CULTURE, PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH

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Master's Thesis

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January 1995

ISBN 0-612-15658-3

UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for generously subsidizing my life, both finacially and morally. Secondly, I thank the former Coordinator of the Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP), Ron Audette for his friendship and enthusiastic and practical "in the field" direction during my posting with CARE-Bangladesh. Moreover, I have not forgotten the generous support, patience and understanding that was forwarded to me from all the staff at CARE and particularly CARE-RMP. Of notable mention are my two very good friends, Ms. Nazneen Ahmad and Mr. S.K. ("Super") Deb.

Further, thanks is definetely extended to my pal and classmate, Stephane Paquette, for his editing and constructive criticism of this thesis.

I thank Professor Michel Chossudovsky of the University of Ottawa's Economics Department, for his comments and advice as member of my thesis jury. Also, as member of my jury as well as an influential facilitator (a la Freire), great appreciation and admiration goes out to Professor Raymundo DeAndrade, whose flexibility and open-mindedness to life has been a model to many a student. Last but not least, I extend heartfelt thanks to my good friend and thesis advisor, Professor Victor DaRosa, who inspired me throughout university with his blend of academic wisdom, enthusiasm and fun. As many have discovered before and after me, he has the uncanny ability of converting what would probably be rather "dry" academic material into the very interesting and humorous. I credit Victor more than anyone else as the impetus of my interest in Sociology and International Development.

Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to critically examine the notion that "participation" and the other catch phrases found within the language of grass roots development, namely "people's participation", "popular participation", "participatory democracy", "bottom-up" and "self-help" development, etc. are a panaces for development. The position that will be taken is that these concepts and ideas are often "western" in origin and are not always in accordance with the existing structures and socio-cultural values and realities of a given non-western society. In effect, this research will examine and analyse how culture can be seen (from a western perspective) to be an impediment or obstacles to the ideals of "participation" and "grass roots" development, and to critically question and reflect upon the concept of participation and grass roots development in Bangladesh.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Purpose

The objective of this thesis is to critically examine the notion that "participation" and the other catch phrases found within the language of grass roots development, namely "people's participation", "popular participation", "participatory democracy", "bottom-up" and "self-help" development, etc. are a panacea for development. The position that will be taken is that these concepts and ideals are often "western" in origin and are not always in accordance with the existing structures and socio-cultural values and realities of a given non-western society. In effect, this research will examine and analyze how culture can be seen (from a western perspective) to be an impediment or obstacles to the ideals of "participation" and "grass roots" development.

This thesis does not aim to discredit the very important ideas behind participation and grass roots development but, on the contrary, it seeks to hopefully and humbly learn more about them by critically examining and realizing their limitations. And, in realizing these limitations perhaps participatory development and the various methods and definitions surrounding it can be seen under a different and more realistic light. The objective is not to necessarily answer any questions. More importantly, the goal is to critically question and reflect upon the concepts of

participation and grass roots development with respect to a given socio-cultural and political reality, namely rural Bangladesh.

Methodology

Between August of 1992 and November of 1993 I held an entry-level position as a Junior Consultant with CARE-International's Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP) in Bangladesh. My primary purpose for being in Bangladesh was to participate in the design of a pilot project for the RMP. However, my work with CARE overlapped a great deal with my thesis topic and thus, I was allowed the opportunity to informally gather a considerable amount of data regarding my personal research.

Bangladesh is seen by many as probably the foremost laboratory for development. With very few exceptions, it would not be an exaggeration to say that just about every international non-governmental organization and bi and multi-lateral development agency can be found in one capacity or another in this small nation. Moreover, there exists literally a myriad of local Bangladeshi humanitarian organizations and development academies and institutions throughout the country. In fact, a recent estimate of the number of domestic and international 'aid' and

humanitarian-related organizations lies at about 6000.[1] Needless to say the potential for resource gathering is rather high.

The bulk of my research is derived from secondary sources of which the majority are Bangladeshi publications from, for example, the University Press Limited in Dhaka and the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) in Comilla. I gathered a significant amount of primary data, both as a result of my work with CARE and my personal research. Examples of primary sources are: the Grameen Bank, Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra, central government agencies and institutions, and CARE. Other primary written sources include discussion and concept papers and other studies that were commissioned by organizations from private consultants or firms. Examples of this are: Associates in Rural Development and Development Alternatives, both of the US, and the Centre for Development Research in Denmark.

Although I did not conduct any structured interviews or questionnaires with regard to my research, I would still have to claim that the biggest eye-opener and my greatest sources of primary information were secured from the field trips that I took into the frequently rugged and

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[1] In his book entitled Behavior and Poverty in Bangladesh (first edition, 1986), Clarence Maloney claims that there are 215 Private Development Organizations (i.e. CARE, Concern, Save the Children, Medecins Sans Frontières, etc., and over 600 smaller domestic agencies. This does not include bi and multi-lateral agencies (i.e. CIDA, USAID, UN, etc.).

Aditee Nag Chowdhury (1990) claims there are 6000 NGOs operating in both rural and urban Bangladesh.

harsh, but often beautiful rural countryside and villages of Bengal. My attempts at conversing with the local people (both rural and urban), although often restricted because of my limited command of Bangla (Bengali) were, nevertheless, a great source of information with regards to complementing my thesis-related secondary readings - not to mention an even greater source of amusement for local inhabitants who seemed to never tire of this funny white man incessantly asking for obvious answers to rather inane and silly questions.

Lastly, I would have to draw upon the relationships that I made with my colleagues at CARE as a most important primary source in my attempt at understanding Bangladeshi society. Without sounding boastful, I feel that I managed, unlike many westerners working in Bangladesh, to develop some relatively close friendships and relations, most, but not all of whom were individuals I worked with at CARE. This intimacy that I was so fortunate to acquire with a number of men and women eventually granted me the liberty to ask of them questions that no doubt would not have been appropriate under more formal circumstances. Moreover, although I have realized that the office environment at CARE was somewhat of a vacuum in that many of the employees came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, the office culture nevertheless did serve to some degree as a microcosm of Bangladeshi intra-cultural relations in that it indeed was not exempt from many of the social structures, mores and culturally-determined inter-personal habits and conduct of life in general. Thus, what I have attempted to do with this thesis is merge and superimpose some of my varying personal and professional first hand experiences

in Bangladesh with some of the existing literature concerning Bangladeshi culture and development.

Chapter 1. PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A BACKGROUND

"Participation" has, over the past fifteen to twenty years, become one of the most important (if not most important) concepts within the domain of international development. Regardless of its questionable effectiveness the concept is very fashionable - almost anyone who is anyone in development circles, regardless of their political orientation or ideological beliefs, will agree that 'participation' is a necessary ingredient if a development project or programme is to have at least half a chance of succeeding. As Anthony Hall so eloquently stated (1988, 91):

> [t]he large and ever-expanding volume of literature on the subject reflects the fact that, for many theoreticians and practitioners of development, 'participation' has become an article of faith, a fundamental prerequisite for any successful project or programme, and the single most important key to improving the livelihoods of the world's poor.

In effect, "participation" has become a standardized and consistently uttered term within the rhetoric of development. As we shall see below, the word itself has acquired such an assortment of definitions and approaches that it has become almost meaningless. Arguably, it is simply just another in a long list of obligatory but shallow buzz words that no one within the realm of development would fail to mention for fear of being labelled as politically incorrect. 'It is to be

found in the public statements and stances of even those agencies which have had little to do with either people or participation (Adnan et al. 1992, 16).'

The Origins of Community Development and Participation

"Participation" as a concept began to evolve as a reaction to the failure of imported western economic development ideas that advocated massive 'capital-intensive industrialisation, the rapid commercialisation of agriculture, heavy infrastructural investments and the transformation of traditional values' (Hall 1988, 91). The premise behind the aforementioned notion was that such policies would progressively develop the Third World in the same way that the West (the Industrial Revolution and the later post-WWII Marshall Plan in Europe) had developed and that the benefits would undoubtedly "trickle down" to the masses (Rosenstein-Rodan 1943; Lewis 1955; Rostow 1960).

These predicted consequences did not arise. In fact, in most cases the introduction of a free market capitalist system resulted in relative failure, bringing with it exacerbated conditions of poverty and inequity. Consequently, these conditions induced state governments, with the increasing help of bilateral and multilateral aid organisations, to become more and more involved

in the managing and directing of resources towards the poverty stricken stratas of society (Hall 1988, 92).

> The international agencies, and the United Nations in particular, encouraged this trend by actively promoting the creation of centralised planning agencies and supporting the expansion of state-managed productive enterprises, public education, health and other social services and similar governmental activities (Midgley 1988, 15).

The first community development movements took form in the United States and Europe during the early part of the twentieth century. 'The movements of 'animation rurale' in France and community development in the UK and the USA were, nominally at least, concerned with the involvement of the intended beneficiaries in the development process (Turbyne n.d.: 1-2 in Adnan et al. 1992, 22).' However, As Hulme and Turner (1990, 187) explain, with respect to developing countries it is usually agreed that the approach, as a pilot project, was first taken on in the Etawah District of Uttar Pradesh, India in 1948. Without going into too much detail the project consisted of:

> the mobilisation of villagers by a multi-purpose village-level worker [VLW] to increase agricultural output and improve rural infrastructure, largely through self-help efforts.

The project was initially a great success. Subsequently the Indian government, with the help of large boosts of US aid, enlarged its' scope to include further agricultural improvements, health, and education. Moreover, after such success the only logical route to take would be that of expansion throughout the country. Meanwhile, riding the same wave of enthusiasm, various Western aid organisations began promoting community development methods across the Third World.

As mentioned earlier, at a small and specific level this idea of community development seemed to be quite the success at Etawah. However, as the movement of expansion throughout India and the rest of the developing world progressed, problems soon began to arise. One of the most important and obvious problems was that the expansion of community development was also followed by a rapid rate of bureaucratization. An increasing number of field staff (village-level workers) were needed for the programs and therefore, efficient methods of managing this expanding labour force were also deemed necessary. 'This had major impacts on the programme, reducing its participatory focus and leading to VLWs [also] adopting conventional patterns of bureaucratic behaviour.' Moreover, as Heginbotham (1972, 107) asserts:

> While they [community development programs] were originally conceived of as bottom-up approaches, they soon become vehicles for the promotion of existing government programmes. This resulted from pressures exerted by the line ministries of the central governments. These pressures transformed the village-level worker from a coordinator into a salesman for line-ministry programmes.

Somewhere within this trend of bureaucratization was lost the ultimate goal of the program, namely to assist the poorer groups of the communities in a manner that entailed their participation. In fact, it was the more affluent farmers and local elites who benefitted most in that they wielded the power to manipulate this process of bureaucratization by becoming aligned with the village-level workers (Charlick 1980, 6; Hulme and Turner 1990, 188). Regarding this last point, it is quite easy to understand how a community development program could go wrong. The participation of the local elite could very easily be misinterpreted as full-fledged community participation. Field staff who are increasingly caught within the rigidity of a growing bureaucracy; who are more concerned with carrying out demands from above within a limited time-frame (Jiggins 1977, 1-3); and who have no or an inadequate background vis-à-vis the community's structure and culture[2] are not in a very favourable position with respect to recognizing whether or not true community participation is taking place. In effect, what they may well be witnessing is the illusion of participation. Moreover, even if they do recognize

[2] This problem is not solely attributed to the 'top-down' approach - it can also come into play within projects approached from a 'bottom-up' perspective.

problems the inflexible nature of large bureaucracies in relation to management and planning does not really allow for field staff input or remodelling. As Gow and Vansant (1983, 431) explain:

> In an environment where project staff cannot meaningfully participate, it is highly unlikely that they will encourage participation on the part of those they are supposedly trying to help.

Similarly, Chowdhury (1990, 6-7) states:

> ...the pressure for quick results led CD [Community Development] workers to rely too heavily on the local elites to mobilize labour and to take initiatives. ...Pressures to show demonstrable successes led the VLWs to distort information, drive the people beyond the pace set for them and make planning and management attempts irrelevant to people's interest. Bureaucratic pressure tended to thwart the participation of the rural majority and local decisions were overridden by administrators.

