

A landowning large farmer with large landholding has social influence in the village. The lineage group he leads enjoys a high position in the rural power structure. With such background he can have control over a large number of tenants having little or no land. In Ratanpur, the kinship groups are distinguishable from one another by an economic criterion based on ownership of land. The dominant lineage groups have almost the same economic status linked with landholding.

Ascriptive values are the main sources of acquiring status. Many kinship groups representing the traditional landowning class continue to be dominant in the village. Besides the ascriptive values, achievement facilitates the possession of status in Ratanpur.

It is sometimes assumed that the members of the dominant kinship groups are homogeneous in regard to economic attributes. They are supposed to have identical

economic background, yet the members of the dominant groups may have varying economic status because of the difference in the ownership of land. Exploitation by the rich farmers of the poor farmers within a dominant kin group is detrimental to its status. Here the class structure exists within the kinship structure, if "the affluent families of the dominant lineages exploit the less affluent families of the dominant lineages..." (Jahangir, 1982: 4). Notwithstanding the existence of class position, the leaders of dominant lineages feel it obligatory on their part to keep up ideological unity through the furtherance of economic interests of the subordinate households. It is mostly the large farmers who through renting out land to their poor agnates can hold together a large labour force. For example, Karim Paramanik is a *murubbi* (head) of a rich household. Some households having low economic status have sharecropped in land from Karim Paramanik who took position as a celebrated landowner of the lineage. This economic favour is extended mainly to those agnates within the patrilineage who are on the brink of becoming landless.

This tradition of helping the poor kin and employing labour force from amongst the kin group is also followed by those well-to-do people who live in urban areas and are in occupation other than cultivation. In the share-cropping agreement, the poor partner, who is also a relative, benefits much from using the land of his rich counterpart, because the lion's share of the field goes to him. The user of the land, being share-cropped by the absentee landlord, becomes a *de facto* land owner. The terms and conditions of share-cropping are relaxed in the case of a land transaction between a rural peasant and a town dweller. Whatever little is given to the urban landlord by his poor agricultural practitioner is highly appreciated. Absentee landlordism is a striking feature of the landholding pattern. The land owner in town demonstrates this sort of charity to the localised kin in order to retain his rural base of influence. Such favour may be given to the non-kin, of course to a lesser degree.

This contract system, reflecting the tenancy situation, may turn exploitative. In many cases it does so if the rigidity of the system is maintained and reinforced. The terms and conditions of bilateral agreement appear to stimulate avenues for ruthless exploitation in the existing structural arrangement of rural Bangladesh "in which vertical relationship of interdependence give way to polarisation and structural antagonism" (Jahangir, 1979: 7). The dimension of the problem is germane to the nature of sharecropping as has been shown in a study on this subject by G.D. Wood (1975). Wood analysed share-cropping as an instrument of exploitation and domination.

However, limiting economic transactions such as sale and purchase of land, share cropping out and share cropping in, and mortgaging, within the circle of kin seems to be a potent way of keeping land within the lineage group. It is interesting to note that renting out land to the poor relatives is a gesture highly appreciated, and as such, increases power, influence, prestige and status. Table 5 shows the land transaction within the deferent *gushtis*. From the table it is clear that though new irrigation technology is taking place in the village, the share cropping pattern is still regulated by traditional kinship values. The dominant lineage segments very much value traditional kinship obligation when giving the land on the basis of sharing the crops.

Table 5
LAND TRANSACTIONS WITHIN THE GUSHTI

Name of the gushti	Share cropping out			Share cropping in		
	Total land (in bighas) share- cropped out	Within the gushti	Percentage of land S. cropped out within the gushti	Total land (in bighas) share- cropped in	Within the gushti	Percentage of land share- cropped in gushti
Paramanik (Karim)	22	15	68.2	18	15	83.3
Paramanik (Gafoor)	8	2	25.0	6	2	33.3
Paramanik (Sattar)	6	—	—	8	—	—
Molla (Jabed)	52	33	63.5	33	33	100.0
Molla (Jabbar)	14	6	42.9	16	6	37.5
Molla (Abed)	6	—	—	8	—	—
Molla (Sobhan)	4	—	—	4	—	—
Shaikh (Akbar)	11	4	36.3	9	4	44.4
Shaikh (Madari)	13	8	61.6	12	8	66.7
Shaikh (Dhiraj)	—	—	—	14	—	—
Majumdar (Rashid)	92	34	66.2	34	34	100.0
Majumdar (Bari)	27	15	55.5	15	15	100.0
Sarkar (Tasher)	6	2	33.3	12	2	16.7
Sarkar (Amin)	4	—	—	10	—	—
Mandal (Habibur)	12	6	50.0	8	6	75.0
Khan (Idris)	12	6	50.0	9	6	66.6
Khan (Makid)	—	—	—	4	—	—
Haji (Rahmat)	16	10	62.5	13	10	77.0
Mirza (Rahim)	33	22	66.7	22	22	100.0
Sardar (Ayenuddin)	28	16	57.1	16	16	100.0
Sikdar (Belayat)	—	—	—	6	—	—
Kazi (Alim)	40	26	65.0	36	26	72.2
Biswas (Rahman)	2	—	—	11	—	—

Note: Weavers' householders are deleted
S. cropped out means share cropped out.