Stressing the socio-cultural factor mentioned above it is important to note that '[t]he clientele - the people who were the ultimate object of development, for whom the 'goods' and 'services'

were produced by the organizations - were completely ignored' (Islam and Henault 1979, 257). Moreover, time and time again development programmes have been and often continue to be pursued while inadequate knowledge regarding local and indigenous habits, structures, realities and rites is possessed. '[D]isruptive pressures arising from inequalities of power and wealth, as well as various other forms of social segmentation, are frequently not appreciated' (Adnan et al. 1992, p. 22). Internal and, equally important, external political and social factors are so often ignored or, at best, not looked upon very seriously. The vested interests of local elites and bureaucrats (which are often one in the same) are not identified until it is too late and it is recognized that they come into direct confrontation with the goals of the programme. In essence, contrary to how a great deal of development planning views rural communities, Johnston and Clark (1982, 166) assert that '[t]he rural poor are not a homogeneous group.' In fact, this general perception of the harmonious and communal rural entity that development planners have so often held is:

> ... unfounded when the evidence assembled by sociologists and social anthropologists over the years is considered. In particular, the relationships that exist between villagers are multiplex and constantly changing; there are pronounced socio-economic differences in most rural areas so that the felt needs of one group may be irrelevant or in direct opposition to the felt needs of another group; there is constant conflict, both overt and covert, in most rural communities and, at best, village life in many areas might be typified as an uneasy truce; finally, in most situations the autonomy of village life has been subject to constant erosion during the present century as the state and its agencies have become more pervasive and as the village economy has become cash based (Hulme and Turner 1990, 189).

Hence, it can be argued that it was probably the projects' increasing expansion, bureaucratization, rigidity, lack of social and cultural awareness and "top-down" structure that led to the failure of the projects based on the Etawah model.

Chapter 2. APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Blueprint Approach

The aforementioned model used at Etawah remains even today one of the most often used and popular management and planning methods in community development. It is also one which attracts a great deal of criticism because of its paternalistic top-down manner. Known as the **Blueprint Approach or the Project Cycle**, it entails an enormous amount of detailed pre-planning. In a nutshell, it requires that a certain level of preliminary research is performed in order that planners and administrators may be allowed to develop the most "rational", efficient and cost effective project design. This design is subsequently translated into a 'blueprint' that will cover all aspects of a chosen project, namely: the '...identification, formulation, design, appraisal, selection, organization, implementation, supervision, termination, and evaluation...' (Korten 1980, 496). The managerial staff of a given organisation is required to strictly follow these guidelines in the same manner that '...a contractor would follow construction blueprints, specifications, and schedules' (Korten 1980, 496). Such a project cycle has as its primary objective the elimination or at least the reduction of uncertainty with regards to implementation. As a result, delays and/or planning changes or outcomes that may rise from processes of consultation with various effected or involved parties are typically resisted (Adnan et al. 1992, 23).

> A project...has definite goals, a definite time-frame, and a careful specification of resource requirements....Project goals take many forms, but they all have one common feature: they are terminal. Reaching the goal concludes the project (Pasitam Newsletter 1977, 1, cited in Korten 1980, 497).

Because of its' strict and rigid reliance on order and design, 'top-down' planning can be seen to be very attractive. Arguably, to some extent it can be deemed to be appropriate for large-scale 'mega-projects' in which the task, environment, costs, and time are stable and/or predictable. But, as Korten (1980, 497) argues:

> ...in rural development objectives are more often multiple, ill-defined and subject to negotiated change, task requirements unclear, outcomes unbounded by time, environments unstable, and costs unpredictable.

The Need and Fear of Participation

Inevitably involved with the traditional project cycle method is what Adnan et al. (1992, 24) refer to as the "Need/Fear Dilemma." It basically asserts that projects undoubtably require a certain degree of participation but that it too must be managed in the fear that it gets out of

hand, thus slowing down or changing the entire process. For example, a project may require local labour and maintenance, agreement with regards to the acquisition of privately-owned land, etc. The ideal scenario would be a tight control of participatory processes in the form of involvement of local people for purely functional and instrumental uses - the sole goal being the facilitation of the project's accomplishment.

> The externality of participation means "occasional festivals" of people's participation according to the "entry" and "exit" of external agents who organize the participation (Siriwardena, 1991, 126).

Thus, critics of the Blueprint Approach maintain that because of its essentially top-down nature actual people's participation is severely curtailed - the targets, goals and objectives of programmes are designed from above and reflect an insignificant grasp of communities capabilities, willingness and heterogeneity.

As a result of this type of criticism, various alternative views vis-à-vis rural community development ensued, most of which, as mentioned earlier, look upon the concept of participation as a paramount consideration. In my opinion there are two extremes with regards to participation - the superficial type that is inherent in the Blueprint Approach and the type that is employed in aggressive social movements such as consciousness raising. However, in between

these two extremes lie an assortment of other activities and definitions that also fall under this term. The remainder of this chapter will consist of a survey of this broad spectrum of definitions, types and approaches to this complex element of community development. This will be succeeded by a focus on one of the aforementioned extremes or ideal types, the thought and participatory methodology of Paulo Freire. Following this will be a critical analysis of the concept of participation with reference to the socio-cultural and political structure of rural Bangladesh.

Participatory Development: Ideals and Approaches

Contemporary grass roots and participatory development literature is typically looked upon by its advocates as being a direct counter to the traditional orthodox methods to rural community development such as the Blueprint Approach or the top-down planning and management style. The basic philosophy behind the grass roots or participatory approach is that the local people that a particular project is supposed to help have a much greater knowledge of their own reality than do the so-called "experts" from the outside. The general idea is that this knowledge should be tapped in order that the real problems facing a community can be identified and measures may be taken in an attempt to solve these problems. Ideally, these measures should be **voluntarily** planned, implemented and managed by the local people with outside forces simply filling a

subordinate coordinating role. In effect, 'the balance of the planning shifts from the planners to the "planned" who, after all, are the ones it [the project] is ostensibly designed to benefit' (Rigg 1991, 199).

Despite the general consensus that participation is a positive and desirable element in development there is associated with the term an enormous amount of ambiguity and uncertainty - assigning it an exact operational definition is quite trying. Goulet (1989, 165) asserts that '[m]ost definitions are either too narrow or too broad, too strict or too loose.' However, he continues by pointing to Wolfe's definition as being one of the more useful. Wolfe contends that participation entails:

> organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control (Wolfe 1983, 2 cited in Goulet 1989, 165).

The above description of grass roots development and the succeeding definition of participation perhaps hold a certain value in that they present, in words, a conceptual 'ideal type.' However, moving beyond the rhetorical value of the concepts, towards practical and operational methods

and strategies seems to present a considerable challenge to development theorists and practitioners (Gow and Vansant 1983, 432).[3]

However, the objective of this thesis is not to discover whether there exists a single operational strategy and definition for participation and all of the other related catch words. In fact, my position is that such an initiative would indeed prove to be practically and theoretically useless.

A Typology of People's Participation:

Differences in Conceptual Understanding

In a recently published book commissioned by Oxfam-Bangladesh, Adnan et al. (1992, 28-33) list a whole gamut of activities and qualities which could all arguably be perceived to be participatory. This typology is rather interesting and valuable because it effectively displays how broad, vague and contradictory the term participation and the methods associated with it can be. The authors have sub-divided the typology into three categories: 1. Information Processes -

[3] I would argue that this is an inherent aspect of community development in that every situation is different, therefore, developing a more precise method is impossible.

project-initiated information flows; 2. Project-Related Activities - activities initiated by project management and/or other external agencies; 3. People's Initiatives - initiatives independent of project management and/or any other external agent.

Information Processes

Unilateral Announcement:

Typical of extreme top-down programming, participation in this case means simply letting the community (or select individuals from the community) know what is planned. The "people" to be effected may or may not be allowed a voice in reaction to the plans.

Consultation:

In this situation project management approaches the community in question with a willingness to discuss and perhaps even change the project's goals, options and plans. This process of consultation, however, does not bind management to concede to the "people's" views. The community's voice is listened to but the ultimate decision-making power lies in the hands of the outsiders.

Data Collection:

This type of information-gathering is quite often used to meet the "people's participation" requirements of a project. This methodology has an assortment of forms: questionnaires and surveys, structured and/or informal interviews, or simply impressions arrived at from random walks through a village.[4]

Adnan et al. (1992, 30) also point to what they consider a somewhat more serious endeavour - what they term as "quasi-anthropological methods" which require project staff to briefly live with a community in order to get a more realistic view. They do qualify this method by stating that it by no means approaches rigorous anthropological field work which demands a principal researcher (not an assistant) spending a great period of time living with a community.

Again for the above method, the authors argue that the ultimate goal of this quest for information is with regards to the benefit of the smooth planning and management of the project. None of these methods allow decision-making at the grass roots level.

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[4] Adnan et al. (1992, 29) state that these efforts are often exaggerated to appear as using rigorous social science methodologies. However, 'the people met during these 'random' walks may not be quite so random... eg, people who are unemployed, or are in a position to afford the kind of leisure to be available on roadsides for discussions. Also, influential people and their informers tend to hang around any conspicuous stranger coming into a locality.'

Project-Related Activities

This particular heading refers to actual activities that are practical in nature and move beyond the simple gathering of information and planning stage. The succeeding activities may allow for the community's input or perhaps even a share within decision-making procedures. The entire process, however, is guided by project management who will ensure that it does not progress outside of the pre-defined parameters.

Instrumental Involvement:

As mentioned earlier, projects normally need some sort of local labour and perhaps other services such as intermediary management. Those roles are often filled by groups or individuals which have no further involvement in the project. It is simply an instrumental use of people as a means of executing the project. Nevertheless, it is often considered or misinterpreted as community participation.

Functional Involvement:

Functional Involvement, Adnan et al. (1992, 30) explain, pertains to exercises that are required for the long term sustainability of a project. Examples of such would be collaboration with local people via committees or maintenance groups that would more often than not be organized by the project management. Similarly, taxes or user fees may be levied upon those who are considered to benefit from the initiative. Such activities tend to be normally imposed after the initial stages of the project cycle, during and/or after the project's physical construction. They usually last only as long as the project lasts - in other words as long as there is outside influence, or at best, as long as the focal point of the project (i.e., tube well, cooperative, etc.) continues to be functional and/or productive. The authors do admit that such group formations may play a role in decision-making, but again within limits - only to the degree that it is functional to the project. Further, because the groups are often formed from outside leverage, the project's influence is unlikely to conform to the interests of the community as a whole.

Negotiation:

Negotiation explicitly implies both parties (ie. local people and outside project management) possessing decision-making power. Rather than the superficial decision-making that emerges from externally-organized committees or maintenance groups, this could allow for

substantial project option and goal related mediations. However, 'meaningful negotiations can place only to the extent that people have an organizational base which is independent of the control of project management' (Adnan et al. 1992, 30).

Externally Initiated Organization:

Externally initiated organization is typically the result of influence from the project itself, however, it does occasionally develop from agencies that are independent of the project. A good example of the latter would be that of a NGO that organizes and supports a landless group or cooperative in view of developing some degree of strength vis-à-vis negotiations with project management. Sometimes these types of groups become self-managing and self-sustaining. However, normally this kind of organizational endeavour is completely dependent on impetus from the outside and usually fails once the external leverage exits.

Conflict Resolution:

Very important to the operational needs of a project is some sort of mechanism to address conflict between intra-community groups having opposing interests with regard to a project's outcome. Such a forum could evolve with or without influence from project management. What

is of primary importance with regards to effectiveness is whether or not the institution and process for conflict resolution is seen to be legitimate by all parties concerned (i.e., those who perceive themselves as gaining from the project and those who perceive loss). Ideally, such an endeavour would allow both parties to negotiate and ultimately reach a consensus on what should be done.

People's Initiatives

Reflecting the rather self-explanatory title of this sub-section, the concepts that will be discussed below refer to initiatives that evolved without any outside influence. Adnan et al. (1992, 31) refer to two distinct as well as contrasting varieties of people's initiative: self-mobilization and empowerment.

Self-Mobilization:

Self-mobilization usually involves entire communities or major social groups that are 'stratified by inequalities of wealth and power' (Adnan et al. 1992, 31). The process of mobilization is typically headed by the more influential and wealthier members of the upper

stratas. Moreover, the mobilization may be in the interests of the group or community as a whole or simply in that of the more powerful. In the latter case, the so-called community elite may pursue its identified objectives by enforcing its '...dominance and social control over the rest of the community' (Adnan et al. 1992, 31). In the former case, the objective behind coming together may be as a result of a common problem afflicting all stratas of a community, for example, a flood. However, besides these two extremes, there exists an intermediate scenario in which the existence of a common problem easily allows the more powerful to develop a coalition to fight the problem with the poor while simultaneously taking advantage of the situation to exploit the disadvantaged in other ways.[5] Irregardless of the case, the process is initiated and the decision-making is dominated by members or groups of the community's elite.

Empowerment:

To the contrary of the aforementioned case of self-mobilization, empowerment is seen to be a process that is initiated and controlled by the lower stratas of a community. This process typically faces a certain degree of opposition and even confrontation from the elite of a community in that it naturally questions and opposes the exploitation and control of the more powerful groups. Thus, because it is a movement that addresses the interests of the

[5] Adnan et al. (1992, 31) offer a poignant example of this during disaster situations in which moneylenders and blackmarketeers capitalize on the plight of the famine or flood-stricken poor of a community.

disenfranchised, it '...cannot make the presupposition of communal harmony in an unequal society' (Adnan et al. 1992, 32). Empowerment requires that previously dominated groups develop enough bargaining power to enable them to independently negotiate with village or community leaders (i.e., village elite) as well as project management. Thus, Adnan et al. argue that the above description of empowerment could be seen as '...the most authentic form of people's participation, in relation to which other uses of the term...may be compared and contrasted' (Adnan et al. 1992, 32).

Similar to the above typology of participation by Adnan et al. is another particularly interesting and rather useful participation tool. D'arcy Davis-Case's (1991, 6) recently developed "Continuum of definitions of 'participatory'," explains that there are at least four broad categories of participation in today's development endeavors. She has developed the table below as a reaction to the prevailing interpretational discrepancies that exist amongst development workers when talking about participation. These definitions are a practical communication tool in that they at least help practitioners identify, in general terms, what they themselves mean by participation.

TABLE 1.

A CONTINUUM OF DEFINITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

	Conventional	Consultative	Partnership	Transforming
Intent	Does not challenge existing power structure	Seeks to reform and promotes existing power structure	Negotiates power equity between parties	Challenges power structure
Methods	T & V[6]	D & D[7]	PAME; PRA[8]	Political Activism
Agenda	Outsiders set agendas	Outsiders set agendas	Agendas set jointly by insiders and outsiders	Agendas set by challengers

Source: Davis-Case 1991, 6

[6] Training and Visitation

[7] Diagnosis and Design

[8] Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation; Participatory Rural Appraisal

Chapter 3. WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Before continuing to address the alternatives to the Blueprint Approach to community development, it is initially important to confront the ingredients and conditions that have been deemed as desirable and in accordance with what one could consider equitable and authentic development.

The word "development" is open to a great number of interpretations. Traditionally, the term has been conceptually defined around economic considerations. Socio-cultural factors have, in the past, often been disregarded. If any attention was directed towards the realm of the social, it was often in a negative or subordinated fashion. Socio-cultural aspects were (and in many cases continue to be today) only considered important to the degree that they were seen to impede modernisation and economic progress (Midgley 1988, 19). In the same vein, development programming, planning and policy-making continues to be approached in a very top-down, paternalistic style - the community in question is perceived and often perceives itself to be the "receiver" of greater resources and knowledge from a superior source.

However, since the days of Rostow (1960) and the "trickle down" theory, and other advocates of the 'top-down' approach, a great number of development theorists and practitioners have re-

defined development to include socio-cultural as well as moral, ethical, and philosophical aspects and questions.

A foremost theoretician regarding development, and especially development ethics, is Denis Goulet. His work demonstrates, in part, a notable progression with respect to development concepts, which have, as illustrated above, typically been centred around economics and hierarchical control. In his book entitled, The Cruel Choice: A Concept in the Theory of Development, Goulet (1975, 155) states:

> Development is not a cluster of benefits 'given' to people in need, but rather a process by which a populace acquires a greater mastery over its own destiny.

Development moulded by a people's socio-cultural values, Goulet recognizes, can be effective because it is based upon a reality that is understandable and relevant. Moreover, development in this vein not only permits participation, but in essence requires it. For, without participation from the group that is to be affected by the effort, one does not have "authentic"[9] development,

[9] In critical reaction to orthodox definitions of development based primarily on economics, Goulet refers to "authentic" development as '...a complex series of inter-related change processes, abrupt and gradual, by which a population and all its components move away from patterns perceived in some way as 'less human' toward alternative patterns perceived as 'more human'' (1975: x).

but, instead witnesses a continuation of imposed and most likely inappropriate, unwanted change. Thus, the crucial key to development is in possessing the control, liberty,[10] and power of '...being the agent of one's own development as defined in one's own terms [as opposed to] being a mere beneficiary of development as defined by someone else' (Goulet and Hudson 1971, 19).

The Methodology and Thought of Paulo Freire

The Process Approach: Popular Education, Consciousness-Raising and the Importance of Socio-Cultural Values

With respect to the last section one certainly could argue that the conditions most favourable for the advancement of real development should be in accordance with the socio-cultural values of the community involved. Accordingly, these conditions should, ideally, enable the community to control, participate in, and influence the direction that the development will take. With this in mind, this section will now focus in on what is considered to be the polar opposite of the traditional Project Cycle and, arguably, much more conducive to community development.

[10] Liberation theologist Gutierrez defines development as "liberation" in that all peoples should have the power and liberty to control and participate in the development process of their community (1973 cited in Kindervatter, 1979: 43).

To begin, Arnold, Barnot, and Burke (1988) define 'popular education' as one:

> that serves the interests of popular classes (exploited sectors of society) that involves them in critically analyzing their social situation and in organizing to act collectively against the oppressive conditions of their lives (cited in Turcotte 1990, 52).

Popular culture and education embraces a methodology labelled by La Belle (1986, 60) as the "process approach". In contrast to the aforementioned top-down, donor/receiver approach, the process approach ideally entails a participatory spirit that involves both teacher and student (or development field worker and local individual) in a dialectic of learning. The ultimate goal of this perspective is to implicate the student within an educational process that allows s/he to play a role that goes beyond simply that of a "receiver" of skills and information. Emphasis is redirected from the teacher and the mode of information transmission to the student and her/his participation. Most importantly, the student must be highly involved in the design of the curriculum (or project) while the teacher unpretentiously serves the role of facilitator or aid (La Belle 1986, 61).

Probably the most important and influential champion of popular culture and education and the process approach is the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Freire's style initially developed as the result of his early work as a teacher with north-eastern Brazilian peasants in the early

1960s. From the outset, Freire questioned the system and curriculum that he was partaking in and perpetuating. 'He recognized that education was attempting to make pupils adapt to a society that he, like other critical Brazilians, believed should change' (Sanders 1972, 589). From his reaction to the conditions that he was facing and through his involvement with the Movement of Popular Culture in Recife, eventually progressed a pedagogical system best known today as "conscientizaçâo" (consciousness raising).

The foundation of consciousness raising is characterized by its exploratory and participatory focus on the language, culture and socio-economic and political problems that form the reality of the people in question - namely, marginalized groups of a given society. Freire's method steers away from what he calls the "banking" approach to education in which '...knowledge is [viewed as] a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing' (Freire 1971, 58). Similarly, as opposed to the typical classroom setting, consciousness raising pursues a more egalitarian mood in which all individuals in a "cultural circle" (including the coordinator or animator) are able to freely participate in, but not dominate, a discussion. In the following quotation Freire effectively describes the role a coordinator should assume in a "cultural circle":

> It is almost certain that the group [cultural circle], faced with a situation, will start by describing it in terms of its own existential experience, which may or may not be that of the coordinator. [The coordinator's] role is to seek, with the group, to deepen the analysis until the situation presented, studied as a problem is criticized (Freire 1971, 62).

> A cultural circle is a live and creative dialogue, in which everyone knows some things and does not know others, in which all seek, together, to know more. This is why [the coordinator]...must be humble, so that [s/he] can grow with the group, instead of losing [her/his] humility and claiming to direct the group, once it is animated (Freire 1971, 61).

The emphasis that Freire places upon dialogue is a very important part of the consciousness-raising process. The objective is to identify words and themes that have meaning and relevance to the participants (i.e., unemployment, slums, water, poverty, factory, authority, power, etc.). With the help of visual aids these ideas are presented to the participants and reinforced with questions:

> What is the problem?; Who are the people?; What are they thinking? feeling? wanting?: How should things be in this situation?; Why are things this way?; What is to blame?; What can we do about it? (Kindervatter 1979, 141).

Freire sees the above, similar to the Marxian sense, as a process of "praxis" - of reflection and action. He asserts that '...the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements' (Freire 1971, 75). These elements are founded upon culture; the perceptions, meaning, and reality of the people implicated within the process. However, beyond the positive elements of a culture - the history, the music, the dance, etc., Freire recognizes that there exists a hidden and stifling "culture of silence" that is maintained by mainstream or "prescriptive" education (Freire 1971, 11). Conversely, through a continuous dialogue of questioning, the process of praxis develops in the learner a consciousness - '...the learners gradually, hesitatingly and timorously place in doubt the opinion they held of reality [based on the values and knowledge given to them by outsiders] and replace it with a more and more critical knowledge' (Freire 1972, 34).

A CRITIQUE OF CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

Popular education and culture movements, not to mention, specifically Freirian consciousness-raising, are not without critics. One of the harshest judges of Freire's work is Peter Berger. In his book entitled, Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change (1974), Berger makes some very interesting observations and comments.

Berger basically asserts that it is ironic that the individuals involved in propagating popular culture movements come from, in most cases, the upper middle or upper classes of their societies and have gone through a long formation of formal education. Therefore, in Berger's eyes, consciousness-raising is a top-down movement and not extremely unlike prescriptive pedagogy. He maintains that:

> Consciousness raising is a project of higher-class individuals directed at a lower-class population. It is the latter, not the former, whose consciousness is to be raised. What is more, the consciousness at issue is the consciousness that the lower-class population has of its own situation. Thus a crucial assumption of the concept is that lower-class people do not understand their own situation, that they are in need of enlightenment on the matter, and that this service can be provided by selected higher-class individuals (Berger 1974, 113).

Berger's critique certainly carries some strong points and at first view is relatively convincing. His concluding argument essentially stresses that:

> ...there can be no such thing [as consciousness raising], because all of us are in principle, equally endowed when it comes to having consciousness. At best, we differ in terms of the quantity of information we possess about certain topics (Berger 1974, 126).

Certainly, Berger has a point in stating that such ideology comes from the minds of certain upper-class, formally educated individuals. However, the position of this paper is that Berger has failed to recognize the holistic essence of Freirian ideology. Berger's portrayal of consciousness raising as being top-down and paternalistic is a gross misinterpretation. Further, his argument that the consciousness being raised is that of the lower-classes by the upper-classes is equally misunderstood. The great emphasis that Freire places upon humility vis-à-vis the "cultural circle" coordinator (see above) exemplifies the non-elitist spirit of equality that he has in mind. Freire's process of praxis includes all who are implicated in the "cultural circle" - all have input. Accordingly, the consciousness of all is subject to being "raised" or transformed. Hence, within this frame of mind, the consciousness of an elite could, very well, be raised by the lower-classes - which is, if one could be so bold to speak for him, the case of Freire himself.

To continue, Berger's assertion that all living individuals inherently possess consciousness, thus making it impossible to "raise" it, is at best, a petty play of rigid semantics or another misinterpretation. Freire basically makes the same argument as Berger: '...everyone knows some things and does not know others...' (Freire 1971a, 61). Hence, consciousness raising does not entail the development of consciousness, but the expansion of it. Through the praxis of dialogue individuals share their respective knowledge, thus enabling them, through comparison, to critically analyze their own perceptions of reality and that of others. In effect, the individual self-transforms her/his own consciousness (Freire 1971, 120).

With respect to development, popular education/culture and consciousness raising is meant to serve as an "ideal type" concept. There is no clear cut theory, method or "blueprint" for effective and authentic development. However, the overall paradigm or worldview that popular culture and education is embraced by is a good starting point. As emphasized by Denis Goulet in the introduction to Freire's Education: The Practice of Freedom (1976), Freire makes it quite clear that there is no place for elitism or so-called "experts" in development:

> ...he [Freire] asserts that those [development agencies/workers, etc.] who have...knowledge must engage in dialogue wherein they may learn, together with peasants, how to apply their common **partial** [my emphasis] knowledge to the totality of the problematized...situation (Freire 1976, xi).