In a society with this quasi-feudal economic structure, the landowners endeavour to maintain a complex family structure (joint family) so that, land may be held jointly and a large agricultural complex with all the paraphernalia of modernised farm may be maintained. The strong leadership of the head of a joint household entails co-operation and fellow feelings among married brothers who would rather not separate by dividing the paternal landed property among themselves. This constitutes a positive check to fragmentation. Besides, cohesive kinship groups may constitute a potent force to create the conditions of collective farming by the consolidation of holdings. In Ratanpur, land belonging to different households of a kinship group is found in one area of the neighbourhood or the village. The

subdivided holdings are contiguous, occupying a certain portion of the paddy field. There are many cases of dominant kinship groups carrying on agricultural activities on a cooperative basis consolidating all the individual holdings, under one irrigation scheme. Such cooperation testifies to cohesion and reciprocity among the agnates within the same kinship group. Affinitive (matrimonial alliances) and fictive connections are no less significant. But affinal relationship is only a peripheral issue. Nevertheless, affinal relationship based on 'strategic marriage' is considered to be significant from the economic point of view. Here, certain households having affinal relations with certain land owning families may revive share-cropping facilities from the latter. Strategic marriages among the agnates serve to reinforce kinship relations by keeping the landed property within the lineage group. "According to the Muslim law of inheritance, a son is entitled to two-thirds share of his father's property; a daughter, to one-third share. Thus girls marrying outside the family would take away their share of the property to their husband's family" (Zaidi, 1970:49). Strategic marriage checks the flight of strategic resources.

The pattern of economic organisation is characterised by 'paternalistic connection' or 'patronage in the economic share'. In this way the favours of the land owning families cut across the boundaries of lineage-based kinship and reach up to the relationship of great economic significance. If such an economic relationship between a patron, who represents the dominant structure, and a client is reinforced and strengthened, it ultimately crystallises into a special relationship which anthropologists call fictive kin relationship. To quote Sarkar (1980: 55):

poor will ask the influential person of the village to set up this fictive relation with them, and sometimes the influential will agree. The poor person will get financial and political benefits, such as land for share cropping and fertilizer from the agricultural officer.

In Bangladesh peasant society with dominant agricultural orientation, this relationship centering around land is an important ingredient of the extensive network of kinship. In the case of this institutionalised vertical relationship between a land owner and a poor farmer, one giving economic favours and the other obtaining them, the kin terms could be put into use symbolising the existing power relationship between them.

Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis we had tried to present the extensive network of kinship in this semifeudal economic setting. The kinship system, operating within the traditional forms of social relations, facilitates cooperation and mutual obligations which we recognise to be a structure of reciprocity replete with traditional commitment and social bondage. The kinship network combines the dominance of community structure and the dominance of class structure based on landed property with abiding values and norms. The analysis points to the specificity of the miniature social organisation at the level of sub-system (Alavi, 1973). The economic basis of this sub-system is the structuring of the land-man relationship "on the basis of real or fictive kinship" (Jahangir, 1982: 5). The primary basis of economic relationship is the lineage-based social fabric which regulates the possession of land with a clearly

defined set of rules and customs. To quote Mayer (1963: 70), "The ties of kinship which are recognised in different societies give people claims to land for cultivation, to other kinds of property ... in the pursuit of common interest..." The household, the household cluster and the lineage constitute the internal mechanism of economic organisation of the society as a whole. In addition affinal relationships and fictive ties enlarge the boundary of relationships and the scope of economic cooperation. Kinship system as a whole is an important locus of economic relations based on the ownership of land. Therefore, Wood (1976), Mayer (1963), Nakane (1967) and Sarkar (1976) discussed kinship in relation to land holding and economic activities. Our contention is that the ideological base of solidarity is contingent upon the kinship network which binds the members into an integrated system promoting psychological affiliations and cognitive orientations. Economic relations may bypass kinship consideration in many cases in this era of modernisation and technological advancement; yet, the traditional mechanism of control is inherent in the configuration of economic relations and contract. In the realm of interpersonal interaction among kin, economic interest is not the determinative criterion in most cases. Although kinship and class are to separate variables and entities, they are not wholly isolated; class exists vividly in the internal organisation of kinship. In some cases if a class structure induces exploitation from within, weak kinship relations ensue. In dominant kinship groups the cohesion is maintained by the unique combination of class structure and kinship relations. Thus the structure of kinship with its periphery, functions well with the institution of private property of land in the traditional pattern of agrarian relations.

NOTES

1. For details see: *Bengal Ryots: Their Rights and Liberties* by Chatterjee (1971). See also *Cirasthai Bandabasta O Bangali Samaj* (in Bengali) edited by Muntasir Mamoon (1975).
2. A Chief rent collector of the *zamindar*.
3. Another agent of the *zamindar* for collecting revenue. He is subordinate to a naib.
4. A small landlord, placed in the superior position within a small estate, a part of the large *zamindar*'s estate, having to pay arrears for that area only.
5. The principal land owners, purchasing land, doing money lending business and leasing out land for share cropping.
6. Roy (1974:141) has given a real picture of suffering of the *raiya*t at the hands of the *zamindars* and their agents in his book *Bharater Krishok Bidroha O Ganatric Sangram* (in Bengali). Also see: *Bangladesher Itihas* (in Bengali) by Rahim, et al. (1977).
7. To know the social conditions of Bengali peasants, in detail, after the introduction of permanent settlement in 1793 see: *Annals of Rural Bengal* by Hunter (1897).
8. Although the *zamindars* had the permanent right to acquire and enjoy the land in their kingdom, the supreme right over it was vested with the British. The British rulers fixed the revenue to be paid to them by *zamindars* according to the terms and conditions of the settlement. If the *zamindars* failed to submit the arrears to the government treasury their landed property would be seized and sold on auction and settled with other people.
9. During British period *Dulai* was thana—a fact clearly mentioned in Hunter's book. See: *Statistical Account of Bengal Vol. IX* by Hunter (1876: 297).
10. It means prestige. It corresponds to the virginity of the unmarried women.

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