Chapter 4. THE CULTURE AND WORLDVIEW OF BENGAL

The objective of the following chapter is to display to the reader, as accurately as possible, the principal essence of the Bengali worldview and culture. With regards to the latter part of the last chapter which focused on bottom-up participatory approaches and specifically the Freirian approach, this chapter will point out the potential cultural obstacles and impediments that traditional Bangladeshi society may pose to bottom-up development programmes.

The following is by no means a critique of Bengali culture. On the contrary, I have attempted to be as objective as humanly possible. The goal is to simply illustrate and in some cases explain the traits of a particular culture that apparently contradict a certain approach to development. In this case, the rather top-down and hierarchical nature of Bengali culture versus the egalitarian and democratic essence of the bottom-up approach.[11]

Moreover, it is not to say that a project using a bottom-up or Freirian approach could not possibly be successful in Bangladesh. In fact, there have been a few (as we shall see in the succeeding chapter) that have been somewhat effective under certain circumstances. What is of

[11] Furthermore, as we shall see below, in this thesis I do not want to imply that socio-cultural traits examined below do not exist elsewhere. However, I would put forward that behaviour reflecting a top-down philosophy of stratification is more blatantly evident in Bangladesh than in other parts of the world, except for India.

importance is the proper understanding of the culture in question and by association a recognition of the obstacles, constraints and limitations, and cultural parameters that exist and which should be taken into consideration with regards to setting out on a development endeavour using a specific approach.

This chapter consists of a somewhat ethnological description and analysis of the Bengali worldview and culture. The succeeding descriptions and research is, at times, somewhat subjective in nature in that besides the secondary sources that I have referred to, some of the information has been compiled as an indirect result of observations that I personally made during 14 months of community development work performed in Bangladesh.

Although my primary objective for being in Bangladesh was not that of performing research for this thesis, nevertheless, my thesis topic was always in the back of my mind. While "in country" and as part of my work with CARE, I spent a considerable amount of time "in the field"[12] dealing with a very broad cross-section of people of both genders and from various ethnic groups, classes, professions and nationalities - all of whom were invaluable to me with regards to my attempt at understanding the socio-cultural reality of Bangladesh.

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[12] By "in the field" I am not necessarily referring that I was always physically out on a programme-related field trip and dealing exclusively with so-called "beneficiaries" or "client groups." In fact, equally valuable with respect to my understanding of Bengali culture were the informal chats I often had in my broken Bengali or their broken English, with the local tea or cigarette vendor outside my flat or the lively and often very surprising cultural exchanges that I participated in with many of female colleagues at CARE-Bangladesh's headquarters in Dhaka.

Defining Culture and Worldview

It would seem rather natural to begin a chapter such as this one by defining and explaining the two key concepts that will make up its focal point, namely the inter-related concepts of culture and worldview.

What is Culture?

According to the Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology (Jary and Jary 1991, 101) '[c]ulture may be taken as constituting the way of life of an entire society, and this will include codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behavior, and systems of belief.' Thus, the concept can entail rather simple things such as, for example, the kind of food that a group of people eat, the manner in which the food is prepared, how and when it is served, and who eats it. Conversely, culture also determines more complicated dynamics such as how a society allows itself to be ruled as well as norms of interpersonal relations.

Another effective definition follows as such:

> Culture is an integrated system of beliefs..., of values..., of customs..., and of institutions which express those beliefs, values and customs..., which bind a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity (Willowbank Report 1978, 7).

Culture can also be seen to be ever-changing and continuously affected by outside influence. As has been touched upon above in Chapter 3, and as Abecassis (1990, 2) points out, from a Freirian perspective culture '... is what human beings add to the world as it is by changing it through their free action' [i.e., cultural circle, consciousness raising, dynamic of praxis].

What is Worldview?

The concept of worldview could justifiably be described as simply the manner in which a group or an individual sees the world. It is rather difficult to clearly detach this concept from that of the concept of culture in that both deal with beliefs and perceptions regarding reality and the nature of humanity in the world. However, I would distinguish worldview from culture by arguing that the latter concept is perhaps more global or general (as the above definitions

suggest) with regards to the entire spectrum of traits, rites and mores of a particular group or society. On the other hand, the more esoteric concept of worldview, arguably implies more of a specific attachment to affairs regarding spirituality, mysticism, religion, idealism and methods of interpreting and analyzing reality. As David Abecassis explains in Identity, Islam and Human Development in Rural Bangladesh (1990, 2), a worldview is expressed by means of:

> ...the rites of passage (birth, initiation, marriage, death), worship of God and appeasement or manipulation of supernatural powers, practices and rituals concerning fertility, and the rules which govern relationships between individuals and groups...

Bangladesh: A Culture of Deprivation?

As a premise to the following examination of the culture and worldview of Bengal it should be pointed out that very little emphasis is placed on the more recent history of Bengal with regard to the "Raj" or British colonial period. This is not to imply that this period in Bengal (i.e., mid 1700s until the partition of India in the mid 1900s) did not possibly contribute to the Bengali stratification system. In fact, as Murray (1991, 15) points out, many Bangladeshi historians:

> ...consider the dictatorial agricultural policies of the British in East Bengal, and the establishment of the **zamindar** system, as being responsible for draining the country of its wealth, damaging the social fabric and directly contributing to today's desperate conditions.[13]

However, it is my opinion that despite the arguable cultural contribution or effect that the colonial era may have had on Bengal, the great Hindu and Buddhist traditions are of much more importance and influence and are thus conentrated upon below.

In Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal, Paul Greenough (1982, Ch. 2) argues that the area of the world today known as Bangladesh was much more economically better off before the turn of the century. He appears to assert that the prevailing stereotype of today's Bangladesh which arrives from journalistic images of poverty, famine and environmental catastrophe is relatively accurate, especially in comparison to times past. The American anthropologist Clarence Maloney (1991) who grew up in South Asia and who has spent well over a decade living and working in Bangladesh alone, however, states that regardless of whether the Bangladesh of today is measurably poorer than the Bengal of yesterday, it still would have been

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[13] Zamindars were rent collectors who were established to administer the areas under British control. 'Although many of them adopted the title of raja [i.e., king], they were really entrepreneurs, usually with little sense of the feudal responsibility that real rajas had. In addition, they were nearly always Hindus, which grated on the predominantly Muslim peasantry of east Bengal' (Murray 1991, 15-16).

considered very poor by today's western standards and that further, the Bengali worldview vis-à-vis poverty has not really changed. In his book, Behavior and Poverty in Bangladesh, which concentrates heavily on explaining Bangladeshi culture and of which this chapter draws a great deal from, Maloney affirms:

> For them [Bengalis], the peasant life is the norm, even when poor. The rural environment and the ideal geography of the bari (homestead) is highly upheld in the Bangla poetry and song imbibed all through childhood. Poverty as an abstract attribute is not so conscious; people just cope with daily life and its circumstances (Maloney 1991, 6).

For Bengalis, the word 'garib' (i.e., poor) possesses most importantly a functional purpose. Typically a Bangladeshi will introduce him/herself to a person of superior status as a poor individual, even though s/he may not really be poor by Bangladeshi standards. What is of importance is the existence of the concept of relative poverty:

> What a Bangladeshi means by using the word [poor] is to set up a relationship of inequality between himself and the person addressed in anticipation of possible **patronage** (my emphasis), or at least in a statement of the moral social order which he needs to make his relationships function (Maloney 1991, 7).

The Importance of Hierarchy and Patronage in Bangladesh

As in South and South-East Asia in general, at virtually all levels, Bangladeshi society is predominately characterised as being very centralized and paternalistic - a great deal of respect is directed towards authority and control from above. Very little social equality is displayed, implied or demanded.

The society as a whole appears to value a superior-subordinate dichotomy in both everyday and more formal occasions and relations. In fact, the concept of hierarchy vis-à-vis interpersonal relations is normally viewed as morally correct and necessary (Nicholas 1967). This respect for superiority/inferiority is engrained within the culture to the degree that it appears that very few Bangladeshis have an equal. Everyone is superior or subordinate. Behaviour reflecting this belief is indeed not difficult to detect. For example, except for very inconsequential relations or conversations (and even this is debatable), it is unofficially decreed that all individuals must clearly ascertain the social position and role of another in order that s/he may determine whether his/her position is superior or subordinate vis-à-vis that person.

> When two people meet in daily intercourse they commonly establish relative rank one way or another; it may depend on wealth, lineage, education, rank of employment, or even a small difference in age (Maloney 1991, 40).

Accordingly, in day to day contact the individual deemed to be of superior status is accorded the privilege of obtaining service and respect from the 'inferior' person in exchange for some degree and type of patronage. 'Thus, in the moral order reciprocity is expected between the "big" and "little" people' (Maloney 1991, 40).

Language

One of the most predominant ways in which the hierarchy of Bengal is displayed is via language. Not unlike many other cultures, especially in Asia, respect for one's superiors and acknowledgement of one's subordinate's is even exemplified through simple conversation. I certainly do not claim to be an expert with regards to the Bengali language. However, I did manage to pick up enough Bangla to get by under most simple circumstances. It is a rather complicated tongue and very few foreigners manage a high degree of proficiency. What is of interest for the purposes of this thesis is, however, the fact that parallel with Bengali culture, the language reflects the hierarchy in society. My interpretation of the language is that there exists

within it, in a sense, two stratums: Upper Bangla and Lower Bangla. In accordance with this one must normally quickly determine one's relative rank with another before an elaborate discussion can begin. Sometimes this ranking is rather obvious, for example, the relationship between a rickshaw driver and a business man. In such a case, the rickshaw driver would most likely immediately recognize from the business man's attire that he is important and would consequently address him utilizing the honorific terms and suffixes of Upper Bangla. The reverse would apply when the business man addressed the rickshaw driver. Under different circumstances the determination of one's rank may be less obvious and may require a small amount of neutral conversation with regards to occupation, age, lineage, etc., in order to determine relative status.

Borolok and Chotolok: Big and Little People

As displayed above, the importance of status and how others view one-self is most important in day to day social relations in Bangladesh. It is of such magnitude that it affects how one behaves, the type of work one will perform in public, and the type of clothes that one will wear. Although I feel that the following quotation is somewhat of an exaggeration, it has been said that '[a] Bangladeshi might choose to starve to death rather than engage in a job which he considers beneath him' (Gospel of Christ Mission 1990, 37).

The Gospel of Christ Mission appears to infer that, in Bengal, it is much more prestigious or of higher status to be "in business" as opposed to being under the employ of another party. This apparently applies regardless of how humble the actual business may be:

> The business might be selling betel nut and cigarettes from a hole-in-the-wall shop but he is his own employer. Many a man would rather stay at home and do nothing than go out to work for someone else. It is more dignified to be in business than merely to work (Gospel of Christ Mission 1990, 37).

The above, however, should be qualified in that not all "jobs" or "employment" are necessarily of lower status. For example, often one hears individuals saying that they are "in service" to such-and-such an organization. Employers such as the central government or international agencies or NGOs like the U.N. or CARE are seen as rather important and impressive. The difference seems to be in that despite the fact that they are not in business for themselves, they are doing important work for a renowned organization.

There are many activities that upper and middle class Bangladeshis will not perform or at least not be seen performing in public. Doing one's own grocery shopping or household chores requiring manual labour are seldom engaged in. Typically a household will have a cook and "bearer" (i.e., go-for, handyman) who will be employed to perform such "lowly" tasks. Even

poorer households will often have someone executing these types of chores, frequently members of the extended family or unfortunate individuals from their home "bari" (i.e., village homestead). Most often these domestics will be remunerated with not much more than meals and a place to sleep.

The manner in which one dresses and the types of establishments that one frequents are also often determined by social status. For example, many Bangladeshis would never allow themselves to be seen eating at a roadside stall, but instead would insist on a "proper" sit down hotel (i.e., restaurant). Middle and upper class men will rarely wear a "lungi"[14] outside of the house. Despite the fact that the lungi is often seen with pride as the traditional attire of Bengali men, it is also viewed as not suitable for "big men" to be seen in public wearing one in that the lungi is associated with the lower classes who cannot afford to purchase and wear trousers or a western style suit. I personally found the lungi to be very comfortable and would often wear one around the house. On occasions I would step out to buy cigarettes at the local market wearing one. This was always a great source of amusement for the neighbourhood shopkeepers, vendors and street children who would gather around me and laugh and comment. They rarely, if ever, saw such a "big man" and especially a foreigner wearing a lungi in public.

[14] A sarong; a cotton cloth approximately three feet wide by four feet long which is sewn together at both ends and worn wrapped around the waist.

In their anthropological study of village life in Bangladesh entitled A Quiet Violence (1990) Betsy Hartmann and James K. Boyce reveal that in the village that they lived and worked in and referred to as "Katni", society is divided into two broad but distinct categories: "Chotolok" and "Borolok". Literally these terms, as Maloney refers to them above, respectively translate to "little people" and "big people".

> Borolok are defined by the villagers as 'people who sit and eat', people whose wealth, education and political influence give them a sense of natural superiority... ...[T]hey do not mix socially with ordinary villagers (Hartmann and Boyce 1990, 243).

The division between the big and the little people is epitomized by comparing the differences in lifestyles between urban and rural areas. I certainly do not want to imply that all the population of a large Bangladeshi city live ostentatious lives - on the contrary. However, the availability of commodities and the differences in behavior between town and country is staggering for a foreigner, let alone a "little person" from the village. Hartmann and Boyce (1990, 243-4) documented a discussion with one villager who had witnessed the poignant wealth that exists in certain areas of the capital city of Dhaka. Particularly dramatic to him was the behavior of the upper class women:

> ...Every day these women buy new clothes, every day facial powder, every day milk! Why, they don't even use Bangladeshi powder. No, for them it's powder from abroad. 'Yes, yes,' they nod. 'This Paris scent is very nice!' They parade about in their new dresses, revealing their bare shoulders. They pile their hair on top of their heads and use straps to make their breasts stick out. Our priests tell us they will all go to hell.
>
> Everywhere in Dhaka you see cars and taxis, full of these women. With unlimited money! The Finance Minister needs 20 banks just to store his money. So how much can his wife spend, his daughter, his son? A man like me can't even walk into those stores. I looked at my shirt, at my shoes and at those women - and I turned around and fled. Walking through the streets of the city, I told myself: 'Your name is Dhaka, and your game is taka! [ie. the word for 'money' in Bengali and the name of the currency of Bangladesh].

The Theory of Entitlement

In Poverty and Famines, a rather unorthodox but highly innovative study of the causes of famines, Amartya Sen (1981, 45) introduces what he sees as a much more theoretically sound method to analyzing famine. Contrary to traditional analysis, which concentrates on food supply, the "entitlement approach", Sen explains, focuses on the dynamics and relations of food ownership and exchange.

In essence, Sen questions the theory of "food availability decline" (FAD) as a reliable explanation of the cause of famines. He offers several recent examples of major famines that

have flourished without a sweeping decline in the availability of food (Sen 1981, 154).[15] He effectively premises his main thesis in the following citation:

> Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat. While the latter can be the cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes (Sen 1981, 1).

Entitlement is a group's or individual's natural and moral license to demand subsistence via the accepted modes of a society. As Sen explains, in a free-market economy (such as that of Bangladesh), among others, the succeeding categories of entitlement exist:

> (1) trade-based entitlement: one is entitled to own what one obtains by trading something one owns with a willing party (or, multilaterally, with a willing set of parties);
>
> (2) production-based entitlement: one is entitled to own what gets by arranging production using one's owned resources, or resources hired from willing parties meeting the agreed conditions of trade;
>
> (3) inheritance and transfer entitlement: one is entitled to own what is willingly given to one by another who legitimately owns it, possibly to take effect after the latter's death (if so specified by him);

---

[15] The Great Bengal Famine of 1943, the Ethiopian famines of 1973 and 1974, the Bangladesh famine of 1974, and the famine of the Sahel countries in Africa in the seventies.

(4) own-labour entitlement: one is entitled to one's own labour power, and thus to the trade-based and production-based entitlements related to one's labour power (Sen 1981, 2).

In view of the aforementioned, if we return to the analysis of Maloney (1991, 41), the entitlement view fits very nicely into the Bangladeshi stratification system: '[a] man is entitled to subsistence from the big people he is dependent upon [i.e., his employer, landlord, government officials, relatives, etc.] but similarly there are people entitled to dependence on him, including family members.'

Focusing on Sen's fourth category of entitlement, 'own-labour entitlement', the following may be used as an example. A beggar is often viewed by others and more often by him/herself as performing a service or extending labour in that s/he is allowing a "bigger" person the opportunity to do a good deed and thus perpetuate his/her high status.[16] For, '[i]t is the donor's duty and also his own blessing to give, for which the presence of the beggar provides a chance of fulfilment' (Maloney 1991, 43). During such occurrences, the patron's social status is automatically recognized but no gratitude is seemingly extended or thanks verbally expressed. Because it is interpreted that it is the beggar who is offering a benefit, an individual may actually

[16] With respect to status, Maloney (1991, 43) puts forward: 'It is sometimes plainly said that a person accorded higher rank than another is actually "worth more". The logic of this is that he must indeed be worth more if he is to give the patronage, indulgence, leadership, and blessing expected.'

say "maaf karo" (i.e., forgive me) to the beggar if that individual is unable to take advantage (i.e., give a blessing and thus perform a good deed) of the service offered (Maloney 1991, 43). Thus, although not looked upon as necessarily honourable, the idea of begging in Bangladesh is not frowned upon to the same extent, nor does it carry with it the same degree of social stigma, that it does in many other societies.

Famine Abandonment and Fatalism

The hierarchical nature of Bengali culture is also reflected through the many cases of what is referred to as "famine abandonment", which have been recorded in all times of food crisis in the Bengal region. During such periods individuals will, progressively over time, terminate relations of patronage or support in a hierarchical order. This process normally begins with the cutting of support to outside clients, followed by distant and close kin, and ultimately to wife and children.

The reasoning behind acts such as the above is quite straight forward: if one's divine and earthly patrons fail to provide support from above, one has no option but to fail one's own clients below. Consequently, '[m]en and women die passively in famines because if the divine powers and earthly patrons fail to be indulgent to them, there is not much they can do to resist it'

(Maloney 1991, 42) - in a sense, a morally justified, culturally-induced failure of trickle down economics.

Westerners have historically found this Bengali fatalistic attitude to famine extremely difficult to understand, especially considering the massive and violent uprisings that have taken place in the west as a result of extreme hardships faced by the masses. For example, in 1770 the Bengal region was struck with a particularly severe drought-famine in which an estimated 10 million people died. The descriptions of many Europeans who witnessed the catastrophe in Bengal were compiled in the 1780s by Abbé Guillaume Raynal (1798, 437-38) and include the following excerpt:

> ...it is...remarkable...that amidst this terrible distress, such a multitude of human creatures, pressed by the most urgent of all necessities, remained in absolute inactivity and made no attempts whatever for their self-preservation. All the Europeans, especially the English, were possessed of magazines [supplies of food and grain]. These were ever respected, as well as private houses; no revolt, no massacre, not the least violence prevailed. The unhappy Indians, resigned to despair, confined themselves to the request of succor they did not obtain, and peacefully awaited the release of death. Let us now represent to ourselves any part of Europe afflicted by a similar calamity. What disorder! What fury! What atrocious acts! What crimes would ensue! How should we have seen among us Europeans, some contending for food with their daggers in their hands, some pursuing, some flying, and without remorse massacring each other! How should we have seen [them] at least turn their rage on themselves, tearing and devouring their own limbs, and in the blindness of despair, trampling underfoot all authority, as well as every sentiment of nature and reason!

The great Bengal famine of 1943 furnished a similar reaction from an English medical doctor when he testified before the famine's inquiry commission:

> A. In Bengal they died in front of bulging food shops.
>
> Q. Bulging with grain?
>
> A. Yes, they died in the streets in front of shops bulging with grain.
>
> Q. Because they could not buy?
>
> A. Yes, and it was due to the passive, fatalistic attitude of those people that there were no riots and they were dying [sic] (Nanavati Papers 1944-45, 391 cited in Greenough 1983, 847).

The Personalization of Authority

Another interesting cultural trait very common to Bengal is known as the "personalization of authority" - a term coined by the Bangladeshi social scientist B.K. Jahangir (1982). Maloney (1991, 45) explains that this practice essentially entails the expectation of others (i.e., potential clients) of some degree of patronage from a person holding power or authority. The difference between this case and the aforementioned description of patronage is that the personalization of

authority involves goods or resources that are not privately owned by the individual but are corporate, public or state owned.

On the surface and from a purely western perspective the above type of behavior would be considered simple and pure corruption. This is not necessarily the case in Bangladesh. For example, a government bureaucrat or corporate officer is naturally expected, to some degree, to utilize his control of and access to the assets and/or labour of the organization that he is employed by for his own personal needs or the needs of his clients - regardless of the fact that these resources legally belong to the organization. If a particular individual in such a position '...cannot do this his influence declines and he is thought to not have much personal force' (Maloney 1991, 45).

While in Bangladesh, I heard countless stories and examples of the above mentioned behaviour involving several different development programmes. For instance, Food For Work programmes tend to be plagued with this type of "corruption". In one specific case, an entire network of employees (from field level mid-management right down to the drivers) from a particular NGO were found to be implicated in accepting "kick-backs" from local government for ensuring that Food For Work wheat continued to be distributed to a particular Union.[17]

[17] A Union or Union Parishad (Council) is the lowest strata of official government in Bangladesh. It administers several villages typically constituting between 10,000 and 20,000 people. The Union Parishad is divided into three wards. Each ward elects three council members. One Chairman is elected by the citizenry of all three wards. Three female members are appointed by the elected members of the council.

Furthermore, it was discovered that in the same incident the local government officials were "skimming off the top" of the wheat for their own needs, as opposed to ensuring that all of the wheat made it into the hands of the needy Food For Work workers. Central government and local government officials allocating NGO or government-sponsored work and or development-related resources to friends, family or clients in need are quite often the norm and very rarely the exception.

Maloney (1991, 45) also offers examples of '...accountants of private agencies...[and]...treasurers of indigenous Christian churches, who dipped into the funds of the organization...' However, as is often the situation, the individuals implicated frequently do not see their behaviour as theft or corruption in that in many cases, they were not using the resources under their control for their direct material gain but, conversely, for the aid of others who were in need and expecting their help.

Thus, the concept of private property and ownership is not as cut and dry as for westerners. Accordingly, it is assumed and expected that if one member of a family owns or buys an item, other members will, on occasion, have access to it. This downward distribution of resources, as mentioned earlier, strengthens an individual's personal status and influence (not to mention the maintenance of clients), whether it be simply amongst the person's family or more complicated external relationships. Maloney (1991, 46) points to how this demeanour is

exemplified on a grand scale in some of Sheikh Mujib's public speeches. In them Mujib would often speak of[18]:

"my rice," "my fish going to India," "my rich land," and "my people."

This type of conduct exists at all levels of society, from the president regarding his country, from a local government chairman vis-à-vis the citizens and resources found in his Union, from a land-owner with respect to his tenants or an employer in view of his workers, to simply a peasant family man and his kin.

Authoritarianism

Individuals in positions of relative authority typically treat those below them in a manner that would be interpreted by people of many cultures (especially western) as rather authoritarian. Ordering or treating subordinates in a very abrupt and sharp fashion is quite common.

[18] Sheikh Mujib was a key figure in the East Pakistan independence movement and the war of liberation of 1971. After independence he became Bangladesh's first president.

In one dramatic example offered by Maloney (1991, 46), a high-ranking bureaucrat of an un-named organization, after reviewing a set of documents that were brought to him by an "office boy", simply tossed them on the floor to be submissively collected by his subordinate.

This type of behaviour is often evident with regards to communication within both inter-personal relationships and especially professional environments. The fear and respect for authority and domination from above tends to obstruct lines of communication and hinders the free flow of information. It is a very rare occurrence in which an employee will approach his superior in offer of his/her opinion or advice regarding a given endeavour. Under most circumstances, any input coming from a subordinate in the direction of the superior is as a result of it being ordered from the latter:

> The subordinate tends to not take initiative to speak on a subject or to offer an opinion unless the chief asks for it. [A boss may even order] his next in rank officers to not speak unless asked when a high officer or an important foreigner visits (Maloney 1991, 46).

And when asked for an opinion, as is often the case, the subordinate will report what s/he thinks the superior wants to hear and not necessarily his/her real opinion or the true picture.

Individualism

An additional property inherent to Bengali culture is that of individualism. It should be qualified, however, that when one speaks of individualism in the Bengali sense one does not imply that it is parallel with the type of individualism that has evolved in the west. On the contrary, the characteristics of universal suffrage, intellectual freedom, liberty to question and challenge authority, and other basic human rights which epitomise western style individualism do not necessarily come into play with regards to the individualism of Bengal. When one says that Bangladeshis are individualist, it is meant that they are 'pragmatic and opportunistic in [their] behavior' (Maloney 1991, 51).

Bengalis are deemed to be individualist in that they behave in an individualistic or solitary manner in order to augment and fully capitalize on social affiliations. In effect, Bengalis hold an attitude that they must take care of themselves in life - that no organisation, political party or ideology will do it for them.

> [The Bengali] does not give much weight to abstract rules laid down by some bureaucracy, neither to the ideology of any authority, but rather to the reality of dyadic human relations (Maloney 1991, 51).

The above may sound somewhat contradictory to what has been said earlier regarding how individuals rely on patron-client relations in their day to day lives. There is, however, really no inconsistency. In spite of this fact that Bengalis may not believe in depending on ideology, organizations or institutions for their survival does not impede them from attempting to create linkages with individuals who represent these parties in order to possibly secure some degree of patronage. What is of importance is not the ideological message or the bureaucratic rule, but, the development of a relationship with a powerful person.[19] Maloney contends (1991, 51), that the Bengali:

> ...will suppress his individualism in a hierarchical situation if there is a dominant figure to whom he must show respect...but that is because he observes the moral order of society in which the person of higher status is accorded opportunity to exert more personal force [and offer possible indulgence]. Once he is out of that situation, the Bengali is again a pragmatic individualist.

I would argue, however, that under such hierarchical situations, a Bengali is not, in fact, suppressing his/her individualism in the least. Conversely, by demonstrating reverence and respecting the reality of stratification, what s/he is doing is individualistically following the most

[19] I have listened to many accounts of individuals shifting local political alliances because of more attractive terms of patronage.

socially effective method in which to create an alliance and a relationship of patronage. Thus, s/he is still behaving in a pragmatic and individualistic fashion.

The Influence of Past Faiths and Culture

Despite Bangladesh being a predominantly Muslim country, the influence of past faiths remains quite strong, especially in the rural areas. Asim Roy (1983) and David Abecassis (1990, 8-24) both claim that the Bengali worldview is characterized by a syncretistic tradition in that Islam did not, in fact, dramatically change the worldview of what is now Bangladesh, but simply added to it, allowing very many of the principles, beliefs and practices of past philosophies to co-exist with the Islamic tradition. Roy (1983, 43) borrows the affirmation of Forrester (1977, 45) to explain the large Islamic conversion of Bengali Hindus beginning in the thirteenth century. Forrester, in his work, asserts that a large Christian conversion of Hindus in the nineteenth century was a direct result of:

> a kind of group identity crisis in which the group passes through a negative rejection of its lowly place in Hindu society to a positive affirmation of a new social and religious identity. This new identity does not depend on its acceptance and recognition by the higher castes; indeed, it has been chosen and is sustained despite their refusal to accept it. (Forrester 1977, 45).

In the same manner, Roy (1983, 43) argues that the more egalitarian religion of Islam was viewed as attractive by the masses of Bengalis 'occupying lower positions in the social hierarchy.' Initially, this may have been the case. However as Abecassis (1990, 11) points out:

> ...that [an actual] rejection of low status was ever achieved on a mass scale seems speculative, particularly in the light of the persistence of some caste-like attitudes among Bangladeshi Muslims through to the present time...

And there is little doubt that Roy does recognize this judging from the following quotation:

> ...in Bengal... Islam is not a primary but a secondary culture, that is, exogenous and not endogenous to the particular region... [It] is not a single or the only great tradition since it entered a land which was not culturally virgin, and confronted the long-established endogenous Hindu great tradition (Roy 1983, 4).

Thus, the worldview of Bengal has, over a span of thousands of years, been culturally influenced by peoples of South-East Asia (Er Rashid 1977, 183-4), by animism, Buddhism, Hinduism and

eventually Islam and consequently '...gradually blossomed into a syncretistic and an acculturated tradition' (Roy 1983, 7).

Daya: The Concept of Indulgence and Nurture

With respect to the most recently aforementioned is the matter that inextricably linked to the Bangladeshi patron-client worldview are a number of Hindu philosophical concepts and ideals. One that should be notably highlighted is the concept of "daya". One of the most fundamental concepts of the culture, as Abeccassis (1990, 126) explains, daya is essentially defined as '...the good things in the world - wealth, grace and blessing - which the powerful are expected to redistribute through patronage.'

The concept of daya is introduced to an individual during early childhood. A Bengali infant receives much nurture and indulgence and for a greater period than most other cultures.[20]

[20] Maloney, Aziz, and Sarker state in Beliefs and Fertility in Bangladesh (1981, 184), '[i]t is widely believed that every baby has a right to its mother's milk. The whole process of pregnancy and breastfeeding is regarded as inducing religious merit.' The authors offer the Bengali '...analogy between human fertility and land fertility; man plants the seed, and as it germinates it is nourished by the "mother's semen" before birth and by her milk after birth. The coming of breast milk is an example of how Allah provides for the sustenance of the people He created, so "every mouth brings its own food".'

Furthermore, the female or mother is symbolic of nurture, and is thus desired and needed. However, she is also simultaneously feared because of her power and control via nurture and the indulgence of her breast (Maloney 1991, 42).[21]

Throughout childhood and into adulthood the idea that one must submit to one's elder brother, father, and father's elder brother is continuously reinforced. These players are seen to wield power. They are legitimately authoritarian and can accordingly insist on being served while simultaneously providing daya and patronage (Maloney 1991, 43).

It is regarded that the expressing of indulgence is a demonstration of fondness and sentiment. However, in accordance with other traits of Bengali culture and worldview mentioned above, it is believed that the individuals in quest of favour and indulgence do so towards powerful and, in fact "superior" individuals. Tantamount to this is the perception that those seeking indulgence are relatively needy and impoverished "inferior" individuals in a hierarchy. 'Indulgence is most apparent in the family, but it is also present as an important strand in the ties binding clients to patrons, subjects to kings, tenants to landlords, and devotees to deities' (Greenough 1983, 837).

[21] Accordingly, Bengali men are afraid of women, view them as subordinate and inferior, on average marry younger women, and force women to adapt to the man's household (Maloney 1991, 42).

> Children learn to beg for indulgence and favours, and in this pattern of social relations such begging is to some extent even a form of showing respect to the elders who are thereby accorded the status of giver of indulgence.
>
> Grown children are careful to seek the blessings of the old parents before they die. The children seek not only to inherit the property of the old father, which according to Bengali custom he retains until his death, but as important, to be granted some of the aura of the parents' personal force, to which they feel entitled. The power of the very old resides largely in his capacity to grant this abstract indulgence (Maloney 1991, 43).

In 'Indulgence and Abundance as Asian Peasant Values: A Bengali Case in Point', Paul Greenough (1983, 837) stresses that the most significant expression of indulgence between parents and their children happens at meal times when the family shares rice. In fact, cooked rice is symbolic of the body of the living "master of the family" and its consumption is seen as the sharing of the master's essence. It is the "master's" responsibility to provide rice (i.e., indulgence). He is ceremoniously looked upon as a "destined provider of subsistence." Conversely, his dependents are recognized as "persons requiring nurture" (Inden and Nicholas 1977, 5-6).

This concept of nurture and indulgence is further exemplified in ancient Hindu mythology and particularly through the mythical goddess Laksmi. It has been argued, in fact, that prosperity and specifically agricultural prosperity has over the ages been legitimized by Laksmi to the extent that Bengali Muslims as well as Hindus hold a awareness of reverence towards her (Maloney

1991, 44). T.K. Basu (1962, 71) offers the following Bengali village fable, one of many that are widely known and recited, as an example of the importance of this deity and her provision of indulgence:

> In the good old times there lived a very poor cowherd in this land of Bharata (India). As it happened one day the lamentations of the boy reached the ears of Laksmi...while [she was] making a journey in the sky overhead. Mother Laksmi's heart melted with pity... Laksmi came down on the earth, and handed over the seeds of paddy to the poor cowboy. "Take these," said Laksmi to him, "and poverty and sorrow will remain away from you. When the rains set in, go and so these seeds in your fields. The plants will grow up and bear numerous fruits. When they take on the colour of gold, like my body, and a sweet-smelling odour, as if of my person, comes out of them, you reap the fruits and bring them home." The poor cowboy did as instructed, and one day in the month of Pous he was delighted to see his fields filled up with a heavenly fragrance and lit with the colour of gold, as if Laksmi herself made her presence felt there in her person.

Pirism

For most practising Bangladeshi Muslims Allah is seen as the ultimate and almighty Creator, the holy God above all other gods. This idea of an ultimate or high god is, of course, not new to the region. In fact, long before the Islamitization of what is now Bangladesh the

concept was indeed present as a significant concept within Hinduism. At this time God was distinguished as being of such height and status that a Brahmin priest was required as an absolute interceding necessity between humanity and God. 'Hindu concepts of purity and pollution, and the hierarchical world-view of caste, served to reinforce the transcendence of the holy, unreachable god' (Abecassis 1990, 28).

These concepts, especially that of a paramount and unreachable god, have not been lost since the arrival of Islam. On the contrary, in accordance with the syncretistic tradition of Bangladesh, these ideals have, perhaps been somewhat changed, but, in essence, were sustained with the arrival, in the thirteenth century, of the Islamic sufi mystics, known as pirs.

There is no need to go into great length and detail with regards to sufism and its history in Bengal. What is of importance for this work is, however, the role of the "cult of the pir" in contemporary rural Bangladesh.

For a number of reasons, it is quite difficult for the rural poor peasants of Bangladesh to have "proper relations" with Allah. According to strict Islamic doctrine, one must recite prayers in Arabic. Considering the very high rate of illiteracy with regards to the Bengali language, the perceived difficulty of properly reciting prayers in a language that is effectively understood by

very few is extremely high. The ultimate point being that the prayers will not be accepted by Allah.[22]

Another obstacle for the rural poor in reaching God lies in the fact that one is required to pray five times a day. This is a seemingly unrealistic expectation for most Bangladeshis who are confined by sheer restrictions of survival, to exhaustingly spend most of their time working in the fields. Very few ever accomplish all five prayers in one day (Abecassis 1990, 28).

As a means of overcoming the aforementioned obstacles and becoming closer with a perceived to be unreachable god, rural (and to a lesser degree, urban) Bangladeshi Muslims refer to a Pir for spiritual guidance.

Modern day pirs are seen by their followers as holders of spiritual power. He may be believed to have the power to actually perform miracles and ward off evil spirits or lesser gods.[23] He typically holds many similarities to the Hindu guru in that he often displays an element of aloofness regarding his followers, leaving his closest followers to deal with the other devotees.

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[22] Abecassis (1990, 28) refers to one informant who told him that Imams on Bangladeshi television were preaching that if one mispronounces the prayers, one would be eternally condemned to hell.

[23] Therese Blanchet claims that: 'Muslims believe that their good actions as well as their sins are recorded in Allah's book but they expect the final account to be settled after death, whereas the gods/spirits angered by pollution may strike immediately' (1984, 34).

Similar to Hinduism, in some circumstances, the pir will form a close relationship with a particularly special or spiritually gifted disciple. In these cases the devotee will be introduced to the mystical essence of the sufi cult. The pir is, in general, seen as an arch-patron in that he is a mediator between common man and other-worldly spirits and God (Allah). It is believed that through him the daya (see above) of the world will follow (Abecassis 1990, 30).

Karma and Fate

The classic Buddhist and Hindu concept of karma is but another example of the hierarchical nature of the Bengali worldview. It is commonly held that if one is struck with misfortune it is not simply a stroke of bad luck but the result of some wrongdoing in the past. Thus, whatever happens in one's life is basically summed up as being of the will of Allah. Maloney, Aziz and Sarker (1981, 8-10) offer interesting field evidence of the belief in the all-pervasive control of Allah over one's life. It is not unusual to hear an individual say "Insh Allah" (God Willing) with regards to any future event - God willing I shall be rich, or God willing I will be poor. This belief in pre-determination explains to some degree the aforementioned characteristic of fatalism (sometimes interpreted as laziness) - a sense that one cannot affect one's standing in life - that foreign development workers often witness and very often find so puzzling and frustrating.

Other Factors Contributing to the Existence of Patron-Client Relations

It should, at this point, be at least briefly noted that there exists a limited set of less idealized and more practical factors (especially with regards to the ownership and transfer of and access to land and other important resources) which are also important to the modern existence of patron-client relationships. Jansen (1990, 25-6) offers the following list:

(a) multiple inheritance system with many heirs to an estate;

(b) individual property rights to land;

(c) scarcity of land and unequal distribution of land;

(d) scarcity of employment and other sources of livelihood;

(e) need for political and physical protection; and

(f) lack of access to resources made available by government for the rural areas.

Jansen's analysis primarily focuses on the sale and transfer of land. He stresses the importance of the above set of factors with regards to the development and maintenance of patron-client

relations. He explains that the transfer of land is a dynamic which occurs most often between households that are involved in "many stranded" relationships with each other. In the vast majority of cases, the transfer of land takes place between close neighbours or relatives (Jansen 1990, 25).

> Behaviour in one field cannot be understood with reference to that field alone, e.g., the negotiations about a sharecropping contract must also be seen in the light of possible political support following on the same relationship. Different statuses are mobilized between the same units; landowner-tenant, patron-client, employer-employee. The 'many-stranded' nature of the whole relationships the households are involved in must be captured if we are to understand their behaviour (Jansen 1987, 285).

By "many stranded", Jansen (1990, 25) is referring to the fact that the sale of land rarely takes place in a vacuum (i.e., a single stranded relationship simply of the sale of land and nothing more) but, on the contrary, is often only one aspect in a complex social continuum between relatives or neighbours.

The above explains the apparent lack of class consciousness found throughout Bangladesh and particularly the rural areas. The existence of these close knit and many stranded relationships severely curtails any real degree of class feeling in that:

> it is difficult to define a common 'enemy' by whom they feel exploited. It is naturally difficult to feel that your brother or cousin (who in Marxist terms 'objectively' exploits you in all possible ways) is your 'class' enemy (Jansen 1990, 27).

It is not to imply, however, that the poor rural folk of Bangladesh do not recognize that they are, in many instances, being exploited. Conversely, there is no doubt in my mind that they often do. However, there are few, if any, means in which the disgruntled may mobilize "en masse" to express their common discontent. 'None of the traditional rural institutions or organizations can provide a strong basis for the articulation of class interests' (Jansen 1990, 28). Moreover, because it is recognized or perceived that one has a great deal to financially lose, not to mention the very real possibility of facing physical violence, alienating the powerful and jeopardising valuable relationships of patronage is very unattractive and risky. As Jansen (1990, 28) expresses:

> Given the dyadic economic relationships which exist between poor and rich, there are several types of immediate sanctions with which a client may be confronted if he goes against the interests of his patron (withdrawal of share cropping contract, employment opportunities, credit on 'good' terms, political protection). His "safety net" could disappear if he delinks himself from his patron.[24]

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[24] For an interesting examination of the structure of power and resource distribution in rural Bangladesh see the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (1983) The Net: Power Structure in Ten Villages, Dhaka: BRAC Prokashana.

Similarly, Rozario (1992, 60) places a great emphasis on pure economic survival as an explanation for stratification and patron-client relations in Bangladesh. She states that we must look at the immediate concern of peasants - what Marx referred to as "simple reproduction" - namely, an understandable preoccupation with survival and biological reproduction. The majority of Bangladeshis, according to Rozario, view their plight and poor position in life as a normal and 'inevitable ingredient of their existence.' Instead of questioning from a class perspective and eventually revolting against the richer peasants, the poor '...appear to be grateful for any crumbs they can secure from their patrons. ...[T]heir actions are guided by their immediate or 'temporal' consciousness, which is linked to the economic bases of...social structure. (Rozario 1992, 60). Rozario also points to other researchers who take a similar stand. For instance, Alavi (1973, 333) explains the behaviour of the Indian peasantry as being:

> based on the objective fact of their dependence on their masters for their continued livelihood...When the pressure of population is so great, as in India and China, no machinery of coercion is needed by the landlords to keep [the masses] down. Economic competition suffices.

It is also argued that in order for poor peasants to challenge the forces that are seen to be the causes of their poverty, they must first acquire a minimum degree of economic security. 'The

formation of a revolutionary consciousness....' explains Rozario, '...requires a degree of planning and energy which cannot be expected of landless peasants whose immediate concern is food and shelter' (Rozario 1992, 61). This conforms with the earlier account of masses of starving, weak Bengalis passively awaiting death during the drought-famine of the late 18th century.

Above I have presented and explained the existence of the Bengali stratification system in historical, cultural/worldview and, to a limited degree, economic terms. It is rather apparent from the evidence that I have presented that hierarchy and patron-client relationships are culturally institutionalized and are accepted and have been accepted as morally right for generations. I have shown, in general, the links between the contemporary stratification system of Bengal and the culture and worldview of the past. Quite simply, in Bangladesh, hierarchy and patron-client relations are realistically seen and conceived of as a method in which to conduct oneself with others.

Earlier in this chapter I sub-titled a section by posing the question, Bangladesh: A Culture of Deprivation? Throughout the researching and writing of this thesis the question as to how much of an influence extreme deprivation and economic insecurity has on the emergence and maintenance of stratification and patron-client relations came to mind. It is often contemporarily said that the masses of Bangladesh are plagued with a fatalistic "beggar's mentality" - that they are in a perpetual state of dependence and oppression. Those who have visited or lived in Bangladesh often come to the conclusion that it is extreme poverty and generations of it, that has

directly created this mentality. Analysts such as the aforementioned Rozario also seem to conform to this view. Is Bengali culture (or at least rural folk culture) a culture of deprivation? If one views, as I have presented in this chapter, the cultural/historical background of Bengal, one should determine that such an argument, alone, is too simplistic.

It goes without saying, however, that economics, poverty, and deprivation will have an influence on individual and group behavior. In the case of Bangladesh, a country whose people have suffered greatly, the effect of this suffering is bound to have had influence and effect on its culture. Despite the fact that I asked myself, as I mentioned above, of the extent of influence that deprivation has on Bengali culture, I progressively deliberately swayed away from focusing too much on economics and poverty because, as I just mentioned, the existence and influence of poverty is a given and countless books, articles, and papers have focused on the issue. As to what degree of influence poverty has and has had on culture and specifically on the formation and maintenance of stratification and patron-client relations is debatable. I have come to the conclusion that it is not up for discussion in a thesis of this length and scope. In fact, I would argue, that it is no more than a question of speculation and not scientifically measurable anyway. What is of relevance is that, as I have displayed above, it is not solely, by any means, poverty and deprivation which have created and sustain the hierarchical worldview of Bangladesh.

Chapter 5. CONSTRAINTS AND IMPEDIMENTS IN THE FIELD: IS "REAL" PARTICIPATION POSSIBLE IN RURAL BANGLADESH?

In the preceding chapter, I presented what I and several other social scientists believe to be the cultural reality of rural Bangladesh. I attempted to demonstrate that Bangladesh consists of a highly stratified, top-down society. It is a hierarchical community well grounded on the cultural influence and history of thousands of years. In essence, with regards to patron-client relations and stratification, Bengali culture, offers no major indicators of a lessening in importance and scope.

Consequently, in view of the evidence offered above, from a community development perspective, one may be left to question not whether patron-client relations, extreme hierarchy and stratification exist, but rather, one may pose the following question: Is the "bottom-up", "self-help" type of participation that is so often found in the rhetoric of development at all possible in Bangladesh? After viewing first hand and reading about several development programmes and projects, I am of the opinion that under certain conditions and with the use of certain methodologies, participation is, to a limited degree, possible in rural Bangladesh. However, the goal of this concluding chapter is to focus on the constraints posed to participation; to make the link between the preceding chapter and my initial issue of interest, namely, the

examination of the limitations and impediments to participation within a culture such as that of Bangladesh.

To begin, I will briefly highlight and illustrate a couple of NGOs that have met with some success vis-à-vis grass roots participation in Bangladesh. In particular, I will focus on two organizations who approach community development from the Freirian consciousness-raising perspective that was highlighted earlier in this thesis.[25] But more importantly, following this I will examine some of the constraints that this approach (and in some cases, community development in general) is faced with and which impede its effectiveness and limit its scope.

The Formation of the NGO Sector in Bangladesh

Abecassis (1990, 81) explains that in Bangladesh there is a long history of voluntarism and humanitarianism:

[25] It should be repeated that consciousness raising is, upon my opinion, the purest form ("ideal type") of participation. Whether or not it can be completely operationalized is open for debate outside of the scope of this thesis.

> From earliest times, rich men have endowed **madrassahs** and pirs have established **Khanqahs**.[26] The Roman Catholics sent Bengalis to Goa for education and training in the middle of the sixteenth century and established schools and hospitals thereafter. The Protestants followed suit with charitable institutions in the nineteenth century... (Abecassis' emphasis, my footnote).

However, it was not until 1972, after the end of the War of Independence, that the development of Bangladesh's modern day NGO sector began. At that time the newly founded, wartorn and impoverished nation became the landing pad of unprecedented inflows of foreign aid from all corners of the globe.

> ...Foreign aid poured into the devastated country, denuded of infrastructure and manpower. The handful of idealistic urban youths remaining decided to avail of this opportunity to rebuild the country. They formed semi-social welfare organizations and went to work in the poverty-stricken villages. The sight of foreigners in jeeps doling out food, clothing etc. with villagers running after them was common. Relief and a dole mentality on one hand and government corruption [on the other] were the order of the day (Chowdhury 1990, 28).

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[26] A madrassah is a school where Islam and some other subjects are studied. A Khanqah is 'a pir's hospice and centre for spiritual direction' (Abecassis 1990, 126-28).

These relief initiatives certainly were, no doubt, needed. And, the NGO sector was created as a result of this need. However, after a few short years the needs had dramatically changed and priorities began to be increasingly of a long term nature (Abecassis 1990, 81). Community development in the form of the new concepts of people's participation and self-help initiatives were seen by some voluntary organizations as the path to follow. However, by the late 70's and into the 80's some of the NGOs began to realize the extreme constraints that they were facing in their community work. As mentioned in earlier sections above, the community development initiatives all too often completely failed to reach the poorest of the poor - accordingly they were hijacked by the elite upper stratum of the community in question:

> They [the NGOs] had not appreciated the implications of working through the **matbars** and of trying to include all sections of village society...they had not enquired carefully enough about the relationships between the various people who were getting the external resources... Just as serious, the dependence mentality...persisted - as it was bound to do in a society understood in terms of **daya** accessed through patronage... [author's emphasis] (Abecassis 1990, 82).

Identifying and Working With the Poorest of the Poor: The "Target Group" Approach

As it became increasingly evident that approaching an entire village or community was a futile method in reaching the most disadvantaged, by the early to mid 1980's some voluntary organizations began attempting to develop and/or adopt methodologies that were deemed more appropriate to the socio-cultural reality of rural Bangladesh. NGOs such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Proshika began, through rigorous field research, investigating the inner workings and social structures of communities. Their overall goal was '...to get underneath the stratum of the rich and powerful in the village' and to work towards replacing the prevailing relationship of dependency that existed between the rural poor and NGOs (Abecassis 1990, 83). These NGOs saw themselves as no longer relief agencies delivering goods to peasants. On the contrary, they felt that such an approach and way of thinking was completely inconsistent with any sincere attempt at poverty alleviation and social change. Such a mentality, in their view, had to be transformed into a perspective which recognized that an attempt at development could not be solely designed, implemented, and controlled by outsider NGOs, but conversely must be truly seen and confronted by "the people" concerned and as "the people's" struggle.

> ...the poorest people had to participate in the whole process, **to the exclusion of the rich** [my emphasis]. This called for a complete revolution in community development practice and thinking. Community development, involving all strata in the village, came to be rejected as a concept in favour of community organization, involving only the so-called "target" group of the poorest people (Abecassis 1990, 83).

Borrowing from the thought of Paulo Freire, NGOs such as BRAC and Proshika, as well as organizations such as the Grameen Bank attempt to raise the consciousness of the target group. This group is identified according to predesigned criteria. This objective of the selection process is to form a group that is as homogeneous as possible. The NGOs:

> ...first try to make the rural poor aware of their situation, through social structural analysis, show them the cause of their poverty, dependence and domination on the rural elites and emphasize the critical need to unite and fight against deprivation and social injustice (Chowdhury 1990, 19).

What is of interest at this point is not the Freirian consciousness-raising concept (of which we have already examined) but this idea of a target group strategy. In the writings of Freire, the messages put forward were quite general. Freire's work, I would argue, is a sweeping framework to be used as a theoretical guide. In essence, his writings are that of a visionary. Some

Bangladeshi NGOs, however, have borrowed the vision and attempted to operationalize it. A very simple key to this operationalization is the target group.

Martha Chen (1991, 11) effectively explains the rationale behinds BRAC's eventual recognition that a community-wide approach to development is futile within a culture such as that of Bangladesh. BRAC's analysis and action-research in the field, which eventually led to the formulation and adoption of the target group approach, made it quite clear:

> • that there is a very fundamental relationship between the rural power structure and the distribution of resources;
>
> • that programs designed for the whole community deliver most of their benefits to the richer and tend to by-pass the very poor;
>
> • that programs designed for the poor must address the rural power structure, which keeps not only power but also resources in the hands of a few; and
>
> • that in order to address the rural power structure, the capacities of and institutions for the poor (and powerless) must be developed.

When BRAC initially recognized that the community-wide approach was not working and began experimenting with smaller, more homogeneous groups, they realized that the absolute poorest should be identified and that this should be done according to certain criteria. At first

their definition of "poorest" was very general; they would form groups from the landless, fishermen, and women. Progressively, the criteria changed, became more refined to include:

> those households who sell their manual labor to others for survival, irrespective of occupation, provided they do not have political patrons among the non-target people, and provided they cannot still exercise status considerations. (Lovell 1992, 32)

This definition however, I would argue, was probably found to be unrealistic in that the stipulations regarding political patrons and status considerations would effectively disqualify everyone. Thus, the criteria were further refined and made more specific, to aim at:

> those households that own less than 0.50 decimals of land, own no implements of production, and in which the principle worker has had to sell at least 100 days of labor over the past year in order to subsist. Additionally, at least 50% of each village organization must be comprised of people who own no land (Lovell 1992, 33).

Identifying and mobilizing these people (of relatively common class or status) into groups and working towards generating a degree of solidarity amongst the members has been met with certain degrees of success. Chowdhury (1990, 19) stresses that the efforts of these NGOs with

regards to consciousness raising and target group formation has given many a new identity and confidence to politically stand up against the dominating forces and vested interests.[27] She does however appear to realize the limitations and constraints to the target group and consciousness raising approaches within a top-down society. The limitations appear to: 'stem from an ideology that combines extreme egalitarianism, a rather dogmatic view of class struggle... Experience in Bangladesh reveal that this approach can only be justified by the difficulty of conceiving a realistic alternative (Chowdhury (1990, 10).'

Constraints and Impediments

At this point it would be interesting and consistent with the overall theme of this thesis to focus on the constraints that consciousness-raising-type NGOs face.

Referring again to the superior-subordinate dichotomy inherent in Bangladeshi society, it would seem important to examine how project field workers are often perceived. Whether the field staff are considered superior or subordinate is irrelevant, for either perception would most

[27] Besides the consciousness-raising, some NGOs have supported the groups with practical skills training, the formation of cooperatives and the development of credit schemes, such as that of the now famous Grameen Bank (i.e., the "Village Bank").

likely pose a detriment to a given initiative.[28] For example, if the field staff is seen as superior, which is very likely in that they will be considered better educated and wealthier, then it is highly probable that very little participation, concerning project planning and management, will ensue. For, if an individual is subordinate, s/he has

no place in taking an equal and active role with a superior. In this vein, one would have the type of participation found in the "top-down" approach basically consisting of '...getting people to do what outsiders **think** [my emphasis] is good for them' (Heyer et al. 1981, cited in Hall, A. and J. Midgley 1988, 5). Conversely, if, however unlikely, the field staff is perceived to be inferior, then their actual knowledge, ability and presence would be questioned and, accordingly very little respect would be directed towards them.[29] Hence, the point is that it is a 'Catch 22' situation - equality, typically viewed by westerners as positive for a participatory grass roots project is highly improbable and not necessarily looked upon as a positive element by the target group in question.

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[28] As we addressed earlier, the likelihood of someone being seen as equal or "one of us" is very low.

[29] This example is just used for the sake of making a point. The likelihood that a target group of poor Bangladeshi peasant women, for example, looking down upon NGO field workers is, I would argue with great confidence, almost nil.

However, if, for example, field workers dressed, ate, sat, and as a whole, lived like the "common people" of a target group, I have heard it said that the field workers credibility as being able to "help" would be diminished in that s/he would be viewed as no more important or no more skilled than the common people themselves. In other words the target group perceives outsiders' knowledge of the target group's situation as superior to the target group's knowledge of their own situation.

As was indicated in Chapter 3., the role that is ideally played by the field worker (coordinator or animator in Freirian terms) is extremely important in the consciousness raising process. Freire's theory and methodology requires and assumes that the individuals who are placed in such positions will become, if they are not already, dedicated and highly skilled facilitators who recognize that they have as much, if not more, to learn from the rural poor as they have to offer. In essence, in order to be truly effective, Freire's theory ideally demands humility and a sense of egalitarianism from its field workers. Within the Bangladeshi context, NGOs are often met with great complications in view of this issue. Recruiting, training and keeping such dedicated staff is very difficult.

Related to this matter is the fact that not unlike most societies, Bangladeshi society attaches considerable value and status on mainstream formal education - what Freire views as the banking system of schooling. Accordingly, in most cases animators are recruited from the large pool of relatively well-off university educated young people who have little or no previous experience dealing with or understanding the rural poor. 'Few see themselves as researchers, as teacher-students who can learn from the illiterate [my emphasis] poor. Indeed, for most educated Bangladeshis this idea is unthinkable...' (Abecassis 1990, 102). However, very often these young animators are sincere and truly want to contribute towards the betterment of the poor and of their country as a whole. Yet nevertheless, the influence and conditioning of the banking system of education and the culturally inherent concepts of superiority and hierarchy pose as grave impediments to the consciousness-raising approach.

I personally witnessed this kind problem on many occasions. Being initially somewhat naive with respect to the reality of Bengali culture, not to mention shrouded in a cloak of western culturally and academically-induced egalitarianism[30] regarding community development, it was initially particularly disturbing to me to realize that this type of interaction often took place between NGO field workers and the people that they were supposedly there to "help". The following example is derived from a couple of occasions during which my colleagues and I were out to mobilize and organize destitute women, who were the target group of the programme I was working for. These destitute women, identified as being of the poorest of the poor in Bangladesh, were not yet habituated to dealing with strangers. The likelihood of any of them having ever been spoken to by "big people" in the past was remote. These women were very shy, timid, and if they responded at all when spoken to, it was very softly, almost inaudible and with their hand or veil in front of their mouths. Several of the field workers, perhaps feeling under pressure to get the work done, appeared to lose patience with the women and began to physically handle and sometimes slap the women on the tops of their heads to get their attention. Compounding this was the presence of the Union Chairman and other officials and cronies, who also contributed to yelling at and talking down to the poor women. When I questioned one of the field managers on this issue, he understood what I was getting at and honestly responded that 'this is how we are brought up.' He explained that almost all of the field workers are university educated and some come from relatively prestigious families who would never deal with such lowly people under normal, everyday circumstances. In the scale of things, the field workers

[30] Perhaps, as a result of a western banking approach to education.

were superior to the destitute women and saw themselves as there to simply hand out assistance in a downwardly fashion. Thus, those in positions of relative authority tend to exaggerate their power through domineering actions in order to engender fear and consequently, reinforce their position of authority, status and superiority. Further, as Abecassis (1990, 102) suggests, '[m]any will not have joined the NGO because they are totally dedicated to building a world...where justice reigns among all people who are free and equal, but [for simple practical reasons] because they needed a job and they had the right qualifications.'

In the same vein, field workers often develop or have existing connections to the rural elite of the area that they may be working in. It is natural to assume that young well-educated field workers, who either through friend or family connections or simply because of other commonalities of status, will develop relationships with and be sought after socially by influential community members. In a society which gives a great deal of importance towards hierarchy and superiority, it is indeed quite difficult for a young animator to completely resist being coopted by the social strata that s/he most likely has more in common with in the first place.

The above should not be read that there exists no truly dedicated NGO staff in Bangladesh. In fact, I have personally met and worked with a number of individuals who sincerely attempt to resist the extreme hierarchical nature of their culture and view people and behave from a more egalitarian perspective. However, for pure pragmatic reasons, few of these individuals will remain working side by side with the rural poor forever. Despite their good

intentions and commitment, most individuals have interests outside of their work and have aspirations (like most people worldwide) for improving their lives and those of their families. NGO field work positions typically offer poor remuneration and benefits, very long hours, and the working conditions are more often than not, exhausting. Thus, in many cases, the individuals either quit from burn-out or, for the reasons that they are deemed to be good at understanding and working with the poor, they are eventually rewarded with promotions to better paying city or town-based managerial positions. And regardless of the reasons, the end result is an extreme lack of long-term field work consistency.

It is in view of the above which perhaps reveals the real inherent weakness in Freire's theory. True consciousness raising appears to require a degree of devotion and integrity which is very uncommon to human beings. It demands an unrealistic amount of youthful energy, idealism, and consistent and long term sacrifice from the facilitator. In essence, the theory is somewhat naive in that it basically demands an unreasonable number of martyrs and heroes from which humanity can not possibly provide. Associated with this lattersaid issue is the question as to whether or not consciousness raising is really adequate, within the difficult parametres of Bangladesh's socio-economic reality. Fuglesang and Chandler (1986, 25) elaborate vis-à-vis this question regarding Bangladesh with the following quotation:

> It has turned out exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize the concept of conscientization on a really large scale [which would be required in Bangladesh]. Popular education, popular theatre, community organizing, interactive video--all these approaches can contribute to community participation, conscientization and material progress in a local community. This has been documented. But the economics and logistics of training and organizing 100,000 facilitators or more are insurmountable. And the concept does not tackle the issues of productivity and resource use and control. The ultimate question is whether a method to community participation is economically sustainable.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have presented, in general terms, the spectrum of approaches to participation and focused on what is typically looked upon as the ideal approach (i.e., Freirian). Further, I have also displayed in great detail the many ways in which the highly stratified culture and worldview of Bangladesh contradicts and serve as an obstacle to the egalitarian and bottom-up consciousness-raising concept.

I have shown that it is not that consciousness raising is not at all applicable, but that it must be approached with a very good knowledge of the culture and that it may, to some degree, be successful in certain cases (ie. BRAC, Proshika) in which the individuals that make up the groups being worked with are very homogenous (i.e., target approach). It is this last statement

which is of importance. The fact that there is some success leaves hope for the future with regards to community development and participation in Bangladesh. The tone of this thesis has often been negative and critical vis-à-vis the potential of participation in this country. This has been done not to toss aside participation and consciousness-raising as viable concepts but to highlight the limitations that they face in Bangladesh. As just recently mentioned above (Fuglesang and Chandler 1986), the future with regards to consciousness-raising and participation in Bangladesh appears to be rather grim in terms of large scale impact. However, one could say the same of any approach or methodology that is applied to Bangladesh. For, although I have not focused on the suffering and poverty of the Bangladeshi people, its range and breadth seem to be almost insurmountable. It appears that conditions will only get worse before getting better.

Notwithstanding, there are many individual small success stories that have resulted through the work of dedicated local and international organizations working in rural Bangladesh. Several of these success stories of transformed lives have been documented and serve as small anecdotes of hope for the future. To ignore them to the prevailing gloomy picture of Bangladesh would be contradictory in that it would be the equivalent to ignoring individual lives in local communities, who are, in essence the focus of what local community development is all about.

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